

**“Do what you love”**

When she was four, Sister Jannita Complo saw IHM Sisters in their blue habits; she misidentified them as the Blessed Mother. Her mother corrected her and told her they were sisters who worked for God. “I want to work for God, too, Mommy.” She grew up in Monroe and attended St. Mary Academy, where she excelled in drama. During her senior year of high school, she told Sister Marie Chantal she would not attend college but would become an IHM. Sister replied, “You can’t just walk right in; you need a sponsor. Do you have a particular sister as your sponsor? I expected you to be on a trapeze in a circus.”

Undeterred, Sister Jannita found a sponsor and entered the convent in August 1953. She now was going to work for God. During her studies in formation, Sister Mary Patrick, Dean of Studies, called her into her office. Sister Jannita thought she had done something wrong. “Sister Complo,” Sister Mary Patrick began, “Every time you go by my office, I feel a breeze . . . so I call you Sister Windmill!” When the time came to receive her religious name, she was given her own: Jannita. She was so pleased that she jumped up and hugged Mother Teresa McGivney.

Sister Jannita taught first grade at St. Thomas Aquinas (Detroit) and St. John (Monroe) for nine years and then was assigned to Marygrove College. She earned her doctorate in



curriculum development from Wayne State University. While writing her doctoral dissertation, she created *Dramakinetics* and visited various school children to note what movements were successful abroad. *Dramakinetics* combines movement and drama to foster a child’s kinesthetic intelligence. Her book, *Dramakinetics in the Classroom*, was used by her college student teachers and many teachers in the U.S. Since then, she has published two other books, *Dramakinetics for the Special Child* and *Dramakinetics for the Elderly with Dementia or Without*.



Sparked by an interest in Native American dance, Sister Jannita received a grant to work with the Jemez Indians in New Mexico. She broke the Anglo assumption that Native Americans rarely show emotion. She put on musicals such as *Peter Pan* and *Mary Poppins* and even traveled with her famous Children's Swing Choir, which sang and danced. While ministering there, she received an Honor Award for Meritorious Service from the United States Department of the Interior and was named Outstanding Administrator by the National Indian School Board of Education.



When she returned to Monroe in 1994, Sister Jannita started the Children’s Creativity Center to provide a learning space for children with special needs and the gifted. With eight teachers, they served more than 500 students from kindergarten to high school. She notes, “I am so grateful to the IHM community for their encouragement in allowing me to use my talents in many facets of education.”