



# IHM Sisters – *On Mission*

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

## The New IHM Administration



(from left to right) S. Rita Lenihan, S. Dolores Joseph Bozzelli, S. Joanne Ralph, S. Lorraine McGrew, S. Mary Rose Yeager, S. John Evelyn DiTrolio, S. Mariann Guiniven  
(You will learn more about these sisters in our Winter newsletter.)

## *IHM Sisters – touching lives, affecting history*

**A**s part of the ceremony for profession of vows in our IHM community, the sister being professed is called by name. In response to that call, the sister proclaims: “Here I am, Lord.” Throughout the years our sisters have continued to utter that response to the Lord’s call to minister to His people who, in the course of history, have sometimes experienced times of comfort and joy, and at other times, hardship and pain. It seems that it is especially in those wearying times of hardship that our sisters have always “stepped up to the plate.”

### **Ministry of Education**

To foster the dignity of the human person, especially through education, holds the highest priority in the

IHM charism. Mindful of this mission, the IHM sisters during the 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s answered the call of bishops from the Philadelphia Archdiocese and the Harrisburg Diocese to start/staff many elementary schools. Realizing at the time that the many immigrants flocking to America desired the gift of education for their children, the IHM community responded to their needs and established many parish schools. Once there was a class ready for ninth grade, the sisters pioneered numerous commercial schools and high schools. The following chart of our Pennsylvania schools, including three high schools initiated before the end of the Civil War and twenty high schools begun before the turn of the century, demonstrates the overwhelming success of this endeavor.

School	Location	Year School Opened	Type of Courses That Followed
St. Peter	Reading	1859	2-year high school
St. John the Baptist	Philadelphia	1863	4-year high school
St. Paul	Philadelphia	1864	2-year commercial
St. Joachim	Philadelphia	1865	2-year commercial
St. Francis Xavier	Philadelphia	1869	2-year commercial
St. Agnes	West Chester	1872	4-year high school
St. Patrick	Norristown	1875	2-year commercial & 2-year high school
Immaculate Heart of Mary	Chester	1883	2-year commercial
Immaculate Conception	Mauch Chunk	1884	4-year high school
St. Dominic	Philadelphia	1884	2-year commercial
St. Stephen	Port Carbon	1886	4-year high school
St. Joseph	Locust Gap	1888	2-year high school
St. Mark	Bristol	1888	2-year commercial
St. Gertrude	W. Conshohocken	1889	2-year commercial
St. Mary	Phoenixville	1890	3-year high school
St. Charles	Oakview/Drexel Hill	1892	2-year commercial
Our Lady of Mt. Carmel	Mt. Carmel	1892	2-year high school
Sacred Heart	Philadelphia	1893	2-year commercial
St. Anthony	Philadelphia	1897	2-year commercial
St. Ignatius	Centralia	1899	3-year high school
St. Francis de Sales	Philadelphia	1904	2-year commercial
Immaculate Conception	Germantown, Phila.	1904	2-year commercial
St. Veronica	Philadelphia	1904	2-year commercial
St. Cecilia	Coatesville	1906	2-year commercial
St. Joseph	Reading	1906	2-year commercial
Holy Family	Manayunk, Phila.	1906	2-year commercial
Holy Name	Philadelphia	1907	2-year commercial
St. Philomena	Lansdowne	1907	2-year commercial
St. Monica	Philadelphia	1908	2-year commercial
St. Bernard	Easton	1909	4-year high school
St. Augustine	Bridgeport	1911	3-year commercial
Most Blessed Sacrament	Philadelphia	1912	2-year commercial
St. Joseph	Frackville	1913	2-year commercial
Annunciation	Shenandoah	1914	4-year high school
St. Joseph	Ashland	1914	4-year high school
St. Joseph	Collingdale	1916	2-year commercial
St. Rose of Lima	Eddystone	1916	2-year commercial
St. Monica	Berwyn	1916	2-year commercial
St. Mary of Assumption	Coaldale	1916	4-year high school
St. Katharine	Wayne	1916	2-year commercial & 4-year high school
St. Ann	Lansford	1917	4-year high school
Seven Dolors	Wyndmoor	1918	2-year commercial
St. David	Willow Grove	1920	2-year commercial
St. Charles	Cornwells Heights	1920	2-year commercial
St. Jerome	Tamaqua	1921	4-year high school
St. Nicholas	Weatherly	1921	2-year commercial

School	Location	Year School Opened	Type of Courses That Followed
St. Joseph	Girardville	1922	4-year high school
St. Ann	Phoenixville	1923	2-year commercial
Our Lady of Grace	Penndel	1923	2-year commercial
St. Cecilia	Fox Chase, Phila.	1925	2-year commercial
Immaculate Conception	Tremont	1925	2-year commercial
Our Lady Queen of Peace	Pottsville	1925	2-year commercial
St. Patrick	McAdoo	1926	2-year commercial
Academy of Imm. Heart	Frackville	1927	4-year high school

During these formative years in the IHM community, the sisters possessed an impressive wisdom about the importance of education. Specifically, it is amazing to realize that these early sisters helped their small parish communities establish high school education long before some larger cities provided this opportunity. For example, in Philadelphia, Roman Catholic High School for Boys opened in 1890. John W. Hallahan Catholic High School for Girls started with three annexes in 1901, but the high school building at 19th and Wood Streets did not open until 1911.

### Ministry of Night School

Another documented occasion where the IHM sisters worked with such loving diligence to help provide education as a key for improving life was their teaching Night School to men and boys in a few upstate Pennsylvania towns. St. Joseph in Locust Gap and St. Ignatius in Centralia are excellent examples. These were little towns where many men worked in the mines; the boys from about age ten picked the slate as “breaker boys.” With no compulsory education laws at the time, many children could not read or write. Few boys were able to attend school beyond third or fourth grade. Sister Dominica Collier relates how Mother Columba opened a Night School in Locust Gap, which functioned from October to May each year. Older boys, young men, and even married men wel-

comed the chance to attend Night School as a way to improve their lives and that of their families. At first, some of the younger boys saw the school as a source of entertainment and amusement. They soon learned that Mother Columba had no intention of putting up with nonsense. She demanded punctuality, attentiveness, obedience, and good conduct. To provide as many educational opportunities as possible, the sisters maintained a very exhausting schedule.

5:00 A.M.	Rising
5:30 A.M.	Meditation, Office of Blessed Virgin Mary, Holy Mass
7:00 A.M.	Breakfast, Charges
8:00 A.M.-3:30 P.M.	Regular School Day
4:00 P.M.	Visit to the Blessed Sacrament
4:15 P.M.	Spiritual Reading/ Meditation
5:00 P.M.	Supper and dishes
6:00 P.M.-9:00 P.M.	Night School

After Night School, the sisters would gather in the community room for a short time to share some of the day’s experiences. Sometimes they would get a snack of “stick candy” or peanuts. On cold winter nights, Sister Anacletus prepared big cups of hot gruel (thin porridge) to warm the sisters. At that time Sister Dominica reported, “There was no grumbling among us on account of this exceptional work. We were young and full of zeal and we thanked God for the opportunity of being able to perform spiritual and temporal works for these boys and men.”

### Ministry during the Flu Epidemic

In 1918, a severe flu epidemic attacked the United States. Both rural and urban areas were afflicted; however, the flu affected large cities particularly hard since people lived in close proximity to one another. In autumn 1918 with the epidemic at its peak, group gatherings were prohibited; therefore, schools closed for several months. At a meeting of the superiors of uncloistered sisters of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia held on October 8, 1918, Archbishop Dougherty gave his hearty approval and encouragement for the sisters in local convents to volunteer services to assist the suffering, to help control some of the dire health conditions facing the medical profession, and to increase the limited personnel ministering



St. Joseph Convent and School, Locust Gap, PA

to such large numbers in general hospitals, emergency hospitals, and private homes. When the IHM Mother General issued a request to the sisters, the great question was not “Who would be willing to go?” but “Who will be chosen?” Sisters who were educated to be teachers, and for the most part unskilled in the

nursing profession, volunteered in extraordinary numbers despite the danger of catching the flu themselves.

The following is a list of places where the IHM sisters served and what local convent(s) assisted at that site:

Places Requesting Aid	# of Sisters	Convents from which they came
Emergency Hospital # 1 Holmesburg	30	St. Dominic Incarnation St. Monica St. Veronica Immaculate Conception, Germantown
Philadelphia Hospital – Blockley	9	St. Agatha
Pottsville General Hospital Pottsville Armory Emergency Miliken House, Pottsville	14	Sisters from St. Anthony, St. Clement, and Most Blessed Sacrament in Philadelphia took the train to Pottsville.
St. Joseph Hospital, Philadelphia	8	Gesu sisters replaced nurses who died.
Misericordia Hospital	10	St. Gabriel
Lazarist Seminary	12	Immaculate Conception, Germantown
Catholic Home Bureau	10	IHM sisters who taught there plus Annunciation Holy Name Sacred Heart sisters
Emergency Hospital – Broad & Snyder	20	St. Monica St. Thomas Hallahan High School sisters
Phoenixville Hospital	10	St. Paul Sacred Heart St. Mary, Phoenixville
Emergency Hospital # 8 1726 S. Broad St.	18	St. Anthony St. Gabriel St. Thomas
Emergency Hospital, Gypsy Camp Roumanian Village, Delaware Co.	6	St. Joseph, Collingdale St. Philomena, Lansdowne
Women’s Hospital – 40th & Parrish Sts.	4	St. Agatha
Villa Maria Academy, Immaculata	12	Took care of girls at VMA, boys from St. Aloysius & sisters who became sick
St. Francis Hospital, Lancaster	3	Sacred Heart, Lancaster
Red Cross Emergency, Bristol	7	St. Mark, Bristol
Emergency Hospital, Bridgeport	3	St. Augustine, Bridgeport
Bryn Mawr Emergency Paoli Emergency Children’s Wayne Emergency Italian Colony	8	St. Katharine, Wayne
Frackville Emergency	5	St. Joseph, Frackville
Emergency Hospital – Shenandoah	3	Imm. Heart Academy, Fountain Springs
Mt. Carmel & Kulpmont Emergency	8	Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Mt. Carmel
Coaldale Emergency Hospital	5	St. Mary, Coaldale
Ashland Emergency Hospital	6	St. Joseph, Ashland
Visiting private homes in parishes	212	Sisters from almost every convent

In the hospitals and emergency centers, the sisters ministered in twelve-hour shifts because nursing help was drastically needed and very limited. Shifts ranged from 7 or 8 A.M. to



*Sister M. Celestine Dalton, one of over 400 IHM sisters who ministered during the 1918 Flu epidemic*

7 or 8 P.M. At that time other sisters arrived for the twelve-hour night shift. Unimaginable difficult conditions existed in the hospitals due to overcrowding, insufficient personnel, and so much human suffering.

A few quotes might help to understand the distressing situations faced each day by the doctors, nurses, and sisters. However, there was a great sense of fulfillment in helping those in such dire need. The following are some poignant comments from sisters:

\*\* “After much anxiety, we reached Emergency No. 1. A nurse conducted us to the office of the head nurse and in two minutes we had our masks and gowns on (worn over the habit of blue serge), and were ready for work. There were over three hundred patients and only twelve nurses to look after them, so one can imagine the distress and the misery of these poor people.”

\*\* “We left the convent about four in the morning and returned about nine that night. In the intervening hours we were engaged constantly, waiting on the sick and dying. I was assigned to the women’s acute ward. This meant that death was anticipated for these patients. I was present at many deaths and tried to help them turn their last thoughts to God.”

\*\* “There were about 25 or 30 men in each ward and adjoining shack. Their gratitude for any medical attention from us was really touching.”

\*\* “The first night on arriving at the hospital we found six patients in our ward; before morning we had fourteen, most of them in a dying condition.”

\*\* “I had, on an average, twelve women, six babies, and about four men to take care of. The call ‘Sister’ could be heard every minute during the night.”

\*\* “One night, I spent carrying a baby, three months old, on one arm, and one six months old on the other. When a patient called, I had to lay the babies down at the foot of

the bed to attend to the call. But the look of gratitude on the faces of the sick would repay us for any inconvenience.”

\*\* “It was pitiful to see the suffering of those afflicted, and to hear the moans and cries of those who were dying.”

\*\* “One man said to me: ‘Sister, God must have sent me here to change my opinion of you Catholic ladies. I hated Catholics before this epidemic. Now I shall revere the name of the Catholic sisterhoods and defend them as my life. You good ladies came here to nurse us at the risk of your own lives, and I have learned my lesson. God bless you.’”

\*\* “Through this experience, I have learned to appreciate my vocation to the religious life more than ever before.”

One touching story from an emergency hospital emphasizes how meaningful, both physically and spiritually, the services of the sisters were to the patients.

“There was in my ward a man named Robert, thirty years old according to the chart. He told me that his mother had died when he was five years old and that his sisters and brothers had all been separated....One morning, I was making my rounds as usual and just as I was leaving Robert’s bed, I noticed a chaplain down the corridor. Turning back, I asked: ‘Robert, were you ever a Catholic?’ Imagine my surprise when he answered, ‘Yes, I was born one.’ I asked if he would see a priest and he answered ‘Yes.’ I did not walk, I ran down that corridor. The chaplain came back with me. Robert received his first Holy Communion on his death-bed. I never expect anything this side of heaven to give me the joy which I experienced that morning. After the priest had gone, Robert called me and thanked me for getting the priest. He said: ‘You have made me very happy. You certainly have taken my mother’s place today.’ Later, he died with perfect resignation.”

For five weeks the seminarians from St. Charles engaged in the work of digging graves at Holy Cross Cemetery. Because of this strenuous activity, it was important for the young men to maintain their strength. Therefore, the sisters from Blessed Virgin Mary Convent in Darby prepared and served dinner every night to these exhausted seminarians. John McCrickard, a seminarian brother of Sister M. Adele, wrote to her on Nov. 15, 1918: “We did our best to prepare the graves, but even at that the rush was too great. Sometimes there were two or three from the same family. After we lowered each body into the grave, our fellows always knelt down and recited the *DeProfundis*. Those days in the cemetery will long be remembered. But what we did, I think, is insignificant compared to the work of the sisters in the hospitals.”

Sisters also were asked to nurse and minister in private homes. The sisters walked from house to house, offering assistance where it was needed, especially in providing nourish-



*Certificate of Appreciation from the Emergency Relief Committee  
of South Philadelphia*

ment, cleaning bed linens, bathing the sick if necessary, and administering medicines as prescribed. In many cases, people begged the sisters to help them in their homes. Numerous stories document these home visits. One heartrending story from the many recorded will suffice to demonstrate the tragic situations people faced during this horrific flu epidemic.

“A very sad case was that of a whole family stricken – mother, seven children, and no nurse but the father, who also was seriously ill. When the sisters entered this home, the mother had just died, leaving a baby ten days old. The father, a picture of distress, cared not whether he lived or died. A kind neighbor, whose own girl was lying dead, relieved the sisters of the care of the infant. The sisters nursed the rest of the family back to health except the baby, which later died.”

During the epidemic, many children were received into the Catholic Home Bureau located at 1702 Summer Street. The sick children received attention for the flu; other children were placed at the Bureau temporarily during the illness of one or both parents at home.

One hundred and eleven IHM sisters became sick during the months of this epidemic; eight professed sisters and one postulant died of the flu.

During the epidemic, over two thousand teaching sisters volunteered their services to help in various places in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties. Sisters from the following religious communities gave service: Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of St. Francis, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, and Sisters of the Holy Child. The mayor of Philadelphia was quoted as saying: “I have never seen a greater demonstration of real charity or self-sacrifice than has been given by the sisters in their nursing the sick, irrespective of the creed or color of the victims, wherever the nuns were sent. I look upon the services rendered by the nuns as one of the most potent aids in



*Summer activities at French Creek*

making the headway we have toward getting control of the epidemic.” *The Emergency Relief Committee of South Philadelphia* presented certificates of gratitude to the religious sisters in their area. But the gratitude in the hearts of the people who were helped during the epidemic far surpassed any certificate or words of praise.

## Ministry through Outreach Programs

Once again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the civic and church leaders turned to the religious sisters in the archdiocese to assist them in a newly-conceived city project, the *Philadelphia Anti-poverty Action Commission (P.A.A.C.)* which ran in partnership with the Cardinal’s Committee on Human Relations. During the late 1960s, racial tensions often ran high and riots erupted. In many large cities during this era, city children lacked large areas in which to play. In an attempt to alleviate some of the unrest and stress for the children, religious sisters again were asked to volunteer their time during the summer to participate in this P.A.C.C. Program through *Operation Outbound* and *Play Streets*. Sisters from four communities volunteered: Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of Mercy and Sisters of St. Francis. Because of the presence of so many sis-



*Sister Jeanne Baker (S. John Neumann) taking care of one of her charges*

ters, the program was often referred to as the Sisters' Summer Program.

*Operation Outbound* provided a day-camp opportunity for urban children to participate in a country experience. The committee chose French Creek as the camp site. The city was divided into twelve areas for recruitment purposes. Every other day, sisters would go door-to-door in a designated area asking the parents if they had any children, ages 7 to 12, who might enjoy a trip to the country. Parents signed an "Outbound Extension Card" which served the dual purpose of a permission slip and a bus ticket. On the day of the trip, the sisters and a few camp counselors accompanied the children to French Creek, organized activities for them, and served lunch. Other outings included trips to the Philadelphia Zoo, Valley Forge Music Fair, and the movies.

Sister Miriam Scully (S. Patricia Miriam,) who directed the program for the IHM sisters, recalls how excited the children were when they saw cows for the first time. "This program was a wonderful opportunity to have the children off the *concrete* and into the *country*. I was always amazed at the generosity of the sisters who taught all year and gave up their free time during the hot summer to help the children. If you were one of the children who participated in the program, say a prayer in thanksgiving for those dedicated sisters."

In *Play Streets*, approximately 75 blocks in the city were barricaded and devoted to summer fun and games for neighborhood children. Recreational and educational activities included singing, music workshops, arts and crafts, sketching, folk dancing, drama, language arts, and reading. On exceptionally hot days, the fire department supervised the installment of sprinklers on fire hydrants so the children could cool

off. The altruistic, selfless spirit of the sisters contributed to this successful program for almost ten years. At the time, Barbara Weems, the P.A.A.C. acting executive director commented, "Our lives are truly being touched by the dedication, sincerity, and tranquility the sisters have brought to us."

As we remember and reflect on these significant, historical events, it almost seems humanly impossible that we mortals could endure such rigorous and exhausting schedules and challenges. And maybe, it is! But where human energy and weakness have their limits, the grace of God, love of neighbor, desire for a better life, and pure determination of will can manufacture miracles and propel us to serve without counting the cost! This service and devotion is truly a reflection of the love of God in our midst!



*Children proudly displaying their arts and crafts*