

**Remembering Jane (John Fisher) Farrell, IHM**  
**April 30, 1929 – March 29, 2021**



As our dear Sister Jane Farrell described it, “I was born in 1929 in the back bedroom of our house on Dexter Avenue in Detroit, Michigan, in the shadow of the Jesuit University of Detroit and Gesu Parish.” Shortly afterward, Jane’s mother wrote in the family’s cherished little *Baby Booklet*: “She is one big fat baby who goes to anyone!” There is so much truth to that statement, for over all of her 91 years of life, Jane enjoyed deep and lasting friendships with so many people – family, IHM Sisters, colleagues, staff members, students – whom she treasured wholly and with whom she also had such good times.

Jane’s mother, Margaret McLogan, lived originally in Holy Rosary Parish and when Jane’s father, Fred Farrell, came to Detroit from Connecticut for a work opportunity at Burroughs Co., he also settled in that parish. Margaret and Fred met at the parish social club, and “the rest,” as they say, “is history!” After dating for some time, they married and began their family of three children: Richard Delaney, born in 1920; Margaret Ann, in 1926, and Jane Kathryn in 1929. Later, Mr. Farrell transferred to the Ford Motor Co. where he worked until he retired, including almost two years in France as World War II was building up there. Jane often spoke about how significant her McLogan relatives were at that time, assisting the family in many ways, even though Grandma McLogan at times had to tell her and her cousins “to go to the little back room” when they were a bit impudent!

Jane attended Gesu Grade School and Immaculata High School as did her sister Margaret Ann who then entered the IHM Sisters in 1944 and whose religious name was Sister Thomas More. Just three years later, Jane joined too, but as she described humorously later in her life, “I lasted only two weeks! I was interminably homesick.” She then entered Marygrove College, achieved her B. A. in history and education in 1951, taught for two years in Detroit elementary public schools, and of course continued to have loads of good times with her Marygrove and U of D friends, one of whom is here today, Pat Regan Simon. Pat has tons of “Jane stories” from their long friendship of 73 years. But the call to consecrated religious life continued to unfold within Jane and she responded, entering our congregation again in 1953 and receiving the name, Sister John Fisher. In characteristic McLogan-Farrell family wit, her mother said at the time, “I’m glad we don’t have a third IHM daughter because they might have to name her Sister Sir Winston Churchill!” (*Archives Remembrance for Margaret Ann Farrell*)

In one of our recent conversations, Jane and I talked about how we learned to love God. She said without hesitation that she saw it first in her parents, always so loving, dedicated and welcoming. There was also the Jesuit influence and the IHMs who inspired her profoundly. She spoke often of Sister Christiana Hogan, her history teacher at Immaculata, and Sister Rosalita Kelly, her history professor at Marygrove. They both

taught her about the beauty of being in community where so many gifts come together collaboratively to engage creatively the mission of Christian education. “I learned from the IHMs the value of community and of communal and personal prayer,” Jane said. “I talk to God whenever I want. One of my favorite Scripture texts is: ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ (Ps.46:10) That’s it, *simply and straightforwardly*,” she declared to me. Each morning she nurtured that relationship by meditating on the liturgical texts, seeking in them what to talk to God about today and what to bring to God from whatever was going on presently in her life.

For the next 50 years of her life, Jane lived out these values of an intimate relationship with God and a commitment to community as a devoted teacher, counsellor and administrator. In 1953, she received the M.Ed. from the University of Detroit and from that year to 1958, she taught every single grade in several Catholic elementary schools in Michigan. Then, in 1958, she began six years at Immaculata High School where she taught religion, history and English. “I loved those kids,” she wrote in May 2015. (*IHM Sisters Then and Now*)

And how those girls loved Jane! Several of them wrote to her just a few months ago, one stating, “I paid attention to everything you said – in class and out – because you let us know that we could make a difference. ... You put up with all our silliness, but treated us as responsible adults. I wanted to be just like you. ... I’ve passed these lessons on to my three children and they are exceptional, if I *do say so myself!* (2019 Letter from *Kathleen Bryce Atkins*)

Another acknowledged, “You have been with me all my life. ... You are the one teacher that not only touched my life, but also left the greatest impact on it.” (2020 Letter from *Joyce Boldrini Twomey*)

Another wrote, “I’m reading Jon Meacham’s *The Soul of America* and I want to take history class with you all over again!” (2020 Letter from *Margaret Palczynski Dunbar*)

Another told me, “Sister John Fisher engaged us in serious study. She was a stimulating teacher and she smiled so radiantly. She had a sense of humor, too, and we could tell she enjoyed us.” (2021 Phone conversation with *Catherine Sheehan Heller*)

In 1964, Jane studied full time at the University of Michigan, working toward a doctorate in history. She went to Marygrove in 1967 where she taught history, was the dean of women, and dorm counsellor. It seems that she gave the young women a certain latitude, having been a bit of a trickster herself not too long before them! After three years, along with her dear friend, Marie Gabriel Hungerman, IHM, she transferred to Siena Heights College in Adrian, where each of them taught eager undergrads for six more years.

After a short time as an administrator at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas, Jane moved in 1977 to the Chicago area to assume the position of principal at our IHM High School in Westchester, Ill. Eventually, she was joined by two highly qualified Dominican

Sisters, Pat Brady, OP, and Marilee Ewing, OP – the “triumvirate” as they named themselves – to administer this very large all-girls school. They became very dear friends and Marilee is here with us today. Jane served there for 10 years and then relocated to McAuley High School in 1988 where she taught history and political science for another 10 years. After a few years in Monroe to recover from surgery and to work in our IHM Archives, she returned to Westchester in 2001, where she did substitute teaching until 2009.

There are so many tributes to Jane from all those years of teaching at college and high school levels, all bearing witness to her deep connection with God and the passion she had to bring forward the gifts of her students into full realization and to lead them to care equally for others through compassion and through well-informed political action. Let me cite some words from an undergrad at Adrian’s Siena Heights College, Chuck VanVleet, who is also here today.

In 1971, when I was an undergraduate, Jane invited a panel of young, African American, female students from Marygrove College in Detroit, to be our guests in the class one night. ... She introduced the young women and then literally turned the class over to them. She recognized that we mostly white students needed to see the reality of color difference and yes, the anger that came into the room, too, from their experience with racism, even at their young age. The class ran over the 9 p.m. deadline because, even after foregoing a mid-class break, we weren’t done ... we wanted more!!! Sister Jane Farrell – the nun, the teacher, the activist – brought us that learning experience and I have not forgotten it, even after 50 years!” (*Written comment from Chuck VanVleet, IHM Associate*)

One of her Chicago area McAuley High students, Joy L. Bivens, upon whom the school bestowed its Distinguished Alumnae Award in 2018, acknowledged Jane in her acceptance speech as changing her life from the way Jane taught history experientially. Joy achieved advanced degrees in African-American Studies, focusing especially on the *Great Migrations* north. Today she is director of Curatorial Affairs at the *Chicago Historical Museum* where she regularly engages Chicago public school children experientially with their history, many of whom are descendants of the *Great Migration* to Chicago. (*Joy L. Bivens as cited in a 2018 note to Jane Farrell from Elizabeth Pardo, IHM*)

In 2009, Jane moved permanently to our IHM Motherhouse. She continued to serve our community here as a driver, librarian and volunteer. She loved to read historical novels, autobiographies and biographies and she was always ready to have political discussions, giving “sharp as a tack” responses right up until two weeks ago! And, of course, she was also a social gatherer, extending a full welcome to her friends, with *ample supplies always* including shrimp and a certain array of beverages! During these last months of her life, Jane received such loving care from our health care staff and her IHM friends here and she always exuded gratitude for such attention. If you knocked on

her door, she'd say simply, "Come!" And we did; we came to her and then just a few days ago, we were called to let her go in this Lenten Holy Week time.

Yes, it is time now for *all of us* to let you go, Jane, into the fullness of Life in God whom you loved so much. But we know too the truth of a quote from St. John Chrysostom that you attached to a photo of your dear sister Thomas More: "She whom you love and lose is no longer where she was before. She is wherever you are." So, we know you will always stay with us, and we can *also* see you walking now into the *shindig* being readied for you with so, so, so many people gathered to welcome you! This time it is *they* who say, "Come!" We know too that *they* have the full array of supplies ready to welcome you into the truest of communities, the Communion of Saints. And so, we send you off now, our dear Jane!

May the fullness of Light, and Life and Love be with you!  
May you stay with us, too, giving us *always* your encouragement  
to love God with all our minds and hearts and souls  
and to pursue justice and serve all in compassionate love!  
Amen! Alleluia!

Written and delivered by Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM, March 31, 2021