

Obituary



Sister Barbara Torzewski, IHM, 86, died of natural causes Sunday, May 10, at IHM Senior Living Community in Monroe.

One of six children of Casmir and Cecilia (Singer) Torzewski, Barbara Ann Torzewski was born June 30, 1933, in Detroit. Barbara attended Our Lady Queen of Heaven Elementary School in Detroit, and junior high and high school at St. Mary Academy, Monroe. In 1951, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name Sister Therese Lisieux.

Sister Barbara earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit, and a master's degree in education from Wayne State University, Detroit. As an elementary school teacher, her 20-year ministry included work at St. Michael and St. Joseph, Monroe; Holy Redeemer, Detroit; Holy Name, Birmingham; Sacred Heart, Dearborn; St. Joseph, Dexter; and St. Cyprian, Riverview.

Sister Barbara's ministry changed directions as she next served the congregation as a Motherhouse team member, and director of Kitchen, and at the Visitation House of Prayer, in Monroe. Sister Barbara then began a 19-year ministry as director of Crawfton, Kingsville, Ontario, Canada. A return to teaching brought her to St. Matthew School and St. Jude School, Detroit; and to St. Paul School, Grosse Pointe, where she delighted in working with the very young students. In 2012, she moved home to the IHM Motherhouse, and during her retirement continued to volunteer within the community, visiting sisters and leading small prayer groups.

As one who loved being outdoors, Sister Barbara spoke of her work as director, caretaker and groundskeeper at the Crawfton vacation house as a blessing. It allowed time to contemplate, whether mowing the grounds, maintaining the property or preparing for guests' arrival. In keeping with her love of nature and the outdoors, her travels often involved hiking in the mountains.

Remembering

Sister Barbara Torzewski's Book of Life page has some lovely pictures of nature – mountains, rivers, streams and plains – with one word: SURRENDER. For those who knew her, this comes as no surprise.

Barbara Ann Torzewski was born on June 30, 1933, and baptized at Sweetest Heart of Mary Church in Detroit. Her parents were Casimir and Cecilia (Singer) Torzewski, and they had four girls: Mary Lou, Trudy, Therese and Barbara, and two boys: Eugene and Thomas, who died in a tragic accident when he was small. Both of their parents had to quit school at grade seven in order to work to support their families. Consequently, they, especially their father, were determined to give the best education to their children. A cousin advised, "If you want a good school, send them to Monroe." Her parents made the sacrifice to send all four girls to St. Mary Academy in Monroe.

Therese, who many of us knew as Sister Joseph Therese, entered the IHM community in 1946. We remember that she taught us Christian yoga. Mary Lou and Barbara were still at the Academy. It was during WW II, and their father would walk to work every day in order to save for gas to come to Monroe to visit his girls.

Mary Lou went to Marygrove College in Detroit for one year, and then she entered the IHM community. Barbara remembers her father saying, "I hope you two aren't thinking of doing the same!" Barb kept quiet, but she knew she would have to wait and have some experience before she could convince her father that she knew what she was doing. When she finally told him that she, too, wanted to become an IHM Sister, he exclaimed: "My daughters are all leaving, what am I not giving you? ... But I won't stand in God's way!" Later, when Mary Lou left and returned home, Barb's mother begged her to come home, too.

This was very difficult for Barbara, for she and Mary Lou were very close. "If Mary Lou can't make it, I'll never make it" was her temptation. But Sister Marie Elise offered words of wisdom that spoke meaningfully, "It doesn't depend on you; if God wants you here, you'll stay."

Barbara went to Marygrove College for one year, and she entered the community in August 1951. She was received in 1952 and was given the name Sister Therese Lisieux. Her vows were in 1954 and 1957. Barb began her teaching career in 1954 as a newly professed sister at St. Michaels in Monroe, and this was followed by Holy Redeemer, Detroit; Holy Name, Birmingham; Sacred Heart, Dearborn; St. Joseph, Monroe and St. Joseph, Dexter – all in Michigan. In Dexter, she was both teacher and principal. In 1968, Barb was missioned to St. Cyprian in Riverview for five years.

While at St. Cyprians, Barbara was a companion to Sister Marie Dunnigan, IHM, on her home visits to St. Mary of the Woods in Indiana. Barb took advantage of being so close to a Trappist monastery and visited there. She felt a strong attraction to the life she saw there and returned to visit whenever she could.

In 1973, Barbara was a Motherhouse Team Member and she oversaw the Motherhouse kitchen and Crawfton Inn, at Kingsville, Ontario, as her responsibilities. In 1978, Barbara spent a year at Visitation in Monroe. During that year, the group made a trip to visit the same Trappist monastery in Bardstown, Ky. Brother Richard, a lay brother, showed us all around, and even took us to visit Thomas Merton's hermitage. What a special gift that was for all of us. (I was fortunate to be part of that group.)

Barbara was appointed director of Crawfton in 1979. Barbara and Sister Mary Jane Brown became permanent residents there. After one year, Sister Mary Jane was hit by a car while walking on Route 18A and she was forced to retire to the Motherhouse. Several other sisters lived and worked at Crawfton with Barbara. Among them were Angela Sullivan, IHM, and much later, Eva Schoell, IHM.

Mrs. Torzewski's health was failing, and she lived with each of her children for several years. When it was Barbara's turn, her mother came to live with her at Crawfton. In 1992, Barbara wrote on her Ministry Commitment Form, "I have confidence that God has placed me at Crawfton with many opportunities of ministering to my community, the others who come, my mother and myself. I am challenged each day by the word 'surrender' and the daily scripture readings and by my ministry itself. The 'stuff' of each day offers many invitations to live out the call of a loving God."

Sister Paula Cooney wrote, "As a community we owe a debt of gratitude to the members of the Torzewski family who, during the last few years have given generously of their time and talent in keeping Crawfton under repair. We especially thank 'Uncle Joe' who had undertaken gratis many reconstruction projects on the premises."

In 1994, Sisters Helen Oprysek, Margaret Lorenger and Ann Pauline O'Conner, friends visiting at Crawfton, created a Proclamation presented to Barbara on New Year's Eve. Some of it follows:

Whereas Barbara Torzewski has faithfully fulfilled her IHM Ministry at the Sacred Spot called Crawfton in the Province of Ontario, Canada.

Whereas Barbara has witnessed to outstanding stewardship in the care and upkeep of the grounds and buildings at Crawfton.

Whereas Barbara has gone beyond maintenance to beautify the surroundings and to make them safe and enjoyable for all who dwell there.

Whereas Barb has created and maintained a spirit of welcome and acceptance which is contagious to all who gather there for long or short stays.

Whereas Barb has shared with us her loving Mother as she fulfilled her desire to care for her and to continue her ministry at Crawfton and has thereby made her Mother a lasting presence at Crawfton.

Whereas Barb has spent a sum of over twenty years in her caring and loving ministry at Crawfton.

We proclaim January 1, 1995 as the Beginning of a year of gratitude and rejoicing for all that Barb Torzewski has meant and continues to mean to our sacred spot, Crawfton.

During her year of renewal in 1995, Barb spent a few months at Sangre de Cristo Center in New Mexico. In a letter of recommendation Paula Cooney wrote, "She is a woman of gentle spirit, in touch with herself, the earth and others in a contemplative way that makes others feel at home with her and with themselves."

Around this time, Barbara took a train trip across the United States, stopping in Oregon, California and Florida. She stayed a few days with friends at each stop. "I felt the trip was a good way to ritualize my life journey," she wrote.

In 1996, Barbara began working as a teacher assistant, first at St. Matthew in Detroit, then at St. Jude, and finally at St. Paul in Grosse Pointe. Barbara wrote, "In the struggle to live the Gospel today we recognize our call to serve the needs of God's people and in all we do to respond to these needs we rely on the strength and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These words from our rule state my strong desire to surrender to the action of the Spirit in my life as I minister to the children at St. Paul School."

Barbara and Mary Ann Markel, IHM, traveled the national parks throughout the U. S. as their vacation for about 30 years; each time hiking the mountains. "Being in nature with God surrounding us was extremely peaceful; we felt God everywhere ... we were being drawn into contemplative prayer."

In 2012, Barb decided it was time to move to the Motherhouse. "It's 'inside' time," she said. "It's as if God were saying, 'I'm giving this time to you! I'm responding to the inner call.'"

Written by Roberta Richmond, IHM