

Obituary



Sister Dorothy McDaniel, IHM, died Sunday, July 26, 2020, at IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe. She was 86.

Dorothy June McDaniel was born June 14, 1934, to Harry and Loretta (Bergman) McDaniel in Flint, Mich. She attended grade schools in Holly: Newark Country School and Holly Public School; and Holly High School. She transferred and graduated from St. Mary Academy, Monroe, after wanting to attend a Catholic high school. Dorothy entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) on Aug. 21, 1952, and received the name Sister Harold Marie.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Sister Dorothy immersed herself in the IHM educational mission. She taught elementary grades and later specialized in the sciences for the secondary and collegiate levels across Detroit and the surrounding area at St. Agnes, Epiphany, Gesu, Immaculata, St. Martin, Marygrove College and St. Stephen. Sister Dorothy furthered her education, earning a Master of Science degree at St. Louis University (Missouri). Her ministry continued at Shrine High School, Royal Oak; Immaculata High School and St. Agatha High School, Detroit; and Bishop Foley High School, Madison Heights.

Sister Dorothy was elected to serve her community beginning in 1979, first as Provincial Treasurer, then as Provincial of the Northeast Province. In 1988, she was elected President, serving through 1994. She was dedicated and well-regarded in community and religious life, both locally and regionally.

Following her presidency, Sister Dorothy resumed teaching at Herlong Cathedral School, Detroit; Ladywood High School, Livonia; and several years in a part-time capacity at Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn; and Marygrove College. During this time, she resided in Taylor.

Sister Dorothy cultivated her interests through volunteer commitments such as countering animal cruelty and advocating for sustainable food production. She was an ardent supporter of community supported agriculture and served on the IHM Organic Garden Advisory Committee. She moved to the IHM Motherhouse in 2011 and continued to engage with community members, special interests and volunteer opportunities until her health declined.

Remembering

I was born on June 14, 1934, in Flint, Michigan, the third of 6 children born to Harry Knight and Loretta Bergman McDaniel. I was the first to be born in Michigan. Both of my parents were born and raised in Canton, Missouri, on the banks of the Mississippi. Before I could spell my own name, my mother taught me how to spell Mississippi: Mi, double s, i, double s, i, double p, i.

My parents were married at a young age, my father 18 and my mother not yet 18. My mother had 3 children before turning 22.

My father's dream was to become a steel fabricator and move away from farming. Thus, when he heard there were auto factory jobs available in Flint, he hitched a ride to Flint, leaving his small family behind until he could find work and lodging.

My father was one of the lucky ones who found a job at the Chevrolet plant in Flint. While working during the day he went to night school to learn about steel fabrication.

Such was the beginning of Dorothy McDaniel's autobiography. In the swift pace of a busy life, though she wrote a few reflections here and there, she never really completed an autobiography. In her Book of Life page, she described her life as a search for belonging. She remarked with wonder that during her term as IHM President, the question put forward by the Chapter Committee was, "What does it mean to belong?" A few months ago, however, she found it hard to even choose what she wanted for her funeral liturgy.

She began to muse about how rich life has been for her. Pointing to the picture on the wall of Mary McKendry Bergman, her maternal grandmother, Dorothy said she knew the richness of life, "... beginning with my grandma whom I've never seen." Dorothy's grandmother, Mary McKendry, had joined the Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky, but she developed tuberculosis and was sent home. She married the man she called Mr. Ed in her diary. Ed Bergman and Mary McKendry had four children one of whom was Dorothy's mother. The Bergmans had a farm in Missouri. Mary's illness worsened. Ed took Mary to the Southwest hoping for a cure in the sun, but Mary died at 29. (Interesting, the Bishop of the Missouri territory where the Bergmans are buried, at that time was Peter Paul Lefebvre, a man whose story held a chapter in IHM history and the life of our co-founder, Mother Theresa Maxis.)

"I loved a lot of people," Dorothy mused. She spoke gratefully of family and friends, growing up in Holly, Mich. She enjoyed the many ties and activities of a small town. Proudly she recalled delivering the newspaper to half the town of Holly. Her father had a factory in town that sold his specially designed dust tanks throughout the country. He was on the City Council. Her mother was a serious supporter of St. Ritas Parish. Her father retained his Methodist ties, and in the summer, Dorothy's paternal grandmother took pleasure in introducing the three older girls of Harry Knight McDaniel to the Methodist church in Canton, Mo., where McDaniel family members still lived and worshiped. Unfortunately, Dorothy's father died at age 46 of heart failure. By then, there were six children: Nettie Lee, Bobbie Jean, Dorothy June, George M., Donald Gerald and Harold Knight Jr.

For years, Dorothy was haunted by the community practice that permitted her to be accompanied by only one IHM Sister to her father's funeral because he was Protestant. The details of that experience grieved her for many years.

The question arises, how then did Dorothy come to join the IHMs? As she approached her senior year at Holly High School, Dorothy felt a desire to go to a school where the curriculum was stronger. Thanks to her pastor who thought she had a vocation, and thanks to the efforts of Sister Marie Chantal Sipes who was herself from Holly, Dorothy was accepted in the senior class at St. Mary Academy, though this was not customary.

Her Academy friends predicted that the outcome of the senior retreat would be that Dorothy would go to the convent. Dorothy had no such intentions. To her own surprise, the senior retreat did evoke in Dorothy a desire to enter the IHMs. As graduation drew closer, Dorothy wrote to her father. She wanted to prepare him before she returned to Holly at the end of the school year to ask his permission. She wrote:

I have been hesitant in telling you this ... as I felt you wouldn't understand. But now I realize that your influence on me has probably been one of the greatest factors in deciding my vocation. If it weren't for God giving me parents with such high ideals and sense of values I probably never would have decided to go. You and Mother have taught me what things really count in life. (May 19, 1952)

Sister Gratia MacHale gladly sponsored Dorothy and she entered in June 1952. Dorothy always said she was attracted to the IHMs because she admired them as dedicated teachers. She saw teaching as her way to God.

Coming from the public school system of Holly, her education in Catholic practice came largely from her mother and from the sacramental preparation given at St. Rita Parish. In Monroe, the sisters enlisted Msgr. Marron to instruct her. They also persuaded her to join the Sodality, an organization very popular in Catholic schools at the time. Sodality practices were foreign to her. Sometimes, they seemed phony. She complained of her friends making up the number of aspirations they reported saying each week.

Her childhood faith had been formed by witnessing the actions of her parents expressing their beliefs. Both were hard-working people with a strong sense of duty. As a young man with a growing family, Harry Knight first made his living puddling cement during the Depression in the construction of Highway 24, better known to us northerners as Telegraph Road. Later, as a successful businessman, Dorothy saw him as a man of justice and peace in dealings with family and employees. It was a telling tribute to him that most of the stores in Holly closed during his funeral. In matters of discipline, she admired her father's way. She recalls how she and her sisters squabbled over doing dishes until her father picked up a chair and sat in the kitchen in silent observation to settle them down. No speeches, just action.

Dorothy knew her mother's constancy and patience in raising six children and housing relatives migrating from Missouri to Michigan. She learned of her mother's prodigality in sponsoring the building of a catechetical center at St. Rita. As a young sister at Epiphany School, it was her mother, Loretta, seeing the children on the playground in the winter chill, who pulled out a few hundred dollars to provide scarves, mittens and boots for their warmth.

At her reception in 1953, Dorothy received the name Sister Harold Marie. With others in her class – Beatrice Grundy, John Clement Hungerman, Rose Marie Petranek and Mary Jo Rosenau – she moved to Marygrove for two years of undergraduate study. She completed a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics at Marygrove in 1957. She graduated from St. Louis University with a masters' degree in science, specifically in physics, in 1971.

Her mission experience began at Gesu School in Detroit in the primary grades. From there, she moved to St. Agnes and Epiphany. Dorothy loved the children and affirmed with delight, "I knew I could teach." Thus, began her lifelong love of teaching as a special call. By 1960, Dorothy moved into secondary education at Immaculata High School. Teaching all girls and living with 30 other IHMs enriched her teaching and her community life. Before long, she was sent to St. Stephen, Port Huron, during its last two years of existence. Many years later at class reunions, former students still sang

her praises. They respected her teaching skills. They admired her integrity, her directness, her openness. They saw her as one who set their lives in meaningful directions.

And so it was, too, at St. Martin on the Lake in Detroit where Dorothy taught math and sciences and became acting principal during her final year there. In her first year at St. Martin, she converted her ninth graders by flunking half of them in math during the first quarter, an extreme measure, met with disbelief by some, but proving she meant business. The study climate changed drastically. Sister Carmelia, her principal, remarked that one teacher would come into her office complaining of spitballs on the ceiling and students climbing out of windows while Dorothy arrived with a student who turned his head while she was lecturing.

In 1969, her good friend, Sister John Clement Hungerman, asked Dorothy to replace her at Marygrove for two years, teaching physics and math. She joined the Marygrove faculty and entered a new, expansive environment. She and Sister Amata Miller had some classes on the second floor of the Liberal Arts Building. The sounds of their vigor and energy through the windows above the classroom doors challenged the quieter approaches of the adjoining theology and literature classes.

Dorothy also grew more articulate about the proliferation of nuclear weapons and wrote short articles expressing her convictions. Vatican II moved the Church too, toward change. In the face of sexism in the Church and the world, she also honed her feminist convictions.

When Sister John Clement returned from Texas with her doctorate, Dorothy moved back into high school education, first at Shrine High School in Royal Oak, then at Immaculata once again and Bishop Foley High School in Madison Heights. After another two years at St. Agatha High School in Detroit, her beloved teaching days were eclipsed when the Northeast Province elected her treasurer.

In this new role, she was very comfortable. She understood the work of treasurer. She oversaw the accounts and properties of the Province Corporation. She often personally assisted sisters in understanding how to budget. She helped them with their car purchases. Not only was she a skilled driver, but she knew cars and heard the needs of the province members. She acquainted herself with the car salespeople in the area. She explored new models each year at the Detroit Auto Show. This was for her a particularly enjoyable part of her work. In 1985, she was elected Provincial of the Northeast Province. She knew the province very well and learned more of the ways of governance.

The IHM community became more aware of her as well, and in 1988 she became president of the congregation. In this role she continued to raise awareness of feminist issues and values in liturgy and in life. She and her leadership team moved the offices from the ground floor to the main floor of the Motherhouse. Changing outlooks and changing locations engendered some resistance, but she met every sister personally who voiced concerns.

Dorothy was an active member of the Constitution Committee. As the community gave final shape to our Constitutions, Dorothy was pleased to be chair of the committee and to communicate decisions to the community. Then, as President she felt privileged to be able to distribute the completed sacred document to sisters and associates. Also, accompanied by team members, with a desire to build community cohesion, she visited all the IHMs in the Overseas Missions. For Dorothy, this was another satisfying time of coming to know the members more personally.

In 1994, having served the full number of allowable terms and years of elected leadership, Dorothy returned to her love of teaching. For a brief time, she enjoyed the middle school students at Herlong School, a school sponsored by St. Paul's Episcopal Church (Detroit). She also taught adult education in Southgate. From there she went to Ladywood High School in Livonia. She loved exploring math and science with the young girls there and working with her teacher companions.

She moved to Henry Ford Community College and to Marygrove College from 1999-2011. She had applied to teach physics at Henry Ford, but since that position was already filled, interestingly by one of her first cousins, she became the math teacher.

At her residence in Taylor, Mich., for many years, she cultivated gardens of vegetables and flowers, which flourished. For some years, she specialized in growing sweet corn in her area of the garden. She served on the St. Mary Organic Garden Advisory Committee from its earliest days. She also deepened her long commitment to animal rights. Before long, we were on the front page of the Michigan Catholic with three dogs and a message supporting animal care. Cats, too, became happy residents. If Dorothy had her way, we might even have housed mice in protest against the abuse they suffered in research labs then, and even today in too many areas.

Of course, her past experiences as provincial treasurer drew her to serve as a trustee of the IHM Charitable Trust, but health concerns forced her to resign. Health issues mounted. In 2011, a diagnosis of Parkinson's Disease brought Dorothy to residence in the Motherhouse. She had to face the mysteries of consequent and irreversible

diminishments. She had to let go of one thing after another as physical strength, memory and intellectual skills became challenges. Frequently, she assured her friends, "I'm doing the best I can."

Here was someone who had charted and described planetary activities and cosmic expansion for us to better understand. She and John Clement chattered over ideas for improving teaching physics to students who lacked math background. She enjoyed challenges in mathematics exchanging opinions with Carolyn Kerwin and Mary Jo Rosenau.

And then came the consequences of Lewy Body Dementia and age-related memory loss. Her understandings faded one by one. Names, ideas, even her most recent thoughts began to elude her. Parkinson's brought slower pace, great weariness, unsteady movements, weakening limbs. "How did this happen? I've become a different person. I can't express myself. I have a kindergarten vocabulary. I can't be of any help to the sisters." Such were her early laments.

In recent years, she traveled a rocky road. She traversed it with courage. We thank her family members, especially her brother George and his wife Sandy, her sibling and Godson, Harold, praying for her from afar, and her nieces and her nephews. We are grateful for the nursing staffs in McGivney Way, health care and hospice addressing her needs and finding ways to give her comfort. The women in health care and so many other employees reached out to her. We appreciate the continuing contacts and prayers of her classmates, concerned sisters, relatives and friends.

She has left it to us now to ponder these mysteries and attend to the people we love traversing similar wildernesses. We sense God's Spirit inviting us to a deeper humility as we face our own diminishments even while embracing the abundant gifts that are still ours.

Blessings on you, Dorothy June McDaniel. Thank you for your devotion to your dear family – parents, siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins and all. Thank you for your generous life of 86 years living and ministering among and to us, and to so many grateful students and others. Thank you for your long years of friendship. God must bless you, too, for your tireless efforts in finding homes for so many dogs and cats. May you now enjoy new understandings and abounding restorations in the embrace of our loving God.

Written and delivered by Joan Glisky, IHM, Aug. 3, 2020