



Remembering Sister Brigid Mullane, IHM

April 29, 1920 – Oct. 23, 2008

Margaret Mary Mullane, known to us as Brigid, was born in Detroit, April 29, 1920. Her parents were William Anthony Mullane, a native of Detroit, and her mother Margaret Ellen Mulroy, a native of Bay City, Mich. This union was blessed by seven children, five boys and two girls. The boys were named William, Francis, Joseph, Dennis and Thomas. The girls were Margaret Mary and Kathleen.

Margaret Mary chose her maternal grandmother's name, Brigid, at the time of her Reception into the IHM congregation Jan. 2, 1939. Brigid said that her vocation to religious life stemmed from the devotion of both her parents who were delighted to have a daughter become a nun. She made her first vows in January 1941 and her final vows three years later in January 1944.

Though I have been told that Brigid had many stories to tell about her early years, she was reticent about writing down these stories. She was educated at Holy Redeemer School by IHMs. In her earliest years she lived in close proximity to Holy Redeemer Church. She exemplified the loyalty to parish, school and teachers that characterizes all Redeemerites.

During her early years of teaching, she worked toward completing a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and a master's from the University of Detroit. She loved to travel and enriched her life experiences by attending two Elderhostel programs, one in California and one in Montreal, with Ann Corr as her companion. Later she enjoyed a trip to Ireland with Carolyn Kerwin. For a number of years, she frequently visited her cousin Mary in Coral Gables, Fla. She prized her Irish heritage and often reminded us of that when she wore a green outfit to celebrate.

Brigid began her teaching career at St. John's School in Monroe in 1940, where she taught in the lower elementary grades. The next three years she spent at St. Francis de Sales School in Detroit. In 1944 she was assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes School in River Rouge. It was at Our Lady of Lourdes that she experienced two traumatic events. On Feb. 11, 1946, a passerby noted smoke coming out from one of the grade school windows. It turned into a three-alarm fire which took two hours to extinguish. So serious was the damage that only four rooms in the grade school could be used for the rest of the year. The city of River Rouge came to the rescue and offered space at the Ferguson Public School next to the City Hall until Our Lady of Lourdes Grade School was habitable. It would seem that Brigid was not among those required to transfer her classroom to Ferguson.

Five months later another disaster hit, one which affected Sister Brigid greatly. A tornado struck and in two minutes caused devastation to the church, rectory and convent. In this event Sister Brigid suffered a narrow escape. As she stood on the porch of the convent, the

porch collapsed, and the roof toppled down over her head. As she struggled to get back into the convent through a door that had lost its glass from the gusts of the wind, the wind blew off her veil and bonnet. It took quite a while for her to recover from this traumatic experience.

From 1946 to 1961, most of Sister Brigid's assignments kept her in Michigan, except for a one-year stint in 1952-53 at St. Peter Claver School in Mobile, Ala. Sister Brigid spent 1955-58 in Coldwater where she continued to teach in the elementary grades. Sister Alys Currier remembers Sister Brigid as being easy to live with because of her free spirit and her happy disposition. During these years they would enjoy long walks together. Sister Brigid had charge of the kitchen and would frequently, on Friday afternoon, put eggs on the stove to boil and forget them. Sister Alys recalls that one Friday afternoon there was a grand explosion of eggs, leaving the ceiling and walls generously spattered with the residue.

From Coldwater Sister Brigid went to St. Martin's School in Detroit where she continued teaching in the elementary grades before she was assigned to teach high school math, her predominant area of teaching in the secondary school and beyond.

It was during her next assignment to Our Lady Star of the Sea that she began to show her concern for the disadvantaged and poor. Realizing that her students were all well off, she felt that it was important that they know that others were not as well off as they. Sister Rita McFarland recalls that Sister Brigid started a club called the M and M Club, the Mission and Ministry Club. During club meetings she would teach the students about the poor and disadvantaged and how important it was to share. Guest speakers, films and field trips to the inner city reinforced the lessons that she wanted them to learn. So contagious was her enthusiasm that membership in the club grew by leaps and bounds.

From 1967-1982 she taught math in various settings. In 1975 she began teaching math at Wayne County Community College and continued there off and on until 1994. About this time, she was able to articulate her deep concern for the education of the poor. On one of her commitment forms she responded to the question, "How is your ministry a promotion of the Good News?" She wrote, "In enabling an underprivileged person to realize their God-given potential, the love of God is brought home to them and hopefully the Good News is personally experienced." At the end of the form she noted: "I am sorry that I am late. I mislaid this form." During vacation periods or when her teaching schedule was light, she would work at Hudson's to supplement her income and to help the less fortunate. For two years during this period, when she needed to return home because of illness, she taught at the Human Potential Center at St. Mary Center in Monroe.

As noted above, Sister Brigid recognized her difficulty in doing things on time. Sister Mary Ann Untener tells the story of one Sunday, when her brother, Bishop Ken Untener, was the presider for the Liturgy, the Liturgy had just begun when the congregation was aware of a clickety-clack of heels coming down the main aisle. The clickety-clack ended when the late-comer found a seat. It was Sister Brigid wearing high heels and a hat. At the end of the Liturgy, Bishop Ken announced that he would like to meet in the sacristy anyone who had arrived late

for Mass. Brigid, responding to his invitation, proceeded clickety-clack down the aisle to the sacristy.

During her last years at the Motherhouse, Sister Brigid continued to show her abilities in many ways. Her partners in the game of bridge referred to her as a card shark.

Sister Marge Fogerty remembers with fondness how Sister Brigid loved to help her bake cookies when they were getting ready for an open house in the Memory Care Unit. Typical of Sister Brigid, she did not want to be the one in charge. She loved to help and to wash the dishes when the event was over. Sister Brigid had a phenomenal memory. In her early days she could name every relative, his/her birthday, and remember each one with a birthday card. She never lost this gift. Her caregivers in Memory Care said that she knew the name of every nurse or aide.

Dear Sister Brigid, we will miss your sun-shiny smile, your warmth and your free spirit. May you share these gifts with your relatives, friends and former students who are now enjoying with you the blessings of paradise.

Sister Marie André Walsh, IHM

Oct. 28, 2008

Delivered by Sister Brigid's nephew, Jim:

Thank you for coming today as we celebrate the life of our beloved Sister Brigid. The thing that stands out most about Sister Brigid is her great trust in the Lord. We also remember that she was Irish and a teacher for 50 years.

Her trust in the Lord is probably most responsible for the 88 years she had here with us. Like the willow tree that bends with the wind, it outlasts the mighty oak tree that tries to stand up to the wind and breaks down.

No matter what the problem, Sister Brigid rolled with the punches and trusted in the Lord.

There were tremendous changes in the order during the past 70 years. I remember when she came to visit her parents in the mid-1950s. She had to be escorted by another nun and they had to stand out on the public sidewalk. Her parents had to walk out to them to visit.

Of course, the habits disappeared, and life ceased to be governed by wake up bells, eating time bells, prayer bells, and lights out bells.

When the sisters were allowed to drive, Sr. Brigid took driving lessons. Her brother, Dennis Mullane, bought her a car and she began setting IHM records for fender benders.

But she trusted in the Lord-and her cousin Ed Murphy, who could fix anything-from the crack of dawn to a broken heart. The Lord and Ed Murphy kept her on the road.

On a trip to Grosse Isle to stay overnight with her cousin Loli, Brigid lost her car keys. She called the convent and extended her visit until the keys "turned up" as if the keys were going to do that on their own.

Everyone looked high and low. Finally, someone looked in the car and VIOLA! The keys were in the car. There was never any panic. She trusted the Lord would provide.

She taught students for 50 years. Math was her subject, but her focus was always on the student. She was comfortable teaching boys; probably because she was raised with 5 brothers

In Kings 1, we hear about Elijah looking for the Lord. He was not in the strong wind that crushed rocks. He was not in the earthquake or the fire. He was found in a tiny, whispering voice.

Sister Brigid was tiny, like her parents, Bill and Margaret, and her message not loud or forbearing. With that Irish twinkle in her eye, she would look over her glasses and slip you her Irish wit.

Luke 12 tells us the Lord will take care of us as he does the lilies of the field. Fear not. And she was not afraid. Many times, she told me she was ready when that time came. "None of us are getting out of here alive you know" she used to say. She was at peace with that.

In this Sunday's gospel from Mathew, Jesus taught us the two greatest commandments. Love the Lord, God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second -You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Sister Brigid truly embraced God's two greatest commandments.

She was so proud of her car that allowed her to be the convent chauffeur. When my sister Diane's car broke down, Sister Brigid lent her car to Diane and sought rides herself, while Diane drove her car. Love your neighbor as yourself.

She and her cousin, Mary, were born less than a year apart. They were great pals. When she visited Mary in Florida on one occasion, they were burglarized. The men tied them up and ransacked the apartment. Brigid tipped her chair over and dialed 911 with her tongue. Others may have panicked. Sister Brigid trusted in the Lord and just did what she had to do.

Brigid and her cousin Joan were great pals. And they were close enough to be truthful with each other. Joan did not want to miss anything, so she took several newspapers. She had a tendency to leave the half-read articles around. She had been in a hurry to go to work and brought Brigid back to her house at the end of a long day. The place looked pretty disheveled and Sister Brigid said "Gee Joan, if a burglar broke in here, it would be hard to tell. It already looks ransacked."

And she was so proud to be Irish. I was serving as Principal in Marlette Michigan when Sister Brigid and my mom came up to visit at St. Patrick's Day. Brigid wanted to sing. The neighboring Presbyterian minister, Reverend Shaw, stopped by to visit. He was Irish and to our surprise knew the words so, Joan and Brigid, Rev Shaw and I, enthusiastically sang every Irish tune we knew, for two hours. It is still my most memorable St. Patrick's Day.

She was baptized Margaret Mary, but she chose Brigid, the female patron saint of Ireland, when she entered the convent.

In recent years she had a green bag with white shamrocks on it. It hung over the front of her walker. You could see she was Irish half a block away.

Several relatives emailed me to say they remember most that she was exceptionally nonjudgmental. She understood that God will judge us. We are here to bear witness to the teachings of Jesus Christ, not to judge. That is a lesson we should all take from Brigid.

Sister had several mini strokes that resulted in her being assigned to the dementia unit here at the motherhouse. But she always bounced back.

She was in a semi-comatose state for over a week when I came up to visit her earlier this year. They told me at the desk that she was in a sleep state for all but few minutes in the middle of the night, when she would wake and speak for couple minutes before drifting back into semi consciousness. I asked if they would try to wake her so I could try to talk to her. They tried to discourage me, but I persisted and finally we went down to her room. They woke her up and she talked lucidly for an hour and 45 minutes. She noted family birthdates and ages of extended relatives. She was delightful.

She had a nice room with a beautiful view when she was first assigned to the 3rd floor. One day, she was asked if she would move, since two nuns that were family sisters wanted to locate next door to each other. Of course, Sister Brigid had no trouble moving because the Lord would provide another beautiful view.

She was the sharpest resident of the dementia unit and she asked to be moved. Because of the reoccurring nature of her condition, it was felt that she should stay there. But she enjoyed the time with her buddies playing Bridge on Wednesday evenings.

The other 3 sisters then brought the game up to her on the third floor. I sat in one Wednesday and delighted in their playful banter as they chided each other. Her good friend, Sister Margaret Donoghue, left the Bridge game for glory just 10 days ago.

She found joy in the little things of life; the cards and flowers you sent her. She kept watering the plants, way beyond their intended life span. She had her family collage in a plastic box outside her room and 3 small photo albums next to her bed, which we went through each and every time I visited. She enjoyed recalling events with each of you.

Brigid suffered from Bipolar disorder her entire life. It came and it went. She was on medication for years, but it never interfered with her remembering family birthdays and anniversaries. Everyone here got a card from her in that shaky handwriting. One year she reversed the addresses so that her name was on the card and mine was the return address. The Post Office delivered it anyway. The Lord watches over people like Sister Brigid.

Thank you, Lord, for the treasure that was Sister Brigid. **She enriched our lives with her love, her wit and her thoughtfulness.** Her faith in you was an example to us all.

On behalf of the Mullane and Mulroy families and all their relatives, we would like to thank the IHM sisters and staff here at the motherhouse for providing such fine nurturing and loving care to Sister Brigid.

Thank you, Sister Carolyn, for your constant support and friendship. Thank you Sister **Roseange Luddy**, sister-in-law to Tim Mullane, for her beautiful singing today.

Thank you to the sisters in the wonderful choir today.

Thank you to the sisters who sat and prayed with Brigid as she crossed over from this life to her heavenly reward. She was not alone on her journey.

Thank you, Tom and Dennis Mullane, for constant attention to this Irish American treasure of ours.

Brigid, May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face and the winds falls soft upon your fields, and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His Hand.