



BENEDICTINE SISTERS

SACRED HEART MONASTERY
in CULLMAN, ALABAMA

916 Convent Road NE, Cullman, AL 35055 ~ www.shmon.org ~ (256)734-4622

May 20, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE _____

CULLMAN—Sister Brigid Mary Clarke, O.S.B., a Benedictine Sister of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL, died on Tuesday, May 19, 2020, at the monastery, at the age of 91. Sister Tonette Sperando, Prioress, led the prayers at her bedside, with Community members present.

Vespers for the Dead was prayed privately by the Monastic Community on Thursday, May 21, in Sacred Heart Monastery Chapel in Cullman. A private graveside service with the Monastic Community and the immediate family was held on Friday, May 22, with Sister Tonette Sperando, O.S.B., Prioress, presiding. A Memorial Mass will be celebrated at a later date.

Born in 1928 in Savannah, GA, Sister Brigid was baptized at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Savannah and christened with the name Mary Ann Kavanaugh. Her parents, William Eugene Kavanaugh and Mary Deacy Kavanaugh, raised her within a devout Irish Catholic family. Sister Brigid was educated at Catholic grammar and high schools in Savannah and later attended Armstrong College and Savannah Vocational School.

At the age of 25, Mary Ann married Elbert Nicholas Clarke, with whom she had four children – Nicholas Anthony “Tony”, Mary Elizabeth “Lisa”, Catherine Michele, and Barbara Therese. During these years, the family moved to Marietta, GA, where Nicholas had taken a new job. Nicholas, whose health was precarious due to injuries sustained in an automobile accident prior to their marriage, died after less than ten years of marriage.

Anchored by her Catholic faith and her deep love for her children, Mary Ann devoted herself to creating a stable, loving home for her young children, supporting the family through her secretarial and administrative skills. Mary Ann was active in her parish, the PTA at her children’s parochial school, and in civic organizations. Her work with St. Martin de Porres Council of Atlanta was particularly important to her, as was her connection with Atlanta’s Jesuit-staffed Ignatius House. Through these, she found important sustenance for spiritual growth and opportunities for meaningful outreach. Mary Ann was also active in her Marietta parish, St. Thomas the Apostle, where she served on the Parish Council, as Chair of the Worship Committee, Sacristan, and Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist.

After her children reached adulthood and as she delved ever more deeply in her faith, Mary Ann began discerning a potential call to religious life. She entered the Benedictine Sisters of Cullman as a Postulant in 1983 and entered the Novitiate in 1984, receiving the Religious name of Brigid in tribute to her Irish heritage and her devotion to this Irish saint. Sister Brigid made her First Monastic Profession in 1985 and in October of 1988 made her Perpetual Monastic Profession with the Benedictine Sisters of Cullman.

Sister Brigid's years in monastic life have been filled with fruitful ministry. After a few years as a Pastoral Minister at parishes in Winfield and Fayette, AL, Sister Brigid served as a chaplain at St. Vincent's Hospital in Birmingham for eighteen years where she ministered to patients, families, and staff on the cardiac unit. She was also involved in community outreach through grief recovery programs. Her own experiences as a mother, a young widow, and as caregiver for her terminally-ill husband gave her unique insight as she ministered with empathy and compassion.

In 2005, Sister Brigid returned to the monastery from her mission assignment, re-entering the daily life of the community with her characteristic joy and good-natured spirit. She served as a dedicated sacristan, greeted monastery visitors through her work at the reception desk, and assisted with hospitality in the Retreat Center. Many guests were welcomed by her warm smile and cheerful presence. Sister Brigid's long-standing concerns for social justice continued to find expression as she participated in the community's Peace and Justice Committee, attended prayer vigils for peace, and stayed up-to-date on the Church's social teaching and current events. Devoted to prayer, she routinely had the needs of others in her heart, presenting them to God.

Sister Brigid's children – and later, grandchildren – were frequent and welcome guests at the monastery. Sr. Brigid cherished these visits with the close, loving family she and Nicholas had formed so many years earlier. The monastic community was also enriched by these family bonds.

Sister Brigid was preceded in death by her parents; by her husband; and by her sister, Martha T. Kavanaugh. Survivors include her children, Nicholas Anthony "Tony" Pearson-Clarke (Julie), Mary Elizabeth "Lisa" Clarke (Meredith Marchbank), Sister Catherine Mary Clarke, F.S.E., and Barbara Therese Gionet-Sauve; her grandchildren, Flannery Pearson-Clarke, Rosemary Pearson-Clarke, and Nicholas Gionet-Sauve; her Benedictine Sisters; and extended family and friends.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Benedictine Sisters of Cullman, AL, 916 Convent Rd., Cullman, AL, 35055.