



Eulogy of Sister Mary Rosemunda Besch, BVM

Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Aug. 27, 2024

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Mary Rosemunda Besch.

Dorothy Ann Besch was born on May 13, 1932, in Sioux City, Iowa. She was the youngest of twelve children, five girls and seven boys, born to John and Rose (Treiwiler) Besch. Her father, who was born in Luxembourg, immigrated to the United States and settled in the Sioux City area where he met and married her mother, a native Iowan. Together they raised their children by farming and were strong examples of faithful living by following the commandments to "love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . soul . . . mind, and . . . strength" and to "love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:30-31).

Dorothy attended Cathedral ES and HS in Sioux City. She was a member of the first class to graduate from Heelan HS, the result of a merger of Cathedral HS for girls and Trinity HS for boys. The dedication and example of her BVM teachers at the Cathedral schools inspired her to become a BVM. Her mother was particularly proud of her daughter's decision. Rosemunda entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1950, received the name Rosemunda at her reception on March 19, 1951, and professed first vows on March 19, 1953. She was just 19 days shy of completing her 74th year as a BVM when she died.

For her first mission, Rosemunda taught first graders at St. Catherine ES in the Hickman Mills and Grandview areas that are now suburbs of Kansas City, Mo. In 1953, it was a school out in the country with no houses in sight. Her first thought was, "What do I do with these little kids?" Mentors, meetings and experience helped hone her teaching skills through the years as she ministered as an elementary teacher at St. Aloysius in Kansas City, Mo.; St. Bernard in Los Angeles; Our Lady Help of Christians and St. Vincent in Chicago; Sacred Heart in Boone, Iowa; St. Bridget in Omaha, Nebr.; and St. John–St. Andrew in Meire Grove, Minn.

Rosemunda and Clarenita Froehlich ministered together for 50 years, beginning at St. Vincent in Chicago. Rosemunda believed it was because they were "sort of opposites," that they became so close. Clarenita was an only child and went home with Rosemunda on holidays. The Besch family enthusiastically accepted her as one of their own.

After ministering mostly in large urban areas, one would expect their move to rural Minnesota in 1978 would have its challenges. St. John–St. Andrew was a school of fewer than 100 students divided between two buildings in two towns two miles apart. Clarenita served as the principal and Rosemunda taught fifth and sixth grades. The adjustment was not as difficult as one might expect. "It was nice to meet the friendliness of the people," recalled Clarenita. "When you greet someone on the street, they greet you back." Yes, the friendliness helped, but so did the extraordinary dedication by parents, faculty and pastors to keep their school open. Rosemunda remarked that while people were wonderful at all the missions, the years in Minnesota "felt like our golden years." One parent noted that Rosemunda appeared strict in the classroom, "but we always called her a big teddy."

Twelve years later, in response to their decision to leave St. John–St. Andrew, the St. John Pastoral Council wrote, "[We] wish to express our thanks and gratitude for 'a job well done' . . . When the Sisters arrived, our

[schools] were in crisis. The Sisters turned the whole school situation around. This is brought to our attention every year by the number of [our] students who excel in academic and extracurricular activities at the Melrose Public Schools." The parish pastor added, "Their shoes will be hard to fill. They were very dedicated . . . ran a good ship . . . and were loved by the people as a result."

After leaving Minnesota, Rosemunda and Clarenita moved to Sioux City, Iowa, to be closer to the Besch family. Rosemunda taught elementary mathematics and science and managed the media center at St. Michael in Sioux City, Iowa. She retired in 2001 but maintained a presence in the elementary schools by volunteering. "[I] enjoy helping first graders," she commented. "Each one of them is unique. It is interesting to see how they are progressing." Quite a different reaction than "What do I do with these little kids?" the first time she taught with first graders! Rosemunda also spoke to the students about her religious calling during Vocations Awareness Week. Driving individuals to appointments, visiting and praying for the sick, and consoling the grieving were other ways she continued to "love [her] neighbor as [herself]" as she ministered to the local Sioux City community.

After 28 years in Sioux City, Rosemunda and Clarenita made the difficult decision to move to Mount Carmel in 2018. "I will miss my family and all the many friends who have been so much a part of my life," lamented Rosemunda. Their departure ended a 137-year BVM presence in Sioux City itself and a 157-year BVM presence in the diocese. Sadly, Clarenita died on April 13, 2020.

In a 2015 interview for the Year of Consecrated Life, Rosemunda shared, "My faith has been sustained over the years by the strong faith and example of my parents, which helped me have a solid belief that Jesus is my Lord and Savior who is with me and guides me wherever I go and whatever I do. My greatest joy in choosing the consecrated life is it provided me with the opportunity to serve and help others."

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love God." (I Corinthians 2:9). These words of St. Paul never rang truer for Rosemunda than in 2020. When Rosemunda first came to Mount Carmel just three months after graduating from high school and turning 18, she could not begin to envision celebrating her Diamond Jubilee, and certainly not in the middle of a pandemic. But nothing could dampen her spirit that day. "It's been wonderful! I keep thanking God that I belong to the BVM Congregation. There are so many wonderful sisters; all the good we do as a community is a blessing."

We are grateful for Rosemunda, her life of service and love as our sister, aunt, teacher and friend. We rejoice with her as Jesus welcomes her home to a glorious reunion with her parents, siblings, Clarenita, and all her deceased beloved. Rest in peace, Rosemunda.