

Remembering Sister Mildred (Vincella) Baker, IHM
December 22, 1927 – March 20, 2017



Irish blue eyes, and a welcoming, warm smile are the first words that come to mind for many who knew Mildred Baker, IHM.

At 8 a.m. on the morning of Dec. 22, 1927, Mildred Marie Baker was born to Carl and Helen Baker at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron, Ohio. She was the fourth of six children, three boys and three girls, to grace the Baker household. Gene was the oldest, followed by Ellen (Sister Mary Carl, IHM), Marilyn, Mildred, Howard and Vincent. Mildred's dad loved to call her "Blondie." She frequently recalled the story when, in her younger days, she fell and broke her leg one summer. At the time, the healing process was a full-leg cast for three months, which meant the entire summer. Her brother Gene would carry her to the front porch each morning so she could watch the others play. On his way home from work each evening, he would stop at the local ice cream parlor and bring her a daily ice-cream treat.

The Baker family lived in South Akron, which enabled Mildred to attend St. Mary Grade and High Schools. During her years at St. Mary, the IHM teachers inspired many vocations by their love of learning, deep faith and caring ways. One vocation was her older sister Ellen. When, at age 17, Mildred told her parents of her desire to join the IHMs, they asked her to work for a year and, if, at the end of the year, she still wanted to join the congregation she would go with their blessing. Mildred worked at the local department store and was delighted to be able to contribute to the family. On Feb. 1, 1946, at the age of 18, her father drove her to Monroe. The next few months were challenging for she missed her family deeply.

Mildred's first mission was to Jackson, Mich., followed by Ionia, Flint and Detroit. It was while teaching in Flint that she received word that her father, only in his early 50s, had a major stroke and died. Her mother and youngest brother, Vince, who was only 13 years old, went to live with her oldest brother and his wife. That put Mildred's heart at ease. In 1960, Mildred was missioned to Cleveland, where she taught eighth grade for three years at St. Mark. Her time in Cleveland enabled her to spend valuable time with her mother who suffered with rheumatoid arthritis.

While Mildred was serving at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Detroit, Father Downie, the founding pastor of St. Mark Parish in Cleveland, asked for her to be assigned as principal. Mother Theresa was gracious enough to respond to his request. Mildred returned to Cleveland in 1967, where she was the eighth grade teacher, principal and superior of the house. When a school secretary was hired, Mildred relinquished her teaching position and became a full-time principal.

In the spring of 1979, Sister Mary Kinney asked Mildred to return to the Motherhouse and serve with Sister Rose Estelle as assistant administrator. She served as assistant for three years and was then named administrator for the next six years, until 1989. Mildred returned to Cleveland and was hired by the Diocese of Cleveland to study the health care needs of religious, including priests and brothers. The study was completed in three years and recommended establishing a central health care facility. The Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine was the only diocesan community to sponsor hospitals and had personnel trained in the delivery of health care services. The sisters accepted this challenge and retrofitted their motherhouse into Regina Health Center. The Regina facility offered skilled nursing and assisted living to religious, priests, family members of religious and lay people. Regina Health Center became a national role model in cooperative health care. Mildred was hired by the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine as intercongregational liaison and director of Admissions and she held these titles until she retired in the spring of 2001. As intercongregational liaison, Mildred personally spent time with each congregation helping them transition their members to Regina. As each new resident arrived, she would personally see that their family pictures and other meaningful items were placed in their room prior to their arrival, to make the adjustment easier. As a Sister of St. Joseph recalled, "We are many congregations but one home."

Mildred loved the Sisters of Charity and often joked about her dual membership as an IHM and CSA. In 2003, the Sisters of Charity bestowed on her the Caritas Service Award, which honors outstanding individuals who embody and exemplify the CSA charism to others through a life of generosity, untiring service, joyful witness of the Love of God and expansion of ministry. This award is given only once every four years. Mildred was truly loved by the Sisters of Charity, the residents and staff of Regina.

Following retirement, Mildred volunteered her services in patient relations and administration at St. John Medical Center until the fall of 2013. Mildred was a friend and confidante to many at the hospital. She donated many of her beautifully cross-stitched towels to the hospital's gift shop to support the Hope Fund. As soon as the towels appeared on the shelves, they were purchased. The Hope Fund offered assistance to hospital employees experiencing financial emergencies. Mildred's stitching and sewing were part of her hallmark and treasured gifts to family and friends.

Mildred enjoyed traveling and had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land in 1989 following her tenure at the Motherhouse. Her travels included trips to the Canadian Rockies, Italy, and the heart of Europe. Her nieces and nephews, along with several grand nieces and nephews, took her to Ireland for her 80th birthday, where a grand time was had by all. Mildred's love of family was a treasure to her and to each of them.

In August 2014, at the age of 86, Mildred returned to our IHM Motherhouse where she enjoyed volunteering in the Opportunity Shop, creating designs that she lovingly stitched onto her famous towels and greetings cards. As hearing became a major difficulty for her, she found herself unable to participate in many conversations that, in the past, were one of her greatest enjoyments. Special thanks go to all her IHM Sisters, but especially those on fourth-floor Liguori and to the nursing staff, for their

understanding, encouragement and loving care.

Mildred was loved by many but it needs to be noted that her first eighth-grade class at St. Mark School has always kept in contact with her. In August 2014, the students surprised her with an 80th birthday celebration and sent her off to the Motherhouse with a farewell class picnic!

Memories abound of Mildred, but her love of and commitment to her God, her IHM family and to her own family are found in her IHM Book of Life. She writes:

God's kindness, 'a greater good than life', has remained with me each day of my life, from the moment of birth until now. Loving parents and strong IHM Sisters formed me in faith. ... Experiences of deep sorrow and pain, and an episode of serious illness have, through the kindness of friends, and family, re-directed my life and have been powerful calls of grace for me.

**“You have shown me the path of life:
You will fill me with joy in your presence.”(Acts 2:28)**

Mildred, until we meet again, lovingly rest in the arms of your welcoming God.

Written by Judy Weirick, IHM, and delivered by Yvonne Spenoso, IHM
March 26, 2018