

## Obituary



Sister Teresa O'Connell, IHM, 90, died Saturday, March 23, at the IHM Senior Living Community in Monroe.

Phyllis Ann O'Connell was born April 30, 1928, in Cleveland to John and Beatrice (Uhl) O'Connell. She attended St. Clement Grade School, Lakewood, Ohio and St. Joseph Academy, Cleveland. She then earned a bachelor's degree from Mt. St. Joseph College, Cincinnati. In August 1951, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and received the religious name Teresa Avila. Sister Teresa later earned a master's degree from the University of Michigan.

Sister Teresa's teaching career spanned more than 40 years. She ministered in Michigan at St. Michael and St. John, Monroe; St. Anne, Warren; St. Charles and Marygrove College, Detroit; St. Matthew, Flint; Marian High School, Birmingham; and St. Thomas, Ann Arbor. She also taught at St. Michael, Miami, Fla. and in Ohio at St. Mary, Akron; Lorain Catholic High School, Lorain; Holy Name/Nazareth High School, Parma Heights and Lumen Cordium and Chanel High Schools in Bedford.

Transitioning from teacher to caregiver of the disabled and elderly in 1992, Sister Teresa ministered at SARA Center and St. Augustine Manor, Cleveland. After returning to Monroe in 1996, she continued elder care until retiring to the Motherhouse in 2005 where she volunteered in the congregational service office as long as she was able. Of her service to the disabled and elderly she said, "... my focus is on respecting the dignity of each sister, giving them love, kindness, patience, compassion, affection and being attentive to the needs of all."

## Remembering

Teresa was born on April 30, 1928, and was baptized Phyllis Ann O'Connell. She was the first child of John James and Beatrice Esther (Uhl) O'Connell. John was Irish and Beatrice was German. Two years later, on June 17, 1930, June Marie O'Connell entered the family. Eight years later, they mourned the death of a baby boy in 1938.

Phyllis and June were different. June was outgoing and Irish like her dad, while Phyllis was very similar to their mother, quiet and more reserved.

Phyllis attended St. Clement Grade School for eight years with the St. Joseph Sisters. (These were Mother Seton's Sisters of Charity.) After that, she attended St. Joseph's Academy for four years, and Mount St. Joseph College in Cincinnati, where she graduated in June 1950. Later, she attended the University of Michigan, where she majored in Spanish language and literature.

In grade school and high school, Phyllis always felt the desire to be a sister. After graduating from college, she taught with IHM Sisters at St. Mark, Cleveland, which was her parish. Phyllis admired the IHMs and she knew that they had missions in Puerto Rico, so she chose to enter the IHM community on Aug. 21, 1951. Her St. Joseph sister-friends were very disappointed about this choice.

Phyllis was received into the IHM community in 1952 and received the name Teresa Avila. She kept that name when we changed back to our baptismal names. Teresa made her first profession in January 1955 and her final profession in 1958. While in formation, she taught third and fourth grades at the Catholic schools in Monroe and then taught third grade at St. Anne, Warren, Mich.

It was at St. Charles, Detroit, that Teresa began to teach grades seven and eight. Later, she taught junior high grades in Miami; Akron, Ohio; and Flint and Birmingham, Mich. Teresa spent a year teaching at Marygrove College, Detroit.

The remainder of her ministries took place in Ohio. The reason for moving to Ohio was the declining health of her father. Her mother had died years earlier. Her sister, June, needed help, as she also was teaching and looking after their father. From September 1974 until June of 1978, she taught all levels of Spanish at Lorain Catholic High School, while living in the convent at St. Mary with IHMs, Ursulines and a St. Joseph Sister.

Teaching Spanish in an open classroom with some wonderful students was a good experience for her. In those four years, she had the opportunity for spirituality and made a summer renewal. That same year, she celebrated her Silver Jubilee. The last year at Lorain Catholic afforded the pleasure of taking students to Spain for the spring break. They visited Madrid, Toledo, Cordoba and

Grenada. They traveled to southern Spain (the Costa del Sol), and went by boat to North Africa, which was a tremendous experience.

Teresa was invited to teach Spanish at Lumen Cordium High School, an all-girls school in Bedford, Ohio. She remained there until it closed in 1989. With the closing of Lumen Cordium, St. Peter Chanel High became a co-ed school. Teresa taught there until spring 1991. At the graduation exercise, she was honored with a plaque celebrating 40 years as an educator.

The following year, 1991, was a year of transition. June's health was poor, so Teresa stayed in Cleveland with her. She was unable to find another ministry, so that year was spent in prayer, spiritual reading, liturgy and really enjoying the beauty of God's world. She remembered saying that it was the first time she had moments to enjoy the beauty of the fall season.

The next three years (1992-1995), Teresa and June had the privilege of being volunteers at St. Augustine's Manor, owned by the Diocese of Cleveland and a nearby Catholic nursing home. They visited with the residents, brought Eucharist and prayed with the dying. They had time for traveling together as well.

In 1996, Teresa and June moved to Norman Towers in Monroe. We can learn a little about Teresa's spirituality from her Ministry Commitment forms. She wrote: "To me, IHM mission is twofold – to be committed to Jesus and to be committed to service. Another way to phrase it would be a commitment to love and a commitment to be where the needs are. I consider myself a part of that mission wherever I am, at a Eucharist, at prayer, at Norman Towers, with my sister June, or at a mission unit meeting. In fact, wherever I pray, play or work, I feel connected. Mainly, in my ministry of care and concern for the elderly at Norman Towers, I experience myself as part of our mission. Reaching out in service to others, and seeing their needs for support, encouragement and love makes me realize the importance of my small part in the total mission of the Congregation."

The policy allowing IHM relatives to live at the Motherhouse enabled Teresa and June to move here in 2007. True to her outgoing personality, June found delight in visiting the elderly, and Teresa did also.

As you may have observed, Teresa was a very private person; she was also a very prayerful person. She had a deep, personal love for Jesus. I want to read a prayer she had written.

“I believe that we must be you in the world, Lord,  
and if we are you in the world,  
we must know that our end must be crucifixion,  
in one way or another.  
Let me never forget it;  
but let me never be afraid of it.”

Teresa also had a beautiful and tender love for her sister, June. When June and Teresa first moved to the Motherhouse, they had separate rooms for the first time in years, having lived together in Cleveland and at Norman Towers. They used to call each other frequently to check on the other’s well-being. Later, when communicating became difficult for Teresa, you might find them side by side in their wheelchairs, attending Mass or watching game shows on TV, hands locked in loving companionship. Different as they were, their love endured over many years. Our hearts go out to you, June, as your heart feels its loss. We pray that you may know Jesus’ love for his friends, the sisters, Martha and Mary of Bethany; and may you also know our prayers and our love and concern for you.

Written and delivered by Sister Roberta Richmond, IHM, March 27, 2019