

IHM^s IN ACTION



Sister Marjorie (Katherine Drexel) Polys, IHM, is a clinical social worker in practice both in Wyandotte and Taylor, Mich.

Like many IHM Sisters, she began her ministerial life in schools as a teacher and as a principal. She earned two master's degrees and moved on to pastoral work and serving as a campus minister, followed by 15 years in the IHM Sisters' leadership.

“When I left Central Administration, I knew I needed to get ‘retooled,’”

Sister Marge says. “I had always had an interest in psychology, and I felt I'd have more ministry opportunity as a clinical social worker.”

Sister Marge saw the values of the IHM community and the values within social work were much the same. After she graduated from Simmons Graduate School of Social Work in Boston, she began ministering in Raleigh, N.C., first at a family services organization, and then with a Catholic ministries agency.

“I walked closely with victims of crime and trauma, from homeless people to millionaires,” Sister Marge recalls. “I discovered I truly enjoy working with people in transition, as well as with people in trauma, grief, anxiety and depression.”

Sister Marge spent nine years in North Carolina before returning to Michigan to begin private practice.

“Although I tend to work more with adults, I work with individuals of all ages,” she says, “as well as with couples and families.”

Sister Marge is “eclectic in the processes” she uses with her clients. “Everything I've ever used in my previous ministries comes into play as a clinical social worker,” Sister Marge says.

“For instance, just as when I ministered in schools, I utilize art and storytelling. I work to help people develop empathy, compassion, and belief in themselves, as I did in pastoral work and campus ministry. I also bring the specific skills I've learned as a social worker including policy change.

“Especially helpful with anxiety is ‘mindfulness,’” Sister Marge continues. “It's not about pushing the pain away, but acknowledging it without judging it, to ask the question, ‘Is this thought helpful?’ If the answer is no, let it go. It's easy to get caught up in the content of a difficult experience or thought, but mindfulness liberates us to live more fully.”

For Sister Marge, the most challenging part of her ministry is hearing the story of someone's pain.

“The stories can be horrendous,” she notes. “But the flip side is that clinical social work is person-centered and strength-based. Being able to witness people’s strength; seeing the light in their eyes when they break through and tell themselves, ‘I – or we – can start over;’ and watching them choose life and self empowerment – those are huge rewards!”