

## Obituary



Sister Joy Halpin, IHM, 102, died Monday, Dec. 9, in IHM Senior Living Community.

Joy Catherine Halpin was born on June 12, 1917, to John and Marie (Lavelly) Halpin. The Halpins raised their family of six daughters and one son in Marine City, Mich. Joy attended a one-room district school for seven years, and later Holy Cross, from which she graduated in 1935.

In 1939, Joy entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) and received the religious name, Sister Marie Michael. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College, Detroit, and a master's degree from the University of Detroit.

Sister Joy began her 30-year teaching ministry with elementary students at St. Joseph, Monroe; St. Phillip, Battle Creek; Sacred Heart, Roseville; Holy Name, Birmingham; and Annunciation, Our Lady of Good Counsel and St. Mary of Redford, Detroit. In the 1960s, she taught high school biology at Lorain Catholic High School (Lorain, Ohio) and St. Mary Academy, Monroe.

Moving out of academia, Sister Joy engaged in parish and family ministry as religious education coordinator, director and pastoral associate, taking her to St. Kieran, Utica; and out west to Holy Rosary Mission, Kyle, S.D.; and St. Stephen's Indian Mission, Stephen's, Wyo. Her work in the western United States concluded with teaching positions at Dawson Community College, Glendive, Mont.; and the Creative Learning Center, Austin, Texas.

In 1990, she returned to Michigan, ministered at Sacred Heart, Dearborn, and retired in Port Huron. She volunteered for her community as a companion and driver. When she moved to the Motherhouse in 2003, she served as prayer presence for the community and the world.

## Remembering

I first met Sister Joy Halpin in the fall of 1981 in Pine Ridge, S. D. She was brand new at Pine Ridge and I was brand new in Sidney, Mont. At that time, the IHMs living in the south and west met twice a year in "area" groups. Our area encompassed Montana, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming. Our initial meeting that fall led to a long friendship. It is an honor to share this remembering for her today.

Joy was born on June 12, 1917 in Marine City, Mich., the eighth child of John and Marie (Lavelly) Halpin. Growing up on a farm, Joy learned to love and appreciate the outdoors at a very early age. She also grew to love the water and enjoyed watching the tanker ships on the St. Clair River. In fact, her older brother eventually worked on one of those ships and she would stand on the banks and wave to him as he passed by.

Like her seven older brothers and sisters, Joy began her education at the East China Red Brook School. While there in grade eight, Joy got sent home from school for too much whispering. When Joy told this story, she always said she was “expelled,” and she would laugh and say, “can you believe I was kicked out of school!” Joy was actually kind of proud of her mischievous ways, like taking money from her older siblings to “zip” through the family rosary on nights when they wanted to go out!

After her untimely mid-year dismissal from the public school, Joy’s mother sent her to Holy Cross School in Marine City to finish the year. While in high school at Holy Cross, she felt a call to religious life. This was not a call that Joy was particularly enthusiastic about, not wanting to leave her family or the farm. She related that she talked with a priest about knowing if it was really what God wanted. He told her to make a novena to the Little Flower. “If she sends you roses, then you won’t have any doubts,” he said. Sure enough, on the seventh day of the novena, her mother brought her a big bouquet of roses. And her mother had not known about the novena!

Joy entered the community in 1939 and said she cried through most of the first years in formation. It wasn’t until she was sent to St. Josephs School in Monroe to teach primary grades and fell in love with the children that she finally stopped crying! Joy spent 34 years teaching in Michigan and Ohio, from primary grades through high school biology.

In 1978, she started her religious education ministry at St. Kiernan Parish, Utica, Mich. In 1981, when leaving the parish, the pastor gifted Joy with a ride in a hot air balloon. She had no fears and absolutely loved the experience. I wonder if this experience re-ignited her attraction to adventure?

That adventuresome spirit propelled her to accept an invitation to do religious education on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. From there, she went to the Wind River reservation in Wyoming. She loved working among the native peoples and could easily relate to their love of the Earth. In 1986, her good friend and ministry partner, Sister Ann Corr decided to leave Wind River and return to Monroe. Joy wasn’t ready to return to Monroe, so I invited her to come to Montana and live with me. At 69,

there was no way she was ready for retirement! I don't think she was there a month before she had a job teaching GED in the local high school. Two of her favorite pastimes during the year we lived together were playing with the three small children of the lay pastoral minister in the parish and going to Pizza House once a week for pepperoni pizza and beer!

Joy was playful, mischievous, witty and somewhat shy, usually doing her best to avoid the limelight. One weekend in Montana, while I was away attending a meeting in Monroe, Joy was invited to attend one of the parishioner's annual bull sale at the local stock yard. I warned Joy not to raise her hand during the auction. The owner of the ranch, who loved to tease Joy, called out a greeting to Joy over the microphone just as one of the bulls was leaving the ring. When Joy raised her hand to return the greeting, the rancher said "sold to Sister Joy for \$10,000! You can only imagine what Joy felt like at that very moment! Many laughs were enjoyed over the years of re-telling that story.

When Joy officially retired, she moved back to the Port Huron area to be close to her sister Elsie, who was in a nursing home. Joy was very faithful to visiting Elsie but also found time to rekindle an early passion for painting. She took many classes and became quite an accomplished watercolor artist, becoming a member of the Blue Water Art Association. In 1993, her watercolor paintings were on display at the Port Huron Museum. She even sold some of her paintings!

While in Port Huron, she became friends with Sister Grace Mary and they shared many happy moments, from swimming in the cold waters of Lake Huron to some very regular visits to the local Pizza Hut!

We all know Joy was a very joyful person, but she also had a deep spirituality. One of her greatest joys in the community was making a 30-day retreat, directed by Sister Mary Ellen Keyes. I am sure Joy always had the assurance of God's love and faithfulness, but the grace of that retreat confirmed in her that the God who loved her unconditionally was also, in her words, "my very best friend in all the world."

Joy also knew unconditional love from her family, which her niece, Karen, will share more about after communion today.

In a letter of recommendation to the priest at St. Stephen's Indian Mission in 1982, Sister Becky Hargraves, with whom she had worked at Pine Ridge, wrote, "The woman I have come to know, love and respect in the midst of so many changes is a woman of amazing personal resourcefulness, deep spirituality and abundant commitment. In her ministry as religious educator she works tirelessly and creatively and is highly effective.

She is a person who is intellectually curious, diligent in work, consistently attentive to spiritual exercises, alert to the needs of others and loving in confrontation. As she lives these virtues she is always focused on the direction of the Spirit even when she seems to lead through the desert.”

When Joy officially retired here to the Motherhouse in 2002, at the age of 85, I’m sure she never expected to live until she was 102. However, Joy was never bound by expectations of herself or others. She freely gave of herself wherever and to whomever she was called to be with, oftentimes from somewhere “back stage.” Joy, your very best friend in all the world has now invited you onto center stage in the company of all the saints and angels. We thank you for all the joy you have brought into the lives of those who knew and loved you for so many years. May we honor your memory by living your spirit of joy and adventure in our own lives.

Written by Roberta Richmond, IHM, and Margaret Chapman, IHM  
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