

Obituary



Sister Margaret Ann Henige, IHM, 89, died Thursday, Dec. 7, in the IHM Health Care Center, Monroe.

Sister Margaret Ann was born March 29, 1928, to Frederick and Margaret (Schrems) Henige of Detroit. She was named after her mother and baptized at St. Alphonsus, Dearborn. The family attended Sacred Heart, Dearborn, and the children attended Sacred Heart grade and high schools. One month after high school graduation, Margaret Ann entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) and received the religious name Sister

Jean Francis.

Sister Margaret Ann was a popular elementary school teacher at Holy Redeemer and Gesu, Detroit; Our Lady of Lourdes, River Rouge; St. Philip, Battle Creek; Holy Name, Birmingham; St. Cyprian, Riverview; and St. Rene, Chicago. During these early years, she earned a bachelor's degree at Marygrove College and a Master of Education degree from Wayne State University, Detroit. She served as teacher, directress and principal for 10 years at Hall of the Divine Child, a boy's boarding school in Monroe. Always a favorite, she enjoyed many reunions and re-connecting with former students in later years.

Sister Margaret Ann served the IHM community as secretary for the Central Administration (leadership) in the 1980s and as the congregation's General Secretary from 2000 to 2011.

After a year of renewal at Sangre de Cristo Center in New Mexico, she returned to Michigan and managed the parish office at St. Frances Cabrini, Allen Park. She moved to Norman Towers, Monroe, in 2003 and to the Motherhouse in 2011 before retiring in 2013.

Sister Margaret Ann pursued many interests with enthusiasm: St. Mary Organic Farm (a community garden) and advisory council; IHM Peacemakers and social justice advocacy; and the IHM Haiti Committee. She was a loyal friend and diligent in her care for others.

Remembering

Today, we gather to rejoice in the new life of Margaret Ann Henige, IHM. Born on March 29, 1928, she was the first daughter of Frederick Henige and Margaret Mary (Schrems), both of Saginaw, Mich. Two older brothers, Frederick and John, welcomed her into the family. Later they welcomed a younger sister, Jean. Their parents moved to Dearborn so that the children could have the best of education. Margaret Ann attended Sacred Heart for 12 years.

Margaret Ann's family was very important to her, as was clear when she recalled her first home visit as an especially joyous occasion. Her younger sister, Jean, who also became an IHM, Sister Ann Frederick, died suddenly and mysteriously during the House of Prayer Experience in 1969. Margaret Ann referred to her death only as an asthma attack. Over the course of 20 years, she lost four family members. She and her brother Jack, who died just two years ago, remained very close.

Most of us here have known a few Margaret. What's in a name? How important is it? In some Native American tribes, the name of a child is taken from an event at the time of the birth; in Africa, there is a belief that a person remains present after death as long as their name is spoken. I would suggest that in some cases, a person becomes the very name and I count Margaret Ann among these. What's in her name? Margaret means, in Greek and Old English, "pearl" and in the Latin languages, for example, Spanish, it means "daisy."

Margaret Ann was a precious gem, a pearl. She was deep and taciturn, especially in matters of the heart. Although we worked closely for 12 years, I learned little of her personal history. I do know she had a strong calling to religious life. In her autobiography, she recalled calling up to Sister John Therese who was on the convent balcony, "I'm going!"

And she did just that, entering the IHM community on Jan. 2, 1947. Two years later she became a novice taking the religious name Sister Jean Francis, chosen for her sister Jean and the middle name of both her father and one of her brothers. In 1949 and 1951, respectively, she made first and final vows.

Her ministries kept her in Michigan for many years, teaching grades two through sixth at Holy Redeemer, Detroit; Our Lady of Lourdes, River Rouge; St. Philip, Battle Creek; Holy Name, Birmingham; and Gesu, Detroit.

Then in 1964, she went to St. Rene, Chicago, for four years. In 1968, she returned to Michigan, going to the Hall of the Divine Child to teach eighth grade and to be seventh and eighth grade resident director for four years. Yes, 24 hours a day, but Margaret Ann remarked that it had its rewards. Of that time, she wrote, (just imagine the twinkle in her eyes), "As directress of the 7th and 8th graders at the Hall, we were in the locker room one day as the boys were getting dressed for supper. A woman came down into the area and one of the boys said, "Sister, would you please tell that lady to leave!"

And the students loved her, as a letter written by a graduate of 1972 some 40 years later shows.

I often reflect fondly about my time at HDC. I remember how as a shy kid coming from Detroit, who had never been away from home, you and the other sisters made us feel safe and part of the HDC family. ...

I was not Catholic; however I look back now and appreciate the spiritual foundation HDC was building. ...

You were our favorite sister, as you know. We all wanted to stay on your good side. I recall a few times when we tested your patience and we got "the look" from you. That's usually all it took to get us back on track.

In 1972, Margaret Ann became principal for six years.

What were the secrets of this pearl? No doubt her prayer life and her love of community. Reading through some of her ministry commitments and her chronicles, the growth after Vatican II and the influence of the Church's social teaching emerge clearly. She is exemplary in her personal growth and it mirrors the very growth of the IHM community itself.

Language is formative and hers nuances what had become important to her, such as her references to taking a "contemplative stance," a term used frequently since the last Chapter. And as her close friend, Ann Fielder, recalls, a pet peeve of hers was being called, when in a group of women, "you guys" which happens so often in public. Feminist perspective wasn't lost on her. As a result of Vatican II, worlds opened up and Margaret Ann greeted them, as a daisy greets the sun. Her spirit of adventure led her to the Global Awareness

Through Education (GATE) Program and she was never the same. Issues of El Salvador, and later Haiti, led her to prayer and action on behalf of those who suffered. She was one of the first to get her hands dirty in the organic garden, motivated by the positive environmental effects and community-building it delivered. Sharon McNeil remembered her as tireless, literally, always the last to leave, volunteering with the clean-up. "She was a woman of few words, but her actions spoke loudly and clearly of her love for God, nature and service to others."

But these activities were her side jobs, her volunteer works. In 1982, she had accepted a position of secretary and communications staff for the newly elected then central administration. With 42 goals from the General Chapter and all of us in our 40s, there was never a dull moment and seldom even a moment. With a fleet of good writers, she was the staff anchor in the launching of Spinnaker, a predecessor of the current impact. Then after 10 years, Margaret Ann went into parish work, before she returned to IHM staff as General Secretary from 2000-2012. Writing was never easy for her, much less enjoyable, but she carried on with aplomb.

For 10 of those years, she lived with cancer. Recently, on what was to be her final visit with her oncologist, when he asked her if she was in pain, she responded with her usual, "no, none." He leaned over and said, "If ever you had any pain, would you ever let me know?"

No, our Margaret Ann was no complainer. She had found a field with a hidden treasure, and she gave away all she had in order to live in that field. The hidden treasure was a pearl and the field was planted full of daisies.

Thank you, Margaret Ann, for all you were and all you did for us all. Enjoy the fullness of life as symbols of pearl and daisy fade and their reality is revealed.

Written and delivered by Carol Quigley, IHM
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