

Remembering Catherine Cavataio, IHM

Aug. 2, 1930 - March 26, 2014



Catherine Cavataio was the only daughter of Isidore and Mary (Englese) Cavataio. Isidore was born in Sicily in 1896 and came to this country in 1917. It was here, in Detroit, that he met and married Mary. They had three boys, Sam, Joe and Bill, and only one girl. Catherine was born on Aug. 2, 1930 in Detroit and grew up in St. Rose Parish. She graduated from St. Rose High School in 1948 and entered the IHM community, staying long enough to be received into the Novitiate. She had received the name Sister Mary Peter. However, she was not ready, so Catherine left and got a job in an office for a couple of years. Then, in 1951, she entered again, and at reception, she received the name Sister Mary Alan. This was followed by Profession in 1954 and final vows in 1957.

Having received her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1955, Catherine began teaching Grade five at Holy Trinity, Detroit. From there she taught at St. Matthew, Detroit, and St. Philip in Battle Creek. In 1962, she returned to Detroit, where she taught at St. George, Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady of Good Counsel. At Our Lady of Good Counsel, Catherine taught junior high classes for five years. In 1972, she returned as principal for another seven very fulfilling years.

Catherine loved her ministry at Our Lady of Good Counsel. She felt confident to do it. In her words, "I have the professional training, I have kept up with current curriculum development, I have a strong sense of responsibility and am willing to make decisions and take the consequences; I do not feel threatened by others and generally can communicate with them."

While at Our Lady of Good Counsel, Catherine lived and worked with Sister Alice Baker. Alice said that Catherine was very supportive of her efforts to initiate Epiphany Tutoring Center and even taught there in later years.

In 1979 Catherine was missioned to Queen of Peace School in Harper Woods where she taught elementary school for six more years. It was said of her, that Catherine was very much in charge in her classroom. She had high expectations for her students. In fact, one sixth grader called her "Chopper" because she was tough.

Then, in 1985, Catherine began working in adult education at the Human Potential Center in Monroe. She told the story about being laid up with a broken leg that year and meeting someone who suggested the Education Center at Marygrove College in Detroit. This was a fresh new start for her! She *loved* this ministry, working with the students there as the Learning Center coordinator. She wrote, "The work I do at Marygrove College helps those who are bruised, entrapped; yet who are trying to free themselves. They are endeavoring to get an education; and in their own words, 'to be a role model for their children, so they, too, will aspire to get an education.'" She remained in this ministry until 2001. Mrs. Jo Ann Cusmano at Marygrove

spoke highly of Catherine and her work as director of Developmental and Foundational Studies in Reading and coordinator of the Learning Skills Lab. Her reputation went before her. It was said, “Sister Catherine is *the best reading teacher* around, in fact, she could teach a tree to read.” She believed if you could read you could do anything. She impacted the lives of hundreds of her students academically and also personally, for she took time to speak with them, whatever their needs.

The Cavataio family was very close, and Catherine had a special love for her mother. She was able to visit her daily when her mother was in a nursing home in Harper Woods. On her IHM Book of Life page, Catherine had written that her parents emphasized “love of family; be loyal, work hard and do the best you can.” We know she did exactly that. You couldn’t be in conversation with her for very long before she was telling you about Sam and Joe and Bill and their families, with 14 nieces and nephews and now, some next generation nieces and nephews. The family used to go to the Upper Peninsula for the “cousin’s cousins week” where they rented 21 cabins! Even this past summer, she was able to go. What a gift, for her and for them!

After we celebrated our 50th jubilee, our profession class began to gather for prayer and brunch about every six weeks. We called ourselves ‘The Golden Girls.’ We visited each other’s homes, and Catherine would welcome us to her apartment in Harper Woods. We are still meeting seasonally, and it was Catherine who volunteered to do the prayer for our very next meeting.

Catherine moved to the Motherhouse about four years ago. She wasn’t here one day when our administrator, Judy Smith, sent her for consultation about her breathing and she learned that she had a heart problem. She did the best she could to care for herself, but it eventually got the best of her.

Catherine was a fine educator and a faithful IHM. According to Sister Margaret Ann Henige, she loved football, she loved films and she was a good conversationalist. She enjoyed her little community on Third Floor, E-Corridor in the Motherhouse. In her retirement years, she taught computer skills, worked in the Service Office and the Library and was a driver until her eyesight failed.

Again, I quote Mrs. Cusmano. “Catherine loved life, she loved people and she loved being with people.” The Cavataio family and your IHM family will miss you Catherine. We are grateful for your faithful and loving presence among us these 63 years.

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM
March 31, 2014