

IHMs in Action: Epiphany Education Center

A funny thing happens when nuns retire. Before you know it, they get a vision and start a new ministry.

About a year ago, that happened to a whole group of them. At the end of the 2005 school year, three IHM and four Dominican nuns intended to retire. But even before the summer temps hit the 90s, the newly retired educators envisioned a new kind of school for Detroit youth.

What was once the intensive care unit of Samaritan Hospital now houses Epiphany Education Center. The center provides free after-school tutoring, individualized learning, enrichment opportunities and quarterly evaluations for students in grades one through eight.

The brainchild of the seven nuns, Epiphany currently enrolls 16 students with more on the waiting list.

It all began with the idea of offering some form of education to children in Detroit. The seven sisters had no money, no location, no books, no supplies and no students. By August, they'd found a space. By September, they were led to a warehouse of free furniture. By October, they'd received donations of office supplies, paper, books and financial contributions.

Then they took to walking the Eastside Detroit neighborhood, giving parents flyers announcing the tutoring program and asking businesses to display the flyers in their windows.

By November, the students - some of their parents make a 40-mile round-trip to bring them - began to arrive.

Before students are enrolled, Sister Marie Cyril Delisi, IHM, talks with parents and children alike to determine educational needs and concerns. The sisters emphasize regular attendance, parental involvement and the child's own commitment to the program. That approach gets positive results.

"Parents are well aware of how expensive other tutoring programs are," says Sister Alice Baker, IHM. "They are determined to get their children the academic help they need and appreciate our free program. Students like the fact that we include them in the process and that there is one-on-one interaction with their tutor. Everyone is here because we want to be, and that makes a big difference in motivation."

Their fast-track educational enterprise is ready to grow. The waiting list of students depends on finding additional certified teachers who will volunteer to tutor. Certified



IHM Sisters Mary Laird, Marie Cyril Delisi and Alice Baker

teachers willing to volunteer can contact Epiphany at 313-267-1830 or epipedu@peoplepc.com.

Epiphany Education Center will host an open house on Thursday, April 27, from 4 - 7 p.m. Light refreshments will be served, and the Rev. Norm Thomas, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Detroit, will give a special blessing at 5 p.m.

In addition to Sisters Marie Cyril and Alice, the Epiphany founders include Sisters Mary Laird, IHM; Jo Ann Lucas, OP; and Mary Kay Moran, OP; Kathleen Watt, OP; and Pauline Opliger, OP. All are part of the teaching staff, except Sister Jo Ann, who assists the staff in their outreach efforts to obtain supplies and materials.