

Obituary



Sister Margaret Sweeney, IHM, died Sept. 11, 2020, peacefully at her home in Canton, Mich., under hospice care.

Margaret Sweeney was born Aug. 9, 1940 to Robert and Marie (Allen) Sweeney in Detroit. The family belonged to Christ the King parish in Detroit, where the four sisters and two brothers attend the parish school. Shortly after graduation from Immaculata High School (Detroit), Margaret entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe). She received the name Sister Kathleen Marie. Sister Margaret celebrated her 60th Jubilee in 2019.

Sister Margaret was committed to educational ministry in the Detroit area throughout her career, beginning at St. Bede in Southfield. In 1971, she earned a master's degree in education from Wayne State University. She enjoyed nearly 40 years at St. Cecilia School (Detroit) as teacher of all subjects and long-time principal. Her long tenure at St. Cecilia is testament to her commitment to education and to the families and students of the area. Many friendships were formed over the years with faculty, administrators and parishioners. In later years, Sister Margaret remained committed to education as a tutor and substitute teacher at Most Holy Trinity School and as a school board member, Gesu School.

Sister Margaret was dedicated to her religious community and was elected to the 2006-2012 IHM Leadership Council. She resided in Redford for many years and commuted to Monroe for this responsibility. She took special interest in the care of elderly and infirm sisters and the development of the sisters' health care center which transitioned to become IHM Senior Living Community.

Following her service in community leadership, Sister Margaret gained clinical pastoral education and ministered in pastoral care, most recently as part of the IHM Senior Living Community Pastoral Care Team (Monroe Campus). Often her service was integral for seniors to remain independent. Her sisters in community, residents and staff shared in her caring and loving ministry whenever they encountered her.

Remembering

Today, we remember Sister Margaret Sweeney, IHM, who answered her call to religious life as Sister Kathleen Marie and whom we name: Marge, Margaret, Mags and fondly, Auntie Margie. "What is it to cease breathing but to free the breath from its restless tides that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered." – Kahlil

Gibran Marge chose the thematic line from Kahlil Gibran's poetry that is printed on the front of our programs. For years, we know that Marge has needed to focus on "measured breaths" both for her sister, Marie, and then for her own physical condition. Today, as our nation echoes repeatedly, "I can't breathe," let us reflect on "the breath of life" Marge has been for the IHM community, her family and friends and for St. Cecilia School in Detroit. I now turn to Sister Margaret Sweeney's Remembering, written by Marge herself as she said: "to relieve my friends, my family and my Mission Councilor from scrambling to write something about me."

I, Marge, entered this world on Aug. 9, 1940 as the second child and second daughter born to Marie Eva Allen and Robert Emmett Sweeney. Along with my parents, I was welcomed by my three-year old sister, Marie. The family had recently purchased a home two blocks from Christ the King School so that their children would have an IHM education at Christ the King, St. Cecilia and Immaculata. My parents had been educated by the IHM Sisters and dearly loved the IHMs. I was baptized "Margaret Mary," named after my dad's favorite teacher (Margaret Mary Love, IHM) who taught at St. Vincent's School in Detroit. My first few years are a blur, but I know that they were happy years and that I was greatly loved. When I was three, my baby brother, Robert Emmett Sweeney, Jr., was born. Life was good! My dad was grateful to have a steady job at Kelsey Hayes Wheel Company in Detroit. We didn't have a car, but dad never complained about taking a couple buses to get to work. He enjoyed the people he met on the route and would always have great stories to share at the dinner table when we would ask: "What happened on the way home today?" He was a good storyteller and although we knew the stories were just that, stories . . . we would fall for his exaggerations. If somebody needed coaxing to eat, dad would say: "Take another bite and I'll tell you what happened next."

One of my clearest memories is when I was almost six years old. My mother was pregnant full-term with our sister, Baby Thérèse. Dad rushed her to the hospital. Then he returned home with the difficult news that the new baby had died. It was so hard for us, but, when our sister, Kathleen Marie, was born two years later, it was even more special! She was a beautiful and healthy child. In later years, I chose Sister Kathleen Marie for my religious name. Not long after Kathy was born, my younger brother, Bobby, was diagnosed with leukemia. Visiting Children's Hospital of Detroit with Bobby were family trips. We also visited Father Solanus Casey. Two of the visits appeared to give Bobby strength and energy. On our final trip, my parents were told: "God has a special plan for Bobby." Bobby died two days later on June 7, 1950. After Bobby's death, my parents became the founding members of "The Children's Leukemia Foundation

of Michigan.” Our family appreciates the great strides the foundation has made and we are proud that our parents used their pain to support and comfort other families with their losses. The deep faith our parents shared, as well as their love and support of each other supported our whole family through their deep suffering.

In the January following Bobby's death, William Joseph was born and we celebrated our healthy baby brother. Fast forward to 1955! My older sister, Marie Sweeney, graduated from Immaculata High School and joins the IHMs. Our parents were very proud. At this time, I was a freshman at Immaculata with a strong interest in being a nurse and having 10 children. In January of my sophomore year, Sister Donna Mary Hart invited me to a Day of Reflection that was focused on responding to God's call. Momentous invitation! Sept. 7, 1958, I entered the postulate in Monroe along with many wonderful classmates. My first assignment was teaching first grade at St. Bede in Southfield where I had a marvelous mission experience with Anne Marie Hughes, IHM, as superior and principal, and a great community of Sisters. It was difficult to leave after two years but even as I needed to leave, I was excited to be joining a “city ministry” at St. Cecilia Parish in Detroit.

Little did I know that this would be the ministry I thoroughly loved and where I would be enriched for the next 41 years! The late '60s at St. Cecilia held challenges, tragedies, racial tensions and Vatican II changes. Our parish and school were blessed with great pastors and administrators. Fr. Raymond Ellis was pastor from 1965 until his death in 1972. He was committed to welcoming African American leadership in the parish as well as promoting a choir that recognized the culture of the community being served. Thankfully, this spirit was continued by Fr. Thomas Finnigan in the mid- '70s. I was asked to be principal of St. Cecilia school in 1977 and continued in this role until 2005.

Gifted and talented faculty, students and parents made this ministry one I greatly loved and where I felt that my gifts were welcomed and challenged. I was often asked: "Why do you choose to stay at St. Cecilia?" My response was simple: meaningful liturgies, a beautiful parish community, a great school and staff, a supportive pastor and friend. It was a great personal loss, as well a loss to the Catholic Church, and specifically to the Church in the city, when Msgr. Thomas Finnigan died in June of 2000 at the young age of 70. Oh, how the St. Cecilia faculty remembers our yearly St. Patrick's Day Irish Coffee break right in the middle of the school day. Fr. Finnigan always said: "Let the good times roll!" As "aunts," Marie and I welcomed three nephews and two beautiful nieces to

our family. We were grateful to be included in the families of our sister, Kathy, and her husband, Ed; our brother, Bill, and his wife, Maryjane. In 2001, my sister, Marie, was the recipient of a lung transplant. Her recovery was challenging. She would not have had eight years of "living with "purpose" and advancing the cause of transplant surgeries without the support of Mary Ann Markel, IHM her "number 1" care-giver and friend. Marie's death in 2009 was difficult for all our family and her many friends. I also want to add my deepest gratitude to my friend, Maryhelen Gilday, who companioned me with selfless support through my pulmonary fibrosis for the past five years. We lived each day to its fullest. I was able to continue my service as a chaplain in IHM Senior Living Community. I enjoyed short trips to the beach near Lake Michigan and I even celebrated my 80th Birthday with my sister, Kathy, her husband and our family in Traverse City. My final trip meant a non-stop car ride with a dozen large oxygen tanks in the car. I retired in 2005 as principal at St. Cecilia. I was privileged to serve on our Leadership Council from 2006-2012. My service was a challenging yet very interesting experience! I am most grateful for the opportunity to have worked with Mary Fran Gilleran, IHM, a great team and an amazing staff. It was a well-received gift to interact with so many Sisters whom I may otherwise have known only by name. It was also a significant milestone for our leadership team to acquire licensure for our health care facility, leading to today's IHM Senior Living Community. During my leadership ministry, I found visiting our Sisters in health care life-giving. I felt called to pursue "Chaplaincy" and took Clinical Pastoral classes at Beaumont Hospital. In 2016, I began my Pastoral Care Ministry in our IHM Senior Living Community. I have always felt that I was a very "spoiled" person! I had a happy childhood, enjoyed school and many friendships. I've had very positive community experiences, great principals, pastors and co-workers. My health was always good!

When my sister, Marie, was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis in the year 2000, we were told it was not genetic. However, by 2015, when I was diagnosed with the same disease, the medical practitioners were not surprised because of the advanced medical research in genetics.

Gratitude is my mantra! I am grateful to our loving God for giving me amazing parents, siblings, nephews, nieces, grandnephews and grandnieces, beautiful friends, co-workers and above all my Sisters in community. My greatest joys have been serving people, teaching children and my involvement with parishioners and families. I am grateful for the opportunities and freedom provided by the community to serve the people of God as I felt called. I am

proud to be an IHM and proud that IHMs answer the call to ministry throughout the world.

Marge, thank you for sharing your life and your story with us. We experience God's loving and nurturing presence hearing it. The Sweeney family always looks forward to the many holiday celebrations in your family home, a place we always wanted to call our home too. Generations of the St. Cecilia community know you: at school; in our neighborhood; in our churches; when we need prayers and support; when we need to cry. Thanks for coming to our festivals and backyard barbecues; thanks for our place in your heart.

Our IHM community, especially our health care residents, wait for your prayer, your patience and your loving embrace. We know that for you, we IHM Sisters are special.

Breathe now, Sister Margaret Sweeney, our sister, our auntie, our educator, our friend, our companion, our leader, our prayer partner. Marge, breathe with us and for us so that we, too, know our Loving God, unencumbered. Written by Margaret Sweeney, IHM.

Completed and delivered by Victoria Koivu-Rybicki, IHM Associate, Sept. 14, 2020.