

Remembering Joan Monsour, IHM

April 26, 1933 - Nov. 23, 2022



Sister Joan Eileen Monsour, the second child of James and Lucille Monsour, was born prematurely April 26, 1933, in Akron, Ohio and because of that, she was baptized the same day. When Joan was older, she found that her name meant “God is gracious.” She said, “I thank God for the gracious gift of both life and faith.”

Joan grew up in Akron with her brother Donald and sisters Beverly and Sherrie. Joan’s family was a member of Our Lady of Cedars, Maronite Catholic Church, where she made her first Communion and Confirmation.

Joan’s family first met the IHM Sisters at the Maronite Church when they came to teach religious education.

Sr. Marguerite Donnelly encouraged the Monsours to enroll at St. Mary’s School and as a result, Joan attended St. Mary School from grade 3 through high school. It was there that her first desire to become an IHM Sister was awakened when her third grade teacher, Sr. Anacletus, held her scapular up to her and told her that she looked good in blue! Joan’s teachers, who always seemed fun-loving and happy, encouraged the girls to pursue a religious vocation.

Joan’s school days were enriched by the many musical activities she participated in. Joan played in the school pageant, played the pipe organ for the early Mass, accompanied the school chorus, played the bells in the band and took part in the music recitals!

Joan’s music teachers, Sr. Vera Kelly and Sr. Georgelyn Markey, influenced her decision to enter religious life. Her mother and three aunts were raised by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Mother Cabrini’s orphanage in Denver, Colorado; Joan credits both her mother’s love for these sisters and her love and generosity toward the IHM Sisters as fostering her desire to become one of the sisters in blue. Every feast day, her mother would make a beautifully decorated cake so Joan could take it to the convent for the sisters. In the summer, she was to take the biggest ears of garden-picked fresh sweet corn for the sisters. Later, Joan learned that these big ears of corn had to be broken in two so the sisters could eat them, given their closely shaped bonnets!

Six other Akron-ites and Joan (who graduated third in a class of 133 in June 1951) entered the IHM postulate in Aug. 1951 and received the habit as novices in Aug. 1952.

Joan was given the name Lucille Marie, after her mother, Lucille. One of her great experiences was as a novice being able to play the Motherhouse pipe organ for Mass,

benediction and other services, under the guidance of Sr. Alphonsus Mary (Mary Charbonneau), our talented motherhouse organist.

A month after first profession in 1954, Joan was sent to live and study music at Marygrove College in Detroit. Her studies were interrupted the following year by a year of teaching second grade at Epiphany, doing her student teaching. She then returned to Marygrove to complete her studies and receive her bachelor's degree in Music in 1957.

Joan then spent six summers studying music at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Her hard work was mingled with teasing and laughter with the other sisters studying at the University. It seems Joan was the only one who could type with more than one finger! So, she ended up being the typist for all their papers! Joan received a Master of Music degree from the University of Michigan in Aug. 1967. She went on to further her theology education by attending Saturday classes at St. John's College in Cleveland from 1966 to 1973.

Joan was sent back to her alma mater, St. Mary High School, Akron, because of her mother's illness in 1965 and death in 1966. There she taught religion, English and music. At first, she lived with several other sisters, but soon she was the only one there and she was able to take care of her father after some strokes and his death in 1991.

Joan had spent her entire religious life in formal education for 52 years, teaching at Epiphany and All Saints in Detroit, then IHM High School in Westchester, Illinois and at three different schools in Akron: St. Mary, St. Peter, and St. Francis de Sales. She was at St. Francis de Sales for 32 years. She did much with her music to help the students fully participate in liturgies, taught them hymns, played the organ for all school religious services; she practiced with those who were involved in Christmas programs, as well as other religious activities during the year. No wonder she did so well helping us with our Liturgies of the Word.

When her students went to high school, the teachers asked who their English teacher was because they had correct grammar, good handwriting and were often the ones who produced awards: For many years, Joan's students were recognized for excellence in the statewide "Power of the Pen" creative writing contest!

One eighth-grade boy wrote of her, "I have been blessed with a teacher who has been able to teach me in a way that keeps me interested, focused and improved my desire to learn. ...this teacher truly cares about me as a person and a student. (She has always inspired me) to always do my best and to treat others well and with respect."

Over the 32 years she taught at St. Francis de Sales, she was nominated four times to be honored by being included in the Who's Who Among American Teachers.

On the occasion of her retirement in 2008, each of the school's students (300) decorated a page of farewell with their messages. One student wrote, "At church, your organ playing is fantastic! Someday I want to play like you ... and it is said that in our house, "Sr. Joan rocks on her organ!" They surely loved and appreciated Sr. Joan.

In May 2010, Joan began experiencing daily chest pains and had bypass surgery. Because of these serious heart problems and with the advice of the Motherhouse administration, she moved permanently to the Motherhouse. After recuperating, though, she volunteered in many ways as she hoped to continue to be of service.

In the last year, Joan played at our weekly Liturgies of the Word, as well as our Mass on Thursdays. She also kept the Mass intentions up to date. Recently, she moved to assisted living and seemed more relaxed with less walking around the building.

With her sudden death, we pray that she knows how much we appreciated her using her musical gift right up to the end. She was practicing the hymns for Sr. Jean Ann's funeral when her breathing problem overtook her and led to her final trip to the hospital.

Thank you, Joan, for your dedication to your ministry of teaching and our weekly liturgies as our musical accompanist. May you sing and play now with the angels!

Written and delivered by Monica Stuhlreyer, IHM

Dec. 1, 2022