

REMEMBERING SISTER ANN MARIE L'ESPERANCE, IHM

Aug. 28, 1915 – Dec. 25, 2009



Ann Marie L'Esperance, the third of six children, was born on Aug. 28, 1915 in Detroit to Dr. Simon C. P. L'Esperance and Gertrude O'Neill. Along with her sisters Justine and Rita, and her brothers, Frank, Neal and Jerry, they had an "esprit de corps," and lived up to their family name, counting on the hope, centered in the care of their loving God! Her formal education was given at St. Charles, and from there she entered the IHM community on July 1, 1932 and was given the name "Naomi." Ann Marie kept her family ties intact and often talked of sick members and requested additional prayer for them. She loved joining the family for summer gatherings at Onekoma and would return with stories of the family.

The year 1932 was symbolic to many. The Great Depression was a reality; religious communities were enrolling large numbers. Nearly 90 eager young women entered at the same time as Ann Marie and were welcomed into the Postulate here – a brand new building at the time. What seemed like endless terrain of sand and a couple of trees, the young postulants experienced the sometimes frightening, often hilarious, ups and downs of becoming acquainted. There was, however, a lot of learning going on. There were a number who had entered from high school and a few who had completed college. Some were from Ohio (and they owned their roots) and then there were the native Michiganders. The directress, Sister Vigilia, aimed for a spiritual blend of some sort, but when Oct. 15 (St. Theresa's Feast) arrived, the day to request the "habit," the class membership had dwindled, and when first vows came around there were 32 young women who remained. Those who knew Ann Marie best described her as an "unpretentious" person who always held back a bit. She sensed this as she wrote in her "Book of Life" page – "My one fear in the Postulate and Novitiate was that I would be sent home."

Sister's teaching career began in the Novitiate when she taught grade three in the Academy. Following were 13 fruitful years as a grade school teacher in Michigan. In 1947, Ann Marie began her experience in secondary education, and for the next 12 years she mainly taught in the Detroit area. However, in 1959, as principal of St. Matthews, Flint, she seriously began her career as a Latin teacher.

In 1965 when Ann Marie was sent to the new high school in Riverview, little did she suspect when beginning her years there that she would, by her daily dedication as a teacher, leave an unmatched legacy of 37 years behind of loving fidelity to her work at Gabriel Richard High School.

She was well-qualified, for she had earned a Bachelor of Arts in English from Marygrove College, a master's in education from Wayne State University, and a master's in classical Latin from the University of Michigan. Her expertise was in Latin; she gave 21 years instructing students in its intricacies and insights into Greek Mythology, history and culture. If records prove anything, then we can safely say her dedication brought genuine life both to herself and her students. As a result of her enthusiasm, she accompanied three groups of students to the cradle of Latin with trips to Italy in 1974, 1979 and 1984.

An insert in the Gabriel Richard yearbook of 1984 vividly describes the activities of the Latin Club. Students spent two days at Michigan State University attending the Classical League Convention, attending a Roman Banquet, followed by a dance! From Chronicles, it states that her Latin Club gave a party for the elderly at Marian Manor Nursing Home; food, clothing and toys to an inner-city family; and a party for children of St. Leo's in Detroit. Ann Marie energized her club members well!

What was the "driving force" of this successful teacher? Sirach attempts to understand the work of God's creation, saying, "At God's Word, His works were brought into being! How beautiful are all! Beauty delights the eye, but it is Charity that rescues!" This phrase provides the lens for appreciating who Ann really was!

The following excerpts, taken from her commitment forms over the years, reveal how Ann Marie tried, with all her heart, to become the reality of her dreams.

- 1988 – "I'll help students to understand their responsibility to others less fortunate than themselves. This can be done by encouraging participation in school projects." (Helping mentally challenged, working in the soup kitchen in Detroit, "adopt a grandparent" project in a nearby nursing home, etc.)

Ann Marie's long tenure at Gabriel Richard High School of 37 years found her serving in many capacities. It was not uncommon for her to get a last-minute call to sub for someone who was absent -even far past the retirement age. She never missed an event that took place at the school. She would wear her maroon-colored sweater with pride! Quite a record!

- 1995 – "I must accept myself as I am, where I am, and how 'best' to serve the community."

She loved to shop and so insisted on being "buyer" in the house of 10 sisters. It was one of her outlets when she was no longer a full-time teacher. However, sometimes her idea of "adequate" for such a large house would sometimes bring frustration or a laugh! She would come home with six bananas for ten sisters and then wonder why they were all gone the next day! This didn't bother her at all

since she loved to shop and would often go to the store on the spot for whatever would be needed at the moment.

Sisters who knew Ann Marie and lived with her at Gabriel Richard testify that she had a wonderful sense of humor and her smile when asked "How are you?" and her answer, "Peachy keen" or "As I please" brought an easy response of a smile. This seemed to be carried over when she became part of the healthcare in Monroe as was testified to by the nurses and aides.

- 2001 – "I shall try to help others cross the boundaries of age, color and creed by example and conversation."

Her prayerfulness and love for the Blessed Sacrament were easily picked up. Often when the sisters would return from school or the parish in the afternoon, she would be before the Blessed Sacrament praying. The sisters really felt, when Ann Marie promised to pray for them, she did! Her great devotion to Father Solanus and loyalty to St. Charles were admirable. She loved going both to the monastery and St. Charles.

These excerpts, without a doubt, reveal a vibrant IHM, aware of her potential and one who used her gifts in serving others and fulfilling her responsibilities.

So a loving farewell is offered to Ann Marie with a quote of an article she cherished:

"Each IHM strives to be both a Martha and a Mary by combining a life of real prayer with a life of intense apostolic activity. She learns that belonging to a community means that members live in deep-down unity, but not uniformity – no one is made to order. Each Sister knows that, in her work for souls, the only lasting influence will be that of personal holiness. The very best service she can offer her community is that of becoming a Saint. The teaching apostolate is a powerful means of sanctification."

May Our Loving God gently embrace you, dear Ann Marie, with the gentleness and compassion with which you touched so many lives.

Written by:

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