Sister Mary Hubert Remembers

The Archives' collection of oral histories provides personal accounts of many congregational personalities and events. Their stories also provide glimpses into the person telling them. Sister Mary Hubert Manion was well known to IHM Sisters in her official capacity as novice director from 1938 to 1956. Examinations of her Novitiate conferences on early general superiors offer insights into Mary Hubert herself.

Mary Hubert heard stories from Sister Liguori Stanley about Mother Mary Joseph Walker that suggested she had a charming personality and all seemed to love her. She also had great devotion to St. Joseph as can be seen in the story of the man who came to the door of the convent asking for help. She instructed the sister who had answered the door to give him the last money they had in the house—25 cents. That night the man returned with a ten dollar bill. “I told you St. Joseph would take care of us,” Mary Joseph said. Being loved by all and trusting in God’s care marked this conference.

Mother Gertrude Gerretsen, who followed Mary Joseph, knew how to pray. When she died, Mother Mechtildis leaned over her coffin and said, “I never had to fear for the favor of the community while Mother Gertrude was alive.” Mary Hubert also described Gertrude’s kindness. “She would give anything to help a little girl or boy. She was the one who opened an orphanage in Detroit. And, she started the Holy Childhood. I remember when I was a little girl giving a penny a month to it.” She added that Gertrude loved flowers and the convent’s park and gardens. “For her, every creature was worth something, no matter how tiny.” Fervor, prayer, and care for all creation, no matter how insignificant, struck Mary Hubert as important.

Mother Clotilda Hoskins was the general superior for 19 years. “She taught the sisters to put forth their best effort and then let God take care of it.” This trust in God was reflected in Mary Hubert’s instruction to “pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on you.”

Mother Justina Riley was gracious and kind. Mary Hubert remembers meeting her in a Motherhouse corridor after some days of absence. “She put her arms around me, a little novice.” When she told the novices about Justina, she would caution them, “Like Mother Justina, always go by principle. You can’t let your feelings take over.” A conflict between being guided by principle and being influenced by feeling seems evident here.

It was during the 18 years (1900-1918) Mother Mechtildis McGrail was general superior that she received Mary Hubert into the congregation. Mechtildis faced the difficulty of taking over the administration of the congregation when Msgr. Joos, the director, died. Mary Hubert talked about how the community needed every penny then so it could go on with its mission and how Mechtildis was a great one for poverty and not wasting anything. But equally important to Mary Hubert was Mechtildis’ kindness. “You could tell her anything and she’d never be shocked. She had a tender heart, though you’d never know it.” Thrift and trust were valued, but so was a tender heart.

Wanting to act from principle, to be well-liked, to pray with fervor and then trust in God, to care for all with a loving heart were all things she admired in the early general superiors. The struggle to balance the rigors of religious life with the graciousness and kindness of personal care and love for all was apparent in Mary Hubert’s stories, and so perhaps in her.
St. Vincent's Bell Finds New Home in Monroe

St. Vincent parish and school had a long association with the IHM community that began in 1874. Over the years more than 60 women from the Detroit parish became IHM Sisters.

When the old church was demolished in the late 1960s, only an overgrown parcel of land remained where it had stood. The bell from the church tower was abandoned on the property. Driving by, Sister Margaret (Benedicta) Brennan was shocked to see the bell sitting in the field. When she returned to Monroe, she told Sister Mary Jo (Patrick Ellen) Maher what she had seen, and the two of them decided that the bell should be brought to Monroe.

Mary Jo's brother-in-law, Michael Reilly, a graduate of St. Vincent, had taken the cornerstone of the church when he saw it in the rubble. Mary Jo asked him to find some way to get the bell to Monroe and place it on the knoll near Visitation. Michael and his brother, John, who owned a construction company, had their workmen mount the bell and place the cornerstone in the brick structure that held the bell.

A ceremony to celebrate the mounting of the bell was announced in the archdiocesan newspaper, The Michigan Catholic.

Memorial Cards Have Taken Different Forms

Memorial cards printed at the time of a sister's death have taken different forms. In recent years, a memorial card includes her picture and significant dates in her life: birth, baptism, beginning religious life and death. Putting the picture on the card, however, is a recent addition. When Sister Helen Opalensky researched this in archival records, she found that the practice of putting the sister's picture on the memorial card was not officially adopted by the congregation until 2000. That doesn't mean that pictures had not appeared on some cards before this. Sister Helen learned that Sister Loretta Mary (Mary Alvin) LaPointe had initiated attaching a sister's photograph on her memorial card in 1986. Cards for Sisters Mary Rosary Mayer and Dorothy (Mary Arnold) Rouse illustrate this. Sister Loretta Mary's card is an example of the currently used design.