

## Remembering Mary Anna Riley, IHM

### April 26, 1936 – Nov. 21, 2024

Welcome everyone. Thank you for being with us as we celebrate Mary Anna's long life of 88 years. Being the responsible IHM, she left us a clear sketch of what to include in her remembering. Mary Anna was born in Lakewood, Ohio, the youngest of six children born to Margaret and Edward Riley. She deeply appreciated her German and Irish heritage as she grew up in a loving family. Her father worked for the New York Central Railroad in Cleveland, Ohio. When the Railroad moved their offices to Detroit, the family moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan, when she was a year old. Mary Anna talked about how they walked three miles to go to school; they walked halfway with their dad to the train station, where he took the train to Detroit, and they continued to St. John's Catholic School.



When Mary Anna was in the first grade, she contracted rheumatic fever and missed so many school days that she had to repeat first grade. As a result, she always felt she was not as smart as her brother and sisters. The Riley's moved to Ann Arbor when Mary Anna was in the sixth grade. She was enrolled at St. Thomas the Apostle School, administered by the IHMs. Mary Anna found the IHM Sisters less strict than the Dominicans who taught at St. John's. After graduation in 1955, she entered the IHM community and began her teaching career. Her first mission was second grade at Sacred Heart, Dearborn, where she discovered her love for teaching little children. From Sacred Heart, she moved to several other schools, including Epiphany and Annunciation, Detroit, and Mt. Carmel in Emmett. A fellow Mt. Carmel teacher remembered Mary Anna as a "perfect first grade teacher ... happy, upbeat, and crazy about little kids."

All these years, Mary Anna nurtured her desire to serve in overseas missions. Finally, in 1966, her dream of mission work was fulfilled when she was assigned to Santa Teresita School in Santurce, Puerto Rico. She stayed for seven years. She worked hard to learn Spanish and adjust to a new culture and way of teaching. She was very successful at it and developed a strong bond with all her students and the faculty. Two years ago, her students invited her back for a reunion with them. The celebration and many "Thank you's" she received from them were a testament to their appreciation for her teaching and friendship.

After seven years, her reentry adjustment to U.S. culture was very difficult, but she did it gracefully. She was a directress and taught at the Hall of Divine Child for four years. Gradually, she moved north along the river and took on administrative duties at St. Charles in Newport, Wyandotte Consolidated School, and Christ the Good Shepherd, Lincoln Park. All along, she excelled in her computer skills.

In 1995, after thirty-five years of teaching and serving as principal, Mary Anna retired but still wanted to sail in new waters. So, she enrolled at Schoolcraft College, where she studied Occupational Therapy. After completing her studies, she worked at Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit as an Occupational Therapist, helping developmentally disabled adults learn skills needed to obtain a job.

From her early days, Mary Anna used her talents and gifts to enjoy and build community. One of the special gifts she freely shared was her musical talent for singing and drumming. She was a loyal and longtime member of the IHM Choir. She was most faithful to Thursday night choir practices and singing at Sunday liturgy at St. Thomas a'Becket Parish. We appreciate that some of their choir is with us today to celebrate her life.

Always ready for a new adventure, Mary Anna was asked by a friend if she would consider a ministry at the Siena Literacy Center as their Data and Resource Coordinator. Knowing Mary Anna, we knew she would say "yes." This began a twenty-two-year commitment! Even after her retirement in 2021, she continued as a volunteer. During all these years there were numerous changes in titles, as well as developing many new friendships with staff and students. She loved the staff's team spirit and the opportunity to help the students adjust to their new culture and language, as she had done in Puerto Rico. Many of her Siena friends visited her this past week and are here today. Thank you for being with us.

During her years at Siena, Mary Anna was given two endearing titles, "Sister Fixit" when she and her trusty "tool kit" could solve many problems, and "Sister Candy," which she delighted in as she kept a full candy jar on her desk with a taped-on phrase, "*Only one piece, please.*"

On July 18, 2024, Mary Anna received special recognition for her 25-plus years of service to adult education by having the computer room at Siena Literacy Center named in her honor. What a fitting gift to a woman who was the perfect first-grade teacher and a model and experienced adult educator.

In closing, Mary Anna used these words to describe her life, "I truly have been given God's special gifts from all the lives that have crossed my path and helped me to be who I am this day."

We thank you, Mary Anna, for being that special gift in our lives. We pray and know that you are enjoying your new life with your parents, siblings and dear friends.

***Written by Mary Ellen Hochkins, IHM Associate, and delivered by Kathryn T. Pierce, IHM, Nov. 23, 2024***