

Obituary

Sister Mary Ann Untener, IHM, 90, died Thursday, Dec. 21 in the IHM Health Care Center, Monroe.



Mary Ann Untener was born in Detroit on Nov. 26, 1927, to Andrew and Ann (Kraynak) Untener. The family of four daughters and five sons lived on Belle Isle and attended St. Rita and St. Charles parishes and schools. After graduating from St. Charles High School, Mary Ann entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) and received the religious name Sister Marie Andrew.

Sister Mary Ann attended Marygrove College, earning a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree in education. She began her early teaching career at the elementary level at St. Raymond, St. Mary of Redford and Blessed Sacrament, Detroit; Sacred Heart, Roseville; Our Lady Star of the Sea, Grosse Pointe; and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Minnetonka, Minn. She served as principal at Immaculata Girls High School and Epiphany Elementary School in Detroit.

Sister Mary Ann excelled as a teacher's teacher and provided instruction in teacher education at the University of Detroit in the early 1970s. As changes in the Church occurred, she was called to enter a new ministry of chaplaincy and pastoral ministry. Sister Mary Ann studied and became a certified chaplain and ministered at Bon Secours Hospital, Grosse Pointe; Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, Farmington, Mich.; and at Harper Hospital through the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Service to her community was a value held by Sister Mary Ann. For more than 10 years, she served as assistant provincial and in congregational leadership; as coordinator of ministry and later as volunteer staff in the IHM Archives, where she championed computer research. After a year of renewal in 1995, Sister Mary Ann served in several capacities at the Archdiocese of Detroit Department of Religious Education and the Children's Creativity Center, Monroe.

Sister Mary Ann moved to Monroe in 2000 while working in the Archives Office. In 2005, she became a resident of the Motherhouse and continued various volunteer works within the community.

Remembering

In November of 1927, the Untener family was anxiously awaiting the arrival of their third child. Andrew and Anna Untener already had two little boys and they were happy to welcome a little girl, Mary Ann. Over the next several years, three more girls and three more boys joined the family circle – bringing the total to nine children.

Andrew Untener was a hard worker and struggled to provide for his growing family. Anna Untener was a housewife and a homemaker – very busy taking care of her children and very creative in making ends meet. She was an excellent cook as many of us can attest.

This was Depression time and jobs were not easy to come by and Andrew was eager to take anything he could find. The City of Detroit offered him a job as manager of the canoe shelter on Belle Isle. A huge benefit was that the house next to the canoe shelter also would be theirs. Because there was water right in the front of their house, the children had the opportunity of swimming in the summer and skating in the winter. Sometimes, Belle Isle had competitions and the Unteners were always up for the challenge and often won medals.

The children enjoyed a happy childhood on Belle Isle and learned at a very early age to get along with their siblings because there were no neighborhood children with whom to play. Again Anna's creativity came into play – she organized parties and games for birthdays and holidays – they never missed ducking for apples on Halloween or fixing a snack for Santa.

The Unteners were members of St. Charles Parish as this was the closest Catholic parish to Belle Isle. The children also attended St. Charles School where they first met the IHM Sisters. Mary Ann was always proud to say that she went to St. Charles School from grade one to 12. She was a quick learner and always well prepared. Her grade school years passed quickly and she entered high school and began thinking of her future.

She admired the sisters' way of life and the ministry of teaching and occasionally thought of becoming a sister. More serious consideration was given to this during high school retreats. During her senior year, she made the decision to enter the congregation. Both mother and dad were pleased with her decision

and very supportive. She graduated from St. Charles High School in June of 1945 and entered the community July 2, 1945. After six months of postulancy, she received the habit Jan. 2, 1946, and was given the name Sister Marie Andrew. Formation continued during the Novitiate and after profession Jan. 2, 1948, she headed for her first mission and joined the ranks of the Catholic school teachers.

Her ministries were many and varied. They began in grade schools in the areas of Detroit, Roseville, Redford, Grosse Pointe and then Minnesota. Then she taught middle and upper grades and was always responsible for the extras—girls' choir, classroom singing, school plays. Being a quick learner and able to relate to children on all levels, she moved to teaching high school math. As other opportunities presented themselves, she accepted a position directing teacher certification at the University of Detroit; took Clinical Pastoral Education classes and was trained in hospital ministry; served on a pastoral ministry team; worked in the Religious Education Office at the Archdiocese of Detroit, and here in our Archives.

Her ministry did not end with any of these as she was recognized by her peers for her ability, experience and knowledge of community affairs to serve in leadership – she was elected first to the Northeast Province Team and several years later to central administration.

Two opportunities she was given for which she was most grateful – she was able to be present in Rome with Ken when he defended his dissertation and during her sabbatical, she was able to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land that Ken was leading. This experience is difficult to put into words when you realize that you are actually visiting many of the places Jesus had been. This was an experience to be treasured forever.

Both Mary Ann and her family were also very grateful that both their mother and Ken received the loving care of our health care staff during their final illnesses and death. It was an honor and a privilege to have them here.

As she recognized her own health was failing, she decided to move to the Motherhouse in 2005. She saw this as an opportunity of renewing old friendships and making new connections with others who have become a blessing in her life. She had great gratitude for the opportunities afforded her – attending conferences, workshops and talks that have helped her grow in her

spiritual life. She was especially touched by a quote from a book by Henri Nouwen and used it in her prayer regularly.

“How much longer will I live? One thing seems clear to me.
Every day should be well lived. What a simple truth!
Still it is worth my attention.
Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone’s face?
Did I say a word of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentments?
Did I forgive? Did I love? These are real questions!
I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits,
here in this world and in the life to come.”

Mary Ann has enjoyed a long, fruitful and happy life, touching the lives of many. She loved her family, she loved her community and she loved her ministries. As a young teenager, she answered God’s invitation to follow in his footsteps with a determined YES

Through the years each day as she approached her ministries, her YES was repeated again and again. When declining health necessitated her move from her Liguori room to Memory Care she struggled with her YES as God was asking something of her He does not ask of everyone – her memory. But her deep faith and her perseverance in prayer enabled her to live out her YES in peace and accept God’s will for her.

Thank you, Mary Ann, for your life among us. You will be missed here but we know you are enjoying your eternal reward in the company of your family and friends, and all our sisters who have gone before you, especially your dear friend and companion, Ruth Glaser. We promise to remember you in our prayers, Mary Ann, and ask you to remember us.

Written and delivered by Margaret Babcock, IHM
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