Remembering Amata Miller, IHM
Nov. 30, 1932 – Oct. 9, 2026



Today we gather in a communal ballet — connecting sad reality with joyful and inspiring memory — as we come together within the comforting embrace of our faith to honor the life and celebrate the promised resurrection of Alice Rose – Amata Miller, IHM.

Amata's Earthly life — amazingly fruitful and fully lived — has ended. *"The passing of an era,"* one IHM noted. Sooner, certainly, than any would wish — except perhaps her — and no doubt, with heaven deserved. Her loss could leave a residue of grief that all is finished. Our faith, however, tells us otherwise; indeed, Amata's life and legacy speak that message.

We can imagine many IHMs as defining a "good woman." This one — supremely intelligent, strong, wise, and doggedly committed. "*A will like a piece of anthracite coal,*" commented one nervous corporate executive when confronted with Amata's formidable amalgam of intelligence, integrity and determination.

Yet and also, a gentle, playful side more hidden perhaps, but very much a splendid counterbalance to the diligent, painstakingly organized, and productive woman we all know and love, and whose beneficiaries we all have been. This softer side was perhaps best made clear in her enthusiastic "yes" to welcoming Lahens, then an 11-year-old Haitian orphan, into our home, and the two Ethiopian sisters, Saba and Bethlehem, who preceded him.

I lived with Amata for many years — 30-some — but not at first. She was in leadership for the first 10 years of my life in the Congregation, but our home on Northlawn was her "*escape haven*." During those years of "*lettuce and grape boycotts*," we sometimes did buy and consume both, but only when Amata was out of town. Amata was there with us on that awful night in 1983 when Sister John Clement was killed, and throughout the trial and subsequent months, offering rock-solid support as we all lived through that highly public tragedy.

Amata did a lot of running around in those days and so, for her fiftieth birthday, I bought her a pair of blue sandals with retractable roller-skates, hoping they might become a new IHM fashion. While demonstrating their advantages on our kitchen floor, I crashed unspectacularly to both concern and laughter. The roller-skates were not seen again.

Years earlier, during her time at SLU and then Berkeley, and while wearing the full habit, Amata walked to class carrying her portable, manual typewriter, only reluctantly relinquishing it for a computer decades later. For her dissertation, Amata spent endless

hours conscripting help from IHMs and her sisters - poring through old newspapers and the Montgomery Ward and Sears catalogs, tracing the changing prices of everyday items, including girdles and popular ladies' shoes; her ultimate purpose in doing so still something of a mystery.

Baptized Alice Rose, Amata was a Detroit girl, through and through. Educated at Gesu, Immaculata and Marygrove, she excelled academically and piano lessons revealed yet another talent. As a child, she once delighted her Jewish neighbors by dressing as a nun for Halloween, perhaps hinting at her early attraction to religious life.

Amata revered and honored her teachers and her parents — her father, one of the IHM dads whose hand is evident everywhere in these buildings and her mother, a principled peacemaker and activist. The eldest of four, Alice Rose cherished her younger siblings, Anne, John and Mary. Sailing on Lake St. Clair was a family sport that continued into adulthood. Only seven when Amata came to Monroe, a cherished possession of Mary's is the handmade book Amata created for her First Communion in 1950.

Amata loved summer camp on Lake Michigan, attending every year from age seven until she came to Monroe. As IHMs, she and I later camped on Lake Michigan's eastern shore, once, I recall, about this time in October when the nighttime temperature fell below freezing. Safe to say, we did not always share the same notion concerning the ideal vacation.

Decades after Amata was viewing Lake Michigan sunsets from its eastern side, we lived together in Milwaukee on the west side of the big lake - her last place of ministry outside of Monroe. From our home on Wisconsin's Lake Michigan shore, Amata's practice of early rising allowed her to watch the spectacular sunrise over the lake each morning.

Whatever IHMs, family or friends call her -- Amata, SAM, Mats, Alice Blue Gown, ABG, Professor, Sister Amata or as the six-year-old daughter of a close friend called her, Jesus' grandmother, consider what I found on a slip of used (aways used) paper in her room:

> *Our family is a circle of strength and love. With every birth and every union, the circle grows (**four generations present here today!**)*
> *Every joy shared adds more love. Every crisis faced together makes the circle stronger.*

Strong circle indeed. We were alternately laughing and weeping last week as we began the inevitable task of sorting, decluttering and emptying her room. Among my favorite finds, along with her seasonal and liturgically decorated Jubilee tree, was a tiny roll of small — very small — sheets of wrapping paper, reduced in size each year for perhaps six Christmases. Smaller gifts each year, I guess, carefully chosen to fit the meticulously recycled wrapping paper.

More substantively, her nine-page single-spaced compilation, outlining every IHM Congregational effort and work toward justice, beginning with the education of girls in 1845 until the time when she wrote down this compelling chronology in 2009. Perhaps you've seen it. I had not. It should be required reading, with post 2009 addenda added.

In addition to ample evidence of her life-long devotion to the *New York Times*, Mary, Patty and I uncovered numerous small pieces of paper — each about 3x2 inches — cut down from some prior report or work, one a printed list of deceased IHMs beginning with Sister Ursula in 1865 — ending with Sister Baptista in 1953 — then added in Amata's tiny, perfect palmer handwriting, those who died through 1968. Other slips listed people to pray for: on one tiny sheet I counted 31 lines of perfectly scripted notations. Her journals were the same — never writing on the lines — instead adding two lines of script in the space between the lines.

After short stints in Archdiocesan elementary schools and advanced study in economics, Amata spent the majority of her highly successful career in Catholic higher education**,** with multiple honorary doctorates and named awards testifying to her acknowledged excellence.

Her teaching career spanned nearly 50 years at Marygrove, St. Catherine University, St. Edward's University and Alverno College. Other assignments included 12 years as financial vice president of the Congregation and six at NETWORK. A sought-after lecturer, Amata presented on economic justice and financial matters across the nation. In addition to higher education boards, Amata served on the corporate board of Shorebank in Chicago, of Catholic Health Initiatives in Denver, Mary's Pence, and the Charitable Trust, establishment of which, she told me only days before her death, was her proudest accomplishment. The LCWR honored her for lifetime service to women religious and ACCU similarly recognized her notable service to Catholic higher education.

I have watched "Amata the teacher" hold bishops, CEOs, religious leaders, and Board executives in rapt attention as she laid out in exquisite detail the deep connection between the Gospel and the decisions we make, weaving an argument so tightly and meticulously constructed that nary a dissenting nor idly curious gnat could find its way through it.

At St. Kate's, Amata's work with the Social Work faculty integrated the principles of Catholic Social Teaching with the curriculum and with the field's professional ethical standards. Leaders from most Catholic social work programs across the nation came to St. Kate's to learn how it was done. Similar work with PT, OT, Nursing and Communications followed.

In stunning parallel, Amata was also a lifelong learner, a marvelous example of which appears on a video I have (*ask me at lunch*) of my then 8-year-old grandson, Andre, methodically teaching Amata to play chess and she, in earnest, respectful attention — taking notes.

Never overconfident in the abilities other so readily recognized, I remember one anxious time when Amata was invited into an eight- member roundtable by the Boston College President, with each academic personally preparing an assigned paper, and also responding in writing to a colleague's work. Amata's respondent was Professor Paul Mariani, a noted poet and English Professor. His response to her work is magnificent. Google Paul Mariani and Amata Miller to see for yourself.

During her years as NETWORK's staff economist, Amata provided the research necessary for the lobbyists to prepare airtight policy arguments to members of Congress and their staffs, more than once testifying herself.

During those years, I recall Amata ending many of her talks with Brazilian Rubem Alves' famous narrative on hope, I quote in part:

> *Hope is a hunch that the overwhelming brutality of facts,*
>
> *that oppress and repress is not the last word.*
>
> And she'd finish*, "so let us plant dates,*
>
> *even though those who plant them will never eat them.*
>
> *We must live by the love of what we will never see.*
>
> *…. This is the secret discipline. …that has given*
>
> *prophets, revolutionaries and saints*
>
> *the courage to die for the future they envisaged."*

Consider all this as reflective of deep places in Amata's soul that she unwittingly revealed through the very persons she loved and the work she did: her sister, Mary; me, you, her nieces and their children and mine; her deep and wide array of friends, students and mentees; quiet determination and noble purpose; and vitality extended to all who stepped within the circle of her wise, generous spirit. It is hard to let go of one who reflected the Gospel so intentionally. It is why our grief is acute but also why hope must prevail.

This woman has left a legacy of enduring impact. Over the past days, we watched Amata accept grace and put it on, wearing it like her beautiful Jubilee dress and hat. We had the clear sense she was moving toward her death, moving in steady response to God's persistent urgings.

And so, Amata, beloved even in name, our beacon of knowledge, of enviable discipline, and enduring achievement, <u>is</u> in the hands of God.

Deep within the fertile loam of her good work, with each new idea developed; work toward justice embraced and sustained; great-great-grandniece or nephew born, Amata will offer a gentle nudge of encouragement for the work, the living, and the loving that lies ahead. Watch for it.

Lest you think these are just nice words suitable for a funeral remembering, let me finish with Amata's own words from her ministry update for 2026, signed by our president and her mission counselor a few days ago. "To what are you called?" the document questioned, for yourself, for the community, and for the world?

"*For myself*," she wrote, "*a new realization of the imminence of my death*."

"*For the community, a deepened sense of our charism* …

"*And, for the world, a widened global scope of the full complications of Trumpism, its meaning, its scope, and its new and developing spread*."

Well…I think yes to that.

Amata's mother, Ruth, wrote this in a poem, just a part quoted here:

"Small child – walk with me today.

I dip my height to hear your words.

My smile will give yours strength that words might obscure.

When you surpass me, I will rejoice in your tomorrow."

We will work toward that, and be counting on you for help and guidance, Amata, but for now, go well, dear sister.

Written and delivered by Andrea Lee, IHM, Oct.23, 2026