

Obituary



Sister Cecilia Campbell, IHM, 101, died Thursday, Dec. 21 in the IHM Health Care Center, Monroe.

Cecilia Campbell was born March 3, 1916, in Big Point, Ontario, Canada, to Joseph and Soufrini (Myers) Campbell. She and her sister Josephine (later Sister Aurelia Campbell, IHM) were the only two daughters of their 10 children that survived beyond infancy. In the early 1920s, they moved to the United States and settled in Detroit. Cecilia attended Holy Trinity Grade School and Girls Catholic Central High School, from which she graduated in 1934. Several years later Cecilia entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) and received the religious name Sister Hermes.

After entering the congregation, Sister Cecilia began studies at Marygrove College and earned a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree in special education in 1962 from Wayne State University. For the next 30 years, she taught in area grade schools: St. Charles, Newport; St. Agnes, St. Francis de Sales and Gesu, Detroit; St. Joseph, Monroe; Holy Name, Birmingham; St. John Vianney, Highland Park and St. Anne, Warren. She served as directress for St. Mary Academy in Monroe when it operated as a boarding school for girls.

In 1974 through 1994, Sister Cecilia served in administration of Gesu School as assistant principal and assistant administrator. The Gesu School community was close to her heart and she continued to volunteer her services as needed up until early 2000.

Sister Cecilia retired to the Motherhouse campus in 2002, remaining active in the life of the community. At 90 years of age, she moved to the Health Care Center. She celebrated her 75th Jubilee as an IHM Sister in 2014.

Remembering

Joseph Campbell and Soufrinie Marie Myers were united in marriage on May 7, 1912, at St. Philip Church in Grande Pointe, Ontario. They settled on a farm 12 miles from Chatham, where they were blessed with the birth of their first child, Josephine, on March 17, 1913. Three years later, Cecilia was born on March 3,

1916, the third of their 10 children. Little did Joseph and Soufrinie realize at that time that Josephine, the first of the 10 children, seven girls and three boys, and Cecilia, the third child, would be the only two to survive beyond infancy. The RH blood factor was determined to be the cause of death of the other eight babies.

Cecilia's family was a wholesome French family, rich in love, with a solid Catholic faith where family prayer, especially the rosary, was part of their daily schedule. The family remained in Canada until March 1922, when they moved to Detroit and settled in Holy Trinity Parish (then known as Cork Town). Mr. Campbell was hired at Chrysler and worked there until his retirement.

Having been born and raised in Canada, French was the only language that Sister Cecilia knew. You can imagine the frustration she felt when she started school at Holy Trinity and could neither speak nor understand the English language. Day after day, she returned home from school in tears, telling her mother that she did not want to go back to school. Wise woman that she was, she calmly told Cecilia, "Try one more day. I think it will be better tomorrow." So each day she kept trying until that day finally came when she was able to communicate a little in English.

Cecilia was not alone in this struggle. Josephine also experienced the same lack of success in school. Still, through their parents' gentle encouragement as well as their own patient determination, Cecilia and Josephine mastered the work at hand and eventually achieved their goal – an eighth grade graduation certificate!

By the time Josephine finished the eighth grade, Holy Trinity had closed their high school. So Josephine and Cecilia attended Girls Catholic Central (then called Cathedral High). By the time Cecilia had finished high school and graduated in 1934, her family had moved to St. Agnes Parish in Detroit.

Since Cecilia's parents were deeply religious, it is not surprising that her sister Josephine expressed an earnest desire to enter the convent after graduation. So, on Feb. 15, 1933, she entered the IHM congregation. During this time, Cecilia, too, was inwardly nurturing the seed of a religious vocation. By the time she graduated, however, in 1934, she knew that the low economy, a result of the Great Depression, was causing serious financial difficulties affecting everyone. For that reason, she set her sights on finding a job that would earn a little money to help support the three of them, her parents and herself. She trusted that

when the time was right, God would lead her in the right direction. Fortunately, with Sister Victorine's recommendation she was offered a position as assistant to the secretary of Monsignor John J. Hunt, then moderator of the Propagation of the Faith Society in the Chancery Office in Detroit.

After working for four years, the overall financial condition was gradually improving. Following a period of prayerful discernment, Cecilia thought it might be time to mention her desire to enter the convent to her parents. Though they were reluctant to "lose" the last of their ten children, they generously gave their consent if Cecilia felt that God was truly calling her to this vocation. With their blessing she answered God's call to enter the Postulate on July 2, 1938, and at reception was given the name, Sister Hermes. Two years later, she was accepted for temporary profession of vows and made her final vows in 1944.

Sister Cecilia's teaching ministry began as a novice at St. Mary School in Monroe where she taught grade six for one year. This was followed by her first mission to St. Charles in Newport, a small country school at that time. Here, she was assigned to teach a classroom of grades three, four and five. This first mission experience was both challenging and rewarding for the lifelong lesson she was to learn early on and that was to trust God, who she felt was always with her in whatever was asked of her. Learning to surrender self completely to God she said, (and I quote) "gave me the peace and courage needed to 'carry on' throughout the many years of my active ministry."

Her missions included: St. Agnes and St. Francis de Sales, Detroit; St Mary Academy and St. Joseph, Monroe; St. Anne, Warren; Holy Name, Birmingham; and St. John Vianney, Highland Park.

Sister Cecilia's last mission was at Gesu, Detroit, where she was missioned in 1968. She remained there for the last 35 years of her active ministry. She taught grades four through eight until she was asked by Sister Stella Rabaut, IHM, the principal, to join her in administration as her assistant. This remained her position until she retired from fulltime ministry in 1995 but continued as a volunteer worker. She recalls, with awe, the many changes she saw in the 35 years of her presence at Gesu. Gesu moved from a peak enrollment of 1,600 students to 230. Gesu began with a total white school population to an all African-American student body. At first, the faculty was predominately IHMs; in

the end, all the teachers were lay teachers except for two IHMs. The convent residents dropped from 29 sisters to seven.

Gesu was credited with some remarkable achievements due to its leadership and to the people of the surrounding community. The school became a solid anchor for a changing neighborhood. It adapted to the learning needs of its population and engaged the contributions of such talent as Gladys Knight and the Pips in helping the students make their mark and celebrate their identity.

People spoke of the leadership of Stella Rabaut at Gesu. She was helped by some other fine leaders there, but Stella was certainly wise in choosing Cecilia as an assistant. Cecilia was seasoned, reliable, confident and an optimistic and cheery person. It is no wonder hers was such a lengthy tenure at Gesu.

In 1972, Sister Cecilia's father's diagnosis of lung cancer began a long period of illness ending in his death. After his death, Josephine assumed the responsibility for her mother's care while Cecilia assisted her by taking her turn as caregiver as much as her schedule permitted. As time went on, and as her mother's health diminished, it became necessary to seek the assistance of a home visiting nurse who cared for her mother at home regularly and trained both Josephine and Cecilia in giving the special care their mother needed. This lasted several years until their mother gratefully accepted the St. Mary of Redford sisters' invitation to move into the convent with them. Needless to say, the sisters went "all out" to provide Soufrinie with comfort, loving support and excellent care. Two years later, Mrs. Campbell moved to the Motherhouse Health Care Center. From then on Cecilia travelled from Gesu to Monroe to continue her weekly visits. By then, she was caring for both her mother and her sister Josephine, who had also taken up residence in Monroe as a Health Care Center patient.

Meanwhile diminishing school enrollment at Gesu left fewer sisters in the convent there. Four of them planned to retire to the Motherhouse upon the completion of renovation. In February of 2003, "moving day," was an emotional day for all of them, especially Cecilia after her 35 years of residency at Gesu. Holding precious memories deep in her heart and realizing that the time had actually come for her departure, Cecilia was the last one to close the doors at the convent. She bade a grateful "Thank you" and said "Adieu" to her beloved Gesu convent home.

Arriving in Monroe with a heart full of mixed emotions, her spirit was quickly uplifted by the welcoming spirit and gracious hospitality awaiting her in the newly renovated Motherhouse. She wrote, "nothing was left undone to make us feel welcome, comfortable and completely 'at home' IHM style."

With the constant activity of the busy mission life behind her, she appreciated this time of peace and quiet to reflect on the mysteries throughout her life that testified to God's constant love for her. She saw her opportunity to be home with her sister Josephine during Josephine's final months as one of the greatest of privileges.

In her Book of Life entry Cecilia says, "I am increasingly grateful for the opportunity afforded me to expend my limited energy in service to others, visiting the sick and responding to their needs, as well as in spiritual reading and contemplative prayer. ... At the same time I take advantage of current presentations, reading material, many retreats, and conversation provided as a means of growth in viewing reality from a different perspective, as well as in helping make a global shift in consciousness. The final chapter of my life's story continues to praise God in thanksgiving for ... the inner Divine Mystery ... toward the path of union with God and with the whole of God's creation. Each day my heart overflows with thanksgiving for the realization that my entire life unfolds in the constant, eternal NOW."

Truly, Sister Cecilia Campbell was a blessing to all she met.

One event stands out in the memory of a companion who attended her to her eye specialist in Toledo. At this appointment, Cecilia was expecting a good report. After the doctor examined her affected eye, however, he announced that he had done all he could to save the sight in that eye. He could do no more, but she could go to her regular doctor for checkups. Cecilia's companion felt so sorry for Cecilia knowing how disappointed Cecilia must be leaving the office building. But, as they left, Cecilia turned to her companion and said, "I felt so sorry for *the doctor* when he told me he could no longer help me. He tried so hard and felt so bad that he could no longer improve my eyesight." That was Cecilia, always thinking of the other one instead of herself.

Cecilia journeyed with us now for many years. Wholeheartedly she shared herself with us. We felt this even in these latter years. Over time, her voice had taken on a higher pitch. When she concluded a shared prayer or responded to

our greeting at the kiss of peace, Cecilia answered with vigor, "A-MEN!" We will miss that joyous entry into our shared prayer. Now indeed we can only imagine the ecstasy in her joyful meeting with God face-to-face. How happily must she respond to the message, "Welcome home, Cecilia, my good and faithful servant. In the same measure you have loved others so have I loved you and in more ways than you can possibly imagine." A-MEN! A-MEN!

Written by Carola Keffler, IHM, and delivered by Joan Glisky, IHM

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