

The oldest of 10 children, Sister Bernetta (“Bernie”) Booms grew up on a farm near Harbor Beach, Mich. She lived through the Depression and the deaths of three infant siblings, so she learned early the struggles of everyday life. She was able to attend high school by working for a family for room and board.



In 1973, her prayer was answered when another sister offered to take her place in Cayey. Sister Bernie began her new ministry in Grenada at the Father Hilarion Home.

But in high school, she found that her “desire for religious life was enkindled and seeds [for a vocation] were planted through the encouraging words of Sister Martina. Jesus was guiding me to other pastures – to the ‘more.’”

She was received into the IHM community in 1946. For 10 years, she taught elementary school in Michigan and in 1957, she began ministering in Puerto Rico, first teaching at the Academia de Santa Teresita in Santurce and then at Colegio de la Merced in Cayey.

Puerto Rico offered dramatic changes to her life – in language, culture, climate and landscape.

“But these changes helped me learn patience and being hopeful each new day,” she says.

In 1970, the Rev. Hilarion Summers, a priest from Spencer, Mass., came to Puerto Rico and talked about a home for the poor and aged he was building in Mt. Rodney, Grenada. He hoped to find someone to be a charismatic, prayerful presence with the residents of the home.

Sister Bernie knew this was a ministry for her.

“I don’t believe I ever desired anything more! But I needed patience and trust. My teaching position had to be replaced before I could leave.”

“Our life was filled with new experiences: sharing life in love and simplicity,” Sister Bernie remembers. “We filled a pail in the morning for our water supply that day. On Saturdays, we walked to a local market for a cut of meat for the Hilarion Home for the week. And of course, bananas were plentiful, so we learned to fry plantains for our daily meals. We spent evenings on a veranda overlooking the Caribbean.”



Political and mission changes in Grenada caused Sister Bernie to decide it was time to come home in March 1982. She returned to Monroe and for the next 27 years served as a driver and then as Motherhouse transportation coordinator.

“I enjoyed this position. It allowed me to get to know the sisters better because we’d talk as I drove them to appointments. I also got to know their families,” she says.

Her life took another turn when she had a loss of hearing and her memory began to fail. She accepted the limitations with the same grace that had directed her life down through her many years of service.



“My heart continues with the desire to be attuned to where, when, how God, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, is leading me in being transformed and in participating in the redemptive mission of Jesus.”