

Irene Farmer, SC (1913-2003)



Born in Edmonton, on May 11, 1913, Irene was the eldest of four daughters. Prior to entering the postulate of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, in June 1937, Irene had attended Business College and worked for eight years as a stenographer and bookkeeper. Following her profession of vows in December 1939, Irene taught for several years in New York, Nova Scotia and British Columbia, often serving as local superior throughout this period. In December 1955, she was appointed Secretary General and then elected to this position in June 1956. At the General Chapter of 1962, she was elected General Superior and at the 1968 Chapter of Renewal, she was re-elected for a four-year term.

Having completed her service to congregational leadership in 1972, Irene began a 20-year ministry in spiritual direction, ongoing formation and renewal programs, including 10 years at the Summerland House of Prayer in the Diocese of Nelson, BC. Irene loved her religious vocation and lived it with great conviction. She opened houses in Peru and the Dominican Republic in response to the call of Pope Paul VI, and supported Sisters who felt a call to serve in the Canadian North.

Committed to the renewal of religious life in the Church, she studied canon law and theology, consulting and making friends with experts in North America and Europe. Her insights allowed bringing significant structural change to her Congregation. Through her involvement with the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) and International Union of Superiors General (UISG), she addressed the many inequalities experienced by women religious in the Church of her day.

Irene was elected to serve as an Executive Councillor of the CRC Women's Section in August 1966, and was elected Vice-President the following year. In November 1970, the Sacred Congregation of Religious (SCR) appointed her as Councillor for the UISG in Rome. During her three-year term, she offered a number of recommendations designed to promote collaboration between the UISG and national conferences of religious women, between the UISG and superiors general throughout the world and between the UISG and the SCR. She as well offered a suggestion that structures of dialogue be established between episcopal conferences and representatives of religious life. While many of Irene's proposals were implemented, others remain to be integrated into the life of the church. Sister Irene passed away on October 19, 2003.

LINK: <http://schalifax.ca/>