

As I celebrate 60 years in this 175<sup>th</sup> year of IHM, I look back to move forward, reflecting on:

### *The Early Years*

I grew up in Dearborn, Mich., the eldest child of Madelyn and Frederick Cooney. There were seven, and I sometimes assumed a parenting role with the younger siblings. Twelve years' education in the Dearborn Public Schools, followed by a year at Wayne State provided an excellent foundation for lifelong learning.

As practicing Catholics, our family attended Sunday Mass and weekly religious education classes at Sacred Heart. There, I met the IHM Sisters and became aware of a call to IHM. The family was aware of my grandfather's sister, M. Paula Cooney, IHM; however, she was not really a part of our lives. She is the reason I asked for and was given the name, Marie Paula.

### *Ministry in Community*

Teaching grades six-10 at a time when many schools found it necessary to close, I was gifted with an invitation to 14 years in parish ministry. The invitation to Visitation and ministry at the Barn opened me into a depth of spirituality, community and ministry. Provincial leadership provided an opportunity to shape the end of provinces and move to a new form of leadership. Here, elders gifted my life and drew me to gerontology and professional work with older adults. Congregational leadership during the renovation of the Motherhouse was an avenue to share my gifts with the broader community. While engaging with others to shape the future of this iconic building, I was gifted by all who participated in the project.

The call to California and administration of Regina Residence brought together my gifts of leadership, love of elders and commitment to developing person-centered care in religious life and beyond.



My current ministry as Commissary of the Servants of Jesus, where I serve as canonical leader for 11 women coming to closure of their 45-year history as a diocesan community, weaves all the threads of my ministerial life together.

### *Spirituality Then and Now*

In formation and the early years, my spirituality was much about "Jesus and me." Scripture was important. I came to love the liturgy through our exposure to it during formation. However, I was led to the Documents of Vatican II and books such as Schillebeeckx, *In the Redeeming Christ*, which opened the door to experiencing God in ways I had not learned but that resonated within me.

Since then, meeting people and ideas through books and conversations, I have come to know the Universe Story, the connectedness of all; God present in nature, in mountains, in dogs.

### *Forward from Here*

I look to the future with hope for myself, for our IHM community, for our Church and our world.

May we continue to know and to trust:

- That life is a series of invitations to Come and See.
- Nothing is ever by chance.
- There are still ministries to explore.
- There are new ways of knowing God, being church, living community.
- Our lives are transformed by all that touches us.