

Remembering Annette Boyle, IHM
April 23, 1924 – Dec. 5, 2022



On April 23, 1924, Margaret Irene Boyle, our Sister Annette, was the second child born to Mary (Doyle) of Michigan and Patrick Boyle of Ireland. Catherine, our deceased IHM Sister Patrice, was the eldest of the family; Betty, the youngest, is the mother of five daughters.

Annette's life story and the testimonies of all who knew and loved her demonstrate Annette as a woman rooted in the spirituality of the congregation, a love of Saints Alphonsus, Theresa of Avila, and Mary and a commitment to the liberating mission of Jesus.

Holy Redeemer Parish, Detroit, was very significant to the Boyle family. It was on the steps that her parents met, later were married and where Annette and Patrice were baptized. Holy Redeemer was also Annette's first mission.

Annette writes in her autobiography that her childhood memories were happy ones. "I felt loved and secure and thought all families were like ours." All three Boyle girls attended Henry Ford Public School, within walking distance. They were encouraged to study and knew that their parents were with the teacher if there was trouble. In high school, Annette took the bus to Sacred Heart School in west Dearborn and settled down, as she states, into a routine of study and fun.

It was in 11th grade that Annette began experiencing a call to religious life. In her own words, she writes, "I often bargained with God, kept moving the goalposts and finally relented and told God I would try it." Two weeks after graduation in 1941, at age 17, the family set out for Monroe, where Sr. Patrice was already a novice.

The day after Annette arrived in Monroe, she announced to the postulants, novices and anyone in hearing range that she would stay. It never occurred to her that IHM leadership had anything to say about that decision. Annette liked her formation months, though sometimes difficult; many friends made in those first few days have remained friends throughout her life.

Annette's first mission was teaching first-grade children at Holy Redeemer. She loved teaching them. An incident she recalled with affection was sharing an umbrella with a tiny person named Frank as they walked to the corner at noontime. One hour later, Frank said to Annette, "I still remember the day I walked under the umbrella with you."

After ministering in several schools, two as principal, Annette served as a member of the Northwest Provincial Team. Later as part of the staff of the Visitation House of

Prayer, part of her ministry was to coordinate the summer Houses of Prayer. She also teamed with the Jesuits leading several Spiritual Leadership workshops.

In 1972, Sister Mary Jo Maher, Director of IHM Ministries, invited Annette to South Africa, a country torn by violence and oppression. Annette was sent to assist Sister Genevieve Hickey, OP, in establishing a House of Prayer in Capetown on the southwestern coast. She said, “everywhere there was a desire for God ...a yearning for prayer; a sincere desire to deepen one’s own spiritual life.” This was the beginning of a long ministry in South Africa, which she said “fit me like a glove, a place I will always remember.”

When she was refused a visa in 1977 to return to South Africa, Annette went to Memphis, Tennessee, where she ministered in two parishes, Holy Rosary and St. Anne, for four years in each parish. Her ministries varied: working with a variety of groups of Neighborhood Communities, Marriage/Engaged Encounters, the separated and divorced, deacons and their ministry. Annette was a consultant at the Wife Abuse Center, which four laywomen ran. She remembers this as a time when she learned so much from the laity.

In 1985, Annette returned to South Africa with three other IHMs to minister with the Redemptorists in Howick, Natal. Annette’s major ministry at that time was working in the seminary with the young Redemptorists, offering spiritual direction and leading retreats focusing on Alphonsian Spirituality. She said that at one of these retreats, the inspiration translated into everyday language St. Alphonsus’s booklet, *How to Converse Continually and Familiarly with God*, which was first published in 1753.

Annette took the lead in collaborating with several IHM Sisters and Redemptorist priests in publishing the booklet, *Praying to God as a Friend*. It was soon translated into Zulu, (Xh)“k”oza (*Nelson Mandela’s Home Language*), Setswana and Afrikaans. Annette said that for all involved, it was “an act of love.” One priest theologian in Capetown said the small booklet was “one of the best theologies of prayer written.”

Later, Annette ministered in the Archdiocese of Capetown, where she collaborated with the Catholic Welfare and Development Staff, giving workshops for caregivers of Aids victims and developing Spiritual Companionship workshops for women of all races and denominations. She was part of an Ecumenical Spiritual Directors group offering encouragement and enrichment to experienced spiritual directors in their ministry. She said that it was an exhausting and exhilarating time in her life. She was full of gratitude. She saw the election process in April 1994 that ended apartheid and began independence.

Annette’s presence in South Africa opened the door to making connections for 11 other IHMs to have the privilege of a rich ministry with the people. Seven were also involved in ministry with the Redemptorists, enriching their experience of Alphonsian heritage.

Annette writes on the last page of her autobiography, "God tugged at my heart again, as always, and I knew it was time to return home." She arrived in Monroe in Dec. 1997. The following year she was invited to join the Motherhouse Pastoral Care Team. When it was necessary because of poor health, Annette moved from being a full-time team member to a part-time volunteer. Annette said this pastoral care ministry, along with all her others, was a gift to her.

About her life as a retired sister, she said, "I love being here with much time for prayer and reflection, participating in liturgies and activities and visiting the sick." Annette often shared that day and night and prayed for the most abandoned. She encouraged others to speak to God as a Friend and quoted Teresa of Avila, "What does it matter when we are in the arms of God."

Annette closes her autobiography with her testimony, "Our sisters and staff here are so good. There is much love here mixed with the reality of diminishment. No wonder we sing, 'Praise, Love, Thanksgiving our God to Thee.'"

Written and delivered by Kathleen O'Brien, IHM
Dec. 13, 2022