

Then & Now March 2012



Marion (Mary Mel) Duggan, IHM, was born in Detroit at the time of the Great Depression. Her parents, immigrants from Ireland, met each other on the boat that brought them to America. They had six children, Eileen (who died in a tragic house fire months before Marion was born), Denny Joe, Margaret, Jack, Marion and Sheila.

The family belonged to St. Gregory Parish, which is where the children attended school. After graduation, Sister Marion entered the IHM community. “I was 17 and wanted with all my heart to dedicate my life completely to God. I honestly didn’t know what all that meant, but I was young and in love with God and nothing else mattered,” she recalls.

She earned a bachelor’s degree from Marygrove College and a master’s degree from the University of Detroit. For 25 years she ministered in education. She taught at St. Vincent de Paul, St. Raymond and All Saints in Detroit; St. Hugo of the Hills in Bloomfield Hills; St. Mary and Hall of the Divine Child (HDC) in Monroe; St. John High School/Lumen Christie in Jackson; St. Michael/Luke Powers High School in Flint; and St. Peter Claver in Mobile, Ala.

About her teaching years, Sister Marion said, “I taught in all grades two through 12 and loved them all. I think I grew most, both personally and professionally, during my years in Alabama. At that time, the schools were totally segregated, and our students experienced discrimination on all fronts. I feel our IHM presence, in some small way, contributed to the dismantling of racist attitudes.”

When the IHM community permitted sisters to pursue a variety of ministries, Sister Marion felt called to move into social work. Returning to the classroom, she earned a second master’s degree from Michigan State University as a clinical social worker.

“It allowed me to work more directly with and for the poor,” she said. She worked in a program for the hardcore unemployed until the funding ran out. She then moved into medical social work, first at Flint Osteopathic Hospital and then at Genesys Health Care Center, where she remained until she retired.



While in this ministry, she secured health services for the uninsured, processed adoptions, collaborated with the court systems on child/adult abuse-neglect cases and guardianships, worked with embassies and consulates on behalf of undocumented immigrants, found shelter for the homeless and befriended the dying, among many other works. Sister Marion also served on the hospital ethics committee and charity care committee, and was a board member of Genesys Hospice.

After retiring from Genesys, she turned to God in prayer. “I asked God where the greatest needs in the Flint area were and how I might help meet them,” she said. “I felt a call to the Genesee County Jail and served there from 2001 until moving to the Motherhouse in 2005.” She also tutored at Doyle-Ryder School and volunteered at Kiths Haven Nursing Home.

Speaking of her jail ministry, Sister Marion said, “My role in the jail was a ministry of presence, letting inmates know I cared about them, was interested in their well-being and not judging them or seeing them as broken and needing to be fixed. The jail population is truly among the least, the lost and the lonely of God’s flock.

“I tried to reflect compassion to them and God’s unconditional love. When they felt valued as persons, inmates often took the next steps needed for healing and wholeness.”



At the Motherhouse, Sister Marion is far from idle. She helps in the transportation department, taking sisters to doctor appointments or family visits as needed. She especially enjoys her advocacy role in helping several sisters negotiate complexities of the health care system. She continues her interest in education by serving on the board of St. Mary Catholic Central High School in Monroe.

The motto she wrote for her Golden Jubilee has remained her mission statement for life:

Called by love,
sustained by grace,
I bear Your image
to this time and place.

(Caption for second photo, above.) While ministering at Genesys Hospice, Sister Marion had the opportunity to meet Josefino Magno, MD, founder of the International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care.