

Obituary

Sister Margaret Lorenger, IHM, died of natural causes Wednesday, May 20, 2020, at the IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe. She was 96.

Margaret Mary Lorenger, born July 6, 1923, in Detroit, was the only daughter of four children born to Albert and Margaret (Bishop) Lorenger. Margaret attended St. Cecelia Elementary and High School in Detroit. During World War II, her brothers served in the United States Armed Forces and Margaret continued her education, earning a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, followed by a master's degree from Wayne State University, Detroit.



In 1952, Margaret entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, Michigan and received the religious name Sister Louis Gillet. Having already earned her teaching degree, Sister Margaret immediately began her career at St. Mary Academy and St. Michael School, Monroe; St. Raymond and Holy Redeemer, Detroit; Sacred Heart, Dearborn; and St. Thomas, Ann Arbor. She served the congregation as scholasticate mistress at the IHM Motherhouse for two years in the mid-1960s and then ministered as directress of Formation House in Chicago. Returning to Michigan in 1970, Sister Margaret taught at Marian High School, Birmingham before joining the parish ministry team at St. Gemma Parish, Detroit.

The IHM sisters began opening overseas missions in the late 1960s. Sister Margaret soon joined them in 1972, when she was missioned to Bukalasa Seminary in Musaka, Uganda, East Africa. After five years there, she taught for two years at Pius X Seminary, Meru, Kenya, East Africa. Returning to the Monroe, Sister Margaret enjoyed a year of renewal at the IHM Visitation House on the IHM campus, then served the community as a staff driver for the next two years and as assistant resident directress at St. Mary Academy. The focus of her next two assignments was pastoral ministry, with service as pastoral minister, liturgist, musician and pastoral associate for four years at St. Theresa Parish, Lambert, Mont. and five years at St. Joseph Parish, Martinsville, Va.

Retiring in 1992, Sister Margaret returned home to the IHM Motherhouse. She remained an active volunteer and sacristan for several years until declining health necessitated a permanent move to the IHM Health Care Center in 2010.

Remembering

On July 6, 1923, the Lorenger family welcomed Margaret as their first and only daughter. Her father, Albert Raymond Lorenger, was born in Chicago, and her mother, Margaret Susan (nee) Bishop was born in Dayton, Wash. Margaret was welcomed into the family not only by her parents, but also by her two older brothers, Al and Bernie, who, according to Margaret, kept close track of her. The family was later gifted with another son and brother, Jim. The family has been gifts of love and support to Margaret through these many years and they remember her promise, "I have you in my heart's prayer pocket, if you ever jump out I'll put you back in." Niece Ruth writes, "she inspired me to be the best I could be and to serve others."

The Lorenger name is familiar in the city and county of Monroe. Margaret was proud of this heritage. The most important center of governmental activity in Monroe County in 1976 was Loranger Square. A Lorenger ancestor donated the courthouse property in 1817. Edward Loranger was responsible for the building of many businesses, as well as the first brick Catholic church, which we know as St. Marys. The spelling of the family name changed around 1900. There were many other Lorengers through the years who were builders or developers of the Monroe city area.

Margaret enjoyed attending parades, dances, contests and political rallies in this special place. Sometimes it was good just to rest on the benches in Loranger Square, visit the library or St. Joseph cemetery where her parents and sister-in-law are buried.

Margaret was baptized at St. Cecilia Church, Detroit, and completed her first 12 years of schooling there. Following graduation, Margaret enrolled at Marygrove College, where she earned a bachelor's degree in music. Continuing her studies in music, she earned a master's degree at Wayne State University. Before entering the congregation, she taught music at several public schools in Detroit. During these years, she consulted Father Solanus Casey about her vocation.

Upon entering the congregation in 1952, neither her age nor her experience kept her from being one of the group. She was a fun person and a "community" person. Living at Sacred Heart in Dearborn, Mass was celebrated in the convent chapel every morning and Margaret had the responsibility of posting the hymns of the day. As Sister Ann Pauline often recalled, one morning Margaret added a little message, "subdue solo tendencies." Although nephew Pete recalls a later incident of Margaret and niece Jeanine, from their pew, breaking into a perfect descant to a St. Louis Jesuit song played at a neighboring parish. That must have been okay because it was not a solo!

Margaret had the charism of music and shared it with family, in her ministries and in community life. She drew music out of her students and out of her nieces and nephews. Niece Jeanine credited her aunt with making her dad a "class act" by inviting Jim to accompany her to operas when she got free tickets as a Marygrove student. Margaret was a good friend, a good traveler, a good teacher and a good camper, among other things.

Margaret's IHM ministry took many turns. Her thoughts on what ministry meant to her are well expressed on her page in the IHM Book of Life. She quotes from Corinthians 2: "We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us."

Margaret carried out her teaching ministry from 1954-1959 in grade schools St. Michael, Monroe; St. Raymond, Detroit; Sacred Heart, Dearborn; and in high schools from 1959 through 1966 at Sacred Heart, Dearborn, St. Thomas, Ann Arbor and Holy Redeemer, Detroit.

Influenced by the Sister Formation Program, the community extended the formation and education of newly professed sisters into what was known as the Scholasticate. These sisters continued study and spiritual development in Monroe and later, in larger urban areas. Margaret served as a scholastic assistant from 1966 to 1968 in Monroe and was directress of the Chicago-area IHM formation house from 1968 to 1970.

In 1970, she was called to transition back to ministry on the high school level as choral director at Marian High School. In 1971-1972, she accepted a position as music director and parish team member at St. Gemma Parish in Detroit, where Margaret encouraged her niece to make her debut as a guitarist.

The call to overseas mission came in 1972. Margaret was missioned to teaching at minor seminaries in Musaka, Uganda, and Meru, Kenya. To prepare for the trip, she attended the SubSahara Pastoral Institute at Notre Dame College, studying history, geography, sociology and climates of the two areas. She learned enough Luganda and Swahile languages to enable her to communicate with the natives. At Bukalasa Seminary, Uganda, and St. Pius X Seminary, Kenya, she taught English language, literature, theology and music and helped students prepare for the Cambridge exams which allowed students to move on to major seminary. Her time in Uganda were the days of Idi Amin's warfare. She had been aware of the unrest prior to going to Musaka.

For those of us who communicated with her during these years, we interpreted "we have good wheels" to mean "things are bad but we have a way out." Her family

remembers Margaret's tales of eyeballing a lion and being chased (in a VW) by an elephant. She brought them souvenirs and she must have cajoled a flight attendant when she was allowed to carry a spear for her brother. During a home visit Pete noticed something different in a photo Margaret was sharing. "Were you wearing a wig?" he asked. "Sometimes you gotta do, what you gotta do," was her wisdom. She was affectionately called "Aunt Wigsy" thereafter.

In reflecting on how her mission experience influenced her life, Margaret highlighted the following:

- A sense of focusing or staying centered on what is most valuable
- A better and deeper knowledge of myself
- Greater tolerance and acceptance of differences
- More appreciation of likeness in people of other cultures
- More fidelity in being a disciple of the Gospel
- Ability to enjoy simplicity of this worlds goods

"My return to the U.S. was difficult. The value system, consumerism and materialism were counter-cultural to my seven years of foreign mission experience." Margaret stayed overseas through 1979.

When she returned to the United States, Margaret enjoyed a year of renewal at Visitation and two years of service at the Motherhouse. When the directress of St. Mary Academy Boarding School needed help, Margaret assisted her through 1983.

Margaret again answered the call to pastoral ministry in 1983, serving Lambert, Ma., until 1987, and in Martinsville, Va., from 1987 to 1992. She offered practical help to the parishes, training lay ministers, giving pastoral assistance and providing resources as musician and liturgist. An article about her in a Virginia newspaper even includes her recipe for "Methodist Church vegetable soup!"

Niece Ruth remembers walking with Margaret in the woods up north when deer flies began bothering them. Ruth taught Margaret a Girl Scout trick and broke off a large fern and put it on Margaret's head, with a frond over her face and both sides of her head. Ruth donned a fern also. The deer flies could not penetrate this barrier. From then on, Ruth and Margaret were "fern sisters" to each other.

Margaret returned to Monroe in 1992 and resided at the Motherhouse, making herself available as companion, sacristan and substitute wherever and whenever needed. During the 2000 Motherhouse renovation, Margaret, with Donna Schroeder and Catherine Senia, introduced and sustained the understanding and practice of

Centering Prayer. The group formed, which is affiliated with Centering Prayer International Groups, continues to meet weekly for prayer and monthly for study and Centering Prayer retreats continue to be offered at the Motherhouse.

As her health declined, Margaret moved to the Health Care Center in 2009, where she lived quietly and peacefully, accepting her infirmities.

Margaret sums for us her view and understanding of our place in the plan of God in this quote from Corinthians which she wrote on her page in the IHM Book of Life.

We are only the earthenware jars that hold this treasure, to make it clear that such an overwhelming power comes from God and not from us.
We are in difficulties on all sides, but never cornered;
We see no answer to our problems, but never despair; We have been persecuted, but never deserted;
Knocked down, but never killed; always, wherever we may be, we carry in our bodies the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be seen...for visible things last only for a time and the invisible things are eternal."

Written by Ann Pauline O'Connor, IHM, and Anne Marie Murphy, IHM