

IHMs in Action: Human Services

Patricia (Marie Sara) Rourke, IHM, PhD, has been a licensed clinical psychologist for more than 25 years.

Sister Pat, located in Monroe, Mich., works with people facing life-threatening illnesses and those dealing with death and loss.

"Death is a part of life," says Sister Pat. "My experience has taught me that there's life beyond death. I'm touched by those with whom I work, and often saddened, but it's such a privilege to be with people during this time in their lives."

Sister Pat notes that there are common issues confronted by people facing a life-threatening illness.

"The first is acceptance," she says. "Getting to that point entails being creative in how you choose to live until you die. It's miraculous to be a part of that."

The second issue is preparing others for the changes illness brings about, she says, often including the inability of others to cope, isolation and having to give up work or other activities.

"It's helpful to focus on new directions and how we relate to each other with serious illness," she says.

Her approach to working with people is simple: respect where they are, try to find out why they're there and help them move beyond it.

"There are some people I can't help, and I have to tell them that," she comments. "For instance, people who are blessed in many areas of their lives but focus only on problems. It's also much more difficult for me to work with people crushed by divorce or other forms of rejection than to work with people who are seriously ill."

In addition to her work as a psychologist, Sister Pat is also an award-winning poet. She views both ministries as "making the Word visible to others." Her work has appeared in publications such as *Sojourners*, *American Poets and Poetry*, *Poetry Digest* and *Review for Religious*. She has published four books of poetry.

