Remembering Sister Delphine Charron  
Feb. 20, 1923-May 25, 2012

Elizabeth Jane was born to Lucy Brick and Delphice Charron on Feb. 20, 1923 in Grayling, Mich. She was the youngest of seven children, two boys and five girls. One little girl, Louise, died of pneumonia when she was only one year old. The others lived until adulthood. When little Betty was nine months old, the family moved to Flint, Mich., where Mr. Charron began working for Buick.

Delphine’s parents had both come from Canada. They met in Grayling where their families had moved and were married there. Mrs. Charron was sick most of her life and went to God when she was only 42 years old. Betty was six. Her older married sister, Leona, took care of the family until Mr. Charron remarried six years later.

The Depression years were hard on the family. Mr. Charron lost his job so the family struggled financially. However, as Delphine wrote, “I had a good strong father. He kept the family together. God bless him!”

Delphine attended Saint Mary School in Flint for the first five grades. “I learned most of my spirituality in school at Saint Mary’s from the Sisters of Saint Joseph,” Delphine said. Later, she attended Saint Michael School in Flint. This is where she met the IHM Sisters first. Delphine was not impressed because she found the Sisters “aloof.” Later during her high school years when she had to work for them to earn her tuition, Delphine wrote that she became better acquainted with the sisters. “Sister Mary LaVerne Koehler was my first inspiration”, she wrote.

Delphine’s funding for her job at Saint Michael’s was discontinued so, determined to remain in school and graduate, she was employed as a nurse’s aide at Saint Joseph Hospital in Flint after many appeals to the sister in charge that she be hired! Finally, sister said to her, “I’ll either have to give you a job or a bed!” This is where
Delphine first learned how to care for the sick which served us so well for so many years!

Delphine claimed that she owed her vocation to her father. On Shrove Tuesday of her senior year in 1943, Delphine was boarding the bus to attend the Reception of one of her friends at the Dominican Motherhouse in Grand Rapids, when her father said to her, “Betty, if you wish to go to the convent, I won’t stop you. The next day, on Ash Wednesday, Mr. Charron died suddenly at Church services. And Betty was settled in her decision to enter religious life and the IHM congregation.

There was some concern that Betty might not be accepted into the Postulate since having to work to get through school, she was not able to keep her grades up to “par.” Sister Jamesetta Rhoads was an intercessor for Betty. Jamesetta’s sister had married Betty’s brother, so the two knew one another. It seems that Jamesetta was able to convince Mother Theresa McGivney, the Mother General at the time, that it would benefit us to have Betty as a member. We are all very grateful to Jamesetta for her intercession. We know how right she was! “Sister Jamesetta has been a great help to me over the years, just as I am to her now,” Delphine later wrote.

It was on June 20, 1943, that Elizabeth Jane Charron entered the congregation. This was during WWII and gas was rationed. Sister Mary Ambrose Kinchsular gave gas ration stamps to Betty’s brother so he could drive her to Monroe!

Delphine’s mission has always been one of service to the congregation which she performed loyally and well. As a postulant she worked in the Motherhouse kitchen with Sisters Myra Shanahan and Hilary Dean. They gave her “on the job training” in dietary services. Even though Sister Charron’s duties were different from those of the other postulants, she was always interested in their activities.

On Jan. 2, 1944, Elizabeth Jane Charron was received into the Novitiate and given the name Delphine, for her dear, beloved father. Her work continued to be with dietary services. One day during her second year Novitiate, while Delphine was cleaning the tables in the men’s dining room, saying to herself, “I’m not sure if I can do this for the rest of my life!” as if by divine intervention, Sister Mary Hubert Manion, the novice mistress, put her hand on Delphine’s shoulder and said, “We need to get you cleaned up and ready. You’re going to Ionia tomorrow!” This opportunity gave Delphine a great boost. In Ionia she continued to learn how to care for a kitchen and prepare food. Sister Kathleen Houlihan was especially helpful to her. These were happy years for Delphine in company with her classmates, Jo Ann McAnoy and Audrey Bushell.
Delphine’s days were busy ones. On more than one Ember Day when the confessor was at the convent, Delphine would run from the kitchen to make her confession. On one occasion, when in a rush, instead of the usual “Bless me Father, for I have sinned,” she began “Bless us O Lord, for Thy gifts.” Father responded, “You must be hungry, Sister.”

Delphine spoke of having a “good mix” of mission experience and serving at the Motherhouse. Over the years and at such various missions as St. Charles, Marygrove College and Holy Redeemer, Detroit, she worked in food service, housekeeping and taught religious education classes. Then she would be called to Monroe to care for the sick. She spent more than 10 years in St. Mary’s Infirmary (as it was then called). After that, for some years, she was in charge of the Motherhouse kitchen. (Viewing her chronology, we are not surprised at the remark of one sister to Delphine, “You edify me in accepting your change from kitchen work to nursing.”) She herself wrote, “I cherish the memories of mission life and my work in the Infirmary which taught me to grow in love for my sisters. The sisters who are sick and in pain will tell you something every time you see them…” and when she returned to the main kitchen, she said, “I am…taking care for the sisters in a different way. I am doing what the Community asked me to do, and am happy in serving the sisters.”

Delphine’s special devotion has always been to Our Blessed Mother. “She brought me up!” Delphine remarked, then continued, “I have lots of love and prayers for Mary!” Her other devotions were to Saints Joseph and Jude.

For leisure, Delphine liked to play cards, enjoy the outdoors when she was able and she loved a good detective story! She also liked an interesting movie. The love for movies stemmed from her childhood...5 cents on Saturday, 10 cents on Sunday!

“Nothing ever seemed to be a problem with Delphine” one sister remarked, “either in managing the kitchen or caring for the sick.” Her food was always prepared with nutrition and artistry in mind. It not only was delicious, it was also attractive and good for you. “You are one of the finest nurses I’ve come across”, one of our elder Sisters said to Delphine, impressed by Delphine’s reassuring and gentle manner with her. Delphine has been described as quick-witted and entertaining. She liked a good laugh! Delphine said of herself, “I am loyal! If I say I’ll do something, I’ll do it!” Sister Emily Molloy said to Delphine one day, “Wherever you go, you fit in!”

How appropriate that the section from Proverbs describing the valiant woman was
chosen for Delphine’s Page of Life! This very capable woman, who does her work with eager hands, keeps her lamp lit at night and opens her arms to the needy.

This most valiant woman, our Sister Delphine Charron, has indeed been a blessing to us, feeding us when we were hungry and caring for us when we were sick. Now, we pray with Proverbs 31, that God will give her a share in what her hands have done for us.

Delphine Charron, IHM
Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM, May 29, 2012