



Sister Eileen Semonin grew up with her two brothers and one sister in Akron, Ohio. Her mother died when Sister Eileen was only 3 years old. After having a few housekeepers to help with childcare, her father married a wonderful woman, but six years after they married, her father died of cancer. Her stepmother kept the four children together and raised them until she died three years later.

The children lived with an aunt until Sister Eileen's oldest sister turned 18, then four of them moved into their own apartment under her care. Her sister had a good job and Sister Eileen and her older brother had part-time jobs.

She was engaged when she graduated from high school, but while participating in a 40 hours' devotion at church, Sister Eileen knew she had to call the wedding off.

"I'm kneeling there and, all of a sudden, I was called to religious life," she recalls. She was stunned. Having lost three parents, she realizes now that, "I wanted someone I knew would always be there for me. And that's only God."

Sister Eileen chose to enter the IHM community after they'd taught her in grades 8-12 at St. Mary in Akron. Her father's sister was also in the community.

She started her missions at St. Boniface in Detroit, where she taught first grade for three years. She then went on to teach at Our Lady of the Lake in Harbor Beach, Mich., for one year. The following summer, the Mother General told her she was being sent to Kalamazoo to study nursing. She was taken by surprise, but became a registered nurse and ministered in the Infirmary at the Motherhouse for 24 years, as a staff nurse and then as director. During this ministry, she also went to Europe for a six months' foreign study program.



Following a year of renewal, Sister Eileen went to Florida where she served at a clinic for migrant workers for the next six years and then as a public health nurse for four years. Afterwards, she was elected IHM provincial for the South and West provinces.

Following her six-year term, she moved to Toledo, Ohio, where she facilitated retirement workshops and worked at Ghandy Health Clinic. She also tutored at an elementary school in Luna Pier, Mich., while volunteering with an outreach program for those with HIV. Then she was a contingency nurse for Family Medical Center in Temperance, Mich., and ministered to migrant workers in Monroe County for the summer.

Sister Eileen is most grateful for “the call and the courage to answer.” She is also grateful for attending nursing school; “I loved nursing. I loved taking care of people. It has been a wonderful life.” In her current ministry, she accompanies sisters to their doctors’ appointments and to the hospital to explain medical treatment and help make decisions.



Figure 1: Helen Gurthrie, Kathleen Murphy, Cecilia Lajeunesse, Eileen Semonin and Marilyn Schneieders