

Remembering Nora Marie Duggan, IHM Dec. 22, 1931 – Oct. 22, 2017



Our sister, Nora Duggan, was born on Dec. 22, 1931 in Detroit, and baptized Marcella at Holy Redeemer Church in Detroit on Jan. 3, 1932. She was the fourth of five children born to Daniel and Nora Duggan. Her father, Daniel, was born in Kerry, Ireland, and Nora Clancy, her mother, was born in Clare, Ireland. They met at a Detroit gathering of Irish folks newly come to the United States and the rest is history.

Their first child, named Nora Mae, died when she was just 6 years old from a heart problem. Nora recalled that Sister Leontine (Martha Schick) was the first grade teacher when little Nora Mae died, and she was a great comfort to their grieving mother. The next child, John, was their first boy; Daniel, (a second boy) died at a very young age from a childhood disease. This little grieving family was grateful to welcome Marcella, and finally, Henry, as healthy children.

Their father, Daniel, worked at the Department of Street Railways (DSR), up and down Vernor Highway. Their mother, Nora, was a homemaker, and she lived and loved her Irish heritage. She enjoyed the luncheons at Holy Redeemer Parish and she organized many family picnics at Irish Hills in Tipton, Mich.

Sister Nora (Marcella) remembered that while she was growing up, John was away in the Army and younger brother, Henry, was a bright little boy. Marcella attended Holy Redeemer School, grades one-12. She was impressed that there were so many sisters there – more than 50 – and so many priests at that time. One of her favorite sisters was Sister Wilhelmina Wascha. This teacher used to let the children choose their own seats. “You sit where you think you can learn best,” she would say. Marcella played basketball after school and did volunteer work, caring for babies with the Little Sisters of the Poor in Detroit. When she was in 11th grade, there was a “class retreat” – five days of prayer and silence during class time. During a quiet time in church, she remembered thinking about religious life: “If it’s all that they say (it is), I think I should look into it.”

And so, Marcella entered the IHM community on Aug. 20, 1950; she was received on Aug. 15, 1951, and given the name Sister Nora Marie; she made her vows in 1953 and 1956. There is an interesting note in Nora’s folder, indicating that she had many cousins in religious life – there was Sister Marcella Clancy, SSJ, and those in the IHM community. They are listed as Kathleen and Eileen Houlihan, Regina Knaus, Mary Frances Hogan, Brigid Wade, Moni McIntyre, Nancy Ayotte and Evangeline Nestor. Sister Brigid tells of a bittersweet time in her life, when she called on her cousin, Nora Marie. Brigid was missioned in California at the time. She got word that her father was very ill and preparing to die. Considering the length of the trip from California to Michigan, Brigid called Nora Marie, and asked her to be with her father – to sit with him until she arrived. Sad to say, he died before Brigid arrived, but she had the comfort that Nora Marie had been with him. Consequently, in Nora’s days in Memory Care, Brigid kept a loving eye on her.

Nora began teaching primary grades in 1954 at St. Martin School in Detroit. She was there for three years, and it was while she was at St. Martin that her cousin, Brigid Wade, was her service girl. Then Nora was missioned to Mobile, Ala., for three years. There she met and

introduced her parents to Sister Patrice Selby, IHM. Thus began a 60-year friendship during which their two families met and socialized together.

Nora taught junior high students in Detroit and Chicago. In 1971, encouraged by Sister Mary Patrick Riley, IHM, Nora went to Wayne State University as a full-time student, to become a guidance counselor. Having finished these courses, Nora was missioned to Immaculate Heart of Mary High School in Westchester, Ill.; she worked there from 1972 until 1980. She had a year at Visitation, in Monroe, in prayer ministry from 1975-76.

The better part of Nora's ministry was as a guidance counselor. She wrote this about her work: "The young women in high school have much to contend with, pulls to easy evil ways, difficult classes, sad home conditions and personal doubts; they need to hear and experience that God is holy, gives peace to their lives and can keep them blameless. Much of my work is affirming their goodness and giving encouragement and direction in their choices."

After six years at Aquinas High School in Southgate, Mich., Nora served as guidance counselor in several schools in Florida, from 1986–2006. Once again, Patrice and Nora lived together; however, they had separate ministries. Patrice went one way doing disparate ministries, while Nora was always involved in schools. It is interesting to know that the cost of living kept escalating where they were living, so brother Henry invested in a condo where they could live, paying a reasonable noninflation-driven rent, thus enabling them to continue living in Florida, and to continue in their ministries there. Nora wasn't sure when interviewed, but she thought that John helped with that.

John and Henry had lived together in Boyne City, Mich., and later in Florida. They shopped and cooked together and sometimes entertained Patrice and Nora for dinner. John, who also had a heart problem, died in 2012.

Nora underwent very serious surgery in 2005. The artificial heart valve that she received at that time, according to Nora's own opinion, "Is doing what it's supposed to do and doing it well. It was only supposed to last 10 years, and here we are at 11," she said.

Patrice and Nora retired in 2006 and decided to spend the next six months enjoying the beauty of Florida, followed by several months preparing their condo for sale. In 2007, Nora retired to the Motherhouse, where she became a well-loved driver/shopper for the sisters in Health Care. In fact, the pharmacist at K-Mart used to call her his "courier."

Nora was easy to be with – she always had a story to tell. After Henry, her brother, moved to Norman Towers here in Monroe, Nora and Henry would often go to Saturday evening Mass together and then out to dinner. She loved having Henry nearby.

Over the last few years, Nora's health and her ability to be of service to others gradually diminished, but her love of life and interest in the community remained strong to the end. Whenever she was asked, "Nora, would you like to go ..." Her answer was "YES" even before the sentence was finished.

And so, now we ask, "Nora, are you ready to spend eternity in the loving embrace of your Heavenly Father?" and we hear her joyous shout – "YES!"

Written and delivered by Roberta Richmond, IHM, Nov. 6, 2017