

IHM^s IN ACTION



Sister Joan (Marie Trinite) Glisky, IHM, defines her ministry as the IHM oral historian as gathering memories and considers it a privilege.

“Hearing how each person’s life has unfolded makes you feel like you’re in sacred space,” she says. “I’m seeing how each person concretizes what it means to be an IHM. The individual stories flesh out the IHM story.”

Oral history documents events through interviews with those who can give eyewitness accounts. It may also involve gathering people’s perspective about their lives, what shaped their decisions and how events may have affected them.

“I’m collecting the histories and the stories, but I’m not writing them,” Sister Joan notes. She records her interviews with IHM Sisters and then transcribes them verbatim.

“On average, collecting each oral history takes about 40 hours,” she says.

That includes the interview, replaying the interview for the individual, making any needed changes and transcribing. Accuracy is essential, as is patience.

“Sometimes you have to go back to the person you’ve interviewed for clarification of a word or phrase that may be unclear on the tape,” Sister Joan explains. “You also have to be able to interpret the tone of the person – noting when someone chuckles or sighs – so that the verbatim is as accurate as possible.”

Once the transcription has been approved by the sister, it is cataloged and kept in the IHM Archives. The IHM Sisters have gathered oral histories since the 1960s. Sister Joan has filled the role since 2000.

The process of gathering an oral history usually begins when Sister Joan approaches a sister to find out about a particular event or about her ministry during a certain time.

Those who agree to tell their stories have the option of writing a memoir or an interview built around a set of questions Sister Joan provides to prepare for their recorded conversation.

The histories document IHM life and missions locally and around the world, and the information becomes available to researchers within and beyond the IHM community.

“Oral history is at the heart of the congregation,” Sister Joan says emphatically. “Knowing where you came from is important to figuring out where you’re going. Preserving the memories preserves our identity and gives focus to our future.”