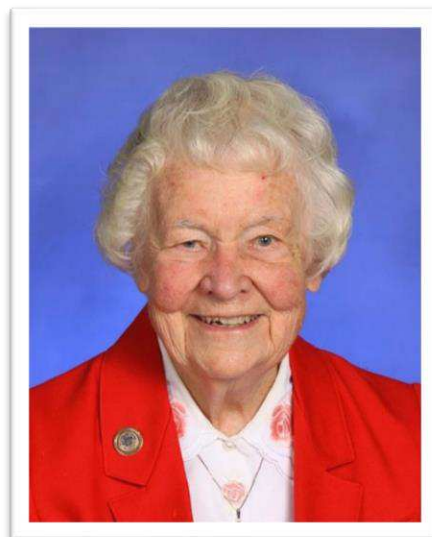


## Remembering Beth Wood, IHM

Nov. 17, 1928-Oct. 24, 2023

On her Golden Jubilee, Beth Wood was the librarian at Casa Maria, the Library at Pontifical North American College for American seminarians studying in Rome. Following glowing after-dinner remarks, Beth climbed high up to the towering pulpit to respond. From there, she spoke:

No one gave me permission to be up here to do this. But this is a historic moment for me, so I thought I would take advantage of it! I am probably breaking Canon Law #1549, but I thought if “L’Osservatore Romano” was looking for a headline, I could provide it: “Sister takes to Pulpit at the Casa Santa Maria.” I wish to reply to the beautiful remarks just made and because I am shy... timid... and a woman of few words, I will begin.



With a flourish, Beth unfolded a roll of taped papers stretching over the pulpit toward the floor. Being in her sixth year at the Casa, everyone knew Beth could easily provide many pages of reflection and much detail to any narrative she would offer. With a pause, however, Beth took herself down to ground level to deliver a brief, thoughtful reflection to her many friends.

One look at her “IHM Book of Life” page from a few years ago makes visible the scope and variety of her busy life. Along the way, she has told us many of her stories. Probably, you have heard quite a few of them. They reveal a remarkable and generous life, summed up by drawing from the words of Saint Pope John Paul II as “gift and mystery.”

Born Nov. 17, 1928, she was the only daughter of William and Hilda LaChance Wood in a family of five children: two older brothers, Glynn and William “Bill,” and two younger brothers, Patrick and John “Jack.” Her brother Glynn died at an early age, as Fr. Solanus Casey had predicted when they brought Glynn to the monastery for blessing. Her parents had moved from Canada to Detroit to raise their growing family.

Beth attended St. Brigid Catholic School and two public schools in her early years. When it was time for high school, Beth registered at Immaculata High School in Detroit. The year’s enrollment was filled to capacity, and her acceptance and entry seemed by chance. Beth attributed it to the Holy Spirit, to whom she was staunchly devoted.

As she has told many of us, her mother advised her to go on the first day of school despite being informed that Immaculata had to put her on a waiting list. The registrar, Sister Thomas Aquinas Walmsley, invited her to look around the school as the students settled in. As Beth explored, roaming up and down the halls, the registrar called her as

she passed by, "Are you the girl whose name is Wood?" "Yes. I am." A parent had called to say they were moving, and their daughter would not be attending Immaculata, and her name began with W. "You can guess the rest," Beth said. That was Beth's first meeting of the IHMs.

She grew to love the sisters and confided in Sister Maria Froehle when she relayed, "I think I want to be a sister." Maria never pressured her. Beth went to Monroe with friends to witness the reception of Sisters Ann Gabriel Kilsdonk and Sister Margaret Brennan. While attending, she quite casually had an interview with Mother Theresa McGivney. She returned to Monroe later when her friends Sister Maria Virgo Schemanske and Sister Christelle Reiha were measured for their postulant clothing. At the last moment, she, too, got measured. So much seemed to happen to her with an element of surprise.

When she came home and reported the day's events, her mother asked, "And did you get measured, too?" When Beth said yes, the look on her mother's face betrayed her inner resistance. Beth had not realized that parting with an only daughter would be so painful for her mother. Still, it was her mother who pressured her to be ready for the July 2 entry day. Even at that, she was hardly ready. Beth managed to get the required physical and pack a required blanket. She had misplaced the list of needed items. She got some black oxfords, and her father got a dozen black hose [hosiery] for her.

On July 2, 1946, the last day for entering the postulate that year, late in the evening, around 10 p.m., the family arrived, bringing Beth. They went to the wrong building, the Academy. A sister on the second floor called, "What do you want?"

"I want to be a sister."

"I'll call over to the other building. The sister will meet you at the door."

They wandered a bit on the campus. Finally, as they passed the West Door, a sister came out wearing her bathrobe and veil and carrying a flashlight. It was Sister Jamesetta Rhoads who said, "Welcome! Come on in."

Beth proclaimed, "I think I am in the Guinness Book of Convent Records as LATEST ARRIVAL."

Sister Jamesetta was very kind to Beth's mother, who was crying all the while. Beth always recalled that when her mother visited, she would not come into the building. She learned that her mother cried until Christmas. Still, she would bring treats and materials for the gift shop. Beth heard that her mother did thank God for a daughter to give back to God.

On Nov. 16, 1946, the eve of Beth's birthday, her parents came to take her home. Mother Theresa met with them and persuaded her mother to leave Beth here until Mrs. Wood had made a rosary novena. After that, her mother never dissuaded Beth in pursuit of becoming an IHM. Beth attributed overcoming all the obstacles to her entry to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Baptized “Betty Jane,” she chose Beth instead of Maria Alma, the name given at her reception in 1947. She noted, “Father Cairns called me Sister Woods once and I told him I was singular. He told me if I was singular I would never last in the community! I am singular and I am lasting (thank God) so no, it’s just plain Wood!”

She began her mission life on the very night of her first vows, Jan. 2, 1949. She went to St. Boniface in Detroit. Arriving at about 8:20 p.m., she was given a sandwich and her books to teach Grade 5 to replace a sister for two weeks. Actually, she completed the school year and was re-assigned to St. Boniface in the fall. Thus began her lengthy and varied ministries.

When she left St. Boniface in 1950, she spent the next decade as an elementary teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes in River Rouge, Mother of Our Savior in Detroit and St. Joseph School, Trenton. For the next six years, she taught at Immaculate Heart of Mary Elementary School in Minnetonka, Minnesota. Returning from Minnesota in 1961, Beth spent two memorable years at St. Raymond’s, Detroit., and another year at St. Martin’s, Detroit. Finally, while at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Emmett, Beth concluded her studies in library science and assumed principalship at Emmett for the last three years.

In the next two decades, Beth put her librarian studies to work at Lake Michigan Catholic High School (St. Joseph, Michigan) and St. Mary Academy, Monroe. Encouraged by Sister Claudia Carlen, Beth served as librarian from 1991 to 2001 at Casa Santa Maria, the Graduate House of Studies for American Priests, an institution built in 1603. She called the experience “pure gift.” In high school, she had read The House on Humility Street. In Rome, Beth herself lived in this historic house for 10 years appreciating, “a new culture, a new country, a new people.”

With retirement in 2008, Beth returned to Michigan and quickly applied and found a library ministry at the library of the University of Michigan, Dearborn. In typical fashion, she saw this as “a gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Over the decades, Beth explored multiple interests and connections. Along the way, she made many friends, including her profession classmate Sister Marie Kathleen, as well as Sisters Virgine and Christelle (Beth Reiha). Perhaps she was best known as a marathon runner. Over the decades, she completed over 25 full (26.1 miles) and half marathons. Some marathons led runners across Michigan from east to west; others ran from Detroit to Canada and back. As fewer people were running in her age category, news scouts took an interest in Sister Beth’s persistence and fitness. Local outlets featured Beth at the Susan B. Komen yearly run. She prepared with daily runs in cold, rain, snow – whatever the weather.

Her frequent foot travel put her in another ministry of building relationships with many in the area. Beth saw everyone she met as she walked or ran as a friend to be discovered. She would stop and chat with anyone. Soon, she was praying for the new friend’s needs right there on the street or in a hospital waiting room or crossing the Monroe bridge or after Mass in a nearby parish on First Saturday or during a marathon run itself. She had a regular ministry of friendship. In these latter years, we remonstrated with her going out

to run on dark, snowy winter mornings. We heaved a sigh of relief when we saw her all bundled up, visiting the second-floor chapel on her return.

And now Beth has run her many courses. We are confident that she enjoys the final victory in the loving embrace of the Holy Spirit. There she has many family members and friends from past years to chat with and greet.

We pray for you, Beth, as you do for us. We hear you exclaim, “Little old me... an IHM sister – Gift and Mystery – who can really fathom the meaning!”

***Written by Joan Glisky, IHM (Oct. 2019)***

***Delivered by Anne Marie Murphy, IHM, Oct. 27, 2023***