

Remembering Therese Mary Rudell, IHM
Dec. 17, 1926 – May 2, 2013



On one of her IHM Commitment Forms, Sr. Therese Mary states, “My IHM spirituality has enhanced my ministry through God's gift of joy. I try my best to bring joy to all my Sisters, acquaintances and all with whom I come in contact. So many are joyless in God's great world. God (through my parents) has given me great joy and I must show that as I try to treat all with respect and dignity.” Therese Mary's joyful disposition was evident in both her personal and professional life.

Therese Mary was born on Dec. 17, 1926, to George William Rudell and Florence Ann Breault. She was the youngest of five children. Florence, Frances, George Jr. (who was a year old when he died) and Charles were her older siblings. Living in Holy Redeemer and Gesu parishes, the Rudell family had a long-standing connection to the IHMs. In fact, Therese Mary's parents wouldn't even think of sending their children to any other school but an IHM school. And during World War II, Mr. Rudell through his work had almost all of the IHM accounts. He also supplied the Motherhouse and Holy Redeemer with ration stamps and sugar whenever they were running low. Nothing was too good for the Sisters.

Therese Mary credits her mother for giving her a strong faith, devotion to Mary and a cheery disposition. One example of her mother's strong faith occurred the day Therese Mary was born. When the time came to deliver the child, her mother had a mid-wife who was an atheist. The woman told her to think of all beautiful things such as flowers. The response of Therese Mary's mother was, “Nuts to you, girlfriend, I'm saying my prayers.” Mrs. Rudell also had a special prayer time every day. She would sit in her chair and Therese Mary could crawl on her lap but was not allowed to disturb her mother's quiet time with God. Therese Mary's mother also had a special devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Even though the family moved out of Holy Redeemer to Gesu Parish, they traveled back there every week to attend Perpetual Help devotions.

In an interview, Therese Mary recalled an incident that motivated her to stay happy. As a child, one morning, she decided she was tired of being happy all the time. (To be pleasant was part of her mother's training.) Therefore, she came down to breakfast with a face she described as one that could hang a dog. Her mother promptly ordered her back upstairs. When she could come down with a smile on her face, she could have breakfast. Since Therese Mary was hungry, it only took a minute to come downstairs again. After that experience she made it a point to always be cheery in the morning.

Therese Mary attended St. Agnes, Blessed Sacrament and Gesu in grade school; in high school she went to Girls' Catholic Central and graduated from Immaculata in 1944. She entered the congregation in 1944. Surprisingly, she was baptized on Jan. 2, 1927, and received into the Novitiate Jan. 2, 1945, and finally professed on Jan. 2, 1950.

According to Therese Mary her formation years were both peaceful and trying. Sisters Rita Rennell and George Ellen Brannick recalled what a great pianist she was, entertaining her classmates with jazzed-up versions of popular songs. Therese Mary did not leave Monroe until 1949. She stayed at Monroe studying and teaching music with Sister Alphonsus Mary Charboneau at St. Mary's Academy.

From 1947 to 2006 Therese Mary had a variety of positions such as music and English teacher in grade school and high school, director of religious education, organist and substitute teacher in Michigan, Missouri and Puerto Rico. Teaching was her passion. She said on one of her ministry commitment forms, "When I entered the IHM I knew I would be a teacher. During all the years (55 to be exact) that desire has never changed. I am looking forward to my classes next September as much as I did the very first time I set foot in a classroom. More and more I see that the youngsters of today seem to be looking for some signs of stability and if they can't find it in a religious, where are they to find it? My reason for staying in teaching is that. I believe that teaching is by its very nature a proclamation of the Good News. I think through patience and generosity shown in the day-to-day teaching of teenagers the Good News is exemplified in me..."

Therese Mary was such an excellent teacher; she was named the Kalamazoo Diocesan Teacher of the Year for being an effective, inspirational, motivational and creative teacher who had high expectations for her students. She used her leadership skills to reach out to persons in need. In short, she made a significant impact on generations of families.

In the 1970s Therese Mary met Sister Electa and they forged a long-standing friendship. In fact, Electa became part of Therese Mary's family as well as house-mate and travel companion. They enjoyed going on trips together -- especially cruises -- whenever they could.

After 55 years of teaching, 30 years of which were spent at St. Philips in Battle Creek, Therese Mary left the classroom to pursue another one of her passions -- raising money. She was asked to stay on at St. Philip to do fundraising for the school and the parish. Some interesting money stories were part and parcel of Therese Mary's teaching career even before her retirement. Joyce Durosko, for instance, recounts this one from the Hall of the Divine Child. "Sister Therese Mary and I worked together for Company BG at the HDC. We decided that the students needed some live creatures in their lounge. We purchased an aquarium full of wonderful exotic fish such as guppies and angel fish. After a few weeks Therese Mary decided to make some additions to our collection. She brought back to HDC some beautiful Neon Tetras with a luminous strip on their sides. She splurged to buy five specimens. But something went terribly wrong! As she carefully placed each fish in the water, the very aggressive Angel Fish gobbled them up one by one. Therese Mary, in horror, exclaimed in despair, 'Oh my 45-cent Tetras! Oh my 45-cent Tetras!'" Joyce, the biologist and trained in fish communities, decided to manage the aquarium after that. Therese Mary also got St. Joseph into the act of money-making adventures. Often when there was a mega-million jackpot, she would buy a ticket and place it on his altar in the Motherhouse Chapel convinced that she would win someday and payoff the IHM debt. You can almost hear her prayer, "Please St. Joseph, SHOW ME THE MONEY!"

In 2006 because of ill health, Therese Mary came home to the Motherhouse. From that time until she went to the Health Care Center in 2012, she volunteered in the library, tutored some the employees' children, helped CENA' s prepare for their licenses and served on various committees.

Therese Mary, you faced your illness with honesty, openness and willingness to do God's will. You said, "If this is what God wants, then who am I to say no." Because of your surrender, God gave you serenity to accept the things you could not change, the courage to change the things you could and the wisdom to know the difference. One of your favorite Mary prayers includes this line. "Receive me, then, I beg of you as your perpetual servant."

May the God you love and follow, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, receive you joyfully with smiles on their faces, ready to celebrate with the "Party Nun."

Written by Mary Ellen Loren, IHM
Presented by Joyce Durosko, IHM

Jan. 31, 2013
May 6, 2013