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Sister Mary Ignatius DeNay

Sister Mary Ignatius Denay, RSM, a Sister of Mercy for 84 years, passed away on November 14, 2006, at McAuley Retirement Center in Farmington Hills, MI. She was 99 years old.

She was the fifth of seven children born to Henry and Josephine (DeCaire) Denay in Owosso, Michigan, and named Josephine Loretta at her baptism. The family later moved to Pinconning. At the age of 14 she joined the Sisters of Mercy in Grand Rapids and one year later received the name, Sister Mary Ignatius. She made perpetual vows on April 26, 1929. Sister Mary Ignatius earned a bachelor's degree from Mercy College of Detroit in 1950, and a Master of Arts from Notre Dame University in 1957. She continued to develop her talents with classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, Michigan State and Western State.

Her 63-year teaching career began in 1924 at St. Mary's School in Cheboygan and concluded in 1987 at Mercy Center in Farmington Hills. Sister Mary Ignatius taught in elementary schools in Grand Rapids, Ludington, Hemlock, Midland and Rogers City before changing to secondary education in 1942. She taught art and served as Mistress of Boarders at Mount Mercy Academy in Grand Rapids. She came to Mercy High School in Detroit in 1949, to teach art and religion and continued there for 30 years, encouraging and supporting the artistic talents of her students and serving as chair of the art department. Under the auspices of the Foreign Study League for High School Students, Sister Mary Ignatius spent the summers of 1968 and 1970 guiding students through museums in Rome, Florence, Paris, Geneva, London and Madrid. In 1978, Scholastic Magazines honored her as the only art teacher whose students had won Blue Ribbon and Hallmark awards for 35 consecutive years. That same summer she was named Farmington Hills "Artist of the Year." Sister Mary Ignatius established an adult art education program at Mercy Center in Farmington Hills in 1979. When this concluded eight years later, she continued at Mercy Center as an artist in residence. She maintained her own studio and continued to create works of beauty and to receive visits from many friends and former students. She said that her door was

always open "because I want the whole world to come in." Sister Mary Ignatius was especially skilled in calligraphy, wood-carving and mosaics and was commissioned by local parishes, Mercy hospitals and the Michigan Catholic Conference to provide religious artwork. Over 30 of her mosaics grace the walls of Mercy High School and three of her carved statues are in its chapel. One of her sculptures, a life-size depiction of Jesus, graces the entrance to the chapel at McAuley Retirement Center where she retired in 1994. Her mosaics of the Eight Beatitudes were installed at Michigan Catholic Conference in Lansing when it moved to its new location in 2003. Sister Mary Ignatius had a keen mind and the ability to retain the name, faces and special memories of those she met. Her deep spirituality inspired her works and her friendships. Among her many friends was Midland native, Cardinal James Hickey whom she taught in elementary school. In 1991, he wrote, "You are in large measure responsible for my priestly vocation. Your joyful witness as a religious sister made it possible for me to believe that God was calling me... You have helped so many to believe in the truth and the power of God's love." Hundreds of friends looked forward to her correspondence and annual, personalized Christmas cards and marveled at how she remembered them and their families after many years. She celebrated her 99th birthday on October 26, and she delighted in saying, "I'm in my 100th year of life."

She is survived by many nieces and nephews, the members of her Mercy community and many friends. A welcoming service was held on November 15, 2006, at 3 p.m. at McAuley Center, 28750 W. Eleven Mile Road, Farmington Hills, with a remembrance service at 7 p.m. The Mass of Resurrection took place on November 16, 2006, at 10:30 a.m. at Mercy Center Chapel, 28650 W. Eleven Mile Road, Farmington Hills. Burial followed in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Southfield.

McCabe Funeral Home, Farmington Hills, was in charge of arrangements.