

Obituary



Sister Mary Pipis, IHM, 90, died Saturday, March 24, in the IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe.

Mary Therese Pipis was born in Monroe on July 29, 1927, to Melchior and Susanna (Nemeth) Pipis. Her parents, immigrants from Hungary, were married in St. Stephan Church, Toledo, Ohio. The family home on Vivian Street soon filled with two sons and five daughters. The children attended St. Mary Grade School. Mary continued on to St. Mary Academy and graduated in 1946. That summer, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name, Ann Michael.

As an elementary school teacher, Sister Mary was missioned to St. Peter Claver, Mobile, Ala.; Holy Redeemer, Miami; and in Michigan to St. John, Jackson; St. Charles, Newport; Holy Redeemer, Holy Rosary, St. George, St. Agnes and for 15 years at St. Cecilia, all in Detroit. She enjoyed teaching young students and was dedicated to their formation. Sister Mary earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and a master's degree from Wayne State University, Detroit.

After a sabbatical in 1990, Sister Mary began a 20-year ministry serving the poor and homeless in Detroit, Clinton Township and Goderich, Ontario, Canada, where she lived for 10 years. After formally "retiring," she continued this ministry in Goderich and later in Monroe through St. Mary Parish Soup Kitchen and as visitor to the sick and homebound. In 2009, she moved into the Motherhouse and considered herself retired in 2013. In her retirement, she prayed daily for community needs and world affairs and often visited residents in the IHM Health Care Center.

Remembering

Today we gather as a family to celebrate the life of our dear sister, Mary Pipis, Sister Ann Michael and known lovingly to her family as "Babe." At her 50th anniversary, Mary recalled the events that guided her life. I will quote her often in this Remembering. Three miles east of the Motherhouse, on the Feast of St. Martha, July 29, 1927, Mary Theresa Pipis was born, the seventh and last child of Mandy and Susan Pipis. Mary writes about her parents, "My Hungarian blue-blooded father and peasant mother gifted me with a keen sense of humor and optimism; deep love and respect for all persons and a tremendous love for the Church. Ours was a fun-loving family built on faith, love and respect.

"A cherished memory is falling asleep in Appa's arms and he, carrying me to bed. Mamma always had breakfast waiting on the table; homemade toast, buttered just right. I was Appa's little angel, even as I grew up. I never remember doing anything to make him sad, except when I left for the convent. Just before I made my final vows, Appa came to the convent and asked me if I really wanted to take my vows and if I was being pressured by anyone. He said he and Mamma would not be ashamed of me if I came home. I assured him I was happy being a nun and it was my own choice."

Mary attended St. Joseph School in grade one and St. Mary from grades two to eight. She went on to St. Mary Academy for high school and graduated in 1946. She entered the community on Sept. 18, 1946 and was received on Aug. 15, 1947.

Mary writes about her first assignment

A childhood dream came true with my first assignment: Holy Rosary 'on the alley' as we called it then, was life among the poor, many unchurched and minorities. Next came my first far-away mission in Mobile, Alabama at St. Peter Claver. As a temporary professed, I was surprised and thrilled to be sent there ... teaching in the Black Community ... we suffered along with our people since some of our white sisters and priests did not approve of whites teaching the blacks. My assignment to Liberty City in Miami was again a landmark. Sister Marie Joan, myself and Father Joseph Devaney started the first Catholic school for Afro-Americans in Miami. We helped break down barriers between white and black schools.

Mary was greatly influenced in her life by Father Clement Kern, Father Frank Granger and Father Norm Thomas. The three men were active in the Civil Rights' Movement. Mary and other justice-minded people accompanied Martin Luther King Jr. in a Poor Man's March when he came to Detroit in the 1960s. It was here that Dr. King first delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, which he later repeated in Washington.

Mary was right in the midst of the riots in Detroit in 1967. She was stationed at St. Agnes on 12th Street, the epicenter of the violence. The sisters delivered coffee to the National Guard and distributed milk, bread and food sent from the Motherhouse to the frightened people in the neighborhood. One night a man was shot and killed on the front steps of the convent. Mary found a bullet lodged in the wall of her bedroom.

Mary's efforts to help the Black community did not go unnoticed. In 1968, she received the Favorite Teacher Award, presented by the *Detroit News*. In the same time-frame, DBS featured a national four-hour, coast-to-coast, program covering the changes in

the Church in which all the major cities in the United States were represented. It was very significant that her classroom was the only one chosen to represent the Catholic schools in the education segment of the program. For two days, she taught with a cameraman walking up and down the aisles behind her and, behold, she ended up being a star on national television. Also, on June 5, 1990, the Detroit City Council awarded her a Testimonial Resolution signed by every member of the City Council for her many years of dedicated teaching.

Mary had yet another challenge to face – cancer. She wrote this poem:

THE ME THAT'S YET TO BE (RADIATION TREATMENT)

Lord, I prostrate my body, mind and soul before you on this radiation table
Complete surrender and acceptance fills my heart.
Strange sounds grind out from the machine high over my dead-still body.
The shrill radar pierces the silence as its rays penetrate my body – unfelt.

Lord, I pray – fill me with your healing power – cleanse my soul and body of all
unclean cells and evil spirits.
As I rise from the table I feel nothing in my body – but my soul soars with thanks
and praise – as I go forth to radiate my Jesus on my life journey for many
more days.

Mary continued her devotion to the poor and marginalized at Holy Trinity, Holy Redeemer, St. George and St. Cecilia. She remained at St. Cecilia for 20 years and there was known as “the white tornado.” All in all, she spent 42 years in her ministry to African Americans.

When Mary retired from teaching, she went on to do pastoral work at St. Rita Parish with Father John Nowlan. She visited the shut-ins, worked in the soup kitchen, served at the food bank and was ready to serve any daily need. Finally, in the late 90s she moved to Goderich, Ontario, Canada. Mary called the beautiful town “rich in God.” There she carried on her pastoral work as well as being a caregiver to a life-long family friend, Father Leo C. Ramer. After his death, Mary retired to the Motherhouse in May of 2009. Even here, Mary continued her devotion to the poor by helping her niece at the St. Mary soup kitchen once a month.

Mary gave us an understanding of her life-long dedication to the poor in the acrostic,
WHO AM I?

M – missionary on the move, learning and teaching

A – among Afro-Americans in Alabama, Miami and Detroit
R – reaching out in shelters – nursing homes – soup kitchens – streets and abandoned houses
Y – Yahweh my strength and guide year after year.

Mary expressed her gratitude for being an IHM at the time of her golden anniversary.

I am grateful for being accepted as a member of such a formidable group of religious, visionary, prayerful women of whom many I call friends. As we celebrate fifty golden years, I realize we have shared and continue to share the experience of suffering, rejection, powerlessness and sorrow in ourselves, each other and the global people of God. From these experiences, we have grown to be loving, caring, sensitive women who are the personification of the beatitudes. ... For all of this and more I can only give Praise, Love and Thanksgiving my God to Thee!"

Mary, truly you lived a life of a "Martha" and earned the title of servant in your devotion to God's people. We, your sisters, are grateful to have walked this journey together with you.

Written by Frances Chirco, IHM, and delivered by Genevieve Petrak, IHM
March 28, 2018