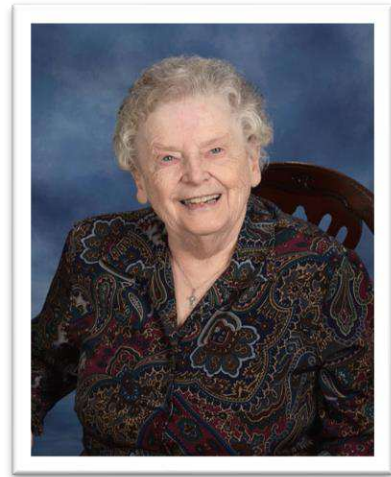


Remembering Sister Marietta Murphy Nov. 11, 1924 – Jan. 21, 2025

Mary Cecilia Murphy, whom we have known through the years as Sister Marietta, often insisted when one visited her, "I have always been loved." She felt the words of Isaiah (43:1-5), "You are precious to me. I love you." applied very much to her. She chose this thought for her page in the *IHM Book of Life* and throughout her lifetime, she deeply felt this love expressed by family and friends.



Marietta's father, William Joseph Murphy, was born in Birmingham, England, and came to the United States at the age of six months. In his adult years, he worked as an ironworker, bricklayer and shipbuilder in a New York shipyard. He met his future wife, Mary Margaret Keating, at a party in Buffalo, New York. William followed up this party with frequent phone calls to Mary Margaret. When her sisters realized how persistent these calls were, they said, "Look, why don't you pay attention to this promising new relationship? We give you our strong encouragement!" So it was that William Joseph Murphy and Mary Margaret Keating were married Oct. 17, 1917, at St. John the Evangelist Church in Buffalo.

The Murphys made their home in Buffalo. Eventually they had four children: Helen Marie, John Joseph and William Augustine. Each one named in honor of a paternal or maternal grandparent. Their youngest child was born Nov. 11, 1924, and on Nov. 23, baptized Mary Cecilia at St. Monica Church.

Mary Murphy was briefly a student at St. Monica School, but she had most of her elementary education at St. John the Evangelist Elementary School to complete her first eight grades. She entered South Park High School, Sept. 1938, eager to meet new friends and enter into the activities characteristic of her early teen years.

However, just a couple of months later, on Nov. 12, 1938, Mary's mother died of cancer. It was a terrible loss for Mary occurring on the day after her 14th birthday. Then, while still grieving the death of their mother, the Murphy children suffered another huge shock. On March 25, 1939, their father died. Soon after, the four children were separated and taken in by other family members, another dramatic change for each of them.

Mary moved to Detroit to live with her dad's oldest sister, Aunt Dora and her husband, Uncle Joe. She enrolled at St. Catherine High School April 3, 1939, where she first became acquainted with IHM Sisters. Interestingly, in her sophomore year of high school, she chanced to meet Patricia Guthrie as they each were enjoying a trip on the boat to Boblo Island. She and Pat became good and long-lasting friends as a result of this meeting. When Aunt Dora died, Pat's father stated, "Mary is always welcome in our home." Thereafter, Mary did enjoy many very happy hours with the Guthrie family.

After high school graduation June 8, 1942, Mary entered the Postulate July 2. "I was very lonesome," Mary admitted. "I realized that I needed to leave Monroe and grow up. That's what I did. In the following months, I enjoyed experiencing life and even had a marriage proposal! However, in my heart I knew, in time that what I really wanted was to return to the IHMs."

Mary returned Sept. 8, 1943, received the habit and entered the novitiate Aug. 15, 1944. Receiving the name "Sister Marietta" felt like an honor because during her high school years, Sister Marietta Hughes had been one of Mary's teachers at St. Catherine's. "She used to lean on me when walking to school on rainy days," Marietta noted. "This was always amusing to everyone because Sr. Marietta Hughes was a rather big woman!" Sister Marietta pronounced her first vows Aug. 15, 1946, and made her final profession Aug. 15, 1949.

Sister Marietta earned a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College, and a master's in Special Education at Wayne State University. She was interested in the Montessori method of educating her students, especially in teaching them to help themselves.

In the next twenty-plus years, Marietta was a successful teacher of her students at St. Joseph, Dexter, Michigan; St Peter Claver, Mobile, Alabama; Sts. Gregory, and Francis de Sales in Detroit; and Hall of the Divine Child, Monroe. At the Hall, she recalled picking flowers for the chapel from Emil's Garden, and the fun of being "Director of Company D" that is, the youngest of the Hall boys. At St. Mary in Mount Morris, Michigan, she was the elementary school principal, as well as being eighth grade teacher.

Then in August 1969, Sister Marietta was assigned to Holy Name School in Birmingham, Michigan. As principal, she was dearly loved by students and faculty alike. Bishop Bernie Harrington, pastor of Holy Name Parish at the time, became a lifelong friend of Marietta.

Sister Marietta marked 25 years as an IHM Sister in 1971. Holy Name Parish readily picked up on that information and planned a grand celebration for Nov. 7. The day held a 10 a.m. Mass in her honor, and a reception in St Anne's Hall from 4 to 6 p.m. The parish paper, The Holy Name Spotlight featured her story and stated, "We are all aware of the dynamic leadership and growth that Sister Marietta has brought to our parish and school. Holy Name School is considered the finest elementary school in the Archdiocese of Detroit. Its curriculum, facilities and teaching staff and the leadership of Sister Marietta have made it so."

Following a sabbatical and participation in "Religious Leaders Program" in 1979, Sister Marietta was hired as a full-time rector of Baden Hall, a women's dormitory at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. She was trusted and appreciated by the students during the whole time she held this position. While still employed at Baden Hall, Marietta took on part-time service in IHM Development work. "Each IHM Sister

was asked to list the names of 10 people they knew who might be good support for the development program,” Marietta said. “I think I got the Development job because I gave 50 names.”

For the next 16 years, Marietta devoted all her summer vacations and school holidays to Development. She was involved in correspondence with donors: newsletters, yearly Christmas cards, annual appeal letters, welcome letters to new and prospective donors, and personal notes and cards.

“Development is all about relationships,” stated Marietta. “It has allowed us to reconnect with former students, who are now adults, and hear their deep appreciation for the education they received.” Marietta conceded that, while it is enjoyable and rewarding, fundraising is also hard work. She remained always thankful for the presence of many sisters who helped with stuffing envelopes, and for the loving relationship that developed between herself and Sister Annunciata during all those years of their working together.

In 1995, Sister Marietta moved to Monroe where she continued overseeing the development work for the congregation until the arrival of a lay Director. “I lived with a small group of sisters in the “Old Rectory” which was then serving as a hospitality house, and I loved the contacts with people that living in this place offered me.”

Her decision to become a permanent resident in the Motherhouse occurred in 2010. Here, she moved around actively, still engaged a bit in her loved work of development. Her light-hearted presence was a gift she offered to everyone she met each day. Many residents were on hand to cheer her when she was honored at a party recognizing her significant contribution to the IHM Development Program. Following her retirement from a dearly loved ministry, Marietta served as receptionist in the Congregational Business Office for as long as she was able.

Sister Marietta turned 100 this past November and she was still as sweet and sometimes as feisty as ever despite her memory challenges. She resided in the skilled nursing unit of the IHM Senior Living Community.

Marietta's greatest joy, she said, since joining the community was having the opportunity to serve the Church and “just being an IHM Sister.” She stated that she so appreciated “having the privilege to teach so many children.”

May Sister Marietta, who rejoiced in being loved throughout her Earthly lifetime, find and be enveloped in, the Source of Love itself as she moves into the nonending joys of Eternal Life!

***Written by Marie Gatza, IHM. Amended by Monica Stuhlreyer, IHM.
Delivered by Ann Oestreich, IHM, Jan. 30, 2025.***