



Remembering Sister Agnes Louise Murray, IHM

July 26, 1933-April 27, 2011

We gather this afternoon to remember our dear Sister Agnes, known to many of us as Sister Agnes Louise, or in a more informal manner as Sister Aggie Lou. Sister Agnes was the second youngest of five children born to Thomas Murray and Agnes Dougherty. She was born July 26, 1933, in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, and was given the baptismal name of Margaret Frances. Her siblings were Mary Agnes, Ann, Paul, and James, now deceased. Her education began at St. Joseph Elementary School in Cuyahoga Falls and she went on to attend St. Mary High School in Akron, where the IHM Sisters taught for many years.

As a young child she had thought about religious life. She had two aunts and a great-aunt, who were Humility of Mary Sisters, and two uncles who were priests, one a Jesuit and the other a diocesan priest. With the encouragement of Sister Maurine Morrissey (Sister Hilaire, IHM), she began to think seriously about religious life. Upon graduation from St. Mary High School in 1951, she entered the IHM Postulate. During her postulate, her mother became seriously ill and died. The death of her mother during the postulate created a serious void in her life. In her memoirs, she noted that the community had permitted her to make four trips home to Akron in her postulant's habit to visit her mother. At the time she was not aware what a privilege this was and it was only much later she realized it.

After completing her BA degree at Marygrove, she taught in various elementary schools in Michigan and in 1955 she was missioned to Immaculata High School in Detroit. Her companions recall what an excellent teacher she was, teaching world history and US foreign affairs and challenging her students to excellence by her careful preparation and encouragement.

In 1969 she was sent to Maryhill College of St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, where she served as dormitory rector while completing an MA Degree in political science and American government at the University of Texas. During a financial crisis at St. Edward's University in the 1980s, she was reassigned to direct a reading laboratory and teach reading to migrant students.

In 1980 she began to feel a deep call to work in adult parish ministry, a call supported by Sr. Mary Mercy Geohegan, IHM, and Fr. Dick Berg, CSC, a Holy Cross priest, who was serving in St. Ignatius Parish. Upon application she was accepted at St. Ignatius Parish, run by the Holy Cross Fathers, to work in adult faith formation. Around this time the IHM congregation was discerning the meaning of relationships in religious life and she asked herself, "How can I help to bring life to others?"

Of her ministry in marriage and annulments, she commented, "Working with adults and helping them know their own strengths and insights has been a tremendous gift to me. So many people don't realize that things in their life can be healed and taken care of." These words of wisdom flowed from her own deep faith. Truly Agnes was the voice of wisdom to the adults with whom she ministered.

After 10 years of successful ministry, she joined a renewal program at Wellsprings. Upon her arrival there she received word that her brother Jimmie, who had had a kidney transplant earlier, had passed away. This was a traumatic point in her life because earlier, when it was decided that he needed a kidney transplant, she had volunteered to donate a kidney. At this time it was discovered that she too was afflicted with the same disease. After her return from Wellsprings for three intervening years she continued as a spiritual director and parish associate for marriage at San Jose Parish in Austin.

In 1995 she returned to St. Ignatius Parish as Director of Adult Faith formation. In 2004 she was named Director of RCIA and soon was recognized as the person with the greatest expertise in this area in the Diocese of Austin as well as in other dioceses in Texas. Because of her great understanding and empathy for persons struggling in failed or invalid marriages, she became a true resource for many persons who were suffering. She had developed a team of sponsors for RCIA whom she trained with great expertise and devotion, It was then that she realized that she could assist others in their quest for belonging. In 2005 she was appointed parish advocate for the Marriage Tribunal.

During her 10 years at St. Ignatius her associates and friends recognized what a powerful and deeply spiritual influence she had on their lives and on their faith development. In addition, they saw her as a woman gifted with a keen intelligence and an extraordinary faith that enabled her to process even the most difficult annulment cases and bring them to a happy conclusion.

In 2007, Sister Agnes returned to the Motherhouse and for a while was able to live a fairly active life as a retired sister. Soon her illness took over and she began the tedious process of dialysis, which required a good portion of her time. Through many months she struggled with exceptional patience, never offering a word of complaint or giving in to self pity. Her final move to the Heath Care Center was difficult emotionally for her, but it afforded her the assurance that help was always at hand when she needed it and she appreciated the loving care that each member of the health care staff gave to her. Her strong faith enabled her to continue taking each day at a time.

We say goodbye to you today, dear Agnes, as you enter eternal life with the God who has loved you so well and whom you have loved so well in return. We will miss you, but you will be near in our hearts until the day when we meet again in heaven. Eternal rest, grant unto you and may your soul rest in peace.

Sister Marie Andre Walsh, IHM
May 2, 2011