

Remembering Regina Irene Fanning, IHM
July 12, 1931 – July 9, 2025

God is love and he and she who abides in love, abides in God; our God, who embraces each and every one of us just as we are. So too, with Sister. Regina Irene Fanning, an Irish Colleen, who loved everyone and was so loved in return. It was as though each person had a personal connection with her.

Sometimes all it takes is a single ray of sunshine to make the whole world lighter and brighter. Way back, in the beginning, when she first entered the world on that sunny Sunday morning, July 12, 1931, on the south side of Chicago, who could have imagined her influence? Baptized, Nora Louise, by her uncle, Father Paul Nolan, at Our Lady of Peace, she was welcomed as the little sister of Mary Catherine. Their closeness in age forged a special bond. Next came brother Tom and eventually, the blessing of four more sisters: Rita, Regina, Helen and Kathleen.



Her love for family was “off the charts!” Her parents were affectionate, prayerful and faith-filled. Mom (Mary Irene Nolan), unassuming and gentle, saw the good in everyone, instilling life values such as cleanliness and order in the home. Dad (Thomas Patrick Fanning) was happy, full of humor, loving, kind, always ready to lend a hand and a lover of music.

Regina gave him a poem, which he cherished, entitled “I’m the Daddy of a Nun.” At the end of the poem, the dad is concerned because he is only human and might come up a little short when he reaches heaven’s gate. The poem concludes: “But then I’m not a-worrying about the deeds I’ve done, I’ll just whisper to St. Peter: “I’m the daddy of a nun.”

Growing up on Chicago’s South Side, she was first, last and always a Chicago girl, loving the city and her team, the White Sox. Maybe, with the Holy Father in Rome and Regina in heaven, the team might do better. Sorry to you, Brian Lochner, Detroit Tigers fan, dear friend of Regina, for all the quarters she still owes you for this year.

Educated by our sisters at her parish school, St Felicitas, she was impressed by their teaching skills and happy dispositions. At the time, St. Felicitas only had two grades of high school, so Regina graduated from Loretto Academy in 1949.

Leaving home for Monroe in August that year, she just wanted to give her life to God. Received in 1950, she made her final profession of vows in 1955. And now this year, be it in Heaven, she celebrates 75 years as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She gloried in the name and had great love and devotion to our Blessed Mother.

Ever grateful for the IHM teacher-training she received during formation, Regina devoted her life to Catholic education. She loved teaching and loved the children. After spending several years in Michigan, she was delighted to return to her beloved

Chicago, where she served in several schools, including St. Felicitas and her favorite, St. Rene.

Over the years she heard from and corresponded with former students, who shared happy memories, told of her goodness, the good habits she instilled in them, her positive influence that they had passed on to their children. The list goes on with “great teacher, “so kind,” and “all heart.” Many were surprised that she still remembered them and knew their names and signed their letters, “respectfully yours” and “your favorite student.”

From 2000 to 2004, accompanied by her good friend, Sister Dorothy Joyce (Marciana) (a friendship that was to last for some 45 years), she lived at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Convent in Westchester while caring for her elderly mother. They lived on an upper floor where there was no elevator. No problem. I am told that her friends at the local fire station were only too happy to carry them up or down the stairs whenever needed. Can't miss those hair appointments!

After the passing of her mother, Regina volunteered at Epiphany School under the guidance of Sister Elizabeth Pardo, then retired to the IHM Motherhouse, which she was not particularly thrilled about at the time. Here, she provided a litany of services: driving, visiting, playing keyboard in memory care, shopping, assisting in chapel, secretary for Sister Jannita Compto's “Dramakinetics,” and for many years the sorting and distribution of mail, which she shared with her best friend Sister George Ellen Brannick and faithful co-worker, Sister Jane Arthur Duffy. This gave her the opportunity to relate to many staff members across various departments. Sister Regina counted our volunteers and employees, past and present, among her most precious friends.

As it became clear that her days were numbered, many friends came to see her. Have we ever heard these words spoken so much: “I love you,” or “Be sure to tell her, I love her,” or “I just love her?” Her relationships were lasting and sincere. How often she mentioned how she missed her oldest and dearest friend, Sister Juanita Bernard, in Puerto Rico.

Was it her warm, welcoming presence, that amazing smile, kind ways, sense of humor, happy disposition? Or those little “talks” when she showed such caring and made you feel she was your friend and confidant, able to sympathize and empathize, which left you feeling a better person? No one was small in her eyes; everyone was valued. She had a special affection for our health care staff, who cared for her with such love and tenderness. But ever humble, she wrote, “I have made many good friends who have inspired me to be a better person and have stayed by my side through thick and thin.”

Some of us are the hands, the feet, the eyes of Christ, bringing his love and care to others. She was the heart. Not just a nice person, gracious, grateful, genuine, neat as a pin, who lived up to the saying, “Look good, be good, do good.” She was also courageous in her suffering, strong-willed and determined. She really did “act for justice, love tenderly and walk humbly.” Above all, the center of her life was Jesus in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

In her *IHM Book of Life* page, Regina Irene (Nora Lou) wrote:

I trust my Past with its successes and failures to the Mercy of God.

I give the Present to the Love of God.

I place my future in the Providence of God.

Well aware of her declining health, Regina's Mission Commitment Form for the current year contains the words of Saint Teresa of Avila. "Let nothing make me afraid as darkness hides me, with no one but You to overhear my prayers. Let me not be afraid to dream great dreams, to pray great prayers. With only You to hear, I can be bold as I need to be, as courageous as my dreams permit."

Eternal rest grant unto you, dear friend, and let that ray of sunshine that you are melt into the Perpetual Light that is the Presence of our loving and merciful God.

Written and delivered by Loretta Schroeder, IHM, July 17, 2025