

Obituary



Sister Mary Faith Bell, IHM, 82, died Sunday, April 21, at IHM Senior Living Center under hospice care in Monroe.

Sister Mary Faith, as she was known, was born in Detroit on March 18, 1937, to Lafayette and Mary (Manning) Bell. She attended Holy Rosary and St. Gregory Grade Schools (Detroit) and St. Gregory and Girls' Catholic Central High Schools (Detroit). Upon graduation from Girls' Catholic Central in 1955, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe and received the religious name, Sister Marie Faith.

Sister Mary Faith earned a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College and entered elementary level teaching ministry at St. Charles and St. Boniface, Detroit; St. Mary, Marshall; and St. Mary, Wayne. In 1972, she earned a master's degree in education from Wayne State University, Detroit. After 10 years in general education, Sister Mary Faith committed to all aspects of religious education: teacher, coordinator, parish, director and administrator. In these capacities, she served at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish and Education Center, Ann Arbor; St. Joseph, Erie; St. Patrick, Carleton; and Epiphany, Detroit.

In the mid-1980s, she returned to teaching at St. David School and St. Ambrose Academy, Detroit; St. Benedict School, Ferndale and Highland Park, and St. Mary School, Royal Oak. During this time, she resided in Ferndale before moving to Norman Towers, Monroe, in 2003.

In later years, Sister Mary Faith served her community as caretaker and hospitality staff at Visitation House of Prayer, Monroe. She transitioned into various volunteer ministries before retiring to the Motherhouse in 2008. When her health declined in 2012, she moved into the health care center.

Remembering

In 2012, Diane Brown helped Sister Mary Faith gather a few of her memories. They say a lot in a way that only poetry can.

WHERE I'M FROM

I'm from Catholic school, from Holy Rosary in Detroit.

I am from my First Grade teacher, an IHM Sister, so kind and gentle. I'm sure she understood my pain. I was still there when my sister, Ann came into first grade the next year.

I am from working outside with Grandmother, with Ann, Ted and John. We chased the dog while Grandmother worked in the garden. It was fun.

I am from family dinners, from Mom's good meals, four kids and Dad and Mom together. I felt safe and loved.

I am from law and order, right and wrong, from my father's job as a Detroit policeman. After he was killed, my mother married Mr. Barker.

I am from "quiet down" and "Bless us, O Lord, and these, thy gifts;" and from five more children.

I am from Holy Rosary Catholic Church, from praying, and from helping the lady with the altar guild. The priest knew I had a vocation, even then.

I am from Detroit, from Ireland and Canada, from St. Mary of Redford, from Irish stew and soda bread, from corned beef and cabbage. Grandmother taught kids good handwriting at St. Mary of Redford while mother and her brother went to school there.

I am from my Uncle Joe who was in World War II. When he came back, he became a policeman like my Dad. He was a funny guy with just the right personality to pass out meals to prisoners.

I am from hard times, and from hidden blessings which help me understand others.

Sister Mary Faith Bell thought of herself as a "Detroit girl." Her parents were Lafayette and Mary Catherine (Manning) Bell. Her father was from Missouri and her mother from Michigan. She was proud to say she was (Canadian) French, Cherokee and Irish. Her father, Lafayette, was called "Fait," and she was named Mary Faith after him.

Mary Faith was the first of four children born to her parents. After her came Ann, Theodore and Edward John. They were enjoying a happy childhood when their policeman father was killed. This was a trauma for all. They had to be uprooted from Missouri and go to live with their grandmother in Michigan. According to Mary Faith, her grandmother was very good, very smart and very holy. She was also very much loved. She had wanted to be a religious sister at one time.

Mary Faith's mother married again, to Mr. Barker, and together they had five more children. It was perhaps for this reason that Mary Faith felt her mother had little time for her, and she looked to her grandmother to be her mother.

She was enrolled in Holy Rosary School in 1943 and was baptized later that year on Dec. 5. Perhaps the reason the children had not been baptized was that their father was Baptist.

While attending Girls' Catholic Central High School, Mary Faith lived with her beloved grandmother. She was an outstanding student and active in many school activities. She also helped the Women's Guild with their work in church. According to Sister Liz Pardo, she was well-liked for her utter openness, being totally herself. Nothing was "put on" about her. And later, in formation, she was not one to accept criticism blindly, but would ask why. The directresses did not brush her off and companions admired her for her simplicity. Mary Faith had always wanted to be a sister. While her grandmother did not approve, she did not hold her back. According to Mary Faith, her grandmother did not want her to lose what she herself had lost by not listening to that inner call.

Four young women from Girls' Catholic Central came to the IHM community that summer: Jean Morsch, Joan Michalik, Elizabeth Pardo and Mary Faith. She entered on Sept. 7, 1955, just as the Angelus bell was ringing. Reception was on June 17, 1956, and vows were made on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul.

Sister Mary Faith earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove, and her master's degree from Wayne State. She began her teaching career at St. Charles, Detroit, in 1960, where she taught grade one. She continued teaching primary grades at St. Mary, Marshall; St. Boniface, Detroit; and St. Mary, Wayne. In 1972, she began a ministry as coordinator of religious education at St. Thomas, Ann Arbor. She remembers that she lived with Sister Paracleta, who was very kind and supportive of her. In 1986, she returned to classroom teaching and continued until 2002 in different schools in Detroit suburbs.

It was in 2002 that Mary Faith moved to Norman Towers in Monroe. In 2003, she began three years of hospitality and caretaker service at Visitation House of Prayer. Working alongside Rosalind Naebers, an IHM classmate, she enjoyed the work and the fun they had together. In her free time, she enjoyed visiting the sisters in the Motherhouse. She loved Sister Helen Mekeal, who loved her in return. Mary Faith moved to the Motherhouse in 2006.

Mary Faith was a happy person, she laughed easily, and she loved to whistle and to sing. She used to sing to Sister Ann Marie Hughes, who lived just across the hall from her in Health Care.

On her Page of Life she had written:

My soul does magnify the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior.
For s/he that is loving has done great things,
And holy is our God.

Through life's valleys, along the lakes, across the deserts, by the oceans, up onto the mountains, beholding the sunrise, exalting in the sunsets –
I can only praise and LOVE my God for all of my life.

For my wonderful parents, grandparents, Fr. Jim Serrick, SJ, my precious sisters and brothers, my sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews, my friends and marvelous companions – the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

I pray: My God, Holy Jesus,
I know that you love me completely.
I put my total trust in You at every moment.
I consciously invite You, my God, Infinite LOVE
to come into my entire being,
to flow through every part of me.
I love You.

We thank you loving God, for this dear and gentle person that you gave to us, her IHM Sisters, and to her family. And now we return her to you.

Composed by Diane Brown, IHM, and Roberta Richmond, IHM
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