

## IHMs IN ACTION



Sister Marie (Robert Marie) Sweeney, IHM, was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis in the late 1990s.

Breathing became difficult, and daily activities became impossible. She could survive only with the help of an oxygen machine. Or she could have a lung transplant.

On Sept. 30, 2001, 15-year-old Jeremy Smith was killed in a car accident. Jeremy's mother wanted some good to come from his senseless death, so she donated his organs and corneas to those in need. Sister Marie received Jeremy's left lung the day after he died.

Today, in addition to being a wedding coordinator at Marygrove College, Sister Marie is an active volunteer with [Gift of Life Michigan](#) – a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing participation in organ and tissue donation for transplantation.

She is a volunteer area leader, working with Detroit area volunteers and organizing speaking engagements, and she talks to groups as diverse as Cub Scout troops and health care professionals.

"After my transplant, I went back to work part-time at Marygrove College, but when I left in 2004, I couldn't just sit home," Sister Marie says. "Gift of Life Michigan asked me to tell my story.

"There's such sadness from Jeremy's death, but at the same time, I can bear witness to his life and show that organ transplants work."

Sister Marie also reaches out to other transplant patients.

"I visit people to talk about their transplants," she explains. "I know some of the emotions they're feeling. It helps to hear someone who's been there tell you, 'it's going to get better.'"

An unexpected bonus for Sister Marie has been the people she's gotten to know since her transplant.

"The experience has provided me with a wonderful exposure to diversity – cultural, ethnic and religious. We may have different belief *systems*, but we all *believe*. I've never met an atheist in the transplant community!"

In 2005, Sister Marie received a Shining Star award from the Michigan Department of State for her work to increase awareness of the need for organ donations. In 2007, her volunteer work with Gift of Life Michigan was recognized by the Detroit chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Sister Marie carries Jeremy's picture in her wallet and has a button with his photo, which she wears at her speaking engagements. She visits with Jeremy's mother regularly. Strong emotion is apparent when she asks, "How do you thank someone for six years of your life?"

She is gearing up for National "Donate Life Month" in April. "What will we leave for others?" Sister Marie asks. Becoming part of a donor registry is quick and easy, either through [Gift of Life Michigan](#) or through [Donate Life America](#).