

Remembering Patricia Dearbaugh, IHM Jan. 24, 1941 – July 12, 2022



Sister Patricia Dearbaugh reports, “January 24, 1941, in the still, snowy, early morning, I decided to make my presence known to my family and the world as well.” She continued making her presence known right up until she quietly slipped away Tuesday morning.

Pat lived her early life in Southgate and Wyandotte. Her mother was a nurse and her father was a pharmacist. They fostered Pat’s great care for others: friends and strangers. Pat had an older brother, Bob, and a younger sister, Mary Jo. Pat was baptized at the United Church of Canada. Pat had a fondness for Canada, where she spent most of her summers—just a short way from our IHM Crawfton. In Pat’s early years, God was planning a call that came to fruition as she later joined our IHM Congregation.

Pat said during her growing years, she attended the Congregational Church and Sunday school, but most of her friends were Catholic. In 1953, Pat transferred from public school to the Academy of the Sacred Heart. It was through the religious serving there, especially Sr. Eileen, that Pat said, “God became real to her.” God began to unfold the plans for her: she had thought of becoming Catholic and entering religious life in grade 12, but her father was strongly opposed.

While at Michigan State, she met her life-long friend Marge, a friend who became like a sister to Pat. After Marge married Don “Zeke” Zerial, the three of them were friends, really family, through joys and sorrows, even through the death of Don. Pat was heartbroken because she was too ill to go to his funeral. The future God had for Pat unfolded during her college years and she became a teacher. She taught at North Park Elementary school in Grand Rapids for 28 years. While teaching there, Pat met her other dear and closest friends, Kay and Floyd; and Bill and Laura, who supported her and continued a close friendship. They understood and accepted her. They were all family. They went on summer vacations together. Her Grand Rapids’ friends stayed connected with Pat by visits and phone calls.

After Pat’s mother died, Pat felt free to look at her journey and be open to God’s plan for her. With the friendship, encouragement and spiritual guidance of Sr. Monica Stuhldreier, IHM, Pat grew in her Catholic faith, attending spirituality classes led by Sr. Monica at St. Alphonsus Church, Grand Rapids. In the context of spiritual direction, Sr. Monica came to know of Pat’s desire to enter religious life. Pat started in the IHM

Associate program but felt that was not enough. During that time, Pat's desire to enter religious life was rekindled. God's plan for Pat's future journey moved forward and she applied for entrance to the IHM community. Entering IHM in 1993, Pat says in her autobiography, "I will always be grateful to my many friends especially, Dr. Dorothy Berg and Sr. Monica Stuhlreyer, IHM." Pat often says she truly learned about community life and prayer from her first IHM community at G-wing in the Academy building. She found this group of women a welcoming and loving community. She spoke of their continued support, encouragement and patience as she began to grow forward, embracing life experiences as an IHM. From her first day in the IHM community until her passing, she knew they would stand beside and with her.

Pat loved meeting and getting to know people of all ages. God's plan led her to the University of Notre Dame (Indiana) through the invitation of Sr. Carrine Ethridge, IHM, in 1997. During her eight years as Rector of Cavanaugh Hall, she mentored young women to grow and be their best selves. They fondly called her "Sheriff Pat." Jeni Discher co-rector, recalled a visit by Mary McCann, IHM, as Pat was on a Hawaiian float with the women of Cavanaugh Hall celebrating a Notre Dame event; she was smoking a cigar, too. That was Pat having fun with her girls. Pat was always up for a party and did so right up to the last week before she died. Marge and Kay came for a visit and her first words were, "So, where are we going to eat?" Because she was so weak, Marge and Kay ordered lunch from Pat's favorite place, Michigan Bar and Grill, so they had a "party." While her sister Mary Jo and her husband, Charlie, visited last week, she had them get her a salad from Michigan Bar. Well, Pat, I hope you are enjoying a great party now!

While a rector at Notre Dame, Pat took classes in Pastoral Ministry. She reported that the skills she learned led her to "deeper self-awareness and awareness of the way her style of ministry affected others." She proved it by building relationships with the sisters on second-floor A-wing and her community on first floor Liguori. She became a confidant and friend to Muriel, who lives on the same hall. Pat loved the nursing staff who cared for her in Liguori and on third-floor health care; she knew them by name and was always interested in their lives and families. Pat was a "friend who knew you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts who you have become." She always encouraged you to be you and love who you are.

Thank you, Pat, for responding to God's plans and for your love and encouragement to us, your family, IHM Sisters, and many friends. We miss you and your smile.

Written by Elaine Aldridge, IHM and Jeni Discher.
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