

A Spiritual Legacy of 175+ Years

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An image of unfolding by Trish H-C on Unsplash

In 1845, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary were founded in Monroe, a small frontier town in the state of Michigan, with the purpose of educating girls and helping people in their spiritual life. Back then, we didn't use the word "spirituality" all that much, certainly not like it is used today. Nonetheless, the IHM charism, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit to the IHMs, included tending to "souls," which sisters and associates have done religiously all down the years and continue to this day in whatever ministry or form of presence we have.

While it is evident that we are about "spirituality," what exactly does this mean? Is it just nuns and others in religious positions that are spiritual? Is it loosey-goosey or set in stone? These are all good questions. In fact, there is a lot of fluidity around what people mean when they say "spirituality." Some speak of their Christian spirituality, some of the spirituality of nature and still others the spirituality of cooking or golf. The understanding of spirituality that I favor, and which comes from scholars steeped in its study, is that spirituality is our life project as it is oriented around what we perceive to be of ultimate value; it is integrated with all that we are and do. (From the work of Sandra Schneiders, IHM, STD)

Every one of us is spiritual. It is an essential part of being human. We all have this capacity, this draw to something bigger than ourselves, to meaning, to the classic understanding of "the good, the beautiful, and the true." Sometimes we are more aware of it and nurture it more than other times. Ideally, one's religious tradition is a place where that spirituality can flourish and grow. But that's not to say that anything of this world cannot nourish our spirit. Saint Ignatius of Loyola always reminds us that God is in ALL things.

Our spirituality is fluid, just like our lives are. We learn and grow and evolve. We have different styles and priorities and needs throughout our lives. The expressions and emphases of our spirituality may also change – and that is quite natural. That doesn't mean that one day we are Catholic and the next we are Taoist and then after that we are Hindu – although any religious or spiritual tradition can be enriching. Rather it means that we discover new rooms in our interior castle, as Saint Teresa of Avila would say. Just as no two people are identical, so too no two spiritualities are identical. And this is a good thing for the diversity and richness of experience gives a sense of the fullness and vastness of God.

And so as I, along with the rest of the IHM community and our friends, celebrate 175+ years of a spiritual tradition, I am grateful for the many dimensions of my own spirituality as well as the spirituality we hold in common as IHMs. From the earliest days of our co-founder Mother Teresa Maxis Duchemin's trust in Providence to the Redemptorist vibes of humility simplicity and zeal inherited from our other co-founder Louis Florent Gillet – all down the years with influences from Ignatian spirituality, Carmelite Spirituality, feminism, ecology and of course, the deep and abiding presence of sacred scripture and the liturgical tradition of the Church (from conversations with Susan Rakoczy, IHM, PHD). These are all like threads woven together to create our IHM spirituality, a spirituality that is ever-unfolding just as the Spirit continues to unfold throughout creation and history.

As you reflect on your own spirituality, what are some of the major spiritual influences in your life? How have you experienced an unfolding of your spirituality?

Julie Vieira, IHM