

## Obituary



Sister Marylyn Russ, IHM, died Sunday, April 5, at IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe. She was 84.

The oldest of three children of Joseph and Mary Anna (Flerchinger) Russ, Marylyn Helene Russ was born Jan. 7, 1936, in Cleveland. She attended grade school at St. Jerome, Cleveland. After graduating high school from Villa Angela Academy, Cleveland, she worked at General Electric and attended night school at John Carroll University. Sister Marylyn realized her call to religious life and in 1958 entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, receiving the religious

name Sister Peter Faber. She celebrated her 60<sup>th</sup> jubilee as an IHM Sister in 2019.

She earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit, and a master's degree in education from Wayne State University.

Sister Marylyn eventually taught at all grade levels. She ministered at St. John and Catholic Central High School, Monroe; St. Mary, Marshall; St. Thomas Aquinas and Holy Redeemer High School, Detroit; and Gabriel Richard High School, Riverview. She then served the congregation as treasurer of the IHM Southeast Province for nine years. Beginning in 1994, she worked in the business office of Marygrove College until 2000 when she returned to teaching at the college. She loved teaching math and physics and found it particularly satisfying to help her students succeed. She retired in 2013 and a year later returned home to IHM Senior Living Community.

An accomplished quilter, crafter and cook, Sister Marylyn sewed quilts for her entire family, including great-nieces/nephews and many friends. In the 1980s and 90s, she and the late Sister Catherine Mary Zacharias, IHM, enjoyed catering large and small events and delighted in preparing beautiful desserts. In an interview for her jubilee, she commented her greatest joy in her life as an IHM was participating in retreats, workshops and spirituality classes, as prayer was at the center of her life.

## Remembering

When I found out a few weeks ago that Marylyn wanted me to do her Remembering, I went to her to discuss this. I asked her what she would like me to say. She chuckled and said: "It's real simple: 'she was born, she lived, she died. Bye-bye.'" We laughed and then I told her that I knew I'd have to "fill in the blanks" to give more of a snapshot of her wonderful life. She then offered me her page in our "IHM Book of Life." She titled it:

“Bending and not Breaking; Changing and Living Anew.” In this, she tells the story that Mother Anna Marie Grix wrote in one of her monthly letters to the community about an ice storm on the campus. Some of the trees broke, but some that were able to bend survived. She then applied this to our lives. Marylyn said that she learned over the years that what didn’t break her in her life and community, really made her stronger. These themes flow throughout her life.

Marylyn’s journey began by being born to Mary and Joseph Russ in Cleveland. She has two siblings, Peter and Joan Marie. Joan Marie is an Ursuline Sister. Marylyn attended St. Jerome Elementary School and then Villa Angela Academy for High School where she was taught by the Ursuline Sisters. After high school, she worked for General Electric and attended John Carroll University night school where she majored in physics and math. Before graduating, she began to recognize that she may have a religious vocation. During a retreat, she began to consider what community to join. She said she chose the IHMs “because of their devotion to Mary and the happiness expressed in their pictures.” Marylyn left Cleveland by train and arrived in Monroe in 1958. She entered the same day as Sister Fran Mlocek. Both of them had completed college and so a bond was formed immediately. They were considered the “senior members” of their class. They have remained very close friends throughout their lives.

Marylyn loved her family. It was very hard for her to leave her family when she entered the community. Throughout her life, she visited them as often as she was able. She tried to be with them for the holidays and all special occasions like graduations, religious milestones, weddings, etc. She delighted in telling stories about her nieces and nephews and all their children. She was a very proud auntie! In the past few years, the deaths of her nephew, Peter, and niece, Aimee, truly broke her heart.

Marylyn began teaching in various elementary and high schools from 1961 through 1985. The main subjects she taught, and loved, were math and physics. In 1985, she became the Treasurer for the Southeast Province. Paula Cooney was the provincial and the two of them began living and ministering together. They became and stayed very close friends. In 1994, her ministries took her to Marygrove College. Her first position was as the Assistant to the Director of Accounting. Paula recalls that Marylyn minded that her days were filled primarily with numbers and not being able to teach, but she felt that because of the work she was doing she was enabling others to minister to the students. From 2000 until the time of her retirement in 2014, Marylyn was assistant professor of mathematics. She really loved teaching at Marygrove!

Marylyn was a very spiritual woman and God was most important to her. In perusing a few of her Ministry Commitment Forms, it is clear she strived to live out our Chapter

Directions in her own ways. It is also clear that in all her learnings about God and our world, she tried to live out what she learned. She wanted to bring the presence of God to all her students in ways that they could understand. She wasn't pushy about this ... she just "lived it." She was a woman who loved education, she loved to teach! On her 2011 Ministry Commitment Form she wrote: "I believe education can free a person to live the life that they are called to by God." She worked hard to find new ways to meet her students' needs and help them to learn. Marylyn was a good listener and confidant; she was supportive and encouraging of others. She wanted her students to feel comfortable coming to her, to ask her questions and get her assistance. As the Southeast Province Treasurer, she did the same with the sisters. She recognized the struggle for many to ask for money or to discuss finances. Marylyn was very patient, helpful and understanding toward each sister in meeting their needs.

Marylyn loved to sew and knit. She LOVED material and yarn! When she and I were in Rome visiting Sharon Holland, we were about to get on a bus when an elderly lady became somewhat combative with us when we wouldn't give her our tickets. When we got on the bus, I asked Marylyn where we were going and she said, "I don't know ... let's just ride." We got off when we saw a McDonald's, got a drink there. Then she said: "I just need to feel material to calm down." We found a material shop nearby and we went in so she could feel the material! Marylyn created quilts, blankets, sweaters, vests, etc. for each member of her family and for many of her close friends. Usually around July, she would announce that "Santa's Shop is now open" and she would begin to make all her treasures for Christmas for her family. This was quite a task as the family continued to grow, but that never stopped her!

One of Marylyn's hopes for retirement was that she would have a lot of time to enjoy sewing and knitting to her heart's content. God had other plans. Marylyn was diagnosed with macular degeneration several years ago and she lost a lot of her vision. She grieved this a great deal. However, she didn't break from this. She seemed to grow stronger and more resolute to do all she could do for as long as she could.

After she retired from Marygrove, she spent the next year packing up her belongings in the house she had lived in for about 30 years and moved to the Motherhouse. She was sad and discouraged that she couldn't do what she had hoped to do, but she found ways she could participate. She joined the Quilting Group and did what she could. Her presence, experience and advice were much appreciated. She and her dear friend, Marge Fogarty, continued to share their love of sewing and quilting. Marge helped Marylyn with her quilting and supported her in remaining independent. Marylyn continued to sew her quilts, more by feel and less by sight. Marge said that she was amazed at how Marylyn could still thread a needle herself! Marylyn talked

about her joy in finding some of her mother's quilting pieces that were not completed and she wanted to finish them. She was successful in doing some of this. Very recently, Marylyn realized that she wouldn't be able to finish one of the quilts, so she asked Marge to do it for her. Marge said yes and finished it last Saturday. This is the quilt on Marylyn's casket. Thank you, Marge!

Another love of Marylyn's was cooking. She was in charge of the kitchen while living at Redeemer. Over many summers, she cooked at Crawfton and at a retreat house in Glauster, Mass. She and her good friend, Catherine Mary Zacharias, shared their love of cooking and catered many events in the 1980s and 1990s. Not only was the food absolutely delicious, they always made sure that the presentation was exquisite! To them, both were very important. In the Feb. 15, 1992, edition of the SPINNAKER, there is an article titled: "Kate and Allie of the IHM's" describing their endeavors. (Kate and Allie was a television show about two women who ran a catering service.) Marylyn told me that she really believed that when people had good, nutritious food that they were happier and, while on retreat, this would help them to be able to pray better.

Another ministry that Marylyn felt she was able to do and was passionate about was sitting with our sisters as they were dying. She felt everyone deserved to have someone with her when she was declining, no matter the time of day. She made sure the appropriate staff members knew of her desire to do this and she sat with many folks. Truly she was a gift to each one!

Her final months of life were very challenging for her. She had to accept that she needed help from the nursing staff and that she had to move from her room on Main Liguori to 3-G. She knew in her heart that these decisions were the right ones, she just didn't like it. But she chose to accept these moves and to bend rather than break. She was very appreciative of all the nursing staff and the hospice staff. Little by little, she continued to accept all that God was presenting to her. She remained steadfast in her love and faith in God and she knew to the depths of her core that God loved her. Last Sunday, while she appeared to be resting in the lounge on 3-G, God came to her and called her name. Once again, she said her "Yes" and went home to God.

Marylyn, we are so grateful for you in our lives. We are happy that your suffering has ended and you are now joined with your loving God, family and our IHMs. Please continue to be with us and bless us ... until we meet again. We love you and miss you!

Written by Gretchen Webb, IHM, and Paula Cooney, IHM  
Delivered by Mary Catherine Quick, IHM