

## Remembering for Sister Marie Evelyn Dunn, IHM

March 7, 1929 – Nov. 22, 2017



It was late winter, March 7, 1929, when Marie Evelyn was born, at home, to Florence Mueller Dunn and Thomas Dunn in Detroit. Her mother was of German descent, and her father was an immigrant from County Offaly, Ireland. The family was living in St. Martin Parish, and the new baby was baptized there and named Shirley Ann. She had one sister, Ruth, and three brothers, Thomas, John and William. She was the fourth child, and William was the youngest.

Marie Evelyn writes of her childhood: “We lived in a neighborhood with friendly neighbors and many children. My Dad was a D.S.R. bus driver. This entailed split shifts in his work during most of my life at home. Because of this, he usually came home from the early bus run near 9:30. After he had breakfast, he would often gather us with some of the children in the neighborhood and take us to the playground or for a walk to the Detroit River at the end of our street, where we would wade in the water or sit on large rocks and watch the boats go by. This would relieve our mother for an hour or so before he went back to work his next shift.

“Since we did not have a car, the highlight of my Dad’s vacation was a whole day at Belle Isle. My Mother would make potato salad and all the trimmings for our lunch and supper. We always looked forward to going to the casino there where Dad would splurge and buy us each an ice cream cone, ginger ale and cracker jacks. We felt like the luckiest kids in the world.”

The children attended St. Martin School. She wrote: “From the time that I received First Holy Communion in Grade One, I attended daily Mass. Because of this, my Dad often called me Sister Mary. Perhaps that is when the first seeds of my vocation were planted, even though I had no such intention/desire at the time. It was during my junior year in high school that Sister Ann Pierre Paquette encouraged me to think about entering the convent. When I was a senior, she invited a couple of my friends and me to go to a Reception (in Monroe). (The next year) I entered along with Mary Laird, on June 29, 1947, and was received on January 2, 1948. Profession was in 1950 and 1952. My life as an IHM all began with a tremendous grace from God that gave me the strength to leave my dearly loved family to follow HIM.”

Marie Evelyn received her bachelor’s degree from Marygrove, in Detroit, and a master’s degree in special education from Wayne State University, also in Detroit. She wrote: “The outstanding preparation for teaching that we received as IHMs is a blessing that I have valued more and more each year. It is probably one of the major factors that have kept me in the classroom, regardless of exhaustion by 3:00 pm.”

“Going on my first Mission was the beginning of so many experiences of loving friendships and beautiful examples of generosity of so many IHM Sisters.” Marie Evelyn began a long, faithful

ministry of teaching at St. Hugo in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. from 1950–1955, followed by five years in Benton Harbor, then in Wyandotte, Detroit and Ann Arbor, all in Michigan.

In 1967, she began teaching for a period of eight years at St. Mary, Monroe. On Dec. 12, 1974, the pastor, Rev. Gentner, wrote to Marie Evelyn: “Thank you for your splendid service here at St. Mary’s. You have done a magnificent job here. You seem particularly endowed to be open to the future while respecting the past.”

In 1975, Marie Evelyn was asked to serve as principal at St. Patrick, Carleton, Mich. This she did until 1982. When St. Paschal School (Taylor) re-opened in 1982, Marie Evelyn showed her fine ability to manage many tasks. She taught classes in grades one and two and organized the Religious Education Program for seven years. Then she moved on to her next mission.

Records show that Marie Evelyn was assigned to St. Mary, Mt. Morris, Mich., in 1989. But her teaching position did not materialize, so she filled in many needed positions: Coordinator of religious education, teaching religion in grades two, five and six, handwriting in grades five and six, and religion in religious education classes. Her treasured responsibility and her great love was preparing the children for reconciliation and Holy Eucharist. Eventually, the curriculum got settled, and she remained at St. Mary until 2003, 14 years.

Sister Marie Evelyn and Sister Julia Ann Kline were the last IHM members to teach at St. Mary in Mt. Morris. They helped close the school after eight decades of IHM presence there. St. Mary opened in 1921, and more than 20,000 students had attended over the years. There was an article in a Flint newspaper at the time of the retirement of these two women. It said:

*“They are called servants of the IHM but to thousands who graduated from three Flint-area Catholic schools where the nuns taught, they are better known as women who played vital roles in the students’ future. ... Many who were taught by the nuns locally have fond memories of their teaching service at St. Michael’s and St. Matthew’s schools in Flint, and St. Mary’s in Mt. Morris. .... Hundreds of the nuns taught in the three schools stretching as far back as 1877 when four nuns came to teach at St. Michael’s.”*

We take time to remember the close personal and working relationship of Sister Julia Ann and Sister Marie Evelyn. They experienced 28 years of a long, devoted and helpful friendship, going back to the time they were together in Carleton. Marie Evelyn took loving care of Julia Ann when she was assigned to Memory Care, taking her twice daily to play cards and to visit

Like each of us, Marie Evelyn did many things besides those written here. She was a supervisor of student teachers for the IHM community, for Marygrove College and for the University of Detroit. She was secretary for the Southeast Province for 10 years.

Rev. Charles Fontana of St. Patrick, had written the following in the parish bulletin:

*“This weekend’s 11:00 AM liturgy is offered in thanksgiving for the years of service given by Sister Marie Evelyn Dunn, our principal and Sister Julia Ann Kline, our third grade teacher. After seven and eleven years here respectively, both Sisters are leaving to accept teaching positions at the newly re-opened St. Paschal’s School in Taylor. The*

*entire parish family owes a profound debt of gratitude to both these religious women for their selfless dedication. In addition to their school commitment neither has ever hesitated to serve in other areas of parish life. Both have been readers, Eucharistic Ministers, visitors of the sick, religious education teachers for our public school children as well as kitchen helpers at both our festivals and roast beef dinners. Personally, I have appreciated their warm support of my pastorate, their kind invitations to breakfast and to dinner, and the friendly skirmishes at cards. We bid them official farewell today."*

Friends shared memories of Marie Evelyn: she was serious, shy, prayerful and she liked being alone in her room. But there was another side to this woman; she could enjoy a funny story about herself. She liked to tell about the time Sister Marie Winifred (Kerwin) came to observe. Marie Evelyn was teaching reading at the little chairs, using a large (two feet by three feet) reading chart with vocabulary and phrases. When she turned the page on the chart, two other pages fell to the floor. Naturally, every child in the group scattered to pick them up. As she looked up, she could see Sister Marie Winifred covering her face and cringing in her seat.

While she was at St. John, Benton Harbor, there were 12 happy, and mostly young sisters. Besides teaching school, they taught catechism on Saturdays and Sundays and had many household duties in the convent. Because of this, it seemed they were always very tired! As a result, they decided they were going to start a 'new community'; they would call it "the Dormitians," and they elected Marie Evelyn to be their Mother General. She was to be called "Mother Dormitia." Their main ministry was to sleep and rest. In fact, when Mother Teresa McGivney came for visitation, she declared that she, too, wanted to join this community, because she never liked getting up at 5 a.m.

Marie Evelyn cherished memories of her family life, her reception of her First Communion, the beautiful children that she had taught. Also among her memories was a prayer written on the back of a holy card received from a very special friend at her reception.

*Oh! With a gesture light and free, Lord,  
I would give my life to Thee -  
Not sparingly, not grudgingly -  
But I would take my life  
And fling it at Thy Feet  
And sing and sing;  
So glad that I might bring Thee  
This one thing!*

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM  
Nov. 29, 2017