

Obituary

Sister Martha Jean McGarry, IHM, 82, died on Friday, April 19, in hospice care at IHM Senior Living Center, in Monroe.

Sister Martha Jean came from a large family of 12 children born to George and Martha Ann (Joerger) McGarry. She was born Feb. 14, 1937 and baptized Catherine at St. Martin, Yorkville, Ind. After attending Gesu Elementary School and graduating from Immaculata High School in Detroit, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe in 1955. She received the religious name, Sister Martha Jean.



Sister Martha Jean earned a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College and began her teaching ministry at Mother of Our Savior, Detroit, for several years before moving to the western United States to teach at Our Lady of Assumption, Albuquerque, N.M. During this time, she studied at the University of New Mexico and earned a master's degree. New Mexico was her home for more than 45 years with her career spent at Our Lady of Assumption and the Catholic Charismatic Center, Albuquerque.

The early years were spent in formal education. In the early 1980s, she embraced pastoral ministry as a pastoral assistant in the parish, and as staff, and later as director of the Catholic Charismatic Center. She gained further education and developed skills as a spiritual director and in 2008, became the bishop's liaison for the center.

After retiring to the Motherhouse in 2010, she renewed old friendships, served as a community representative in governance and served as sacristan for the community. She enjoyed many new relationships from her service on various team projects.

Remembering

It is said of Martha Jean that she was a very peaceful person.

Martha Jean's parents were George Thomas and Martha Ann (Joerger) McGarry. She was born on Feb. 14, 1937, and came near the end of 10 children. Her family lived in Detroit and her parents expected her to be born there. Instead, she was "accidentally" born in Indiana when her mother was visiting family and a flood prevented them from getting back home to Detroit. She was baptized Catherine Margaret.

Martha Jean was very close to her brother, Richard, who became a priest in the Archdiocese of Detroit. He died in 1996.

Martha Jean was raised in a faith-filled family. Often, they walked about a mile to attend church services at Gesu, in Detroit. She went to school at Gesu and Immaculata High School. Sister Letitia O'Connell remembers teaching her at Gesu. "She was very bright, and not at all interested in showing off," she said. "I can see her in her seat – quiet and reserved, even as she is now."

After high school, she entered the IHM congregation in 1955. She felt at home as soon as she entered – she knew "that's where God wanted me to be." In her prayer, she came to know Jesus in a very special way. "I feel very close to God and that is where I get my strength," she was quoted as saying in an IHM publication.

Martha Jean was the oldest in her reception class. For that privilege, she got teased immensely. One night, she was chosen by her novitiate classmates to bring down the bat flying in the corridor, "because you're the oldest." She was obviously a good sport!

Martha Jean's first mission was at Mother of Our Savior in 1960, where she taught the second grade for four years. Next, she was assigned to Our Lady of the Assumption in Albuquerque, N.M. She taught there for many years and in 1969 was introduced to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal program. "My life has not been the same since. I was grateful my community encouraged me in pursuing this spirituality," she said. "Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, I came to know Jesus in a very intimate and personal way. I saw the Holy Spirit working in my life and was fascinated to see how the Spirit was at work in our community throughout the years. I became aware of the Spirit working in and through me and the gifts that God gave me for service. Respecting the work of the Spirit in others was a natural consequence of accepting how the Spirit was working in me. I have been doing things that I never dreamed of doing. I have learned that it is useless to say, 'I can't do that.'"

Martha Jean became the director of the Catholic Charismatic Center of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe before serving as the bishop's liaison for the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. She was a gifted journalist and wrote many articles for *Pentecost Today*, *New Covenant Magazine* and many other publications.

Sister Mary Ann Grates lived with Martha Jean in New Mexico and remembered, "Martha Jean was very witty, someone who could find humor in every situation; someone who brought joy into our lives." She told how the maintenance people at Assumption School had shined up the school nicely for the season, but they had inadvertently overlooked Mary Ann's classroom. It was Martha Jean who cleaned it for her.

Sister Catherine Mary Zacharias knew Martha Jean as a very prayerful person with an easy sense of humor. The children at Assumption School used to beg her to tell them

what color her hair was. "It's orange," she would tell them, "with purple polka dots." Martha Jean was an apostle for charismatic prayer; she traveled all over the state to introduce charismatic prayer to the parishes.

Perhaps she was remembering that during her last illness. One day a nurse found her getting out of bed ready to walk away. "Stop, Martha Jean, where are you going?" the nurse asked. "I want to walk with Jesus" was her response.

Martha Jean retired and moved to Monroe in 2010. She was very happy to come back to the Motherhouse. "I wanted to get to know the community again" she said. She enjoyed working in the Service Office as well as ministering as the sacristan. Sister Monica Stuhlreyer wrote that "Martha Jean was a wonderful sacristan. Most importantly she was calm when things got complicated back in the sacristy because of changes or problems. That is what I so appreciated about her. She was truly a woman of prayer, you could tell. She was a behind-the-scenes person. She took care of so many details that we didn't realize until her illness took her away from her ministry in the sacristy. I just remember her with such love and gratitude. She lived by the Holy Spirit and was a model for us all." Martha Jean wrote, "I am blessed to have a great team to assist me in this work as sacristan. All kinds of gifts are needed for this ministry to flourish. I am greatly blessed with my team of awesome assistants. Teamwork is the key!"

Martha Jean had written the following on her Ministry Commitment Form in 2012. "When I retired a few years ago, Jesus assured me that he had me by the right hand and we would complete my journey home together. I am confident his word to me is true as I go about my variety of ministries. I am forever encouraged by God's word and such passages as Isaiah 41:13: 'For I am the Lord, your God, who grasps your right hand. It is I who say to you – fear not, I will help you.'

"My call to build the Body of Christ, to be servant to my sisters and be present to others with an understanding heart has brought me more blessings than I could ever imagine. I thank God every day, especially at Eucharist, that I am blessed to serve."

Written by Roberta Richmond, IHM, and delivered by Monica Stuhlreyer, IHM, April 23, 2019