We gather today to remember and celebrate the life of a most gentle and gracious woman, Sister Therese Martin Hart.

Dorothy Marion Hart was the second of nine children born to Jeanette Smith and William Herbert Hart on Sept. 19, 1911, in Detroit, Mich. The children, Herbert, Dorothy, Betty, Bob, Jeanne, Frank, Joyce, our Sister Donna Hart, Bill and Alan, cover about a 20-year span from oldest to youngest. Mr. Hart was from Detroit. Mrs. Hart was born in Marine City, Mich., but moved to Detroit in her teens so her father could establish a grocery store in Detroit's Corktown area. Mr. Smith, Therese's grandfather, was the founder of the chain of CF Smith grocery stores around Michigan that were popular from the 1920s to the 1950s. Both William and Jeanette, called Jennie, were members of Saint Vincent Parish in Detroit. When they married they moved north to Blessed Sacrament Parish. This is where Bert and Dorothy, the two eldest children, were baptized.

When Dorothy was very young her Grandfather Smith lured his family out to his country estate near Farmington, Mich. “Grandpa wanted us around him,” she told me. “Those early years, spent in the country setting and enriched by the love of family, were happy ones,” Therese Martin wrote.

Therese Martin and her brother, Bert, attended a one-room schoolhouse for their primary grades and attended catechism classes at Saint Mary of Redford, the closest Catholic Parish, about 12 miles away. Every Saturday, two IHM Sisters came from Saint Agnes Parish, Detroit, to teach catechism to the many “rural” children in the area. Therese Martin wrote, “Utterly fascinated, I watched (Sister) in that royal blue habit with the crucifix in front telling us of God’s love and… desire to come to us. I recall thinking what a wonderful way to spend one’s life - teaching children about God’s love for them. I believe a tiny seed of vocation was planted at that time.”

By the time Therese was in fourth grade, Saint Mary’s had opened a school in a building called Rosary Hall. Sister Alagonda Posner was on the first floor with grades one and two, and Sister Genofeva Guerin on second floor with grades three and four. As Therese progressed through the grades she watched the new school being built. “I was a member of the third graduating class and the second to go down the aisle of a beautiful new church still standing proudly today facing Grand River Ave,” Therese wrote. Therese said that her years spent with her teachers at Saint Mary’s ignited in her a desire to join them and do as they were doing...teaching children to grow in the knowledge and love of God. Sister Mary Jane Brown (Jane Edward) especially inspired Therese. She maintained a close and loving relationship with Mary Jane which Therese said “sustained” her through the years.

At the time of graduation in June 1928, Therese was struck down with pneumonia and her mother
was pregnant with her ninth child. For these reasons, Therese decided to enter the congregation in February 1929. From September-December, 1928, she enrolled at Marygrove for private music lessons with Sister Marie Clotilde Schrage.

It was on Feb. 2, 1929, at about 7:30 p.m., that Dorothy Marion Hart entered the old Saint Mary’s Convent on the banks of the River Raisin. This was four months before the “fire of 1929.” On entering, Therese began work in the music department but secretly longed for the classroom. In the Novitiate, to her great joy, she was switched from music to preparation for the classroom. It was on Aug. 15, 1929, that Therese was received into the Novitiate and given the name Sister Therese Martin. Therese had great devotion to the Little Flower, having been deeply stirred by her biography *Story of a Soul*, and so was delighted to share her name for the years to come. At one time, Therese Martin had thought that she might be a Carmelite, like Therese Liseux. She learned that they had a board for a bed. Therese thought she could get used to that. When she learned that Carmelites don’t eat meat, Therese Martin thought she could handle that, too. However, when Therese found out that Carmelites keep silence, she thought, Never!

In 1930 as a second year novice, Therese Martin was missioned to Blessed Sacrament School, Detroit, to teach sixth grade. Therese said that she was enraptured by her first superior, Sister Edwardine St. James. “I was so relaxed with her” Therese told me. For about the next 20 years, Therese taught in the middle grades in the Detroit metropolitan area, fifth grade being her favorite. For the next several years, Therese taught mostly Religion and English in grades nine and ten. It was a “blow” to her when in 1956 Mother Anna Marie Grix casually mentioned to Therese that she was going to Saint Michael’s in Miami, Fla., to be superior and principal. Therese sincerely did not think that she was fitted for this position. She said that she wanted to do what she was doing - teaching. She told Mother that she couldn’t do this! “Of course you can’t,” Mother told her, “let God do it.” This did prove to be a stressful six years for Therese because of the Cuban missile crisis in the 1960s. With the rise of the dictatorship of Castro, many Cubans were fleeing to Florida and so, at Saint Michaels, there were about 300 distressed Cuban refugee children.

Some 36 years after graduation, Therese Martin wrote that she was “thrilled” to be assigned to teach at her Alma Mater, Saint Mary of Redford. Here she taught ninth grade, did substitute teaching and later part-time teaching. After 12 years at Redford, Therese Martin accepted an invitation to move into pastoral ministry at Saint Joseph’s Parish in Winter Haven, Fla. She ministered to the sick, widowed and elder members of the parish. “This meant a whole new lifestyle...while trying my wings in a satisfying...new career with God’s people. I had given my early years to youth and now I could share my senior years with my peers,” Therese wrote. In 1991, Therese retired but remained in the parish as a volunteer. Then in 1994, she moved to the Motherhouse.

Sister Therese Martin loved her habit. She told me that she vividly remembered the day that she wore it for the last time and thanked God for the years she was clothed in it. “It took me time to grow into the truths of the Vatican II Renewal,” Therese remarked.

It was a great joy for Therese when, in 1945, her “little sister” Eleanor Joyce, entered the congregation. Eleanor Joyce is our Sister Donna Mary Hart.

All of her life, Therese Martin’s focus in prayer was on Therese Liseux’s “Little Way” of love and self-surrender. “God does everything if we give God the freedom” she told me. “I am grateful, oh Sister Therese Martin Hart

2
so grateful, for these years of retirement” Therese said. “I am learning so much more about community, prayer and the spiritual life” she continued. In 1992, Sister Therese Martin participated in the Venture Renewal program in San Antonio, Texas. What brought her to this time of renewal, she wrote, was for God to take her away to be alone with God so that she would be prepared for whatever the future might hold. In her later years, Therese Martin was deeply inspired by Mary’s faith and trust in God. Mary said “yes” without knowing the answers. Therese remarked that at this stage of her life she, too, has many unanswered questions.

On her Page of Life, Therese Martin wrote a scriptural parallel for several stages of her life. “Get up and make your way down to the potter’s house; there I shall let you hear what I have to say,” was her call and initiation into ministry. Then Vatican II issued a new summons, she wrote. “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets.” On her 80th birthday, God’s Word spoke to her again. “Stay with us Lord; it is evening and the day is almost over.” Retirement was such a blessed time for Therese. She wrote that she had time to listen to the voice that says, “Be still and know that I am God.”

Time is what you have now, Therese. Time to enjoy God; to look on God’s Face. You have been a faithful servant of Mary, pleasing in God’s sight! May you dwell in peace.

Therese Martin Hart, IHM
Patricia A. O'Donnell, IHM, scribe
4-5-03