

Remembering Marie Gatza, IHM
April 24, 1926 – Aug. 22, 2023

As Madonna Oswald worked on Marie's Remembering, she found a little piece of paper on which Marie had scribbled these words of Oscar Romero:

This is what we are about. We plant seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that will produce effects beyond our capacities.

About which Marie said: "I love this quote. I like to think that's what each of us has been doing over all these years, whether we fully understood it or not!" So today, reflecting on Marie's story, we look at her "planting of seeds" and her hopes of their "holding future promise."



Almost as if she had heard an invitation like "open your eyes and see how good it is to be awake," Marie Gatza was born at 2 o'clock on the morning of April 7, 1924. From this early start, she considered herself a "morning person" all through her life. Once up and alert, she looked forward to the possibilities open to her in the hours of the new day.

Marie's parents, Anthony Stanislaus Gatza and Margaret Ellen (McAlindon) Gatza, had grown up on nearby farms in the small town of Munger, located about 10 miles east of Bay City, Michigan. As a young adult, Anthony joined the U.S. Navy. Following his service in World War I, he and Margaret Ellen were married at St. Norbert Catholic Church in Munger on Jan. 3, 1923. After their marriage, they moved into a small bungalow on Stone Street in Flint, Michigan.

There, Marie, their first of 12 children, was born. On the Sunday after her birth, she was baptized in the Regent Theater across from St. Michael Catholic Church, which was under repair due to a fire that had recently damaged it. Later, she said she got ribbing from high school friends about her "theatrical baptism," saying she was headed to be a star!

In time, Marie was joined by seven brothers: Joseph (ordained to the Priesthood in 1951 for the Lansing Diocese); Raymond (a priest in the Precious Blood Order, 1953); James, Paul, John, Michael and Robert. She also had four sisters: Catherine (Sister Marie Raymond, IHM, entered in 1947), Margaret, Rita and Eileen.

"Our parents," Marie wrote, "provided an atmosphere in our home that encouraged each of us children to find and develop our own talents and to appreciate each other's gifts. My mother was competent in every aspect of homemaking: cooking, baking, making our clothing, upholstering furniture and serving as a nurse, counselor, electrician or plumber, as needed. Above all, she loved each of us individually to the point that we each claimed to be her "favorite."

About her dad, Marie said, "He was a hard-working and loving father who was employed at Buick Motor Company, Flint, for many years. During the Depression, he transferred to the U.S. Postal Service so that his pay, though lower, would be more consistent and reliable for serving the needs of our growing family."

Marie's earliest schooling began at St. Michael's Catholic School in Flint. All of her brothers and sisters joined her there as they came of school age. Thoughts of what her future might be like moved in and out of Marie's mind through her high school days, but not seriously. She had friends; and school and family activities brought fun and good times to be spent together. Books opened her mind to all kinds of people and cultures. She loved music and especially enjoyed occasions when she played her violin in the school orchestra.

She left home on Friday, June 21, 1940, to enter the IHM Congregation. Though considered young to have made this choice, she had her parents' approval and her teachers' encouragement. She finished her senior year of high school at St. Mary Academy. On her Reception Day into the IHM Congregation, she received the name Sister Marie Anthony and was finally professed in August 1946.

Once she obtained her bachelor's degree at Marygrove College, her continuing education included coursework at St. John College, Cleveland; Alverno College and Marquette University, Milwaukee; and Catholic University, Washington, D.C. She earned a master's degree at the University of Detroit. Marie once remarked, "Being able to study at various universities was a very broadening learning experience."

Marie taught at St. Mary Parish School, Monroe and St. Mary's, Marshall. She taught young RIM students on the Monroe Campus of Marygrove College for a short time. After five years teaching at St. Francis de Sales High School, Detroit, she was assigned principal and superior at St. John's Grade and High Schools, Benton Harbor. She vividly recalls her appointment to Benton Harbor. Marie and other sisters were shelling peas in the kitchen (remember those days?) when she was told that Mother General wanted to see her in the office. For what, she had no idea. Mother Anna told her that she was to be in charge as principal and superior at St. John's, but "Do not speak of this," she said, "until I make some announcements in Lilac Court Sunday."

Two other ministries beyond formal education claimed a number of years in

Marie's professional life. One came about as a result of the 1966 Chapter, when she was elected to serve on the General Council of the IHM Congregation, along with Sisters Margaret Brennan, Robertine Romaine, Jacqueline Rumley, Anne Marie Hughes and Jane Johnson. The Second Vatican Council was ending in Rome. Marie recalled that on the very next day after their election, reality hit! The new council members were very aware of their call to lead members in a spiritual renewal according to the guidelines given by Vatican II. Marie remembered how, right from the beginning, they agreed to work together to carry out their task faithfully and joyfully. In that spirit, they looked at many proposals which the community had raised during the 1966 Chapter, such as change of habit; Apostolate; Sister Formation; and IHM governance.

As a General Council member for six years, and vice president under Margaret's presidency (1972-1976), Marie's responsibilities were quite varied. She served as coordinator of the IHM Formation Team. I am sure some of you have memories of her relating to you and your classmates during those years; she served as the contact person for the IHM Sisters who administered the Motherhouse and Infirmary; and assisted several sisters transferring into IHM from their former religious community.

As a trustee and Secretary of the Marygrove College board of trustees (1966-1976), Marie witnessed the first installation of a lay person as President and the college becoming a coed institution. Many difficult decisions occurred during this time and are well-documented in the IHM Archives. One such decision was the loss of the sisters' residency at Marygrove Convent once their college ministries were completed. Marie's leadership position and her abilities to work well with people, setting goals, and organizational view led openness to new ways of getting things done.

A second long-held ministry began when Marie and Madonna moved into an apartment in Southfield after their years of administrative service. Marie believed she was called to minister to those in physical and emotional pain. She entered a yearlong Clinical Pastoral Education Program (CPE) to prepare herself for hospital chaplaincy. Hired by the Daughters of Charity, she remained in pastoral care at Providence Hospital, Southfield, for 15 very productive and happy "Camelot" years, first as a chaplain, then finishing as Pastoral Care director. Marie wrote:

My co-workers, a team of women religious, Catholic priests, Protestant ministers, lay volunteers and I, formed a delightful community. We shared our ministry of care and presence with patients, their families and hospital staff. Available round the clock, seven days a week, we worked hard. But we also celebrated special events together, including times away from the hospital where we engaged in prayer, ritual, planning and fun. I found this ministry very life-bringing and fulfilling.

Toward the end of her years at Providence, Marie was asked by her supervisor, Sister Dinah White, D.C., to oversee the renovation of the hospital chapel to update it to the specifications of Vatican II --quite an invitation for someone who had no previous experience with this! Marie started by finding a pastor who was building a new church and in need of pews. With her negotiated sale of pews, 100 new chairs were purchased. Hospital carpenters fashioned a new Altar and Ambo and replaced the confessional with a new reconciliation and counseling room at the chapel's entrance. "Teamwork," Marie exclaimed, as all who had been part of the transformation stood together admiring the finished task, "... is a very satisfying way to get things done!"

When Marie was appointed to the Motherhouse Administrative Team (1994), she promptly organized a pastoral care department to serve the Motherhouse and Health Care Center residents. However, when serious illness struck several of her siblings within a short period of time, Marie resigned her position to offer care to each loved one. She and her family grieved the loss of brothers Paul, James, Raymond and sisters Margaret and Catherine within a four-year period. This quality stems from Marie's view of self as a "morning person" or one who prefers to "get things done" rather than "put things off."

Madonna also remembers Marie's participation at the Gatza family bowling tournaments held each Christmastime for years as days that brought her whole family together for competition, fun and sharing stories. In the 1980s, an unforgettable Mediterranean Cruise took both friends to Greece, Turkey and the Holy Land. Marie's journal of this trip gave us much enjoyment and relived events of the wonderful experience of cultures, peoples and places.

Many of Marie's co-workers in ministry have expressed appreciation through letters in her file commending her work as Secretary of the Marygrove board of trustees for her presentations at formation conferences, Providence Hospital and Michigan Catholic Health Association. At one point, she was honored by Providence Hospital employees who chose her to receive the "Very Special Person Award." Throughout the years, Marie enjoyed hearing from co-workers and former students through notes, phone calls and class reunions. One reunion was colorfully recorded on the front page of the *Monroe Evening News* in Jan. 2009.

So, it looks as if Marie's planting of seeds may have taken root and hopefully borne fruit in many places during the whole of her lifetime. Her last years as a Motherhouse resident have provided her with time for reading, reflection, contemplative sharing and enjoyment of friends and family.

In reflecting on her long life, Marie spoke of it as "a river flowing." Marie had a particular liking for Rilke's words in one of his poems:

May what I do flow from me like a river,
no forcing and no holding back — the way it is with children.

Then, in these swelling and ebbing currents, these deepening tides moving
out, returning, I will sing You as no one ever has,
streaming through widening channels into the open sea.

Flow into God, dearest Marie. Flow on!

Written by Madonna Oswald, IHM in 2015 and 2016. Adapted with Judith Bonini,
IHM, liturgical celebration.

Delivered by Judith Bonini, IHM, Aug. 29, 2023