Experiences and Expressions of the Arts
To commemorate the anniversary of the congregation’s founding on Nov. 10, 1845, this exhibit included photographs and artifacts from the IHM Archives that highlight the creative process and the imaginative spirit of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
This article was first published in the IHM newsletter *Earth Community* in 1999. It served as a source of inspiration for the staff of the IHM Archives throughout the planning of this Founders’ Day exhibit.

The title of the exhibit, “Experiences and Expressions of the Arts,” was taken from the first paragraph, and exemplifies a focus on the process of art-making and imparting the joys of creativity, as well as the beauty of the final product.

When the arts reclaim the beauty of creation, we see with the eyes of the heart and the truths of life merge more evident. The arts liberate humanity’s cries of agony, yearning and exultation. With a heightened awareness we recognize the voices pleading for attention, gentleness and loving care. Mutuality replaces domination and right relationships grace our lives. Experiences and expressions of the arts sustain, heal and vault us to fuller harmony and connectedness with the human spirit.

To do art, to know art brings a power which is transformative of self, community and the world. Musical genius restores tranquility to an environment barraged by the noise of semis grinding gears; a sketch or visit to the museum replaces the vision of burned abandoned buildings; and a well-written novel erases society’s lack of civility by reaffirming the complexity of the human spirit. Drama plants a spark in a life that may burn forever. Crossstitch, embroidery and needlepoint bring peace and beauty with each motion of the needle while crocheting and knitting develop myriad patterns of beauty and warmth. Gardening and culinary delights nurture the whole of us. The list goes on...

The arts offer a unique entree into the soul of all creation, for beauty in its multiple definitions, enables us to be touched and makes our vision clearer. Life in our throwaway society regularly demands a different perspective! Consider! Styrofoam scraps from computer boxes become art pieces in the hands of students. In a giant puppet play, 1st graders are set designers and 5th graders become a river. Athleticism and rhythm combine in street-generated break-dancing.

To do or participate in the arts is to be present to life. When we do not possess the arts in our lives, we become less expressive and seldom acknowledge where our heart is. Within us, the arts center and sustain the underlying spirit of creation; it is ours to seize with joy.
Louis Gillet, Who is Like Fire, 2004
Nancy Lee Smith, IHM, iconographer

Theresa Maxis, the Holder of Fire, 2004
Nancy Lee Smith, IHM, iconographer
She, our first Teresa,
Beginning of a mighty throng
Reaching from generation unto generation
Would sing Magnificat at the source
Sing it in a strange land
In exile, suffering and disgrace
Yet never cease to sing –
To sing of Mary’s joy –
    MAGNIFICAT
And out of all the anguish of those years
Out of the loneliness of grief and separation
Has come our Mary-gladness
Like a river flowing darkly
In the earth, scarcely heard
Going its way unknown, unfathomed
Till suddenly breaking forth
It flows in jubilation
Under the brightness of the sun
Scintillating in its rays
Drawing all who see it
To marvel at its majesty.
So, in this new century,
This beginning of yet greater things for God
Our Mary-life goes on,
And Our Blessed Mother sings in you her new Teresa
Her one perpetual song,
    MAGNIFICAT
All the gathering of old and new have met
And kissed each other in mighty peace.

From the illuminated manuscript, “Songs from the Source,” 1946, Rena (Mary Columba) Geary, IHM (1918-1976)
To Père Gillet

Out of darkness and obscurity
And quite forgottenness
He came – a flame
For three short years.
A dream – no more
And four nuns in a cottage
Recall disgrace – defeat
And tumbling over on him all his dreams
All human trust vanished quite away
So God is all –

A monastery
Silence – solitude
And did he ever think of us
Or even pray for us
Or even had thought
This work too as all his works
Were past and gone
Part of that strange time of
Death and doom.

Here he was witness, faithful witness
To the only things worth living for
And so he lived and would have died –
Yet God who loves to give men joy
Gave him this full measure to know his little
Planet was not a tree –
That souls were being saved because he placed
A seed in Monroe.

O there are those who say what if he did plant a seed.
What matter if the tree was nourished and grew tall
Without his help at all.
Obscurity and dark of failure were the wings
That lifted him above these earthly things.

Dear Père Gillet
What can we say
We who know that anguish and abandon on your cross
Was the one most necessary past.
And chose you and only you
To suffer that Sisters clad in blue
Might bring a smile to Mary’s lips
A glory to her heart.

Rena (Mary Columba) Geary, IHM (1918-1976)
Written about 1958-61 when missioned to St. Mary, Akron, Ohio
Nazarita Joly, IHM (1905-1956, left), pictured with Mary Robert Gilloe, IHM (1905-2000), led the Art Department at St. Mary Academy in Monroe from 1943-1951. Her many contributions, both large and small, to the festivities marking the congregation’s 100th anniversary included the set design for the Centennial Pageant, presented by the girls of the Academy, and the program for the celebration dinner, the cover of which is shown here.
Genevieve Sullivan, IHM, Mary Ralph Lefebvre, IHM, and Marie Sylvia Sullivan, IHM, pose for a photo during the summer of the IHM Centennial, 1945. According to Sister Gen, she was supposed to appear in a photo of sisters playing croquet, but was instead asked to pretend to sew. And pretend she did, as she had “never held a needle in her life!”
During the Tri-IHM Sesquicentennial celebration in 1995, Martha Rabaut, IHM (1927-2017, left), and Stella Rabaut, IHM (1925-2001), collaborate on a piece of a tapestry assembled by members of the three communities.
Anna Mae Nadeau, IHM (1914-2002), spent 64 years in education, both in the classroom and as principal and superior for schools in Detroit and Highland Park, St. Mary Academy and the Hall of the Divine Child. In the homily for her funeral, Bishop Kenneth Untener recalled that five Untener siblings were taught by her. “Before I ever started school, the name, ‘Sr. Anna Mae’ was a household word.” In retirement she made dolls and doll clothes that were sold at Christmas sales. She learned doll-making and inherited a sewing machine and dolls from Sister Mary Siena Ethlen.
Macrina Zimmer, IHM (1905-2000), was a renowned seamstress who taught home economics for 13 years at Holy Redeemer School in Detroit, among her 56 years in teaching.

Returning to the Motherhouse in 1971, she served as Mistress of the Sewing Center. Here, Sister Macrina works on a quilt.
Marie Louise Drawe, IHM (1883-1970), taught choir, orchestra, studio music and private lessons for 58 years. She took her final vows in July 1905 and almost immediately began teaching at St. Mary Academy. Sister Marie Louise also painted with watercolors and the sale of her cards made income for the community.
Jannita Complo, IHM, developed the art form known as Dramakinetics to engage children and adults through music, drama and creative movement. Sister Jannita instructs student teachers at Marygrove College (left) as part of a movement education program (1975) and connects with a young student at Jemez Day School, Jemez Pueblo, N.M. (1992).
Eighth grade students from St. Hugo of the Hills School, Bloomfield Hills, Mich., prepare for a liturgy with their teacher, Margaret VanVelzen, IHM (1975).
Cecilia Schmidt, IHM (1925-2015, above), and Norma Groth, IHM (1920-2015, right), conduct a craft class at the Detroit Baptist Children’s Home, 1974. In addition to clay projects, the boys did copper tooling, straw weaving, and sand casting.
IHM Sisters at the St. Philip convent, Battle Creek, Mich., c. 1963. Identified in the photo are Doreen Lynch, IHM (violin), Mary Anne Humbel, IHM (piano), and Corona Buchheister, IHM (1893-1979; behind pianist).
Music was a central element during the 42-year history of Visitation and the Lord’s Barn. The experiences at this IHM House of Prayer were lively, moving and deeply spiritual. The IHM Sisters contributed to that in every way, including music-making.

Here, Sisters Susan Mahalik and Barbara Weigand accompany the service on guitar and Sister Carrine Etheridge plays piano. Sister Barbara spent seven years at Visitation directing retreats. Sister Susan held her incorporation ceremony at Visitation and frequently played guitar for Wednesday night liturgy there. Sister Carrine also used her musical talents to play for liturgy while she was rector at Notre Dame’s Farley Hall.
Barbara Weigand, IHM, directs the boys’ choir at St. Martin Church, Detroit, where she taught fourth, fifth and sixth grades between 1961 and 1964.
Therese Mary Rudell, IHM (1926-2013), spent her life making music – for serious study, for worship and just for fun. She studied under Sister Alphonsus Mary Charboneau at St. Mary Academy. She also was the organist for the Veterans Administration Hospital in Battle Creek from 1996 to 2006.
IHM Formation Chorale in the auditorium of St. Mary Academy, as led by Alphonsus Mary Charboneau, IHM, 1961.
Mary Charboneau, IHM (1915-1985) spent nearly 50 years teaching, playing, and composing music. She served as Motherhouse music director from 1944-1967. She won awards for her contributions to Catholic music education and liturgical music.
Flora Brennan, IHM, earned her Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Notre Dame in 1970. For her thesis project, titled “Peace and Resurrection Joy,” Sister Flora designed and decorated the altar, tabernacle, wall paintings and vessels in the convent chapel at Catholic University, Ponce, Puerto Rico.
Ann (Mary Aquin) Chester, IHM (1901-1999), wrote the play, *The Voice of Bernadette*, in 1958. Based on *The Miracle of Lourdes* by Ruth Cranston, it was described as “a drama in dance, verse choir, and mimic presentation.” It was performed by the students of St. Philip High School, Battle Creek, in 1959 when Sister Ann was the superior there; this photo shows another performance at the Motherhouse. A quote from the play: “Return, O man, from your out-posts of space to your earth-home.”
Sister Edith (Kilian) Kenny worked in many different media, from water color, oil and ceramics to metal, jewelry and silk screen. A self-taught artist and devoted teacher, she was a member of the Marygrove College faculty for more than 40 years.

“Three Kings” by Edith Kenny, IHM (1915-1997)
Discovered in the Power House by Ann Currier, IHM, this statue of Our Lady of Grace was moved to what is now known as Our Lady’s Courtyard in 2006. Sister Ann, along with her sister, Alys Currier, IHM, and Josephine Sferrella, IHM (1928-2017), were instrumental in its installation and development, with its spring and summer flowers, into a centerpiece of the Motherhouse complex.
Germaine Sibbald, IHM (1861-1955), taught art at St. Mary Academy and Marygrove College for 57 years. Sister Germaine’s studio, located in the Old Motherhouse, was spared in the fire that destroyed St. Mary Academy in 1929. She spent several years reproducing many of the works lost in the blaze, including some originally painted by Blanche Vanderheyden, IHM, whose studio was in the Academy building and was completely destroyed.
Before John Louise Leahy, IHM (1925-2016), became a well-known and widely admired pastelist, and a teacher of both art and art therapy, Miss Jean Leahy (below) expressed her creative talents through cartoons during her time at Immaculata High School and Marygrove College in Detroit.

These drawings, dated from 1942 to 1946, are from Sister John Louise’s sketchbooks.
My Day at Immaculata

Religion

English

Gym

Economics

Lunch

History

Chemistry
Jean Booms, IHM, illustrated this book, *The Shepherd’s Gift*, for her friend John Raterman, the author, and his wife Mary. The tale is one of a grieving father who finds peace in the understanding of his late daughter’s enduring presence, as he presents her lambskin blanket to the newborn child shivering in a stable.

As the flock nestled down calmly content in the view of their shepherd, Jonah, too, lay down for some rest. As he looked to the heavens, he noticed a star that he had never noticed before.

“Sleep well, Rachel,” the shepherd whispered as he closed his eyes to rest.
Kathleen McLaughlin, IHM (1922-1996), spent 20 years teaching first-graders. While at St. Francis de Sales in Detroit, she and second grade teacher Jan Soleau, IHM, wrote and illustrated a Mass book for their students. This children’s book, Little Boy, written in 1963, tells the story of a child who feels lonely amidst his busy family until he’s welcomed and comforted by a gentle, old tree.

"This tree is kind.
It has time for me," thought Little Boy.
And the gnarled old tree responded
with a sway and rustle of leaves.

"It's glad I came. It wants me here."

And Little Boy felt content.
Painting by Miss Mary McGivney, later Mother Teresa McGivney, IHM (1879-1967), c. 1900, when she was a student at St. Mary Academy in Monroe. The painting was donated in 1988 by Dorothy Hill Dukes, daughter of Mother Teresa’s younger sister, Gertrude McGivney Hill.
Dozens of sisters attended that retreat at Crawfton and the guestbook (top, middle) shows the participants’ signatures within a loom-like frame. Marge Hughes, IHM, has saved two weavings she created (left of center). In one, she portrayed her beginning life in white at the top of the piece, then three children, a hut in Camyagua, Honduras, followed by bars representing a jail where she worked with domestic violence victims. The final weaving (far right) was done by Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM, after the death of her sister.

Eva Schoell, IHM, believes weaving is a “way of praying through our hands” and she sought to share this by leading retreats she called The Prayer of Weaving Peace. (Her work is right of center.) In writing about her life and ministries, she described the process as “a person reflects on the journey of their life, the joys, the sorrows, the ups and downs, successes and failures and aims to make peace with the whole of their lives as they weave it into a tapestry. …”
Eleanor Fitzgibbons, IHM (1909-2004), was a prolific and widely published poet. This draft of the poem, titled both “Giving All” and “The Gingko Tree” in its various forms, had an accompanying note to a friend:

Just to let you know  
the poet is back.  
After the removal of cataracts  
from both eyes during the past few weeks,  
I am seeing better with both inner and outer eyes now  
and want to share a beautiful experience:

[Image of handwritten draft of poem]
“Last Will and Testament” by Miriam Fidelis Donohue, IHM. The poems of Sister Miriam (1894-1983) were published in numerous journals, both under her religious name and under a pseudonym, Frances Marie Shannon – her mother’s name.
From the 28-page illuminated manuscript, “Songs from the Source,” written and illustrated by Rena Geary, IHM (1918-1976). According to the Archives’ records, the manuscript was created for Mother Teresa McGivney in 1946 “at the suggestion and inspiration of Sister Mary Aquin Chester.” It includes a Dedication section devoted to The Blessed Virgin Mary, plus the poems “Margery Kempe of Lynne” (about a 14th-century English Christian mystic) and “What Things are Bound.”
Sister Marcella and Sister Ann were to reside at the Gesu Convent until their accommodations at the new St. Columban were ready. Out of necessity, the sisters caught a ride in a truck set to deliver food and pick up laundry at various IHM missions in Newport, Trenton, Wyandotte, and Detroit.
A note written by Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM (1925-2017), accompanies this mask stored among the files of her sister, John Clement Hungerman, IHM (1934-1983):

This mask made by JC for some festive occasion shows Einstein’s formula for ENERGY! And a little owl – a favorite symbol for her. I would keep it in her folder – as e.g. of her creativity. MGH 6/28/10
“Time to Sow” was published quarterly from 2003 to 2012 and offered members of the IHM community insight, resources and reflections on both the fearful and the hopeful aspects of the human-Earth relationship.

Left to right: art by Jean Booms, IHM; art by Harriet Singelyn, IHM, poem by Mary McCann, art by Joan Lowell, IHM; art by Kate O’Brien, IHM
After 35 years teaching religion, math, and drafting, Rosella (Providentia) Murphy, IHM (1915-2005), fulfilled her dream to study art. Over the next eight summers she completed the necessary coursework for both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in art.
“IHM Sisters Motherhouse” by Kathleen O’Brien, IHM, was awarded first place in the Watercolor and Pastels category at the 2017 Somewhere in Time Juried Art Show sponsored by the Monroe County Historical Society.
Theonilla (Agnes) Krass, IHM (1889-1983), was the second IHM Sister to take that name. Her aunt, Theonilla (Barbara) Krass, IHM, died the year before the second Theonilla entered the congregation.

This drawing of the organ loft in the Old Motherhouse chapel is dated 1910.
This undated sheet music was composed and arranged by Marie Elise Phillips, IHM (1879-1935), a sister remembered for her humility as well as her literary and musical talents. Her work with the choir at Christmastime gave her particular joy. From her menology: “[N]o matter who the children were, they were made to vie with the angels in singing the exultant ‘Gloria.’”
The music and lyrics of this song were written by Annetta Voigt, IHM (1895-1965). Sister Annetta taught voice and instrumental music at Marygrove College for 30 years. Around 1935, this handwritten copy was accidentally taken home by one of her voice students who, realizing her error, returned it to the Motherhouse Archives – in 1985.
An acrostic is a poem, puzzle or other composition in which letters in each line (in this case, the initial letters) form a word or phrase. This piece, “Ideals,” was composed by Mary Charboneau, IHM (1915-1985), and Anna Marie Grix, IHM (1903-1996), in 1942.
This coupler board was part of the console on the Casavant Frères organ built for the new Motherhouse chapel in 1940. The couplers were hand-lettered by an unknown IHM sister. The aging board was replaced with a more modern version in 2003. The writing on the labels in the corner is that of Mary Jo Maher, IHM (1929-2015), IHM community historian from 2000-2008.
Rose Carmel Burgess, IHM (1928-2015), combined her talent for calligraphy and her love of all things related to music to reproduce this quote by Martin Luther.
Paraclita Schnebelt, IHM, has spent her nearly 80 years in the congregation as, among other things, an educator of children, teens and adults, a counselor, an advocate, animal lover and a calligrapher.
Artist's palette belonging to Rena Geary, IHM (1918-1976)
Beatrice Faucher, IHM (1910-2009), used her teaching skills even in the art of sewing. From 1991 to 2006, Sister Beatrice sewed doll habits that were known to be perfect replicas of the IHM habit. She presented this doll in 1999 to former St. Mary Academy student Katy Binns (Moosman). The cloth used for the habit is the same material originally used by the sisters in the summer.
Mary Van Gilder, IHM (1924-2012), taught art and art appreciation at both the secondary and college levels for 40 years. This painting, dated 1961, hung in the Memory Care unit of the Motherhouse for several years; at some point its whereabouts became unknown. It was discovered after several years in an electrical closet on the ground floor and handed over to the Archives in early 2017.

It was decided almost immediately that this work would, somehow, be part of this year’s Founders’ Day exhibit.
IHM BOOK OF LIFE

A four-year study in theological education concluded in 1998 with a Lent-to-Pentecost reflection on the transformative experiences in the life of each IHM Sister. Just as the times and the Church had gone through transformation over the preceding 30 years, so had the IHM congregation, individually and communally. In writing and verbally through a cassette recording, the sisters were asked to examine the turning points in their lives and to discover “God’s gentle, mysterious design.”

They were to identify their own contributions to the IHM legacy and their personal faith journey. The process was to have three phases:

a. RECALL AND REFLECT the personal spiritual journey;
b. Create a PRIVATE RECORD of significant turning points; and
c. Summarize with a one-page PUBLIC TESTIMONIAL for a bound book
This grouping offers 12 examples of the creativity, complexity and discernment that went into producing individual Page of Life submissions. The Pages are bound in two hard-cover volumes that are available in the Leadership suite.

Top row, left to right: Candyce Rekart, IHM; Annette St. Amour, IHM; Gloria Rivera, IHM; Elizabeth Fleckenstein, IHM; Margaret Basso, IHM; Maria Theresa Magrie, IHM

Bottom row, left to right: Bernice LaPorte, IHM; Teresita Nazario, IHM; Carol Janowiak, IHM; Joan Therese Lowell, IHM; Mary Jane Herb, IHM; Rose Matthew Mangini, IHM
According to Archives' records this portrait of Mother Mary Joseph Walker, superior of the IHM congregation from 1859-1864, was painted by Blanche Vanderheyden, IHM (1855-1938). Sister Blanche was born in Belgium and was the niece of Monsignor Edward Joos, who served as director of the congregation from 1857-1901. Blinded by cataracts near the end of her life, Sister Blanche never complained and said, “I have given my sight back to God who gave it to me, and I would not retract an iota of the offering.”
Little is known about these works, except that they were painted by Mary Joseph Walker, IHM (1827-1864). Mother Mary Joseph was the first novice mistress of the IHM congregation and served as general superior after the departure of Mother Theresa Maxis in 1859.