

Obituary



Sister Marilyn A. Mechtenberg, IHM, 85, died Friday, July 26, at her home, IHM Senior Living Community in Monroe.

The only child of Dr. William and Mrs. Arline (Capper) Mechtenberg was born Dec. 10, 1933, in Durant, Iowa, and was baptized, Marilyn Ann, on Christmas Eve 1933. As a youngster, she accompanied her father on house calls in rural Iowa. After her father died when she was 7, mother and daughter moved to be near family in Illinois. Marilyn attended Morrison Grade School. They later moved to West Palm Beach, Fla., to ease Marilyn's childhood tuberculosis. There, she attended St. Ann and the Rosarian Academy while her mother taught school. Her mother's

marriage to an Air Force officer led to frequent moves. Marilyn's school experiences ranged from Dewitt, Iowa, to Troy, Ohio, to Mt. Clemens, Mich. A time of world travel followed graduation from St. Mary High School. She then earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College in 1955 and entered the field of teaching.

In 1956, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name, Sister Veronica Marie. Her ministry began in elementary education at St. Mary of Redford, Detroit; St. John Vianney, Highland Park; St. John, Fenton; St. Mathew, Flint; and St. Regis, Bloomfield Hills. During these years, she earned a master's degree from the University of Detroit.

Sister Marilyn expanded her ministry to high school education at Immaculate Heart of Mary, Westchester, Ill.; social justice endeavors; community service; parish ministry; and adult education. She taught French and Spanish languages, tutored young and adult students and taught English as a Second Language for the Detroit Board of Education and at Glendale Community College, Glendale, Ariz. While in Arizona, she cared for her elderly mother.

In 1994, Sister Marilyn returned to Michigan and lived at the IHM Motherhouse. She enjoyed art, music performance, writing poetry and volunteering in community services, especially the community library and resource center.

Remembering

Sister Marilyn Mechtenberg was born in Davenport, Iowa, and as an only child, enjoyed the undivided attention of her loving, creative parents, Dr. William Rudolph and Arline Helen (Capper) Mechtenberg, a poet and artist. Marilyn had fond memories of her early years, her father coming home from work, putting on "The Blue Danube" waltzing her mother around the house. She cherished memories of him reading to her – poetry, nursery rhymes, Rip Van Winkle and myths. Her excitement when her mother's poetry was published in the Chicago Tribune was another cherished memory. Summers gave time to visit her grandmother and cousins, Corrine, Carole and Dick, in DeWitt, Iowa.

When Marilyn was 7 years old, her father, mother and aunt had planned a trip to Dubuque, Iowa, but her mother stayed home because Marilyn was ill. Marilyn's father and aunt were killed as the car skidded into a bus on the icy road. Losing her beloved father was heartbreaking. In retrospect, she developed a profound gratitude for God's providence – grateful that her mother was not in that car as planned. After her father's death, and due to Marilyn's fragile health, her doctor advised her mother to move to a warm climate, so they lived in Florida for four years.

When Marilyn was 11 years old, her deceased father's brother, Lawrence, a career Master Sergeant in the Air Force, returned from overseas, and married her mother. They settled in Mt. Clemens, Mich., near Selfridge Air Force Base where he was stationed. Marilyn met and loved the IHM Sisters who taught her in grade and high school at St. Mary, Mt. Clemens.

At Marygrove College she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree, with a major in English, and prepared to be a teacher. Second grade at Our Lady of Good Counsel was her first teaching position with Sister Marie Patrice Boyle as her directing teacher.

During that year, Marilyn's grandfather gave her \$1,000 to help pay for her wedding. But by then, Marilyn had heard the call to dedicate her life to God in the IHM community. With her grandfather's blessing, she used the money to be part of a tour of 13 European countries in 70 days! Four days after she returned from that trip, she came to Monroe.

About her call she wrote:

One day, during First Friday adoration, the desire came to give myself completely to God, and for me, this meant to become a Sister, Servant of the

Immaculate Heart of Mary. The beautiful Sisters I had known in high school and now in college did much to reinforce this vocation through their exemplary lives.

During her Postulate and Novitiate, along with living a new way of life, she studied theology and was assigned to teach first and second grade at St. Mary School in Monroe.

As a professed sister, she continued teaching primary grade children in Highland Park and Fenton. Then at St. Regis in Bloomfield Hills, she taught fourth grade.

During summers, she earned a master's degree in English at University of Detroit and was assigned to teach English in grades nine-12 at Immaculate Heart of Mary High School in Westchester, Ill. She enjoyed working with a team learning new, creative ways of teaching.

Another significant ministry opened for her when she was invited by our IHM Social Justice Coordinator Sister Joann McAnoy to become her secretary. Marilyn wrote: I had loved teaching and living at IHM, but after prayer I accepted her invitation considering it God's will.

During that year with the support of Sister Joann and Mother Margaret Brennan, I did civil disobedience with the Farmworkers and with sisters from other religious communities. We were arrested, fingerprinted, photographed, booked.

The group was then released about 2 a.m. and taken home. She said that this experience proved to be deeply traumatic for her and had lasting emotional effects.

Marilyn later worked with Sister Mary Jo Maher, director of the IHM Apostolate. She also ministered at Marygrove Writing Center and at the Adult Education Center at St. Mary Academy, tutoring those needing Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language.

When Marilyn's stepfather died in 1985, she moved to Sun City, Ariz., to care for her mother. She enjoyed teaching English part-time there at Glendale Community College. When her mother died very peacefully in June of 1992, Marilynn spoke of the loving support she received from our IHM Sisters in the area and from her two cousins. After a year of living alone in her mother's home, she decided to return to Monroe.

My ministries here (at the Motherhouse) have been ones which I have enjoyed: singing in the choir, tutoring, being a companion to patients, and working in the library. My life here provides many opportunities for spiritual, intellectual, physical, and psychological input. One unusual way I had to explore and demonstrate my sense of humor was being mistress of ceremonies at two Halloween parties. It fulfilled my secret desire to become a stand-up comedienne.

Marilynn was a thoughtful, sensitive woman always ready to affirm others because she knew how much affirmation meant to her. She loved writing poetry, her first poem published when she was only 10 years old. She was a creative lover of words: besides her poetry, she could write substitute lyrics to song melodies to fit a certain celebration. She created her own Christmas cards. She loved to tell jokes, to play with words: "When my uncle married my mother, I became my own cousin." Or discover and share pearls of wisdom: "You're not as young as you used to be, but you're not as old as you're going to be. So, watch it!"

Reflecting on her life, she wrote:

If I am to be remembered for a spiritual saying, I would choose – "Isn't it Providential?" However, that saying is trite compared to the mystery of its reality which we will know when we die.

A prayer that expresses my attitude toward my spiritual growth during these retirement years goes like this: "I lovingly and willingly release and let go of all that no longer serves me in a positive and progressive way." I feel that God alone knows the image I am meant to be, and as the Divine Artist, God should have free reign to make me grow toward that end. . .I won't know what is going on deep within, but I want to "surrender to the moments as they pass" ... surrendering completely to God's will."

Dear Marilyn, as you are now enjoying your resurrected life with God in the Communion of saints, know that we are grateful for the way you have gifted your many students and gifted us, your sisters in community, with your love, your honesty and your vulnerable courage that has touched us so deeply. Amen.

Written and delivered by Kathleen O'Brien, IHM
Aug. 1, 2019