

IHM Sisters - Then and Now

July 2009



Sister Mary Therese (Raphael Marie) O'Donnell, IHM, entered the IHM community after high school. She earned her bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and knew she wanted to teach.

Sister Mary Therese's first assignment was teaching all subjects to first-graders at St. Charles School in Detroit. She was transferred to Sacred Heart, Roseville, Mich., after three years.

"We had so many first-graders at Sacred Heart, they had half-day sessions," Sister Mary Therese recalls. "I had 45 children in the morning and another 45 in the afternoon. I was determined that the students would know what they needed to know by the end of first grade in spite of half-day sessions, so I had to get creative!"

After teaching second grade for two years at St. Matthew, Detroit, Sister Mary Therese began teaching seventh- and eighth-grade history at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Detroit.

"I had just started working toward my master's in history," she chuckles. "I was teaching the children from my class notes and thought everything was going well – until they took their first test. Not a one of them passed. I realized they might not be quite ready for university work."

Sister Mary Therese spent time as a pastoral assistant and religious education coordinator before returning to the ministry she loved – teaching.

She taught in Detroit, Westchester, Ill., and Chicago and served as principal of Star of the Sea Elementary School in Jackson, Mich., for four years. The opportunity to teach junior high school, this time at Sacred Heart, Dearborn, Mich., drew her back to the classroom.

"I spent 15 years at Sacred Heart teaching English and reading," she says. "I'd write a simple sentence on the board and tell students, 'Make it interesting.' As they became more comfortable, I'd challenge them to not only make it interesting, but do it in a certain number of words.



"I also taught them how to create an outline, do research and write a term paper, including a bibliography. I heard later that their high school teachers could usually tell which students came from Sacred Heart."

Because of a series of health concerns, Sister Mary Therese retired in 2001 and lived at the Marygrove College Convent. Ever the teacher, she tutored and helped with Marygrove's children's programs. She returned to the IHM Motherhouse in 2003.

"It's marvelous to live at the Motherhouse," she says. "I've been able to blossom. I work in the Gift Shop; I joined the choir, take care of decorating the Dining Room for the Motherhouse sisters and serve as a Eucharistic minister.

"I've also been able to pursue my love of art and have even sold some of my ceramic pieces! My sister, Pat (Sister Generosa), also lives here, so I feel doubly blessed."