

Dorothy Diederichs, IHM

"You never stop searching for God."

Growing up with two brothers and one sister in Detroit, Sister Dorothy Diederichs wanted to be a missionary in China. She was also interested in becoming a nurse; teaching never entered her thoughts! But she was taught by IHM Sisters and felt called to their authentic religious life. There was something deep within her that led her to the IHM community.

Ten years after Sister Dorothy's novitiate, having taught primary grades in Pontiac, Bloomfield Hills and inner-city Detroit, her missionary dreams were realized: she was missioned to Puerto Rico. She taught fifth through eighth grade. She was challenged to learn Spanish to be effective in catechetical work among the poor. After six years in Puerto Rico, she and three other sisters were missioned to Recife, Brazil, as part of the Archdiocese of Detroit's Mission Team in Latin America. "Many people around us did not have running water or electricity," she recalls. "The people lived on the hillside, in close quarters, in homes built with mud. Based on reading and reflection on the Scripture, the formation of Base Christian Communities in light of Vatican II was a focus of our efforts.

"Gradually, the people came to believe who they were as people of God and that their human rights should be respected. Because of this awareness, the people began to demand water and better living conditions. From the point of view of the Gospel, they understood and gradually claimed their own value as a person," she notes. While in Brazil, Sister Dorothy had the opportunity to go to the Latin America Pastoral Institute in Ecuador, where she studied with the foremost liberation theologians. Her worldview was shattered and she became aware of being a part of a bigger movement. She relates, "That is where it started for me, seeing the world differently, through the eyes of the poor as they interpreted the Gospel. My experience in Brazil and its coinciding with the birth of the liberation movement has deeply influenced my life."



When her father died, Sister Dorothy returned home to be with her mother. She was elected to the IHM South/West Province team and for six years, she assisted the sisters who were ministering in the southwest U.S. and provided support for their ministries. Later, as director of the Michigan Farm Worker Ministry Coalition, advocating for farmworkers, especially UFW and FLOC, she was educating the local and state churches/groups about farmworker struggles and seeking their support.

Sister Dorothy returned to Brazil to continue her ministry for 12 more years. She returned to the U.S. and became part of various groups seeking justice and social change; she also tutored at Marygrove. After six years, she moved to the Motherhouse, where she served on committees. She is most grateful to God and the community for her life experiences on her IHM journey.

