

Obituary



Sister Frances Gabrielle Hess, IHM, 93, died Wednesday, May 3, at her home, the IHM Motherhouse in Monroe, Mich.

Sister Frances Gabrielle was one of two daughters and three sons born to Francis and Gabrielle (Horn) Hess. She was born on April 6, 1924, in Elizabeth City, N.J., and given the name Mildred. Young Mildred attended several elementary schools in Detroit and graduated from Visitation High School, Detroit. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit and State of

Michigan teaching certification before entering the IHM community. In 1949, Mildred entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name of Sister Frances Gabrielle.

Her early teaching assignments brought her to St. Patrick, Wyandotte, Mich., and Immaculata and St. Cecilia, Detroit. Within a few years, she returned to study at Michigan State College (University), Lansing, Mich., earning a Master of Science degree. Sister Frances Gabrielle began a 20-year career as college/university professor at Marygrove College, serving as faculty, chairperson of the Home Economics Department, chairperson of the Human Ecology Department and assistant professor of Foods and Nutrition. She completed much of the doctoral program in biology at Wayne State University, Detroit. In 1976, Sister Frances Gabrielle joined the faculty of Madonna College, Livonia, as faculty, assistant professor and director for the Dietetics Program. Her 20-year ministry at Madonna also encompassed pastoral care as a residence hall counselor.

Following her tenure at Madonna, Sister Frances Gabrielle served as archivist at Catholic Central High School, Redford, Mich., before retiring to the Motherhouse in 1997. Sister Frances Gabrielle was an active community member and volunteer, often as a driving companion for the sisters.

Remembering

Sister Frances Gabrielle Hess celebrated her birthday just a month ago, on April 6, she turned 93 years old. She was born in 1924 and was baptized Mildred Mary, at Sacred Heart Church in Elizabeth, N.J. Mildred's father was Frank Hess and her

mother was Gabriel (Horn) Hess. At her reception she received her name in honor of both of them. Mildred had three brothers, Francis, John and Albert, and one sister, Gabrielle. In the IHM Book of Life, Sister Frances Gabrielle wrote, "Before considering 'turning points' in my life, I want to establish its basic foundation of love, laughter and faith as found in my immediate and extended family. We moved to Michigan in 1930, but our ties in the east were strengthened by summer-time visits with relatives who were very humorous characters typical of Brooklyn, New York. . . . My faith was fostered by our family's participation in parish life and Catholic schools, as well as by close contact with relatives who were ordained to the priesthood."

Mildred's sister, Gabrielle lives in California, and due to ill health, she is not able to be with us. Her brother, John lives in Rochester Hills, Mich. and her niece, Theresa Kern lives in Goodrich, Mich.

When Mildred was six, the family moved to Michigan and she attended Holy Cross School in Lansing for the first three years; then grades fourth through 12th were spent at Visitation School in Detroit. After high school graduation, she worked at Chrysler Engineering in Highland Park, Mich. in the engineering laboratories and assisting with experiments. In her archives folder is a letter of recommendation from Chrysler Corporation stating, "I found her to be quick in learning, rapid in carrying out routine procedures and resourceful when deviations proved necessary. She was a conscientious worker and had a pleasant personality. We were sorry when she left us."

Mildred attended Marygrove College and received her Bachelor of Science degree in 1949. The first major "turning point" in her life was due to World War II "in which separation and suffering caused my first real experience of deep sorrow." She doesn't indicate the cause of this pain, but since it corresponds with 1945-49, it's possible she saw her brothers go off to war. "Attending Marygrove at that time helped me to cope with that sorrow and mature my faith. The courses in religion and philosophy, the example and influence of Sister Honora and other IHMs at the college, and the book, *Self Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Dom Caussade prepared me to welcome my religious vocation." And so Mildred entered the IHM community in Monroe, Mich. in 1949, was received into the novitiate in 1950 when she received her religious name, Sister Frances Gabrielle, and made her vows in 1951 and 1954.

She taught at St. Mary Academy and at St. Mary in Monroe during her formation years, and in 1951, Sister Frances Gabrielle began teaching at St. Patrick School, Wyandotte Mich. This was followed by Immaculata High and St. Cecilia in Detroit. For a time she was a student at Michigan State University in Lansing, and in 1956 she began teaching home economics and human ecology at Marygrove College, Detroit. Sister Ann Gabriel Kilsdonk, IHM, related that in 1971 the Dad's Club at Marygrove offered, through the "Wings of Wisdom Program," a chance for herself and Frances Gabrielle Hess an opportunity to study in Europe for a summer. But Frances chose the University in Vancouver, Canada, perhaps because she had family in California at that time. Ann Gabriel says that Frances was well-loved by her students, a good teacher and a very good academic advisor. Since the Marygrove faculty had both Sister Frances Gabrielle and Sister Ann Gabriel, you must know that the students would find nicknames for them: Thus they were known as "Franny Gabe and Anny Gabe."

Again, I am quoting from Frances' page in the IHM Book of Life: "The years spent as an IHM on mission and as a teacher at Marygrove were the source of both great joy and deep sorrow. Living and working with the sisters who had influenced me as a student was a privilege and joy, especially during the first ten years. However, another 'turning point' for me was witnessing basic changes in the college which I could not condone". . . . So Sister Frances Gabrielle left Marygrove, and began teaching at Madonna College in Livonia. From 1976 until 1995, she was the Director of the Dietetics and Food Science Program there. She was a registered dietitian. During that time, she was also actively involved in both district and state level dietetic associations.

It goes without saying that changes in religious living as we IHMs responded to the call of Vatican II were a source of deep sorrow for Sister Frances Gabriel and a witness to her courage in living her convictions.

After retiring from Madonna College, Frances Gabriel volunteered as an archivist at Catholic Central for Boys in Detroit. She was living and working alongside her good friend, Sister Mary Cabrini Hohl, IHM. Archives has a lovely picture of the two sisters featured in *The Aluminator*, a publication of Catholic Central Alumni Association in Winter 1997.

In 1997, Frances Gabrielle moved to the Motherhouse in Monroe. She wrote about that, "The final 'turning point' is one that has restored much of the love,

laughter and faith with which I began life. I am now living back at the Motherhouse where the sources of joy are the graces of the Liturgy, the faith and humor of close IHM friends and the opportunity to be a sister, servant as long as I am able." In Monroe again, she began 10 years of service as a driver for the Motherhouse and the Health Care Center. Whenever and wherever she drove, Sister Mary Cabrini would accompany her. In 2003, both sisters moved into a double room in Memory Care in the newly renovated Motherhouse. Frances Gabrielle was able to help with Mary Cabrini during her years with memory loss. Even though Mary Cabrini died in 2007, Frances Gabrielle decided to stay in her room on the Memory Care unit. She loved the staff and nurses who worked there. "They are absolutely the best. They take such good care of us; I don't want to leave," she said.

There are several letters in Archives, written to Frances Gabrielle. I'm quoting: Dear Sister, I really admire you and the many years of effort you put forth to educate your student ... I know that succeeding in the transfer of information from educator to student is indeed a difficult thing to master. Thank you so very much for standing before your students year after year as an educator. Cheryl, 1995.

To Archives: Sister Frances Gabrielle Hess was not only my professor of Dietetics at Marygrove College for two years, but she was also my friend! Sister Hess allowed me to open my inner self to her in confidence because she realized how much I had to give, and offer this world, but I was afraid to ... I truly hope the IHM Archives will give credit to Sister ... for being an outstanding teacher and an individual who has the courage to stand up for what she knows is right! Amen. God bless you and I love you, sister! Stephanie, 1992.

And finally, here is part of a response by Sister Frances Gabrielle to Sheila in 2002: Thank you for ... the brief visits we had in my office at Madonna and also in our Dining Room at the Motherhouse. Each time you left a generous donation and an old nun with a happy heart to have been remembered by you. You will ever remain in my grateful prayers.

Sister closes her reflections on her Page of Life with two simple prayers:

Thank You for coming – the Redemption
Thank You for staying – the Eucharist.

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM, May 8, 2017