

Sharon (Mary Austin) Defever, IHM

"I depend on the Holy Spirit to allow the right words to come out."



I first heard the call when I was a little girl. I was impressed with the IHM Sisters who taught me. I spoke to my parents about joining the convent when I graduated high school; my parents insisted I first attend college. I attended Marygrove and my admiration for the IHMs deepened. I knew I wanted to join the community. My parents initially didn't like my decision, but I was 22.

My first experience in the classroom was student teaching. I taught third and fourth grades at St. Mary's in Monroe and St. Thomas in Ann Arbor. I had no idea what it was like to work with little ones, but I learned you must repeat and repeat and repeat. A teacher must keep discipline and be stern yet not mean. I know I had trouble being stern. I left Michigan for Mobile, Alabama, to

teach at Saint Monica School. I taught grade school for a long time. When the school closed, I took Clinical Pastoral Education courses at Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida and I was certified by the National Association of Catholic Chaplains in hospice care.

My second ministry was as a hospice chaplain. I visited patients, usually in their homes, listening to their needs and lending as much support as possible. Through the hospice ministry my patients touched my life and I touched their lives. I received a call one day from a former patient's wife. I was working with a young man who turned out to be the grandson of this former patient and his wife. The grandmother/wife called to thank me for all I had done for the family. I was surprised at the impact I had on this family. I found the family was a blessing for me and learned I was a blessing for the family.



After over 12 years as a hospice chaplain, I began a ministry at Providence Hospital in Mobile. I worked with sick babies and patients in the terminal care area, listening to their needs. I gathered with staff for prayer every morning before seeing patients.



I returned to the Motherhouse in 2014, eager to continue my ministry in pastoral care with the Motherhouse staff. I ministered primarily on the main health care floor with many long-term residents. I noticed a difference in the depth of experience with the residents and their families who came to help loved ones at mealtime. I spent many hours in the resident dining room helping residents who needed assistance eating and being supportive of their families.

My experiences since I joined the IHM congregation have far exceeded my expectations. When I joined, I thought I would probably stay around Detroit and teach in local schools. I never had any idea I would be working all over the country teaching and in hospice care.