When Sister Margaret (Thomas Adrian) VanVelzen, IHM, began her ministry at St. Hugo of the Hills School she never dreamed it would be her home away from home for the next 44 years.

She began teaching third grade at the K-8 school in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., in 1966.

"The drawback to teaching young children is they tend to see all adults as much older than they actually are," Sister Margaret jokes. "So I switched to teaching seventh- and eighth-graders."

After 12 years as a teacher, she applied for the assistant principal position at St. Hugo. The principal, Sister Mary (Mary Ives) McClellan, IHM, was her mentor for 13 years prior to Sister Margaret assuming the role.

"One of the things I like about being in the same place so long is meeting students whose parents were also St. Hugo students," Sister Margaret notes. "Although if the grandchildren of any former students enroll, I think it will be time to leave!"

"Our children wouldn't be the same without Sister Margaret," one of the parents states. "As a result, even when our youngest graduates, we will always want to help the school."

"Our parents are very supportive," says Sister Margaret. "Catholic education is extremely important, but we need strong Catholic families raising strong children. This is a great school, and we're all working together to keep it that way."

In addition to a curriculum that provides a solid educational foundation, St. Hugo students also learn the importance of outreach.

"We are called to care for others," Sister Margaret explains. "Our students learn that at home, and we reinforce it at school. Students have worked to raise money and collect food and clothing for those in need, and during their study periods, our eighth-graders regularly help unload food for a local food pantry."

Sister Margaret enjoys the variety of each day.

"There's no such thing as a 'typical' day," she laughs. "I develop budgets, pay bills, work with the parish education committee and meet with faculty, parents and students."
"I enjoy it all, but the hardest part of my job is reminding students when they need to improve. My favorite part is the smile of a little kid and how, on their birthdays, they run down to my office to share their treats.

"I surround myself with wonderful staff people who do lots of 'extras' to make our school great."

St. Hugo of the Hills achieved "Blue Ribbon School" status in 2009 for being a top-performing private school. Honored schools are in the top 10 percent nationwide in math and reading scores.

A committee of faculty members and school administrators worked on St. Hugo's application. The school was nominated as a Blue Ribbon school by the Council for American Private Education and was the only school in Michigan to receive the award last year.

If you would like to partner with the IHM Sisters in support of their ministries, secure [online giving is available.](#)