

Today and Yesterday

Stories from the Archives

Sister Ignatia Frye: Pioneer in Computer Science

Sister Ignatia Frye led the way to the future for her students.

The 1960s had just begun when Sister Ignatia started studying the powerful potential of digital computers. By the late 1970s, she was a pioneer in the computer science department at Marygrove College.

“I think as we gain greater insight into the field of science, it gives us a greater understanding of what God is,” she told *The [Marquette] Mining Journal* for a newspaper story in 1983.

She was born Frances Cornelia Frye on May 11, 1912, in her great-grandmother’s house in Washington, D.C. Eventually moving to Michigan, she chose to attend Marygrove College in 1930. In her autobiography, Sister Ignatia said she wavered between majoring in English or chemistry. Her

English instructor recommended chemistry.

She entered the convent in Monroe on July 1, 1934, and was received on Jan. 2, 1935. She started teaching 10th grade English at the Academy, but soon was sent to St. Catherine’s, Detroit, to teach chemistry and English.

In the summer of 1938 she went to Catholic University in Washington, D.C., to work on a master’s degree and she taught math, chemistry or physics the next 12 years.

For Sister Ignatia, the 1950s were filled with work and study in the sciences. She received a Ford Foundation Fellowship to study chemistry at CUA, she had a research assistantship funded by the Air Force and she finished her Ph.D. in physical chemistry in 1955.

At 69, she moved to



Sister Ignatia Frye with students in the first computer lab at Marygrove.

Northern Michigan University in Marquette and spent four years there beloved by her data processing students. Glimpsing the future, she told *The Mining Journal* that, “Today, the smaller, more inexpensive computers are rapidly becoming a basic part of our daily lives.”

Her final ministry, and said to be her most cherished, was with the sick and dying. She returned to the Motherhouse in Monroe in 1989. She died on March 2, 1996.

In her Remembering, Eleanor Fitzgibbons reflected that Sister Ignatia felt that the glory of God, “comes from realizing your own capabilities as fully as possible – for the benefit of others.”





Mother Gertrude Gerretson

America and IHM: Melting pot

America is a country of immigrants.

The most recent breakdown of IHM sisters by country of birth shows many were foreign-born, including 99 from Canada, 43 from Ireland and 26 from Germany.

Other sisters came to the

United States from England, Mexico, Scotland, Puerto Rico, Belgium, Australia, Cuba, Malta and more.

This photo is Mother Gertrude Gerretson (an IHM from 1858-1916) who was born in Prussia.

We salute and defend the contributions all people.

Motherhouse Chronicles: March 13, 1934

“On March 13 Sister Flora celebrated her ninetieth birthday, Sister Raphael her eighty-ninth and Sister Patricia her seventy-sixth. This was such an unusual occurrence that Mother gave permission to have a little party for them at 5 p.m. in the sun-

parlor on the Second floor of the infirmary. Sisters Flora and Patricia were brought there in wheel chairs. They had a very delicious supper served on an individual tray. Several Sisters came to wish them many blessings on their natal day. Sister Flora asked that the community might

have recreation at supper to help with the celebration. This privilege was enjoyed by all.”

In 2017, the March 13 birthday is shared by Sisters James Marian Sarchet and Barbara O’Neill.



Sister Raphael Behan



Thank you, IHM Awakeners!

We remember all of the IHM Sisters who have unleashed the power of words and reading to young people. American writer Paula Fox said, “When you read to a child, when you put a book in a child’s hands,

you are bringing that child news of the infinitely varied nature of life. You are an awakener.”

(Photo: St. Augustine Grade School, Barberton, Ohio, circa 1951. Future IHM Sister Barbara Johns is at far left).

Meeting of the Minds on Prayer

We remember the indomitable spirit of IHMs Margaret Brennan, Mary McDevitt, Ann Chester and others that led them to meet with Catholic writer and thinker Thomas Merton in October, 1968, to explore an emerging concept called House of Prayer. They spent three days with him in California on the eve of his trip to Asia. They were among the last people to see him; he died



Thomas Merton during his visit with "the gang from Monroe," as he called them.

two months later in an accident in Bangkok.

One of the friends joining the IHM Sisters on that

journey to see Merton was Brother David Steindal-Rast, a Benedictine monk instrumental in the House of Prayer movement. Brother David celebrated his 90th birthday last July. He presides over a lovely Web site called

gratefulness.org and remains a seeker of truth, beauty, spirituality and joy.

Then, as now, the journey to engage God is both shared and solitary.

“When I remember my last visit with Thomas Merton I see him standing in the forest, listening to the rain.” — Brother David Steindal-Rast

Mystery photo: St. Mary's Academy, circa mid-1950s

This photo and inquiry were posted on the IHM Facebook page:

We know that many people enjoy a good mystery. Sometimes our mysteries arrive in the form of photos that have no identification information. Do you recognize the mid-1950s St. Mary Academy girls in this picture? How about the privilege of TV-watching at that time or which shows were favorites among the students?

Here are a few responses that were posted on Facebook:

Paula Johnson Torp: “I remember watching Fulton Sheen every week, sometimes the Ed Sullivan show.”

Maria Liparoto: “The only time that I remember ever watching anything on tv was when the tv was wheeled in the triple parlor and all upper classes watched the assassination of President Kennedy. It was a very sad sad time in our country.”



Pat DiVita: “I can't recall ever watching tv except for watching as the first astronaut was launched to orbit the Earth. We also got to watch the splash down. But recreation

hours were games, cards and crafts.”

Do you know more? Contact Deb Saul, ext. 321, or dsaul@ihmsisters.org

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Since 2000, all IHM sisters have been encouraged to submit individual chronicles to the IHM Archives. These records about your own life and ministry over the course of a year or more add breadth and depth to the documented history of the IHM Sisters. Your contribution will enrich the future record of the IHM, so please be sure your life's story is included in the community's story.



Remembering the planet we stand upon...



Planetary montage by NASA

Creativity, spirituality and exploration were the watchwords for the Summer Festival of Learning held during August, 1995, for hundreds of IHM Sisters at the Motherhouse. A flyer from the time explains the purpose was to look at how transformations “in the socio-economic-political-cultural context of our time call us to new ways of thinking about God, ourselves and others, the world we live in, and about God’s call to us now.”

One of the songs used during the festival was Monty Python’s “Galaxy Song.” Its lyrics still are a wise reminder of the fragile and

amazing home we share:

*“Just remember that you’re standing
on a planet that’s evolving,*

*And revolving at 900 miles an
hour;*

*That’s orbiting at 19 miles a sec-
ond, so its reckoned,*

*A sun that is the source of all our
power.*

*The sun and you and me, and all
the stars that we can see*

*Are moving at a million miles a
day...”*