

Obituary



Sister Mary Naughton, IHM, 92, died Tuesday evening, April 24, at IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe.

Mary was born in Detroit on Dec. 22, 1925, to Irish-immigrant parents, John and Catherine (Murphy) Naughton. The family, including daughter, Kathleen, and son, John, belonged to St. Gregory Parish, and the children attended the parish grade and high schools. As soon as Mary graduated, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe. She received the religious name Sister Caritas and joined many of her cousins in religious life.

Sister Mary's early teaching ministry was with young elementary students in Detroit at St. Charles, St. Martin, St. Matthew and St. Rose; Holy Cross, Marine City; and St. Phillip, Battle Creek. Along with teaching responsibilities, every year she prepared a First Communion class and assisted older students with their Latin studies. She earned a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College, and within several years, a Master of Arts in Education at the University of Detroit. Sister Mary continued in elementary teaching in Michigan at Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward, Detroit; St. Anne, Warren; Sacred Heart, Roseville; and St. Gertrude and St. Isaac Jogues, St. Clair Shores.

In the mid-1970s, Sister Mary transitioned to new ministries in parish life, communications and library sciences. Earning a master's degree in library sciences from Wayne State University, Detroit, led her to serve as librarian at St. Clement High School, Centerline; St. Mary, Gaylord; Bishop Borgess High School, Redford; St. Scholastica Elementary, Detroit; and Our Lady of LaSalette in Berkley, Mich.

Sister Mary served her community in Monroe as librarian for 10 years in the IHM Congregational Library and Visitation House of Prayer. In 2002, she moved to the Motherhouse, and at age 80, considered herself retired. When her health began to decline, she moved to the Health Care Center, where she resided until the time of her death.

Remembering

Mary was born in Detroit on Dec. 22, 1925, and baptized Mary Margaret at St. Gregory Church. Her parents, John Patrick and Catherine (Murphy) Naughton, were both born in Ireland and immigrated to the United States. It was in Detroit that they met and married. During the boom in the auto industry, Mary's father worked in construction building houses. He later was hired by the University of Detroit to work in the

maintenance department. The family lived near school, church, shopping and friends and never owned a car, walking everywhere they went.

Mary had one sister, Kathleen, and one brother, John, both of whom are now deceased. She indicated that she had four relatives in religious life, among them were Sister Elizabeth Naughton, a St. Joseph Sister from Nazareth, Mich., and “the other” Sister Mary Naughton of Ireland.

The Naughton children grew up in St. Gregory Parish, Detroit and according to Mary, the siblings were close. When asked about when and how she knew she wanted to be a sister, Mary said, “Oh, I knew it when I was 6 years old. It was always a part of me.”

Mary’s first grade teacher at St. Gregory was Sister Alfred Marie Hebert, IHM, who influenced her to become an IHM. This teacher had 90 students in the morning class and 90 in the afternoon. She was creative in her teaching methods and often sang the lessons to the children.

On June 1, 1943, Mary entered the IHM community at the age of 18 years old and was one of four young women from St. Gregory. She made her first vows in 1946 and final vows in 1949. Mary’s first mission was to St. Charles, Detroit, where she taught grade four. Next, she went to St. Rose where she taught first, second and third grades. After that, her ministry took her to teaching elementary grades in Detroit, Marine City, Battle Creek, Warren and Roseville.

In 1969, after more than 25 years in the classroom, Mary began her study of library science, and began a ministry that took her to St. Gertrude in St. Clair Shores, St. Mary School in Gaylord, at Visitation library in Monroe, at Bishop Borgess High School and St. Scholastica School in Detroit, and Our Lady of LaSalette in Berkley, Mich. Being willing to help out at any school that needed assistance with its library, she often advised other librarians and staff. She was a good organizer and able to keep up with the various needs of student libraries and was generous, sometimes to a fault. For Mary, work was an expression of love. Like Father Gillet, she found great satisfaction in working long hours in order to help others meet their many needs. Perhaps this was the context in which Mary began to prioritize ministry as her primary way of engaging with people, of building relationships. Yet, there always was something in Mary that loved herself, an inner strength that enabled her to know what she really wanted, and to struggle for it.

On her 1992 Ministry Commitment Form, Mary wrote:

I share in Christ's own redeeming mission in the reality of these times through a variety of ministries in which I participate, 1) IHM Community, 2) Visitation Retreat Center Library, 3) Active participation in MCLA, 4) Pastoral ministry to residents in Baldwin House, 5) Sewing alterations, 6) Volunteer services in various school libraries; supported in prayer and through friendships.

In 1999, the Michigan Catholic Library Association (MCLA) presented Mary with the Gabriel Richard Award. The MCLA newsletter acknowledged Mary as "a long-time member of MCLA and has served on the Executive Board as Treasurer for the past fifteen years." In her resume, Sister Mary wrote that her goal for the MCLA association was "to support members and to encourage new members," and as treasurer, "to responsibly record revenues and expenses and to pay all bills promptly." Sister Mary certainly lived up to her goals and has done much, much more to serve her profession.

After a very long and varied career as a librarian and teacher, Mary then became volunteer extraordinaire! She delighted in the new technology and was always eager to use it in her work. She continued to grow in her profession at all stages of her career, always eager to learn new ways, and eager to share her knowledge with others. It was for these reasons and "with great pleasure that Sr. Mary was chosen for the Gabriel Richard Award."

Mary was incredibly proud of her heritage as an Irish lass and visited Ireland three times in order to meet her relatives. Her room in the Health Care Center was full of treasured artifacts from those times. She also went to Australia to attend the ordination of Ken Rae, a Marist brother, who was becoming a priest. Mary had met him during one of her renewal times. She later invited him to celebrate her golden Jubilee liturgy.

Before her retirement to the Motherhouse in 2006, Mary lived at Baldwin House in Birmingham, Mich., which was a low-income residence for senior citizens. While there she made many friends, which she did by sewing for them, listening to them and visiting with them. Mary's hobby of making cards was another way she connected with people. Her nieces and nephew were very attentive to Mary, sending cards, letters and flowers and visiting when they could.

Mary was an avid reader. Often when visiting her in the early years of retirement, she would always be reading the life of some historical figure, a pope or a president, and the number of pages in the book was no deterrent. When you got to know her, you would appreciate her good sense of humor. She loved visitors and greeted them with a big, warm smile. In earlier times, she was open and receptive and the visits were

interactive. As her illness progressed, fatigue kept her from waking up at times. Stays in the hospital became exhausting and these long periods of fatigue were her struggles as she grew older.

Some of us remember that when she was received into the community in 1944, Mary was given the name "Carita," a feminine form of the Latin word for charity or love. She was teased that her name sounded like "carrot top" and so she petitioned the General Superior to add an 's' to her name so she might be called "Sister Caritas." However, there already was a Sister Caritas. Mary had to wait until the other Sister Caritas (Margaret Ferguson) entered her eternal reward before she could have the name "Caritas." Happily, this occurred for her in 1955. Then, of course, the community returned to baptismal names in 1968.

Mary loved it whenever someone would pray with her. She entered into the prayer, sharing her own thoughts. She said that being around other people who are holy brought her to holiness. When asked if she was holy now, she answered, "I'm on the way; not being but becoming." It has been a privilege to sit with Mary as she neared the end of her life. Sometimes she would tell me about her dreams of Jesus and Mary. One time she told me that she was sad because Jesus and Mary had been there, and had left without her. I tried to humor that story because we don't know the myriad ways God works in our souls to help us get ready to leave this life.

Mary suffered in this life, and sometimes her suffering overflowed and was felt by others – is this not how it is with each of us? The Lord Jesus told us to carry each other's burdens and bring each other home. The nurses and assistants in Health Care, Mary's friends, and Sister Mary Agnes Ryan all did this for Mary.

I believe that Mary strove consciously to live out the meaning of her name, "Caritas." When she celebrated her golden Jubilee at Visitation in 1994, the cover of her booklet and the songs she chose indicate the focus of her life. She wrote:

In the end I think my greatest concerns will be: How much love did I have in my life? How did I share my love? Who loved me? Whom did I treasure? Whose lives did I impact? Did my life make a difference to someone else? How did I serve the world? I'm certain that my only concerns will be about how I did or did not fill my life with love.

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM, April 30, 2018