

Obituary



Sister Rose Margaret West, IHM, 92, died Wednesday, Sept. 7, at her home, the IHM Motherhouse Health Care Center in Monroe.

Sister Rose Margaret was one of six daughters and six sons born to Martin and Frances (Leonard) West of St. Clair, Mich. She was born on Jan. 21, 1924, and attended Rural School in Croswell and St. Mary of Redford High School in Detroit. She entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe in 1944 and received the religious name, Sister Rose Margaret.

Sister Rose Margaret studied nursing at St. Charles Hospital in Toledo, Ohio and at St. Mary Infirmary (now the IHM Health Care Center). Her ministry spanned more than 58 years on the IHM campus in nursing, physical therapy, cardiovascular technology and podiatric care. With the exception of one year in her early career teaching sewing at St. Mary of Redford, Detroit, her ministry was dedicated to the IHM community of Monroe.

In 1975, Sister Rose Margaret spent a semi-sabbatical year working at the Father Hilarion Cheshire Home, a residential home for the elderly located on the island of Grenada, West Indies. She returned to Monroe and continued her ministry of health care. In 1998, she retired to part-time work and continued to volunteer wherever she could be of assistance.

Remembering

Sister Rose Margaret West worked for most of her religious life caring for the sick in our Infirmary/Health Care Center. She is remembered by her friends and co-workers as a marvelous nurse, compassionate, accommodating, always ready to learn more about caring for the infirm. Reflecting on her life, she wrote on her page in the "Book of Life," "I remember always that it is God who has walked with me through the years."

Margaret Jane's father, Martin West, was born and raised in Marine City, Mich., and her mother, Frances Welch, grew up in Forester, Mich. Margaret Jane, as she was named, was born in St. Clair, Mich. on Jan. 21, 1924. She was the second of 12 children, and the oldest girl. Ten of the children lived into adulthood. The twins, Marie and Marian, born in 1926, died in infancy.

When Margaret was 4 years old, the family moved to an 80-acre farm in Lexington, Mich. Margaret grew up there. She wrote, "Our home was on a high hill and we could see for miles away. We could see freighters on Lake Huron a mile and one-half away. In the winter time, we would toboggan down the hill at night, fall off the toboggan and try to name the stars in the beautiful sky."

When Margaret was only 14 years old, her father died of heat stroke. Being the oldest girl, this left her with a lot of responsibility for taking care of the little ones. The children had to walk a mile and a half each way to the local public elementary school. One of Margaret's tasks was to see that the youngsters got there and back safely. Apparently, she also had to see that they were warmly clad; she tells of making snowsuits for the five youngest children.

She also had to teach the younger ones their prayers. "This was very special to me," she wrote. The West children attended a two-week catechism class each summer taught by the Adrian Dominican Sisters. This is when Margaret recognized that "she started wanting to be a religious."

She was not alone in assuming a responsible role; Edward, the oldest boy, had to quit school and learn how to work the farm. The closest high school was four miles away in Lexington. So when Margaret was in ninth grade, she stayed with a family in Lexington, worked for her room and board and went to school. In the 10th grade, she went to school and worked for her room and board in Croswell, Mich., eight miles away. During both of these years, she would walk home on weekends to help her mother with the chores. In spite of all the hardships, Margaret wrote that the family "had a lot of happy times together."

After these two years of high school, Margaret took a job in Detroit, doing some housework and caring for the two children, ages 2 and 4, of a Jewish family. The family took her to Florida with them for the winter. So, she missed her third year of high school. It was an upsetting experience for Margaret when the mother of

this family had an abortion while they were in Florida. When they returned to Detroit for the summer, Margaret went home.

A friend of the West family from St. Mary of Redford Parish in Detroit had a cottage in Lexington. This good friend encouraged Margaret to finish high school. She made arrangements for her to live at the rectory at Saint Mary, work for her room and board and attend the high school there. Margaret wrote that this was a great turning point for her. She had met the IHM Sisters and was influenced by Sister Mary Edward Patton, who encouraged her desire for religious life. Margaret decided to join the IHMs.

After graduation from Saint Mary in June 1944, Margaret entered the Postulate. She came on July 2, 1944. Rose Margaret confided that her decision to enter was hard for her mother, but she never interfered. Of her entrance, Rose Margaret wrote, "I came as a stranger into a wonderful group of people and I felt that God was indeed in this holy place."

On Jan. 2, 1945, she was received into the congregation and given the name Rose Margaret. Soon after reception, she began her long and stellar ministry serving the sisters' health needs, while at the same time attending classes. In September 1952, Rose Margaret was missioned to Saint Mary of Redford. She took care of the kitchen work, cooking for 35 sisters, taught sewing to high school girls and assisted in the school library. One weekend a month, she would return to St. Mary's Infirmary in Monroe to do foot care. A year later, she was reassigned to the Infirmary, which was her "love," she said. At that time, Infirmary work for the nurses entailed taking care of just about all of the sisters' needs: housekeeping, food preparation, night watches with the sisters in emergencies, bringing patients to doctors. And there were often sisters who needed specialized "complete" care. Of course, all the responsibilities of being a nurse were hers. She shared this ministry with Sisters Gertrude, Joselma, Gracelma, Jamesetta and others.

It was Sister Jamesetta who persuaded Rose Margaret to specialize in foot care. She extended her service not only in Health Care but throughout the Motherhouse. Rose Margaret's ministry has benefited hundreds of sisters. In 1975, Rose Margaret had what she called a sabbatical. She went to Grenada, West Indies to help our sisters in the Hilarion Home for aged black people who

had been slaves to the English and were left behind. Although it was a brief service, she indicated that she loved it greatly.

Rose Margaret sometimes felt that she was looked down upon because she did not have as much education. So during her years of service, she frequently enriched her background by taking courses in the nursing field and also attended workshops. In 1984, she earned membership in the National Alliance of Certified Cardiovascular Technologists.

In 1986 she wrote, "I have chosen this ministry because of Christ's great healing and compassion. I would like to be a part of it in taking care of my Sisters." Later Rose Margaret wrote that she found working in the Health Care Center very rewarding, that she loved sharing with her sisters. "I loved it as it was," she wrote.

In 1987 Rose Margaret's mother died. "This was very hard on me," she wrote, "even more so since my brothers and sisters depended on me (during her mother's final illness) being a nurse. On the other hand, it was very rewarding because I was alone with her and the experience I will never forget."

In the early '90s, Rose Margaret had a renewal time in San Antonio. This was a new adventure for her, she said, and she was glad for the time off.

When Rose Margaret spoke of her prayer, she indicated that she had nourishment in the practice of Centering Prayer. "I live with the Lord all the time during the day," she said.

She was, indeed, a multi-talented woman. Besides being an excellent caregiver, she was a gardener, a seamstress and taught herself how to upholster furniture. In the late 1990s, she was able to lessen her hours in the Health Care Center. She continued doing foot care part-time for several more years. Dr. Hughes, a local podiatrist, expressed amazement at her very professional skill. After 50 years of this ministry, Rose Margaret retired because of her health and also because of new regulations, which made only podiatrists able to do that work.

In recent years, she continued to keep touch with her family, some of whom still farm land around Lexington and Crosswell. She expressed concerns about the limitations put upon smaller farmers like her brother. "You can't use the seeds

you produce; you must buy them each year," she noted and remarked how little farmers were paid for what they grow.

At the Motherhouse, her hours were becoming quieter and her walking limited. But she did enjoy playing cards weekly with some of the sisters.

Dear Rose Margaret, we have loved you in life. We are deeply grateful for the loving, faithful care you have given so many of us for so long. We are glad your own long years as a patient are over. We will miss your quiet, smiling presence. We pray that you now experience God in fullness and joy.

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