

IHM Sisters Then and Now

December 2012



Sister Eileen (Mary Gael) Houlihan was born in Detroit in 1922 into a family of eight children, which included two sets of twins. She attended St. Mary of Redford School and entered the IHM congregation two weeks after graduation.

Growing up, Sister Eileen took music lessons off-and-on whenever the family could afford it. After making first profession in 1943, she was sent to Marygrove College where she earned a bachelor of music degree and later a bachelor of arts degree. She also studied at Notre Dame University during the summer and earned a master's degree in liturgy.

She began her teaching career in studio music, classroom music, choral, theology and English at St. Matthew, Detroit; then on to St. Mary Academy, Monroe; St. Michael the Archangel, Miami; St. Patrick, Wyandotte, Mich.; and Marygrove College (Monroe Campus).

In 1965, schools began cutting back due to financial reasons and many music teachers were placed into the classroom. Sister Eileen taught religion at Immaculata High School, Detroit; and religion and sociology at Marian High School, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

It was during a reunion of her profession class that she heard Father Tom Sutherland speak on the opportunities for women religious in pastoral ministry. "I was excited, spoke to him and received great encouragement to pray and investigate this ministry," she recalled. Thus began her second career in pastoral care.

In 1971, she ministered throughout Michigan at St. Matthew Parish, Detroit; St. Mary of Redford Parish, Detroit; St. Ann Parish, Monroe; St. John Parish, Howell; St. Stephen Parish, Saginaw; and Our Lady of Lake Huron, Harbor Beach. She also spent two years on staff at Visitation in Monroe.



Sister Eileen (right) at her retirement party with cousin Nancy Ayotte, IHM.



Then, in 2004, she retired and moved into the Motherhouse. Here she enjoyed visiting sisters in the Health Care Center, especially her sister Kathleen; worked distributing the mail; and used her musical skills as a substitute accompanist.

Looking back on her years, she said, “Along the way I have had the support of friends and a wonderful spiritual director. How could I not believe in God’s love? For my IHM vocation I shall never be grateful enough. The wonder of this calling fills me with awe.”