Remembering Sister Mary Margaret Durack, IHM
May 18, 1924 – Oct. 9, 2015

"Irish blue eyes and a beautiful smile" are the first words that come to mind from many who knew her.

This first child of Thomas Patrick Durack of County Clare, Ireland, and Mary Genevieve Wines, was born on May 18, 1924. Baptized at St. Cecilia in Detroit, she would be joined by three sisters: Julia, who served as Maryknoll missionary, Sister Maria Luz; Eileen, who became the mother of seven children as Mrs. John Muldowney; Anne, our IHM Sister; and finally, 11 years later, a brother, Thomas Patrick, now father of six with his loving wife, Ann.

Mr. Durack was a fireman, rising to the rank of captain. Sister said, "I can see him coming home in his blues, so happy; I can hear his very heavy Irish accent." Mrs. Durack was very religious and had a prayer chair and no one was to disturb her during her prayers, as she often prayed for religious vocations in her family.

And religious vocations were very much a part of this family with great-aunt, Sister Harriet, IHM, and four cousins, Sisters Scholastica and Maria Gratia, both IHMs, Rev. Michael Delahanty, a Servite missionary and Rev. Thomas Fitzpatrick, a Holy Cross father.

Her family remembers her as a very active and involved girl, a leader to her three sisters. A talented musician, Mary Margaret played piano beginning in grade one, then violin, and had a lovely voice. Her talent was such that she and her good friend presented their own recital in high school.

She loved a party, loved to be with her family and had an amazing memory for family history. (She knew, for example, that her great-great-grandfather was a general in Napoleon's army.) She knew everyone's name and was always thirsty for family news. She continued this interest in the community, ever wondering what was happening because she loved people and was concerned.

Educated by IHMs at St. Cecilia, Mary Margaret entered the IHM community on July 2, 1942, was received Jan. 2, 1943 and given the name Harriet, making her final vows on Jan. 2, 1948 as community member #1413.

When she received her BA, majoring in music, from Marygrove College and later her masters in music education from Wayne State University, the plan was to share her passion for music as a teacher in that field, but such was not to be for long. This was a difficult period when music teachers were needed as classroom teachers and so they went on a path they might
not have chosen.

As educator, she served in Erie, Mt. Clemens, Flint, Wayne, Birmingham, Farmington, and Detroit. Sister was principal at St. Joseph, Dexter and St. Michael, Monroe. In her earlier days, it was said that she didn't walk, but flew, a tall figure with her black veil and blue IHM habit flying behind in her wake.

She was blessed with both the creativity of the musician and the mind of a mathematician with its logic and organization. She liked to plan and do things her way.

A talented seamstress and knitter, a perfectionist at this craft, she made prom and graduation dresses, a flower girl dress and afghans for everyone. She also made the dress and jacket she is wearing today. She loved talking to other knitters and was generous with her patterns. Dozens of baby sets and angel-soft baby blankets were made for family and for the IHM Gift Shop. Each year she spent many hours making craft items for the Christmas sale. She was an excellent and generous cook. Nieces and nephews looked forward to her Christmas cookies. When not otherwise engaged she was an avid puzzle worker. Those hands so busy about service and activities were to become virtually useless in her last days and still we saw that radiant smile.

Sister's Ministry Commitment Forms over the years reveal a person committed to the IHM spirit and mission in the work of the Church, concerned about Gospel values, wanting to learn about and respond to issues of peace and justice and the needs of the global society. Education in Catholic schools and parishes was at the heart of much that she did. She states, "... the honor that is mine as an educator," and "... to recognize and respect the sacredness of all life." She believed that compassion and reconciliation could bring healing to the troubles of the world. Sister Mary Margaret said that, while forms of community and ministry had changed drastically, her IHM commitment had not. Her page in the IHM Book of Life is built around the letters in these words: "A Grateful Heart."

She saw retirement as a time to pause and hallow her life, a time for prayer and reflection, which she truly treasured, but still she remained active, generous with her time. She touched base with fellow senior citizens in her parish, experiencing the reality of aging, ministered to the sick, visiting and bringing communion, volunteered at St. Mary of Redford to stay in touch with the ministry of education, helped at a soup kitchen and always maintained an interest in missionaries.

In 2005, as a victim of a horrendous purse snatching, she suffered serious physical and emotional trauma, then used the event as an opportunity to deepen her understanding of this kind of suffering afflicting so many in our times. Through all this, she was sustained by prayer and the blessing of living with Sister Anne, whose tender care was so very much appreciated.

During these last years, the diminishments of aging became an even heavier burden: hard of
hearing, hands increasingly balled up, feet becoming twisted and deformed, her head bowed down, so dependent on others, unable to do for herself, but still blessed with the sisterly dedication of Sister Anne, and the kindness and love of our Health Care staff, sisters, and family, she was courageous and trusted in God's will and love for her. "I am in God's Hands," she said. Increasingly unable to swallow, her speech halting and delayed, she knew what she wanted to say, and she often expressed gratitude for kindnesses rendered to her.

Not long ago she was heard to say quite clearly, "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard ..."

Sister Mary Margaret Durack was not famous, or highly honored, and never sought to see her name in bright lights, just an ordinary person, a good sister, who took her gifts and talents, her weaknesses and strengths, the good and bad of life, and did her best to endure, to learn, to love, and to serve her family, her community, the Church, our God, and did so with that radiant smile. Then, on the morning of Friday, Oct. 9, at precisely 4:38, as we sang, "Softly and tenderly, Jesus is calling ... Ye who are weary ... Come home, come home ...," she slipped away.

And can you imagine that moment, when the Lord finally said, as He did about Lazarus, "Release her and set her free"... and twisted feet were beautiful again; no longer stiff, her hands could be lifted high; there was music in her voice; that bowed head raised, blue eyes wide open, and her smile never more radiant as she beheld her loving God, face to face.

Sister Loretta Schroeder, IHM
Oct. 12, 2015