

IHM^s IN ACTION



Sister Maryfrances Barber, IHM, graduated from Marygrove College with a degree in chemistry. Her first ministry was teaching science at St. Martin de Porres High School in Detroit.

“I needed graduate classes to maintain my teaching certification,” she says. “I left St. Martin de Porres after a year when I found a full-time graduate program at Wayne State University. I took a position as a teaching assistant in chemistry and discovered I loved higher education.”

Sister Maryfran received a fellowship from Wayne State and earned her doctorate in chemistry in

1990. She spent 10 years teaching chemistry at Marygrove before working for the IHM community. She is in her ninth year ministering as a senior lecturer in chemistry at Wayne State.

“I focus on undergrads in their first year or two in college. My classes are enormous – from 200 to 500 students in each,” Sister Maryfran says. “With so many students, I utilize innovations such as clickers – a student response system – in order to promote active learning.

“Homework is done online. The questions are random, and students must get two in a row right or they start over. The randomization of the questions and the immediate feedback are very helpful to learning. “Very few students take chemistry for chemistry’s sake,” laughs Sister Maryfran. “They need it in order to reach a goal. I love helping them get where they want to be.”

Sister Maryfran also works with beginning graduate students, coordinating their training as teaching assistants (TAs) and helping them get oriented.

“Each of my undergraduate classes has a staff of teaching assistants I’m responsible for,” explains Sister Maryfran. “The classes meet in smaller groups led by a teaching assistant.

“Wayne State is very diverse in terms of students’ age, culture and academic sophistication,” she continues. “Most of the undergrads are first-generation college. They grew up in the United States, but their parents have not. It’s important for me to ensure the TAs are sensitive to the diversity, to respect it and work with it.”

As part of her ministry, Sister Maryfran is part of numerous committees, including the Graduate Teaching Award Committee and the University Technology Committee.

“The Technology Committee has implemented ‘Lecture Capture’ as a pilot program this term,” she says. “This allows us to post what happens in the classroom online for students who may have missed the class or want to review the material.”

Sister Maryfran loves teaching and demonstrates a genuine concern for her students.

“It’s easy to get lost in such a big place,” she says, “but students know when a professor cares. They’re young; young people sometimes screw up, but they learn from their mistakes.

“My favorite part of this ministry is nurturing students toward their next stage of growth.”