

Obituary



Sister Marjorie McFarland, IHM, 94, died Friday, Sept. 6, at her home, IHM Senior Living Community.

Sister Marjorie was born to Peter and Lucy (Gregory) McFarland Feb. 17, 1925 in Akron, Ohio. Though Marjorie attended Rankin Public and St. Sebastian grade schools, it was while attending St. Mary grade and high schools (Akron) that she came to know the IHM Sisters. Upon graduation, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe and received the religious name Sister Ann Gregory. This year she celebrated her 75th Jubilee as

an IHM Sister.

Sister Marjorie earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, a Master of Arts degree from Loyola University (Chicago), and a Master of Religious Education degree from SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary (Orchard Lake).

Formal education was her ministry for more than 28 years: in Detroit at St. Catherine, St. Cecilia, Gesu and Immaculata High School; St. Philip, Battle Creek; Holy Cross, Marine City; St. Joseph, Dexter; St. Michael, Flint; Marian High School, Bloomfield Hills; and Immaculate Heart of Mary, Glen Lake, Minn.

In the mid-1970s, she transitioned to religious education beginning as religious education coordinator at St. Thomas Aquinas School and Parish (Detroit) where she led programs for junior and senior students and adult parishioners. She then accepted a director's position with the Aurora, Ill., Board of Catholic Education and later as area director for the Aurora Area Center for Religious Education. In 1990, Sister Marjorie joined Holy Cross Parish (St. Petersburg, Fla.) as director of religious education for the next 10 years.

Sister Marjorie returned to Michigan and lived at Norman Towers Senior Residence before retiring to the Motherhouse in 2008. She was an active participant in the Monroe community and often volunteered her services to the congregational community.

Remembering

Marjorie McFarland was born on Feb. 17, 1925 in Akron, Ohio. Her family belonged to St. Mary parish there. Her father, Peter, a veteran of World War I, worked most of his life for the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company in Akron. Her mother, Lucy, was a teacher before her marriage and returned to teaching after her children were raised. Marge was the oldest of the four children: Marjorie, Rita, James and Robert who died as a young child. Her brother, James, and his wife, Kathleen, had four children: Rita, Dennis, Martin and Michael. They were very important in Marge's life and very much loved. It was a close-knit family. From the beginning, Marge and Rita were close. They used to say, "When one inhaled, the other exhaled."

Marge's mother, a teacher, and her uncle James Gregory, a professional artist, greatly influenced her life. Her mother, a beautiful role model, was always able to answer her questions; and her uncle introduced her to art, giving her lessons on Saturdays.

Her decision to join the community initially broke her mother's heart. "My sister Rita told me that for the first six months that I was gone our mother put a towel on the pillow before she went to bed because she was crying."

Marge entered the IHMs on June 29, 1943. Influenced by the IHMs who taught her and her friends who joined the community, Marge said it felt natural to become an IHM. When she was received into the novitiate, she was given the name Sister Ann Gregory. Gregory was her mother's family name. Her first profession was in 1946 and her final profession in 1949. Rita, just a year younger than Marge, entered the IHMs one year after Marge.

Marge's first mission was to St. Catherine in Detroit where she taught grade seven. After that, she taught in elementary schools for 18 years. She taught Latin at Immaculata High School in Detroit from 1966 until 1970 and then for the next four years at Marian High School in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. From 1974 until 1980, Marge was religious education coordinator at St. Thomas in Detroit. Then, she became area director of religious education in Aurora, Ill. for 10 years. From 1990 until she retired, Marge ministered in adult education and pastoral ministry at Holy Cross Parish in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Marge enjoyed studying, learning and engaging with others in more serious conversations. She especially relished political discussions. Time, Newsweek, Commonweal and newspapers were some of the sources for her engaging others. Rita was an equal colleague in their discourses. They also had similar tastes in TV news and entertainment programs. Rita commented, "Our favorite recreation is a walk or swim at the Gulf, or some quiet time to read a favorite book. We count our blessings each day in being able to share so many beautiful things."

Dr. D. Herbert Abel, professor of Classical Studies at Loyola University Chicago, in 1967 had written this comment about the oral exams Marge had completed as a requirement for the master's degree in Latin. "You did a superlative job. ... You are the best MA candidate that these faculty members have examined in the last ten years. We recommend that you continue your studies in the Classics to the degree of the doctorate." But Marge declined to begin her doctorate. This was during her years at Immaculata High School and she preferred to continue with her superb gift of teaching.

Marge's sister Rita had begun ministry in Florida in 1978 at the invitation of Sister Shirley Hinks. In 1990, Rita joined Marge in her ministry in St. Petersburg. After so many years of living apart, it seemed natural for them to be together again and the parishioners enjoyed having "blood sisters" there. Some even thought they looked alike.

In an article in *Spinnaker* in 1995, Rita wrote about her relationship with Marge over the years. "Although family resemblances grew stronger with the years, there are enough differences between us to keep life interesting. While Marge usually gets things done immediately, dates on our calendar, meals planned days in advance, correspondence answered the very next day, I often have stacks of things to read and letters to answer always covering my desk. We recognized each other's characteristics from our growing up days."

(Parish ministry) "offered us the opportunity to be involved in some new and some familiar ministries. Marge uses her teaching experience in her role as Adult Education Coordinator. She reaches many people during her Adult classes as well as weekly Bible sharing sessions. It encourages her to find people open and anxious to grow in their faith; their enthusiasm is matched by her own. Being a member of the Liturgy Committee, Marjorie helps plan meaningful parish

liturgies. Joining the choir is giving her another chance to be involved in special liturgies with the people. Who would have dreamed when we packed our bags and left Akron for Monroe so many years ago that such experiences would come our way? We thank God for His goodness down through the years, even until now."

In 2002, Marge and Rita left Florida and headed north to Monroe where they lived at Norman Towers until 2008. In retirement, Marge volunteered at the Motherhouse library and as an art instructor for the sisters. But her real love and desire, as she stated on her 2009 commitment form, was to make her time in retirement at the Motherhouse "one long retreat." She enjoyed reading books on theology and spirituality. After the IHM Theological Education sessions of the '90s, she had put together a compendium of the materials from the five summers of learning and referred to it often, trying to become familiar with the great thinkers, professors and theologians of the post-Vatican II era.

Marge had a special fondness for the work of Karl Rahner, Denis Edwards and Thomas Merton. She used their thoughts as part of her prayer and reflection as is evident in this quote from Thomas Merton's "Theology of Prayer" in a prayer service Marge created.

"Contemplation is a religious apprehension of God; an awareness that I proceed from an invisible transcendent source and the source is God. I continue to grow in that awareness; I awaken to the REAL within all that is real. I know this God dwells within me and I dwell in GOD. I know that my natural life has been completed, elevated, transformed and fulfilled in God. I know that all of this awareness is God's gift to me! For this and all your gifts, I thank you, O my God."

Marge had a good sense of humor and always liked being part of a group of friends getting together and enjoying good times. A few stories come to mind.

During her years at Immaculata in the late 1960s, many changes were taking place in religious life. One of them was relinquishing religious names and returning to the use of birth names. Sister Ann Gregory became, once again, Marjorie McFarland. And, of course, high school teachers acquired new nicknames. Marge one day complained to some of her confreres that it seemed to her that although everyone seemed to have a nickname, she didn't. So, of course, they created one for her, "Mugs or Mugsy." From that time, she was

often called “Mugs McFarland” and seemed to enjoy the humor and camaraderie that it suggested.

Marge liked to recall what she referred to as “The Pagani Summer Group.” Pagani, you may recall, was the 2A corridor of the Motherhouse that had been outfitted as a hospitality center for sisters coming to Monroe and needing a place to stay for a short time. One summer during the early 1990s, a group from Florida, including Shirley and Mary Jane Hicks and Marge and Rita McFarland, and another from Texas, including Jean Burbo and Anne Crane, all arrived there at the same time. They had such a good time together that they decided to plan in the future to vacation in Michigan at the same time and stay together in Pagani and at Crawfton. They had many good times together and developed lasting friendships. Marge treasured those days. She always enjoyed getting together with friends.

Some of you may remember that during her later days at the Motherhouse, she planned afternoon teas. She wrote formal invitations and hosted some wonderful afternoon gatherings, which many enjoyed. Her Irish ancestors must have been smiling.

Marge also had some very difficult family tragedies to deal with over time. The death of her little brother Robert at a very young age was something that always stayed with her. She recalled that he had not yet received all inoculations that young children usually receive and died of diphtheria. Then, in 2009, several years after Marge and Rita had completed their ministries in Florida and returned to the Motherhouse, they planned a retreat at their nephew’s home. They enjoyed going to a family summer home in Indiana where they had many good times. They arrived on a Sunday and had a wonderful day together enjoying a cookout with Marty and his family. Rita got up during the night in her second-floor bedroom and made a wrong turn in the hallway. She fell down the stairs, was badly injured and was admitted to the Methodist hospital in Indianapolis where she died two days later.

Marge, supported by her faith, accepted Rita's untimely death, but her friends would say she never really got over it. Many years later, Marge said only, “It was sad for me, but she lives on in the sisters who knew her and loved her.”

In conclusion, some excerpts of the final message Marge and Rita gave to the Florida folks when they left there might convey somewhat our experience of loss right now.

“Don’t cry because it’s over;
smile because it happened.”

This expresses how we feel right now. It is always hard to say goodbye to people we have come to know and love, and yet we look forward to being nearer our Community in Monroe and our family nearby. Our leaving brings to an end the presence of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Community here at Holy Cross. We “smile” because it happened that our IHM Sisters have been involved at Holy Cross from its beginning. ... It has been our privilege to continue some of the good works our predecessors began, and we have enjoyed working for and with the people of Holy Cross ...

Beginnings and endings are part of our life, and we, as Pilgrim people, know we are on a journey. We thank God that our journey has brought us to this place, and we promise that we will never forget the deep faith life we have found here, the welcoming hospitality of the people, and the love and support we experienced in this parish. When we head north on July 17, we may have a few tears, but we will also smile that these last years happened for us. Again ...

“Don’t cry because it’s over;
smile because it happened.”

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM
Sept. 11, 2019.