

# Journey

Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA Vol. 42, No. 1 Spring 2024



# The Vows that Unite Us

by Kathryn Clauss, IHM

As we enter into the Easter season, we have compelling examples of sisterhood/brotherhood. It is evident in the witness of women and men of Jesus' time who gathered to serve the needs of others, share their faith, break open their doubts and concerns and draw from one another's convictions about Jesus. Our sisters and brothers found their way to belief and stayed the course because of a community of faith that grounded them.

Throughout this edition of *Journey*, the authors invite us, through meaningful insights, to celebrate and understand particularly the blessings of sisterhood. The themes and threads woven together here illustrate the essential elements to which we attend, and the communion we experience with those who share similar dreams, values, best hopes, and heartaches.

Engaging in sisterhood calls us to pay attention to what God and our sisters and brothers need from us. In Mark 4:9, Jesus offered a mandate, "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand." The poet Mary Oliver beautifully nuanced the act of attention as "the beginning of devotion" (Upstream, 2019); and "our endless and proper work" (Yes! No!, 1994). Philosopher Simone Weil expanded the understanding of the impact of attention. She called it the "rarest and purest form of generosity" (1942). The act and art of paying attention empowers us to see each other and creation in Christ, and to see Christ in each other and in creation.

As women religious, we profess vows of consecrated celibacy, evangelical poverty, and prophetic obedience. We profess these vows, and spend the whole of our lives coming to understand and embrace their fullness. It is that

fullness that enables us to enter deeply into the sisterhood/brotherhood of humanity and care for all of creation.

The spirit and words of our IHM Constitutions call us into a global sisterhood in which we live our vowed life in Christ for others. *Our commitment to God's people and to creation compels us to live with a self-emptying spirit of love, joy, and hospitality. We strive to reflect that humility and simplicity, which present a clear and compelling witness to Jesus Christ, who welcomes everyone* (Constitutions 8).

As we live the vow of consecrated celibacy, *"we give ourselves totally, unreservedly, and perpetually to Jesus Christ as our primary relationship. Celibacy compels us to become radically available for others in loving, mutual relationships... for the sake of the Reign of God... here on earth."* Through this vow we are invited to *"live out our weakness and vulnerability by surrendering to the overwhelming gentle tenderness of unconditional, unending and irresistible Love"* (Constitutions 18). The vow of consecrated celibacy renders us free to move into diverse groups of persons in our lives. The synergy in those gatherings deepens our intention to live out the vow in Christ for others.

Living the vow of evangelical poverty frees us to *"witness to our dependence on God, our sisters in community, and all creation for our physical, material, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Our primary motivation is the following of Jesus Christ in his total giving of himself to the Father for the salvation and liberation of humankind* (Constitutions 23). *By this vow, we commit ourselves to a life of accountability to care for all creation without entitlement, greed, or competition"* (Constitutions 22). As we enter into the lives of those with whom we live, serve, and engage, we do so with the self-giving spirit



of Jesus as we attend to those with whom we journey.

As we live the vow of prophetic obedience each day, *"we are inspired by the example of Jesus, who lived his life responding to the Father's will. Through prayer, dialogue, and discernment, we seek fidelity to the will of God for the building of the Reign of God* (Constitutions 31). *Through deep and prayerful reflection on the Gospels, we actively seek to live our vow of prophetic obedience. We are guided by the needs of the people of God, the signs of the times, the Church, chapter decisions, congregational leadership, and leaderful membership* (Constitutions 35).

Our global IHM sisterhood in the vowed life grounds us in the truth that sets us free to live in Christ for the sake of others and to further the Reign of God.

*Sister Kathryn serves as president of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA.*



Our mission as Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Scranton, Pennsylvania, is to follow Jesus as a community of disciples, aware that we are sent to be a clear and understandable prophetic witness to the presence of God in the world. - *from the IHM Mission Statement*

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# The Ministry of Presence

by John Michele Southwick, IHM

Who is Jesus for you? What do you think was important to him? He didn't have a job after he left home, and he didn't even have a home. I think what was important to him was "being present" to those around him. What a difference it would make if we all could "be present" to those around us.

I'm sure all of you have had the experience of speaking to persons whom you know are not really listening. They are hearing you speak but have no sense of what you are really saying. Their eyes wander, they are looking at things going on around them, looking at their watch or phone, and their body language suggests they want to exit. What is the feeling you have when they walk away? Being ignored, unimportant, not taken seriously, invisible?

In my experience as a religious sister, teacher, campus minister and counselor, I have "seen" many people both young and old, as well as family members and sisters in my own community. Has my "seeing" them had a positive impact? Have they left my presence feeling important, valued and listened to?

I remember the painful experience of the death of my best friend. I found myself just standing in the Marian Convent community room and staring out the window. A sister who lived there came to me, didn't say a word, but just stood near me. I didn't know this sister very well, only by name. Her choice to be present at that moment of grief and pain was consoling to me. This silent act of kindness meant the world to me. She was like an angel sent to me by God.

I think often of our late Sister Maria Rose Kelly. She was a master in the ministry of presence. At her funeral so many spoke of Maria Rose's gift of presence. When with Maria Rose, YOU were the only one and the only thing that mattered. You were her focus and she brought you into her presence. She always said, "everyone needs a good listening to."

I looked up the word "presence" in the dictionary and the words that stood out to me were "attending to."

Ministry of presence is important to the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. While the number of our members is dwindling and we're not staffing as many missions as we once did, the importance of our presence—wherever we are and whatever we're doing—is vital to fulfilling to our mission. Our IHM Charism states, "We joyfully participate in



*Presence, no matter how it is achieved, is an act that requires self-awareness, choice, discipline, and other-centeredness. Presence is the only act required for deepening a relationship—a relationship with God, with others, with nature, with self.*

the redeeming love of Jesus which impels us to proclaim the good news of God's unconditional love for all." In my mind, it's possible to proclaim God's love only when I am present to those I meet—in the hallway, the grocery store, church, a meeting. Being the presence of God is no small task. You might ask, how can I possibly be present to everyone when I have a job to do, a family to care for, my own health and well-being to take care of? Presence is about awareness. I am aware of you. I attend to you in the moment. I take you in.

Being present isn't just a choice motivated by religious life. It's a human and relational choice. A recent headline in the New York

Times, March 2, 2024, by Melissa Kirsch, read, "We know that happiness is to be found in taking our time and being present. How can we slow down and stop rushing our way through life?" The author goes on to explore the bad mood and anxiety that are created when we are rushing to the next thing, the next appointment, passing people as if they are unplanned obstacles to reaching the next goal.

Today we are experiencing a sociological phenomenon that began long before Covid isolation; Covid simply exacerbated our need to communicate electronically. So many of us have become addicted to this other type of presence—Internet presence. We place viewing the most recent post/video/news as more important than the person sitting across from us at the dinner table. Our obsession with online information has become a substitute for relating to others in physical form with language and expression. We've become shallow in our communication truncating complex issues, experiences and feelings into a few superficial words.

This is not to say that presence isn't possible through the use of our phones, the Internet, and social media. Presence, no matter how it is achieved, is an act that requires self-awareness, choice, discipline, and other-centeredness. Presence is the only act required for deepening a relationship—a relationship with God, with others, with nature, with self.

I've been blessed throughout my lifetime with ministries of presence. I have received countless notes from students about the difference I've made in their lives. Wow! I don't even remember what I might have said to these students that could have made such a difference. I look back and think that it is not what I've said or what I've done for them but rather how I made them feel. If by my presence I made them feel seen, valued, respected, loved, then that's the positive result of my ministry of presence.

Can I be free enough to be like Jesus whose whole earthly ministry was simply being present?

*Sister John Michele serves as a counselor with the Counseling & Student Development Center at Marywood University in Scranton, Pennsylvania.*

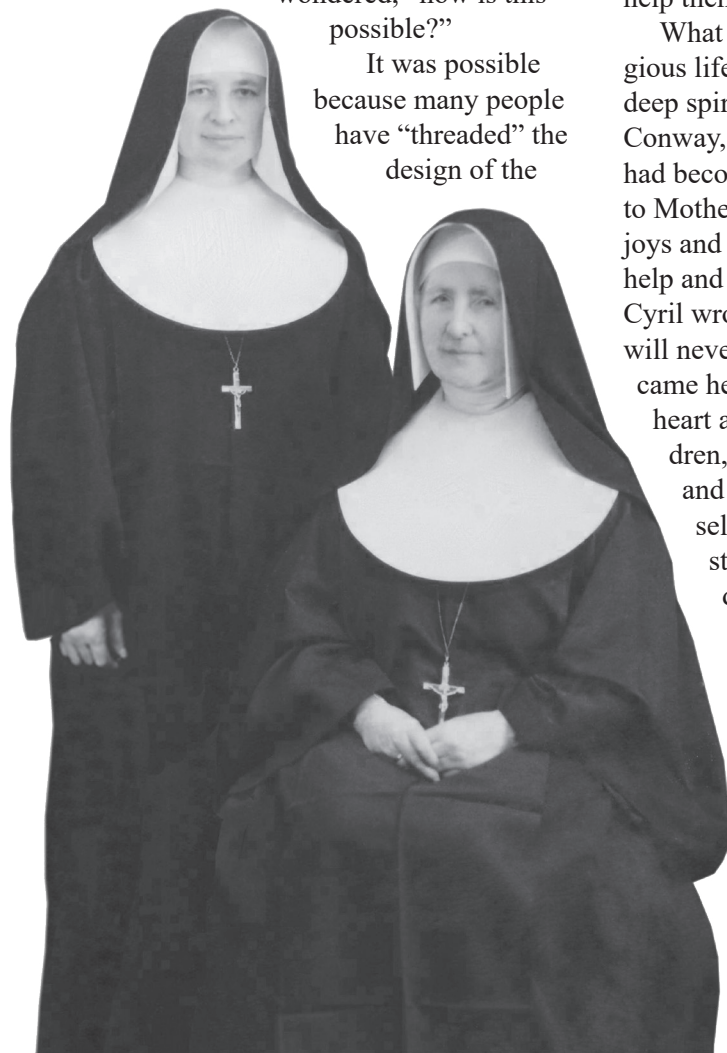
# A Tapestry of Love and Collaboration

by Margaret Petcavage, SSC

In the late 19th century, the lives and experiences of many people became the threads that were woven into the life story of the Sisters of St. Casimir. Most especially among those threads was the life of the remarkable woman, Casimira Kaupas, born in 1880 in Ramygala, Lithuania. Cooperating with God's great love for her and her great desire to help the Lithuanian immigrant population which she first witnessed in Scranton, PA, Casimira did all she could to weave the threads of a lovely tapestry of a religious community into existence.

This was a remarkable accomplishment because Casimira had never seen or heard of a religious Sister in her life, until she arrived in Scranton, PA in 1897, to be the housekeeper for her priest brother. Seated on a streetcar and through a window, she saw blue robed women with a group of children. Hurrying home to her brother, she asked who these women were only to hear him say, "they are women who live for God alone." At last, her life's dilemma was answered, she would become a Sister, but she wondered, "how is this possible?"

It was possible because many people have "threaded" the design of the



Mother Maria Kaupas (left) and Mother Cyril Conway in 1932 at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the founding of the Sisters of St. Casimir.

weaving of our life story especially Casimira's brother, Father Anthony, pastor of St. Joseph parish in North Scranton and Father Anthony Staniukynas, a scholarly pastor in Mt. Carmel, PA. Through their dedication and commitment, along with The Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, (IHM) and so many others, our Congregation came into existence. It was Father Staniukynas, who agreed to guide and train this young Congregation. He asked his Bishop, John W. Shanahan of Harrisburg, PA to help bring the Congregation into existence. The Bishop, in 1905, immediately wrote to Mother M. Cyril, IHM, General Superior of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Scranton for assistance in guiding the three young women desiring to become Sisters and help them establish a new Congregation.

What began as a time of training in religious life for Casimira, soon developed into a deep spiritual friendship with Mother M. Cyril Conway, IHM. Six years later, when Casimira had become Mother Maria, she wrote monthly to Mother Cyril seeking advice and sharing her joys and challenges, ever trusting in Mother's help and the Lord's. In a 1911 letter Mother Cyril wrote, recalling their beginning days, "I will never forget the first night the three of you came here... and the one who went into my heart and made me feel you were God's children, and I was called upon to encourage and help you as best I could, was yourself..." This bond of friendship remained strong and lasting until Mother Maria's death in 1940, when Mother M. Cyril attended her funeral at the Chicago St. Casimir Motherhouse.

Throughout the years, the two Congregations continued the sisterly bond first established in 1905, especially as many St. Casimir Sisters attended Marywood College for their higher education. This sisterly bond continues to this day as the number of St. Casimir Sisters has greatly diminished. Following in Mother Cyril's footsteps, the IHM Sisters have continued to walk with us each step of the way providing support and love as we continue as a very small community. In 2018, a formal



"Covenant agreement" and plan was signed by members of both communities. The required step of requesting Rome to appoint a Pontifical Commissary (a leader being sent to govern) to oversee our needs, to care for our Sisters and to govern the business of the community, has been enacted. It was requested of Rome that this "commissary" be an IHM Sister. Two SSCs will be appointed as members of the commissary's advisory team. This decision to be gov-

erned by a Pontifical Commissary, namely an IHM Sister, will begin on August 29, 2024.

The thread and fabric of our ministries, namely teaching and health care throughout the past one-hundred plus years helped the Sisters of St. Casimir to achieve much for the Lord's people in fourteen States. In this way they carried out Mother Maria's desire to help God's people. One of the greatest accomplishments of the congregation was to pursue the Beatification and canonization of their Foundress, Mother Maria. Her holy life is visible throughout the Church because Rome has named her to be "Venerable Mother Maria." Her holy remains rest in the very Chicago chapel where she prayed daily.

As we, Sisters of St. Casimir, look back over these past 116 years, we remain filled with gratitude to God for we have been so deeply "Rooted in Love." This, we attribute to firmly believing that our Mother Maria, SSC, and Mother M. Cyril, IHM, continue to weave the lives of our two Communities--both having a special devotion to Mary, our heavenly Mother.

At this time of change, we see history repeating itself. Our very first General Superior in 1907 was Mother M. Gabriel Donnelly, IHM. This was because, according to Rome's decree, Mother Maria had to be professed for six years in order to be eligible to be elected as General Superior of the Sisters of St. Casimir.

Our SSC and IHM communities truly have grown in grace—a gift freely given by our loving God and for which we remain ever grateful.

*Sister Margaret, a Sister of St. Casimir, serves as the vice postulator for Mother Maria's sainthood cause.*



## A Peace and Justice Perspective

# Above, Below, Around, Within: Soul Connections

by Chris Koellhoffer, IHM

It began with St. Francis of Assisi. Until that year in grade school, I had not heard of any one of my relatives referred to as “sister” unless they were a clear and defined part of my family tree. Unless they claimed a heritage that went back to Ballina, Ireland or Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Then they might be sisters.

When I first listened to St. Francis’ *Canticle of the Creatures*,<sup>1</sup> I expected to hear words referring to male gender. And so I did: Brother Sun, Brother Fire, Brother Wind. But it was the shift to the feminine that made my ten-year old self sit up and take notice. Sister Moon, Stars, and Sister Water, Mother Earth, and even Sister Death. In that mystical hymn, St. Francis single handedly ushered me into a new sense of sisterhood. Freed my imagination. Stretched my theology. Widened my worldview. Challenged me to expand my sense of neighbor. Now, stars in the night sky, oceans that broke over me in waves, the very earth under my feet were my sisters, as was all of creation. This was my understanding of what sisterhood meant: a place of deep connection, a kinship of the most profound kind. Here, no one was left out. Here, everyone was neighbor, everything belonged.

When we hear the question, “Who is my neighbor?” we may automatically think it refers only to members of the human race. But Brian Patrick challenges us to extend the definition of neighbor further because “our neighbor is also the whale, the dolphin, and the rainforest. Our neighbor is the entire community of life, the entire universe. We must love it all as ourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, another Francis, Pope Francis, authored an encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*.<sup>3</sup> He discussed his namesake in the light of integral ecology, considering the interrelatedness of all life and how humans are meant to connect and care for each other and the natural world. In speaking of a sacred sisterhood, Pope Francis underscored that “our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us... This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.”<sup>4</sup>

For St. Francis, “each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists.”<sup>5</sup> That is why the smallest creature merited the name “sister” or “brother” from his lips. Pope Francis urges us to approach all of nature and the



environment with this same openness to awe, to speak the language of kinship and beauty in our relationship with the world.

This same tender care for sisters and brothers finds a home in Rumi, beloved poet of Afghanistan. Rumi lived in the thirteenth century (1207-1273) and his life overlapped somewhat with St. Francis’ (1182-1226). Although they lived nations apart, they were spiritual relatives practicing the same mystical caring for the smallest among us. Rumi echoes the saint from Assisi:

“During the day I hold my feet accountable to watch out for wondrous insects and their friends. Why would I want to bring horror into their extraordinary world?”<sup>6</sup>

In Jesus’ earthly life, even something as tiny as a mustard seed captured his attention. He noticed and was tender towards lilies of the field, birds gliding through the sky, fields of wildflowers, a mother hen. Why, then, should we not rescue earthworms after a rainstorm, step carefully over industrious ants on a grassy path, scatter seeds and nuts outside for chickadees after a snowfall? These are all little souls that deserve a life as we do. The call of our sisterhood is simple: to develop a practice of loving what God loves, as God loves.

Perhaps it is children or the childlike among us who intuitively grasp this. Fady Joudah<sup>7</sup> witnessed this understanding in the heart of his own child:

*Mimesis*

*My daughter  
Wouldn't hurt a spider  
That had nested  
Between her bicycle handles  
For two weeks  
She waited  
Until it left of its own accord*

*If you tear down the web I said  
It will simply know  
This isn't the place to call home  
And you'd get to go biking*

*She said that's how others  
Become refugees isn't it?*

Thank you, my sister, beloved daughter of Fady, for embodying what my inadequate words have been trying to say. We celebrate your sisterhood that draws all of creation closer together in love and in kinship.

Sister Chris is a writer and spiritual guide who offers retreats and presentations internationally through her *Mobile Spirituality Ministry*. Visit her blog, *Mining the Now*, at [chriskoellhofferihm.org](http://chriskoellhofferihm.org)

<sup>1</sup> *Canticle of The Creatures*, St. Francis of Assisi. You can read the complete text and listen to music at this address: <https://tinyurl.com/3xp6rrwu>

<sup>2</sup> Brian Patrick, quoted by Michael Dowd in *Earthspirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity*, Twenty Third Publications, 1991

<sup>3</sup> *Laudato Si*, translated as *Praise Be to You*. Those words form the opening line of St. Francis’ *Canticle of The Creatures*. Go to <https://tinyurl.com/mtze4xvf> for the full text of this document, *On Care for Our Common Home*.

<sup>4</sup> *Laudato Si*, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Laudato Si*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Jalaludin Rumi, “Huddled Beneath the Sky,” *Love Poems from God: Twelve Sacred Voices from the East and West*, translated by Daniel Ladinski, New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 2002, p. 81

<sup>7</sup> Fady Joudah is the author of several volumes of poetry. “Mimesis” is included in *Poetry of Presence, An Anthology of Mindfulness Poems*, edited by Phyllis Cole-Dai and Ruby R. Wilson. Grayson Books: West Hartford, Connecticut, 2017. Born in Texas to Palestinian refugees, Joudah serves as an Emergency Room physician and volunteers with Doctors without Borders.

# We Need Innovators and Disruptors

by Annmarie Sanders, IHM

When I was in downtown Dublin in 2022, the sight of a large ad for Trinity College Dublin wrapped on a public bus took my breath away. The ad read, “We need innovators and disruptors.” I thought immediately – disruption has become such a part of religious life. What, though, if we looked upon the disruptions as gateways to innovation?

In the two years that have passed, I have been watching the religious life “disruptions” of decreasing numbers, frailer members, fewer ministries, and more become gateways for the innovation of collaboration. Our inability as individual religious institutes to be all that we once were and often wish we could still be for the world, is leading us to a whole new set of possibilities as we explore partnering across institute lines and with other organizations.

This shift should not surprise us since it is a movement happening throughout society. Our consciousness as a global community is shifting significantly as we discover how truly interdependent our world is – and how fragile. Only by working together across the boundaries that have historically divided us will the planet even be able to survive. Nowhere is this more evident than in the climate crisis, the pandemics, and the military conflicts occurring across the globe.

A parallel consciousness is arising in religious life as religious congregations are entering into alliances – not only with other religious or other Catholic entities, but with many other movements and organizations that value the common good. Fostering interdependence is becoming an imperative for religious institutes.

## A Movement that Comes with Challenges

Most of the women in religious life today lived through years where every religious institute operated quite independently. For the most part, women religious ran their own institutions and ministries and were accustomed to being in charge. This movement towards collaboration, therefore, can come with some challenges. In the past, collaboration often involved bringing other people into our works and, essentially, expecting them to carry on those works as we had.



Today the invitation is to become more horizontal collaborators where we walk side-by-side with others with a common vision – even when others’ ways of operating may be unfamiliar, make us uncomfortable, or require that we relinquish control.

In places where women religious are engaged in this type of collaboration, we hear stories of how sisters are valued for skills that they often took for granted because they were developed via our communal lifestyle. Those skills include

experience with teamwork, practice in conflict resolution, and an understanding of life from the perspective of those on the margins. Often sisters are surprised by how appreciated and valued these skills are.

In my work at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, I see that congregations that are deep into the work of making this shift to horizontal collaboration are focusing on the work of transitioning. For example:

- Many are engaged in proactive planning that looks at transitioning sponsored institutions or congregation ministries to lay leadership.
- They are making plans to repurpose their properties and buildings to serve wider needs.
- They are partnering with other entities whose mission is compatible with theirs and they are finding creative ways to contribute to those entities.

## Standing on the Threshold of Possibility

This time of significant change in religious life places those of us living it now in a unique position to help shape what this lifeform can be today and into the future.

This is a moment for careful listening together to what the Spirit, the world, and our own hearts are telling us that religious life might be for these times – and then acting to shape it accordingly. The past is past. Today we are much smaller, more culturally diverse, intergenerational communities that are not restricted to the boundaries that once held us. We can partner with freedom with other communities and other entities serving the common good. We have opportunities to shape something for the future that past generations

simply did not have because religious life was a more determined lifestyle with fewer options for how to live it.

Here in the United States, it is becoming clear that most religious institutes will not go into the future alone. Collaboration among us across charisms and across congregations will most likely be a way of life.

## Disruption and Innovation

I think the “innovators and disruptors” advertisement became emblazoned in my memory because it holds a compelling invitation to live religious life today in a more collaborative form while trusting that new alliances will bring new and undreamed-of possibilities. We are members of religious institutes whose histories are replete with stories of disruptions of the status quo and innovations that were never thought possible. So, maybe our call today is to explore questions such as:

- What might we need to “disrupt” in the ways we have structured and lived religious life? Are there ways of making decisions, relating to one another, defining our identity, embodying our mission that would benefit from some disruption?
- Where do we need creativity and imagination in our congregation life for these times in which we live? Are there new partnerships that could lead to new expressions of mission? Are we being called forward to form relationships that we previously never considered?

If we engage these questions, we will need to be clear on why changes are needed and what those changes could bring about for the world we serve. Times of transformation and change always come with some cost. A vision is essential.

My sense is that this is a time for religious life to simplify who and what our congregations have become so that we can return to the very essence of this vocational call. Perhaps as we embrace this time of a religious life lived without the boundaries and works that once defined us, we will find new and ever more meaningful ways to live as the disruptors and innovators that the world most needs us to be.

*Sister Annmarie serves as the director of communications for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in Silver Spring, Maryland.*



## Celebrating Shared Sisterhood

by Jo-Ann Baca

When asked to compose an article about the meaning of Sisterhood in the IHM-Associate relationship, I wondered how I could put this mystical, multidimensional relationship into words. No stranger to the joy of siblings, I began with my own personal experience. I was born the fourth of seven children, blessed with three brothers and three sisters. Our parents lived with faith and raised us to know God's love. Although it has been more than 40 years since our parents' passing, my siblings and I celebrate our ties today more than ever as we keep the memories of their love alive. Uniquely different individuals, we are forever united in the lifelong bond of family. Similarly, our IHM Associates keep the torch of the living reality of God's love burning. We delight in our shared faith and love of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Together we strive to emulate Mary, the first disciple, and joyfully carry the charism following in the example of foundress Mother Theresa Maxis.

Merriam Webster defines sisterhood as: *"the solidarity of women based on shared conditions, experiences, or concerns."*

Solidarity, in our case, is rooted in the IHM Charism and Core Values. Webster further provides examples such as a quote from Kathleen Newman-Bremang, a journalist for a multinational digital media company dedicated to inspiring young women to live informed and well-rounded lives. On Dec 21, 2023, she wrote: "... the strength of sisterhood is the only way forward."

Through shared sisterhood we can forge



our path into the future as we nurture each other and build strength in numbers.

To understand what sisterhood means to those blessed to be in an IHM Sister-Associate relationship, I wanted to hear from and honor those who stood by my side during formation, commissioning, and along this sacred journey. So, I turned to the Associates and sought their input. And they did not disappoint!

*You do not have to have a sister to enjoy sisterhood. ~ Cathy D.*

*As we move forward, together, the wisdom and teachings of the sisters are internalized, pondered, and finally incorporated into our very beings so we may further the charism of bringing Jesus to others through word and works. ~ Olga W.*

*We are the community of Christ at Mass. We are the hands of Christ in our ministries, but we are bound by love of one another and Jesus in our Circle. How grateful I am. ~ Diane B.*

*It is wonderful to have sisters in faith to support, encourage, and band together to nourish each other through our shared life journeys. Our burdens are lessened, our joys enriched. As we pray, bringing strength and healing, the Holy Spirit is so*

*present and richly felt; it is contagious. We are truly blest and called to be together in spirit. ~Kathie S.*

*IHM Associate Sisterhood has enriched my prayer life, brought me closer to the Holy Spirit, and is helping me grow through sharing with our IHM Sisters. ~ Joyce M.*

*I have been blessed in my life with many sisterhood relationships. By that I mean the kind of interactions where we accept each other unconditionally and are free to be vulnerable. My sisterhood with my IHM associates is this and more. It has added a deep spiritual dimension to our relationships. Thank you, God, for this sisterhood where we share a deep love for our brother Jesus. ~ Joan B.*

*Our sisterhood is a loving community, formed and strengthened through the mutual bonds of prayer, support, and fruitful relationships. Both the sisters and the associates contribute to and receive the wisdom of the others. Then, as companions in vision and mission, we can collaborate to make God's creative presence more visible, and in the process, transform our world. ~ Mary C.*

Their heartfelt responses attest to their solid foundation in IHM values and exemplify "journeying together with grace to co-create

*our ever-evolving future."* Our shared relationship brings forth graces and blessings beyond measure. It is no wonder we sometimes refer to ourselves as Ladies of Grace! IHM Associate Sisterhood is a *modus vivendi*, a way of life. We get to share our sisterhood with our IHM Sisters, inspired by them



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish's combined Circles of Grace, L-R seated: Olga Ward, Joyce Marchesi, Diane Braendly, Joan Burlew, Cathy Davy. L-R standing: Jo-Ann Baca, Kathie Sarnecky, Mary Calderone.

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# An Intergenerat

by Cor Immaculatum Heffernan

## Cor Immaculatum

Eleven years ago, Lisa and I co-wrote an article for *Journey*. The topic was: *New Grass: Visiting and Journeying*. There was a newness in our 10-year relationship, a sense of *being with, accompanying, sharing...* the reality of being generations apart, fifty years of difference in age, experiences, and decisions... and the realization that *unity was the tie that bound us together in friendship, reverence, and joy.*

My own experiences in sisterhood began with an awe and reverence for the IHM sisters by whom I was taught and with whom I have lived and taught. These were the pioneers and trailblazers who responded to the poor, to women in need, to the uneducated and vulnerable. Those sisters, who are now our prayer ministers at Our Lady of Peace Residence, continue to inspire me. Today, it is with reverence and openness that I interact with our younger sisters who are already living with a world vision, shoulder-to-shoulder with diverse ethnic, cultural, and aging populations.

With each generation, I am walking on “blades of new and old grass.”

A field of grass,  
Never still, never silent,  
Responding as one being to wind and weather,  
Rippling in breezes, dancing in rain,  
Changing each moment in its fervent march  
To ripened maturity.

In the spring new bright green velvet  
Covers hillsides,

Undulating in capricious spring breezes,  
Laying flat to reveal the shining silk beneath  
And cast with showers of clouds moving quickly  
Over hillside and valley;

In June, tall and deep green  
With eager pale seed heads  
Standing tall and youthful,  
Dancing carelessly in storm winds and evening breezes;

In the amber of late summer  
Under the relentless faded August sun,  
It stands in simple primitive beauty  
At the moment of its ripe maturity,  
Whispering in anticipation  
Of the end of its journey.



*Visitation at Wood*, 2013 is an oil painting on canvas, measuring 40" x 28" by Lisa M. Perkowski, IHM. The piece is part of a body of work based on personal narrative of her spiritual journey and produced while working on her Master of the Arts in Art Education.

Interested in the dialogue between photography and painting, she staged photography references based on experiences in prayer, in nature, and in relationship with others—at times making a biblical reference. This piece alludes to Mary's visitation with her cousin Elizabeth, a modern interpretation of that poignant moment depicted by numerous master painters—an empathetic, joyful, greeting between kinswomen of different generations graced by the providence of God and power of the Holy Spirit. As one can see, Cor and Lisa were the models for the photography references.



# ional Sisterhood

n, IHM and Lisa Perkowski, IHM



Sister Cor with Sister Lisa during a recent visit to Tampa, Florida

This poem “*Field of Grass*” by Bernadette Kazmarski beautifully expands on Sister Davida Sullivan’s “The New Grass,” adding the life spans of both nature and people. It paints a vivid picture of living, growing, suffering, rejoicing, dancing, maturing *together in shared sisterhood*...living and “*whispering in anticipation*” of oneness in the God who has loved each one of us uniquely and unconditionally from before the foundation of the world.

## Lisa

Recently for a middle school service-learning activity, I suggested that we divide the sixth-grade students and send them to visit an assisted living facility and a day center for adults with special needs. During the reflection time after their experience, I asked each group to verbalize a takeaway, and a student answered, “I realized that I can be friends with people of any age.” Living in an intergenerational sisterhood has taught me over many years what this child discovered in two hours.

As a younger woman interrelating with a disproportionate number of older women, early on, I felt self-conscious going out with my sisters. One time when my IHM Sisters came to see an exhibit, I overheard a couple of women snicker, “Those must be nuns over there.” At that point, I felt belittled yet protective, as this was my lived reality.

Growing older myself may have dispelled that self-consciousness, but I believe it’s the development of intergenerational relationships that have, themselves, grown into a stage of mutual care that defies ageism. Here are some examples of the experiential shifts that dismantled my biases.

1. In an intergenerational setting, cherish the present moment. For years, I wasted energy on excessive worry over the fear of when my older sister-friends might die. Because they were such dear companions, the thought of having to go through most of my adulthood without them elicited the anticipation of grief. Until one

day, when a younger sister in another community died and I watched her older sisters grieve, my perspective shifted.

2. There are no age boundaries for late-night owls! The friends I’ve counted on to receive my 9:30-10:30 pm phone calls are those double my age. Some of our most honest and empathic conversations were late-night. They’ve even called me when I’ve been under the covers before them!

3. Enjoy activities that are intergenerationally inclusive. Instead of focusing on what activities my older sister-friends can’t or won’t enjoy doing with me (e.g. paddle-boarding), I’ve learned to enjoy the activities we’re mutually able to appreciate: cooking or dining together, going on low-incline nature walks, seeing a movie, crying at the climax and denouement of each “Call the Midwife” plot, and playing card games together.

4. Exchange stories. In an intergenerational sisterhood, telling about each other’s childhoods and family experiences is self-revealing and builds relational understanding. Storytelling is conducive to active listening and shared journeying. I’ve been blessed to have sister-friends who’ve shared painful and adverse experiences in their lives because, as more has “happened” to me with time, I can recall stories they’ve told and identify with their experiences retroactively. Knowing that they’d understand my experience gives me consolation.

5. Sisters’ spirits transcend time—stay attuned to the gift of each other’s personalities, spiritualities, and emotional lives. Wrinkles may grow and deepen over time, but in an intergenerational sisterhood, I have recognized that our passion for mission, shared faith, emotional experiences, and patterns of thinking deepen more. Even friends with neurodegenerative changes have the capacity to connect emotionally and spiritually through conversation and attending Mass together. If we are really attuned, we will notice the courage and humility drawn out of them by such interactive engagement. This is an inspiration for growing old.

An intergenerational sisterhood reveals that hurt relationships end with forgiveness and unconditional love. There have been times that an older sister gave advice when what I really needed was empathy. There have been times of misunderstanding. Confronting a sister about her cognitive changes initially resulted in defensiveness. Living in community, we grapple with the tension of sisters’ different needs depending on the demands of ministries, health, etc. In all of these instances, honest communication and compassion—both self-compassion and compassion for the other—help us to reconcile hurts and renegotiate living expectations.

Friendship requires gentleness and vulnerability to walk on each other’s blades of green.

*Sister Cor serves as a freelance artist and consultant and also as a spiritual and retreat director.*

*Sister Lisa serves as the director of mission and ministry at the Academy of the Holy Names in Tampa, Florida.*



# A Global Sisterhood

by Judy O'Brien, IHM

We, vowed religious women, at our best selves, are the very embodiment of the word and meaning of sisterhood. We experience it every day. Our sisters, and there are thousands of them, from all walks of life across the globe, form, define, and gift us with the breadth and soul of sisterhood relationships. Blessed with the sacredness of hope, peace, courage, joy and love, these gifts mandate that our love flow to our relationships with all people, regardless of gender, race, orientation, intellectual ability and to our responsibility to protect the integrity of all of God's creation for the duration of our time in this beautiful yet deeply hurting and scarred world.

## Sisterhood Origins

From the moment of our birth, many of us are steeped in the rich gift of sisterhood. For me, this journey began within the embrace of a close-knit family. Guided by my maternal grandmother, who stood as the matriarch of the total clan, I witnessed and learned the value of belonging to this sisterhood. The relationships among grandmother, mother, aunts and cousins, formed us as women, sisters, mothers, grandmothers and friends, and taught us the values of faith, kindness, compassion, loyalty, hard work and the importance of being rooted in sisterhood for a lifetime.

This familial foundation led me to a broader calling, to the ultimate sisterhood of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. From many corners of the world including Asia, Eurasia, Europe, North America and South America, we come together as a global sisterhood, connected by shared values and a proud sense of belonging.

Surrounded by women who create community to further the mission of Jesus, we choose sisterhood each day. Love, prayer, intentional purpose and meaningful relationships are our guides. Together, we are gifted with a treasure that enriches our lives and motivates our purpose.

## Sisterhood Spirituality and Ministry

Global sisterhood relationships are grounded in a profound commitment to contemplative prayer. These relationships connect us to the prayer life alive in our sisters world-wide. Our collective contemplative practice, joined with our united social action become our means to transform the world. Our individual relationships with the Divine meet the Divine dwelling in religious women across the global community. This cohesive prayer force gives us the courage to confront violence, hatred and oppression in all of their forms. Through the lens of justice, peace and the integrity of creation, we strive to create a more peaceful and perfect world.

Over time, circles of sisterhood increase and expand across borders and cultures. These connections are woven



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from shared experiences of inter-congregational living and international travel. As we travel the globe, we encounter hundreds of other sisters, each on a similar path, a path marked by compassion and unwavering faith. In some of the poorest communities in our world, from the hollers of Appalachia, to the busy streets of Harlem, to the sun-soaked shores of Haiti and Jamaica, to the rugged landscapes of Peru, Chili, El Salvador, Guatemala, we meet our sisters. These encounters are sacred intersections where hearts align and mission comes alive.

Our education and religious formation have called us into ministries that touch the homeless, the hungry, the sick, the incarcerated. We stand with migrants seeking refuge, and children committed to the overwhelmed social system of foster care, all the while educating others to do likewise.

The women we have been privileged to be with in all of these ministries come from homelands throughout the globe. Together, we form a sisterhood of spirituality and ministry, a bond that has filled our lives with apostolic zeal, indescribable and irreplaceable experiences and relationships.

Our IHM Sisterhood far outreaches our Scranton, Pennsylvania, roots and borders; it extends over the continents. For example, while our foundress, Theresa Maxis, was born in the US, her mother, Betsy, was Haitian. That historical connection has led us to Haiti where we share our stories and resources with the Little Sisters of St. Therese. They minister in Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, under some of the most dangerous situations. Our sisters have traveled to Haiti, experiencing firsthand, the suffering of people and the commitment of the sisters who minister tirelessly to their people to improve lives and offer hope in what can seem to be a despairingly hopeless situation. Theresa Maxis keeps us rooted in Haiti and connected with our Little Sisters of St. Therese.

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# An Intercultural Sisterhood

by Elvia Mata Ortega, IHM and Mary Elaine Anderson, IHM

Intercultural Sisterhood... hmm... what is that? When we look at the phrase, four root words immediately jump off the page: inter, culture, sister, and hood.

Let's start with "hood," which is slang for neighborhood, a word that is familiar to us. "Hood" conjures up feelings of belonging, and the neighborhood where we grew up was probably a place where we felt comfortable interacting with our "neighbors," people who most likely were of the same socioeconomic background and perhaps looked very much like us. Every neighborhood has its own peculiar "culture" or way of interpreting life's events and relating to God, the world, and other peoples. As children, we drank from the cultural well of our "hood," and we relied on it to make judgments about what is right and wrong, who can be trusted and who is not to be trusted.

In a similar way, each religious congregation has its own culture which is expressed through traditions, food, music, beliefs, thought patterns, myths, and behavior. Joining a religious congregation entails moving beyond the culture of one's personal family and close-knit neighborhood to form a "sister" hood with others who have similar values and a common mission. A "sisterhood" might be considered "intercultural" when its members not only embrace what they have in common but also recognize and celebrate their differences.

In July 2022, the OSP-IHM Board invited Oblate Sisters of Providence and IHM sisters from Monroe, MI, Immaculata, PA, and Scranton, PA to form an "intercultural sisterhood" at the US-Mexico border where they would minister to migrants in McAllen, Texas, and Reynosa, Mexico. Four sisters volunteered to be part of the core community: Carmen Armenta Lara (Monroe), Rose Patrice Kuhn (Immaculata), Elvia Mata Ortega (Scranton), and Mary Elaine Anderson (Scranton). Two of the sisters are from Mexico, and two are from the US.

Living and ministering intercongregationally and interculturally is an intentional choice to go beyond congregational and cultural borders and to widen our understanding of sisterhood and neighborhood. One of the greatest gifts of making this choice has been the opportunity to minister collaboratively with other women and men religious in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas and in Reynosa, Mexico.

In truth, sisterhoods and brotherhoods extend far beyond our immediate religious communities. Outside the walls of our convents, religious residences, or monasteries, many of our brothers and sisters live on the margins, oppressed, rejected, and stereotyped.

Trying to explain something about intercultural sisterhood, the words of the biblical scripture from



*It's a time to celebrate the fullness of our cultural diversity by fostering atmospheres for others to be themselves and to work to create equal opportunities for justice, respect, and equality. It's a time to create spaces for everybody to awaken and be liberated by beginning to transform sociocultural structures of xenophobia and inequality. Our call to awaken to our common humanity goes far beyond just the walls of our convents and beyond the territorial walls of national borders.*

Genesis come to mind: "Where is your brother/sister?" and Cain's immediate response: "Am I my brother's/sister's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9)

Most of us have the experience that when we were little, we used to argue with our siblings. When one of us was upset because we had lost an argument, our parents would ask, "Why is your brother/sister crying?" or "What did you do to your brother/sister?" Our knee-jerk response was always, "I don't know why he/she is crying," or "I didn't do anything to him/her."

The question, "Where is your brother/sister?" takes on a deeper meaning when reflecting on the living conditions of our migrant sisters and brothers. During a recent visit to the Casa del Migrante in Reynosa, Mexico, we were struck by the number of different nationalities present in a space no larger than 1,500 square feet. People from sixteen different countries were gathered together in that small space at the border amidst chaos, confusion, and pain. They were in a type of limbo situation where everything was uncertain. But there we were, united by our same faith and humanity, celebrating life and our similarities and differences. Seeing the diversity of all the people who were there was a reminder of those arguments when we were children. A reminder of the disagreements we still have with our brothers and sisters of other nationalities because they are different from us, because we do not have the same skin color, or because we think somehow, they are different, because... because...

It's a time for transformation, a time to open our eyes and broaden our horizons regarding who forms part of our sisterhoods and brotherhoods. It's a time to celebrate the fullness of our cultural diversity by fostering atmospheres for others to be themselves and to work to create equal opportunities for justice, respect, and equality. It's a time to create spaces for everybody to awaken and be liberated by beginning to transform sociocultural structures of xenophobia and inequality. Our call to awaken to our common humanity goes far beyond just the walls of our convents and beyond the territorial walls of national borders.

We live in a very diverse country where different cultures coexist, but there is still a long way to go before we become truly an intercultural nation. As we journey together, let us ask God to grant us the grace to expand our understanding of living into the fullness of our sisterhoods and brotherhoods. May God stretch our minds, open our hearts and awaken in us a desire to truly embrace others as our brothers

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## In Memoriam

*As women of faith, we find ourselves in communion with all who stand at the crossroads where death is giving way to risen life. As we grieve the loss of our own cherished IHM Sisters, we also celebrate their lives poured out in love and service to our beautiful yet wounded world. We invite you to join us in honoring the memory of these beloved and holy women.*



Sister Geraldine Marie Dranginis, IHM  
June 12, 1930  
December 20, 2023  
by Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM

As we begin this celebration of Sister Geraldine's life, we welcome her nephew, Paul Savage and his family, our sisters and associates who are present, and those who are joining on livestream. We welcome our celebrant for the liturgy, Monsignor Jordan. We also draw into our prayer with gratitude, the administrators and staff of Our Lady of Peace Residence who cared for Gerry and the sisters with whom she shared life in the 3 C Community.

Sister Gerry Dranginis was a woman who lived the life of a seeker in her desire for religious life. In 1949, she entered the Sisters of St. Casimir and after years of formation she professed her final vows in 1957. With a desire to respond to God, she lived her life as a sister of St. Casimir and over time she began to sense a call within a call. Gerry became aware of her desire to explore the possibility of transferring to the IHM Congregation. In 1980 Gerry requested and began the incorporation process with Sister Redempta. On September 12, 1982 she formally commenced her life as an IHM sister, with the deep heritage of the Sisters of St. Casimir and the motto of Mother Maria Kaupas in her heart: Always more, always better, always with love.

The first reading of today's liturgy from Isaiah reflects the trust with which Gerry journeyed. Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid for the Lord is my strength and my might; God has become my salvation.

As a sister of St. Casimir and an IHM Sister, Gerry also had an educational and ministerial journey. Her professional preparation for ministry included degrees in the disciplines of education, counseling, and religious studies.

Her training readied her for 53 years in ministry as a teacher, guidance counselor, pastoral minister, and religious education director from 1957 to 2010. In 2010, Gerry moved into the encore ministries of her golden years in the IHM Business Office and as an instructor in the Everyday English for Adults program. Gerry's agility and trust in God's providence fostered her ability to transition from ministry to ministry and to leave a legacy of building the Reign of God as she responded to God's call.

Gerry's gift of yielding to God with trust reflects the lived reality of our vow of Prophetic Obedience: we are inspired by the example of Jesus, who lived his life responding to the Father's will. Through prayer, dialogue, and discernment, we seek fidelity to the will of God for the building of the Reign of God. (Constitutions 31)

As I reflected on Gerry's faith-filled life, I was reminded of the words of the mythologist Joseph Campbell who reminded us that, "We must be willing to let go of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us."

Gerry yielded the life she had planned with faith in the life that was waiting for her. Today, Gerry has the ultimate life that she longed for, eternal life in God as a daughter of Maria Kaupas and Theresa Maxis.

Our Sister Gerry attended to God's Word and responded to it with her life. It is Jesus, the Word of God, who now welcomes her home.

As I prepare to place Sister Gerry's vow card by her urn, please take a moment to recall her presence in your life. With gratitude and love we thank you, Gerry.



Sister Jean Toolan, IHM  
December 13, 1922  
December 29, 2023  
by Sister Therese O'Rourke, IHM

Your precious life was a journey, Jean, and we feel so blessed to have shared it. How we loved you, dear friend.

To share life with Jean was to live the gospel in what can only be called an immersion experience, no skimming. Here is the complex and rich truth: Vatican II took on flesh in Jean's life years and years before Vatican II ever happened. It was rooted in her personal relationship with Jesus that grew deeper with each experience, each ministry, every joy and every struggle. She knew God's unconditional love and knew that it was the very essence of life and intended for every human person.

From the beginning until her final hours, Jean's life reflected a generosity that amazed others: her siblings, extended family, coworkers, students, the staff here at OLP and her IHM sisters. There was never a dramatic display of generosity just a quiet, gentle gift of presence and whatever else you may need at any given moment.

We will never know the countless number of people who were shaped by Jean's capacity to love them and to see their positive potential especially at moments when others, for one reason or another, would be judging them harshly.

Often, she would soften a negative verbal blow intended to over simplify a choice or a mis-step made by another with these words: "I wonder what walking in her shoes could teach

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us?" She would draw a new circle of calm and kindness and change the direction of the discussion. Such was the legacy of love that she left behind every place she went.

Please don't misunderstand me. The Spirit of Jesus that seized her early in life and was the source of her incredible capacity to love was also what fueled her strength and made her fearless when confronting injustice. Never caustic or unkind she was always willing to stand tall, and alone if necessary, and speak the truth as she saw it. That truth was always through the lens of the Gospel.

Jean also had a quick sense of humor and many favorite things: good candy, homegrown tomatoes at the peak of their season, a significant conversation that would light up her day and great books. She loved to read.

At the heart of her joy during her last years were her daily calls from Deb and her Sunday visits from Jeff.

Those of us who knew Jean well recognized her brilliance. While getting a Master's Degree at Notre Dame the congregation asked her if she would pursue a PhD. She declined. She felt called to come home and tend to those she loved and those who needed her. That group would include her family, her students and her IHM family. It would include her ever expanding legacy of love.

Since the moment Jean died I have been praying to her. I recommend that you do the same.



Sister Catherine Ann Gilvary, IHM  
July 17, 1936  
January 16, 2024  
by Sister Judy O'Brien, IHM

On behalf of the IHM Leadership Team, I want to welcome all of you as we celebrate this holy moment of farewell for our sister Catherine Ann Gilvary, IHM.

Two weeks ago, on a dark Sunday night, Sister Katie Clauss and I had the privilege of sitting with Katie as she was journeying home to her God. She talked about her wonderful

Gilvary family life and her wonderful life as an Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister. These she stated were her most precious treasures. She spoke of the wonderful care she was receiving at Our Lady of Peace and how she was ready to meet her God.

In the course of the conversation Sister Katie and I asked about her wishes for her funeral. When we asked her who she would like to celebrate the funeral Mass she immediately responded Fr. Phil Sladicka. She spoke of his long friendship with their family through moments of great joy and deep sorrow, a life-long friend of the Gilvays. We are very grateful to Fr. Sladicka for being here with us today. It was as Katie wanted it.

The next question we asked her was who she would like to do this welcome. She looked at me and said, "Judy, as my representative for the Congregation I think it should be you, and here is what I want you to say. I don't want a lot of words, just tell them "you knew me by the way I lived my life." I was so taken back, I will never forget the clarity and surety with which she spoke those words. Who gets to say that "you knew me by the way I lived my life"? Katie Gilvary does, because it is the truth. We did know her by the way she lived her life. Katie lived an authentic Gospel life. She was a loving, kind, and compassionate daughter, sister, aunt, and IHM sister. She was kind and tender with her students, their parents, her co-workers, those in her spiritual care, and any others she met along her way.

There is much to celebrate and to cry about today. A wonderful woman has taken her leave from us, we mourn her and we will miss her, but by God we will never forget her words, "I don't want a lot of words, just tell them. "you knew me by the way I lived my life."

Amen, Katie. Go with our love and in peace.



Obituaries for IHM Sisters  
can be found at  
Find a Grave

<http://tinyurl.com/yb3mp9ds>  
search by last name.

The IHM Communications Office is seeking old photographs of IHM Sisters who are deceased. Send photos to [communications@sistersofihm.org](mailto:communications@sistersofihm.org)



Sister Marianne Knight, IHM  
December 31, 1938  
February 2, 2024  
by Sister Kathryn Clauss, IHM

As we gather this morning to celebrate the gift of the life of our Sister Marianne Knight, I'd like to offer a word of thanks to all who cared for Marianne with great professionalism and tenderness here at Our Lady of Peace Residence. Let's hold in our hearts Sisters Roberta Peters, Joann Madden, Anne Mary Boslett, dearest friends of Marianne. How she loved and deeply appreciated all of you.

I have been a friend of Marianne's for 51 years. She was my first principal and what a blessing she was and continued to be for me as a mentor and friend. Conversations with her over time were a great source of joy and support as well as consolation and the proverbial challenge to get a grip and keep moving forward. As Marianne's life was ebbing and flowing over the past few weeks, I could see with new eyes that our friendship was a spiritual journey where life could be broken open and shared with tenderness and honesty. In listening to and observing Marianne, I learned what Simone Weil meant when she stated that "attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity," I learned this in the way she wholeheartedly focused on the person with whom she was speaking. Howard Thurman, in his book, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, captures Marianne's ability to listen attentively. He notes, "How indescribably wonderful and healing it is to encounter another human being who listens not only to our words, but manages somehow to listen to us."

Today's gospel, the Emmaus story, is a very fitting scripture passage for this celebration of Marianne's life. Like Jesus, Marianne attentively walked with family, friends and those she served who were struggling with doubt and fear, disappointment and wanting to turn away from the possibilities that were ahead. Her ability to attend to them helped her to listen them into a new understanding that they could take forward.

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In her final days, Marianne walked her own Emmaus journey with a sense of God's presence as she longed for the time when she would be able to ask God all of the questions that were burning in her heart, longing to have those questions, like bread, broken open and shared. I can imagine that as she neared the edge of her life, she heard Jesus beckon to her, "Marianne, stay and have supper with me. It is nearly evening and the day is done."

Marianne, you heard and responded wholeheartedly to God's Word as you daily lived your vows with integrity and fidelity. It is Jesus, God's word, who calls you, who loves you home.

As I place Marianne's vow card on her urn, please take a moment to remember and give thanks for her life.

Sister Roberta is going to share with us a prayer that had deep meaning for Marianne, Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. It was one she shared freely with those she met.



Sister Joan Katoski, I.H.M.

December 17, 1940

February 5, 2024

by Sister Grace Surdovel, I.H.M.

I am grateful for this opportunity to offer a few words about our Sister Joan Katoski. We are blessed to welcome Joan's brother Robert, her sisters Marcia, Cynthia and Joan's cousin Connie and their families, our brother priests, Joan's friends and our I.H.M. Sisters who join us today both in person and via livestream as we celebrate the life of our sister Joan.

In preparation for this reflection, I reached out to Joan's dear friends Sisters Jan Marie, Dottie and Mary Alice. What they shared mirrored my own experience of Joan when we ministered together at Notre Dame in East Stroudsburg many years ago.

In all her encounters, Joan brought a joy and energy that was contagious. Music was Joan's life. Even during difficult times, Joan would find the joy only music and a profound faith

in God can bring. Joan was always singing or humming as she was doing household chores, walking, or planning her lessons. She was enthusiastic, welcoming, and fun to live with. Joan enjoyed being with people and enjoyed time with family and friends. She loved her lobster dinners at Coopers with Jan Marie, sharing a meal with friends or her local community and long conversations with her family. She had a passion for walking and was always keeping track of her steps whether she was walking in nature or doing the many stairs in the convent. Joan was always in motion, with a smile on her face and a song in her heart. In good times and those that were more challenging, Joan found a reason to rejoice, usually through song. Even after illness limited her physical abilities, Joan found solace in the presence of music in her daily life. It seems that Music was part of Joan's DNA.

In a work entitled, *The Gift to Sing*, poet James Weldon Johnson reflects this same love of music and song. I find the words of this poem reflective of Joan's spirit of joy and love of music. A spirit so evident in today's celebration of Joan's life. I offer this poem in memory of our dear Joan who shared her loving, musical spirit with us all.

*Sometimes the mist overhangs my path,  
And blackening clouds about me cling;  
But, oh I have a magic way  
To Turn the gloom to cheerful day—I softly sing.*

*And if the way grows darker still,  
Shadowed by Sorrow's somber wing,  
With glad defiance in my throat,  
I pierce the darkness with a note,  
And sing, and sing.*

*I brood not over the broken past,  
Nor dread whatever time may bring;  
No nights are dark, no days are long,  
While in my heart there swells a song,  
And I can sing.*

As we remember our dear Joan today, may we do so by piercing the darkness with a note.

Well done good and faithful servant. May you join the choir of angels in your eternal resting place. Know that we rejoice in the gift you have been to each of us and pray you home into the loving arms of your lord.

*Jo-Ann Baca, continued from page 7*

to "engage in actions that reflect God's unconditional love for all creation and the transformation of the world." In following the examples of Mary and the brave women of the bible, we are boldly affirming that our shared relationship is rooted in God.

Finally, I turned to the wisdom of spiritual giants like Joan Chittister, who in *Friendship of Women: The Hidden Tradition of the Bible* (Novalis, Toronto, 2006), conveys: "The realization that friendship is one of the great spiritual resources of the human existence... drives us beyond the superficial to the meaningful... To grow... requires us to surround ourselves with people who speak to the best part of us from the best part of themselves."

When I imagine the potential life-changing power of friendship, Joan Chittister's words resonate even more deeply within my soul. Recently, I had a reunion with dear longtime friends, whom I consider sisters by choice if not blood. We attempted to define sisterhood by using the method of a popular late-night TV host who often asks his guests to describe their lives in five words. Applying this approach to sisterhood, we generated these: *connection, support, encouragement, imperfection, acceptance, ability to disagree agreeably, and longevity*. This exercise was fun and illuminating, as we connected the threads of friendship, sisterhood, and relationship, although admittedly we did not limit our responses to five words! How fitting are the words of Thomas Merton, who articulates this so perfectly, in *Letter to a Young Activist, Essential Writings*, as cited by Chris Koellhoffer in *Longing for the Endless Immensity*, (2014 Sisters of I.H.M., Scranton, PA): "In the end, it is the reality of personal relationship that saves everything."

Through our shared I.H.M. sisterhood, Associates can aspire to build holy relationships and inspire others to do the same. And that is something to celebrate!

*Jo-Ann is a wife, mother, grandmother, and author who loves teaching and sharing her faith with others. She is blessed and grateful to be an I.H.M. Associate.*



*Elvia Mata Ortega and Mary Elaine Anderson, continued from page 11*

and sisters. When we hear that scripture question, “Where is your brother/sister?” may we not answer like Cain: “Am I my brother’s and my sister’s keeper?” May we never answer as we did as children: “I don’t know why he/she is crying,” or “I didn’t do anything,” but may we be able to respond sincerely, “Here we are trying to care for each other and create a common home.”

*Sister Elvia is a graduate student in the Social Work Department of the University of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley.*

*Sister Mary Elaine is the Director of Formation for the Scranton IHM Congregation.*

*Sisters Elvia and Mary Elaine are members of the OSP-IHM core community in McAllen, Texas, an inter-congregational initiative that accompanies asylum seekers on the US-Mexico border.*



*Sisters Mary Elaine Anderson, Elvia Mata Ortega, Carmen Armenta Lara, and Rose Patrice Kuhn*

*Judy O'Brien, continued from page 11*

In our commitment to global education, the IHM congregation as well as Marywood College welcomed international women beginning at the turn of the 20th century. Some of these women were attracted to religious life and spent time in formation with the Sisters of IHM including the Maryknoll Sisters whose sisters serve in foreign missions, the Sisters of St. Casimir and the Sisters of Jesus Crucified, who were founded to serve Lithuanian immigrants to the US, and the Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who were founded to serve Slovak immigrants to the US. So many of these sisters and hundreds of sisters from other communities were and continue to be educated at Marywood University for service to the church and world. We continue to celebrate these sacred friendships of sisterhood to this day.

Presently, three sisters from Vietnam and one sister from Kenya are pursuing studies at Marywood University. They are joined by nineteen other sisters from Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Ghana, and Zambia who are living and ministering here in Scranton. Some of these sisters lovingly care for our fragile residents at St. Joseph's Center. While ministering, they are learning valuable skills

that they will take home to care for their fragile ones. There is always such mutuality in sisterhood. Many international sisters reside at our IHM Center and enrich our lives as they share their stories, cultures and traditions.

In 1959, Pope John XXIII invoked the words of St. Augustine, summoning the universal church, including religious congregations, to “*Extend your charity to the whole world if you want to love Christ, because the members of Christ’s body cover the whole world.*” His call, found in *Principis Pastorum*, inspired our IHM congregation, to reach out globally by serving in missions in Puerto Rico, Canada, and Peru. This commitment to global service continues to this day.

The African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC) was established in 1999 by the leaders of four congregations of women religious in Pennsylvania and the presidents of the colleges and universities founded by their congregations. The purpose of ASEC is to provide educational opportunities for women religious in Africa. “Through its programs, ASEC has educated more than 5,000 sisters and students, and this number continues to grow” (*ASEC, Strategic Plan, 2023*). We Sisters of IHM with Marywood University proudly co-sponsor ASEC and support its mission.

We have ministered alongside sisters around the world, including Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Mexico, Rome, and Peru. Our journey has taken us onto the reservations of the Yakama and Choctaw Nations where we have lived and served with their people. Currently, we extend our ministry to McAllen, Texas, where we are assisting those at the US/Mexico border who are seeking safety and asylum and a new life.

We continue to celebrate a long-standing covenant relationship with our Sisters of St. Casimir. As global sisters, we share with them a mission to serve God’s people and protect our earth. We share the spirit of their foundress, Mother Maria Kaupas, “Always more, always better, always with love.”

Together as vowed women religious, we, Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, strive to make a difference. We continue to change our world, reaching out to needs, and enhancing lives throughout the globe with unwavering love, all in the name of our God, and through the unbreakable bond of a global sisterhood.

*Sister Judy serves as a councilor on the IHM Leadership Team.*





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OUR FLORIDA IHM ASSOCIATES



Sister Nancy Elder gathers IHM Associates at the convent in Gainesville, Florida.  
Pictured L-R: Marilyn Ozeck, Sandra Moorhead, Gina Gombola, Regina Mallini,  
Pat Rohs, Sister Nancy Elder, Erin Tighe, Shanell Weems, Stephanie Bokowy,  
Kathleen Olson, and Jill Ingebritson

