

**Remembering Frances Chirco, HIM**  
**Jan. 5, 1928 – Sept. 19, 2021**

Today we bid farewell, and celebrate the entrance into Heaven of our sister, aunt, cousin, friend, and IHM Companion, Sister Frances Chirco, known at her Reception as Sister Mary Pierre, IHM.



Frances' parents came to this country from Sicily. Her mother, Eva Cipriano, was six years old, and her father, Salvatore "Sam," was seventeen. They met and married on the feast of Saints Anne and Joachim, July 26, 1919.

Fran was the only girl, the third child of Eva and Sam Chirco. She had two older brothers, Peter and Sam, and one younger brother, Joe. The family grew up during the Great Depression and World War II. Frances' mother, Eva, was a strong influence in the family, and although she herself had only a meager education, she encouraged her family to appreciate a good education and to learn all they could. As a result, her brother, Peter, never missed a day of school and won top honors from St. Catherine's when he graduated. He later became a lawyer. Sam was educated as a credit agent and had his own business, while Joe

worked in the food industry as a union agent. Fran also attended St. Catherine's elementary and high schools.

Frances' father, Sam, worked at Dodge Main Plant in Hamtramck. As a result of his afternoon shift, he was seldom around his family home and children during the week. However, on Saturdays he would go to the Eastern Market to find the greatest bargains to provide fruit and nourishing food for the family.

World War II brought separation and sorrow to the Chirco family as Fran's two brothers, Peter and Sam, were enlisted in the Infantry. Sam was in the European Theatre and Peter served in the Pacific. Both had difficult assignments, and Sam was wounded three times. Frances and her parents prayed earnestly to God for their safe return home. When the war ended and they returned safely, they all prayed in thanksgiving, and Frances attributes these prayers to her call to religious life.

Fran entered the IHM community on Feb. 2, 1946. Being from a close-knit family, she was terribly homesick during her Postulate, and waited a year before entering the Novitiate on Jan. 2, 1947. She felt this was a blessing because it strengthened her in her vocation.

Fran began her teaching assignment as a novice at St. Joseph School in Monroe. She continued through the years in middle grades at Sacred Heart, Dearborn; All Saints, St. Matthew, and Holy Trinity, Detroit; Sacred Heart, Roseville; Immaculate Heart of Mary, Glen Lake, Minn.; St. Mark's, Cleveland; and Hall of the Divine Child, Monroe, as well as East Catholic High School.

It was later in Puerto Rico where she switched gears and taught at the University of Puerto Rico in Ponce, at which time she became proficient in the Spanish language. It was this experience that encouraged her to work with adults and with the poor Mexican migrants who had settled in

the area of Fremont, Ohio. She always enjoyed teaching, but later found pastoral work more satisfying.

Fran received a Bachelor of Arts degree at Marygrove College, and a master's degree from the University of Detroit in English and Education. She taught school, worked in Parish Ministry, and taught migrants for over 25 years.

Later, Fran found pastoral work very satisfying. She became a Pastoral Associate at St. Isidore in Macomb Township and worked there for nine years. There was much sorrow and mistrust in the parish when they discovered the pastor had abused children. He was removed, and for one month, until a new pastor was assigned, Fran, as pastoral associate, was in charge. It was after this experience, she returned to teaching classes of English to the Spanish speaking and working with migrants.

In 1997, Fran's aging mother in her mid-90's, was told she no longer could live alone, so Fran received permission to leave her job and stay with her. Her mother lived to be 100, and the family had a great celebration on her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Shortly after, she died and was buried from St. Athanasius Church on her wedding anniversary, July 26, the feast of Saints Anne and Joachim.

Although now in her 70's, Fran still had a desire to work and teach to the Spanish-speaking, so she was hired at St. Catherine Church in Sebring, Florida, where she also visited the sick in two hospitals in town. After five years, in 2008, it was time for her to return to Monroe and retire.

Fran was at the Motherhouse for about two years when she received an invitation to live with the sisters at Star of the Sea in Grosse Pointe. She still had a desire to work for the Church. She spoke to Leadership and they okayed her wish. Fran worked part time at her own parish, St. Catherine, now St. Augustine/Monica, and found another position at Our Lady of Grace in Warren. The pastor there was Asian and helped her understand the kindness and gentleness of the Vietnamese people there. During her fourth year at Our Lady of Grace, an unexpected event changed her life; she was hit by a car crossing Ryan Road. Thanks to the prayers of many persons, she returned to good health. Fran was very grateful to God who had been so good to her, and to the community which provided her with all she needed to do the work, the mission, and all she was able to accomplish.

Frances, your many years of teaching and ministering to the poor and Spanish-speaking has brought joy and comfort to many of God's people. You have been a source of joy and friendship to not only your IHM Sisters and family, but to all you have taught and ministered to throughout your life.

We can hear God saying: "Well done, good and faithful servant—enter in the JOY of the Kingdom!"

We will miss your presence and vivacious personality but rejoice with you as you have "finished the race and received the reward!" God bless you, Fran, may you rest in peace.

Written by Sr. Ann Isabelle Tefend, IHM  
Amended and delivered by Monica Stuhldreier, IHM, Sept.19, 2021