

In Memoriam
Sr. Margaret Ann Dirkes
July 16, 1929 — January 29, 2015

Dr. Margaret Ann Dirkes, 85, Professor Emeritus of Education, passed away January 29, 2015 at the Dominican Life Center Maria in Adrian, Michigan. She was born in Detroit on July 16, 1929, to Vincent and Alma (Yott) Dirkes, one of four children. She is survived by her sister, Joan Dirkes Vismara of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan.

Ann went to grade school in Gross Pointe, Michigan. She graduated from Dominican High School in Detroit. In 1947, Ann entered the postulate and at reception received her religious name, Sister Ann Vincent.

Following her profession of vows in 1949, over the next seven years Sister Ann was assigned to teach elementary grades in three parish schools in Michigan and Illinois. While teaching, Sister Ann studied at Siena Heights College in Adrian and earned her bachelor of science degree in 1955.

Between 1956 and 1972, Sister Ann taught math courses in five high schools, three in Michigan and two in Ohio. Meanwhile, she began work toward her graduate degrees. Sister Ann earned her masters degree at the University of Detroit-Mercy in 1962, and her Doctorate of Education in Curriculum from Wayne State University in 1974. Her dissertation was titled “The Effect of Divergent Thinking Experiences on Creative Production and Transfer Between Mathematical and Nonmathematical Domains.”

Sister Ann, now known as Dr. M. Ann Dirkes, applied for and received a faculty position at IPFW in 1974. She was tenured and promoted to Associate Professor in 1980 in the IPFW Division of Education and, in 1986 Ann was promoted to Professor. During her 20-year career at IPFW, Dr. Dirkes was known for her work teaching Math Methods to pre-service and in-service teachers, for her interest and work in Gifted Education, and for her many presentations at research conferences. Her early work in Creative Problem Solving evolved into a career-long passion for self-directed problem solving and metacognition, and led to the 1993 publication of her book entitled *Self-Directed Problem Solving: Idea Production in Mathematics* by University Press of America.

During her 20-year career at IPFW, Ann was passionately interested in learning about how her students used their own thinking to solve math problems. I remember one of my advisees in the early 1990s telling me about being in Dr. Dirkes’ math methods class: “I ask Dr. Dirkes how I’m supposed to solve this problem,” the student explained, “and she says to me, ‘How do you *think* you should solve the problem?’”. When I shared this conversation with Ann, she confirmed its accuracy — with one caveat: “What I actually say to them is, ‘How do *you* think you should solve the problem?’”. A September 5, 1985 edition of *The Communicator* notes Dr. Ann Dirkes was scheduled to speak to the

Fellowship of Student Athletes that week on the topic of “Student Academic Self-Direction: A Social Concern.”

Ann was actively involved in IPFW faculty governance. She chaired the IPFW Honors Program Development Subcommittee and, in January 1981, on behalf of that subcommittee recommended the IPFW Faculty Senate approve the creation of the university’s first Honors Program and establish an Honors Council. She also chaired other Senate subcommittees such as The Senate Agenda Committee, and the Curriculum Review Subcommittee, and served as chair of the newly named School of Education Promotion & Tenure Committee from 1991 until her retirement in 1994. In 1993 Ann was admitted to the Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society.

“Although I must achieve and contribute to research, teaching, and service or most assuredly lose my position here,” Ann wrote in her 1976-1977 Annals and Ministry report to the Adrian Dominican Congregation, “I need to be wary of professional competition which serves no charitable purpose.” When she was away from campus, Ann worked one-on-one tutoring local teenagers in math and tutoring adults recommended to her by the Three Rivers Literacy Alliance.

After retiring from IPFW in June 1994, Ann continued to read, research, and write professionally. She was working on at least two book manuscripts when, in 2013, her failing health led Ann to return to Adrian and seek care at the Dominican Life Center Maria.

Dr. Paul M. Terry, Professor Emeritus of Education at the former Florida State University – Lakeland and formerly Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at IPFW, remembers Ann Dirkes with these words in an e-mail dated April 11, 2016:

First, and foremost, Dr. Dirkes was a very kind, gentle, sweet, lady. She always looked at the glass as being half full and was always very positive. As a young, novice Assistant Professor attempting to start my research agenda and survive the 'publish or perish' syndrome, Dr. Dirkes was always extremely encouraging and helpful to me. You could mention to Dr. Dirkes that you were researching 'so and so' and she would listen attentively and usually say, "that is very interesting." Then later, when you checked your mailbox, there would be a book, an article, a manuscript or something that Dr. Dirkes thought would be helpful to you with nothing more than a yellow sticky note on it saying "thought you might find this useful. Let me know if I can help. Ann" If she could help you in any way, she would. She was a great professor, solid scholar and she definitely did her research. Dr. Dirkes was held in high regard by her students and most of all, her peers. She was a great asset to the IPFW School of Education.

Dr. Nancy Cothern McFarland, former Associate Professor of Education at IPFW, shares her memories of Ann in an email dated April 12, 2016. Nancy recalls Ann invited several Education faculty to her apartment for brunch. Nancy adds:

She also came to the old church I lived in (Salem’s Reformed Church, 1867) and

blessed it right after we moved in. When I became so allergic to cats that I had to give them up, Ann took one of ours. His name was Cheever. She adored him and took good care of him.

She was a professor who considered her students' work and faculty policy from multiple perspectives. When students asked about their grades, she replied, "What do you *think* you've earned?"

Dr. Carolyn Carter, former Assistant Professor of Education at IPFW and former Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Jackson, Michigan, remembers Ann in an e-mail dated April 12, 2016:

My personal memory of Ann [is when] she reached out to me when my mother died. And sent me a message that welcomed my mother to eternity. She was compassionate and scholarly, a rare combination. God rest her soul.

Dr. M. Ann Dirkes will be remembered by her friends and colleagues for these words she shared with her religious order in her March 1998 report:

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