



**Eulogy of Sister Katherine E. Heffernan, BVM
Mary Frances Clarke Chapel, Feb. 11, 2025**

It is good for us to be together to celebrate the life of our Sister Katie Heffernan.

Katherine Elizabeth Heffernan was born in Omaha on April 14, 1923, to John and Julie (Anheuser) Heffernan. She joined a sister Julie, who died in 1999. Katie was born into an impressive family. Her paternal grandfather John Hefron (Heffernan) came from Kilkenny, Ireland, and settled in Hubbard, Nebr. To acquire provisions to farm his land, John, like dozens of other men, crossed the Missouri River to Sioux City, Iowa, to find work. He, along with his Irish friends, built the first Catholic church in Sioux City so to have a place to worship while living there. Katie's father owned and operated grain elevators and stockyards up and down the river. Heffernan Hall at Briar Cliff College in Sioux City and a park in Hubbard are named after him. Katie's mother graduated from the University of Nebraska with a major in chemistry at a time when few colleges would accept women. She taught at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebr., a school she could not have attended.

Katie graduated from Hubbard HS in 1941 and received a commercial certificate from St. Mary's College in Omaha in 1942. In 1946, she completed a bachelor's degree from St. Louis University with a major in sociology and a minor in economics. In the 1950s, Katie worked in Rome for Catholic Relief Services as the Director of Welfare for the United States Escapee Program. After returning to the United States, she was a case worker for Catholic Charities in St. Louis.

Katie entered the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in St. Louis on Sept. 8, 1958, and professed first vows on April 5, 1961. After profession, she ministered as a history and home economics teacher, a counselor, and a housemother to troubled adolescent girls committed by the court to a residence on the congregational grounds. She remained there for thirteen years with interim missions to San Francisco; Tulsa, Okla.; and Chicago. Katie's experience as a housemother formed the rest of her life. "Through my understanding of this apostolate," she wrote, "I have developed much deeper insights and interests in the peoples of the world and especially of women who are in need of justice and advocacy." So deeply touched were several of the girls to whom she ministered that they named their daughters Katherine.

In 1970, Katie lived at Wright Hall in Chicago as she pursued a master's degree in social work at the University of Illinois – Chicago. The relationships formed at Wright Hall along with her desire to be a member of a more progressive religious congregation culminated with her transfer of vows to the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Jan. 20, 1973. She lived 66 years as a religious sister, 52 years as a BVM.

Katie ministered in the Chicago area as the director of social services at Fox River Hospital and London Memorial Hospital, and as director of clinical services at Barclay Hospital, also in Chicago. She served as a district social worker for the Chicago Board of Education and clinical social worker and care manager for special education students.

During her retirement years in Chicago, Katie served on the board of American Women for International Understanding and provided hospitality for grantees from Mongolia and India. She belonged to the Renaissance Club, the American Architectural Society, and the Chicago Council for Global Affairs. She volunteered at St.

Gertrude Parish and Misericordia. She also kept in close contact with BVMs in the neighborhood including those at Wright Hall until it closed in 2011.

Katie enjoyed sitting on the balcony of her Sheridan Road apartment high above the streets below. There she reflected upon the sky, Lake Michigan, as well as the city noise. Her apartment met her contemplative and meditative needs. She shared, "I feel as if I have my own hermitage and can be on retreat whenever I so chose."

Katie's life was filled with unique experiences quite in contrast with her "hermitage." While working in Rome in 1955, she was given a private audience with Pope Pius XII.

In 2003, she was a delegate to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as a member of American Women for International Understanding. Along with all the delegates, Katie received an abaya and a veil at the airport and was expected to wear them in public. She commented, "[We were there] to appreciate, accept and understand. [We] learned that women worldwide have a core value and deep concern about others, their education, health, employment and helping the less fortunate."

For the 75th anniversary of her high school graduation, Katie was invited to be the Grand Marshall for the Hubbard HS homecoming parade. "It was great fun as I sat up on the jump seat of a 1929 Ford Convertible." she recalled. She also gave the invocation and was the main speaker for the all-school banquet.

In 2008, Katie had a brief movie career as an extra in the Batman movie *The Dark Knight*. "My biggest moments came when the Joker threatened to blow up Gotham General Hospital. As a hospital patient in a wheelchair, I was evacuated while holding my IV bag amid great panic, confusion, and noise. . . The last scene was shot inside a bus as it pulled away with smoke and debris hitting and shaking us while we were all panicking and yelling . . . It was a great, fun experience."

Of course, who could forget Katie dancing at her 100th birthday celebration? Earlier in the year, she took a Roberta Kuhn class to learn how to line dance. The more advanced class graciously backtracked to help Katie get started.

"Thus says the LORD . . . Do not fear, for I have redeemed you . . . I have called you by name: you are mine. . . You are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you." (Isaiah 43: 1, 4). With God as her foundation, Katie was fearless and resilient. The richness of how she lived life was a foretaste of the joy she now knows. Surely her heavenly homecoming was the party of a lifetime and, knowing Katie, she quite possibly cajoled everyone in heaven into line dancing.