

REMEMBERING SISTER REGINA MARY AFFHOLTER
June 1, 1927-Dec. 19, 2011



*“So I will sing the praises of your name
forever,
fulfilling my vows day by day.”*

This quote, from Regina Mary’s Book of Life page which each of us filled out several years ago, gives us a glimpse of what was in Regina’s heart all these years of her religious life.

But let’s begin with the beginning. Rita Magdalen Affholter was born on June 1, 1927, to Lloyd and Irene Affholter of

Wyandotte, Mich., to join her sister, Betty Ann. In the ensuing years, her sister Nancy and brother Lloyd, in that order, completed the Affholter household. Rita began her education at Woodruff School in kindergarten and transferred to St. Patrick’s in Wyandotte for first grade. She transferred to St. Mary Academy for high school where she continued with the IHM Sisters as her guides through high school and eventually into the IHM congregation, which she entered on June 27, 1945.

Regina learned how to work quite early as did all of the Affholter children, at the family-owned Wyandotte Creamery and at their farm on Bluebush Road where they raised pigs and cows. The Affholters were thrifty people and knew how to use everything to the fullest. Mr. Affholter recycled the run-off from the creamery as food for the pigs instead of letting it flow into the river. Aside from that, many ice cream treats followed Regina into the community.

As a postulant, Rita Affholter was a lively addition to the large class of postulants who entered that summer when the community celebrated its 100 years of existence. In the course of the summer and the ensuing years in formation Regina exhibited her leadership and her many skills, particularly in sports.

After profession on Jan. 2, 1948, Regina was assigned to Holy Rosary School in mid-Detroit where she worked with children whose families had many needs. Regina began her side

career of obtaining school materials and clothing for her students and their families. At the same time, she worked unceasingly at developing a belief in themselves and awareness that there were opportunities “out there” for them.

In the 1950s Regina was assigned to teach at St. Peter Claver School in Mobile, Ala. She enthusiastically engaged in the students’ activities, including the initiation of a boys’ basketball team. Segregation was still alive. This prohibited her young men from playing against the white teams in the city, and there were no other black teams in the city. Undaunted, Regina enlisted the help of Sister Patrice, another IHM at a “white school,” and off the two of them went with their teams to play against each other in a distant city. On their return trip they passed an ice cream shop. Knowing that the young black men would not be welcomed inside, the two sisters, in full habits, went in and ordered ice cream for the boys intending to take it to the boys waiting patiently in the cars. To Patrice and Regina’s amazement, the store manager refused to sell ice cream to the sisters because it was going to be given to the young black men. The two cars returned to Mobile, and their occupants enjoyed some great Affholter’s ice cream at St. Peter Claver. Those two pulled it off and their students had their eyes opened to a broader view of our world.

In 1969 Regina was assigned to Holy Redeemer where she ministered until 2003. It was at Holy Redeemer that Regina reached her epitome in the field of education.

Regina continued her “extra-curricular” ministry of seeing that her students had what they needed in clothing as well as school materials. She began this work at Holy Rosary, continued at St. Patrick’s and brought it to full-bloom at Redeemer by establishing a program to assist students who were struggling in classes. With financial assistance from generous donors, Regina began the program “Getting Educationally Motivated,” better known as the GEM program, to offer individual assistance to students struggling to master their school work. This was an attempt to help those students tempted to drop out because of lack of interest and/or a need to develop learning skills.

Over the years there were more than 1,000 students who benefitted from this personal tutoring and guidance. A newspaper account tells about one student who paid little attention to his teachers and who caused trouble in the classroom. He was sent to the GEM room in the early 1990s and, after four years, was achieving well in his classes and even tutoring some of the

younger students. He was quoted in the newspaper as saying, “This program has made me want to learn.”

Another account involves a little girl in second grade who was disruptive in class and not doing her work. Sister Regina Mary came to her classroom one day and said to her, “Tomorrow I want you to come to my room.” Then Regina hesitated and asked the little girl for her home phone number. The little girl looked up and nervously asked, “Are you going to get me in trouble?” Regina answered, “No, I’m here to keep you out of trouble.”

The program has a 95 percent success rate. The GEM room continues to this day for students at Holy Redeemer with other Sisters and many volunteers. On May 5, 1997, Regina was honored by the alumnae of Holy Redeemer when she was inducted into their Hall of Fame. She was awarded the Education Honoree for that year – a well-earned reward for all of her years of teaching.

As all of the above was progressing, Regina had the opportunity to share a cottage at Wampler’s Lake with many of her Holy Redeemer faculty and her IHM Sisters. Her parents purchased a small cottage across from theirs which gave many people a chance to relax at and in the lake. Those gatherings were the highlight every summer for the IHMs celebrating a Jubilee. Regina invited the entire class out for a day and treated them with a day of relaxation and fun with boat rides, swimming and games. Regina was the truly the “hostess with mostest.”

In 2002, Regina’s dear friend, Sister Conradine Konefke died. They had worked together at Redeemer for many years and were strong supports for each other when problems in school arose.

In 2003, when her own health began to cause problems for Regina she moved to the Motherhouse. It was then that she could slow down and turn to her ministry of prayer and visiting the sisters in the Infirmary.

Many parents and teachers wonder if the values and the lessons they taught their children or students really had an impact. Earlier this month a proof that these values do take effect came to light in a generous contribution made to our community in memory of Sister Regina Mary by a student whom she taught at Holy Rosary School in the late 1940s. He wrote, “I remember Sister Regina Mary at Holy Rosary School in Detroit. She was my fifth- or sixth-grade teacher. She could throw a football so far that we all thought she should play for the Lions. Today I

received a note from Sister Jane Arthur informing me that Sister Regina Mary is now in the health care unit. Please tell Sister that I will be praying for her. She made a huge impression on my life and I thank her for that.”

We close with the words quoted at the beginning of this Remembering -

“So I will sing the praises of Your Name forever,
fulfilling my vows day by day.”

And now, Regina, you have fulfilled your vows and now join your family members and our IHMs in singing God’s praises forever. May you rest in peace.

Mary Ann Untener IHM
Dec. 21, 2011