

**Remembering Anne Marie Hughes, IHM**  
**Sept. 12, 1925 – Oct. 21, 2013**



On her IHM Book of Life page, Anne Marie wrote: “How blessed I am to have been born into a loving, faith-filled, happy family – the last of twelve children, ten of whom grew to adulthood! These, with my Mother and Father, were my first teachers as I began my Catholic education in my own home, and continued it through graduation from St. Charles Borromeo Parish School in Detroit, Michigan, and then on to Marygrove College for one year.”

For having been the youngest of such a big family, Anne Marie wasn’t the least bit “spoiled.” She reflected in her personality the “loving, faith-filled, happy family” in which she grew up. What a wonderful mother and father she had! Joseph Hughes married Catherine Downs in 1902, and they had 12 children – six boys and six girls. Little Catherine died at age 2, and Bernard died shortly after birth.

Joseph Hughes, Anne Marie’s father, was born in Detroit. Although he did not have much formal education, he started his own very successful construction company as a young man, building many important buildings in the City of Detroit. All five of Anne Marie’s brothers – Bill, Joe, Jack, Bob and Tom worked with their father in his company.

Catherine Downs Hughes, Anne Marie’s mother, was born in Port Lambton, Ontario. With so many relatives there, it is not surprising that Anne Marie’s parents had a summer home in Port Lambton where their large family spent every summer having fun on the banks of the St. Clair River.

But the Hughes family knew how to live through difficult times, too. As Anne Marie wrote, “Living through the race riots in Detroit in the early 1940s, and also World War II as a teenager, awakened me abruptly to the larger world and its many problems surrounding us, both in the United States and throughout the world. Rationing and the drafting of family members and friends into military service brought the reality of sacrifice and suffering very close to home. Trying to cope and trying to learn a different life than I had been used to were both maturing and challenging experiences for me and for so many others living during those years. We entered into the peace efforts and did our best to alleviate some of the suffering, and bring some hope and happiness into our homes and neighborhoods (Book of Life).”

By the time Anne Marie graduated from St. Charles High School in 1944, she, her brother Bill, and her oldest sister Mildred, a teacher in the Detroit Public Schools, were the only children still living at home. Her sister Mary and her brother Jack had married in 1939. Her sisters, Carolyn (Sister Rita Marie) had joined the IHM Sisters in 1929 and Helen (Sister Mary Faith) in 1940. Her brothers Joe, Bob and Tom were overseas fighting in World War II.

During her high school years in the early 1940s, Anne Marie “struggled to know and answer God’s call to religious life.” When, as a senior, she told her parents that she wanted to join the Maryknoll Sisters, her father asked her to go to Marygrove College – at least for a year. As she wrote: “My father could not give me permission to enter after graduation [in 1944] as I had 3 brothers in the War, 2 sisters in

the convent, and 2 others married so he felt the house would be too empty; and I, being the youngest, brought friends and life into our home (Oct. 18, 1997).”

By the end of her freshman year at Marygrove, Anne Marie had decided to enter the IHM congregation, joining her two sisters, her aunt, Sister Mildred Hughes, and her cousins, Sister Ann Margaret Hughes and Sister Mary Solanus Ufford. In July 1945, she became one of the IHM Centennial Year postulants.

While still a novice, Anne Marie’s desire to be a missionary (that is, to serve the poor) was fulfilled when she was sent to St. Joseph’s School in Monroe and, after profession in 1948, to Holy Trinity in Detroit. Of those years she wrote: “Father Vanadia [at St. Joseph’s] and Father Clement Kern and Sister Josine [at Holy Trinity] were excellent mentors, and their words of wisdom have remained with me throughout my life, wherever I have been (Book of Life).”

Anne Marie endeared herself to her students at St. Joseph’s, (Monroe); Holy Trinity, St. Patrick, Gesu, Immaculata High School (Detroit); and St. Bede in Southfield where she was principal and superior. Anne Marie loved each one, treated each with so much respect and fairness, and showed a genuine interest in whatever was going on in their lives. Many of her students kept in touch with Anne Marie – through 30, 40 and 50 years. I wish there were time to recount some of their stories.

In 1966, at age 41, Anne Marie was elected to the Leadership Council of the congregation. This was the leadership team headed by Margaret Brennan which implemented the Second Vatican Council’s call for the renewal of religious life. Anne Marie’s areas of responsibility included the Infirmary, IHM elementary schools and the overseas mission. In 1969, when Margaret Brennan accepted the invitation of the Bannabikira Sisters of Uganda to send IHMs to teach their young Sisters, Anne Marie accompanied Margaret Brennan to Uganda and was the council member responsible for our first African mission.

At the completion of her six-year term in 1972, Anne Marie was finally able to fulfill her desire to be an overseas missionary. She went to Puerto Rico that summer. During that year, IHM missionaries from Puerto Rico, Brazil and Grenada made the decision to open a new mission among the poor in Honduras. Honduras was the second poorest country in Central America – second only to Haiti, the poorest. Anne Marie was one of the three IHMs who, in 1973, to the delight of the bishop of the Diocese of Olancho, accepted the invitation of a Spanish priest to join him in the parish of San Francisco de la Paz.

The parish included three small towns and 60 villages. Most could be reached by Jeep; others only by riding a mule. The chronicles describe life for the missionaries: “The kitchen [in our adobe house] has a dirt floor, the shower is outside and the bathroom is an outhouse....Lunch today was milk-toast with sugar. Supper was a package of soup and yucca added...”

Those were dangerous years in Honduras. The bishop, Nicholas D’Antonio, was completely committed to the poor and spoke out for their rights. That was a great threat to the wealthy land-owners. In 1975, when the hungry peasants of the Olancho province began a non-violent march to Tegucigalpa, the capital, they were stopped by the Honduran Army. This attempt by the hungry peasants to protest the lack of food led to what became known as the “Olancho Massacre.”

Two Catholic priests, two women visitors and 10 peasants were murdered by armed men employed by the land-owners. Not only was the bishop’s life in danger, but that of all the Catholic missionaries in

the Olancho Diocese. All were forced to leave. Some were taken into custody by the Army, some escaped by car. Anne Marie and Valerie Knoche, the two IHM missionaries there at the time, were placed under house arrest in a convent in the capital. When, after four months, the missionaries were permitted to return to Olancho, many decided to go elsewhere. The bishop was never able to return because there was “a price on his head.” Not only did Anne Marie and Val return to San Francisco de la Paz, but two more IHMs joined the Honduras mission that summer.

Anne Marie continued to serve in the IHM missions for the next 20 years. Six of those years (1976-1982) she was provincial of the IHM Overseas Missions. Soon after being elected, in order to give greater recognition to the IHM Overseas Missions as a special governmental unit in the congregation, Anne Marie decided to locate the IHM Mission Center in New York City. There, she was close to Maryknoll in Ossining, N.Y. During those six years, she became a founding member of the United States Catholic Mission Association. After completing her six years as provincial of the overseas missions, Anne Marie returned to Honduras to live and work with IHM Sisters in very poor and isolated villages.

Upon her return to the United States in 1995, Anne Marie again served the poor. At Holy Redeemer, Detroit, she did pastoral work and Christian service, especially among Spanish-speaking people. She never wavered in fidelity to her call to serve the poor and abandoned and to do so with so much delight and enthusiasm.

By the time she retired to the Motherhouse in 2003, Anne Marie was beginning to suffer from short-term memory loss. She set a powerful example for all of us when, not long after, she herself decided that she should move to the Memory Care Unit of the Health Care Center. This was a very painful time for her – and for those of us who were her close friends.

During the next few years, Anne Marie’s physical health gradually diminished and her ability to communicate verbally became increasingly poor and ineffective. She moved to the Skilled Care area of the Health Care Center to benefit from the compassionate care of the HCC personnel, her family and her friends who faithfully visited her.

Then, early on a brisk October morning, her long period of waiting ended. Anne Marie’s spirit took its joyful flight into new and eternal life, giving the beauty of her earthly life back to the Source of All Life and Beauty.

May we hold her in our love and prayer!

Written by Mary Jo Maher, IHM

Delivered by Marie Gatzka, IHM, on Oct. 23, 2013