

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



Sister Tiz with third-graders (left to right) Jeovanni Jimenez, Brandon Espinoza, Alejandro Carbajal, Maira Herrera

When Elizabeth (Joseph Sarto) Fleckenstein, IHM, joined the IHM community, being a teacher was not at the top of her list of priorities.

That changed quickly.

"Through the wonderful IHMs who mentored and encouraged me, I learned how much I love children and what a privilege it is to have a part in developing their minds, hearts and spiritual lives," Sister Elizabeth ("Tiz") recalls.

After teaching in Trenton, Mich., and Monroe, Sister Tiz has spent 30 of the last 36 years ministering at Holy Redeemer Elementary School in southwest Detroit. She served as co-principal from 1976-1980, left for a position in Kirkwood, Mo., and returned as principal of Holy Redeemer in 1986.

"When Holy Redeemer School opened in 1882, its founders wanted to teach more than just the 'three Rs'," notes Sister Tiz. "They wanted to teach children the values they'd need to confront injustice.

"That's still true today, more than 125 years later. Injustices such as hunger, poverty and violence are all around us."

Some of Holy Redeemer's students are from families split up by the current immigration laws. Approximately 85 percent of the children qualify for a low-cost lunch because of their parents' income level.

"We know the environment our children come from, but our job is to help them be the best they can be, in spite of the obstacles they face every day," Sister Tiz emphasizes. "We tell our students that failure is not an option.

"It's a real challenge to make tuition affordable but still meet staff payroll," she continues. "Parents are willing to make the sacrifices necessary to send their children to Holy Redeemer because they recognize the quality education we provide and the dedication of our staff who see this as a ministry, not just a job."

The result is a partnership that is readily apparent.

The Michigan Non-Public School Accrediting Association accredited the school last spring. The report cited the atmosphere of care, concern and respect from teachers, students, support staff and parents, which especially impressed the review team.

"When I see how happy the children are, the collaborative atmosphere with everyone working for the children, I never feel like I'm in this alone," Sister Tiz comments. "The students provide my energy. There's a spirit here that gets in your blood."

*Since its founding in 1882, an IHM Sister has served as principal of Holy Redeemer.*