

Margaret (Marie Pauline) Gearhart

I first met the IHM Sisters at St. Mary's High School in Akron, Ohio. Principal Sister Thaddea Littlejohn had a profound influence on me during the mornings I spent in her office for personal reasons. My grandmother was also central to my spiritual formation.

I had planned to attend Ohio University with hopes of becoming a journalist. However, I embarked on a different journey after hearing some of my classmates talk about a trip to the IHM Motherhouse during my senior year. Once I came to Monroe, I was absolutely determined to enter. There was something about this place and the women that drew me in.

To my parents' dismay at the prospect of not having grandchildren, I left Akron, where my two sisters and I were raised and joined the IHM community.

My first ministry was teaching grades five and six at St. Gerard Majella in Kirkwood, Missouri. After five years, I took a year of renewal before making final vows and ministered in religious education, first in Montana and then in Michigan. I returned to teaching fifth grade for two years at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Minnetonka, Minnesota, and then served in religious education in North Carolina for six years. During this time, I realized that I tend to be a creative thinker and began to develop my adult education skills.

Over the next five years, I managed two women's shelters in West Virginia before returning to religious education in Richmond, Virginia, for a two-year period. During my tenure in these various ministries, I earned my master's degree in ministry from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. The Archdiocese in Miami hired me to design programs to meet the needs of the parishes in the Florida Keys. I was also a case manager for a child abuse program.

This was followed by two years teaching religious education for the Catholic community at Bolling Air Force Base in Washington, D.C., and then ministering at homeless shelters in D.C. After eight years, I moved back to Monroe to serve as a case manager and advocate for Family Counseling and Shelter Services and then as part of the Monroe County Guardianship Program.

The IHM community is one of my greatest joys. Knowing that I belong to this group of women and that we will be together wherever we are. This is family. I have come to see myself as an amazing creature of God. I am most grateful to the community for "loving me into life."

I now reside at the Motherhouse, where I minister to the sisters and residents.

