

## Remembering Sister Marie Ellen Moir, IHM

Aug. 9, 1920-July 19, 2008



We have come together today to remember and celebrate the life of our dear Sister, Marie Ellen, a witty, fun-loving person who gave us many good laughs. Marie Ellen was determined but always with a certain gentility. Harsh treatment jarred her.

Sister Marie Ellen, the second of four children, Rosemary, Marie Ellen, Bill and Lewis, was born to Robert Moir and Loretta Sloan on Aug. 9, 1920, in Detroit. Mr. Moir was of Scottish descent and Mrs. Moir of Irish descent. Marie Ellen told me that her father "suffered" from his Scottish heritage. When her sister, Rosemary, was married, Mr. Moir's buddies from the Detroit Gas Co., where he worked, jokingly said that they wanted to be sure to be there to see him give his daughter "away" since

they had never seen him give anything away!

Mr. Moir was not Catholic. It was important to Mrs. Moir that the children attend Catholic school and church but she did not want to put any responsibility on her husband to get the children there. So, when Marie Ellen was very young, the Moirs bought a home in Epiphany Parish on Detroit's west side that was walking distance from church and school. Two years before his death, Mr. Moir became a Catholic. Father Chapman the pastor at Epiphany, the brother of our deceased Sister Mary George Chapman and the uncle of Sister Margaret Chapman was the one who instructed and baptized him.

Sister Marie Ellen recalled that since her father did not go to church with the family on Sunday mornings, they would come home to a Sunday breakfast that he had prepared for them. "Oh, the smell of bacon when we walked into the house," she said.

The family was quite worried about Marie Ellen when she was a toddler. She was almost three and had not started to speak. Her mother decided to wait until Marie Ellen's third birthday. If she still was not speaking, a doctor would be consulted. On her third birthday, looking wide-eyed at her cake with three candles, Marie Ellen surprised everyone with, "Now, I am a big girl!" Her grandfather said that she was just waiting for something good to say. And her father often remarked that Marie Ellen started to talk on her third birthday and never stopped!

Marie Ellen attended Epiphany Elementary School and since Epiphany did not have a high school, she went on to Saint Mary of Redford High School in Detroit, graduating in June 1939.

While in high school, Marie Ellen took music lessons from Sister Grace Maher only because she liked talking with Sister Grace! Marie Ellen said that she has never played the piano since! Sister Grace inspired Marie Ellen to enter the IHM congregation, which she did on July 2, 1939, two weeks after graduation. Even though her father was not Catholic, he supported Marie Ellen's decision. "She's one I won't have to worry about," he commented.

On Jan. 1, 1940, Marie Ellen was received into the Novitiate and given the name Sister Mary Gildas after Saint Gildas, who was born in Scotland but was influential in the 6th century Irish Church. The class was received on Jan. 1 because the bishop was not able to come to Monroe on the traditional reception day of Jan. 2. This was the first class to be received in the newly finished Motherhouse Chapel.

In 1942, Marie Ellen was assigned to Holy Redeemer School in Detroit to teach sixth grade. She told the story that while at Redeemer, the superior, Sister Irmina O'Conner, told her and Sister Deodata (Elizabeth Girardot) to go downtown and buy a piece of linoleum for the convent sewing room floor. They walked down Fort Street to the downtown and purchased the flooring. The proprietor apologized that he was not able to provide delivery service since all of his young employees were off in WWII. The two knew that Sister Irmina would not be pleased if they returned without their purchase! So, they began to walk home in full habit with the rolled linoleum, one at the front of the roll and one at the back. They stopped many lines of traffic along the way. The roll was so long that they blocked either the right or left lane on every street crossing. Sister Irmina was baffled by their ingenuity!

For about 30 years, from 1942 until the early '70s, Marie Ellen taught in the middle and upper elementary grades throughout Michigan. Then she decided to use the master's degree she had earned in guidance and counseling. For about the next 10 years, she was employed as a guidance counselor in various Catholic elementary schools in the Detroit Archdiocese. Marie Ellen found great satisfaction in her work as a counselor. She did spend a brief time at Sacred Heart School and Pensacola High School in Pensacola, Fla., as counselor and high school teacher. It was during this time that Marie Ellen realized she had an addiction problem. She spoke of her deep gratitude to Sister Dorothy Diederichs, her provincial, for Dorothy's care and support during this difficult time. After her five-month addiction treatment program in Chicago, Marie Ellen went to Marian Convent in Bloomfield Hills to live while she continued to counsel young students, both at Brother Rice High School, Bloomfield Hills, and Saint Bede's Elementary School.

When Marie Ellen retired from Saint Bede's in 1994, she continued to live at Marian and began her volunteer ministry. She helped in the Pastoral Care Department at Providence Hospital, Southfield, and also came to Monroe two days a week to drive for the Health Care Center. In 1998, she came to live with a small community in Saint Mary's Center, Monroe, and continued to offer her service as a driver. About three years later, Marie Ellen had to give up her driving because of rheumatoid arthritis. As one can imagine this was a stunning experience for such an independent, self-motivated person as she. Marie Ellen wrote that her reasons for moving to Monroe in 1998 were twofold: her own need for community and the need

for drivers in the Health Care Center.

Marie Ellen spoke of the time of Renewal as being "freeing" for her. "I loved it", she said. "I could be who I wanted to be!" Marie Ellen often spoke of her longing to be free. For years she struggled with guilt, scrupulosity and lack of trust in her own judgment. In the summer of 2005 when she found it more and more difficult to do things for herself, she moved into the Health Care Center. She minded this move intensely. It was her fourth since moving to Monroe in 1998 and she felt confined.

Sister Marie Sweeney relates that eight years ago when she came to the Motherhouse to ask for prayers for a donor of a lung, Marie Ellen met her afterwards and offered to donate one of hers, in all seriousness. Marie responded that it wasn't possible because it was too old. Marie Ellen's quick reply was, "Mine works for me!" Marie Sweeney was touched by her generosity and humor. No one else, she said, made an offer like that. Eventually, she did receive a lung from a younger donor.

Marie Ellen had several wonderful trips. One summer, she was able to spend a whole month traveling through the West. For a long time she traveled to visit relatives in the South and Southwest every year. Her nieces and nephews, Marie Ellen's sister Rosemary's children, treated Marie Ellen like their mother after Rosemary's death. She was the "mother" at weddings and other special occasions.

Marie Ellen loved her family and they were very devoted to her. They invited her to holiday celebrations, baptisms, First Communions, anniversaries and other family gatherings. She always delighted to be a part of these special days. Her brother Lew and his wife Betty had a home near Lewiston, Mich., and loved to have Sister visit them there. Marie Ellen also kept in close touch with her brother Bill and his family in Cleveland.

Marie Ellen told me that she found spiritual nourishment from the prayer of the Church. She used contemporary editions of the breviary for much of her prayer. And her greatest leisure activity was reading. Marie Ellen was proud to say, "I have come from a family of readers."

From living for so many years, Marie Ellen said that her deepest learning has been to have an all-embracing trust in both God and people. One needs both, she emphasized...God and others. "To lose trust in either can be defeating," she continued. On her Page of Life, Marie Ellen wrote, "Lord, help me to remember that nothing is going to happen to me today, that You and I together cannot handle."

Dear Marie Ellen, you are with God. With God there is no more guilt, fear or uncertainty. Sister Marie Ellen, we pray for your peace.

Deep peace of the running waves to you.  
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the smiling stars to you.  
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the watching shepherds to you.  
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.  
An Old Gaelic Prayer

Written by our deceased sister Patricia Ann O'Donnell, IHM  
With additions by Mary Laubacher, IHM, and Marie Sweeney, IHM  
Read by Sister Jean Laubacher, IHM