

## IHM<sup>s</sup> IN ACTION



Sister Paula Cooney (second from right) works with a resident council at Regina Residence, the retirement community of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange

The ministries of Sister Paula (Marie Paula) Cooney, IHM, have been a series of steps, taking her from classrooms in Michigan to a retirement center in Orange, Calif.

Sister Paula spent her early years teaching elementary and high school students in the Detroit area. She spent 18 years working with adults in parish ministry and at the IHM Sisters' Visitation House of Prayer.

When Sister Paula became an IHM provincial in 1988, she worked extensively with some of the senior members of the community.

"I saw the beauty of elder spirituality and the gifts and challenges of older adults," she recalls. "I wanted to be involved as they continued their life journeys. I wanted to ensure they had the support they needed as they grew older and to directly impact how care is provided."

Sister Paula returned to school to learn more about the field of gerontology. She was serving as the administrator of Maryhaven, a senior community in Southgate, Mich., when she was elected to the IHM Leadership Council in 2000. She served for six years and was involved with the development of the Memory Care Unit in the IHM Motherhouse.

After her term of office ended in July 2006, Sister Paula was invited by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange to serve as administrator of their retirement community at Regina Residence. It's a ministry that uses all the knowledge and experience she has gained in her past ministries.

At Regina Residence, Sister Paula developed dementia care protocol, redesigned the environment to stimulate those with cognitive challenges, adopted person-centered care for the residents and began working to empower staff.

"Empowering staff members is essential," notes Sister Paula. "When people are empowered – able to acknowledge their insights and be comfortable sharing suggestions – they're more invested in their work, which benefits staff and residents alike.

"We introduced person-centered care for the residents, meaning each person is encouraged to take on as much responsibility as possible for directing her own life," Sister Paula continues. "It's a shift from the kind of care many of us are used to, where caregivers make the decisions.

"It's been so rewarding for me to watch the sisters grow in their ability to claim their own lives, to enter into making choices for themselves about how they live their elder years."

The care provided at Regina Residence has garnered the attention of other religious communities.

"We've had four or five teams from different congregations come to see what, and how, care is provided and what person-centered care entails," Sister Paula says.

"It's a 'pay it forward' situation. We were supported by many organizations when we started, so now we're doing the same for others.

"This ministry has been a wonderful opportunity for me to grow."