



Sister Shirley Houff was born and raised in Lorain, Ohio. She attended St. Anthony Elementary School, which was run by the Franciscan Sisters.

She attended St. Mary High School where the IHM Sisters taught her and entered the IHM community right after high school. Her father had predicted that would happen: he frequently said while she was growing up, "Shirley's going to go to the convent." Sister Shirley flatly denied it, "But sure enough, it was always there."

Because of her association with the sisters, she was drawn to religious life and had entertained the idea of becoming a sister when she was in eighth grade. Seeing the religious devotion of her grandmother and having an uncle who was a priest also had an impact on Sister Shirley's decision. She came to the IHM community instead of the Franciscans because the lifestyle of the IHMs appeared more attractive than the Franciscan Sisters and she had a close relationship with an IHM Sister.

During novitiate, the novice mistress had received a letter from Sister Shirley's mother concerned that Shirley was not the same calm girl they had sent to the community. Her mother thought she was displaying signs of tension and was worried about her well-being. Sister Shirley was surprised that her mother wrote the letter and wrote back assuring her that she was well. There were times during her novitiate that were difficult but not detrimental. She says "Well, we were all in the same boat." The camaraderie and friendships with her classmates helped her get through formation.

Sister Shirley's first mission was teaching fourth grade at St. Martin on the Lake in Detroit for a year. For many years, she taught at St. Regis in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., but lived at the Marian High School Convent nearby. This was followed by years teaching at St. John in Monroe, St. John in Benton Harbor, Mich., and St. Mary High School in Wayne, Mich. Following her mother's death, she taught at Lorain Catholic High School in her hometown; she wanted to be close to her father. During the summers, she completed her Master of Education at Wayne State University, majoring in mathematics. Later, she moved to Arizona to live near her father after he and his second wife relocated from Ohio.



Sister Shirley then taught at Xavier College Preparatory School in Phoenix, where she taught history and math and became chair of the Mathematics department. (She comes by her math ability naturally; her father was always very good at it.) She also served as a guidance counselor at Xavier. In 2005, Sister Shirley moved back to Monroe to be closer to her sister. She worked as the Coordinator for Transportation for the community, arranging transportation for the sisters when they went to their appointments.

Sister Shirley now volunteers in the archives at the Motherhouse. In her spare time she likes doing crossword puzzles. "I like looking for answers," she says.

