Sister Margaret Ann (Ann Vincent) Dirkes, OP
(1929 – 2015)

As the story continues, I can hardly wait to see our pursuit of creative energy and the ultimate life force.

- A Note from a Nokomis Jubilarian, March 22, 1998, M. Ann Dirkes

Born July 16, 1929, in Detroit to Vincent and Alma (Yott) Dirkes, Margaret Ann was one of four children. She attended grade school at St. Paul in Grosse Pointe and graduated from Dominican High School. In 1947, Ann entered the postulate and at reception received her religious name, Sister Ann Vincent.

Following profession in 1949, Sisters Ann was assigned to teach elementary grades in three parish schools in Michigan and Illinois for seven years. During the summers she continued her studies at Siena Heights College (now University) and received her bachelor of science degree in 1955.

From 1956 to 1972, Sister Ann taught math courses in five high schools: three in Michigan and two in Ohio. During these summers she began her graduate studies at the University of Detroit and received her master of arts degree in 1962.

Beginning in 1972, Sister Ann’s ministry years were dedicated to teaching college and university students. The first two years were at Wayne State University in Detroit, where she taught math courses and received her Doctor of Education Degree in Curriculum in 1974.

That year, Sister Ann applied for and received a faculty position at Indiana-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, Indiana. She continued to teach, publish, serve on university committees, and participate in community programs and projects for the next twenty years. In her 1976-1977 Annals and Ministry Report, she reflected on her professional involvement and goals:

Three articles published in educational periodicals, two others accepted; numerous speaking engagements; participated in a University policy-making committee; tutored a teenage girl from the Welfare Department.

Each year I conceptualize differences between my value system and that of married couples and of persons who award high priority to family concerns and to material gains. Although I must achieve and contribute to research, teaching, and service or most assuredly lose my position here, I need to be wary of professional competition which serves no charitable purpose.

Once established in her new position, she reactivated her connection with the Creative Problem Solving Institute. In her Annals she wrote, “I anticipate that my return to the Creative Problem Solving Institute next week will be meaningful indeed. My experiences there four years ago resulted in significant changes in the way I teach courses, solve my own problems and opportunities, and make choices.”
It should be noted that her dissertation, published in 1974, was entitled: The effect of divergent thinking experiences on creative production and transfer between mathematical and nonmathematical domains.

During that first year at the University she was also caught up in some political concerns which she described as:

...affirmative action suits, employment questions, and student justice. I have been involved in each either directly or indirectly. Desegregation plans are pending for the public elementary schools. Since I visit the schools and teach some of the teachers, I will be involved. The public schools reflect society. Many there strive to make public schools and the work around them better places for people. I am anxious to take part.

Ann sought out opportunities to participate in liturgical functions. She wrote,

I have enjoyed the monastic atmosphere [at Crosier House of Studies] which comes through due to the fact that there are novices and others in training there. Although I have developed a habit of prayer at home, it certainly needs to be intensified now that I have adjusted to the many new avenues associated with living alone in an apartment and teaching at a public university.

During the remembrance gathering after the funeral liturgy, Sister Mary Jane Lubinski, Prioress of Adrian Crossroads Chapter, read the following messages from Sister Ann’s friends in Fort Wayne.

From John Neubauer:

My first recollection of meeting Ann was at the Crosier House of Studies, a theology school for the Crosiers, in Fort Wayne. She was there for Sunday Liturgy and I met her at the coffee and doughnuts after Mass. After the Crosier House closed, Ann continued on with our Sunday community at St. Andrew’s and when Pidge and I decided to have evening prayer at our home on Wednesday evening, she was the first to say yes to our invitation.

Ann was an independent thinker and followed her conscience. We loved having her as a part of lives and she enriched us with her matter-of-fact observations and down-to-earth reflections. She was not closed off nor was she afraid of conflict although she didn’t get into arguments, simply stated her position and let others state theirs. She was truly an intellectual and deeply spiritual. I will miss her.

From Pidge Newbauer, facilitator of the Wednesday night prayer group:

Ann loved being a teacher of mathematics even to the point of writing her own outline for a book and she loved our Wednesday night prayer group attending faithfully since the mid-80s. Ann’s quest in theology seems to have led her to almost having memorized the writings of Karl Rahner. Ann was a constant seeker and questioner and thus the perfect teacher.

From Anita Carter:
I loved her dearly; she was my spiritual director for a while and I loved meeting with her. She was so on the spot when it came to living and loving unconditionally.

From Barb, a member of the book club:

When I reflect on my relationship with Ann I see and remember her as part of a book club we shared thirty-five years ago. I came to know that Ann was a nun but that was after I knew her as a friend. I can’t recall Ann speaking or acting negatively. Closest she came to a critical comment was to ask, “Have you ever thought about the issue this way?” Ann was a pleasure to be with and a wealth of comfort and questions. Ah, the questions. I miss you, Ann.

Sister Ann retired from Indiana University/Purdue University (IPFW) in 1994 as professor emerita of elementary education. She continued to live in Fort Wayne. In her Annals, she wrote:

[My] major ministry has become writing books, one on math for adult education, and another on God and cultural change. I also tutor an adult through the Three Rivers Literacy Alliance. I made a study of two books which have influenced my spiritual life greatly: Lonergan and Spirituality and Quantum Theology by Diamuid O’Murchu. I continue to write a novel with a spiritual twist.

When her health began to fail, Sister Ann returned to Adrian in 2013, and lived in the Dominican Life Center Maria until she died on January 29, 2015.

In her homily, Sister Fran Nadolny said that Sister Ann had named their mission group, Connections, because she believed that in this universe we are all connected, both to our God and to one another. “Truly she lived that greatest of the commandments,” Sister Fran noted.

Here are some excerpts from Sister Fran’s homily.

In selecting the readings, I chose the gospel because Margaret Ann’s heart was so large that her love extended both to her God and to those around her. I selected the passage about gifts because Margaret Ann had a special group of students who were gifted in intellectual, creative, artistic or leadership abilities. That really seemed a bit narrow-minded to me, but for Margaret Ann, she saw giftedness in many different ways and St. Paul helps us to see what the different gifts looked like to her:

Wisdom in discourse: For Margaret Ann, each person had the right and the privilege to one’s own opinion. She viewed that person as gifted and in challenging people to show it, she was nurturing the gift.

Power to express knowledge: At each [mission group] meeting she would ask what we were reading or what films we were enjoying and then she wanted to know why we liked them. We each were gifted, and in challenging us to show it, she was nurturing the gift.

Prophecy, tongues, and interpreting tongues: For years, she and her university colleagues formed a Poets Society where they met regularly to share whatever was important to them. Their
opinion, views and dreams mattered to Margaret Ann because each had a giftedness which she wanted to see and nurture.

She lived for the common good of her family, for the common good of her university colleagues and students, for the common good of the congregation in which she lived simply, contributed generously, participated thoughtfully and loved wholeheartedly.

Father Jim Hug, SJ, offered this prayer during the funeral liturgy:

    Our loving God, we bring to you these gifts of bread and wine.
    They stand for our gratitude for Ann,
    and for the offering of our lives, our giftedness,
    our commitment to serve You through service to each other
    the faithful and joyful service that Jesus gave us,
    and that Ann taught us.