Sister Carolyn (William Mary) Campbell, IHM, is a chaplain at Mercy Memorial Hospital, a 238-bed, full-service community hospital in Monroe, Mich.

Sister Carolyn spent most of her ministerial life in schools in Michigan, New York, Florida and Puerto Rico – as a teacher and nearly 20 years as principal, including eight years as principal of St. Michael the Archangel in Miami.

“In 1993, I decided on a change of pace,” she recalls. “During a year of renewal, I took one unit of clinical pastoral education (CPE) and loved it. I continued my CPE at Mercy Memorial and at St. Vincent Hospital in Toledo. Once I was certified, I was hired by Mercy Memorial.

“I was a long way from home for many of the years I worked in schools,” Sister Carolyn continues. “Being close to the IHM congregation and closer to my family has been such a blessing.”

In 2000, Sister Carolyn was elected to the IHM Sisters’ Leadership Council. When her term of office ended in 2006, she returned to the Pastoral Care department at Mercy Memorial.

“The first thing I do when I get to my office is print out a list of patients to see if there’s anyone new I should see,” she says. “I bring the Eucharist to patients who have requested it, and then I visit people who have been hospitalized for a long time – usually in the intensive care unit.

“Whether it’s praying with patients and families or listening to them express their pain and fear, people appreciate the support we provide,” Sister Carolyn observes. “The more we can help people feel at ease and that they are being taken care of, the better off they are.”

Sister Carolyn is in her office 20 hours per week. She is on-call an additional 20 hours.

“A chaplain is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” she says. “We are always called when a patient dies. If a ‘code’ is called, or in cases of trauma, we are there for the patient and family. We are also available to staff if they request our help.”

One of the biggest challenges Sister Carolyn faces in her ministry is being part of a great deal of suffering.

“I need to connect with people, be totally present with them and then take a step back and give the suffering to God,” she says quietly.
“My greatest reward is the flip side of the challenge. I have been able to see the resiliency of the human spirit, and I’m in awe.

“Parents handling the serious illness or even the death of a child; adults dealing with chronic, painful illness; caregivers being with their loved ones through many crises – it’s amazing to witness.”