

Obituary



Sister Corita Lear, 92, died Saturday, Jan. 23, at her home, the IHM Motherhouse in Monroe, Mich.

Sister Corita was one of six children, four boys and two girls, born to Joseph and Catherine (Tuschinger) Lear. She was born on March 17, 1923, in Ford City, Pa., and given the name Mildred. She attended St. Paul and St. Mary Elementary Schools and St. Mary High School all in Akron, Ohio. She completed her high school education and graduated from St. Mary Academy, Monroe. Mildred entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Monroe in 1939, and received the religious name, Sister Corita.

Sister Corita earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and a masters' degree from Wayne State University, Detroit. She ministered in formal education as a teacher for 35 years, in Michigan at St. Mary, Marshall; St. Patrick, Carleton; Holy Redeemer, All Saints, St. Catherine, St. Cecilia and St. Rose, Detroit; St. Joseph, Monroe; and St. Charles, Coldwater. She taught in Ohio at St. Mary, Akron; St. Mary, Lorain; St. Mark, Incarnate Word, Corpus Christi and St. John Nepomucene, Cleveland; Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Wickliffe; and St. Clare in Lyndhurst.

In 1977, Sister Corita began pastoral ministry of the sick and elderly through St. Gregory the Great Parish in South Euclid, Ohio. As a pastoral minister, she visited and cared for the sick and elderly for 10 years. She continued her ministry as a volunteer, caring for the aged, in-home health care and family care in Ohio and Pinellas Park and St. Petersburg, Fla. Sister Corita enjoyed reading, sewing and scrapbooking. In 2006, she retired to the IHM Motherhouse and entered the IHM Health Care Center in 2008.

Remembering

There is a story about Sister Corita's name, but that comes later. First, we'll start at the very beginning. Sister Corita was born in Ford City, Pa., on March 17, 1923, to Joseph and Catherine (Teischinger) Lear, who were of German, French and Austrian descent. She was the second of six children, her siblings being: Raymond, Winifred, Jerome, Wilbert and Armand. Her father was a carpenter and eventually started his own business as a contractor building homes. He legally changed the spelling of the family

name from the German “Liehr” to “Lear,” because it was easier in the business world for clients to recognize and pronounce. The family lived comfortably, but was not wealthy. When the Great Depression hit, everything changed. When Corita was 5 years old, the family moved from Pennsylvania to Akron, Ohio, and continued to struggle financially.

When her father died from a stroke in his early 60s and her mother was feeling overwhelmed, Corita helped raise her two youngest brothers, Wilbert and Armand. She said that her childhood ended at age 10, as she assumed the role of “little mother” in the family. She did not have much time for hobbies or games while growing up, but she did enjoy her family and helping her mother. This devotion to her family remained very strong in Corita’s heart.

She liked St. Paul School, staffed by Dominican Sisters. When she was in the third grade, a sister mentioned that she thought Corita might have a vocation to religious life. Sister Corita remembered that as a child when she misbehaved at home, her mother would say that the sisters might not accept her. That warning was all that she needed to straighten up. It worked every time!

Because of financial problems, the family moved again to an area in St. Mary Parish, where Corita met and fell in love with the IHMs. In her second year of high school, Sister Delphina, the principal, invited her, along with two other girls, to visit Monroe in the summer. Of course, they were impressed. In the meantime, Sister Delphina gave Corita a book on the life of “The Little Flower.” These experiences made her more aware of God in her life. She developed a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, attended daily Mass and Benediction on Sunday evenings. Sister Corita also loved Mary and this love continued to deepen throughout her life. Witness the hymns she chose for this liturgy.

At the completion of her sophomore year, Corita bid farewell to her family and traveled to Monroe in the bus with the sisters to begin her life in the IHM community. She found it difficult to say goodbye to her family, but never regretted her life choice. As a postulant, she finished high school at St. Mary Academy and entered the novitiate.

She received the name Corita. She had been hoping for some form of the name of Mary, because of her devotion, but Mother Ruth was not allowing double names at the time. So, Corita got creative and added the initial “M” before her name and always said her name meant: “Little Heart of Mary.”

The other story about her name was at the time of her birth. Born on the feast of St. Patrick, March 17, her mother wanted to name her Patricia. Her father decided on "Mildred" because he was from a large family and did not want his children confused with other family members. She was baptized "Mildred Agnes."

Following her two-year novitiate, she became a primary teacher at first in Michigan, then in Ohio. For more than 30 years she loved teaching children in the early elementary grades. During that time, her college education continued as she completed her bachelor's degree at Marygrove College. She took graduate classes at Wayne State University, St John College in Cleveland and Cleveland State University, earning permanent teaching certificates in Michigan and Ohio.

During Corita's last years of teaching, her mother became ill and Corita assisted in her mother's care. In 1977, she began a ministry in pastoral care to the sick and the elderly. From that time until she retired to the Motherhouse in 2006, she poured her heart into this "call within a call," responding to the spiritual and emotional needs of a vulnerable elderly population at St. Gregory Parish in South Euclid Ohio. She attended conferences and workshops related to aging and spirituality to be all she could be for those in need. She described her work as a "ministry of presence." When her brother became ill while living in Florida, Corita moved there and assisted him until his death. While living in Pinellas Park, she ministered to the elderly in the senior residence where she was living.

Sister Corita reflected a heart of hospitality to any who were "down on their luck," whether family member or stranger. As she says on her page in the "IHM Book of Life," the gifts and talents she received from God, she used in ministry, always broadening her horizons, always deepening her compassion following in the footsteps of the One who called her by name so many years ago. The One who calls her now, "Come, M. Corita, good and faithful servant, you labored long and well. Enter into my loving embrace forever."

Written by Marion Duggan, IHM
Delivered by Donna Hart, IHM, on Jan. 26, 2016