

**Remembering Ann Nett, IHM**  
**Nov.24, 1940 – Feb.17, 2026**

In the program booklet celebrating her 50<sup>th</sup> jubilee in 2013, Ann noted the word “accompany” as one of her favorite words, saying that “accompanying people has always been very important to me.” Relationships have been at the heart of Ann’s life and accompaniment is a word that well describes her various ministries over the years.

Some of the descriptions I’ll be giving are taken from a series of interviews Ann did in 2013/2014 with Patricia Chargot, IHM Associate, and which also included Ann’s own words from letters she cites during the interviews. We should not be surprised – everyone knows how much Ann loved writing letters and birthday cards.



Ann’s journey began on Nov. 24, 1940, when she was born as the first child of her mother, Clara, and her second husband, Gordon Nett, the nephew of Clara’s first husband, August Nett, with whom she had five sons, and who died when the youngest was only six months old. Ann’s only sister, Lois, was born in 1944. Unfortunately, as Ann recalls, this second marriage ended in divorce and her mother never remarried. Her three older brothers, Norman, George and Patrick, had all gone off to World War II, leaving only the two younger ones, Joseph and Alan, at home together with Ann and Lois.

It was probably because of the financial challenges the family faced during the years when Ann attended St. Catherine’s elementary and high schools that her mother insisted she take the business courses of typing and shorthand that were offered rather than the college preparatory courses, which Ann wanted. Ann also wanted to enter the congregation right after high school, but her mother opposed the idea. As Ann wrote in her 60<sup>th</sup> Jubilee book, her brother, closest in age to her, had been helping to support the family and “now it was my turn.” She worked as a cashier at the A&P Supermarket for the next four years, after which her mother finally agreed she could enter the IHMs, which she did on Sept. 7, 1962.

Ann’s ministry of accompaniment began during her experiences with formal education. After completing student teaching at St. Thomas in Ann Arbor, she taught third grade at Holy Name for two years, then went to St. Regis in Birmingham. During that time, she was part of a new community living at St. Ives Parish, where they also engaged in some

parish pastoral activities. Ann was never one to complain, but even she said that teaching full-time and doing pastoral ministry at the parish was, in her words, “a bit much,” and she stayed only one year.

In 1970, Ann went to Puerto Rico, where she began teaching third grade at Colegio La Merced in Cayey. The younger grades were taught in Spanish, and since she didn't know much Spanish, she had to prepare her classes in English, and then someone else would have to help her translate them. She notes how she was relieved when, after half a year, she was moved up to junior high, where they spoke English, even though she found working with teenagers (Seventh and eighth grades) a little more difficult and, in her words, followed by some laughter: “I was glad when it was over.”

Another form of accompaniment began in 1971, when Ann, Joan Brazzel and Pat McCluskey joined the Detroit Archdiocesan-Recife Team, which had begun in 1966 through an arrangement between Cardinal Dearden of Detroit and Dom Helder Camara of Recife, consisting of some diocesan priests and some IHM Sisters. At the time of their arrival, there were two diocesan priests, Larry Dunn and Bob Singelyn and three IHM Sisters, Dorothy Diederichs, Mary Jo Maher and Carol Quigley.

Nova Descoberta, where Ann, Dorothy and Pat ministered, was a sprawling favela with over 25,000 people living in adobe huts on the hillsides and along a street with open canals on both sides. There was a main church, the Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes, on the street and several smaller chapels in the hills. Under the leadership of Dom Helder and grounded in liberation theology, which was beginning at that time, the Recife Team engaged in a new way of being Church.

Accompaniment now meant, first, sharing the life of the people, living in their midst, forming relationships, listening and learning, sharing their joys and sorrows, and affirming their gifts and abilities. Ann participated in the weekly meetings in the chapel area, where the focus was on reflecting on the Gospel and how it applied to their current life situation, building community and developing their capacity for leadership.

In 1976, accompaniment took still another form for Ann as she returned to the States after learning her mother was diagnosed with cancer and had moved in with her brother, Norm and his wife. Ann felt she was there to provide companionship to her mother and respite for her brother and sister-in-law when they had to go elsewhere.

After her mother died in Sept. 1978, Ann returned to Brazil in Jan. 1979. She moved to Charneca, a semi-rural area, where she lived with a Brazilian and, later, for two years with Margaret Alandt. Once again, accompaniment took the form of sharing the simple lives of the people and participating in various community groups, assisting them to reflect on the life situations in which they found themselves in light of the Gospel.

The first lay volunteer, Karen Perez, also shared their life in Charneca for a couple of years, participating in this work of accompaniment, which led to faith in action. It was only this past week that Karen and a couple of other women from Charneca gave a Zoom presentation honoring the legacy of the work of Ann, Dorothy and Bob Singelyn, sharing how it continues both in Brazil and here in the States, where Karen now lives.

In 1986, Dorothy Diederichs returned to Brazil, where she joined Ann and the sugarcane workers. With the rising price of sugar, the owners had forced their workers to live on the hillsides where sugar cane couldn't be grown. They still worked in the fields, but now had to be picked up by trucks in the early morning. Women planted and tended the sugarcane, which the men then cut by hand. Focusing on the women and appreciation of the land, Ann and Dorothy lived just like the others on the hill, praying and partying, helping and healing with herbal medicine, being leaven more than leaders in consciousness-raising.

It was in Charneca that Ann became involved in the work of Doctor Celerino Cariconde, who worked with medicinal plants and had a clinic there. Ann would accompany the groups of women with whom he met and learned the method he used to teach about the effectiveness of plants to treat simple maladies. He would ask what they knew about the plant and to stress personal health, but he would also ask, "How can we organize to make a difference in the health system? It was a form of conscientization and consciousness-raising that resonated with Ann's focus on liberation. As she shared in one of her letters, "In whatever group I have ministered or been ministered to, I have always stressed the importance of participating on other levels in order to try and bring about systemic change."

In 2005, Ann returned from Brazil and, after a period of transition, continued her ministry of accompaniment, this time with individuals as part of the team for Monroe County Guardianship and Compassionate Companions.

Living at Hartman on the Marygrove Campus, she became involved in campus activities and participated in various grassroots initiatives. She will probably be most remembered there for Hilde-Garden, the herbal garden which she began and named for St. Hildegard of Bingen, abbess, artist, author, mystic, pharmacist and theologian. The garden, which continues to this day, produces and sells various teas and salves.

Since 2021, Ann has been living at the Motherhouse. During these years, she has dealt with cancer, cognitive decline and dementia. You might say it was now her turn to be accompanied by others. She still loved playing cards, or you could join her in cheering on one of the Detroit sports teams playing on the TV. Through it all, she kept an open,

gracious presence, accepting the help of the health care staff, welcoming all who visited her, and trusting that she was accompanied by God's all-embracing love.

Ann's book of Life page begins with some words from the book of Deuteronomy: "Today I set before you life and death. Choose Life, then so that you and your descendants may live." Throughout her life, she did this eloquently, especially through her ministry of accompaniment. Today we give thanks for the many ways she graced our lives through her choices and that she herself now enjoys the fullness of life and so we end saying: "Ate logo, querida amiga Ana, que descanse en paz."

***Written and delivered by Pat McCluskey, IHM, Feb.19, 2026.***