

Remembering Marcella Regan, IHM Sept. 23, 1932 – Nov. 10, 2025

What a daunting task it is to reflect on the life of a person who embodied the very essence of what it is to be a woman and an IHM Sister! On Sept. 23, 1932, Mary and Thomas Regan were blessed with a baby girl, whom they named Marcella. She was one of 10 children in the Regan family, surrounded by her sisters, Dorothy Ann, Mary Jo, Carol, Rita, Lois and her brothers, Frank, Dennis, Lawrence and Thomas. Marcella's DNA, of course, included Irish blood, French, Dutch, German, and a touch of San Marino, *Italian* blood.



One can imagine a Regan household that was never dull. Marcella was closest to her brother, Larry, who, in her eyes, could do nothing wrong! Her little sister, Rita, who is here with us today, was only six years old when Marcella entered the convent, but Rita was very dear to her heart. She often told me how much she loved Rita and her brother-in-law, Marty. The baby of the family, Lois, was *special* in many ways and she *adored* Marcella!

The Regan family moved around various parts of Detroit so that Marcella's father could find work. She attended three different grade schools, the last of which was Holy Redeemer at Vernor and Junction in Southwest Detroit, a location I came to love when we IHMs founded Detroit Cristo Rey High School and resurrected the abandoned Redeemer High School building. It made Marcella very happy that I taught there on the grounds where so many IHM Sisters had touched the souls of their students. She attended high school from 1946 to 1950, just after World War II, and glowed when she spoke of her time there. In recent years, if Redeemer was mentioned, she'd often spontaneously sing their alma mater with all the enthusiasm of a teenage girl. I am sure some of you have been in her audience. Sister Anne Mamienski and I had front row seats on more than one occasion!

After graduation, she came to Monroe and entered our IHM congregation. She professed her vows in 1953. From 1954 to 1962, she taught First Grade at Saint Mary School here in Monroe, followed by All Saints, St. Mary of Redford in Detroit and St. Columban in Birmingham. From 1963 to 1969, she transitioned to seventh and eighth grades at St. John in Fenton, Gesu in Detroit, and worked for one year at Marian High School in Bloomfield Hills.

Then her life dramatically changed! Margaret Brennan, able to read the signs of the times, sent her and Joanne Witucki to Brussels, Belgium, for one year to learn new methods of teaching religious education in the classroom and the parish. They were two very young sisters on the verge of a new post-Vatican II era filled with exciting possibilities, yet not without challenges. From 1970 to 1972, she and Joanne served as IHM Elementary Religion Teacher Consultants. Then they ministered at St. Priscilla Parish in Livonia from 1972 to 1984, while continuing to give Religious Education Workshops to classroom teachers and parish catechists. They excelled in this area, and many catechists benefited from their expertise.

Marcella took a well-deserved year of renewal from 1984 to 1985, followed by a year of work in the Overseas Mission Province Office and three years in Mexico. The people loved her there, but she returned to the United States in 1989 because she was concerned about her mother, who had Alzheimer's Disease, and her sister, Lois, who lived in a group home for people with Down syndrome. How fortunate I was when Marcella joined us in the community at Saint Vincent Convent 35 years ago in Detroit's Cork Town! There she saved my vocation. She gave me much-needed love, support, guidance and spiritual companionship. She changed my life and opened me up to a *world* of possibilities. At that time, the Columban fathers asked her to work on a religious education series entitled *Come and See*. She enjoyed writing those lessons and continued to write in later years.

Often, she would take me with her to visit her mother, Mary, at her nursing home in Westland. There, I witnessed lots of kisses, hugs, hand holding, and affection from Marcella to her precious mother. Her father was there every day. It was obvious that he was lost without his Mary. Marcella also took me to visit her sister Lois. She just *loved* Lois. That's what Marcy *did*. She *poured love* on those who were close to her heart.

In 1990, she again spent a year doing administrative work at the Overseas Mission Province Office. She was on fire with passion for people around the world who needed to hear the good news of Jesus. *What did Marcella do next?* At age 60, she returned to the classroom and taught for four years at Holy Redeemer Grade School, followed by 10 years at St. Mary of Redford. In 2002, she told me she wanted to retire from teaching and work in the after-school program. She asked *me* to take *her* place teaching sixth, seventh and eighth grades. I responded by asking, "Are you crazy? You want *ME* to follow *YOU* in the classroom. No way! Besides, I have no desire to teach below ninth grade!" She reminded me that I was between jobs and that there were no high school openings, so, with great fear, I said yes and Loretta Shroeder hired me. I promised to stay for one year, and then I was running back to high school teaching, which I did here at SMCC in Monroe. What did Marcella do? She came *out of retirement* and taught for *two more* years. In 2005, she finally moved to the Motherhouse and served as the Sacristan for two years.

In addition to her ministries, Marcella earned two master's degrees, one at Loyola University and another at the University of Detroit. She was an intellectual, but not like those who wear their degrees on their sleeves. Of course, in an academic setting, her intelligence was apparent, but in Parish Ministry, she was pastoral. She made Jesus real for people. She spoke in a language people could understand and said things in a way that touched their hearts and reached deep into their souls in that place where God dwells, and we are truly alive and grace-filled. You can't *learn* that ability. Marcella was *so one*, *so attuned to Christ* that she *oozed his grace*, and that grace *flowed* from her and enveloped all those in her midst.

On a practical level, in her daily life, even in her convent chores, she was the "queen of organization and label making." At Saint Vincent Convent, she even labeled the items in our kitchen food pantry. When she was the Motherhouse Sacristan, she had details and instructions down to a science. A first grader could walk in and understand *what* things were, *where* they were, and *how* they could be used to make liturgy meaningful.

In the last four years, she may have been confused due to Alzheimer's disease, but she was still bursting with physical energy. Her personality was the same. She was loving, filled with joy,

never complained and was aware of her surroundings. She could still read and she knew her own name and my name most of the time. She lavished me with love, friendship and affection. She still exuded the *fire* and *passion* of the Gospel message of Jesus. She was a true-blue IHM and precious Marcella, until her last breath.

Recently, I joined Marcella on one of her frequent trips down memory lane. In fact, I occasionally recorded our conversations so I could spend time with her whenever I longed to hear her voice and her endearing laugh, or to see the twinkle in her Irish eyes. I have played those videos several times since Monday morning, when I held her hand and felt her heartbeat for the last time at daybreak.

Now she is united with her parents, her other deceased family members, especially Larry and Lois and her dear friend, Joanne.

She is swimming in the ocean of God's *boundless* love. How blessed *I was, we were*, to have been touched by such a beautiful woman. I will miss her, but I *know* that she is at home, fully united with Jesus, whom she served so well. So let me close with the words of St. John Chrysostom, who said, "Those whom we love and lose are no longer where they were before. They are *now* wherever *we are*!"

Written and delivered by Rita Rinaldi, IHM
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