

# Elizabeth (Joseph Sarto) Fleckenstein

As I reflect on my 70 years as an IHM, I will always be grateful for my parents, who loved me into life and provided a home where faith, love and family were nurtured. I am the youngest of two girls and five boys, two of whom were priests. My senior year began with the unexpected death of my mom. I had never considered religious life until Clare Elizabeth Lemmer, IHM, shared not-so-subtle words, inviting me to attend several weekends in Monroe. I began to experience a call that I could not ignore. My one worry was leaving my dad home alone. After sharing my dilemma with my Maryknoll brother, he said, "If that is where God wants you, God will take care of Dad." The power of invitation changed my life.

I am most grateful for the women who saw and called forth my gifts, affirming and entrusting them in ministries I might never have chosen. I taught third grade at Holy Redeemer Grade School and later became the school principal; I fell in love with the children of Southwest Detroit. As a young sister, on appointment day, I prayed not to be sent there because of its size. It turned out to be a ministry I loved and cherished for 45 years. There, I learned to experience more deeply the Liberating Mission of Jesus, exemplified in His life and teachings, as He reached out to the poor and marginalized.

Born and raised in Port Huron, water has always brought me peace, calm

and great joy—a place where I commune with my loving God. It is also the source of one of my greatest sorrows—the deaths of my two priest brothers in a 1962 swimming accident. A life-changing feast for me is the Annunciation. After being asked to pray a Novena to Mary, it was on this day that I committed to join the IHMs. On this day, I also decided to step down as Holy Redeemer Principal and became a volunteer in the GEM Room for the next 11 years. Like Mary, I have never regretted any of the times I said yes.

Another grace was my time on the CC. I was challenged to think outside the box as we contemplated our future as the IHM family. Taking time for daily contemplation, silence and prayer helped create a softer heart, one open to sustained conversations with people with whom I may have differences. It has helped me lift the blinders through which I view myself, others, our Church, the world and God. I believe the heart of IHM beats strong, inviting me to let go and let God.

I feel energized by prayer, conversations and active participation in shaping a future born of cherished values, hopes, challenges, and guiding principles. This is our IHM heritage, as expressed in Chapter Directions. As I celebrate this year of Jubilee, I live happily at home, where it all began. I wish to extend a big, prayerful thank you to all who have shared their presence, example, and love of God for being a part of my happy life.

