

Obituary

Sister Norine Wholihan, IHM, 91, died Monday, July 9, in IHM Senior Living Community, Monroe.

Sister Norine was one of four children, two boys and two girls, of Daniel and Doris (Mulligan) Wholihan. She was born in Detroit on Nov. 12, 1926, and given the name Norine Theresa. She attended elementary school at St. Cecilia and St. Francis de Sales, Detroit and St. Mary, Adrian. Her high school education was through St. Francis de Sales and St. Mary of Redford in Detroit. After graduation, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary July 2, 1945 and received the religious name Francis Edward.



Sister Norine began her higher education that same summer at Marygrove College in Detroit, eventually earning bachelor's and master's degrees there. Spanning more than 50 years, her teaching ministry brought her to many Michigan elementary schools including St. Mary, Wayne; Our Lady of Good Counsel, St. Patrick and Gesu in Detroit; St. Stephen, Port Huron; St. Regis, Bloomfield Hills; Holy Name, Birmingham; and St. Mary, Mt. Morris. She also taught at Immaculate Heart of Mary High School, Westchester, Ill.; and Convento de la Merced, Cayey, and Santa Teresita, Santurce, Puerto Rico.

During the last 10 years of her ministry, Sister Norine taught adult education at Franklin Adult Education Center in Detroit and was a math tutor and continuing education instructor at Marygrove. In 2002, she retired to Gesu Convent, Detroit and then returned to the IHM Motherhouse in 2003, where she resided until her death. Several years after she retired, Sister Norine reflected on her educational ministry saying, "I have loved my vocation in our IHM community. I thank God each day for all the joys my life has been given. I have loved the children I've taught and pray for them each day."

Remembering

It was 1926 and Norine was the first daughter born to Daniel Wholihan of Jackson, Mich., and his wife Doris Mulligan Wholihan of Adrian. There were two older brothers, David and Robert, and the following year, Paula was born. David married Jean (Lannen) and they adopted three children. Bob married Ethel and together they had 11 children. There were many loving nieces and nephews. Sister Norine wrote a charming autobiography, which I will quote from throughout most of this Remembering. She writes, "Paula and I had a very close, happy

childhood. Each summer we went to Jackson on the train to visit with Grandfather and Grandmother Wholihan. We loved to play in their big yard and help Grandfather with his gardens. Our grandmother had a bookcase full of wonderful books to read: Louisa May Alcott and the Five Little Pepper books were just a few.

“My first three years in school were at St. Cecilia in Detroit. Later, we moved to Adrian and took care of Mom’s old home when her mother died. Our backyard was fun to play in because of the big old pear trees. Paula and I were in the same homeroom in school there, for two grades were in each room. Our cousin, Jane Mary Howard, had lived in Adrian with our grandmother, so now we were living together.

“Mom took Paula and me for long walks along the paths beside the Raisin River. I just loved everything I saw and learned about on these pleasant trips. Those were the early years of my first real understanding of God’s closeness and love for me and my dear family. The only regret we had as a family while living in Adrian was that Dad could not keep his job if he moved from Detroit. There was nothing for him in Adrian and so he only came home on weekends. Dad worked on Grandma’s old house when was home. He worked very hard, I felt as a child, and he was very tired at times.

“In 1937 we moved back to Detroit to St. Francis de Sales parish. We lived close to school where I was in the seventh grade and Paula was in the sixth grade. Dad was with us every day again, and we were happy. We all liked our Sisters at school, especially Sr. Rose de Lourdes and Sr. Marie Eileen. Mother Generosa was principal, and everyone loved her.”

“In the summer of 1943 we moved again to a nice home near St. Mary of Redford Church and school. This time changing school friends became a very hard thing to do. Being in the choir helped me to know my classmates better. Things were always fun at St. Mary’s of Redford, and in the next two years I realized I wanted to be an IHM sister.

“That summer of 1945 was Centennial Summer in our IHM Community – a wonderful time to join the friends from school and become IHM Sisters. But it was a hard time for Mom and Dad. My brothers were just coming home from war and our family was being broken once again – for good! I remember that day being so hard when I had to say good-bye to Paula, Mom and Dad. In the summer of 1946 Paula joined us here in Monroe. I felt then, that God had given me the greatest

gift possible. Knowing that Paula was here, as an IHM Sister, these many years has always been a great joy to me.”

Here I would like to include a little from a letter written by Mother Teresa McGivney in January 1947 to Mr. and Mrs. Wholihan:

We are particularly eager at this time to have you know that we understand and appreciate the sacrifice you have made in giving your two lovely daughters to the service of the Lord. We hope that you will always feel that they are nearer to you now than ever before. ... Thank you for your generous donation and also for all you have done to help your children to realize their vocation to our community. Sister Justella looks quite at home in her habit and veil. I am sure Sister Francis Edward is quietly giving her some sisterly help and advice. Sincerely yours, Mother M. Teresa.

“I love to think back over my years of teaching: I left an ice-bound Monroe on January 3, 1948, and headed to St. Mary in Wayne. To my delight, my first years of teaching began with little third graders. Our Lady of Good Counsel was my second mission. I learned about the joys and sorrows of training little children for their First Holy Communion. I look back now with great gratitude in my heart. I learned to pray with a greater realization of God’s close presence during those years. After St. Stephen’s, Port Huron, St. Patrick’s, Detroit brought me back to the city and its many needs. There I found children whose home life was very insecure because of the lack of finances and parental care in the early years of their lives. Those years with such needy children were a preparation for my future missionary life.

“In 1963, Cayey, Puerto Rico, was truly mission country. I soon loved those Puerto Rican children and their families, but was greatly saddened because of my inability to understand their needs in school. I found it very difficult to learn to speak Spanish.”

“Thus, in 1966, I was back in the States teaching at St. Regis in junior high, and earning summer school credits in History and Economics. I taught at St. Mary, Mount Morris, and at IHM High School in Westchester, Ill. I returned to St. Mary when Mary Kelly asked me to come back as the CCD Coordinator, which I did for two years.”

“It was in 1974 that I began my longest span of teaching at Gesu School in Detroit. Those seventeen years, meeting junior high youngsters day after day, were perhaps the most fulfilling, happy years of my life.”

Norine and Paula, together with Sister Mary Therese O'Donnell and her sister Pat O'Donnell often vacationed together through Elderhostels. Sister Cecilia Campbell remembered that Norine was an excellent teacher, and that she had received a plaque to this effect from one of her former schools. Norine also loved to garden and she had both flower gardens and vegetable gardens in the Gesu yard. For years, Norine would help Stella Rabaut with shopping at the Eastern Market on Saturdays. Sister Martha Rabaut said that Norine was very caring and kind to Stella when she became so sick with cancer.

In 1991, Paula persuaded Norine to join her in adult education, which she did until she retired. In 2002, the few remaining sisters retired from Gesu, and Norine was pleased to come home to the Motherhouse to be with Paula, who was struggling with her second round of cancer. On Sept. 22, 2003, Paula passed away. Norine wrote that she was grateful to God for Paula's life and her peaceful death. However, we know that losing Paula, and later her friend and classmate, Sister Rose Bernadette, were very painful experiences for her.

"Completing the work a Sister has in school or parish and coming home to Monroe is a very scary thought in many IHM Sisters' minds. We don't want it to happen until it must happen! I was glad to come home to Monroe, for Paula's sake. Everything worked out well for me. I was able to work in the Service Office for five years and loved it. I then worked for a while in the library, where we find so many interesting things to know and do.

"What have I loved most since I have come home? Most of all, I appreciate the beautiful chapel we have, I love the liturgy each morning. There I can thank my Loving God again and again for God's Love for our community and for God's Love for my beautiful family. And I thank God for all the grace which has been showered upon each of us."

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM, July 12, 2018