

In Action



As part of being Lola Mae Trombley's guardian, Sister Peg Gearhart, IHM (right), visits with her regularly and has built a comfortable rapport.

In 2007, the IHM Sisters embarked on a new ministry: serving as guardians and/or conservators for adults whose physical or mental condition compromises their ability to make good decisions.

"Guardians are appointed by the court to make decisions regarding someone's personal or financial matters," Sister Margaret Chapman, IHM, explains. Sister Margaret is president of [Compassionate Companions, Inc.](#)

Located in Warren, Mich., Compassionate Companions serves as the umbrella agency for the IHM guardianship program. Eight IHM Sisters staff the organization, which serves approximately 100 clients in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Monroe Counties.

"The court prefers that a family member serves as guardian where necessary, but many people don't have family nearby or relatives are unable or unwilling to become guardians," says Sister Margaret. "That's where we come in."

Once the organization has been appointed as someone's guardian, a staff member meets with the person to determine how well he or she is able to function and communicate and addresses any priority needs, including housing, physical care and social services.

In some cases, guardians also manage their clients' finances, acting as Social Security payees, setting up bank accounts and paying bills. Sister Frances Mlocek, IHM, takes care of this aspect for Monroe County; Sister Margaret Alandt, IHM, handles it for Detroit-area clients.

The IHM guardians agree that a big part of the job is advocacy on behalf of their clients, ensuring they aren't taken advantage of and that they are receiving all the services to which they are entitled. Another important aspect of the ministry is pastoral, encouraging development to the fullest potential and accepting people as they are, without judgment.

"We're working with people who have fallen through the cracks," notes Sister Mary Catherine Quick, IHM. "We're not always welcomed - we've all had clients who don't want a guardian and are not receptive to us - but this ministry truly fits with the IHM charism of caring for the most marginalized of our society."

"To be invited to share another's space, to witness the grace clients exhibit every day just by getting up every morning in spite of their challenges - it's a gift, Sister Marianne Gaynor, IHM, adds.

In its short life, Compassionate Companions has developed a good reputation within the communities it serves.

"Because IHMs are so well known in Michigan, we frequently meet people who know the community," reports Sister Margaret. "People know they can trust us and that we will be there for them."

Compassionate Companions, Inc. also offers what they refer to as "pre-guardian services" for those who are still able to make their own decisions but may need some assistance to remain independent. Services include medical advocacy, assistance with finances and household errands.



Compassionate Companions, Inc., is staffed by IHM Sisters (left to right, seated) Margaret Alandt, Margaret Chapman, Hilda Skelley and Marianne Gaynor. Standing (left to right) are IHM Sisters Ann Nett, Peg Gearhart, Mary Catherine Quick and Frances Mlocek.