

IHMs in Action



Judy Coyle, IHM



Peg O'Shea, IHM



Sue Rakoczy, IHM



Annette St. Amour, IHM

2010 marks the 25th anniversary of IHM Sisters ministering in South Africa. IHM Sisters Judy (John Vincent) Coyle, Peg (Cornelia) O'Shea, Sue Rakoczy and Annette (Madonna Marie) St. Amour currently minister there.

In 1983, the Redemptorists in South Africa invited IHM Provincial Mary Jo (Patrick Ellen) Maher, IHM, to establish a mission community in the country. Sisters Judy Coyle, Eileen (Amy) Karrer and Annette St. Amour began a two-year process of preparation. Sister Annette Boyle, who already had extensive experience in South Africa through a prayer ministry in the mid-1970s, was the fourth original member of the mission.

In 1985, apartheid was in full force, and the country was experiencing violent civil unrest. In spite of the very real danger, the IHM missionaries arrived in South Africa in October.

Over the past 25 years, IHM South African ministries have included parish administration, pastoral ministry, nursing, opening preschools, teaching sewing classes and college courses, fundraising and ministry to people of all ages infected and affected by AIDS.

Sister Judy Coyle says, "After 19 years at St. Joseph's Theological Institute in Natal, I am now in my fifth year as a lecturer at St. Augustine College in Johannesburg, an independent Catholic college that opened 11 years ago.



“The college is on the edge,” Sister Judy continues. “Our numbers are small, our space is limited and funding is a constant concern. Nonetheless, its ethos is a distinct alternative to the vast state universities, and it is a contact point with other Catholic institutions worldwide seeking some connection to the continent.”

“The gift of working here is learning from the people we have come to serve,” says Sister Peg O’Shea. “My ministries in South Africa have included sharing the spirituality of St. Alphonsus with Redemptorist postulants and students; working at Redemptorist Pastoral Publications; and serving in pastoral ministry.

“Parish ministry in Howick has given me the opportunity to reach out to the poor and abandoned through a preschool for poor children, activism for street children and education and support for people affected/infected with HIV/AIDS. My ministries help me reflect upon the values of South African cultures – and especially the ability of people to address suffering and challenge with hope.”



Sister Sue Rakoczy says, “I am a lecturer in spirituality and systemic theology at St. Joseph’s Theological Institute, Cedara, where I also coordinate the post-graduate program with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I feel especially committed to preparing the next generation of women theologians in Africa. Women’s voices and contributions are vitally needed by all Christian communities on this continent.”

Sister Annette St-Amour’s early years in South Africa brought rich experiences through pastoral work, visiting five rural mission communities of farm workers and building Gospel-sharing groups and catechumenate communities.

“A highlight was participating in voter education, serving as monitors/official observers and as permanent residents, voting in the monumental first democratic election of 1994 when Nelson Mandela was elected president,” she recalls.

Currently, Sister Annette ministers in Durban as diocesan catechetical coordinator. Her work focuses on supporting parish coordinators and formation of catechists. Responsibilities have included compiling an age-appropriate AIDS curriculum for catechetical sessions, developing a holistic moral curriculum for adolescents and training for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as well as creating deanery training teams.