

## IHMs In Action



Sister Marie Clark, IHM, is pastoral associate at St. Jude and Immaculate Conception parishes in Louisa County, Va., a ministry she began 10 years ago at age 73.

At a time of life many people have retired, her tenure comes as a bit of a surprise, even to her, but she is lucky enough to honestly say she loves her work.

"I'm involved with outreach efforts at both parishes," she says. "I work with people who call the parish for help. I find out what the problem is and ask questions to learn more about the situation."

Sister Marie is also in touch with parishioners who are hospitalized and makes sure they can receive the sacraments. She is in touch with several hospitals since parishioners might go to the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville, Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg or to hospitals in Richmond.

She came to her current ministry via a circuitous route.

Growing up in Philadelphia, Sister Marie knew she wanted to be a religious sister.

"I almost became a Mercy nun," she recalls. "I was influenced by one of my teachers -- Sister Mary Agnes -- a Mercy Sister who was a magnificent teacher. She made sure I really learned my Latin," Sister Marie says with a chuckle.

"I finally chose the IHMs because I had been in touch with my third-grade teacher, Sister Mary Assumption, IHM, all the way through high school and she made an impression on me."

Sister Marie entered the IHM community in West Chester, Pa. She taught in schools throughout Pennsylvania for many years, and spent six years teaching in Santiago, Chile. She spent time as a school administrator in Miami before returning to Philadelphia as a teacher and administrator.

After a six-year leave of absence to care for her mother, Sister Marie discerned a call to join the IHMs in Monroe. "I felt very strongly that we should be out there with the people," she explains. "The Monroe IHM Sisters offered that opportunity."

She served as the administrator of St. Mary Conference Center in Monroe for nine years before accepting the challenge of opening a religious conference center in Louisa County.

"They wanted someone with experience," Sister Marie says, "but the new center never prospered as planners had envisioned. I resigned and contacted my IHM superior, Sister Carolyn Campbell, in Monroe for guidance.

"She asked, 'What about the local parish? Don't they need a sister?'" Sister Marie said.

It turns out they did.

"The pastor of St. Jude and Immaculate Conception hired me on the spot to give retreats and provide spiritual direction," Sister Marie said. "The job responsibilities changed, but I love the regular interaction I have with parishioners. I have no plans to retire any time soon!"

*This article is based on "The Catholic Virginian" feature of Sister Marie and her ministry.*