

Obituary



Sister Eileen Denomme, IHM, 89, died Monday, Feb. 19, at her home, the IHM Senior Living Community, in Monroe.

Sister Eileen was born to the family of Omer and Marie (Gagnier) Denomme. One of three daughters and two sons, she was born Aug. 2, 1928 in Detroit, and was baptized Marie Eileen. Her education began at St. Matthew Elementary School then to Dominican High School (Detroit), where she graduated in 1946. That summer, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name Sister Yvonne.

Sister Eileen entered studies at Marygrove College and earned a bachelor's degree, which focused on English, education and special education. Her early teaching ministry was at the elementary level at St. Joseph, Dexter, Mich.; St. Felicitas, Chicago; St. Michael, Monroe; and St. Gregory, Detroit. For 10 years she served in the reading clinic of Marygrove College while pursuing her own studies for a master's degree in education at Wayne State University.

Upon completing studies for a doctorate of education from Wayne State in 1967, she continued at the reading clinic and also chaired the Department of Psychology at Marygrove. Within the next five years, Sister Eileen, a licensed psychologist, ministered as dean, in administration and as a reading consultant. In 1975, she accepted a position with the Portage Public Schools and made her home in Portage, Lawton and Mattawan, Mich. Over some 20 years, Sister Eileen was a gifted clinician, coordinator and supervisor for special education classrooms and assistant director of special education. She continued her private practice in child psychology and psychotherapy. During these years she resided at Shadestone Farm, where she greatly enjoyed being a part of the community and continued to offer her ministry service from there. She retired to the IHM Motherhouse in Monroe in 2011. As her health declined, she moved to the Health Care Center.

Remembering

Marie Eileen Denomme was born on Aug. 2, 1928, to Marie and Omer in Detroit. She was the eldest of five children, having two brothers, the older named Lawrence Omer –but called Pat – and Bob, and two sisters, Bernadette – who for years has made her home here in Monroe – and Yvonne, whose name became Eileen's religious name.

According to Bernie, "Eileen, a beautiful little girl, had a fun, adventurous childhood." The Denommes lived on the east side of Detroit in St. Matthew Parish and all attended the elementary school there.

"Summer for the Denommes was the highlight of every year. It was spent in Bayfield, Ont., Canada at a cottage on Lake Huron. What fun we had!"

Following her graduation from Dominican High School, Detroit, Eileen entered the IHM community on June 30, 1946, owing no doubt in part, to her mentor, Sister Rosalie Omans, IHM. She became a novice in Jan. 2, 1947. Two years later, she professed first vows and on Jan. 2, 1952, she made final profession.

For 10 years, she taught first grade in parish schools staffed by IHMs: St. Joseph, Dexter; St. Felicitas, Chicago; and St. Michael, Monroe. By 1954, she had earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove and in 1957 went on to St. Gregory in Detroit for a year. Eileen loved first-graders, noting "They were so curious and eager to learn. I had a marvelous time with them, even though I sometimes had as many as 55 children in one class!"

In 1958, she went back to Marygrove College, this time as faculty. With her success as a first grade school teacher, Eileen took her experience to the Diagnostic and Reading Clinic, joining IHMs Mary McGrath and Solanus Ufford. "It was challenging," she said, "While I was establishing the clinic, I was also a full-time student myself." From 1958-1965, she served as its director.

Sister Eileen earned both a master's degree in education and, in 1968, a doctorate in education with a concentration in special education, both from Wayne State University. She chaired the Marygrove Psychology Department, was an associate professor and became vice president and academic dean at Marygrove. While in demanding roles at Marygrove, she also served as president of the Michigan Reading Association, a professional organization with some 3,500 members. After 17 years, Eileen left Marygrove College. She recalls that it had been a time of pain, loneliness and purification. The sudden death of her father was part of that period. At the turn of the 21st century, she returned to the college as a board member.

A new chapter in her life began in 1975 when she moved to the western part of Michigan. For 21 years, Eileen served as assistant director of special education for the Portage Public Schools. Eileen told friends, "I'm using every gift that God gave me and I am appreciated."

Living on Shadestone Farm in the rural setting of Lawton and Mattawan and with long-time friends, Linda Delene and Antoinette Ruedisueli, IHM, gave Eileen a fertile field for her many gifts. In the chronicles for 1980, Eileen writes, "School ended for the summer and the chickens went to slaughter." How well our native Detroiter had adapted to life on the farm!

She also brought beauty with her lovely soprano voice, which she shared with the parish choirs at St. Mary in Paw Paw and St. John Bosco in Portage. With her so-called retirement in 1995, her life took on the rhythm of nature with a monthly emphasis on specific farm work, beginning with winter planning and followed by replacement of trees in the fruited area as well as forest management of its 20-acres of hardwoods. Mid-August through September was harvest time, with the year ending indoors enjoying domestic pets.

Continuing in private practice as psychotherapist for another 11 years, Eileen retired to the Motherhouse in 2010.

In time, the chronicles gave way to the holiday letter, written by Linda and set in the context of world issues. Tales of the swans, horses, cats and dogs with their colorful escapades made for an enjoyable read.

In 2010, Linda recounts the move to the IHM Motherhouse. "Eileen's move has not been easy but was necessary given our changing circumstances." In 2015, we read more specifically, "Sr. Eileen is in the long twilight of dementia compounded with Parkinson's disease and is now in a palliative protocol."

Eileen so loved children that she became like them in the Gospel sense, without guile. Although she had her share of suffering and heartbreak, she never became calloused or judgmental. Her response to disappointment in others was, "People usually are doing the best they can, given their circumstances."

And now, having mentioned Linda Delene, let me offer her to all here to complete this Remembering.

Written and delivered by Carol Quigley, IHM
Feb. 23, 2018

Good Morning. We are gathered here to celebrate and give thanks for the life of Sister Marie Eileen Denomme, IHM. While there is sadness present at her passing into eternal life, there also are other emotions present. There is genuine relief that her final months of confusion are over; there is deep thanksgiving for Eileen's dedication to God; and continuous gratitude for Eileen's fidelity to her profession as a religious sister in the

Immaculate Heart of Mary congregation. Eileen never wavered in her life choice, and when her health began to fail in 2010, she came home to her congregation here in Monroe. In 1947, when Eileen joined the IHM congregation, her earthly life became grounded in the three tenets of the congregation – deep faith, courageous spirit and action for justice. Each tenet helped shape her professional work and personal contributions to others.

First, Eileen's deep faith was not usually evident as she was an extremely private person who rarely conversed about her innermost feelings – even after almost 50 years of friendship. However, her faith was always demonstrated in her work with children. They instinctively trusted her and readily told her their secrets. As a child psychologist, reading specialist and special education advocate, Eileen counseled the child and the whole family with faith that every improvement, no matter how small, was worthy of praise.

Eileen's faith was evident to families as she worked to resolve conflicts and design services on a case-by-case basis. Eileen's reckoning of solutions always favored the involved child and often tested the limits of her faith. Her faith helped her craft solutions as families tried to cope with fear and bewilderment at their circumstances. Eileen sometimes thought her limited solutions were inadequate. Yet, when others expressed frustration with individuals, Eileen always said that "people usually do the best they can each day." She graciously and unconditionally accepted others and they, in turn, accepted her advice and assistance.

Eileen's family was also a primary source of her deep faith, and most especially her mother, Marie Denomme. As close friends, they wrote letters back and forth, spoke on the telephone frequently, and for years and years, Eileen made the monthly trip to Harper Woods to visit Marie in person. Yet unfortunately, even Eileen's deep faith along with her mother's support, was inadequate to move the Detroit Tigers into national championship caliber of play despite their combined annual appeals for success.

Eileen's courageous spirit was her constant second companion along with her deep faith. The accidental death of her younger brother Pat (Laurence) as a teenager abruptly introduced her to life's fragility. When she spoke of his accident and untimely death, she also reflected on God's spirit in so many parts of her life – almost as an exchange of grace to her. Further, as Eileen recounted her changing work in different locations, she stated that her ability to do the work was provided by the Holy Spirit. As was true for most religious sisters in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, assignments were made by the General Superior and dutifully carried out by individual sisters. In many

cases, their courageous spirits and faith were the singular glue for success. And Eileen found the Holy Spirit everywhere she lived, worked, and traveled.

On a trip to Grunewald, Switzerland, we attended Mass at a small, concrete, box-like church that was cold, gray and without adornment of any kind. As we walked back to our hotel after Mass, Eileen commented that the Holy Spirit had a major task in sending some spiritual life and joy into that church. We later learned that the church itself was an old WWII building used to store ammunition and its character had changed little over the years. On another trip to Murmansk, Russia, we attended a Russian Orthodox service in a cavernous church with a few large icons and a massive altar. The service lasted about 2 1/2 hours without lights, seats or heat of any kind. After that service, as we were standing outside, Eileen commented about the courage of the participants and their spiritual character as many were crying and reciting prayers as they left the sanctuary. Eileen immediately recognized their deep faith despite the difficult physical conditions within the church.

These examples of Eileen's comments illustrated her quiet insight. She was a reserved person who did not talk needlessly and to some, this characteristic reflected a stoic detachment. This was not the case and her quietly shared perception about situations was penetrating, insightful, and occasionally, devastating. She had little use for excess of any kind, including talk and her exterior composure helped conceal internal observations about situations and events. On a more personal note, Eileen exercised her insight into one of her favorite pastimes, shopping. Regardless of the item under consideration, clothing, shoes, food, cars, scarves, briefcases, she loved to shop for herself and for anyone else. Since red was her favorite color, any red item quickly moved to the top of her shopping list.

The third tenet of the IHM congregation – action for justice – was Eileen's highest priority. In fact, based on my long friendship and association with her, I can state that Eileen was a "warrior" for responsible action. Action in pursuit of justice was not an abstract idea given her very practical nature. Eileen always sought to identify the necessary steps to remedy or modify a situation. She had little use for strategic plans or cardinal rules – instead she sought to identify and share the first, then second, concrete steps a person had to take to change their situation. Sister Antoinette, who had lived with us for about 25 years, was wrestling with her increasing fragility and had difficulty in finding a path to Monroe. Eileen sat with her for days and helped Antoinette design an approach so she could accept her move to Monroe. Eileen knew that any successful action plan needed a specific person responsible for each step along the way. And, without ownership of specific actions, she also knew that little would be changed or accomplished. This principle of individual responsibility for

action permeated her life without exception. Eileen's action for the Lord was also reflected in her glorious soprano singing voice, especially during Mass, when she sang God's praises with her entire being.

As Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, stated: "Service is the rent we each pay for living. It is not something we do in our spare time; it is the very purpose of life." Sister Eileen paid her life's rent with more than 70 years of service to others fortified by her deep faith, her courageous spirit and her commitment to action for justice. In retrospect, Eileen lived her life in accordance with Psalm 100:

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands;

Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing;

Know that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us, not we ourselves, we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter into his gates with Thanksgiving, and unto his courts with praise, be thankful to him, and bless his name.

For the Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endures to all generations.

God bless Eileen's family and especially her sisters Bernadette Costello and Yvonne Isola; her sister-in-law, Mary Joan Denomme; her many nieces and nephews and their wonderful families. And finally, may God continue to bless this extraordinary and prophetic Immaculate Heart of Mary Congregation. May the Lord welcome Eileen home and give her eternal rest. Thank you.

Written and delivered by Linda M. Delene