

Obituary

Sister Theresa Tenbusch, IHM, died Sunday, Aug. 9, 2020, at IHM Senior Living Community. She was 89.

Theresa Tenbusch was born Oct. 27, 1930, to Frederick and Honorah (Gill) Tenbusch in Detroit. The family of two daughters and three sons lived in Epiphany parish, where the children attended the parish grade school. After graduation from Immaculata High School, Theresa entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Monroe) in 1948, receiving the name Sister Bonaventure.



Earning a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Sister Theresa's early education ministry brought her to St. John, Benton Harbor; St. Boniface, St. Gregory and Holy Redeemer, Detroit; St. John, Monroe; St. Mary, Wayne; and several years at St. Peter in Deland, Fla. While teaching at St. Vincent High School, Detroit, Sister Theresa engaged in further study and earned a Master of Education degree from Wayne State University. This led to a transition in ministry, serving the community in health services related to respiratory disease and tuberculosis. She held positions in patient affairs, supervision and human development at Herman Kiefer Hospital and the Wayne County Health Department. Her service was recognized by the State of Michigan, which named her as a licensed social worker in 1973. This acknowledgement opened the door to community service ministry as a social worker with Michigan Health and Human Services and the Macomb Oakland Regional Center, both located in Mount Clemens. This ministry endured for 20-plus years.

After retiring from state and county social services, Sister Theresa was an active member and volunteer at St. Margaret of Scotland Parish, St. Clair Shores, and served the parish community in pastoral care and as parish liaison for health care (2005-2018). Over the years, her service ministry took many forms but never ceased. When her health declined recently, she returned to live at the IHM Motherhouse, residing in IHM Senior Living Community and health care center.

Remembering

Theresa Tenbusch was one of two girls, Noreen being her younger sister, and three boys, Fred – who some of us knew as a dentist – James, who died as an infant, and Frank. Frank's wife is Evelyn, and Fred's wife is Mary Lou. Their parents were Fred and Honorah. The family grew up in Epiphany Parish (Detroit) and attended school there. Theresa went to Immaculata High School and graduated in 1948. Theresa entered the IHM community in 1948 and received the name Sister Bonaventure.

Theresa did her first six years of teaching in Michigan. She wrote that she worked with Sister Anna Mae Nadeau, who was very kind. "I will always treasure my experience with her," she wrote. After some years of teaching in Michigan, Theresa spent three years of teaching at St. Peter in Florida. A letter from Rev. Edward Vella, CSsR, written at the time of her jubilee, reads:

Greetings from Grand Rapids. This is a voice from the past. I was honored to have you as an elementary school teacher at Holy Redeemer Grade School in the 1960s. I saw your picture in the Michigan Catholic, and wanted to write to congratulate you ... on your jubilee. Do know of my gratefulness to you and the IHMs for the excellent education and faith witness I received in my first years.

An earlier letter written by Shirley Griggs, assistant principal at Eastern High School, reads,

It was certainly a joy to have you in class this past summer, Sister. You brought an enthusiasm and curiosity that helped to spark the whole group. You must be a gifted teacher in the classroom because you have a natural gift for understanding people.

A letter from Mary Clark Johnson said,

Sr. Bonaventure came to teach at St. Peter's School when I was in seventh grade. My first memory of her is seeing her tie up her habit, and sling part of it over her arm as she rounded the bases when playing with the children. She was always laughing, and her orange freckles made her the only nun we had ever encountered of whom we (were) sure of her hair color.

Theresa taught for 20 years before completing her master's degree. After conferring with her good friend, Sister Marge Basso, and her provincial, Sister Margaret Babcock, she decided to go into social work. In high school she had volunteered at Providence Hospital and loved it. So, she went into the "Witness Program" and then chose to work in the tuberculosis program at Herman Kiefer Hospital. She worked with drug and alcohol-addicted people and then became supervisor of the Social Service Department. She moved on to the Department of Mental Health Services for 28 years at the Macomb Oakland Regional Center.

When she was a social worker, Theresa wrote a beautiful and touching article in *Spinnaker*, titled "For Babies Born Addicted, Life Begins in Torment." It chronicled the first seven weeks of a newborn in protective custody. Theresa worked hand in hand

with a nurse named Carol Whelan for 20 years. Together they closed institutions so that the handicapped would have a better life in group homes or in foster homes.

Theresa wrote:

My life has been one of doors opening and closing and opening and closing. God always points the way, when one door closes, the other opens. I was sent to various institutions to help them close. We were assigned in 1982 – 1986 to the closing of all nursing home for children. Governor Blanchard said by 1986 that every child in Michigan was to be placed in a home. So, we closed all nursing homes and placed children with families, back with their own families or with adoptive or foster homes. We developed and became the First Discharge Planners from hospitals. Until we came along, there was no such thing; now every hospital has and utilizes these Planners. Other than this I also had a caseload of 29 serious medically involved children. Being a Sister I could do things that others couldn't do. I continued to do my apostolic work of trying to lead people back to God. Many babies were baptized in my work.

Frank Tenbusch, brother to Noreen and Theresa, wrote Theresa is survived by six nieces, three nephews, 17 great nieces and nephews and 9 great, great nieces and nephews. Sister Theresa lived the creed: "As one door closes another door opens – and now on to heaven." Sister Noreen said, "Theresa was always my loving sister. We both were so pleased to be able to live together once our ministries no longer separated us."

Sister Julie Vieira interviewed Theresa in 2000 for an article for a community publication. The following is part of what she wrote: "In Theresa's experience, ministry has less to do with the actual tasks performed than it does with who you are in the ministry. It's about integrating your life into what you think the Gospel is calling you to do and to be. Ministry becomes a part of you. After 52 years, it's difficult for me to separate my life from my ministry from my prayers. They all become one. It's just the way you live your life."

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM, Aug.12, 2020