

Obituary



Sister Geraldine Demech, IHM, 82, died Monday, Aug. 1, at the IHM Motherhouse, where she resided since 1997.

Sister Geraldine was born in Detroit on Jan. 10, 1934, to George Philip and Rose Alice (Tahash) Demech. She attended Precious Blood and graduated from Immaculata High School, Detroit, in 1951. Later that year, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe and received the religious name, Sister Rose Philip.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College she began teaching the elementary grades at Hall of the Divine Child, Monroe; St. Patrick, Carleton; St. Mary, Wayne; St. Raymond, Detroit and St. Leonard, Warren. Known to many as "Sr. Gerry," she recalled her years teaching at Immaculate Heart of Mary of Glen Lake in Minnetonka, Minn., as "four very happy years" in her career. Sister Gerry dedicated more than 21 years to St. Matthew School, Detroit, as a teacher and later as a volunteer. Her love of teaching young children remained throughout her career.

Later in life, her care for others was evident among visitors to the Motherhouse, residents and employees of IHM. Sister Gerry retired to the Motherhouse in 1997, where she remained active volunteering in the IHM community.

Remembering

"Life's various circumstances mold and form me at each stage of my life. I mirror God's lovingness."

Sister Geraldine wrote in her autobiography, "My parents deeply loved God, the church, their country and their only child." Her parents, Rose Alice (Tahash) and George Philip Demech, met at a parish dinner dance at Most Holy Trinity, in Detroit. Rose was Irish and an upbeat person. George, born on the Island of Malta, was as steady as the ships that sailed the sea near his home. Rose fell in love with George immediately; they married in 1929 and Gerry was born Jan. 10, 1934. They were, all three, very close and the bond between them lasted all through their lives and beyond. Now Gerry is embraced in that love forever.

Gerry attended Precious Blood Grade School and Immaculata High in Detroit.

She loved all the sisters, but chose the IHMs because of their radical commitment to Mary, to poverty and to the Gospel. She entered the community in 1951 and the Novitiate in 1952, happily receiving the name Sister Rose Philip, after her parents. Her first vows were in 1954, with final vows three years later.

Sister Margaret McGinley, IHM, lived on the same street in Detroit as Gerry and they were longtime friends. When Margaret entered IHM the year before Gerry, Margaret's father was at a total loss in his loneliness. Gerry's kind heart reached out to him and she became like a surrogate daughter to him.

Gerry began teaching in 1954, right after her first vows. The next 37 years found her teaching in primary classrooms, and rather than feeling undervalued, she became an expert in the field of early childhood education. "Teaching children to read, to see letters turn into words, the word click with the brain and then see them run out the door saying, '*I can read!*'" – this is how she describes her most gratifying experience. "I firmly believe that if children learn how to read, they can *teach themselves* anything they want to learn."

Gerry's first mission was Hall of the Divine Child in Monroe, Mich., followed by St. Mary, Wayne, St. Patrick, Carleton, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Glen Lake, Minnetonka, Minn., St. Raymond, Detroit, and finally 20 years at St. Matthew in Detroit. In 1993, she retired from classroom teaching and volunteered as a teacher-aide for four more years.

On a commitment form in 1984, she wrote: "To struggle untiringly to bring the Gospel of Jesus into the children's lives, to make him alive by my word and action – fully realizing that I fail often ..." (here we remember that Gerry's dry sense of humor crept into conversation in most unlikely places) "... fully realizing that I fail often, but nonetheless, springing from my bed as though it were on fire (to quote an old Rule) very early each morning, to begin again."

Gerry loved the gifts of creation – the flowers, the trees, the sky and of course, the animals: the cats, dogs, squirrels outside her Liguori window and "Egypt," the therapy dog, whenever Patrice would bring her. She would sketch the animals and write Haiku verses about them, which she kept in journals. Whenever I marveled at this faithfulness to her own gifts, she'd say: "You forget I was an only child; I learned early how to entertain myself."

In 1994, *Spinnaker* published her poem called "Autumn Musings." Here is a little of it:

Autumn's warm colors
Softened by morning's moisture
stillness

Capture welcome

And here's another:

The sounds of silence
speak more to my heart than edifying words.

Gerry loved to celebrate quiet Sabbath mornings during which time she would entertain her musings and draw or paint with pastels. This was for her, a soul-filled, sacred time.

As I mentioned before, she did not lack a sense of humor; she loved coming to the dining room where she could be part of lively conversations, peppered with laughter. One time she was asked how she liked being between her two next-in-ranks, Catherine Cavataio and Barbara Torzewski. "Oh, it's like being between Mt. Vesuvius and Lake Placid," she retorted.

In 1997, Gerry retired to the Motherhouse where, over the years, she helped in the sacristy, served as a volunteer driver, distributed mail and worked in arts and crafts. She was quoted in IHM "Then and Now" in 2008: "I try to meet everyone, hopefully, with kindness and a smile. I pray each day that I look in the right places to find Jesus and that I bring Jesus to other people in my dealings with them." She related easily to staff people who served her in any way. Everil Bellman, of haircare, knew about her Maltese heritage and the picture her father painted of his memories of Malta. Matt Lambert was pleased to talk with Gerry about his two sons, Jonah and Jason, whose picture was in a special place in her room. Matt would bring the boys to visit Gerry, saying, "She's like family to us."

Gerry moved to Health Care about six months ago. She said she really liked it there "because she could wear one of those long bibs, and eat junk food." She loved potato chips! She found new life there ... she participated in the activities, shared ideas with the activity director and generally loved it. She was happy in her environment and in herself. That's why news of her death surprised many of us.

There are a few distant relatives in Australia and Malta, but we are her family. And so we hold her in our hearts and in our prayers.

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM
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