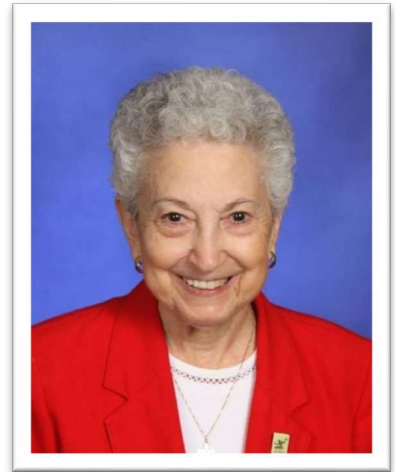


Remembering Marie Cyril Delisi, IHM
Jan. 26, 1928 – Feb. 8, 2026

Tenacious and faith-filled, Marie Cyril came from Sicilian heritage. Immigration and immigrants were common words for the Delisi family. Ciro Delisi began to bring his wife and family to the shores of New York in order to settle in Detroit, Michigan. Rosario, the oldest son, was in his late teens when he came with his father to settle in the U.S. Eventually, Rosario's four sisters and his mother joined the household, which was to be home for the family until the Great Depression. As each son or daughter married, the Delisi family expanded to include the in-laws and grandchildren; the mansion-like building housed a community of people under the patriarchal authority of Ciro Delisi. Whatever income was earned was placed in a common purse to be distributed by Grandpa and Grandma Delisi. Relationships among the children were nurtured and expanded by age group. The children, on the other hand, as the first American-born generation, began to take on the culture of their environment and extend their circle to include other group cultures and Americans. Marie's arrival Jan. 26, 1928, made her the 15th member of the clan. The children of the three families formed a microcosm of society.



Marie Cyril entered the Immaculate Heart of Mary in June 1947. She received counsel from Father Solanus Casey, OFM, from St. Bonaventure monastery on Detroit's eastside. Not sure which religious community to join, Father Solanus encouraged her to go to IHM. She attended Our Lady of Help for elementary school and St. Charles High School, so she knew us. Weren't we lucky?

Her time in education lasted almost 79 years. Always on the move, a woman in motion, she was always teaching and learning simultaneously. Marie always expressed great love, respect and kindness toward her staff, parents and students. Not being able to find her in her office would be a challenge, but her secretary knew she might be outside, cleaning up the playscape or in the preschool room, hugging the little ones. Tenacious and adventurous, she could inspire everyone to become their very best. That little finger pointed at you would wake you up to her words and advice more than anything else. For example, there is a story about when she was tutoring a small boy with very low self-esteem. She took him over to a mirror and said, "I want you to point at yourself and say three times, 'I am GREAT!' 'I am GREAT!' 'I am GREAT!'" Maybe it was a transformative experience for him? I have no doubt.

In her early years as a teacher, Marie learned from the Monroe IHM school master teachers who were staying at the Motherhouse. She continued her college studies as well. In 1951, Marie was sent to Sacred Heart School in Roseville to teach first grade. This was the era of baby boomers and the move from the city to the suburbs. Due to the overpopulation and the large number of children, half-day sessions for students in grades one through four were necessary and limited to 45 students per classroom. Each teacher had a capacity of 90 students per day. Their day began at 8 a.m. and ended at 3:30 p.m. with a half-hour lunch break. On Sunday mornings, she taught religious education to children in public schools. This was certainly "a test of fire" for these eight sisters under temporary vows. From Roseville, Marie went to Epiphany, Detroit, St. John, Jackson and St. Charles, Coldwater, teaching mostly in primary grades. At St. John, Benton Harbor, she had some junior high classes and was assistant principal. Then, at St. Philips High School in Battle Creek, she served as assistant principal. At this time, she was experiencing the consolidation and merging of schools, which was also very emotional and volatile for parishioners across many parishes. The defeat of Proposal C was devastating to private schools throughout Michigan. She experienced the closure of many schools, beginning with high schools.

In the summer of 1971, Marie was able to make a thirty-day retreat and in 1977-1978, have a year of renewal. These were blest times for her, with a renewal of spirit. She became involved in several programs and also visited sisters in their ministries. In Chicago, she spent several weeks at the Seventh Day Center, where she learned about social justice work. She spent a month in New York with the Fourth World Movement, getting acquainted with the poor in lower Manhattan, and then went to Canada for a clinical pastoral associate program that included making home and hospital visits. Finally, she visited sisters in Kentucky, Tennessee and New Mexico. All of these experiences gave her an understanding of issues beyond her educational world. She learned that she truly belonged in education.

In 1979, Marie became principal of St. Mary School in Wayne, a kindergarten through ninth-grade school. The school was under dual enrollment, which meant that there were teachers paid by the Wayne-Westland school system and teachers on the St. Mary payroll. The students benefited from auxiliary enrichment classes provided by the public school system. The obvious salary difference was a problem in maintaining an equitable pay balance. Despite the salary inequity among all the lay teaching staff, there was a wonderful spirit among them in how they perceived their profession. While not the best of arrangements, the teachers made the best of the situation.

From 1985 to 1987, Marie taught fifth grade at St. Cecilia School in Detroit's inner city. This would be her first experience with African American culture. It gave her a sense of appreciation for their culture. In 1987, Marie became principal of St. Ambrose Academy, a preschool through eighth-grade school located on the Lower East Side of Detroit,

where mostly low-income families resided. Again, Marie jumped in with both feet. She personally and literally cleaned up the area around the school, guided the building of a well-needed playscape, and inspired strong leadership in completing an outstanding evaluation of the entire school community for the archdiocese.

In Aug. 1997, Marie underwent surgery for ovarian cancer. The seriousness of the illness kept her from school and she was unable to return. She did manage, though, to have an excuse to visit the students on two occasions. During this time, she received and felt the support of all the sisters in the city who knew her, the IHMs, and the school community. She underwent chemo treatments successfully. She was determined that this would not be a terminal condition for her. Everyone had her in their prayers. Though the doctor's verdict was life-threatening, she was a true cancer survivor!

In the fall of 1998, Marie and her brother Frank took a trip to Europe. It was on this trip that she visited Lourdes. It was a true pilgrimage to the shrine, and it was well spent time at the baths. It was at the baths that she felt she was cured of cancer. Her great faith in Mary helped her recognize the power of faith.

From 1998 through 2005, she divided her time by helping at St. Matthew School, Detroit; tutoring students after school at the St. Franciscan Discovery Learning Center; serving as a docent, giving tours at our newly renovated Motherhouse; and helping in the Development Office in Birmingham.

In 2006, Marie joined with two IHMs and four Dominicans who had all ministered in Detroit to discern whether they would like to open a tutoring center together on Detroit's east side. All believed there was a great need. After several meetings at the Dominican High School convent, and Marie suggesting the name be Epiphany Education Center, the women were "off and running!" Today, the center is completing its 20th year. Marie had served it well for 19 years. Her deep faith, boundless energy and love of children inspired others to believe that the center will have, at the least, another 20 years of service in Detroit.

Marie was always full of energy for everything connected to justice and peace. She participated in the annual IHM Aids Walk, the monthly Pax Christi group at Marygrove and stood weekly at Clark Park in solidarity with our sisters and brothers facing deportation. She was an active member of Faith in Detroit, a group of religious who lived and/or worked in Detroit. If you walked into her kitchen, you would see calendars hanging on the walls depicting groups that support basic human and animal rights and the protection of the environment.

I'd like to close by sharing a small, typed note found among her "treasures" that might be her treasure to us:

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatsoever I can: I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live ... Life is for me no brief candle: it is a sort of splendid torch which I hold for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

Written and delivered by Alice Baker, IHM, Feb. 23, 2026

(Taken from resources gleaned from Marie's own writings of chronicles, early family life before entrance, her "Treasures," and her Book of Life page)