

Margaret (Peggy) Devaney, IHM, “Sistá,” to most whom she has served for the past 40 years in her Oakland County Jail and Outreach Ministry, is truly a woman who “Irish step-danced” from the Detroit Gaelic League.

Her “call” to the IHM congregation as a young teen grew out of the loving support of her Irish immigrant parents, especially her mother. Peggy’s dad, a bus driver, was tragically killed in a pedestrian accident leaving mom, a practical nurse, to raise John, Michael and young daughter, Peggy.

Peggy’s academic degree preparations (bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education and a Master of Divinity degree in theology) and lifelong service are undergirded by her guiding mantra: “God leads us where we did not plan to go.” As expressed in the IHM Constitutions: “We hear the cry of all God’s people, especially of the poor and abandoned.”

Peggy began her ministry as a teacher – at Epiphany (Detroit), St. Michael (Flint) and Nativity (Hollywood, Fla.). She served in parishes in Michigan and Florida as a pastoral minister and in religious education, before embarking on the jail and outreach ministry.

Local, national and international honors and recognitions throughout Peggy’s ministry acknowledge her dedication, compassion, leadership and volunteerism. The expression that earned these awards is Peggy’s day-to-day “holding the hands and hearts” of the disenfranchised, the recovering addicts, the recently incarcerated and the victims of crime.



She was unanimously selected to receive the 2020 Volunteer of the Year Award from the American Jail Association (AJA) – a national award – and was chosen from among 50 nominees!

In her nomination package, spearheaded by Lieutenant Jennifer Miles of Oakland County Jail, Peggy’s achievements over nearly 40 years of jail ministry were cited.

The package also included a letter of recognition presented to her by Major Charles Snarey, commending her for her “ability to encourage and bring together different faith groups from the community as well as managing hundreds of volunteers serving within the jail.” It also states that she is “a relied upon source of knowledge regarding issues involving religious rights for inmates” and has “the respect of Sheriff’s Office Command and jail personnel.”



She trains hundreds of interfaith jail volunteers, directs an outreach/distribution center she founded and daily counsels the many who search for hope and healing. In addition, as a gracious caregiver, Peggy lived with and prayed with many people through their final journey.



Peggy’s 60-year ministry, even today, partners in an “Irish step-dance” with those people who search for her smiling and compassionate guidance and care.