

Obituary



Sister Judith Anne Eliassen, IHM, 77, died Sunday, Dec. 29, in IHM Senior Living Community.

Robert and Edna (Terrian) Eliassen welcomed their daughter Judith Anne on June 27, 1942 in Detroit. The family lived in St. Gregory parish where Judith attended Winterhalter and Crary grade schools before moving to St. Mary of Redford and attending the parish school. Judith graduated from St. Mary of Redford High School, entered Marygrove College and earned a Bachelor of Science degree.

After graduation from Marygrove, Judith entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) and received the religious name, Sister John Chrysostom. Her teaching career focused on the sciences at St. Mary Academy (Monroe) for 10 years, and for 15 years at Holy Redeemer High School (Detroit). She continued her studies and earned a master's degree from Purdue University, Indiana.

Sister Judith expanded her education and professional development in behavioral sciences, chemical dependency and counseling, with a special focus on the secondary student. Along with teaching, she held positions as assistant principal, alumnae and public relations consultant, academic advisor, counselor and substance abuse educator.

In 2001, Sister Judith engaged in a year of renewal while residing in Detroit. She returned to education in 2002, serving at Marygrove College as coordinator and later director of the Student Academic Enrichment program and Teacher Education Academic Support Lab. She supported students, as well as those who served students. She continued this work until 2013.

Sister Judith retired to the IHM Motherhouse where she was assisted in her health concerns. She volunteered in justice advocacy and tutoring services for local students.

Remembering

In celebration of the gift that Sister Judith Anne Eliassen is to her family, friends and our IHM congregation, we want to begin our time together this morning by remembering highlights in her life and ministry.

To begin ... here's a glimpse of Judith and her beautiful Eliassen family: Born on June 27, 1942, Judith was baptized at St. Cecilia. Judith grew up in Detroit and was the

eldest of her three brothers and one sister. She attended public school until eighth grade, when she transferred to St. Mary of Redford. After graduating from high school, Judith went to Marygrove College as a day student. During college, Sister Judith worked in her family's restaurant. She later worked at Henry Ford Hospital in the cancer research lab.

Her years at Marygrove were exceedingly important for Sister Judith. There she deepened in spirituality; was inspired by the life and work of Sister Mary Emil Penet; heard the calling to become an IHM Sister; and developed outstanding teaching ability.

Faculty members, especially Sister Stanislaus (Mary Ann Huddleston), helped her grow in spirituality and prayer. Sister Mary Emil Penet helped her to deepen her commitment to social justice. Having completed her coursework at Marygrove and graduating, Sister Judith joined the IHM congregation.

The year was 1964. During the second year of her novitiate, the biology teacher at St. Mary Academy (Monroe) became ill and Judith was asked to take two of her classes. Judith did very well as an Academy teacher. After formation, Judith earned a Master of Science degree from Purdue University. She moved into the Academy and taught there for 10 years. These were wonderful years for her, and she served mightily. In addition to full-time teaching, Judith assisted the resident students, managed the auditorium and drove the bus. Judith was very much appreciated by the students and many have stayed in contact with her over the years.

I have known Sister Judith for many years as friend, co-teacher, and principal. When Sister Judith was a faculty member at St. Mary Academy, I learned about her outstanding educational work. In the summer of 1976, as co-principal of Holy Redeemer High School (Detroit), I hired Sister Judith as a math and science teacher and to chair the science department. With all the love in her heart, she served at Holy Redeemer for the next decades!

At Holy Redeemer, Sister Judith became a master high school teacher. She instilled in her students a love for learning, for excellence and for service. Students who had her in class were so very grateful and she was grateful for them and their progress.

In a very real ways, Sister Judith embraced our founder's vision, expressed in the statement, "I desire to be everywhere when I see so many needs." I say this because, in addition to her teaching, Judith also served Holy Redeemer as assistant principal,

academic advisor, initiator and director of alumni, director of development and director of public relations.

When she learned about students who were children of alcoholics and struggling with addictions themselves, Sister Judith became certified in chemical dependency prevention as well as motivating a team of faculty to become certified. Together, they brought the program into the lives of the students.

Judith's experience with the alumna of St. Mary Academy had taught her the importance of alumna outreach and development efforts. In addition to her academic work, Sister Judith worked on development efforts to raise a large amount of funds to keep our school of excellence in operation. She also devoted a great deal of time to establishing and maintaining an amazing alumni association at Holy Redeemer that still flourishes to the present day.

Judith accomplished these amazing feats with her co-minister called "Dad," who graciously provided the financial support for this important work. Evenings, weekends and vacations were all spent building an alumni base and a continued future for the school and student body.

Redeemer graduates, like myself, are forever grateful for Judith's role with alumni and development. She spearheaded a program that kept Holy Redeemer High School open for decades.

Throughout these years, Judith continued to grow in her love of the poor and in dedication to social justice and Catholic Social Teaching.

After taking a sabbatical, Judith went to work at Marygrove College, where she tutored for two years, served as the coordinator of academic enrichment for three years, and director of teacher of academic support for two years.

When Sister Judith retired, she became part of the IHM Motherhouse community and participated in Armchair Activism.

Here are some additional notables about Sister Judith Eliassen:

Throughout her life, Judith has been recognized as a woman of prayer, competency, commitment, compassion and service on behalf of the betterment of others.

Her life and work embody the vision and mission of the IHM congregation.

Her educational work was of the highest quality and her students excelled in math and science. Her work with highly skilled honor students was outstanding. At the same time, Sister Judith's commitment to empower students who lacked the necessary academic skills for math and science was also outstanding. Every week, she worked tirelessly after school assisting students who requested help. Almost always, her teaching skills, her belief in each student and the work they would do together had a positive personal effect on the students and an impressive academic outcome.

Judith received the Marygrove Distinguished Alumni Award in 2015. Bestowing this award and honoring this wonderful woman again confirmed the outstanding education that graduates like Judith received at Marygrove College.

Now as we gather around the altar ...

We miss Judith very much.

We stand in prayerful support of Judith's family.

We thank our Loving God and Judith's wonderful family for the gift of this great woman in our midst all down the years.

And, as we celebrate her life and ministry, we also celebrate that the angels have led Judith into paradise, and she is in the arms of our Loving God.

Amen.

Written and delivered by Elizabeth Walters, IHM

Jan. 7, 2020