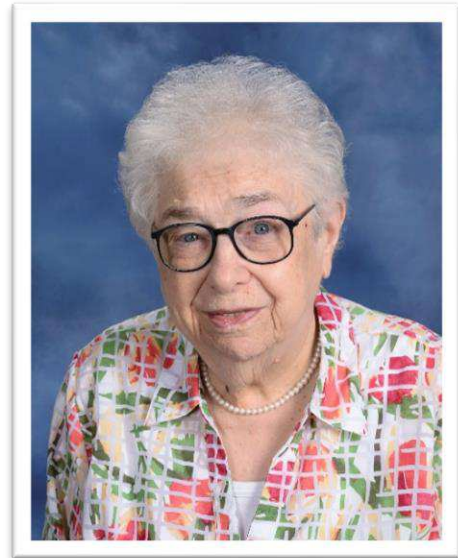


Remembering Antoinette McNamara, IHM
June 13, 1926 – Aug. 16, 2023

Mary Antoinette McNamara, daughter of Walter Joseph and Agnes Margaret (Tully) McNamara, was born June 13, 1926, in Chicago, Illinois. Her sister, Josephine, was born one and a half years later. Their mother, Agnes, died when Antoinette was only two and a half years old, and Josephine was just one year old. Their young, grieving father and grandmother, Mary Tully, loved and cared for them. They had no aunts, uncles or cousins from this side of the family.



After about two years, Walter married Mildred Hamlin, who lovingly cared for Antoinette and Josephine as if they were her own children. Mildred gave birth to two more girls, Jean and Collette, who formed a loving family. Antoinette often said, "It was never mentioned that we were 'half-sisters'; we were always one family." Mildred was the only mother she and Josephine knew. "This was due to (Mildred's) open loving heart to include Josephine and myself as her own children."

Their father's love was ever present. He worked hard and sacrificed for the well-being of his children. During the depression, when he lost his business, he was still there for the family and during the years when Mildred was ill. Antoinette knew her blessing to have experienced a loving family. Her two other sisters, Jean and Colette, died an early death. The nieces and the nephews still stay in touch.

Antoinette attended St. Anne's Elementary School and St. Martin Commercial High School in Chicago, Illinois. This school placed her as a secretary at the Mack Truck Company, where she worked for a year. In the summer of 1943, Antoinette came to Monroe as a postulant, having been introduced to the IHM community by Marie Fitzmaurice, the sister of Sisters Della Marie and Harriet Fitzmaurice, IHM. Since she needed to take some further classes, her Reception was in 1945, when she received the name Sister Jean Clare. First vows were in 1946, and final vows were in 1949. Josephine McNamara entered the IHMs just two years after Antoinette. Because their ministries took them to separate places, Antoinette and Josephine didn't ever live together, yet they always looked out for one another.

Antoinette's first mission was St. Agnes in Detroit in 1946 and 1947, where she taught first grade. Next, it was to Our Lady of Help and Gesu, also in Detroit. In 1953, Antoinette was missioned to Miami, Florida, where she taught grades two and five at St. Michael the Archangel School. There, she came to know Sister Remi Pauwels, who said that Antoinette was a lovely person to live with, very even-tempered and pleasant.

From 1956 until 1965, Antoinette taught the middle grades at several schools in Michigan. A fire broke out in the church during her time at St. Mary in Mount Clemens. The clamorous fire bell brought both teachers and children to stand outside for a long while. Ultimately, teachers and students had to move to Dickerson Public School. The sisters' convent was also damaged.

Antoinette spent 13 years as an assistant librarian at Immaculate Heart of Mary High School in Westchester, Illinois. Recently, she received this message from an alum of IHM High School:

Dear Sister Antoinette,

I was in your homeroom and we shared the same birthday. I think of you often whenever I drive by the old high school, which is now St. Joe's. My father died when I was a senior at IHM. Life hasn't been easy at times, but I am now 62 years old and working as a pediatric nurse at Loyola University Medical Center. I am hoping that you will remember me. I am praying for your comfort and longevity. Thank you for making such a positive impact on my life. -- Michelle Kotanova.

Antoinette also served three years as a librarian at St. Mark's in Cleveland, Ohio. She enjoyed working with the children when they came for books, although she claims she was pretty strict with them, expecting silence in the library. There, she met Mrs. Janice Hinsdale.

Antoinette enjoyed a year of renewal at Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, Ohio. She then moved to Chicago and worked with Sister Joan Mumaw in a new ministry. In 1981, after the sisters began open placement for their ministries, the LCWR Region VII established a clearing house to advertise their various institutions' available ministries. At some point, Joan was selected as the director and Antoinette was invited to be her assistant. Joan said that she was amazed at the efficiency and thoroughness with which Antoinette embraced this position. She had impeccable filing systems and remembered details perfectly, as well as each person who was contacted. The amazing part of the job was that Antoinette did not drive. She took three buses in the cold, windy city each day to get to the center. Antoinette told Sister Joyce [Duroske] that the most grueling part of this ministry was braving the cold and bitter Chicago winters, standing and waiting for the buses. She remained in this ministry for nine years.

In 1991, Antoinette returned to Monroe, Michigan, where St. Mary Conference Center claimed her as secretary for another nine years. Hired by Sister Mary Kinney, she worked with Sisters Joyce Duroske and Marie Clark, both of whom spoke highly of her easygoing nature and her excellent secretarial skills. Joyce wrote about those days:

I was anxious to move into the computer age and started to prepare the staff to use computers. Antoinette was a great typist and could produce perfect documents as requested. So, I procured a computer for her and taught her the basics. I left the typewriter in her office as a backup. But after some weeks of tutoring, I would hear the click, click of the typewriter again and the computer was abandoned. After some cajoling and more lessons, I removed the 'crutch' and provided only the computer for her work. And behold, she took to it and moved with us all into the computer age.

A former co-worker at the Center, now living in Massachusetts, wrote:

Antoinette was such a gentle soul with her own defining personality. She had a soft heart. I loved her sense of humor... not many saw that side of her. We were lucky and blessed to be let into her friend circle. I loved her thoughts on the various groups that came through St. Mary's. She was kind, helpful and one of a kind.

In 2000, Antoinette began working in the Monroe Motherhouse Library and did this wonderful work for 16 years. Sister Marie Gabriel Hungerman said of Antoinette:

She was always a sweet, friendly person, very humble; her classic statement: “I don’t know, I just don’t know.” But she did know. She was smart and learned new skills; she was a great and faithful worker in all her ministries, especially secretarial and librarianship. Antoinette dressed well and was always color-coordinated with matching earrings in a simple, elegant style. Antoinette was a grateful, loving person and much loved by those who knew her.

Aware of her growing memory loss, Antoinette graciously accepted it. While in Memory Care, Antoinette kept aware of world and political events by watching CNN and reading the daily newspaper. Above all, she looked forward to going to the dining room with Jo for Sunday brunch. There, Antoinette enjoyed conversing with others and hearing the happenings of community life. She was grateful to Jean Laubacher, who faithfully visited her with the latest community news, and Marie Clark and Kay Wiseman, who accompanied her weekly to the dining room. The health care staff often remarked to Jo that Antoinette knew all their names and brought joy to their hearts by her ‘down to earth’ remarks and willingness to help others whenever needed. Her love for our Blessed Mother was witnessed by praying the rosary every Tuesday, led by Marge Fogarty, who continued to be a friend of Antoinette since her first days in Memory Care. On her “IHM Book of Life” page, she quoted Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister and wrote: “One of life’s best lessons is that it is in ordinariness where God waits for us. It is in the ordinary that we too often miss the Sacred Presence While we touch the holy in our hands, we look for it elsewhere We need to understand that what is real for us is the only piece of the sacred we can be sure of in life. After all, where else can we find God except where we are.”

Written by Roberta Richmond, IHM, 2017

Delivered by Marie Clark, IHM, Aug. 21, 2023