



Remembering Patricia Ann Kidder, IHM Aug. 27, 1929 - Dec. 24, 2008

Many of you know Patricia Ann and I attended high school and graduated together. And together we joined the IHMs in 1947. We even flew on a small airplane from Akron to Toledo on the day of our entrance, thinking we would never fly again.

In a large religious community, like ours, assignments and ministry often take us far and wide and we go our own ways. And so we did. After many years, Patricia Ann and I connected again in 1971. And I must say, I really did not know the *heart* of Patricia Ann Kidder. But now, after spending some days reading her writings and collecting stories and insights of others, I can say this: Article 11 of our IHM Constitutions, which I believe foundational to our IHM ministry, was *the* motivation for her life and ministry. Selections of the article say; "In our struggle to live the gospel today we recognize the needs of God's people not only through the traditional works of mercy, but also by working with others to eradicate the causes of injustice and oppression. In a special way, we are committed to the work of education, a ministry in which our community has been engaged for over a century." This vision, I believe, was the inspiration for Sister Patricia Ann Kidder to energetically dedicate 58 continuous years of her life to formal Catholic school education – always passionately promoting the works of justice.

Her special life began in Akron, Ohio, Aug. 27, 1929, when Edna Margaret joined her three sisters, Helen, Rosemary and Agnes, as part of the growing family of Anna Catherine Seib and Francis Michael Kidder both from the Akron area. Later they welcomed two more daughters, Patricia Ann and Frances. Fritzie told me this morning that their father died at age 41, leaving Anna, with the help of their grandmother, to raise these six young daughters. Anna then went to work in a factory in Akron to support her growing family. And what a wonderful job she did! In her book of life, Edna says about her family, "My mother and my family taught me how to pray, deepened my faith and gave me hope and love." While researching material for this remembering, several people confirmed these statements and were witnesses to her deep faith, her prayerful spirit.

Edna was the popular girl at school. She was fun-loving, a great dancer and enjoyed parties. She wanted everyone to have a good time and put in the energy to make that happen. Years later, when she was living with a small group in the Chicago area, Antoinette McNamara remembers her great organizational skills of planning fun vacation trips for their local community. As a history teacher, she loved historical places and so created detailed, exciting trips to various states during their vacation times.

Like all the Kidder girls, a Catholic education was a must even in those difficult Depression years. In the true IHM spirit, the Akron St. Mary faculty firmly planted the seeds of Catholic social principles throughout their scholarly curricula. Patricia Ann's 12 years of such educational underpinnings, no doubt, deeply influenced her future apostolic ministry. She might also have been inspired by her IHM aunt, Sister Mary Timothy (Agnes Kidder), a highly respected educator already making an impact in educational circles. Clear statements on almost all of Patricia Ann's IHM commitment forms emphasize her zeal for bringing about the kingdom of God through the ministry of education with Catholic social principles as the focus.

In 1950, Holy Redeemer grade school was the site of her first apostolic ministry, then on to Sacred Heart, Roseville, and Our Lady of Lourdes, River Rouge. St. Mary, Wayne, challenged her to stretch to the high school level as history teacher and guidance counselor, at the same time offering experience to her as an assistant principal. Battle Creek provided more opportunities to test her administrative skills, as an assistant principal with Sister Remi Pauwels.

Now prepared for more administration, Patricia was invited to be co-principal with Joyce Duroske at Immaculate Heart of Mary High School, Westchester, Ill. This was a new administrative arrangement within the IHM educational system and yet to be tried. This school of approximately 1,200 young women, already with a strong academic foundation, was a very exciting place. With the commitment of over 50 highly motivated staff accompanied by many younger IHMs experiencing their first opportunities for changing the world via education, it was an educator's dream job. Sister Patricia Ann, using her guidance and administrative background, eagerly assumed her new role of co-principal.

According to her contract, Patricia Ann's "primary duties will be to have full responsibility for the student activities, the school calendar, the guidance department, and the admission of students." She also shared responsibility for the hiring and firing of faculty and staff, the school office, the parent-faculty association, supervision of classes, faculty meetings and department meetings. Quite a challenge, but Patricia Ann was eager and willing. As I remember, she thoroughly enjoyed the interaction with students, their activities, their social plans, athletics and general student life. Many new activities were launched and IHM school spirit thrived under her leadership. After three years, an organizational change thrust Patricia Ann into directorship of the school as sole principal. She received high praise from the faculty board coordinator for being "tireless in devoting time and energy to our two parents' organizations, winning a high degree of respect and cooperation from the local board or council of the Girl Scouts, in recognition of which she was recently granted a citation."

After a few years, she felt the need to move on, desiring to test some educational possibilities within the diocesan structure. After a limited time with the department of Christian formation as curriculum coordinator within the division of Catholic schools in Baltimore, Md., she formally resigned citing, "educational differences in curriculum development and research." In all aspects of life there are moments of disappointment when one feels the clash between vision and practice. These moments can be defeating or challenging.

Patricia Ann chose to be challenged. In an often-quoted phrase of hers from the National Catechetical Directory she writes, "Schools are the most effective means the Church has in educating the young people." Staunch in that belief, she found an opportunity to bring about the kingdom and to promote justice among thousands of students and hundreds of teachers and principals. She began perhaps the most dynamic and far-reaching ministry which consumed her life for the next 25 years. Patricia Ann joined in partnership with the Cleveland Diocese. She held many influential posts such as associate superintendent and administrator in the Akron Regional Office of Education, regional superintendent, field director and director of elementary education. According to her own writings, she was driven to bring about the kingdom by helping teachers and principals experience the vision as she did. For her, Catholic education in practice was, "stewardship, human dignity for students, gospel values, reconciliation, non-violence, forgiveness and compassion and understanding the mission of the Church."

Yvonne Spinoso, IHM, and Joan Monsour, IHM, both spoke of her great dedication and service to the principals. One principal who was struggling with a bad situation in the parish confirmed that Patricia Ann bounced into the school with such positive energy and hope that all would be well that she felt affirmed and comforted with renewed courage to go on. Principals in the Akron area were known to call at all hours asking for advice and always finding comfort in Patricia Ann's words and suggestions.

Margaret Lyons, superintendent of Catholic Schools and co-minister with Patricia Ann, added another dimension to what we have said of Patricia Ann. At her retirement gathering in 2006, Margaret used our own IHM Mission Statement as a basis for her comments. "Urged by the love of God, we choose to work with others to build a culture of peace and right relationships among ourselves, with the Church and the whole earth community". She says, "I think Sister Patricia Ann has embodied quite well the mission of her community. Committed in a love relationship with Jesus Christ, she has worked tirelessly, always aware of the presence of God among us." She added that St. Paul who speaks of 'peace of mind' was how she experienced Patricia Ann. "I have always found sister to approach all decisions about her work with you (principals), the schools and pastors, and her life with **peace of mind**. Peace of mind is acquired through prayer and reflection. It is given when someone openly and honestly approaches God and asks his counsel on all aspects of her life."

Sister Maureen Field, who was Patricia Ann's close friend for 35 years, witnessed this same peace of mind attitude. Maureen told me that Patricia Ann was so faith-filled, and lived so peacefully that if anyone was ready to be called by God without notice--it was Patricia!

We, all of us, say to you, Maureen, you have been blessed with many years of great memories. You have a forever friend for life, and forever has no end. And now you know, Maureen, there is no purpose in friendship other than the deepening of your spirit. You, and all of our spirits, are enlivened because Patricia Ann Kidder somehow, somewhere touched thousands of lives through her tireless dedication. We rejoice in that great mystery of devotion and love. Like Abraham in today's second reading, Patricia Ann was sent by **faith** and received **power** to generate many vibrant Catholic school offspring who would carry out the promise and further the reign of God.

Dear Patricia Ann, you indeed have fulfilled your life's dream. You also lived well the lessons of your family which inspired your life and service. Your untiring zeal for bringing about the kingdom of God through Catholic education and its call to justice is being fulfilled even *now* as you personally experience the *true mystery of that kingdom* and the *completeness of that peace* you knew so well here on earth.

Thank you, Fritzie, and the Kidder family for sharing Edna with us IHMs and the Catholic school world in three states. There is no greater gift than giving one's life for a vision and being excited anew each day about witnessing to its possibilities.

Patricia Ann, Your IHM Classmates, your Mission Unit and all IHMs say, thank you, faithful Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Joyce A. Duroske, IHM
Dec. 28, 2008