

Maryellen Harmon, RSCJ
February 6, 1924-June 18, 2011

Maryellen Catherine Harmon was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, one of four girls and two boys of Daniel Lewis Harmon and Mary Cecile Molloy. She attended Catholic Central High School in Terre Haute. Her college degree at the University of Detroit was a B.S. in Professional Chemistry, with minors in Mathematics, Biology, and Philosophy.

Maryellen entered the Society at Kenwood on January 22, 1946, received by Reverend Mother Bodkin. Her noviceship was under the direction of Mother Schroen. She received the habit on August 5, 1946 and made her first vows on August 5, 1948. Her first assignment was to Eden Hall for half a year, where she was second grade teacher in the parish school. From January to August, 1949, she was back at Kenwood as Assistant Treasurer and organist. The next year she was at Elmhurst doing the same kind of work, then 1950-1952 at Rochester, then at Noroton for one year. For the year 1953-1954, she was at Greenwich teaching Second Academic and still organist. She then went to Rome for probation with Reverend Mother Zurstrassen, making her final profession on February 9, 1955. For the next three years she was at Kenwood, then Greenwich for one and a half years, then ten years at Grosse Pointe, 1958-1968, as Mistress of Studies for the last three of those years. The following year she taught Math and Science at Kenwood. During this time, she earned a Master of Science degree in Chemistry from the University of Detroit in 1963 (thesis: "The Formation of a Kaolin-Humus Complex and its Effect on the Cation Adsorption of Soils") and another in Mathematics from the same institution in 1967.

In 1970, she founded the Street Academy in Albany and was its director for the first two years, after which she began her doctorate in Education at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, completing it in 1976 with concentrations in Humanistic Education, Curriculum Development, and Organizational Management. Her dissertation was titled: "Paolo Freire: Implications for a Theory of Pedagogy." From 1973 to 1976, she worked first at the Cathedral School of Albany, then as Director of Religious Education for the Catholic schools of the diocese. From 1976-1980, she was Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Detroit, the first non-priest to hold that position. In 1980 she became Associate Professor of Education at Madonna College in Livonia, Michigan, while at the same time, from 1983-1985, Principal at Epiphany School in Detroit. During the summers 1982-1985, she was also Adjunct Professor in Education at Boston College.

In 1986, she moved to the Lee Road community, Newton, and in 1989 to 785 Centre Street, Newton, to continue teaching at Boston College, now during regular terms. She was a senior research associate at the Boston College Centre for the Study of Testing, Evaluation, and Educational Policy (CSTEPEP), and became its Associate Director from 1988-1990. From 1986 she engaged in widespread consulting work in Network and public schools and colleges, including the school districts of Springfield, Massachusetts, Newport, Rhode Island, Middletown, Connecticut, and Albany, New York on topics such as curriculum and staff development, Mathematics and Science curriculum and assessment, management and long range planning, multicultural education, and race

relations. She worked with Simon and Schuster, Prentice Hall and other publishers, with the National Science Foundation, and with the Educational Development Center on science education assessment, project reviews, and problem solving for special needs students.

Maryellen was a member of the John Dewey Society, the American Educational Research Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Science Teachers Association, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and Alpha Sigma Nu (national honor society of Jesuit institutions). She published extensively in the field of educational research, especially in performance testing for assessment of Mathematics instruction.

From 2006-2008 she continued her consulting work from Regis community, St. Charles. When it became necessary for her to give up this work, she moved to Teresian House in December, 2008.

The afternoon that Liz White died (June 18), the RSCJ pastoral staff at Teresian House received a call from Maryellen Harmon's nurse that she had "taken a turn" and would not live much longer. The staff put her to bed and began a medication that finally relieved her of the terrible anxiety that had dogged her recent months and she slowly and peacefully slipped away four days later, the morning of Liz's funeral. Her RSCJ sisters had taken turns staying by her during those days, but in the end she died alone.

Margaret Seitz, RSCJ, said of her: "For me, she is up with the 'greats' in Society education. She never once forgot that her knowledge was at the service of others. There is so much more to Maryellen than a listing of all the things she did. Her intelligence was keen and she brought it to bear on everything. She was kind and generous to one and all."

After her death, beautiful tributes came from priests with whom she had served. Rev. Kenneth Kauchek, in whose parish Maryellen was Principal, wrote: "what I recall is a woman filled with faith whom God had gifted with many, many talents. Not only was she a brilliant educator, but she was also a very hands-on teacher. Maryellen had an indomitable spirit that believed a problem was only a problem if you defined it as such. I found her to be a woman who walked in faith with Jesus, who loved the church, who was dedicated to her community ...and also found the face of Christ in everyone she met. She was an inspiration to me in ministry. I treasured her friendship and her partnership in parochial ministry."

Rev. Walter Farrell, S.J., wrote that Maryellen "was a woman small of stature but large in mind and heart....she was a vowed religious whose vision and fundamental desire were those of the expansive heart of her God, Jesus Christ. I had the good fortune to work with Maryellen especially during her days on the board of education of the Archdiocese of Detroit. This led to the privilege of being one of her friends. So now as a member of the Communion of Saints, I pray she will continue to help all of us who knew her."