



Eulogy of Sister Marjorie M. (Herberdette) Heidkamp, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Nov. 26, 2024

Good morning. It is good to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Marjorie M. Heidkamp.

Marjorie Mary Heidkamp was born March 6, 1934, in Chicago to Herbert and Mary Cecelia (Toner) Heidkamp. She was the seventh of eight children. She was welcomed by siblings Herbert, Rosemary, Mary Louise, Robert, Francis, and Philip and followed by brother Jerome.

The Heidkamp home was simple – three bedrooms and one bathroom for ten people! However, in Marjorie’s memories it was warm and inviting with huge Christmas trees and bobbing for apples in the living room, and wonderful aromas coming from the kitchen. The backyard was a place of captured river turtles, a victory garden, fireworks on the Fourth of July, and neighborhood sing-alongs. Marjorie wrote, “Being a child on Western Avenue was wonderful. The streetcars went by on a regular schedule. We had sidewalks and alleys, a beautiful park and a whole neighborhood for a playground.” One sadness was that for five years two stars hung in the front windows, a reminder that her brothers Herb and Bob were fighting in World War II. She recalled, “Yet, because we were there together it was somehow going to be all alright.”

While her years at Queen of Angels Grammar School were “ordinary,” Marjorie referred to her high school days at The Immaculata as “an adventure” as she developed a comfortable sense of self and friendships that lasted a lifetime. “It was at Immaculata . . . that I first began to hear a new call. At the end of our senior retreat, we sang a hymn about ‘take my life, my heart.’ I knew with certainty, unusual in my teenage heart, that I would go to Mount Carmel the following fall.” Her decision was not received well at home. Her mother cried and exclaimed, “You will end up teaching first grade all your life!” Her father simply said, “We won’t even discuss this.” Yet in the end, her family was supportive and helped her complete the preparations.

Marjorie entered the congregation on Sept. 8, 1952, and instantly felt at home, despite the silence and discipline, and entered fully and sincerely into a deepening relationship with God and the community. She received the name Herberdette upon her reception on March 19, 1953; professed first vows on March 19, 1955; and lived 72 years as a BVM.

For her first mission, Marjorie was sent to St. Jerome in Chicago to teach – you guessed it – first grade. This was followed by missions teaching higher grades at St. Joseph in Sioux City, Iowa, and junior high at St. Peter in Antioch, Ill. “I gained confidence in my abilities as an educator,” she remarked. “One of the best things about convent living was the ongoing ‘teacher education’ around the community room table.” After twelve years of teaching at St. Peter, she assumed the role of DRE (director of religious education) first at St. Peter and then at St. Beatrice in Schiller Park, Ill.

From 1979 to 1984, Marjorie served the congregation as a member of the BVM formation team. Her first experience in team ministry was very positive. Subsequently, she only accepted positions where she could function as part of a team. In later years, she wrote reflections for liturgical services including the reflection for the Diamond Jubilee of her set in 2022. She wrote her last reflection this spring for the BVM benefactor

gratitude service, although she was unable to read it. After her term as director of admissions concluded, she spent the next six years teaching religious education at St. James Parish in Chicago.

By 1991, Marjorie felt that she could no longer work in the official Church but wanted to continue ministering in some capacity. After a year and a half at a major trauma center, she had the training necessary to minister as a hospice chaplain in the Chicago area, first at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, and then at Vistas Innovative Hospice in Lombard.

In 1999, she became the health care coordinator for the Great Lakes Region. After retiring in 2005, she lived in Chicago and volunteered at Vitas Innovative Hospice and at the Women's Center, part of the Chicago Public Library, as well as offering pastoral counseling.

In his letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul advises, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. . . Above all, clothe yourselves with love." (Col 3: 12, 14). Marjorie inherited her mother's love of reading and very early became a regular at the local library. While honesty, fairness, respect for others, faith, and education were strong Heidkamp family values, Marjorie wrote that "[books] served to open my mind and heart to a larger world of cultures and customs, art and beauty. This planted seeds of acceptance of all human experience even when it is very different from mine."

In 1981, Marjorie traveled to Honduras on a Third World Grant. She was shocked by the poverty and anti-American sentiment. Seeing the way the poor were treated, struggling with her ability to communicate, and even having garbage thrown at her made her more compassionate toward immigrant people at home. "My greatest gift has been to be a listener, a storyteller, a compassionate presence. . . I hope that my listening and caring and being present to others has brought them some warmth and beauty and peace."

Marjorie's love and acceptance of others was obvious, as was her tremendous gratitude for her loved ones, life, and all of life's experiences - good and bad. "My birth family is large and loving. . . [They have] always been a supportive part of my life . . . They give me joy and acceptance and trust. At the time of my Golden Jubilee, they planned a three-day reunion that none of us will ever forget. It was both sacred and profane and so much fun! My family also gifted Elizabeth Wirtz and me with a trip to Ireland!"

Her gratitude also extended to her students and coworkers who "absorbed the BVM charism as fully as vowed members." She referred to the employees, co-workers, and friends that surround BVM community as "a joyous blessing" and considered their kindness, laughter, and concern to be "pure gifts."

Finally, Marjorie's gratitude extended to her BVM sisters. "[They have] gifted me with friendship, education, acceptance, challenge and love. [My] relationships with my sisters [vary] – some very close, some casual, but still my sisters. . . The community is family in a way I don't know how to put into words. The BVMs are my circle of friends and kindred spirits. I know they have my back." In the end, Marjorie shared that "all is grace."

With gratitude for Marjorie and the gift she has been to us, we rejoice as she is welcomed into her eternal home by her deceased family and friends, Mary Frances Clarke and our deceased BVM sisters in the presence of our loving God.