

## Obituary



Sister Maria Virgo Schemanske, 88, died Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2016, in the IHM Health Care Center.

Sister Maria Virgo was born on Feb. 14, 1927, in Detroit. Her parents, Stanley and Clara (Perganty) Schemanske, christened her Gertrude Clare at Sr. Casimir Parish. The family of three daughter and two sons attended St. Boniface and Precious Blood Schools and parishes. Gertrude graduated from Immaculata High School in Detroit and entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe in 1946, receiving the religious

name Maria Virgo.

That same year, Sister Maria Virgo earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, followed by a master's degree in education from Wayne State University, Detroit. Her teaching career spanned 20 years at St. Joseph, Erie, Mich.; St. Joseph, Trenton, Mich., and Detroit schools, St. Patrick, St. Agnes, St. Raymond, St. Rose and St. Catherine; St. Anne, Warren, Mich.; and St. Felicitas, Chicago.

After many years of teaching, Sister Maria Virgo returned to Monroe to serve as the IHM director of retirement. This position began a shift in ministry to service and program direction that would cover more than 20 years with Monroe Senior Citizens, Inc. and Retired Senior Volunteer Program of Monroe County, Mich.

She retired in 1990 and remained an active resident of the Motherhouse, often volunteering as printer for the community. Sister Maria Virgo entered the IHM Health Care Center in 2000 and ministered as prayerful support to the community.

## Remembering

St. Valentine's Day 1927 was a special occasion for Stanley and Clara Schemanske as they anxiously awaited the birth of their fourth child, Gertrude, who would join brothers George and Erwin and sister Esther, in the family circle. That circle would be complete a few years later when Shirley Ann was born.

The family lived on Detroit's west side in a very close-knit Polish community. Stanley was employed by the *Detroit Free Press* and worked hard to support his growing family. Clara was a very busy housewife caring for their home and their five children.

Being of Polish descent, both Stanley and Clara spoke Polish, but English was generally spoken in their home. They were forced to meet many challenges: clinging to their own heritage, preserving their lifestyle, using their native language and recognizing that their children would grow up and live in an English-speaking country and adapt to lifestyles that would be "American."

Saint Casimir was the parish to which they belonged and most of the parishioners shared the same Polish heritage. Saint Casimir School was staffed by the Felician Sisters and classes were taught in both Polish and English. So the decision was made, when Gertrude was ready to attend first grade, she would enroll at Saint Boniface School where the IHM Sisters taught classes in English. By the time Gertrude was ready for the middle grades the family moved to northwest Detroit, practically in the backyard of Marygrove College, and so her elementary education was completed at Precious Blood School.

Choosing a high school was very easy, since Immaculata High School had been built in 1941 on the east side of the Marygrove College Campus. Gertrude began as a freshman in 1942. As a teenager, she enjoyed her high school days and as she grew in knowledge and maturity she also began to admire the life and ministry of the sisters. With the help of Sister Maria Froelke, she thought very seriously about religious life. She received her diploma in June 1946 and made the decision to enter the community.

Sept. 8, 1946, was the date given for all young women who wanted to enter the community that year. While waiting in the parlor for her turn to accompany the postulant mistress to Our Blessed Mother's altar to be consecrated to her and then to be dressed in the postulant's garb, she attempted to make conversation with a very serious, somewhat older woman dressed in black. "Do you have a daughter entering today?" Gertrude asked. The response was, "No, I'm entering." The lady in black turned out to be Sister Leonilla (Dorothy McGlinn) and she and

Gertrude were not only next in rank but became very good friends. After completing a year of postulancy, Gertrude received the habit on Aug. 15, 1947, and the religious name Maria Virgo. Two years of novitiate followed and on Jan. 2, 1950, she professed her first vows. Maria Virgo loved the Motherhouse and was very happy living and serving here. However, the need for teachers was great and with her teacher certification completed, she set out to join the ranks of Catholic school teachers.

The next 20 years of Maria's active ministry were spent teaching in parish schools in Michigan and Illinois: Erie, Trenton, Newport, Detroit, Warren and Chicago. She taught primarily middle and upper grades mostly in the areas of religion, English and the arts.

In 1968, Sister Rosalie, the provincial, invited Maria to return to the Motherhouse and assume the position of director of retirement planning. This required preparation in a two-year program titled "Faculty Seminar in Gerontology." From this experience flowed ideas of how smaller living units could be developed within the Motherhouse. Each unit would be equipped with a lounge, kitchen and press room. The smaller number of sisters in a living area would bring more cohesiveness and sociability to the larger group. Many of our senior sisters were able to partake in enrichment classes. Many more fun activities were planned and enjoyed by all.

In 1973, while still living at the Motherhouse, Maria became the activity director at Monroe Senior Citizen Center. This provided her the opportunity of working with the lay people in Monroe and in her own words, she "found it very fulfilling and enjoyed the 'youthfulness' and energy of these 'young' elders." After a short period of time the director of the center approached her for another position as program director for the retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). Her responsibility was to recruit senior citizens, age 60 years and older, to be of service to the County of Monroe. These dedicated senior citizens served in every capacity, helping those less fortunate than themselves. In the 16 years she served in this capacity, enrollment soared from 20 members to 500 seniors who served at 62 stations throughout Monroe County and who performed every corporal and spiritual work of mercy every single day.

In 1989 she became the overseer of the Motherhouse printing department and was very generous in using her artistic and mechanical skills in the service and needs of the Motherhouse. She also served on the Monroe Community College Events Committee and on the Advisory Board for Mercy Memorial Hospital.

As time went on, Maria's health needs required that she take up residency in the IHM Health Care Center. Even here, she was generous in sharing her creative talents as she decorated dining rooms and corridors to provide a seasonal atmosphere. In later days, Maria was a "bit of a hermit," living mostly in her butterfly-decorated room in Infirmary 3G. She remained grateful for her life among us and for the many blessings she received. As stated in her prayer,

"I thank God for all the lives I have been able to touch. I am filled with much  
love, joy,  
peace, and happiness; and above all, deep gratitude for my call to this  
community."

Written by Ann Pauline O'Connor, IHM, 2014

Delivered by Margaret Babcock, IHM, Jan. 19, 2016