IHM Sisters - Then and Now
October 2010

Sister Rita (Marie Ambrose) Rennell, IHM, has been a teacher, a nurse and a missionary – sometimes all at the same time.

She entered the IHM community shortly after high school. She attended Marygrove College and began teaching second grade at St. Mary in Monroe. She taught at elementary school in Detroit, Flint and Port Huron, and then made the switch to teaching high school at St. Martin in Detroit.

“I sought God and found Him in the beautiful children I taught to read and spell and cipher,” she recalls. “When I moved on to high school, God was there in the inquisitive faces of those who joined my science classes.”

When one of the sisters teaching at El Colegio La Merced in Cayey, Puerto Rico, became ill, Sister Rita was assigned to replace her.

“I never asked for mission work,” she says. “But when I was asked to go, I prayed and felt it was God’s special call.

“The students were always clean, neat and polished,” notes Sister Rita. “They really wanted to learn and to make something of themselves.”

After more than four years in Puerto Rico, where she taught high school, worked in the school library and coached the volley ball team, Sister Rita was assigned back to Michigan. She taught high school at St. Gregory in Detroit, then at Marian in Bloomfield Hills. Ten years later, her superior, Sister Marion Farrell, suggested she go to nursing school.

“She pointed out I already had the science credentials and that the IHM Motherhouse needed nurses,” she chuckles. “I expected to be a Motherhouse nurse for about six years, but it was ten!”

Sister Rita’s final years in active ministry were spent in South Africa, where she was able to call on all her previous skills. During the eight years she spent in South Africa, she ministered as a nurse, served as missionary and in pastoral care/education. She taught cooking and sewing to young mothers – even repaired sewing machines.

“I’ve always been mechanically inclined,” she says, “and my background in physics helped in my repair work.”
She also ministered as a librarian at the seminary of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) priests – the first non-OMI to hold the position.

Sister Rita returned to the IHM Motherhouse in 1996. She served as a driver for Motherhouse residents, lectured at Mass, helped with evening prayer and made IHM dolls for several years. She remains active, working in the Motherhouse Service Office and singing in the choir. She enjoys historical novels and relaxes every now and then by watching a rerun of \textit{M*A*S*H} and \textit{The Golden Girls}.