

*“Sometimes you just have to do something and don’t understand why. But if you don’t do it, you won’t grow. The decision to do it is the most important thing.”*

Sister Gail Addis grew up in Mount Clemens, taught by IHM Sisters. The idea of becoming a sister had been in her thoughts since grade school, and during her junior year in high school, a visit to the Motherhouse and a conversation with Mother Anna Marie Grix aided her decision.

“I told Mother Anna Marie I’d come to try it. She told me, ‘Don’t come to try it; come thinking you’re going to stay.’” She entered the community right after graduation and realized she was in the right place, enjoying what the community taught her and the companionship.

Sister Gail taught second grade at St. Columban in Birmingham, Michigan. The school closed after her first year, but she stayed to work at the parish and teach religious education. During a year of renewal before making final vows, she provided pastoral care at the Department of Social Services in Coldwater, Michigan, on the women’s long-term ward at Ypsilanti State Mental Hospital and at a physical rehabilitation hospital in Detroit. She also took courses in clinical pastoral education.

Afterward, Sister Gail went to Oklahoma and ministered in religious education and provided catechist training for four parishes. She moved to another parish in Oklahoma as a pastoral associate and director of religious education and youth ministry and then to a larger suburban parish where she organized small faith communities. This was followed by a ministry in pastoral and religious education at a parish in Oklahoma City, where she started an HIV/AIDS ministry.

She began a Meals on Wheels program for people with HIV/AIDS and gave talks about HIV/AIDS to various groups. After 10 years, Sister Gail went to work at Catholic Charities in Oklahoma City to expand the AIDS ministry while continuing the Meals on Wheels program and HIV/AIDS presentations. She also started a residence for those with HIV/AIDS. It fascinated her that “there were so few Catholics [in the area] and so few sisters. There were all kinds of new opportunities. You had the opportunity to do things you’ve never done before. You had to step up to the plate.

“I learned and grew a lot. The AIDS ministry was my passion and one of the biggest gifts of my life. It was a joy even in the middle of all the dying because the people were so great.”

Sister Gail also started a ministry offering retreats for ecumenical groups of women, an opportunity to pull women of diverse interests and backgrounds together for spiritual enrichment.

In 2003, she returned to Michigan to be closer to her elderly mother. She is now the pastoral administrator for St. Joseph Parish in Bay City, where she does everything but performs the sacraments.

Sister Gail says, "I am grateful for all the opportunities I have had being a member of the congregation."