

Remembering Josephine McNamara, IHM March 21, 1928 — May 18, 2022

Ps. 23 Only goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life...

Josephine Therese, daughter of Walter and Agnes (Tully) McNamara was born in Chicago on March 21, 1928 and baptized at St. Brandon's on April 1. She writes...

I had one sister, Antoinette. Our mother died at age 23 due to a heart condition. Antoinette and I were cared for by our grieving father and loving grandmother.

Later our father married Mildred. Mildred gave birth to two more girls, Jean and Colette, forming a loving family. I never thought to say we were stepsisters. Mildred was our mother and Daddy, our father. Mildred was the mother we knew and loved. Jean and Colette died early deaths from cancer. We were blessed to have nieces and nephews because of them.

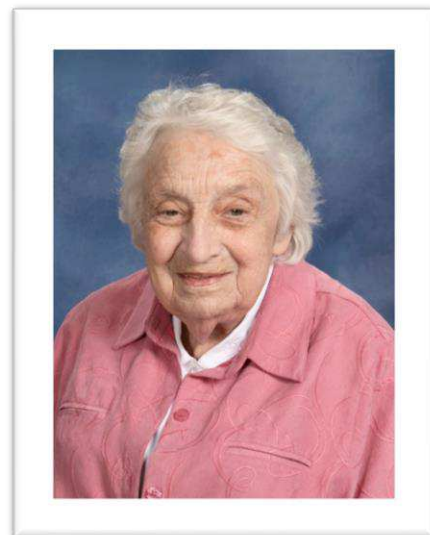
I attended St. Anne Elementary and St. Martin High School in Chicago.

In 8th grade, I first heard the call to follow Jesus — to bring His love and care to those in need. A Maryknoll priest came to speak of his overseas mission. Then, visiting the Little Sisters of the Poor and seeing the work of the Sisters of St. Vincent DePaul deepened my desire to minister among the poor and marginalized.

After a year of discernment and prayer, I entered the IHM community in 1945, having been introduced to IHM by my sister, Antoinette, who entered the community in 1943. I was attracted to the IHM Sister's simplicity of life, commitment to prayer, community life and the founder's desire to serve. My religious name was Sister Jecile.

When I was a novice, the bishop of Puerto Rico visited the Motherhouse to ask for sisters to minister in Puerto Rico. I wrote a letter to Mother Teresa expressing my desire to go there. After teaching at Mother of Our Savior School in Detroit, my desire to minister in Puerto Rico was fulfilled. I taught in Cayey, Santurce, Casa Rosa Public School, and evening adult classes. My 12 years there were life-giving, filled with happy memories.

Then, I accepted an offer to serve with the Spanish community at St. Vincent Parish in Pontiac, MI. I ministered in areas of outreach, formation of small faith communities and assisted in the formation of permanent deacons. The warm



hospitality, deep faith and loving support of the people of St. Vincent's Spanish community made me realize that my future ministry would be in parish work.

I am so grateful to the community for the educational opportunities that prepared me for my ministries: Bachelor of Arts, Marygrove College, Detroit; Master of Science, Barry College, Miami; Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry, Marygrove, Pastoral Ministry Certification from the Detroit Archdiocese and Training in Specialized Community Services.

In 1973, I joined the pastoral team at St. Gerard's in northwest Detroit, serving in Christian service, formation of block clubs, RCIA and leading prayer services. What a blessed 12 years.

Next came wonderful experiences as a pastoral associate at St. Michael in Grand Ledge. Again, I encouraged and oversaw 23 small faith communities, along with parish ministries.

In 1991, installed by Bishop Povich during Sunday Mass, I began ministry as pastoral Coordinator at Good Shepherd Parish in Montrose. What a joy to serve among these grateful and supportive people, offering spiritual and liturgical guidance along with the administration of the parish. My main task was to strengthen lay leadership in following Jesus the Good Shepherd.

After 18 years of this service, I retired to Monroe with my beloved Golden Retriever, Tobias. I ministered at the River House in hospitality and outreach. This work and the staff were such a blessing. I also visited the sick and elderly with Tobias, who I trained as a therapy dog. After my third therapy dog, Nicholas, died, I moved to the Motherhouse, continuing my visits until I had a fall which limited my mobility and ability to serve.

Sister's life notes end with a request for me to continue the narrative with, as she wrote, "whatever comes next..." This is the story of a life well-lived by those who knew her.

Sister Jo loved her parish work and was loved by those with whom and for whom she ministered. She was bright, witty, charming, always with a sweet smile and always had a helping hand. She was appreciated for her personal caring, hard work, deep spirituality, constant presence and warmth, dedication and love for the people.

Her style of leadership was more partnering than parenting, with a focus on helping lay people to serve as leaders. Over and over, I heard about her gentle persuasion, words like, "always asks for a favor, never a demand." She had a keen eye for volunteers, an extraordinary ability to find the strengths in others and use them for the betterment of the parish and a subtle way of encouraging people to participate in leadership roles with her gentle guidance.

Her great days of prayer inspired us all. She was, they said... a patient planter ... who watered the "garden" that is the parish with quiet prayer ... and gently coaxed growth

Sister had great devotion to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. She wrote, "Psalm 23

expresses the gratitude that fills my heart for God's continued presence throughout my life. It is a prayer that I have prayed for many years. Surely His goodness and kindness have followed me throughout my years of ministry. I have dwelt in the House of God, for all creation encompasses His presence and glory."

Her love for creation was evident in her devotion to her dogs. She walked our neighborhood several times each day; a very healthy practice and a good way to spread the message of God's love and care. With her little old lady look, sweet smile, elfish sense of humor, a good listening ear and obvious interest in others, she talked and prayed with just about everyone she met. No one was a stranger. And everyone knew her friendly, tail-wagging partner. I remember how, when Tobias was dying, she spent the whole night lying on the floor with him, comforting him until he passed away.

She was fearless in doing good. Once a car full of weed-smoking men was parked near her building. She walked right up to their window and sweetly suggested they might like to move along because the law might be passing by any time soon. I'm pretty sure these roughnecks said a respectful "thank you, ma'am," before they buzzed off!

And so, hers was a life well-lived. So many valued friendships with our sisters, not the least of them her dear sister Antoinette, and her family. So many loyal friends she met along the journey. This touching tribute says it well...

*You have touched us gently. You have left sweet memories.
You have shared the beauty of your spirit. You have given us love.
You have been a sweet, delicate flower in our lives,
Your memory pressed forever in our hearts!*

And now dear Sister Jo, this prayer from Jan Richardson's, *In Wisdom's Path*, is fulfilled:

*Thou my source and my returning, my beginning and welcome home,
be the path on which I journey, be the way that leads me on.*

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Delivered by Loretta Schroeder, IHM
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