



Remembering Sister Brigid Mullane, IHM

April 29, 1920 – Oct. 23, 2008

Margaret Mary Mullane, known to us as Brigid, was born in Detroit, April 29, 1920. Her parents were William Anthony Mullane, a native of Detroit, and her mother Margaret Ellen Mulroy, a native of Bay City, Mich. This union was blessed by seven children, five boys and two girls. The boys were named William, Francis, Joseph, Dennis and Thomas. The girls were Margaret Mary and Kathleen.

Margaret Mary chose her maternal grandmother's name, Brigid, at the time of her Reception into the IHM congregation Jan. 2, 1939. Brigid said that her vocation to religious life stemmed from the devotion of both her parents who were delighted to have a daughter become a nun. She made her first vows in January 1941 and her final vows three years later in January 1944.

Though I have been told that Brigid had many stories to tell about her early years, she was reticent about writing down these stories. She was educated at Holy Redeemer School by IHMs. In her earliest years she lived in close proximity to Holy Redeemer Church. She exemplified the loyalty to parish, school and teachers that characterizes all Redeemerites.

During her early years of teaching, she worked toward completing a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and an master's from the University of Detroit. She loved to travel and enriched her life experiences by attending two Elderhostel programs, one in California and one in Montreal, with Ann Corr as her companion. Later she enjoyed a trip to Ireland with Carolyn Kerwin. For a number of years she frequently visited her cousin Mary in Coral Gables, Fla. She prized her Irish heritage and often reminded us of that when she wore a green outfit to celebrate.

Brigid began her teaching career at St. John's School in Monroe in 1940, where she taught in the lower elementary grades. The next three years she spent at St. Francis de Sales School in Detroit. In 1944 she was assigned to Our Lady of Lourdes School in River Rouge. It was at Our Lady of Lourdes that she experienced two traumatic events. On Feb. 11, 1946, a passerby noted smoke coming out from one of the grade school windows. It turned into a three-alarm fire which took two hours to extinguish. So serious was the damage that only four rooms in the grade school could be used for the rest of the year. The city of River Rouge came to the rescue and offered space at the Ferguson Public School next to the City Hall until Our Lady of Lourdes Grade School was habitable. It would seem that Brigid was not among those required to transfer her classroom to Ferguson.

Five months later another disaster hit, one which affected Sister Brigid greatly. A tornado struck and in two minutes caused devastation to the church, rectory and convent. In this event Sister Brigid suffered a narrow escape. As she stood on the porch of the convent, the porch collapsed and the roof toppled down over her head. As she struggled to get back into the convent through a door that had lost its glass from the gusts of the wind, the wind blew off her veil and bonnet. It took quite a while for her to recover from this traumatic experience.

From 1946 to 1961, most of Sister Brigid's assignments kept her in Michigan, except for a one-year stint in 1952-53 at St. Peter Claver School in Mobile, Ala. Sister Brigid spent 1955-58 in Coldwater where she continued to teach in the elementary grades. Sister Alys Currier remembers Sister Brigid as being easy to live with because of her free spirit and her happy disposition. During these years they would enjoy long walks together. Sister Brigid had charge of the kitchen and would frequently, on Friday afternoon, put eggs on the stove to boil and forget them. Sister

Alys recalls that one Friday afternoon there was a grand explosion of eggs leaving the ceiling and walls generously spattered with the residue.

From Coldwater Sister Brigid went to St. Martin's School in Detroit where she continued teaching in the elementary grades before she was assigned to teach high school math, her predominant area of teaching in the secondary school and beyond.

It was during her next assignment to Our Lady Star of the Sea that she began to show her concern for the disadvantaged and poor. Realizing that her students were all well off, she felt that it was important that they know that others were not as well off as they. Sister Rita McFarland recalls that Sister Brigid started a club called the M and M Club, the Mission and Ministry Club. During club meetings she would teach the students about the poor and disadvantaged and how important it was to share. Guest speakers, films and field trips to the inner city reinforced the lessons that she wanted them to learn. So contagious was her enthusiasm that membership in the club grew by leaps and bounds.

From 1967-1982 she taught math in various settings. In 1975 she began teaching math at Wayne County Community College and continued there off and on until 1994. About this time she was able to articulate her deep concern for the education of the poor. On one of her commitment forms she responded to the question, "How is your ministry a promotion of the Good News?" She wrote, "In enabling an underprivileged person to realize their God-given potential, the love of God is brought home to them and hopefully the Good News is personally experienced." At the end of the form she noted: "I am sorry that I am late. I mislaid this form." During vacation periods or when her teaching schedule was light, she would work at Hudson's to supplement her income and to help the less fortunate. For two years during this period, when she needed to return home because of illness, she taught at the Human Potential Center at St. Mary Center in Monroe.

As noted above, Sister Brigid recognized her difficulty in doing things on time. Sister Mary Ann Untener tells the story of one Sunday, when her brother, Bishop Ken Untener, was the presider for the Liturgy, the Liturgy had just begun when the congregation was aware of a clickety-clack of heels coming down the main aisle. The clickety-clack ended when the late-comer found a seat. It was Sister Brigid wearing high heels and a hat. At the end of the Liturgy, Bishop Ken announced that he would like to meet in the sacristy anyone who had arrived late for Mass. Brigid, responding to his invitation, proceeded clickety-clack down the aisle to the sacristy.

During her last years at the Motherhouse, Sister Brigid continued to show her abilities in many ways. Her partners in the game of bridge referred to her as a card shark.

Sister Marge Fogerty remembers with fondness how Sister Brigid loved to help her bake cookies when they were getting ready for an open house in the Memory Care Unit. Typical of Sister Brigid, she did not want to be the one in charge. She loved to help and to wash the dishes when the event was over. Sister Brigid had a phenomenal memory. In her early days she could name every relative, his/her birthday, and remember each one with a birthday card. She never lost this gift. Her caregivers in Memory Care said that she knew the name of every nurse or aide.

Dear Sister Brigid, we will miss your sun-shiny smile, your warmth and your free spirit. May you share these gifts with your relatives, friends and former students who are now enjoying with you the blessings of paradise.

Sister Marie André Walsh, IHM
Oct. 28, 2008