



Sister Mary Ellen Sheehan was born in Detroit of Irish immigrant parents who had many brothers and sisters in the United States and England and Ireland. Eventually Mary Ellen came to know them all and her 40 first cousins. With her four younger siblings, she grew up with an active sense of our Catholic faith.

She describes her extended family “as practicing, though not overly pious. We were and are very concrete in our expression of faith, caring for others, especially immigrants and others enduring troubles.” Sunday dinners with family and friends were joyous occasions, filled with crackling conversation. “We often welcomed Irish missionary sisters and priests, visiting Detroit to raise money for their works. They were loving people and we learned so much, listening to them talk about countries all over the world.”

Mary Ellen had IHM Sisters for 12 years at St. Vincent and Gesu Grade Schools and Immaculata High School. She experienced the sisters as humane, humorous, caring and dedicated to their mission. In her high school senior year, she sensed a call, stemming from both IHM and Gesu Parish Jesuit influences, to give her life fully to God, discerning it quietly through a steady, though hidden, practice of prayer. Her family, though a bit sad, celebrated her decision to seek admission to the IHM Sisters. Since the family had sisters and priests in previous generations, her father remarked wryly, “Tis in the breed!” In 1956, she went to Ireland with him, his first trip back in 28 years, and her introduction to many more relatives with whom she is still in contact.

The broad education and theological grounding that Mary Ellen received in her IHM formation years solidified her vocation. “What we learned about Scripture, the sacraments, the liturgy – so informing and so broadening!” The rigid rules, however, nearly caused her to leave, but with guidance she decided to stay. “I remember afterwards a specific religious experience I had in the Chapel where I received in prayer the deepest of insights into what it means to be ‘in Christ.’ That was it, the sealing sign!”

Sister Mary Ellen taught first at St. Catherine School, Detroit. Next, she studied full time at St. Louis University, earning a master’s degree in philosophy. Then, she taught philosophy for three years in the Monroe Formation College. In 1968, she began full-time study in theology at the Université Catholique de Louvain in Belgium, receiving the S.T.D. degree in 1975. Then, she taught theology for three years at St. John’s Major Seminary in Plymouth, Mich. In 1978, she began teaching at the Faculty of Theology, University of St. Michael’s College in the Ecumenical Toronto School of Theology, staying until 2013.





IHM Sisters Then & Now

March 2018

“My 58 years of full-time ministry and now continuing are wondrous years, full of life and love, teaching and learning, giving and receiving – the sheer beauty of living deeply in the ever dynamic mystery of being ‘in Christ’ in the communal, universal IHM way.”
Simply put, “I give thanks galore!”