Remembering Sister Lucille Alberta Smalley, IHM

Lucille Alberta Smalley was born Dec. 4, 1917. She was the oldest child of Matilda Valade Smalley and Lamont Albert Smalley, both of Bay City, Mich. The family moved to River Rouge when Mr. Smalley obtained a job as an electrician for Edison. They had four other children: Lamont Jr. (who became a priest for the diocese of Fargo, N.D.), Robert, Denise and David.

Lucille attended the parish school, Our Lady of Lourdes and was a bit of a tomboy. She remembered walking on the tile floors, clicking her heels. It was there in the 12th grade that she had Sister Eulalia as her teacher. She thought Sister Eulalia was great, and so when Sister Eulalia asked Lucille, “Will you talk to me about being a sister?” Lucille agreed. After the appointment with Sister Eulalia, Lucille went home and told her mother that she wanted to go to the convent. At first, Lucille wondered why Sister had asked her, but then she thought maybe Sister had noticed her at the 6 a.m. Mass every day and that might have been the reason.

Lucille entered the IHM congregation right after graduation in June 1935. When she left home, she did not know that her mother was expecting her fifth child. She later found out at the family’s first visit to Monroe. Lucille decided, after a good cry, that if her mother could make this sacrifice, then she would stay at the convent. The baby, David, was born in December, and Lucille recalled how the other sisters cared for David so her mother could attend the reception ceremony at which Lucille received her religious name, Sister Mary Lamont, after her father.

Sister Lamont went to Holy Rosary to teach as a novice, and she taught third grade. Later, she was missioned to Blessed Sacrament for four years. She also served at St. Matthew, St. Rose, Sacred Heart in Roseville and Gabriel Richard in Riverview. She actually taught every grade from third to 10th in her years in the classroom. She received her master’s degree in science and was able to teach biology and chemistry until 1975, when she retired from teaching.

In 1975, Sister Lamont decided to prepare for a new ministry: pastoral work for the sick, hurting and dying. To do this she took a year-long CPE course at Harper
Hospital. This was a life-changing experience for her. She was the only woman in a group of male students, and the relationships she developed helped her get in touch with her feelings and her own strengths as a minister. The men encouraged her to go back to her baptismal name. From then on, she was Sister Lucille to everyone.

Around this time, she received a call from Fr. Clem Esper at St. Hugo of the Hills Parish, who invited her to care for the sick, elderly and dying in his parish. She agreed to come as soon as she completed her course work at Harper Hospital. After a month off to relax, Lucille began her pastoral ministry to the people of St. Hugo in the fall of 1976. She went to several nursing homes as well as to private homes to visit the sick. She prayed with families at funeral parlors and followed up to see how they were doing after the funerals. Eventually, she recruited parishioners to assist her in her work of visiting and caring for the sick. Lucille retired from her pastoral ministry at St. Hugo in the fall of 2006.

In all of her life, Lucille was aware that she had been created by God to respond to God’s call to holiness. She found the Charismatic movement very helpful in her search for God. She was one of the founders of the Light of God Prayer Group, which has been in existence at St. Hugo for more than 40 years.

Lucille also expressed her love for God through her happy, outgoing personality and her love, especially for people, nature and animals. Her love for animals was displayed by sneaking mice and rabbits into her bedroom at Sacred Heart Convent, helping birth a calf at her sister’s farm in Virginia, feeding birds in Bloomfield Hills and loving Rocky in the memory care unit.

Another side of Lucille was her unique “Bucket List.” This included several entries. We will mention five. They included wild and exciting rides at amusement parks. After the age of 75 or 80, she added a few additional items: driving an 18-wheeler truck from St. Hugo parking lot to the Silverdome (but don’t worry – there was an experienced parishioner in the truck); riding in a hot-air balloon; flying with a Detroit News cameraman, Charlie Tines, in the News helicopter over the Red Wings parade after the Wings had won the Stanley Cup – Lucille was wearing a Red Wing jersey at the time; testing and driving a police car with a Chrysler employee, the sirens screeching loudly all the way; driving a friend’s Corvette at a high rate of speed on I-75.

That was our Sister Lucille: loved by all the parish, very real and wholly (spelled with a “w” and an “h”).
When a senior office secretary at the parish office heard of Lucille’s death, she exclaimed, “Heaven will never be the same!”

Whatever the mode of transportation in Heaven Lucille, God called you to holiness and in becoming holy, you were happy, joy-filled and unafraid.

May the Holy Spirit help us to be free too. We love you, Lucille. Continue to hug all of our friends here and there and continue to laugh and smile a hundred miles an hour.

Delivered by Sister Margaret VanVelzen, July 24, 2012
Compiled and composed by Sisters Margaret VanVelzen, Mary Ellen Keyes and Monica Stuhlreyer with information received directly from Sister Lucille Smalley