

Obituary



Sister Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM, 92, died Tuesday, June 27, at her home, the IHM Motherhouse. She had recently become ill and moved into the IHM Health Care Center.

Sister Marie Gabriel was one of three daughters and four sons born to Clement and Edna (Makary) Hungerman of Chester, Pa. Born on May 20, 1925, she was baptized Marie Louise. The family moved to Detroit, where the children attended St. Agnes elementary and high schools. After high school graduation, Marie entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the

religious name Marie Gabriel.

Upon entering the community, she began studies and earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit. Her early teaching found her at St. Gregory, Gesu and Holy Redeemer, Detroit; and at St. Mary, Monroe. Doctoral studies took her to St. Louis University, St. Louis, where she achieved a doctorate in philosophy in 1960. This allowed her to teach at the collegiate level at Marygrove College for 11 years and at Siena Heights College in Adrian for four years. Within those years, she also served as academic dean, dean of the college, associate professor and chairperson of the philosophy department.

In 1976, Sister Marie Gabriel focused on congregational service as she became first assistant to the president of the IHM congregation. She held this position for six years before joining the faculty of Nazareth College where she served for seven years. After enjoying a one-year sabbatical at Catholic Schools of Hawaii in Kaneohe, Hawaii, Sister Marie Gabriel joined the faculty of Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo. A gifted educator, she received many honors for outstanding contributions in the field of educational leadership.

In 1995, Sister Marie Gabriel moved to Monroe, and at age 70, accepted appointment as IHM Theological Education Project director. This encompassing educational program was attended by congregational members over several summer sessions. In 2000, she began service as director of the IHM Congregational Library/Resource Center, retiring from this position in 2008. After moving into the Motherhouse in March 2008, Sister Marie Gabriel was always working on a project of interest for the community: a gifted writer and theologian, 10 years on the planning committee for "Many Stories, One Community" reading project and as a provider of spiritual poetry to many in the community.

Remembering

INTRODUCTION

We are here today to celebrate the life of Sister Marie Gabriel Hungerman and the message of love that she brought to world throughout her 92 years.

Reflecting on her life, Sister Marie Gabriel wrote in her autobiography:

“God has showered me with gifts: faith, good and loving family, education, vocation, friendship and loving community support.”

“My life has been ... grace filled, blessed with joys and sorrows ... My heart is full of gratitude for it all.”

Sister Marie Gabriel “Gabe” a spacious, kind and wise woman, embraced the wholeness of life and encouraged others to do the same.

EARLY YEARS (1925-1960)

Marie was born on May 20, 1925, to Edna Marie Makary and Clement Henry Hungerman, in Chester, Pa. The family moved to Detroit when Marie was two, and her baby sister Ann just a few months old. Mr. Hungerman, an engineer, was a foreman in the foundry at Cadillac Motors. Mrs. Hungerman managed the busy household, which in a few short years included Clem, Paul, Ron, Edna and John.

The Hungermans were a close family that enjoyed music and being together. All the children learned to play a musical instrument and Marie played the violin. The family band spent many evenings together, playing music and singing. Gabe would play the violin for most of her life.

Faith was at the center of Hungerman family life. The love of family deeply influenced Marie’s earliest image of God—not a distant, judging God, but a God who was an ever-loving presence in her life.

The family’s parish and school was Saint Agnes, on the west side of Detroit. There, Marie met the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, from Monroe, Mich. For the next 12 years at Saint Agnes, they would be her teachers and mentors.

Marie was a bright student, and her curiosity led her to ask questions. By her junior year of high school, one of the questions was about what her own future might hold. In her autobiography, Gabe wrote, “My plans were vague but idealistic: to create a

cure for cancer or to be an influential politician and of course marry and have about a dozen kids.”

It was Sister Mary Joseph Loges, her IHM teacher, who threw the first big wrench of doubt into Marie’s plans: “Have you considered a religious vocation?” “No,” replied Marie, adding that although religious life was beautiful, it was not the life for her.

But Marie would soon discover that her “no” was just the first step to “yes.” Several months later, Marie was received into the novitiate, with the religious name, Marie Gabriel. That was not her first choice for a religious name: she had hoped to use her parents’ names. For Marie, it was another unexpected turn in a journey that continued to invite and challenge her “yes” to God.

Gabe was still in the novitiate when, at the Labor Day picnic in 1945, she was informed she would go on mission the very next morning to St. Gregory School, to replace a sister who had become ill. She was greeted with a room full of lively second graders. “Thus began my life as teacher,” said Gabe. She confided that at first, she prayed every morning that it would be Saturday. Gradually, however, she got her bearings and fell in love with teaching.

She went on to teach grade school at Gesu and Holy Redeemer in Detroit, and at Saint Mary in Monroe. It was at Saint Mary that she and several other parochial teachers took philosophy classes from Sister Mary Emil Penet.

For Gabe, the experience was transformative. “These classes enriched me,” said Gabe. “I felt I was finding something I had been seeking all my life.”

The IHM community recognized the spark in Gabe. She was sent to study philosophy at Saint Louis University, where she completed her bachelor’s degree and her master’s and doctoral coursework. During those years, she travelled between Saint Louis and Monroe on the famous Wabash Cannon Ball passenger train. After completing her PhD coursework, Gabe returned to Monroe. She taught at Saint Mary Academy in the mornings, and in the afternoons wrote her dissertation, “Berkeley’s Critique of Newtonian Natural Philosophy.”

COLLEGE PROFESSOR (1961-1976 and 1982-1994)

In 1961, with her doctoral degree in hand, Gabe began a new chapter in her vocation as educator. For 27 years, Gabe served at number of Michigan institutions: Marygrove College in Detroit; Siena Heights College in Adrian; Nazareth College in Kalamazoo;

and Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. She served in a variety of roles including professor of philosophy, department chair and academic dean.

Over the years, Gabe taught hundreds of students, extending to them the liberating mission of Jesus through education. She encouraged students as well as faculty and staff to do their best, to live thoughtful lives and to remember that God, an ever-loving presence, was always at their side.

Gabe's unusual combination of philosophy and elementary education took her to new places. While at Nazareth College, she participated in an international program that prepared educators to teach philosophy to grade school students. The idea was to help students develop skills in areas such as reasoning and ethics that would benefit them through their whole lives. Gabe served as a teacher-trainer in the Philosophy for Children program for 10 years.

Gabe also received a year-long sabbatical from Nazareth to develop teachers for the program in Hawaii. Gabe lived on the island of Oahu and felt deeply enriched by the diversity that surrounded her. She reflected, "Sharing in the multicultural parish life at St. Stephens Church was a special grace, becoming friends with Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Samoan and Hawaiian members who were so welcoming to me."

CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION (1976 to 1982)

For six years in between her ministries in college, Gabe served in Central Administration in Monroe. In 1976, Gabe was elected to leadership and was first assistant in the administration of Sister Mary Kinney. Among Gabe's areas of responsibility were programs for transfers and for associates; liaison to the Marygrove Board of Trustees; and summer programs on the Monroe Campus.

The summer programs were a particular delight for Gabe. She helped to design the slate of week-long classes that covered a wide variety of areas and provided continuing education credits. The summer programs, said Gabe, "were a real joy, giving free rein to my creative spirit and educational ambitions for life-long learning for all IHMs."

As part of Central Administration, Gabe visited IHM Sisters in New Mexico, Arizona and Wyoming. She also travelled to Germany on congregational matters, making the trip with two of her siblings, who attended an international conference: Ann, a professor of education at the University of Michigan, and Edna, known by her IHM religious name as Sister John Clement, a professor of physics at Marygrove.

It was a year after Gabe's term in Central Administration, which one of the great sorrows of her life occurred. Her beloved John Clement was killed near Marygrove College. The tragedy shocked and saddened the Hungerman family, the IHM community, the Marygrove community, the city of Detroit and far beyond.

THE MONROE YEARS (1995 to 2017)

Gabe concluded her ministry in formal education in 1995, moving in May of that year into the large brick house at 805 West Elm Avenue, just across the street from the Motherhouse. Gabe's mother Edna also soon moved to Monroe, to the Health Care Center, where she lived with the mothers of several other IHM Sisters.

At 805, Gabe, along with IHM Sisters Rachel Lambert and Marietta Murphy, launched a new venture in hospitality and community living. If you are an IHM Sister or Associate, you may recall having mission unit meetings, Christmas parties or other gatherings there. 805 West Elm is also the place that the Hungerman clan gathered to celebrate Gabe's 80th birthday. She treasured the memories of that time with family and friends for the rest of her life.

Gabe lived at 805 for 13 years, and then moved to the Motherhouse in 2008. Throughout these years in Monroe, Gabe expressed her love of community and of learning in many ways. One was through the theological education process. Gabe participated in planning weekends, helped to organize the IHM summer weeks, and handled various logistics. She later gave workshops on the program to religious communities in Florida and New York.

Gabe also led the initiative to update the IHM Library to refocus the collection and introduce an electronic catalogue system and computers. For many years, Gabe served as director of the library. This was a ministry, said Gabe, "that I really loved and worked at, through the packing and unpacking, weeding [the collection] and setting up in a new space after the great Motherhouse renovation."

Just a quick note about the card catalog: As the collection was refined, the old card catalog was replaced with a new one. The old cards, roughly the size of index cards, were blank on the back, and they were made into notepads for everyone to use. There were literally thousands of old cards. Even now you can find a pack of them here and there, like little messages of encouragement from Gabe to find a good book and enjoy learning.

True to the IHM spirit of zeal, Gabe was involved in many other activities as well. She served on the Health Care Ethics Committee; the Elder Council; the Many Stories, One

Community project; and on Coordinating Council. She was a volunteer at Habitat for Humanity and a board member of the Community Foundation of Monroe. The list goes on.

In between times, she played cards with friends, took art classes and read books, especially fiction and poetry. She enjoyed movies and visiting with people. And she listened to all kinds of music, especially classical music, which she dearly loved.

CONCLUSION

This week, the choir of heavenly angels gains a new voice as Gabe is reunited with members of the family band who have gone before her: Mr. and Mrs. Hungerman, Clem, Paul, Ron, Sister John Clement and John.

Thank you, Gabe, for the gift of yourself and for your dedication to the liberating mission of Jesus. Thank you for the love, encouragement and wisdom you shared with us and the world.

Our hearts are full of gratitude for it all.

Written and delivered by Maxine Kollasch, IHM
June 29, 2017