

Obituary



Sister Carolyn Dowd, IHM, 80, died Friday, April 14, in the IHM Senior Living Health Care Center, Monroe. She had been under the care of Promedica Hospice of Monroe.

One of six children, three boys and three girls, of William and Joyce (Gerber) Dowd, Sister Carolyn was born on Aug. 2, 1936 in Port Huron, Mich., and given the name Carolyn Joyce. She attended St. Stephen Grade School and graduated from St. Stephen High School, Port Huron. She became a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, in Monroe, in 1956 and received the religious name, Sister John Paul.

Sister Carolyn earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit, and a master's degree from Wayne State University, Detroit. She taught and ministered in administration in formal education for 52 years, in Michigan at St. Joseph, Erie; St. Mary, Mt. Clemens, St. Joseph and St. John, Monroe; and in Florida at Nativity, Hollywood; and St. Lawrence, N. Miami Beach. Sister Carolyn then taught for 21 years at St. Ann, W. Palm Beach, and since 2003 had ministered at Sacred Heart School, Lake Worth as admissions director and remedial teacher.

Residing in Florida until March 22, Sister Carolyn at that time returned to Monroe and entered the IHM Senior Living Health Care Center.

Remembering

In 1961, Sister Viviana, directing teacher for Sister John Paul (named after her two grandfathers), concluded a glowing summary. She wrote, "I have every reason to believe sister will be a very fine teacher . . ."

As her years of ministry rolled along, Sister John Paul, now known as Sister Carolyn Dowd, realized these expectations of Sister Viviana, now known as Sister Jean Ann Gorman. In the 1990s alone, Carolyn received recognition in the publication *Who's Who among America's Teachers* (1991, 1992). In addition, she was named variously in 1997 as Teacher of the Week and in 1998 as Teacher of the Year. In 1998, she was cited for excellence in teaching in other ways; she was awarded for "teaching excellence" and for 15 years of service in the diocese. Her siblings, Joan and Joyce, tell me that they discovered in Carolyn's closet a box full of plaques and other awards for her educational leadership. In 1999, she reached a high point of recognition in being named by the National Catholic

Education Association (NCEA) as Teacher of the Year. Article 11 of our *IHM Constitutions* holds a significant line. It reads, "In a special way, we are committed to the work of education, a ministry in which our community has been engaged for over a century."

The life of Sister Carolyn Joyce Dowd is a testimony to her embodiment of that tradition. For 56 dedicated years as teacher and administrator, Carolyn realized through her ministry in formal education the liberating message of Jesus as so many IHMs have done and still do. Recently, illness brought Carolyn to Monroe, but she was quick to tell me that she had a contract waiting at Sacred Heart School, Lake Worth, Fla., for 2017-18.

She has done it all with excellence and with notable success. Her principal at historic St. Ann's School described her as "the finest, most dedicated teacher I have had the pleasure to work with ..." (Candace Tamposi-Switlyk, Sept. 22, 1999). Her co-workers, too, praised her. One of them noted, "I have nothing but highest commendations for Sr. Carolyn Dowd both as an excellent role model for Catholic Christian living, and as a teacher and administrator." (Susan McGhie, teacher, Sept. 27, 1999).

Parents, too, acknowledged her gifts and character. Mr. John Vara testified, "Sister Carolyn is truly one of the most outstanding teachers I have known in my life. I am very grateful that Madeline (their daughter), and our entire family have had the opportunity to be touched by her." (John R. Vara, MD; letter dated Oct. 3, 1999).

Students respected and loved Carolyn. It was they who nominated her for inclusion in *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*. Many have written back and kept in touch over the years.

Most impressive for many of those who knew Carolyn was that she never missed a day of school - except for one day when her residence burned to the ground. Even that day she came to school in the afternoon.

Like so many other sisters, Carolyn was active, too, in her local parish and diocese. She participated in civic and parish life working for youth, for migrants. Just as earlier IHM Sisters collected our nickels for pagan babies, Carolyn invited her students to help the children in Guatemala.

In a timely expression of her philosophy of education Carolyn wrote, "I believe each child is a unique individual who should be free to develop ... to the full extent of his/her abilities in order that they may become responsible Christian citizens, educated in the principles of peace and justice, and able to work for the betterment of society in the twenty-first century."

Carolyn's description echoes the St. Andre System of Education adopted by the IHM congregation in the 1860s. It was inspired by Bishop Dupanloup of France who said it this way:

"What teachers of youth ought never forget is that the child is the man himself, the depository of all the gifts of God, of all the hopes of humanity, and young as he is, clothed already with all the grace, with all the dignity that God has communicated to human nature." (Rosalita Kelly, IHM, quoting Bishop Dupanloup in *No Greater Service*, p. 321)

How inspiring it is to read Carolyn's full expression of her philosophy and to realize how seriously she lived an outlook to which the community subscribed for over a century.

This year, 2017, marks Carolyn's Diamond Jubilee, 60 years since her reception into the IHM Congregation. God has summoned her in this Easter Season to a Resurrection Jubilee exceeding our highest expectations. We are left recalling the gifts of Carolyn's full and generous life among us.

Her aunt, Sister Margaret Dowd, can regale us with tales of Carolyn and Carolyn's five siblings growing up in Port Huron, Mich. Born in 1936, in Port Huron, Carolyn was the first daughter of the marriage of William Henry Dowd and Joyce Allen (Gerber) Dowd. Following Carolyn, came her brothers, William and James, and the twin girls, Joyce and Joan, and finally the youngest son, Joseph. Theirs was a rich nuclear and extended family life. Their attentiveness to Carolyn in her final days witnesses to the love that has bound them together.

Carolyn graduated from St. Stephen High School in Port Huron. After 12 years at St. Stephen, she knew the IHM Sisters well. In addition, her Aunt Margaret Dowd, only three or four years older, had already entered the community four years earlier.

Carolyn entered in 1956 and was received as a novice in 1957. The sisters in Carolyn's profession class recall with pleasure their early days together. They

speak of Carolyn's openness, her hospitality, her fun-loving spirit. They tell of their days in formation, their shared pursuit of undergraduate degrees from Marygrove College. By 1972, Carolyn attained her master's degree in education from Wayne State University.

Completing her years of formation, Carolyn spent her first 11 years teaching in Michigan. She was at St. Joseph in Erie and St. Mary in Mt. Clemens. Then she taught at St. Joseph and St John in Monroe before moving to Florida to continue her long and singular educational ministry. As a result, many of us never really came to know her. Still, so much of her story identifies her as sister to us.

She took her fun-loving spirit with her to Florida. Sister Janet Lemon wrote, "I was with her in Hollywood, Florida from 1971-1975. Almost every night we played cards and often went on trips to some of the attractions in Florida. One time, Carolyn decided to go outside in her bathing suit to wash her hair in the frequent rain, but she couldn't get any suds ... the constant rain kept rinsing out the shampoo. We were having a good laugh watching her through the window." As for the card games, Sister Margaret Dowd recalls that Carolyn had her own style of overcoming a losing streak at playing cards. She would jump up and run around the table while performing an Indian war dance accompanied by whoops and hollers.

After seven years at Nativity School, she moved to St. Lawrence School in North Miami Beach for three years. There she served as a principal and as a teacher. Then, Carolyn began her 21-year ministry teaching at historic St. Ann School in West Palm Beach.

One more move took her to Sacred Heart School in Lake Worth, Fla. For 13 years Carolyn served as director of admissions and remedial reading teacher. Her illness in March brought her to the Motherhouse and she had been restless to return to Sacred Heart School.

Recently, Carolyn summarized her thoughts on realizing the liberating mission of Jesus through her ministry at Sacred Heart School. She described it as "both a joy and a challenge." She noted that, "To bring glad tidings to the poor and help empower our two-thirds Guatemalan and Haitian population has been energizing and exhausting." She listed the remarkable achievements of the school in recent years: their success in keeping it from closing, their raising funds to pay their debts, to begin a new learning lab, to renovate the entire

school, to set the bar very high academically, to establish electronic textbook learning and to open a recording and TV production studio. These are only a few of the remarkable achievements in which Carolyn herself was involved. She saw herself as working, as she wrote, "to eradicate some causes of injustice and oppression." She summed it up, "And, I believe, that in holding our people before God in prayer, we are effecting change in their lives, and I am living out the liberating mission of Jesus in my ministry."

Carolyn, how wholeheartedly, how elegantly, you followed your baptismal call to love God and neighbor! There you have been these many years, in a more distant location, seemingly on the periphery of our striving. But, no, instead the vigor and passion of your commitment illumines our lives. We are blessed to have shared your journey with you as family, as IHMs, as friends. We trust that even through the lens of eternal light you will draw us forward toward fulfilling our deepest longings and highest hopes. Whatever our personal calling, may we, like you, embrace our call with deep faith, courageous spirits, and action for justice.

Written and delivered by Joan Glisky, IHM
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