

Remembering Elaine Garety, IHM

Oct. 6, 1922 – March 12, 2014



We have come together to celebrate the life and resurrection of a valiant woman, one who lived with strength and dignity, and who advanced in wisdom and grace.

Sister Elaine Garety was one of 14 children, baptized Dorothy Elaine, born to James and Matilda (Meyer) Garety in 1922. Two older sisters also became IHM Sisters: Martha, named Sister Priscilla, IHM, and Genevieve, named Sister Patricia, IHM. Her sister Genevieve left the IHM community after 25 years of service and returned to secular life.

Sister Elaine's father was of Irish descent and her mother's family came from France and Belgium. Her mother was an extremely talented seamstress and made most of the children's clothes. Elaine had her first "bought" coat when she was 16 years old. Elaine's father was a blacksmith for many years in Gagetown, Michigan. When his health began to fail, he bought a farm located on the county line between Tuscola and Sanilac Counties where he trained his children to help with the work. Dorothy (Sister Elaine) had many responsibilities, including hoeing the crops and milking the cows. Dorothy was an avid reader and often got engrossed in a book, leaving her duties of feeding the chickens and cleaning milk pails until darkness had set in.

Sister Elaine was raised during the Depression years and the family was poor but loved their religious background. Elaine wrote that one of her earliest memories was that of her mother sitting in the kitchen with the kerosene lamp shining over her shoulder while she said her rosary. Her father was a firm believer in the Holy Name Society and she never heard him use the Holy Name irreverently. "This was remarkable," she noted, "because he was a blacksmith by trade. When men are in such a situation, their speech often leaves much to be desired."

Dorothy's older sister, Albina, as a new teacher, tried all of her teaching skills on Dorothy who was 13 years younger. By the time Dorothy started Stone School, a one-room schoolhouse, she was ready for second grade. After second grade, she spent a short time in third grade and then was

moved into fourth [grade]. As a result, she and her sister Beatrice ended up in the same grade.

This turned out to be a traumatic time for Dorothy. "I felt like an ugly duckling," Dorothy recalled, "while Bea was cute, with curly hair, and the boys were crazy about her." The two sometimes had arguments over text books, too, since to save money only one set of books was provided for them. As the girls grew older, however, they became good friends.

By the time Dorothy had graduated from high school, two of her sisters had already joined the IHM congregation. One of them, Genevieve, had a book on convent life that she gave Dorothy to read. Although Dorothy had had no previous contact with women religious, the influence of her sisters and reading about convent life inspired a vocation in Dorothy. However, her entry was delayed.

In January 1938, Dorothy's senior year in high school, her mother became very ill with leukemia and died just two months later in March. That left Beatrice and Dorothy to keep house with Caroline, who was a teacher. Except for three months when she was in bed with rheumatic fever, Dorothy was housekeeper for her father until February 1941, when she entered the IHM Postulate. Although Dorothy had not attended a Catholic school, nor had any sisters as her teachers, "When I came here," she stated, "it was Home!"

On Aug. 15, 1941, Dorothy received the habit and was given the name "Sister Elaine." Meanwhile, Mr. Garety had re-married. Wonders of what would happen to her should the IHM community not want her to continue as a member sometimes arose in the mind of this novice, causing anxious moments: "Would she have a place to go then?" However, these concerns did not materialize, and Sister Elaine made profession of her first vows on Aug. 15, 1943.

On the following day, Sister Elaine was assigned to Holy Redeemer School in Detroit. She was to teach first grade, feeling very inadequate since her profession class had not had the benefit of many courses in pedagogy at this point. She received some "coaching" from Sister Anne David Dumas, which she said was a terrific help. Sister Elaine taught in primary, middle, and junior high grades in Michigan and Florida for her first 20 years.

Sister Elaine stated that her hardest year of teaching was in Wayne, Mich., where the first four grades were on half-day sessions. The Superior had not stopped the first grade enrollments when the usual three sections were filled. With enough first graders for four half-day sessions, there was a real problem. Sister Elaine finally offered to take the 105 second graders, which seemed the only solution.

In Ionia, Sister Elaine stated, convent life was very pleasant. However, when she learned some news about each of her two IHM Sisters she was greatly concerned. The night before Retreat Sunday in September she received a letter from Sister Patricia, explaining that she had applied for a dispensation from her vows. On the next day, she had a phone call from Sister Martha's superior saying that Sister Martha had been taken to Mercywood. Elaine stated that she did not know what she would have done without the kindness and understanding of Sister Miriam Joseph Bauman, her superior, who offered the time and caring presence that Sister Elaine needed to get her through these intense moments of distress and loss.

From Ionia, Sister Elaine was assigned third grade homeroom in Hollywood, Fla., and taught arithmetic in grades three to seven. This seemed her most fruitful year for developing self-confidence and successful teaching, especially in Arithmetic. During the summer she was sent to Laval University in Quebec to begin a master's in French. She was then missioned to Immaculata High School, where she taught French for the next six years.

In 1973, she returned to Holy Redeemer where she taught high school boys for the first time. She had, during her time at Redeemer, a month in France where she found her French quite adequate. But, though Elaine loved French, she found that her students were more interested in Spanish, since there were more and more Spanish-speaking folks in the neighborhood. So, Sister Elaine studied Spanish for two summers and then spent two summers at the Universidad Autonomo in Mexico City.

Thereafter, when there was need for a French teacher, she taught French; for Spanish, it was Spanish; for English, English! Sister Elaine laughingly stated that a "safety pin" would be a good symbol for her: she could "save the day" under many circumstances!

Finally, Sister Elaine worked in the attendance office for a time until 1993, when she retired after having had surgery to remove a brain tumor.

2002 found Sister Elaine living in Monroe, within St. Mary Conference Center (the former St. Mary Academy) while the Motherhouse was being renovated. She had begun knitting baby outfits and when the sisters saw the beautiful work that she did, she was assigned to knit as a charge.

Throughout her life, Sister Elaine has shown great versatility and talent in adapting to whatever needs existed. Her quiet, prayerful life as an IHM Sister has been an inspiration to many. Her expertise in sewing and knitting has benefited many sisters, as well as brought a nice profit to our Gift Shop and Christmas sales.

Sister Elaine, we will miss your beautiful, quiet presence among us, and we wish you blessings as you enter your true heavenly home where you will shine as a star for your wonderful dedicated prayer life and service to others as a true IHM Sister.

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March 19, 2014