

“The origin is scripture ... the starting point, and you follow where that leads you.”

IHM sisters taught Sister Judith Coyle from elementary school through high school in Flint, Michigan. Her family knew the IHM sisters well, and having had a strong sense of vocation since she was 12, she joined the community after high school.

Sister Judy says her vocation arose from the tragic death of her older cousin. She realized she “needed to be about something that was ultimate. The kind of ultimacy of religious life brought me here.” She was drawn to the lifestyle and wanted to give her life to God.

She was very happy during her formation. The religious instructions, as well as the music, made these years very enjoyable. Sister Judy says the music “made coming to religious life very full and beautiful in many ways. And the prayer, of course, is part of that.” She fondly recalls the beautifully arranged music sung by more than 100 young voices directed by Sister Alphonsus Mary. After Vatican II, the sisters sang beautifully as they “threw over the organ and picked up the guitar.”

Sister Judy began her ministries at St. Charles in Newport, Michigan, where she taught seventh and eighth grades. From there, she taught grades four and five at St. Joseph in Monroe; after the school closed, she stayed to serve in parish ministry. She then went to St. Charles, Coldwater, Michigan, serving in parish ministry before becoming the liturgist at St. Martin de Porres Parish in Warren, Michigan. During the summers, she completed her master’s degree in liturgy from Notre Dame University.

When she was asked to serve in South Africa by Sister Mary Jo Maher, Sister Judy had no desire to go, but after attending a retreat, she had a conversion, what she describes as “a call within a call.”

After two years of preparation, she went to South Africa, where she ministered at St. Joseph Parish in Howick and collaborated with the Redemptorists in the formation of their priests. For 19 years, she taught seminarians at St. Joseph Theological Institute. During that time, Sister Judy earned her doctorate in spirituality at the University of South Africa, where she taught before serving at the newly established St. Augustine College in Johannesburg, her ministry for nine years. Currently, Sister Judy is the acting head of the Theology Department. Along with her administrative duties and teaching responsibilities, she is helping to reestablish the undergraduate programs cut in 2009.

Sister Judy feels very fortunate to have always lived in the community. She enjoys praying with other sisters every morning, enjoys their company and is grateful for their support. She never imagined that she would be living in South Africa.

“It is only because of the community and the vision of women who called us to something we never could have imagined on our own.”