

Juanita (Guadalupe) Bernard, IHM

“Living with a spirit of compassion, community, solidarity and prayer gives witness to God’s love and presence.”



When the IHMs arrived in Sister Juanita Bernard's small town in Puerto Rico in 1948, she was struck by their courage, coming to serve people with a different language, culture and lifestyle. She was introduced to the “beautiful spirit” of the IHM Sisters when they taught at her high school. She participated in the school choir and was also a book club member. An IHM led both groups and that is where Sister Juanita says, “I fell in love with their missionary spirit and the risk they took to serve the people.”

She privately inquired about becoming an IHM; she did not want her family to know. Her father had aunts in another order and he told her the work was too much. Her 11 siblings worried they would lose their sister if she became a nun. (They now know they gained a whole community of sisters as part of their family.)

Like the IHM Sisters who inspired her, Sister Juanita demonstrated bravery by being one of the first women outside U.S. borders to join the IHM community when she and Sister Teresita Marie Nazario made their way from Puerto Rico to Monroe in June 1952. “We took a train from Miami to Monroe and arrived at 6 a.m., dressed for the postulate. Meeting



people from another country with another language was an interesting experience for us all. “I did not think about how hard it was going to be. I felt called to be part of the IHMs and did not think about what would happen. I loved what was happening.”

Sister Juanita's first mission was at Detroit's Holy Trinity. After her profession, she returned to Puerto Rico to teach first grade at Academia de Santa Teresita (Santurce). She taught kindergarten and primary grades at other schools in Santurce and Adjuntas, including Caserio Llorens Torres School, part of the housing projects of Santurce. This was done to provide quality education to the population with less access to resources.



Sister Juanita later ministered as a secondary school counselor, served as inter-congregational formation directress and became the first woman chaplain in Puerto Rico when she ministered in a hospital in Caguas. She served in parish and pastoral ministries in Ceiba and Loiza. She accompanies people in different ways as they seek her out for counseling and advice.

Reflecting on her years with the community, its spirit has had the most impact on her life. "I feel like living together gives passion – to our energy, stories, conversations—and life to our professed role. It allows the spirit to guide our journey and give it flight. "Walking together has transformed the people I serve and me. I am grateful to my IHM Sisters for accompanying me. They have made me who I am."