

Journey

Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA Vol. 44, No. 1 Spring 2026



The Light that Darkness Makes

by Katie Clauss, IHM

With our theme, The Light that Darkness Makes, we entered the first moments of Chapter on April 11, 2026 still carrying Easter's newness. Grounded in the scriptures proclaimed during the Triduum and Easter, we arrived with audacious hope for what might emerge. Yet the world around us felt more like an intersection of the times — Good Friday's violence lingering, Holy Saturday's ache stretching long. And still, Easter had come. Not as a blaze, but as a quiet insistence that newness rises even when shadows remain. Resurrection does not wait for the world to be ready.

Into this tension, another story met us. While we gathered on Earth, the Artemis II crew circled the moon, traveling farther from home than any human before them. For a time, they slipped behind the far side — no contact, no signal, only silence.

And then, connection returned. Mission Specialist Christina Koch's voice broke through the static with words that felt like a blessing: "It's so good to hear the Earth again... To Asia, Africa, and Oceania — we see you too."

From their vantage point, borders disappeared. No lines dividing "us" from "them." Only one luminous sphere suspended in darkness, a single, shared home. The crew recognized something profound: the light they saw was made visible by the surrounding darkness. The darkness did not extinguish the light; it revealed it.

Their awe became an invitation — one that resonates deeply with the Gospel we carry.

For the Risen Christ meets his disciples in places where darkness has not yet lifted: Mary Magdalene still weeping, the disciples still hiding, the travelers to Emmaus still confused. Again and again, the Gospel reveals a God who steps into a wounded, fearful, unfinished world and brings forth life that cannot be contained. The light of Christ is not deterred by darkness; it is revealed through it.

So when we heard the Artemis II crew speak, we heard an echo of Easter. Their borderless view mirrors the way the Risen Christ widens the disciples' vision, teaching them to see him in the gardener, in the breaking of bread, in the breath of peace, in the stranger who becomes companion. The Gospel trains our eyes

to recognize Christ in the fragile interdependence of all peoples, in the beauty of our common home, in the places where suffering cries out for accompaniment, and in the courageous hope that rises even when shadows remain.

To follow the Risen Christ is to step into the world's darkness not with despair, but with the conviction that God is already there — revealing, restoring, and inviting us into resurrection's work.

In a world marked by violence and division, we are called to look again at the beauty of Earth, our common home, not as a backdrop to our mission, but as the very ground of it. We are invited to deepen relationships across borders and expectations, to steward our human, spiritual, and financial resources with reverence, to accompany the marginalized with tenderness that seeks systemic change, and to collaborate in ways that reflect the borderless belonging glimpsed from space and proclaimed in the Gospel.

The Artemis II crew returned from darkness with a message of connection. The Gospel sends us forth with the same charge. We, too, are asked to emerge from the shadows of our time with renewed commitment to see and respond to one another, all people, all creation with Easter eyes.

And so, we turn to the reflections offered in this issue. Together, these writings break open our theme, The Light that Darkness Makes, revealing how, again and again, God's light becomes visible precisely where shadows fall.

Sister Katie serves as President 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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How the Light Gets In: Navigating Broken Relationships

by Janet Merkel

Relationships are challenging. Love is challenging. Nothing stays the same. Life is about change. These are truths we live with but do not always acknowledge. It is much easier to imagine that there is certainty in our lives and relationships. Despite our longing for stability and certainty, misunderstandings, mistakes, and emotional hurts are inevitable, especially with those closest to us. The closer we are to others, the more likely we are to step on their toes. This is not a flaw in our humanity; it is a fundamental part of being human. Conflict is not evidence that love has failed; it is evidence that imperfect people are trying to be close. The true challenge lies not in avoiding conflict but in learning the delicate art of repair when relationships falter.

The art of repair requires the hard work of healing. It means acknowledging our part in the problem and apologizing—not merely with empty words of “I’m sorry,” but with a willingness to change what needs to change for relationships to flourish. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes in *The Cost of Discipleship*, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.” Words of apology are hollow without the work of reconnection and reconciliation that must follow.

One obstacle to repair is our resistance to acknowledging guilt. It takes humility to name honestly how we have hurt others, and to admit this not only to ourselves but to those we have wounded. Part of the difficulty may be that we have learned to equate guilt with shame. Perhaps we heard “shame on you” as children. But the true shame is not that we have done something we regret; the real tragedy would be allowing shame to prevent us from doing the healing work. Repair requires guilt—honest ownership—but healing requires freedom from shame.

Two virtues are essential for healing: curiosity and compassion. Curiosity invites us to explore what we did and how we came to hurt those we love. It encourages us to look inward and understand the patterns that lead us to stumble. Yet when we feel guilt, many of us default to self-chastisement rather than courageous curiosity. We must distinguish between appropriate guilt for our actions and the destructive habit of self-attack. Self-condemnation consumes psychic energy and blocks our capacity to grow. Without curiosity, there is no transformation. The virtue of curiosity must be cultivated if relationships are to heal.

The second virtue is compassion. We must be compassionate enough to treat ourselves with loving-kindness, even when we feel guilty. Many of us extend far more compassion to others than to ourselves. We may even question whether we deserve it. Yet self-condemnation is not a growth path; it keeps us stuck. Together, curiosity and compassion create the conditions for transformation.

When difficulties arise in relationships, we may despair that all is lost. We may believe we have ruined any chance of repair. Yet healing is not only possible, but it is an expression of our commitment to love.



Grief becomes the sacred work that keeps our hearts soft. When reconciliation is not possible, we are called to give thanks for what was, mourn what is no longer, and move forward.

Curiosity and compassion guide us back toward connection.

There is both bad news and good news in broken relationships: they often stir up old wounds. Past hurts can intensify present pain, but they also offer an unexpected opportunity for deeper healing. When a colleague and friend stopped speaking to me a few years ago, the loss was painful. Yet it also reopened an old childhood wound—the pain of receiving the silent treatment when I had done something wrong. In working through the present hurt, I was also given the chance to address and heal that earlier pain.

Another challenge arises when we are the only ones willing to do the work. Repair requires mutual participation. When someone blocks our attempts at reconciliation, the work shifts from repair to grief. Some relationships are meant only for a season. In those cases, grieving becomes essential—it is the antidote to bitterness and rumination. Grief prevents resentment from hardening into a shell that shuts out the light. Grief becomes the sacred work that keeps our hearts soft. When reconciliation is not possible, we are called to give thanks for what was, mourn what is no longer, and move forward. This may sound simple, but it is never easy.

Face-to-face repair remains the most courageous path. It takes humility and bravery to sit with another person and do the work of reconciliation. Many prefer email, text, or other forms of digital communication, yet these mediums are easily misinterpreted and can compound misunderstanding. I once had a young adult patient who believed I was angry with her because I ended an email with a period instead of an exclamation point in response to a scheduling change. She arrived at our next session anxious about my “tone.” Such is the fragility of digital communication.

Ultimately, our aim is reconciliation rooted in love. As Rainer Maria Rilke writes, “For one human being to love another human being: that is perhaps the most difficult task that has been given to us—the ultimate, the final problem and proof, the work for which all other work is merely preparation.” Broken relationships are not proof that love has failed. They are invitations to deeper love—if we are willing to undertake the courageous work of repair.

In keeping with the theme of this Journey issue, I am reminded of Leonard Cohen’s famous line from “Anthem”: “There is a crack in everything—that’s how the light gets in.” The full lyric reads: “Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

Imperfections, brokenness, and flaws are not merely weaknesses. They are opening places where growth, healing, and grace can enter.

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Solstice: The Dance of Light and Dark

by Nancy Hawkins, IHM

Many years ago, when I lived on Long Island, a friend invited me to an incredible celebration at the Church of Saint John the Divine in Manhattan. The church was packed, and I could feel the excitement in the air. Suddenly, a huge gong gave off a majestic sound. To my surprise, a fully grown tree was pulled into the church to the sound of music written by the composer Paul Winter. I was at a powerful celebration of the spring solstice!

Solstices are meaningful, cosmic, terrestrial events. The writer Richard Heinberg calls them “the original Earth days.” They are astronomical facts celebrated for thousands of years. The word solstice comes from the Latin meaning “the sun stood still.” The solstices divide the year into two halves by the waxing and waning of the sun. The solstices form a creative relationship between light and dark, day and night, heat and cold. The sun tilts a certain way to create this dance. The other moments that are related to the experience of light and darkness, of day and night, are the equinoxes. They celebrate the fact that there is equal light and darkness, a time of balance, on a particular day. I must admit to being fascinated with this cosmic reality when I was growing up. I think I expected an alarm to go off when the balance was just right!

Our ancient ancestors were keen observers of nature; they experienced the power and influence of the cosmos. They knew the importance of the earthly cycles and the interplay of light and dark. We, so-called scientific people, may know about the solstices, but our modern responses to them are rather sterile. I once had a student ask me what the “big deal” was at Stonehenge on the day of the summer solstice. Needless to say, I took time in class to explain why thousands of people visit Stonehenge and New Grange every year to watch the sun rise and set perfectly in between two huge stone pillars. Those who constructed the many stone circles in Ireland, Scotland, and England understood that all that surrounded them in nature and in the cosmos was sacred. Another interesting fact is that King Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem was oriented to the equinox sunrise. This shows that the temple’s purpose was connected to the coming of the divine.

Christine Valters Painter, whose spiritual writing often focuses on Celtic Christianity, writes in her book, *The Soul’s Slow Ripening*, that “the unfolding of the seasons and the rhythms of the earth was an overarching template for the Celtic imagination and spirit.” They farmed the land, lived by the sea, knew the way the tides came in, and respected the sacred symbol of the circle represented by the sun and the moon. Sun circle symbols are found in pre-Christian rock art. Each of the great Celtic harvest festivals happens at the midway points between the solstices and equinoxes. There is Samhain (pronounced sow-en) that coincides with All Saints and All Souls Days. Imbolc is the midway point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. St. Brigid’s feast and Candlemas come at this time as well. Beltane, a time of flourishing, takes place at the midpoint between the spring equinox and the summer solstice. It is experienced at the height of spring. The light has shifted! The flowers are blooming.

As I ponder the theme of our Chapter 2026, *The Light that Darkness Makes*, I understand on a new level that light and darkness are bookends of time. From the start of creation, light and dark have cooperated to frame day and night. Light



and darkness are at the heart of life. We lived in a womb of darkness that kept us safe, and then we emerged into the light of day. On the journey, we learn that both light and darkness bring us wisdom and spiritual growth. The monastic way respects the sacred rhythms of the day as seen in the Liturgy of the Hours. Communal and personal prayer centers

around the rising and setting of the sun. Light is praised at the moment of dawn, and night prayer allows for one’s day to be reviewed as darkness brings rest and peace. As we tap into prayer throughout our day, we understand that all time is holy. We once again honor the life cycles of the seasons, the earth, the planets, and the stars.

This year, the spring equinox occurred at 10:46 am on March 20 in the Northern Hemisphere. This threshold time celebrates the day and night of equal length, marking the start of spring. There are many ways to honor this longed-for day! One can plant new seeds, light bonfires or candles, go on nature walks, and pay attention to the birds and animals along the way. As the late Edward Hays writes in his well-known book *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*: “Sacred Parent, creator of the sun which makes the seasons, I rejoice in the gift of ever-growing light as the earth daily leans closer to the daystar. With joyfulness I greet this new season of spring that rises from the grey death of winter. I sing with joy that your son, the sun has signaled once again the beginning of a new season of life.”

References:

Edward Hays: *Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim*, page 20.

Richard Heinberg: *Celebrate the Solstice*.
Christine Valters Painter: *The Soul’s Slow Ripening*

Sister Nancy Hawkins teaches in the religious studies department of Marywood University. She embraces her Celtic roots every day!

“
*Light is praised
at the moment of
dawn, and night
prayer allows
for one’s day to
be reviewed as
darkness brings
rest and peace.*”

CONFRONTING OUR FEARS

by Kathy Kurdziel, IHM



Somewhere in the 1980s, when we could still manage some vigorous hiking, four of us went on vacation, driving through the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and as far as the Great Smoky Mountains. On our way home, we resolved to stop and crown our days with a hike through the famous Lourey Caverns. Two of our more senior companions opted to wait for us above ground at the mouth of the cave and “hear about” our underground adventure.

As part of the orientation to the hike, our guide offered us an option—a silent sit in a motionless pitch-black cavern. We actually chose that option! It was an astonishing experience raising an incredible range of emotions from immobilizing terror to a feeling of smothering to finally halting slowly into eternal peace. A peace like that in the dark seems softly luminescent and otherworldly.

Confronting fear is like tearing through a dark tunnel in a 90-mph bobsled, clinging for dear life. It’s never a single action; it’s a transformation that feels like gulping terror and anticipating a smacking impact into the airless tunnel and gradually fading into a free-floating fall toward total obliteration, but finally landing gently in a magnificent, peaceful wholeness of soft dawning light. It’s a process of coming to gradual, enlightened peace that says with great wonder: “I’m OK. I’m OK.” Like the slow emergence of a rainbow from the darkest cloud of a storm, my spirit breathes, “Ahh-how beautiful!”

Once in a hospital during an illness, I hemorrhaged so badly that I lost consciousness and experienced a feeling that my life was slowly draining away.

Then out of a hollow, cave-like darkness, I heard a tense but calm, breathy whisper: “I got it: I got a pulse.” I heard it several times more in the ICU that night, and each time I felt closer to safety, the kind that comes with trust and surrender into the gentle hands of another.

It’s akin to some of the gospel experiences of Lent, where the terrified apostles, being roughly tossed about in their fragile fishing boat, cried out to awaken the sleeping Jesus, screaming, “Save us! Save us!” Yes, because at the very core of their being, they knew that with the presence of Jesus, nothing could ultimately destroy them. In another Lenten gospel of the transfiguration, terrified men, hugging the ground, came to believe on that crest of a mountain, that this man, Jesus, their friend and teacher, was truly the Son of God who could subdue their fears and misconception and walk with them down the mount to embrace the mission that would fill their lives and eventually take them to their deaths. Jesus’ transfiguration transformed them from fearful creatures to courageous disciples, living perpetually in the abiding presence of everlasting love, care, and personal protection. Finally, having experienced the transfigured Jesus, their inner knowing becomes clear. “Their Jesus is truly God, and in God, all things are possible.”

Facing fear involves feeling it, seeing it for what it is, walking through the dreads, discovering with confidence who I am and whose I am, and trusting my existence is held firmly and safely in sacred hands.

When we were young sisters, a beautiful artist from a war-torn Lebanon gave us a lecture. Day and night, warning sirens were going off signaling imminent danger and sudden death. With each siren, she’d quickly hide her paintings under a bed and go quietly to the sheltering hall of the hospital where she lived. Huddling silently against the wall, she waited for peace to come, but her many weeks and months of terror took her beyond her fear to see what she most valued in life and what she least wanted to surrender.

We asked how she did that. “When you come to trust, you are grasped forever by unending love, you begin to live beyond fear in incredible freedom of spirit.” She learned that she was always grasped by life, either here or beyond, and that her

eternal spirit is indestructible. No matter what, she lives as God lives; she lives “through God and with God and in God, always.”

How am I learning to confront my fears? I am learning to embrace the subtle art of transformation—I learn from suffering cruel hurts, surviving tragedy, tending to gut-wrenching grief, languishing in spiritual poverty, dryness, loneliness, longing, unraveling and slowly encountering the velvet touch of blackest darkness, but also discovering the gifts of darkest nights’ stars, moon, planets, the Milky Way, wonder, rest, shadows and thresholds, dreams and dancing. I am coming to believe that one doesn’t necessarily have to boldly confront fear but can learn to walk quietly beside it in lock step, matching the rhythm of imperfect humanity like the Irish step-dancers in a parade. Breathe step, breathe step, one, two, three. Fear, who has become my teacher, reveals to me what is most dear and what I don’t want to surrender: life and loving; working and thriving, confiding in friends and standing by them, reaching out with integrity and compassion; praying for mercy; finding peace in the face of bad news, sickness, and even death.

On NPR radio, I listened to an inspiring interview with many young Ukrainian adults in Kharkiv. Despite all the death and bombing, the rubble and terror, the youth wish to live life, celebrate life, and when the sun comes out, they meet and eat, and dance in their broken streets. In Ukraine’s second-largest city, the remote yet real possibility of dying hasn’t stopped many of its residents from living. It can be scary, say the students in Hemingway’s Bar as they quote its namesake: “Life always defeats death; the sun always rises.”

Welcoming the light that darkness makes!

Sister Kathy serves as the Delegate for Religious for the Diocese of Scranton and as a part-time editor in the IHM Communications Office. Her favorite ministry, though, is part-time teaching English to new immigrants in the IHM free program, Everyday English for Adults.

GRIEF, LOSS, AND LIGHT: SOME REFLECTIONS

by Gail Cabral, IHM

Grief is the experience of coping with loss, and both come into everyone's life, sometimes in devastating ways, sometimes in small losses that surprise us by the force of grieving that ensues.

Coincidences come into every life as well. In the days since Sr. Fran Fasolka invited me to write this article, several decisions requiring change have happened in my life. I needed to withdraw my name as chapter delegate and officially indicate my need to remain permanently at Our Lady of Peace Residence. I need to begin a major downsizing of belongings that were stored easily at St. Joseph's Center but will not fit here at OLP. Adjusting to life at OLP is an ongoing process; dealing with limitations in my mobility has been and continues to take much of my attention.

McCoyd and Walter (2016) assume that change is a necessary and unending part of development, and that even positive change holds within itself some aspects of loss. They detail the effects of grief at every stage of life, including death and non-death losses. They also explain that a loss at one age may have repercussions at other ages. Loss of a parent as a child is the devastating absence of a caregiver to whom one is greatly attached; later, it is the absence of a supportive guide when one is an adolescent, and a grandparent to one's own children later in life.

McCoyd and Walter present the physiological, psychological, and social aspects of grief and loss. Biological changes may involve neurological systems, genetic/epigenetic factors, immune systems, hormonal changes, and cardiological systems. Psychologically, grief involves sadness, rumination, psychic pain, and irritation. Challenges in coping may be due to cognitive changes, such as a lack of focus and clarity. An additional psychological effect is a heightened sense of vulnerability, similar to the effects of trauma. Each person must cope with this fearfulness and anxiety, which are not usually associated with grieving.

As we mentioned before, smaller secondary losses accompany major life changes and death experiences. This fact helps us to understand the holistic nature of coping. Moving to high school is an accomplishment; students and adults share pride in accomplishments. Nevertheless, some things are lost: closer ties with a smaller number of classmates, teachers who have

greater contact with those in the classroom, and the familiarity of an environment one knew well. And the parents feel the loss of the child they could direct with little questioning, even as they rejoice in growth towards adulthood.

Psychological losses and the processes of grief seem to me to be intertwined. Examples of psychological losses include the following: loss of security, loss of identity, autonomy, belonging, loss of financial security; these may be losses in their own right. They are also the accompaniments of life-changing illness, injury, or death-related change, our own or that of a loved one.

One of the tasks that occurs as part of grieving is learning to adjust our view of the world. We all carry "assumptive" beliefs about reality. They may be unique to us, but often they are shared with others. We assume things about the world being fair. We assume things about who is liable to die and when. We make judgments about health and health practices. I remember a man who worked on having a very healthy lifestyle. He biked, exercised, and ate well. When he developed cancer in his 70s, he was quite angry at what he felt he should be able to avoid.

This brings me to two caveats: (1) Do not compare yourself to others. (2) If you have expectations, hold them with the uncertainty they deserve.

The Advice I Need

1. Remember that not everything has changed; also, attend to the positive aspects of even difficult changes. Cultivate gratitude.
2. I may need to examine and adjust some of my assumptions, including how I see my own identity.
3. God is God. Our attempts at control are normal and often healthy. It's good to make wise decisions about health, exercise, and social interaction. However, God is still the one in charge, and our attempts to understand will fall short, even though we often cannot resist the human tendency to try to figure things out.
4. God is with us, on our side, understanding how we are made, both as humans and as the unique being each of us is.
5. No one is exempt. Each person has experienced, and will experience, grief and loss. Often, we do not know of another's pain. Sometimes, when we do, we don't understand it. We need to have as



much compassion as we possibly can, for ourselves and for each other. This is the journey we make with others; this is the journey that makes us one.

As Sister Patt Walsh is fond of saying, "Coincidences are God's way of being anonymous." Perhaps the transitions I mentioned at the beginning of this article are not really coincidental with the invitation to write this article. There is one more 'coincidence' I'll mention. I hope it leaves you with a sense of the presence of God.

A few weeks ago, I received a card created by an old friend, Noelle Kilmer Angevine. The painting on the card includes a narcissus, and the accompanying poem, also by Noelle.

Paper White

And then I saw the dark at night
That set the flowers and leaves
on kitchen windowsill in white.

Not bright enough,
Distracting me from paper on my table,
Piled with sliding mail
That hides my fruit,
Bowled in straw baskets.
Forms to fill,
Forms to mix in other forms,
To play a game of "Hide and Seek."

The night is dark.
Turn off the light.
The drifting snow outside is soft.
The paper, darkened in my sight,
Turns into foothills
And between my work and snow,
Like sparks,
Narcissus stands and blesses me.

References

Angevine, Noelle Kilmer. Paper White (poem). Used with permission.

McCoyd, J.L. M. & Walter, C. A. (2016). Grief and loss across the lifespan: A biopsychosocial perspective. NY: Springer.

Sister Gail is a developmental psychologist and an adjunct professor at Marywood University.

One Way of Living Out our IHM Statement of Commitment to Immigrant and Refugee Neighbors

by Donna Korba, IHM

The city of Scranton and much of Northeastern Pennsylvania is a region of the country that offers a richness of diversity in many forms: cultural, artistic, musical, culinary, and linguistic, to name a few. This richness is the human expression of the many immigrant groups who have called this area home for centuries, from the original Lenape peoples to European immigrants of the last two centuries to newer immigrants and refugees from Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Northeastern Pennsylvania, and Scranton in particular, holds a treasure of diversity!

In addition to this diversity, the people of this area offer a sense of community and an atmosphere of care for their neighbors. Especially evident is the network of local leaders and concerned citizens who periodically gather to plan public events, celebrations, and multi-faith prayer services when an issue arises that needs public witness and attention.

Recently, a Lackawanna County commissioner spoke of his concern for our local immigrant population and the looming threats of federal ICE agents periodically appearing in the area. They have nabbed residents without proper warrants or explanations, detained neighbors and parishioners, and caused fear and distrust among members of the community. He proposed an ordinance, "Protect Our Neighbors Act," which would prevent Lackawanna County officials from assisting ICE and other agencies with immigration enforcement, ensuring that local law enforcement protects local residents and maintains their confidence. This ordinance would not interfere with federal ICE law enforcement, but it would ensure that local law enforcement does not cooperate in ICE's distressing tactics.

A network of local leaders has been attending the bi-monthly commissioners' meetings in support of the proposed ordinance. It is frustrating that the ordinance has not yet become a part of the meeting agenda. Local people continue to speak publicly at the open mic part of the

meeting. Citizens have spoken about their own personal experiences with ICE in the area, including a woman who shared her concern about a harrowing encounter that she and her daughter (a U.S. citizen adopted from China in 2009) had with ICE. While witnessing armed men in tactical vests surrounding a local home, the woman took out her phone to record the incident. When ICE agents noticed her, they took pictures and videotaped her and her daughter. The woman fears that she and her daughter may have been entered into an "enemy of the state" database. She is afraid for herself and her daughter.

In the local parish, St. Theresa of Calcutta, where I worship with our Latino community every Sunday, various parishioners have been nabbed; a few off the streets of Scranton as they were going to work or dropping their children off at school, and even some as they were leaving official Immigration appointments in Philadelphia and New Jersey.

The IHM Sisters and members of the wider IHM family collaborate with this diverse network in support of the rights of people to migrate and against the plethora of false information being spread about them. IHM associates who are leaders in the Scranton community, a member of the IHM leadership team, and I have joined others who care about the community and value the lives and contributions of our immigrant brothers and sisters. We

have spoken in public, and I have personally had the opportunity to share the recent "Statement of Commitment to Immigrant and Refugee Neighbors" published by the IHM Leadership Team. It reads: We promise to:

- a) Extend hospitable hearts and accompaniment to those seeking safety and belonging.
- b) Advocate for just and humane immigration policies that protect families and honor human rights.
- c) Educate and engage our communities in building understanding, empathy, and a culture of welcome.
- d) Serve generously through our ministries, offering support, resources, and hope.
- e) Pray faithfully for all who journey in search of peace and a future for their families.

The statement is based on our rootedness in "Gospel love and our IHM mission and charism. We pledge to stand with our immigrant neighbors, wherever we serve."

Wherever we may find ourselves, I invite us all to intentionally commit to at least one of these promises. Our 2022-2026 IHM Direction Statement affirms that we "intentionally engage in actions that reflect God's unconditional love for all creation for the transformation of our world." Let this be our time to reflect on the unconditional love of God by our commitment to our immigrant and refugee neighbors in their time of need.

Sister Donna serves as the IHM Congregation's Director of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.



IHM Sisters and Associates attended a gathering in downtown Scranton in support of our immigrant sisters and brothers

Darkness

"In a Dark Time, the Eye Begins to See."

- Theodore Roethke

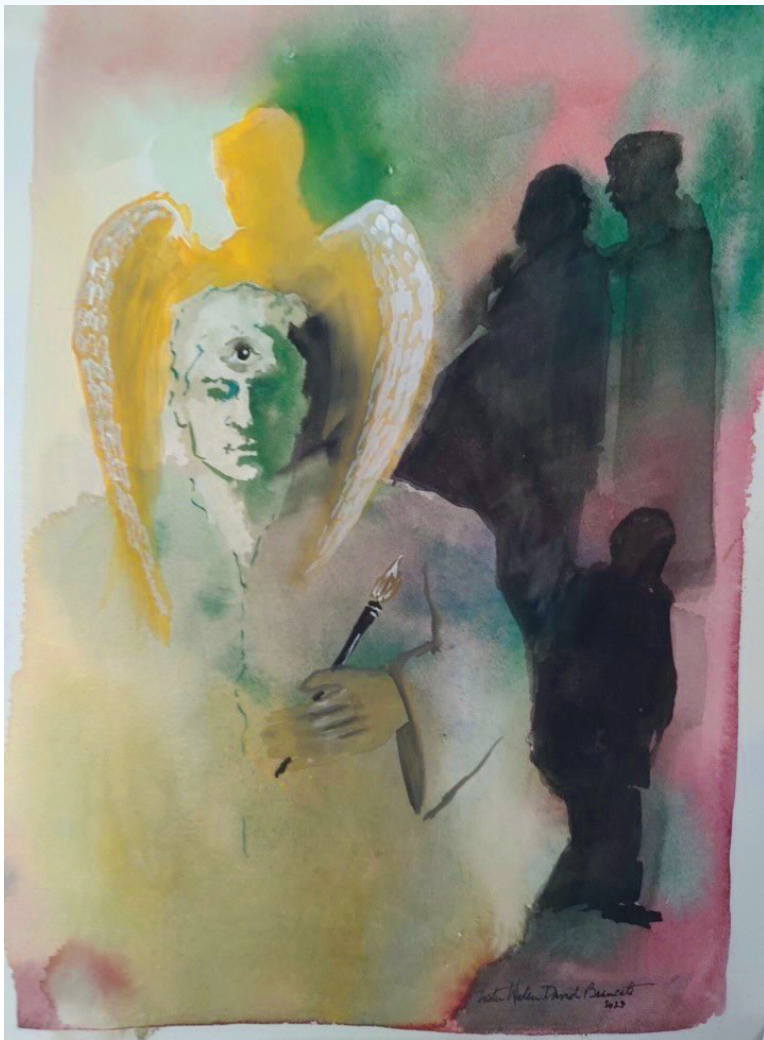
As an artist, I am intrigued by contrast. Many of my paintings emerge from very dark backgrounds, making the light stronger and more evident to the viewer. The following artists were not afraid of painting or drawing very dark backgrounds to convey what was going on in their world. Three wonderful artists come to my mind: Kollwitz, Rembrandt, and Caravaggio. The substance of Kathe Kollwitz's art is dominated by compassion and strength, with a deep understanding of the misery of her neighbors, the oppressed. She lived

through a dark time in Germany and expressed a deep concern for humanity through her prints and drawings. Her powerful sketches were prophetic. Rembrandt's painting, "The Return of the Prodigal Son," uses a very warm, inviting balance of light and darkness. Caravaggio's "The Crucifixion of Saint Peter" has an interplay of shadow and light. I sometimes think that artists have a "Third Eye" and see the world very differently from others. An example of this is my own personal experience during

a retreat in Ocean Grove, New Jersey. I was able to paint during the retreat and created many abstract backgrounds depicting my inner feelings. At that time, I had just experienced a loss of confidence in my life and in my artwork. Gazing at one of the dark backgrounds, I saw a figure stripped of her confidence. But out of the darkness, there appeared a beautiful white dove offering HOPE to my wounded spirit.

“
Mystics, poets
and artists learn
to wait, to trust,
to rely upon
darkness
just as nature
has always
depended on
Nature folds the
into waiting periods
for events like
birth and death
and harvest at
sunset.

- Evelyn Mattern



Third Eye by Helen David Brancato, IHM



Stripped of My Confidence by Helen David Brancato, IHM

Mergus Light

by Helen David Brancato, IHM

Images often reveal so much about what a person sees in their own darkness. This experience led me to give workshops about using ink blots or shadows to reveal what is deep in our subconscious (like the Rorschach test). I purposely use black India ink for participants to discover the images they have created by dropping ink on a wet surface paper and letting the ink bleed. Once dry, studying the image from a distance, asking yourself the question, "What do you see in the shadows?"

She was very interested in writing about women mystics and wanted to combine poetry and art. The two of us met in North Carolina and discussed the book process. We both agreed that the artist's process emulates the mystic's. The presence of God was found in the shadows. The art form mirrored the mystic's. Evelyn Mattern said, "The mystic waits for God in darkness and has no fear of the shadows."

Since we lived at a distance from each other, we agreed to complete the book by mail. I would send 20 ink blots to Evelyn, and she would put them on her wall. Then she would write a poem about each one and send it back to me. This led to the publication of "Why Not Become Fire?" It was a wonderful, creative venture for both of us.

"Mystics, poets, and artists learn to wait, to trust, and to rely upon the darkness just as nature has always depended on it. Nature folds the dark into waiting periods for events like birth and dawn and harvest and sunset." - Evelyn Mattern



About the Artist

Sister Helen David Brancato, IHM studied portrait painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and a variety of visual art forms at The Tyler School of Art of Temple University. Working as a painter, printmaker, and illustrator, she has exhibited professionally primarily in the Philadelphia and New York areas, and taught visual arts at Villanova University. She collaborated as illustrator with Henri Nouwen on *Walk with Jesus: Stations of the Cross* and with Evelyn Mattern on *Why not Become Fire?: Encounters with Women Mystics*. But one

of her major accomplishments has been guiding artists from six to eighty years of age in an open studio at the Southwest Enrichment Community Art Center in Philadelphia.

She is the recipient of an Independence Foundation Artist Fellowship, and her work is in the collection of The Museum of Contemporary Religious Art at Saint Louis University and Villanova University. Sister Helen David's artist's statement resonates beautifully with her mission: "My work is bound up with the human condition. I respond to nature peacefully and to human nature with healthy agitation. It is important for me to interact with the lives of the poor. Through painting, I try to bring the depth of my insight into the pain, the strength, and the dignity of my subjects."



Edith Stein by Helen David Brancato, IHM

"A soldier from Cologne, a new recruit to form a postal unit in the eastern zone, waits in the depot as the door slides open on a freight car packed with people cowering. The stench is overpowering. A woman in nun's clothing says to him, "This is my beloved hometown. I will never see it again. We are riding to our death." - Evelyn Mattern

In 1999, Ave Maria Press printed a book titled "Why Not Become Fire? Encounters with Women Mystics." It was my good fortune to reconnect with poet Sister Evelyn Mattern.



Immigrant Family by Helen David Brancato, IHM

Persistence

by Sister Ancilla Maloney, IHM

It all began with an interview by Father Sean O'Malley, OFM, of IHM Sister Mary Martha Gardiner. Father Sean had determined that an American wouldn't know how to identify with Spanish-speaking people, therefore, Sister didn't receive the sought-after job at the Spanish Catholic Center in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C. This was before sister went to Peru as a missionary in Lima and the Andes mountains.



Sister had been a nurse before she entered the IHM Congregation, but her first assignments had been teaching, which she loved. But one day she said to herself, "I want to nurse." As luck (or God's plan) would have it, she met Sister Michael Marie Hartman, stationed in Peru, who asked if she had ever considered volunteering for a mission in Peru.

The IHM Sisters went to Lima in 1965 to teach in an elementary school in Lima and soon realized that the health situation was pathetic for many of the poor families in their neighborhood: no water system, no sanitary conditions, no medical care. So Mother Beata permitted Mary Martha to join the sisters in Lima. After meeting with the pastor, she saw that what was needed was a clinic to address the health care needs of the many poor people who were guarding the houses of the rich that were being built in the area. She set up a clinic in the basement of the church with volunteer physicians and began doing house visits. Soon she discovered many children whose families had come from the mountains. They were malnourished, having diarrhea, and were dying of dehydration. But she also asked, Why? What were the root problems for such misery?

The answer revealed itself when she took a three-day trip to the mountains by bus, truck, and on foot with Sister Joel Marie Sheehe. The plan was to return two little children, who had recovered from tuberculosis, to their mother. She saw the pressing needs of the Quechua people in the remote villages and said, "This is where I want to be." In the town of Yanaoca in 1975, in the Diocese of Sicuani, Mary Martha and Joel Marie

began preparing people to be catechists and health promoters in each village. She also invited a team of American dentists to come for a week at a time. While there, they taught the health promoters how to administer Novocain and to pull teeth. The dentists were amazed at how skilled the health promoters



L-R Sisters Mary Martha Gardiner, Joel Marie Sheehe, and Sister Janice Heisey

were at extractions, and for three years, the dentists chose to return for a week of service and instruction.

Twelve years later Mary Martha returned to the U.S. She went with Sister Anne Munley again to seek a position in the clinic in the Spanish Catholic Center in Washington, D.C. The same Father O'Malley was still in charge. This time, she got the job!

Sister believed that one must not just "look" but "see." The darkness she saw was a wasting of time on the part of people who were coming to Washington from distances in Maryland for services. "Let's put a center in Maryland," she said to administrators, and for 17 years, she served the people there in Maryland. She went door to door asking for volunteer doctors. And they came, all cultures, all



religions, all races—the doctors came. One day she learned of a young man who was a double amputee. He was sent home from the hospital to his brother's house, as there was no money for any kind of residential care or for prostheses. She visited the home and he came, without legs, bouncing down the stairs! A few phone calls and one prosthesis was secured. He had to come up with the cost of the other one. He did!

Mary Martha saw the need to improve the dental care for the poor that was offered at the center. So she invited Sister Janice Heisey, IHM, a high school science teacher, to come and set up a dental clinic. "I don't know anything about dentistry," said Janice. Nor did she know any Spanish. "You can do it," said Mary Martha. And Sister Janice came and set up the dental clinic and did it for 34 years! Along with some volunteer dentists, Sister Janice secured the services of the Howard University Dental School students, who took care of all the dental needs of those who came to the clinic. She used to tell people who asked if she knew Spanish, "I speak dental Spanish."

St. Francis of Assisi is supposed to have said, "Start by doing what is necessary, then do what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." In the case of these two sisters, when they saw darkness in the absence of needed care for the poor, they opened their hearts and used their gifts to bring the light of urgent care to those in need. And so much that seemed impossible became a reality.

Sister Ancilla Maloney recently returned from 12 years of missionary work in Sicuani, Peru. Currently she is volunteering at St. Francis Kitchen and Friends of the Poor/Catherine McAuley Center in Scranton, PA. Sister also serves as an oral historian for the IHM Archives Office.

The Upanishad Showed Me that Light Appears When It's Darkest

by Rexilla Raymond, SFCC

I found myself reflecting on light during a recent community sharing that began around the celebration of Deepawali, the festival of lights. Though the festival has passed, its symbol remains with me as we now move toward Easter — another moment when Christians proclaim that light shines in the darkness.

Across many faith traditions, people celebrate the victory of light over darkness. Deepawali (or Diwali) in the Hindu tradition, Hanukkah in the Jewish tradition and the Christian feasts of Christmas and Easter all carry this theme. In Islam, the Quran speaks of God as “light upon light” (Surah An-Nur 24:35), a divine presence that guides us even when we feel lost.

My Catholic faith teaches me that Jesus is called “the Light of the World” (John 8:12). The Gospel of John reminds us: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). Yet there are moments in life when that light feels distant.

A few years ago, I experienced such a moment.

The loss of my job felt like a storm that swept through my life. I had poured my heart into that work, often spending long hours trying to meet everyone’s expectations and carry my responsibilities faithfully. Yet the environment around me slowly became one of criticism and fault-finding. Decisions were made about me without me. Voices that once supported me grew silent.

I felt cornered by judgments and weighed down by discouragement. My confidence began to crumble. I started doubting my own strength and abilities.

Gradually, I began to shrink in my own skin. The silence from those I once counted on felt deafening. Each day felt like walking through a fog. Outwardly I carried on with a smile, wearing the familiar mask of “All is well.” But inside, something had gone dark.

The light I once carried — the joy, the clarity, the sense of purpose — felt like it had gone out.

Then something unexpected began to happen.

A friend sent a message out of the blue: “Hi, thinking of you... no need to reply... you matter.” A mentor’s support by compassionate listening and assuring presence was enough for me to go on serving and healing the sick. Even people I never expected offered words of encouragement saying, “You’ve been trying to keep your light burning alone. Let us help you light it again.”

Those words slowly began to change everything.

In the midst of everything falling apart, I had a profound insight. During Deepwali, I lit a diya — a small earthen lamp — and realized that even a small flame can hold back darkness.

That insight helped me as I entered my own struggle.

From my school days I remember hearing the chanting of a Sanskrit mantra during important celebrations. Its meaning is simple and profound:

From the unreal lead me to the real,
From darkness lead me to light,
From death lead me to immortality.
May peace be.

This ancient prayer from the Upanishad, taught in schools regardless of caste, creed or religion, seeks wisdom, clarity and

peace. It is a reminder that humanity across cultures longs for the same movement — from confusion to truth, from despair to hope.

During difficult days this prayer comes alive for me in new ways. It reminds me of the cosmic interplay of light and darkness, and that even when truth feels distant, it is still present.

Gradually the shattered parts of my being started reassembling. I became confident in my professional services. In this interplay for light and darkness there were angels, friends and mentors, who not only listened to me but stood by me. When I didn’t have the strength to fight for myself, they helped me write letters to the unions, guided me through the process, and reminded me that my voice mattered. Together we fought for justice. And in time, I got my job back.

In the bargain what I gained was far more than employment — it was dignity. It was the reminder that I wasn’t alone.

The Bhagavad Gita says: “To those who are devoted, I destroy the darkness with the lamp of wisdom” (10.11). I’ve come to believe that a lamp of wisdom often arrives in the form of people who show up when we least expect it. Justice always refuses to look away when we serve one another in love and shared responsibility.

As we move into the Easter season, Christians remember the story of resurrection — the belief that life can emerge even from the deepest darkness. For me, that message echoes the wisdom found in many traditions: Light always appears when the darkness is bleakest.

If your light feels strong right now, hold it out for someone else. And if you’re barely holding on, know that we were never meant to make it alone.

Sister Rexilla Raymond, from India, belongs to the Sisters for Christian Community. She is a fully trained nurse with 19 years of experience in various roles, including senior staff nurse, geriatric care supervisor, nursing aide school instructor, medical coordinator and hospital nursing supervisor. She has assisted in surgeries such as gynecology and oncology. She has also served as a supervisor for nursing aide students and monitored medical health services outcomes. She received the Best Nurse Award in 2012 and completed the ICN Management Course. Currently, alongside her full-time role as a staff nurse, she is pursuing a post-BSc in nursing.

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*If your light feels
strong right now,
hold it out
for someone else.
And if you’re
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alone.*

PUSHING AGAINST THE NIGHT

by Jeffrey Robinson

Push against the Night

When morning comes and darkness lingers near,
And heavy news is all you seem to find,
Hold fast – don't let the voice of doubt or fear
Take root and steal the power from your mind.

Though those in charge may try to keep control,
And rules are made to quiet what you say,
The truth still lives in every open soul,
And light begins where someone lights the way.

Stand strong, though silence presses like a weight,
Though justice hides behind a friendly face.
One voice can shake the halls of fear and hate –
And courage grows in even small, still space.

This day is yours, don't let them take your fight.
Stay bold, speak up, and push against the night.

This sonnet appears in the forthcoming poetry collection, *Divine Office* (2027: Finishing Line Press), written by Jeffrey Robinson (Marywood University, Class of 2008). *Divine Office* is composed of 32 formal sonnets, written in iambic pentameter, and organized around the eight canonical hours of prayer: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. The collection uses the scaffolding of liturgical time to reflect on contemporary life in our unsettled era. The poems move through the day's liturgical arc, tracing small moments of revelation and doubt. The work is not devotional in a traditional sense, but instead uses sacred architecture to ask: what becomes of vocation when the global forces of disruption and uncertainty dominate? What rhythms might ground us? How do we pray – in sonnet form or otherwise – when so much of humanity is at stake? *Divine Office* will be published in January, 2027 from Finishing Line Press, and presales for the book begin in September, 2026. The author will be in conversation with Sister John Michele, IHM at a book event on campus sometime next year.



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Jeffrey Robinson (MU '08), is a Boston-based writer of fiction and poetry. He also writes for the screen. *Divine Office*, his debut chapbook of poetry, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. He currently serves as the Managing Director of GrubStreet, the nation's largest literary arts nonprofit and center for creative writing.

THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S DAUGHTER



Marie Lourdes Vanston, IHM

THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S DAUGHTER

BY MARIE LOURDES VANSTON, IHM

This book brings into focus the characteristics of each member of the family as they establish the new family business. Compassion, love and prayer bring comfort as clients are supported.

Marie Lourdes Vanston, IHM, is a retired Catholic school educator who taught all levels from primary to post-secondary and Master's degrees. She served as a school supervisor, principal, superintendent, college professor and pastoral associate. She now resides in the IHM retirement residence in Pennsylvania.

Purchase on Amazon:
<https://tinyurl.com/3dv27f7t>

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 and wounded world. We invite you to join us in honoring the memory of these beloved and holy women. Following are the reflections shared during their funerals.



Miriam Joseph Reinhardt, IHM
August 8, 1929
October 9, 2025
by Judy O'Brien, IHM

One of the well-known sayings by world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma is, "Good things happen when you meet strangers."

Over the last three and a half years, Sister Miriam Joseph Reinhardt, IHM, and I became dear friends. Miriam was my very first call after I was elected to the Leadership Team. Her call was to tell me that she thought it was time for her to move here to OLP and that she wanted to begin the process. On a side note, she also thought that Sister Tarsicius should consider a move as well, and that I should call and initiate a conversation with her. Which I did, and they moved here together that August of 2022. Little did Miriam know that she was calling me forth into the reality of being an IHM Leader. I will always cherish the memories of those days and these three years that established a friendship held deep in my heart.

Miriam, as we knew her, was not your average Josephine (her actual birth name). Most would describe

her as "a character," and she was. Wearing most of her characteristics on her habit sleeve, she was intensely direct, honest, and stubborn, with a fierce love of life, family, and the Congregation. She was singularly devoted to Jesus, the love of her life. She expressed that love through years of teaching, mastering the cello, living a deeply disciplined and devotional spiritual life, and taking tremendous care of her physical body. This self-care began at 4:30 a.m.—maintaining a healthy diet, taking a nap from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., always choosing the stairs, and, up until a few weeks ago, you could find Miriam on the floor of her room at 6:00 p.m. doing her nightly exercises, which included about 25 sit-ups (and not the cheating kind!). By 7:00, she was tucked in, Rosary wrapped in her hand, ready for a good night's rest.

I also had the privilege of seeing the other, less obvious, "Miriam." She had a beautiful smile that she would share as I entered her room; there she would be, knitting or crocheting beautiful handmade creations to be given away or sold in Heartworks. She would tell me to sit down and, with a whisper, entrusted me with some of her needs and concerns—both personal and congregational. Occasionally, in those visits, she would tell me that she loved me. I would try not to act surprised and just thank her for that gift. How blessed I have been—how blessed we all have been—to share life with one of the many great elders we call sister.

Once again, in the words of Yo-Yo Ma: "Good things

happen when you meet strangers." Nothing could be truer for me than my meeting Sister Miriam Joseph Reinhardt, IHM, three years ago—no longer a stranger, now a friend.

As we send you forward, Miriam, we thank you for being that wonderful character we call you. Amen.



Katherine O'Neil, IHM
May 28, 1941
November 13, 2025
by Terri Jordan, IHM

Welcome, everyone, to the prayer and funeral liturgy for Sr. Katherine O'Neil, a/k/a Kay or Kate.

I want to extend the congregation's sympathy to her brother, Thomas, her sisters Mary and Peggy, and her nephew Robert.

Katherine had tremendous trust in God and gratitude for all that God had given her. She shared God's love with all the people she encountered in her teaching, parish work, as a director of religious education, and in her everyday life. By her example, she taught about the belief in each person's potential and the joy of service.

She was a person with a great sense of humor and

a wicked laugh. She was sensitive to the needs of all people. When moving to a new residence, she would gently discuss the need for a different horarium when not all the sisters in the house taught school, which was beginning to happen within the congregation.

Kate was a strong advocate for social justice and environmental issues before they became popular. While in ministry in West Virginia, she became aware that much of the mountainous area was built on abandoned coal mines, leaving residents without clean drinking water. Through her tireless efforts, she eventually brought clean drinking water to the area.

One time, after a torrential rainstorm, many of the families living in the mountains lost everything. By this time, she had already made a name for herself with the then-governor and other political friends and was able to provide shelter for "her" people quickly.

Kate is now reunited with her parents, Lawrence and Mary O'Neil, her great-aunt, our former Superior General, Mother Mary Germain O'Neil, IHM, in eternal glory with the God she so dearly loved.

In closing, I would like to share a piece from a 1979 letter to Sister Michel Keenan from Kate, "Someday I will be a butterfly; graceful, gentle of touch, adding beauty to its surroundings, a symbol of new life."



Carole A. Griffin, IHM
August 21, 1938
December 5, 2025
by Grace Surdovel, IHM

Today we gather to celebrate the life of our beloved Sister Carole Griffin—a woman of deep faith, gentle spirit, and unwavering commitment to God’s people.

Carole was born in Susquehanna, the daughter of Harry and Helen, and sister to Michael, Daniel, and Linda, who is with us today, along with her family. Carole was a loving sister, aunt, devoted IHM Sister, and a cherished friend to so many of us here, and those joining us by livestream.

For 87 years of life and 66 years of religious profession, Carole ministered in schools and parishes across Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Massachusetts. Wherever she served, she brought kindness, humor, and a welcoming presence that touched students, parents, and colleagues alike.

I first experienced Carole’s gracious spirit at St. Nicholas/St. Mary’s School in Wilkes-Barre, while supervising graduate student teachers. One of my students was placed in a classroom across the hall from Marion Tarone’s classroom, while Carole served as a classroom aide and supported the administration. Marion and Carole were a great support to my student during his placement. Their wisdom, encouragement, and steady presence gave my student the confidence to succeed, and with that newfound

confidence, he later became a middle school math teacher in a Catholic school back home on Long Island.

Another fond memory I have of Carole was of her presence at our Luzerne County IHM gatherings, which would take place on Founders Day, the Immaculate Conception, and the Christmas holidays. Carole and Marion, along with Sue Brown and Mary Ann Cody, would select the date, time, and location, and offer transportation to and from the restaurant for those who needed it. I can still picture Carole at Agolino’s in West Pittston, sharing funny stories about student or teacher antics and offering her witty observations. Her humor and warmth made those evenings unforgettable.

Carole touched countless lives through her ministry and friendship. Many of you here have your own stories of how she blessed your lives. When Kitty invites you to do so, I hope you’ll share them so we can give thanks together for the gift Carole was to each of us.

Carole, thank you for your gentle presence, your love, your humor, and your wisdom. Today, we commend you to God’s eternal embrace. Well done, good and faithful servant.



Christina Aldarelli, IHM
December 23, 1936
January 8, 2026
by Suzie Armbruster, IHM

Good morning everyone, and a special welcome to Sister Christina’s family, especially

her sisters Ursula and Frances, and her brother, Ralph. We welcome her nieces, nephews, grand nieces, and other relatives. To those who were not able to join us in person, we send greetings via livestream and know you are very much with us in spirit.

Today we gather to celebrate the life of our Sister, your sister, Sister Christina Aldarelli. Christina was born on December 23, 1936--- almost a Christmas Day baby! She was the daughter of Nicholas and Mary Aldarelli.

Christina grew up in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and enjoyed the companionship of her two sisters, Ursula and Frances, and her two brothers, Ralph and Nicholas. Nicholas was the youngest, and there was quite an admiration between the two of them. When Christina was to choose her name in religion, she asked to be named Maria Nicholas. Maria, in honor of her mother, and Nicholas, in honor of her father, and of course her baby brother Nicky. She was proud to share his name and spoke often and always of her baby brother, Nicky.

Christina was very proud of her Italian heritage and was quick to let you know she was Italian, as if you couldn’t tell by her quick speech and expressive hand motions. She would speak of aunts, uncles, and cousins--- and by the way she spoke, I think she was related to everyone in Asbury Park! When we listened to her stories about family, you quickly picked up that she was the princess among them all. She adored them, and they adored her.

Christina entered our congregation in 1954 and was professed in 1957. When she entered, she desired to be an educator. She taught in our elementary schools and possessed the gift of relating to young children, while also having a rapport with the middle school students.

She served as principal

and assistant principal and accepted whatever assignment she was asked to take on. Her journey in education brought her to schools in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and even a brief stay in Oregon.

She prepared children to receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and First Communion and was always proud of teaching them the poem, “Lovely Lady Dressed in Blue,” for the school May crownings. She was devout and made sure the children were taught to be devout as well.

I lived with Christina in Goldsboro, North Carolina. Upon her arrival, she learned that living in the South was quite different from our Northern houses. We took turns cooking dinner during the week, and often we were rushing home from school to make sure dinner was ready by 5:30. Chris was known for her delicious “Sunday gravy”--- no matter what day of the week she was scheduled to cook, it was Sunday gravy!

The first time she wrote on the menu “pasta and gravy,” I was intrigued to see what we would be eating, as pasta and gravy was a new one for me! When I searched the kitchen, I discovered it was spaghetti sauce. She was firm in letting me know it was never to be called sauce, but rather, gravy. The recipe was a tradition in her family and was, indeed, delicious even if it was red. Christina would often make her gravy on Sunday just in case she ended up staying late at school on her scheduled day. She loved taunting us with the aroma as it simmered all day. The scent would permeate the house, and if you were lucky, you might be treated to a slice of Italian bread with gravy late on a Sunday evening--- before she hid it in the back refrigerator to be used on her day during the week.

continued on next page

Christina was an avid learner and especially enjoyed taking classes to deepen her knowledge in religious studies. After her years in schools, she ventured into parish work as a Director of Faith Formation. For the most part, that brought her back to familiar territory and close to home and family in New Jersey. As Director of Faith Formation, she was able to share her love of her faith, Church, and breaking open the Word with parishioners of all ages--- children as well as adults through Bible Studies. She had a way of balancing tradition with newer models, always with a devout spirit.

Her last ministry was serving as a chaplain in the Clarks Summit State Hospital. I am sure she was able to teach prayers and Scripture, share faith, and bring comfort to many of the patients. Christina may have been small in stature, but she was not small in her energy or her desire to serve God.

Christina, you are now home--- not only with your loving God, but reunited with your parents, your brother Nicky, the many members of your family, and your IHM family. Rest in peace, servant of God.



Mary Dawson, IHM
March 14, 1939
January 20, 2026
by Therese O'Rourke, IHM

It is my pleasure to welcome you here to this beautiful chapel to celebrate the precious life of my dear friend, Mary Dawson. A special welcome to her family members:

Deirdre Davis Gaspari, godchild of Sister Mary and a treasured friend, Deirdre's husband Jonathan, and their children Grace and Graham Bobby Davis, brother of Deirdre... both children of Mary's cousin, Sue and Scott Taylor, son of Mary's cousin, Chuck Taylor.

That's the Langan side, once Long Islanders... now living or raising families in places as distant as Texas, Mexico, and upstate New York.

On the Dawson side, Mary was a well-loved family member of her Olyphant cousins. With us today are Mary Catherine Walsh and Randy Nolan, her husband. Mary Catherine is the daughter of Mary's cousin Mil. Mil's sister, Mary Hoban, and her husband, Mike, are with us today via videostream. They live in Maryland and were dearly loved by Sister Mary.

You may well wonder how an only child who lost her dad when she was 6 and her mom in her early teens ended up with many family members who loved her unconditionally.

She spent lots of time with her cousins after her mother died, and they became like siblings to her. Their children are like nieces and nephews.

Mary came to all of my family events. My parents and siblings considered her family, and my parents' 27 grandchildren have been calling and texting me just to share memories... and laughs. Several of them are here today.

The day after Mary's passing, I received a call from an old friend of Mary's. Her father was a close friend of Mary's dad. He always worried about Mary. The friend, Patty Lawler, visited Mary, who was a young sister at St. Paul's, and went home and called her own father. She told him to stop worrying about Mary. "She is so happy as an IHM sister. She is right where she belongs."

After Mary's mother died, it was our Sister Faith Brown

who mothered her and even made her a prom dress. No wonder Mary came to us.

If she had one glowing characteristic that drew people to her, it was her genuine happiness. Joy radiated from her. Her quick wit and sense of humor certainly did not hurt either.

I lived and worked with Mary at St. Raymond's school in East Rockaway. We had more than 1100 students at the time. In the past few weeks, former teachers, parents, friends, and students responded to the formal notice of Mary's death... hundreds of them responded.

Here is a very short summary:

- Such a beautiful person, inside and out
- She will be missed by so many
- So happy we renewed our relationship when I was an adult
- She was a legend in education, and to those of us who were privileged to be her students, we were the most blessed because she changed our lives for the better
- She was so special-I have such great memories of St Raymond's.
- Always had a smile, a laugh, and a good word for all
- Thank you, dear Sister Mary.

Our pastor was Msgr. Gerry Ryan. He and Mary were great friends, hence his picture on the table in the hall. A school that size is never without a crisis or two. We had some big ones. At times, the Congregation and St. Raymond's would struggle to find common ground. Here was Msgr. Ryan's wonderment: How does she remain super supportive of her Congregation and equally loyal to St. Raymond's? I knew it was her capacity to love.

Gerry became our auxiliary Bishop and died suddenly. Her grief was overwhelming. I had moments when I wondered if she would ever survive.

Survive she did.

A wonderful IHM educator came to St. Raymond's to join the faculty. The three of us became good friends. Years later, she confessed to me that she came close to turning down that assignment because it was no secret that Mary and I were dear friends, and she had wondered that it might not be a happy situation. I tell this story because it highlights another of Mary's qualities. She was incapable of excluding people. Wherever possible, she would draw others in. If they withdrew, for whatever reason, I came to believe she carried them in prayer.

Her last years were spent here in 1 B. The staff became like family to me. Their love for Mary was always evident. It was no wonder that she often planted a surprise kiss on a hand or arm as they met her every need. It was her way of thanking them for everything when she was not able to speak.

Our President, Sister Katie, was living in 1 B and would often come out in search of early morning coffee. Katie would never fail to engage Mary and her sister companions.

I have to seize this moment to thank God for the great gift of her love and friendship... for her powerful influence in my life as a person, educator, and IHM. I use one of Mary's favorite lines. Sister Redempta tells me, when they were having a great time, Mary would say, "We are lucky, lucky dogs."

Well, Mary, thanks does not cover my gratitude. I consider myself a lucky, lucky dog... for the great gift of you in my life.





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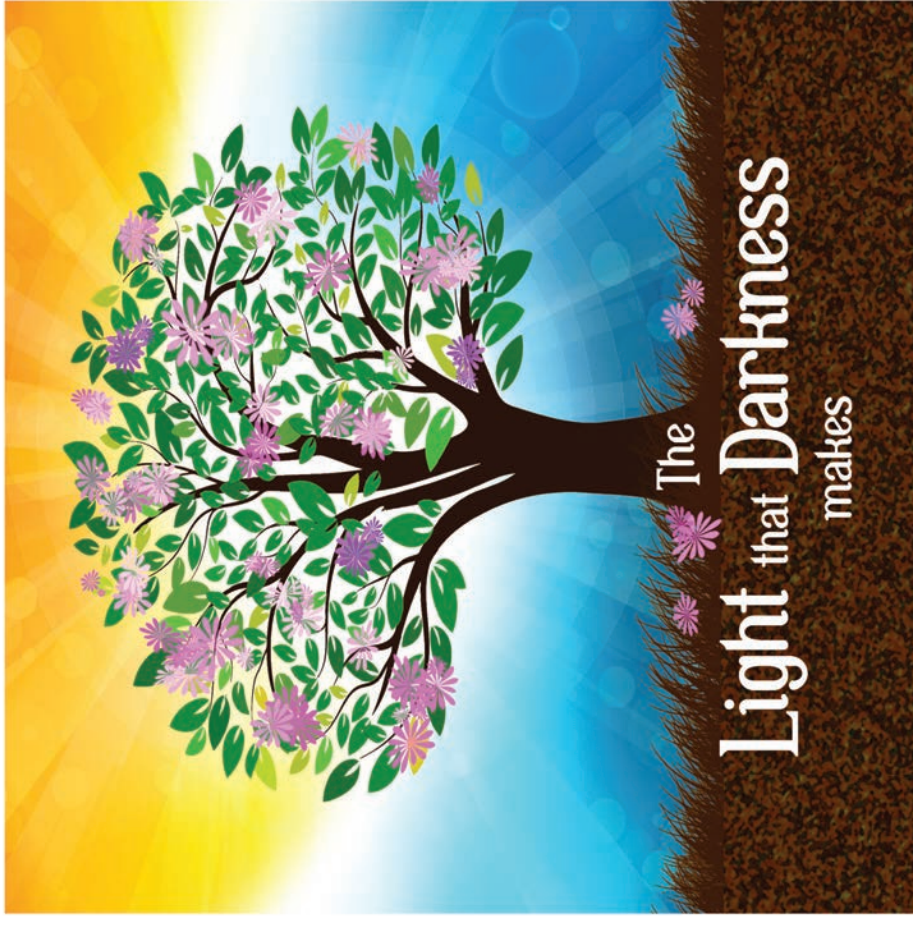


Sister Giovana Professes Perpetual Vows



Sister Giovana Fuentes Bendívez, IHM, professed perpetual vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, at a Eucharistic celebration on November 15 at Our Lady of Peace Residence in Scranton. Sister Giovana is a native of Arequipa, Peru. She served with the Sisters of IHM in Sicuani, Peru, prior to joining the community in 2016. Sister Giovana is a trained psychologist and currently serves with the Association of Latin American Missionary Sisters, a network that supports and empowers Latina sisters in their ministry for the Church and society in the United States. Its headquarters is in San Antonio, TX. Pictured L-R:

Sisters Terri Jordan, Katie Clauss, Judy O'Brien, Giovana Fuentes Bendívez, Suzie Armbruster, and Grace Surdovel.



Imperfections, brokenness, and flaws
are not merely weaknesses. They are
opening places where growth, healing,
and grace can enter.

- Janet Merkel