

## Obituary

Sister Kathleen Koch, IHM, 82, died Thursday, Oct. 10, at her home, IHM Senior Living Community. She was recently admitted to hospice care.

On Jan. 25, 1937, in Akron, Ohio, Kathleen Cecilia Koch was born to John and Catherine Cecilia (Horvat) Koch. Another daughter and three sons would join the family life, first in Akron and later in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Kathleen attended Krouse, Lane and St. Mary elementary schools and graduated from St. Mary High School. It was at St. Mary that she came to know the IHM Sisters. Shortly after graduation in 1954, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) and received the religious name Sister Ann Marguerite.



Sister Kathleen earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and began a teaching ministry in elementary education in Michigan at: Gesu, Epiphany, Queen of Hope and St. Mary of Redford, Detroit; and St. John, Fenton. In 1970, she earned a Master of Education degree from Marygrove College and spent the next five years in parish/pastoral ministry at St. Boniface, Our Lady Queen of Hope, St. Christopher and St. Mary of Redford, Detroit.

Sister Kathleen began graduate studies and earned a master's degree in social work from Wayne State University and was licensed by the State of Michigan. With her education and experience, she ministered as a social worker for many years at St. Hugo of the Hills Grade School, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

She served her religious community as an administrative team member for the Motherhouse Resident Community from 1994 to 2002, when the Monroe community experienced the largest green building project in Michigan with the Motherhouse renovation. Sister Kathleen returned to St. Hugo as a counselor in 2002 and resided in Birmingham.

Sister Kathleen moved to the Motherhouse in 2015. She was an active participant in the resident community, serving on internal committees to improve the resident experience, social justice endeavors and always ready to engage in discussion of current events.

## Remembering

“My roots are sacred ground; mine a simple story – of trying to hear the Word, give the Word my flesh, and in the way I live my life, share the story. Much of the journey is within and personal, yet so dependent on the richness of community.” These are the words our Sister Kathleen Koch chose to describe her life.

She was the second child of Catherine (Horvat) and John Koch, born in Akron, Ohio on Jan. 25, 1937, and baptized at Christ the King Church. Ken was the oldest child. After Kathleen, came Marguerite, Jack, and Joe who was only 5 weeks old when Kathleen came to the community on July 31, 1954.

Kathleen described her mother as a compassionate, talented, strong, hospitable woman who immigrated from Hungary. She went to school to learn English, later attended business college, worked for the phone company and eventually became a trained practical nurse.

Her father was born in Akron and was a professional landscape gardener. He was very interested in sports, was an athlete and a coach at a local school. Although he was raised Lutheran, he became Catholic to marry her mother.

Kathleen’s deep rootedness in her family was always a part of her. Strong family bonds were her joy. The deaths of her parents, and then Ken and Marguerite, were heartbreaking. She loved vacations with nieces and nephews and family who, to the very end of her life, came from great distances to comfort her.

Kathleen’s education began in public school, then transferred in fourth grade to St. Mary, Akron, where she completed high school. She played clarinet in the band, was part of choral and sodality and even played forward on St. Mary basketball team. Warming up the floor for LeBron James!

Kathleen said that from early on she felt called to religious life, inspired by the IHM Sisters she had in school. She wrote,

“After the ‘Mary-Weekend’ experience in senior year, and my interview with Mother Teresa, the Sisters helped me get ready. I had second thoughts at the last minute and through formation, which was often not easy. Deep down I knew I was where I belonged, but I often did wish that I had never heard of Monroe.

“My good friend, the tree outside the Postulate, going through its own seasonal changes, saw me through some very lonely days, I, who had only one other time been away from my family.”

Entering the Novitiate, Kathleen received the name Sister Ann Marguerite. She made her first vows June 17, 1957, and final vows in 1960.

Kathleen taught primary grade children during her first years of ministry in Detroit at Gesu, Epiphany and St. Mary of Redford and St. John, in Fenton.

She then became a pastoral minister at St. Boniface and Our Lady Queen of Hope, both in Detroit. It was at Queen of Hope that she enjoyed being part of a Scripture study group with women who were a loving support to Kathleen over many years until her death. She said that one of her most enriching experiences at that time was preparing a yearly retreat experience for this group.

After a year of renewal and theological studies in Ottawa, Kathleen returned to pastoral ministry at St. Christopher and St. Mary of Redford parishes. In her many interactions with parishioners, she became aware of her need to refine her counseling skills. The community allowed her to pursue full-time studies to earn a master’s degree in social work in the interpersonal/mental health track as a full-time student. This led her to eight years of service as a social worker/counselor at St. Hugo of the Hills School in Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

In 1994, our congregation changed its government structure to no longer be organized in Provinces. The Motherhouse sisters experienced this transition with all the uncertainty that is part of plunging into something new.

Kathleen was invited to become part of the new administration team for the Motherhouse resident community. She welcomed the assignment and ministered with the team meeting the challenges, as well as the creative opportunities of the new moment. Kathleen made daily effort to know the sisters, being attentive to personal needs, as well as the needs of the wider community. She had a gift of listening, supporting, encouraging, especially those who seemed to be alone or at the edges. She felt deeply, had a sensitivity and was so compassionate with all the sisters, advocating for them individually. Kathleen had a naturally strong, quiet presence in her years serving the Motherhouse community.

“Though it was not always easy, I can say without any reservation that this truly was the richest time of my life. The Sisters lived lives of prayer and service,” she said.

Kathleen opened herself wide to the gift of music. She loved inviting Jack to offer concerts here for the community. Kathleen loved to read and immersed herself in good books. She was one of the few people I know who read The New Yorker. She was an independent thinker who formed her opinions after reflection, was strong in her opinions and enjoyed good conversations.

Her spirit was deeply nourished by times of solitude, reflection and prayer. "Much of the journey is within and personal, yet so dependent on the richness of community ... I try consciously to return each day to the center of my being. Blessed there with stillness and peace, reach out person by person with gracious flexibility, patient-waiting, generous service, genuine interest and honest conversation."

During these last weeks of Kathleen's life, we saw her remarkable courage and gentle acceptance, her appreciation of the least kindness. She listened a lot, teased a bit and welcomed warmly all who came to be with her.

When she asked me to do this Remembering, I asked what she wanted me to be sure to include, her eyes filled with tears, so emphatically: "Belonging to this community, the great blessing in my life!"

Kathleen, we say that your belonging to this community has been a great blessing in our lives. May you continue to inspire us as you dwell now in light with all our sisters and your family fully alive in our Beloved God.

Written and delivered by Kathleen O'Brien, IHM  
Oct. 23, 2019