

**Remembering Joan Charnley, IHM**  
**July 13, 1937 – May 13, 2014**



Today we gather to remember our sister, Joan Charnley whom I knew throughout all of our IHM life – and more. I first saw Joan in action as she coached Immaculata’s arch-rival basketball team, St. Gregory, Detroit. They probably beat us, as was their pattern.

To the large and loving family, I shall leave the stories of tears and laughter, of family and team. As the second of 11 children, all 10 surviving, Joan holds a special place. Sports, especially basketball, bound them together and taught them life lessons of fair play, of give and take and how to take a loss.

On Sept. 7, 1958, Joan walked through the front door of this Motherhouse a bit ahead of me. At the time, order of entrance sealed who would be next to one at prayer, meals and most activities. This IHM was called next-in-rank. For many, many years, Joan and I did not call each other by name, as she would usually greet me with an affectionate, “Hi Next,” to which I would reply in kind. We were on the same team by then, with Joan as coach and best player. To this day, our class remains unbeaten in our intermural games.

Joan had wanted to be a missionary, but her mother prevailed upon her to wait until she was 21. In the meantime, Sister Millicent prevailed upon her join the IHMs. What a gift for us.

Joan was the personification of an IHM educator. Teaching in Detroit grade schools Epiphany and Gesu and returning to Epiphany as principal, she caught the eye of IHM leadership. In 1974 as Marian High School struggled with decreasing enrollment, she and Diane McCormack, IHM, joined as co-principals.

Joan had the unique ability to cross Eight Mile Road. Moving within the most racially divided city in the United States; she could bridge the City of Detroit and the suburbs that had inverse proportions of black to white residents, about 80-20 percent at the time. Because people were her first priority, she led by the law of love, leaving other laws, policies, etc. to a lesser priority.

Joan treated each person as a peer, so she quickly befriended the parents at Marian High. The Dads’ Club, made up of strong corporate leaders, found in her a friend and sister. They joined with her in the sorely needed fundraising and became ambassadors in the increase of student population. The school was turned around by those efforts, so much so that more space was needed. The A-wing was added to house the Theology Department and Science Labs.

Sports, especially basketball, remained her passion. A gymnasium with its linoleum tile floor was unacceptable. With the Dads’ Club in the palm of her hand, they raised the funds to replace

it with a wooden floor. Fortunately before it was finished, they changed the name of the team from “Flowers” to “Mustangs” and their logo still occupies the center of that space.

In 1988, Joan returned to urban environs as principal at Bishop Borgess High School in Redford. There she served for 18 years until it closed in 2005. But Joan remained as it underwent a transformation, not to a Charter School, but to a Covenant High School and Academy under the New Common School Foundation. Thus, they remained a Christian school. Given the relationships within the school community, the majority of the faculty stayed and student enrollment increased. What a tribute to the leadership of Joan and Vice Principal Linda Ferenczi, IHM Associate.

With the onset of cancer, Joan wisely moved into part-time ministry at St. James Catholic Church, Novi, in 2010, where her brother George was pastor. There she remained working as adult faith coordinator. As of last Sunday, her weekly column appeared in the parish bulletin.

In all of her ministerial adventures, Joan was the quintessential IHM. Reading her annual commitments, she reflected the treasured IHM values articulated in the current issues, such as racism, non-violence, sexism.

To conclude, let me share just three of the recognition awards she received, hoping that the ceiling above won't come crashing down at Joan's displeasure.

In 1988, Joan was named an honoree in the Hall of Fame of Principals in the Detroit High School League. In 2011 Marian High School recognized her during the Annual Celebration of Thanks. One of her gifts was a piece of the wood floor with the inscription that read, “Thanks for your impact on our athletic program-first wood floor in gym 1977.”

Most recently she was inducted into the Order of St. Bede during the 2012 Bishop Gallagher Awards Dinner.

On May 13 she received her greatest recognition. With the grace of a strong athlete, she slipped away in the course of her admission to the IHM Health Care Center. She probably holds a record for the shortest stay. Now we believe she holds the title of winner of a race well run to the finish in faith and in love.

Already, we miss you, Joan. The *Caritas* sculpture outside of Marian High School, which you had installed, stands as your symbol and your legacy. In a word, “Love one another.”

Written and delivered by Carol Quigley, IHM  
May 15, 2014