

Sister Mary (Marie Thoma) Downey was introduced to the IHM Sisters in first grade at St. Martin in Detroit. During her sophomore year in high school, they suggested she consider a religious life.

She began to think seriously about it when she was a junior in high school. Her parents were very supportive of her decision, but her father's unexpected death later that school year had a powerful impact on her life.

"I was angry at God and said, 'forget it. I'm not joining,'" Sister Mary recalls. She felt that way for quite a while, but after expressing her anger to some very kind sisters and getting encouragement from her mother, she joined the IHM community.

Sister Mary credits the guidance and wisdom of Sister Margaret (Benedicta) Brennan with helping her get through some challenging times during novitiate. When she became frustrated and wanted to leave, Sister Margaret calmly directed her to pray, and together they rectified the situation.

Sister Mary did her student teaching in the third and fourth grades at Holy Redeemer in Detroit. After graduation, she taught second grade at Holy Trinity (Detroit) and took classes in speech and communication in the master's program at Wayne State University.

She went on to teach junior high at St. Vincent de Paul (Detroit) and then ministered as the religious education director at St. Blase (Sterling Heights). She served at St. Mary in Royal Oak, where she was religious education director for nine years and then pastoral associate for another six. Sister Mary also ministered as the pastoral associate at St. Albert the Great in Dearborn Heights for three years. At that point, she wanted to concentrate on one area of ministry. She attended Madonna University and took classes in gerontology and then took a sabbatical while caring for a very close friend. After four months, Sister Mary took a job at the Henry Ford Retirement Community in Dearborn, where she's ministered for the last 15 years.

She has learned so much from the people's struggles and with whom she ministers. "I think it lets me look into my future in a way," she observes. "They give me an example; I learn from their wisdom." She feels it has been a privilege to have had so many people share their lives with her and trust her.

When Sister Mary reflects on the IHM community, she says, "We don't know what the future of the community is, but we feel it is something we can live into together." The community has allowed her to find her "personal relationship with God and how that relationship with God is lived out in our relationships with others. [The community] has always wanted us to consider our talents and how to use them where we felt we could make a difference."