

Maryfrances Barber

I was born April 28, 1953, to Mary Jane Lake and James Barber. A few years later, our family grew: my brother Dan, sister Theresa, and twins Greg and Peg. For a brief time, I was an only child—the apple of my parents’ eye. Then I became the oldest sibling, a role I still hold with all its rights and responsibilities.

School was the anchor of my life. I began at Guardian Angels in Clawson, taught by the Adrian Dominicans. Later, at Mother of Our Savior in Detroit, I met the IHMs and fell in love with their spirit. I attended Immaculata High School and Marygrove College, where I earned a B.S. in chemistry with minors in physics, math and secondary education. I entered the IHM Congregation Aug. 18, 1974.

My teaching career began at St. Martin de Porres in Detroit. After one year of teaching and a canonical novitiate year, I returned and pursued an M.S. in chemistry at Wayne State University, where I also discovered a love for higher education. That led me back to Marygrove and then back to Wayne State for a Ph.D., which I completed in 1990.

Over the years, I served in several IHM ministries, including co-coordinator of Theological Education with Margaret Brennan, coordinator of Congregational Interaction, and a facilitator with the MCLRMP Project Team. During this time, I also became involved with the Women’s International League for Peace and

Freedom (WILPF), which led me to the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in Geneva and introduced me to women from around the globe. I later coordinated a women’s human rights training course for six years. In 2003, I returned to higher ed at Wayne State, teaching large chemistry courses and mentoring new graduate teaching assistants, many of them international students. I remained there for 18 years.

In 2020, I became seriously ill, though I didn’t know it at the time. On Nov. 15, 2024, a cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) leak was discovered and repaired a few days later. Though I lost memory from the years leading up to it, I was cured—and am grateful. Neuropsychological testing shows no dementia or Alzheimer’s.

Reflecting on these 50 incredible years, I see how my spirituality has deepened and changed. I’ve worked to integrate my feminist values with my experience of God and reconcile with the institutional Church—helped by the grounding of Catholic Social Teaching. A prayer group that began during Pope John Paul II’s 1987 visit has been a steady companion, evolving into a space of contemplation. And living at the Motherhouse, meeting sisters beyond meetings, has been a gift—I’ve come to truly love them.

I don’t know what lies ahead. But I know I am deeply loved. I am not alone. And that is enough.



50 years