



Rejoice!

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Newsletter

Winter 2025

Beginnings and Ends and Beginnings

Dear families and friends,

As I pondered what I would like to share with you, I noticed that my thoughts moved through various beginnings and ends. We experience beginnings every day – the beginning of a new day, our daily work, our time of prayer, a shared meal, an anticipated activity—and the list can go on. Yet, with each beginning, there also comes an end. Some ends are sad, such as the loss of a loved one; some ends are filled with joy, such as graduations; and some ends are just ends. Ends, however, lead to the new beginnings – the next job, the next school year, the next opportunity, the next encounter and so on.



On the morning of September 22, the beginning of our day was the same as every other school-day: rising, meditation, Morning Prayer, Holy Mass and breakfast. However, the end was unexpected. Sr. Mary Clare was in the community room preparing for school when she experienced a massive stroke. After a transport to the hospital, rapid deterioration, and the prayers and presence of her IHM Sisters and our priests, Sr. Mary Clare's earthly life came to an end in the early hours of September 23. In the midst of our shock, sorrow and grief, a prayer resonated in our hearts and minds, filling us with a sense of peace and even joy. What prayer would do this? During the Mass of Perpetual Profession, the Bishop prays a solemn consecration over the Sister. What echoed in our heart was the conclusion of this consecration prayer:

Lord, Holy Father, guide the steps of your servant and guard her on her pilgrimage through life. When she comes at last to throne of Christ the King, may she not fear Him as her judge, but hear the voice of her Bridegroom lovingly inviting her to the wedding feast of heaven.

In life we all experience beginnings and ends. Ultimately, our life is one great beginning – the beginning of our journey to God. The end for which we were made is union with God for all eternity (which has no end). Everything else in between are just little beginnings and ends on our pilgrimage journey. Our Lord, in His Loving and Divine Providence, allows us to experience various situations and circumstances so that we may learn and choose to grow in our loving relationship with Him, to love others as He has loved us, to become saints. May all your beginnings and ends and beginnings become grace-filled moments, opportunities to once again choose to love Our Lord, so that, at the end of your earthly life, you too will hear the voice of the Lord inviting you to the wedding feast of heaven.

In Mary's Heart,

Mother Cecilia Marie, IHM

Mother Cecilia Marie Hammersley, IHM
General Superior

Please Pray for the Soul of Sister Mary Clare Johnson, IHM

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace.

May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

The Beauty of Religious Life

THE HEART OF OUR LADY

The Sisters are often asked, “What is your charism?” Often times the inquirer is merely asking what our apostolic work is, other times the questioner may want to know what communal devotions we have. The charism of a religious community does include both of those, but is much, much more.

The charism of a religious community is the prolongation of the Holy Spirit’s foundational gift to the founder or foundress of the community. In other words, it is the reason for our existence as a religious institute, it is what makes our community unique, different from all other religious communities, and it is how the Church identifies us and through which she guides us. More encompassing than our work or our prescribed prayers, the charism is the framework of our life. The charism is not merely about what we do, but more about how we do what we do; the charism is expressed through the specific way in which we live our vows, through our prayer life, our fraternal life in community, and in our apostolic work.



When describing our charism, we immediately refer to the beautiful “badge” we wear, the symbol of our religious institute which has been faithfully handed down to us from the first days of our existence in Spain, 1848, when we were founded by Father (now Venerable) Joaquin Masmitja. We are the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, thus that image, when prayerfully considered, contains and communicates our very identity.



Each element has its own story to tell, but the beginning of the story has to be the heart itself. Most fundamentally, when speaking of this heart, we are referring to the maternal heart of Mary, under which the Sacred Heart of Jesus was formed. Beyond this biological fact, the heart of Mary formally symbolizes the very person of Mary and all grace, sanctity and love which flows from our Mother first to God and then to us, those to whom Jesus entrusted to her as she stood at the foot of the Cross.



In general, when speaking of the heart one is referring to the very core of our being, who we really are. If we say someone “has a good heart,” we mean that they are a good person. If we say we love someone “from the bottom of our heart,” we mean we love them

The Beauty of Religious Life

deeply. More than a biological organ or muscle, the heart is “where” we safely store our treasures, our loves, our memories; it is where we make our important decisions, where we live our interior life; it is considered to “house” the highest part of our soul, which turns directly to God.

Unfortunately, with original sin, all of these wonderful qualities of our hearts are clouded, in a sense, damaged. We have “treasures” that aren’t really treasures that we store away and keep, unhealthy attachments; our decisions might be formed with the confusion of broken emotions instead of objective truth and clarity; we may, in mere sentimentality, weakness, or disordered attachments, turn from the joy of following the Lord and follow, instead, a life of superficial pleasures.

Mary’s Heart, on the other hand, was never clouded with sin; her Heart is pure, clean, immaculate. Having been conceived immaculately, free from all sins, stains and residue, her heart has a purity, a “oneness” which enables her Heart to be all God’s. From the first moment of her existence and throughout all of eternity, she is at complete enmity with Satan, filled with grace and completely attuned to and embracing of God’s holy will. Truly, Mary’s Heart, with no stain or injury from sin, is a fully functioning heart that is totally God’s. Which means, since the heart represents the totality of the person, Mary, in her whole being, is totally God’s.

Living as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, striving to imitate her and follow her maternal guidance in all things ... this is precisely what we want! This is how we endeavor to live: to be completely and wholly His! Whether at prayer, fulfilling our apostolic assignments, doing our daily duties, or engaging in fraternal life within the community, we are attempting to do so in a Marian way: completely and totally God’s; inviting all to come closer to Him; to know Him and His love, and to freely and whole-heartedly follow Him and His ways; and to love Him with their whole heart, mind, soul and strength and others as God loves them.



The badge of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is an integral part of the Sisters’ religious habit and is worn as a daily reminder that we are to conform our hearts to hers at all times, in all places and during all activities.



100th Anniversary of Our Lady's Request

December 2025 begins the centenary celebration of the request by Our Lady of Fatima for the practice of the First Saturday devotion. During the extraordinary apparition of July 13, 1917, Our Lady of Fatima said to the three shepherd children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta:

You have seen hell where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls will be saved and there will be peace. ... I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my requests are heeded, Russia will be converted, and there will be peace

The Fatima apparitions ended in October, 1917. Within a few years, both Francisco and Jacinta died, leaving Lucia on earth to continue spreading the message of Fatima. After fostering for some time, the wish to become a religious, in 1925 eighteen-year-old Lucia joined the Dorothean Sisters. She became a postulant at the Order's convent at Pontevedra, Spain. On December 10, 1925, in the convent in Pontevedra, Our Lady appeared to Lucia with the following message:

See, my daughter, my Heart encircled by thorns with which ungrateful men pierce it at every moment by their blasphemies and ingratitude. Do you, at least, strive to console me. Tell them that I promise to assist at the hour of death with the graces necessary for salvation all those who, in order to make reparation to me, on the First Saturday of five successive months, go to Confession, receive Holy Communion, say five decades of the Rosary, and keep me company for a quarter of an hour, meditating on the ... mysteries of the Rosary.

The most striking part of the apparition at Pontevedra is the incomparable promise made by Our Lady: to all those who make the Five First Saturdays Devotion, under the requested conditions, "I promise to assist them at the hour of death with all the graces necessary for the salvation of their souls." This amazing grace is promised to those who make this devotion.

We would like to encourage everyone to continue or begin this beautiful Marian devotion. If you would like to read more, please check out our Five First Saturday page in our Marian devotions section of our website: www.SistersIHMofWichita.org



*Thank you for all the prayers!
Keep reciting those Memorares!*

6,747,057 Memorares
for Our Lady
to Date

Sister Mary Clare Johnson, IHM

Sister Mary Clare Johnson, IHM *March 17, 1961 - September 23, 2025*

On September 23, 2025, the Divine Bridegroom called His bride of 37 years,
Sister Mary Clare Johnson, IHM, to Himself.

This most important moment of her life, the moment for which we all live, came quite unexpectedly.
With no notable health concerns, it did not seem likely that Sister Mary Clare
would be approaching this moment so soon.

But “the bride belongs to the Bridegroom,” (John 3:29)
and Sister Mary Clare did not hesitate to respond to His summons.



“The Bridegroom is here, let us go to meet Him.”
(Mt 25:13)

On Monday, September 22, Sister Mary Clare followed our normal school morning schedule of rising at 4:30am followed by 30 minutes of mental prayer, Morning Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, Holy Mass, and breakfast. While preparing to leave for school she suffered a massive stroke. Just minutes after the EMT’s arrived, she became unresponsive.

Though the exact words may not have come to her mind, she had lived such that she could pass to the next life with the words of the Liturgy, if not on her lips, surely in her heart, “I have kept myself for You alone and now, with lamp alight, I run to meet my Spouse.” She passed away peacefully in the early morning hours of Tuesday, September 23, 2025, with her religious Sisters at her side.

No one is perfect; our sinful, fallen though redeemed, humanity, coming face to face to Our Most Loving Savior, sees the truth of one’s life. There is nothing to hide behind and no need to do so, for all is known by the Lord and all becomes known to the soul. Please do not forget to pray for Sister Mary Clare. We are grateful that she was able to be equipped for her last journey with the many benefits of our faith, especially the Anointing of the Sick and the Apostolic Pardon.

Sister Mary Clare Johnson, IHM

Sister Mary Clare was born the oldest daughter of Paul and Joyce Johnson in Whittier, California on March 17, 1961. Soon, she was joined by two sisters, Donna and Jenise. They enjoyed life in California, especially raising horses and dogs.

While she was brought up in the Christian faith, it was through friends and acquaintances that she learned about the Catholic Church. There was a spark in her soul that always wanted to know more. Providentially, she was able to attend St. Lucy's Priory for her senior year of high school and this satisfied her deep longing for the truth. Before graduating, she was baptized, confirmed and received her first Holy Communion at St. Frances of Rome Church in Aousa, California. After high school, she worked in banking and raising and showing dogs.

It was not long before she answered the call Jesus had spoken to her heart, and entered religious life. She visited different communities but her heart rested with the California Institute of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary; she entered in 1986 and professed her vows in 1988.

In 1998, while in Spain celebrating the 150th anniversary of Fr. Joaquin Masmitja's foundation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Sister Mary Clare met five IHM's from Wichita. Her desire to live more deeply the IHM charism would lead her to Wichita.

She transferred to the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita in 2003. This transfer was complete on June 10, 2008, when she renewed her "yes" to Jesus, professing her perpetual vows of chastity, poverty and obedience as a Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita.

After her initial formation in California, Sister Mary Clare had pursued studies in psychology with a view of doing social work. However, what was really calling upon her heart was teaching, sharing the truths of the Catholic faith which she had so ardently pursued and embraced. After earning a Master's degree in Education and Administration, this zeal for the faith was lived and communicated in the classroom and as a principal. After coming to Wichita, Sister would go on to also earn a Master's degree in Theology from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia.

Sister Mary Clare was an exceptional teacher; in 2016, she received the diocesan St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Distinguished Teacher Award. She poured so much of herself into her teaching; she wanted her students to know the Catholic faith and God's love for them. Thousands of young people were influenced by her presence in the classroom. Before coming to Wichita, she taught in both California and Arizona. In the Diocese of Wichita, she formed and taught the young of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and St. Peter, all in Wichita, as well as at St. Mary Elementary, Pittsburg and Holy Cross, Hutchinson.



Sister Mary Clare Johnson, THM



Sr. Mary Clare was currently teaching middle school Religion at Holy Spirit Catholic School in Goddard.

Her gifts extended to mentoring new teachers; she would take many under her wing to guide and assist them. Education students would observe her in the classroom (many of them her own Sisters) and be inspired by her gifted teaching. One of them once remarked, "I learned more in Sister Mary Clare's classroom than in any of my education classes!"

More than teaching was Sister Mary Clare's love of Jesus. She had committed her life to our Lord and was dedicated to Him and His Blessed Mother. She was faithful to her daily meditation, Holy Mass, Holy Hour, Rosary and other prayers. She wanted to give Him her whole self. She chose St. Clare of Assisi as her patroness for she wanted to imitate the saint's love for the Eucharist, her simplicity and joyfulness. Sister cherished her time before the Blessed Sacrament.

Her Sisters will miss her companionship, kindness, charity and dedication. She was always willing to help another Sister, especially with her sewing skills. She had an eye for making school projects and projects for events look perfect! She was attentive to anything the Sisters needed, most especially, she assisted them through her prayers. She would respond to prayer requests with a prompt email or write a thoughtful note with promises of prayer. She loved spending time with her Sisters, especially outside, walking the property.

Her family summed up Sister Mary Clare's being: "Her presence brought comfort, her faith brought strength, and her love brought joy to family, friends and parishioners alike."

How comforting the words of Scripture: "Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9).

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

In faith we rejoice with Sister Mary Clare, believing, "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Is 62:5).

Remember the Sisters

DEVOUT MINDS AND HEARTS READY TO SERVE GOD

BY MRS. BRONWEN LEWIS

As I was sitting in the pew in Church, I was giving thanks... ..young mothers were entering the Church. One by one, children would come through the door, seek the font of holy water, bless themselves and wait for their parent to come through the door... ..sure enough, the parent would have a baby in arms, and taking the infant's hand into the holy water font, the mother would say the blessing using the infant's hand to make the sign of the cross on their tiny hearts and head, then herself.

A young father took the hand of his toddler, crouched down low, and let the infant climb on to his knee in order for the toddler to reach the holy water font, teaching ... patiently, lovingly, prayerfully.

The Mass ended, and I noticed these same families preparing to exit. After they gathered the baby carrier and the diaper bag, and straightened the books in the pew, they exited by way of the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary to say a prayer, then walked by the Holy Water font blessing themselves and the infant ... who was reaching for the font too. This reminded me of my own childhood, this witness led me to thoughts of my own mother, who patiently, lovingly and prayerfully taught me my prayers ... it was my own mother who prepared me for my First Holy Communion, as she had done for my 5 brothers and sisters also.

The Family: Teaching ... patiently, lovingly, prayerfully.

And so, it is with the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita: Teaching...patiently, lovingly, prayerfully. In their teaching apostolate in our Catholic schools, as they walk amongst the children every day, their mere presence is a reminder of goodness and holiness ... that there is a God and God is real. The children feel this presence, and are profoundly affected. Just witness the number of vocations coming out of Catholic schools each year along with the large number of devout young families such as the ones we see at Mass. I personally believe the impact of teaching Sisters in our schools has much to do with both of these things...where there are Sisters, these things happen no matter where you live.

For almost 50 years the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita have been teaching the youth in diocesan schools. The promise and hope of beautiful young families is now coming full circle. These young families that we witness are focused on teaching their children the faith, just as my mother taught me. In the process, they themselves are fulfilling one of the most important precepts of the faith...that parents are the first teachers and formators of the faith.

Father Joaquin Masmitja, founder of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Spain in 1848, knew that the world would need good formators for the youth...for the family...for the young women who would teach the faith to their families, changing the world through the Catholic faith through prayer, sacrifice and penance. 175 years later, the Sisters of



Remember the Sisters

the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita continue in this apostolate and charism, and the effects are as beautiful as the sunrise and sunset themselves.

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary arrived in Kansas in 1976, seeking a diocese with conservative Catholic values and traditions where they might be able to teach the faith and pray for the conversion of sinners and sanctification of priests, just as Father Masmijtja envisioned. The Sisters are now teaching the children and grandchildren of their first students...the students who first heard the daily greeting of Sister Giovanni Oliveri to her students, "Good morning my loves, my doves, my beautiful ones!"



Since 2015, when the Sisters opened the doors to their Novitiate House of Formation, vocations have been steadily received...to the point now where the Motherhouse needs to be built. How do Motherhouses get built in these modern times...by your generosity, of course. It does not just happen. It takes work and commitment from those who are compelled...whose hearts see the need and want religious life to thrive.

So many times, we hear stories of a donor who lovingly and generously makes a gift of a lifetime to their "alma mater." Alma Mater – the phrase haunts me because even though I fully understand people giving to their alma mater, alma maters do not always "tow a Catholic heart." In fact, so many are just the opposite. I ask myself, and by association I ask you, "is the work of the Sisters not more compelling than colleges and universities ... and, even more compelling than other "non-profits"? Through their apostolate of teaching and praying for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of priests, the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita continue to be faithful witnesses ... voices calling out in the darkness...shouting from the roof tops...God alone matters!



When the Novitiate House of Formation was built, the Sisters had many, many donors who had the heart to lovingly make "a gift of lifetime" through their own sacrificial giving. It was as beautiful as a sunrise...as a sunset; to watch it unfold in God's providence. Now, as the Sisters begin the quest to build a Motherhouse, gifts through planned giving, gifts of securities and stock, gifts of appreciated land, recurring monthly gifts, gifts of any type ... gifts that will provide a living testament to spread the devotion to the Most Pure and Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Finally, I close with a question to plant a seed in your minds and hearts. Are you the someone or is your family the family to set things in motion? Or, perhaps, you know of someone who has the heart, has the mind to do something beautiful for Our Lady.

SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY OF WICHITA

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