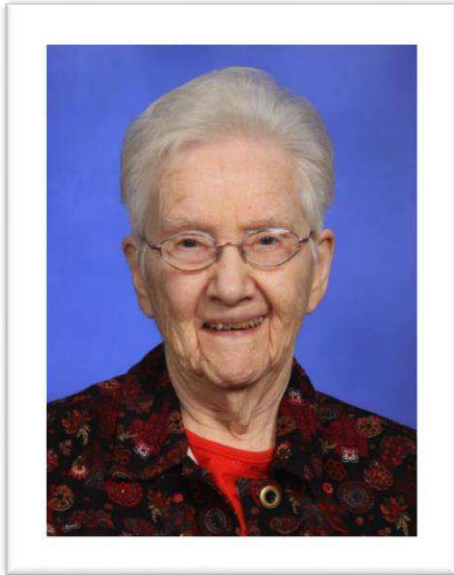


**Remembering Therese “Terry” Lenihan, IHM**  
**Sept. 27, 1928 – Dec.28, 2021**



When I speak, let it be of blessing and gratitude:  
Psalm 145.

What better words to sum up the person, the spirit, the essence of Terry Lenihan and the way she lived? She placed them on her *IHM Book of Life* page and the cover of her 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee booklet.

Terry was a reflective woman and rarely spoke or gave her opinion quickly. She was a wise and discerning woman who acknowledged her many blessings and spoke about them with deep gratitude.

Terry, born on Sept. 27, 1928, loved to claim her birthplace – the Bronx. She was baptized Therese in honor of Therese Lisieux. After the nurses cautioned her parents that she might end up being

nicknamed “Tess,” they decided to call her “Terry,” the name she kept throughout her life. The exceptions were when she needed to use her baptismal name, Therese, or her IHM name, Catherine Marie. As a child, Terry loved playing outdoors and especially swimming and romping about in the water at Jones Beach in New York. She called herself a “tomboy.”

Terry’s parents were Katherine Gilgannon from New York, New York, and Thomas Joseph Lenihan, originally from New Kilmacthomas, County Waterford, Ireland. Although Terry had an extended family in the New York area, her immediate family was small: her parents and two siblings, Peggy (Margaret) three years older than she and Tom, her brother, who was three years younger.

Her mother lost several children to miscarriage or stillbirth. As if these losses weren’t difficult enough, when Terry was six years old, her sister Peggy died at age nine of complications from a serious ear infection. Terry also was seriously ill but recovered and then received her First Holy Communion while bedridden.

A few years later her family moved to Cincinnati as she entered the fourth grade, and then to Detroit two years later. After a recommendation from the diocese, her dad enrolled Tom and Terry in St. Mary of Redford School where Terry met the IHM Sisters. Sister Mary Laubacher (Coronata) was her first IHM teacher.

Terry had an inquisitive mind, loved learning and was a serious student. At the same time, she was already finding her way in her own faith development. Even as a primary student, a sermon she heard about “limbo” disturbed her. She struggled with the idea of a loving God who would “punish” innocent, unbaptized children and talked to her dad about it. She expected that God would respect each person.

All through the years that I knew Terry, she consistently showed respect for every person she encountered: clerks in stores, our staff here at the Motherhouse, all her students, young children and seniors...everyone. This also was evident in the tenderness she demonstrated toward those who were “handicapable.” Terry loved the idea of the Special Olympics and contributed to it every year.

At her 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee celebration, she shared her reluctance to a religious vocation. In her sophomore year of high school, she felt God was bothering her, so she responded: “Enough! Stop bugging me, God, I’m not interested in being a nun.” She repeated her “no” as a senior and then attended Marygrove College while thinking about becoming a doctor.

However, after her first year, Terry’s reluctance abated, and she decided to enter the IHM community in 1947. Her concerns about the convent were dispelled and she was inspired by the caring, daring, strong, gentle, insightful, holy women who had a broader sense of mission that influenced her. She was particularly grateful for those who had marched for racial justice in Selma, stood with striking farmworkers in California, fed students’ families from the convent kitchens and participated in the Beijing conference on women in 1995.

Terry’s gifts for pursuing knowledge and her discipline of study were well suited to her ministry as a teacher. And, perhaps, since both of her paternal grandparents were teachers in Ireland, it was in her DNA.

Terry began her teaching ministry in the middle grades at Our Lady of Lake Huron in Harbor Beach. Of course, she was delighted to be living and working near the water. Just prior to this assignment, her family had moved back to New York.

In the Fall, her mother came to Michigan to visit Terry. Almost immediately after her return home she had a massive heart attack and died. What an utter shock!

The following year Terry was sent from the western shore of Lake Huron to the eastern shore of Lake Michigan to teach at St. John High School, Benton Harbor. Terry often mentioned Sister Robertine, a wise and gentle woman with a wonderful sense of humor, who was a real gift to her as the principal and superior.

Back in Detroit a few years later, Terry was teaching several science courses at St. Mary of Redford while studying chemistry at the University of Detroit when she received a disturbing phone call. Seven years after her mother’s death, Terry’s dad died of a massive heart attack. Thus, Terry and Tom were alone as an “immediate family”. This brought them even closer together and they developed strong bonds and supported one another in their different life paths.

For Terry, all her high school teaching assignments held grateful memories. She had a loving fondness for her students who praised her as an excellent teacher. Her background meant she could carry a variety of courses –Latin, English, Religion and all the sciences – and was an asset to every school for her generosity and talent. And the appreciation was mutual.

Her seven years at Girls Catholic Central in the inner city of Detroit enriched her in every aspect of her life. The students, coming from various ethnic backgrounds and economic conditions, opened her heart to a deep appreciation for the gift of diversity. Sue Rakoczy continues to be grateful that Terry taught them how to pray a Scripture text. Many of the students, especially the classes of '61 and '62, continued to contact her throughout the years. At their 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion, the women honored Terry as the one “who taught us the beauty of language and literature and turned us on to Shakespeare.” Together they named her as the teacher who had the greatest influence on them.

Terry was at Girls Catholic Central High School (housed at St. Patrick Parish) in the years just before, during and after the Second Vatican Council. Because of the commitment of the pastor at St. Patrick's in which the school was located and the responses of the sisters, Terry steeped herself in the call for a renewal of the Church.

She recognized those years as pivotal. The newly published book, *Your God is Too Small*, (J. B. Phillips) had a lifetime effect on Terry and the ways she experienced God. Her image of God had always been big. We know that smallness never fit Terry.

After completing her classroom teaching, Terry ministered in several parishes. She was committed to implementing the directions of the Second Vatican Council. As a pastoral minister, she experienced the struggles involved in church renewal. Realizing her exhaustion and burnout, she took a pause and moved to Colorado for renewal amidst the beauty and spaciousness of the Rocky Mountains. There she took advantage of the outdoors by hiking and cross-country skiing, and other nourishing opportunities –ballet, artwork and expanding spirituality.

While there, always the curious learner, she also cultivated new technology skills. These would serve Terry well. The age of the computer had dawned which would compel everyone – students, teachers, nuns, everyone! to become literate in ways that were new and intimidating.

Terry left Denver when Sister John Clement invited her to return to Detroit to develop the personal computer lab for students at Marygrove. She loved teaching computer skills to students and faculty and then to those she mentored in several IHM congregational offices.

Throughout her life, Terry cherished her relationships, especially with the sisters with whom she lived and taught, her classmates, with members of her Mission Unit and her long-standing faithful friends, Laetitia Lariviere and Janet Provost. They knew that Tom was Terry's only immediate family member. Thus, Janet and Tish shared their families with her and included her in their activities and significant celebrations.

Two other long-time relationships were also very important gifts to Terry and, of course, she to them. Her brother Tom continually sought ways to connect with Terry and to share his life with her. From the 1980s on, their relationship deepened when they traveled to see each other regularly in Chicago, New York, and Palm Springs, California. Tom was such a significant person and presence in Terry's life. She delighted in surprising people when, with a twinkle in her eye, she introduced all 6'4" of

him. Tom, in turn, had a deep appreciation and gratitude for Terry. We hear this clearly in a note written to her in 2014 when he said:

“Ever since 1947 I’ve been blessed...in thinking of you, less often at first...oh, maybe once a month...then after a while, it was every week- and lately, never a day goes by that I’m not lucky enough to stop – and truly cherish my wonderful sister – lucky, lucky me.

Love, Tom”

Tom, a prince of a gentleman, immediately included me in his circle of life from the beginning of our friendship in 1982.

Terry, in turn, became an important member of my family circle. When my mom announced that she was adopting Terry, my sisters, Lil and Ellie, were delighted to have a new “oldest” sister. My mom’s and Ellie’s homes became hers.

Terry loved my mom, was alert to her needs and did many caring things for her. Everyone in my family embraced Terry as an integral member of the family. Many of them sought her out regularly for conversations about their wonderings and concerns. Even my mother would ask Terry (rather than me) about some idea or concern she was working through. One day one of my young grandnieces invited Terry to sit with her as she worked out a musical question on the piano.

Terry and I lived together as a local community beginning in 1983. We enjoyed traveling from coast to coast in the United States, and to Ireland and Germany. Terry so wanted to visit Ireland, her dad’s place of birth, but had no recent contact with her relatives. However, we went in 1985.

While there we searched for family gravesites. Across from the cemetery, we noticed a family-run store. We ventured into it and after about a half-hour of conversation, we discovered that the woman we were talking to was her aunt, her aunt Mary! Can you imagine that moment? What a surprise! We were invited to dinner and continued to visit.

Terry and I often shared the IHM educational and retreat opportunities. She was particularly enticed with the new cosmology because she was able to bring together her gifts of inquisitiveness, scientific knowledge and theological reflection. As some of us were learning new scientific concepts, she mentored us in these explorations. Yes, once again, she had an opportunity to experience the God who was bigger in new and unimagined ways.

While praying for clarity, Terry decided to move to the Motherhouse in 2009. She knew that she could no longer contribute to our local community life in the way she desired and expected. After her move, Terry continued to participate in the IHM congregational life, in the mission unit and major gatherings. Mission unit members continued to value her as a caring, affirming, thinking, gentle, wise woman.

As a motherhouse resident, Terry accepted responsibilities: membership on the Campus Greening Committee, the Hospitality Committee, the Service Office and the

Motherhouse Elder Council. When becoming a member of the Elder Council she described herself in these words:

“I have a caring and careful listening ear; a deep respect for each person, an appreciation of differences; a deeply reflective nature and a desire for the common good.”

Terry continued her sense of ministry in the Motherhouse. She committed herself to be present to staff and residents. In the morning she would walk the halls to converse with staff and to demonstrate her respect and care for them. Many told me they missed her after she moved to McGivney Way.

In the same spirit that Terry decided to move to the Motherhouse, she made other decisions: the relinquishment of her driver's license, the shift from active membership in the mission unit and then the very significant one to move to our Memory Care Unit, McGivney Way on June 1, 2017. Each of these was made with freedom of spirit and flowed from her sense of deep gratitude for the blessings of her life.

It is amazing that Terry, despite her early losses, never seemed to feel sorry for herself nor deprived of blessings. Rather, she focused on the abundance of the gifts she had been given. She was ever so grateful for all the staff and care in Memory Care.

Terry was open to the work of the Spirit within her. She wrote: “Union with God is a deep desire of my heart.” “I pray that God continues to see how I'm doing and continues to help me improve – becoming aware of what needs my attention and help.”

Oftentimes, when I was visiting with her in McGivney Way, Terry would say to me,

I'm so grateful to be here and grateful to the community...

This is the best place in the house. We have community and we listen to each other and notice and care about how the others are feeling.”

Prior to the Pandemic Terry initiated a new response to my question of “How are you?”

She would say with a twinkle in her eye and her teasing smile,

“BEAUTIFUL!”

Thank you, Terry, for allowing God to be very big for you and for living the words:

“When I speak, let it be of blessing and gratitude;  
let your glory --- your beauty within me shine out to the world.”

Thank You, Terry, you are beautiful!

Written and delivered by Margaret “Peggy” Schmidt, IHM  
Jan. 3, 2021