Assembly Facilitator Characterizes IHMs

In August 1987 about 800 IHMs and associates gathered for Assembly. At its conclusion, Diane Fassel SL, who had served as the facilitator, was asked to describe the congregation as she experienced it. She offered the following observations based on what she had gleaned walking the halls, being at the meetings and getting to know IHMs. Some sisters thought it was “right on”; others didn’t. Diane’s comments are edited and abridged in this article.

IHMs present themselves as women affirming one another and appreciating those among them with particular gifts. You created a forum in which various types of gifts were allowed to shine. It was clear that there was a difference between being equal and being peer. All are not equally gifted, but there is a basic acceptance of basic equality in terms of who you are as persons. You seemed to enjoy one another in the variety of things you did.

You have a fascination for the intellectual, both the intellectual as person and as thing. You try not to create hypotheses too soon and are open to remodeling. You seem to connect with one another through ideas and it is in this form that you are most comfortable. It is the most highly developed process among you; the part of your culture you project with the most ease. In the intellectual area, you know you are good and you project that.

Because you are at ease with the teacher-learner situation, you are willing to put your very best thinkers in front of the community. Some of those thinkers addressed IHM history, ecclesial/theological issues, and national and global concerns during this assembly.

Prophets aren’t always accepted in their own community because people in their communities don’t want to hear the message they bring. Often, rather than discounting the message, the community discounts the person. But, you invited your prophets inside, praised them, and were willing to learn from them.

You have lots of workaholics; people who feel most comfortable in the work place and working. "Workaholism is the addiction of choice of religious people. ... [It] is the addiction of choice of the unworthy, who find that even after they work and work, there is still a hollowness inside. Yet they believe if I work harder it will go away. You might want to look at that because so much of your tradition glorifies and supports work."

In setting directions, you never bring up as a group material you’re not ready for—that you don’t have all the strengths and resources to move with what is being presented. Your directions are adamantly connected to justice, feminism, holistic spirituality, and education. They are a very interesting composite.

My hunch is that you will not be able to approach these in your preferred and comfortable manner—that of the intellectual. You won’t have as much control, things will be a little messier—and you don’t like it that way.

Remember that our most important decisions are discovered—not made. We just let ourselves see them.
Postulant Regulations During the 1950s

During the 1950s and 1960s, the Immaculata High School girls got to know their IHM teachers quite well. And, although generally both actively and willingly participating in what may have been the most academically challenging secondary school for girls in the Detroit area, there were times of “frivolity.” One involved the seniors and Sister Agnes Louise Murray, a senior homeroom teacher.

Agnes Louise, referred to as Aggie Lou, was serious in temperament and literal in interpretation. She always tried to do things the right way, whether it was preparing her classes, organizing a school activity, or even maintaining a “professional appearance.” And, yes, even when the sisters were wearing the old habit, they tried to do things like keep their blue serge habits clean and pressed, their shoes shined, etc. The latter might seem like wasted effort as the long habits covered the top of the shoes.

There were five senior homeroom teachers, including four IHMs: Agnes Louise Murray, Marie Monica Stuhlryer, Beatrix Bertrand, Ann Jerome (Anne) Crane; and Ms. Maureen Des Roches. During cold weather, the 180 seniors went to the gym during the second half of the lunch hour for fun and games. At the end of that time, the girls filed out the front doors to the gym and down the senior floor corridor to their homerooms. At the opposite end of the gym there were doors leading to stairs to the outside. The five well-organized teachers placed themselves at various points along the line of students, assuring that the girls would return directly to their homerooms. Agnes was at the front of the lines and Ann Jerome at the back.

One day, when Ann Jerome saw a garter from someone’s girdle on the gym floor, she picked it up and called to a girl from Aggie’s homeroom that she judged to be a reliable messenger. “Will you please take this to Sister Agnes Louise, tell her we noticed her stocking was sagging and ask if it is hers.”

She and her classmates enjoyed such antics, so she set out to carry out the directive. Aggie Lou listened to the girl’s message, took the garter, and told the girl to take a seat. She tried her best to appear unimpressed, but her red face gave her away.

Sister, Did You Lose This?