

## Obituary



Sister Rose Mary Ala, IHM, 80, died Wednesday, April 18, in the IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe.

Rose Mary Ala was born in Detroit on April 6, 1938 to parents, Luciano and Mary (Nardi) Ala. Rose Mary first attended St. Charles Grade School and completed the elementary years at Annunciation (Detroit). After graduating from Annunciation High School in 1955, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name, Sister Louise.

After earning a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College, Sister Rose Mary entered teaching ministry in the Detroit area at Our Lady of Good Counsel, St. Charles, St. George, Holy Trinity; and at St. Hugo, Bloomfield Hills; St. Regis, Birmingham; St. Angela, Roseville; and St. Cyril of Jerusalem, Taylor; as well as several years at St. Mary, Akron, Ohio, and Nativity in Hollywood, Fla. In the mid-1980s she served in adult education with the Detroit Public Schools.

Beginning in 1990, Sister Rose Mary moved into ministries of pastoral care, spiritual direction and retreat programming and gained the necessary credentials. This work took her to St. Athanasius, Roseville, and Our Lady of the Woods, Woodhaven, and continued as she resided in Woodhaven and St. Clair Shores.

In 2000, Sister Rose Mary and Sister Evelyn Booms, IHM, established the Heart of Jesus Prayer Center in St. Clair Shores. Over the next 15 years, the center offered individual spiritual direction, book study and a variety of retreat programs for religious and lay communities. Sister Rose Mary continued to work with those seeking spiritual direction until her recent illness.

Sister Rose Mary transitioned to retirement in 2012 and later that year moved to the IHM Motherhouse. She was a constant volunteer, visiting and praying with those in the Health Care Center, offering words of care and comfort to those affected by memory loss.

## Remembering

About mid-afternoon on April 6, 1938, Rose Mary Ala entered this world. Her maternal grandmother delivered her at home. Mary (Nardi) and Luciano Ala were her proud parents. Rose Mary was followed by her siblings: Mary Margaret Ala Tominac, Michael Joseph Ala and Jo Ann Ala Galasso. As an infant, her mother took her to St. Charles Church in Detroit. She placed Rose Mary on the altar and offered her to God as a possible religious vocation.

Rose Mary attended St. Charles School and then transferred in sixth grade to Annunciation, where she finished through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. In later years, Rose Mary was blessed to travel to Sicily, Italy with her mother, uncle and aunts. They were delighted to connect with family there. She was also privileged to visit the Holy Land.

During a ninth-grade school retreat, she heard a distinct call to religious life. In her senior year of high school, Rose Mary met with the parish priest to discuss her vocation. At the time she was not sure whether she wanted to be a Carmelite Sister or an IHM Sister. The priest suggested that the IHMs would be a better match.

When it was time for her to enter, her father had great difficulty accepting Rose Mary's decision and leaving home. She called on Sister Mary Edward Arthur, IHM, her sponsor, for some help. Mary Edward offered Rose Mary a place to stay at Marygrove College. After two weeks, Rose Mary's father wanted her to return home. She agreed, on the condition that she could leave for Monroe when her acceptance letter came. On Sept. 7, 1955, her family took her to Monroe to begin the entry process. Rose Mary began study at Marygrove College in preparation as an elementary teacher.

Her first teaching assignment was at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Detroit, where she taught third grade for two years. This was followed by teaching first grade for one year at St. Charles Borromeo and then first and second grades at St. George, Detroit. Other teaching assignments included Most Holy Trinity, Detroit, followed by Hollywood, Fla.; Bloomfield Hills and Roseville, Mich. and Akron, Ohio. She also taught special education at Marygrove College, Detroit. Rose Mary's teaching career lasted for more than 30 years.

Rose Mary spent a year at Visitation House of Prayer, which she remembered as "One of my most memorable years was spent at Visitation in Monroe, Mich.

Among the many blessings I received were Hermit Days spent in solitude, book discussions based on theology, and exploring each one's spirituality."

In the 1980s, Rose Mary ministered in adult education and English as a Second Language in the Detroit Public Schools System. This position allowed her the free-time to take classes in spiritual direction and retreat facilitation. After having completed the Columbiere Program for Spiritual Directors, Rose Mary moved into pastoral ministry as Christian service coordinator in several parishes. In 1996, Sisters Evelyn Booms and Rose Mary opened the Heart of Jesus Prayer Center in St. Clair Shores. The Center offered spiritual direction, retreats, book-study groups and workshops on various themes. Rose Mary spent 16 years in that ministry. Working in prayer ministry was her greatest joy because it fulfilled her desire to draw closer to God and to help bring other people closer to God. She considered this ministry a special gift from God.

Rose Mary was a very prayerful person who did not hesitate to share that gift with others. In a note written to her in 1992, a parishioner/friend wrote, "You have taught us how to pray and to find Christ's presence in all those we meet." Another letter heartily expressed, "Sister, I am absolutely sure that you were a direct answer to my prayer- 'Please God, I need someone who understands about breast cancer and my faith in you, and my fears, too.'"

At the same time, Rose Mary maintained her contacts with Colombiere Conference and Retreat Center and Manresa Retreat House and supervised interns in their spiritual direction programs. During summer retreat sessions, Rose Mary walked with retreatants at the centers. The letters of recommendation in her file read glowingly of her work and of her person. From Shannon Barnes, a coordinator of the Internship for Spiritual/Retreat Direction at Colombiere wrote, "Rose has a deep spirituality that is quite in tune with the contemporary church and society. She has been very effective in her ministry of spiritual and retreat direction with a variety of people from all walks of life." Rose Mary reached others through various ministries: Stephen Ministry, Project Rachel, Programs for the Gifted and Prayer Blanket Ministry. This last ministry holds a special story of a teenaged boy who was injured in a car accident and had been in a coma for three months. He was given a 1 percent chance of living. Rose Mary gave a prayer blanket to the mom and asked her to put it on the boy's bed. The very next day, the mom received a phone call from the hospital

nurse who said someone wanted to talk to her. The first words spoken were, "Hi, mom."

From the time Rose Mary retired to the Motherhouse in 2012 to the present, she volunteered her services wherever needed, especially with the residents of the Memory Care unit. When asked what she appreciated about working with these residents, she said: "They are very real, there are no pretentions."

Perhaps you have seen Rose Mary's pastel painting of a doe with beautiful, soulful eyes. This painting had a special place in her room. She was drawn to paint it many years earlier, after reading a book called "Hind's Feet on High Places" by Hannah Hurnard. It's an allegory about a Christian's journey to the "higher places" of unity with Jesus Christ. Rose Mary also wrote poetry, which expressed her love of nature and her own spirituality. I close with just one line – a good take-away:

"Surrounded by LOVE, one becomes LOVE."

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM  
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