

## Remembering Sister Jane Mary Howard, IHM

Nov. 7, 1915 – April 25, 2014

Today we remember a beautiful religious, a gracious lady, a woman of **Integrity, Dignity** and **Humility**.



To begin, we will listen to Jane Mary's own words from her "Life Story:"

I was born November 7, 1915 to Clara Mulligan Howard and Francis William Howard in Jackson, Michigan. Their first child, a daughter, had lived just a few days, so I was especially welcomed with delight.

I was baptized November 21 on the feast of Our Lady's Presentation and named Mary Elizabeth after our maternal grandmother. Eighteen months later, God blessed our family with my brother, Philip.

In the fall of 1918 our father contracted influenza, and mother also became ill. Grandmas Mulligan came from her home in Adrian to care for all of us, but first, father died, and then mother, ten days later. Grandmother took Philip, eighteen months old, and me, almost three, to live with her in Adrian.

She was a loving mother, father, and grandmother, seeing us through measles, mumps, and other childhood diseases. She read to us from the Sacred Heart Messenger, Ave Maria and the many books we brought from school and the public library. One book from her own bookcase which made a profound impression on me was the autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux. I wanted to be a saint too, and her story seems do-able to the ten year old.

My brother and I attended St. Mary Grade and High School and I went to Siena Heights College on a scholarship. My Grandmother died just after Philip's graduation from high school. He went to live with a cousin...near Wayne State [U]...but Aunt Doris [Wholihan] welcomed me into her family of four. Our uncle found employment for Philip and me in downtown Detroit, so we were able to... continue our education at the University of Detroit night school where I made many lasting friends."

Here Jane Mary tells us how she met the IHMs:

"Our pastor from Adrian, urged my aunt to have me visit his cousin, Sr. Rosina Jordan, who was stationed in Detroit. Eventually, I did. I was very impressed with the Community, all of whom were elderly Sisters, but animated, witty and joyful. Sr. Rosina

wanted me to meet her classmate, Sr. Honora, and visit the [IHM] College, Marygrove, which I did.”

With no mention of a vocation consideration or struggle, Jane Mary continues simply:

In July of 1936, in the company of my aunts, Elizabeth and Doris, I came to Monroe to enter the Postulate. I received the habit [and the name Jane Mary] and began Novitiate in January, 1937. In the fall of that year, I was assigned to teach sixth grade at St Mary’s, Monroe, under the guidance of Sr. Marie Winifred. I discovered that I loved teaching and recall that I could hardly wait out the Thanksgiving holidays to return to the classroom.

After completing a Bachelor’s degree, I was assigned to St. Philip High School, Battle Creek, and then to St. Mary Academy. After getting a Master’s Degree at Catholic University, I was assigned to Marygrove, where I taught for two years before returning to Catholic University for a Ph D in Economics.

Then, in a **masterful understatement**, Jane Mary writes, “My ministry at Marygrove spanned the years 1944-1974, and included some administrative assignments as well as teaching.”

So I must say what Jane Mary left unsaid in her story:

Jane Mary was an excellent **teacher** and well loved by her students. Peggy Schmidt remarks that she had the best vocabulary of any of her teachers, even while teaching economics. Her compassionate understanding kept many students loyal to her over the years.

Jane Mary was a **scholar** as well as a teacher.

- In the summer of 1959, funded by a grant from the Organization of American States, she spent three months in Haiti, the first IHM to go to the home of our foundress, Mother Theresa Maxis. Her research was not only on the economic conditions of the country but also a survey of the troubled state of the Catholic Church under the rule of Francois Duvalier. She wrote of her findings in an article published in *America* magazine in December of that year.
- Under a 1962 Ford Faculty Research grant, she attended a summer term on industrial organization at Northwestern University. She then devoted an entire year to a study of ‘The Suitability of Auto Assembly Plant Locations.’ However, she doubted the Ford Company adopted any of her recommendations.
- In 1965, Sister Jane Mary worked for four months in Israel with the American Association of Middle East States visiting frontier settlements and attending seminars with ministers of education and defense.

Jane Mary was a creative and capable **administrator**. She served as administrative assistant to Sister Mary Emil Penet, during her presidency at Marygrove. When she was asked to be the interim president, she proved to be a **visionary leader** more than a place-holder. After the 1967

race riots in Detroit, she initiated a program of scholarships, one in each of the Detroit public high schools. The freshman class of 1968 boasted 60 young African American women, 25 percent of the total class.

In December of 1968, the *Detroit News Magazine* published an article titled “Her Stock Deals Keep Marygrove in the ‘Blue Chips,’” praising her investment “savvy” and listing the college’s many accomplishments under Jane Mary’s leadership.

Jane Mary was one of two finalists in both searches for a permanent president of Marygrove. She suffered deeply the pain of rejection when she was bypassed in favor of a layman, but she never uttered a word of complaint or criticism. After a year as visiting scholar at Stanford University, she returned to her teaching post at Marygrove.

In 1974, she moved on to teach and administer for four years at Siena Heights College in Adrian and seven years at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. Retiring from teaching, she returned to serve as treasurer at Marygrove. In 1986 she traveled to the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Massachusetts as treasurer and administrator.

In a retirement from academic life, she moved back to Michigan in 1992 to live with Sister Angela Rees to engage in the Stephen Ministry and as Eucharistic Minister at St. Regis Parish. She reflected on that time, “I was very happy visiting the ill and house-bound or elderly – a ministry so very different from academia.”

She came back to Monroe in a final retirement in 2001. Using her economic skills in the Motherhouse Service Office, she was a faithful and conscientious check-writer and balanced the books, too. She loved her service to the Motherhouse community and, on the side, she and Sister Rosalind Naebers had a few good laughs. Her interest in public affairs was ever evident in her daily perusal of the *New York Times*, and her keen wit and gentle humor added much to our table conversations.

In 2007, Dr. David Fike presented the first Marygrove College Presidential Award for Leadership to Sister Jane Mary in recognition of her opening the college to new responsiveness to the community of Detroit.

How can we summarize the long and fruitful life of such a devoted servant as Jane Mary? It is not possible to do so. Her Book of Life page, composed during our IHM theological update process, expresses beautifully her own summation of her life as one of **gratitude** and **love**.

“...What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Already you have become rich!” [I Cor. 4: 7-8 NRSV]

Jane Mary adds, “I do not boast; rather I give thanks to our Loving God....” And she lists the many the gifts of her life, concluding: “For all of these gifts, I give thanks. Since, ‘Love is repaid by love alone,’ I pray for the final gift of **fidelity in love**.”

Jane Mary, you have lived that **fidelity** in **love**. You have been **gift** to us. Thank you for the blessing of your faithful life with us.

Written and delivered by Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM

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