

Remembering Jean McInerney, IHM
Aug. 9, 1931 – Nov. 15, 2025

Rosemary Creteau, IHM, wrote this Remembering in October 2007.



Sister Jean had the desire to be a sister ever since her First Communion. She was deeply moved by Jesus' great love for her. She knew then that she had to return this great love by dedicating her life to Him.

Born in Chicago, Illinois (1932) to Bernadette Crowley and John McInerney, she was the eldest of three. She lived her first eight years in the United States. Her dad was offered a job as manager of Wilson and Co. Meat Packers in São Paulo, Brazil, so Jean, her sister Marie, and her young brother Jack spent their early childhood in Brazil. Jean said she was always aware of God's beautiful creation as she lived surrounded by mountains and the Atlantic Ocean.

Reading was always a need and a great pleasure for Jean. Thanks to her mom's guidance, she had already read most of the books on the high school required reading list by seventh grade. She equally loved dancing and she had a lovely singing voice. She had an offer to play professional tennis, but knowing she would enter the convent, she declined it. Jean was an excellent swimmer and she joked that, urged by her mom, she was the first girl to dive from the high board at an Olympic pool. All in all, Jean had an active, happy childhood.

Her education was unique. She spoke Portuguese, French and later Spanish. She attended three grade schools, two high schools and traveled extensively throughout Central and South America. Despite this unusually cosmopolitan upbringing, she adjusted well to St. Mary Academy and the IHM community.

Her family was used to the Redemptorist missionaries from Paraguay and Uruguay dropping in for visits any time they had to come to São Paulo for doctor or dentist appointments. Her dad set up a court so the young priests could play touch football. Of course, there was always a barbecue outside and a beautiful song fest of their seminary songs.

It was the Redemptorists who recommended that Jean and her sister Marie attend St. Mary Academy in preparation for college in the United States. They said that IHMs were great teachers and the girls would be near their grandparents in Chicago for Christmas break. And so, Jean attended St. Mary's for 11th and 12th grades. Though she had only been in grade nine for six months, her credits from Brazil seemed to place her at the eleventh-grade level. She later marveled that after only two and a half years of high school, she started college courses with Marygrove teachers. Sisters Christine Hattendorf, Sheila Gainey, and Anna Marie Quinlan were her favorites, as Language Arts was her forte. Sr. Thomas Aquinas, a wise directress, remained a true friend. She was a strong support to the girls who had come from foreign countries. After Jean received her bachelor's degree from Marygrove (Monroe Campus), she attended Wayne State, Seton Hall University, New Jersey and Villanova University, Pennsylvania, where she received her Master's degree in Spanish. Urged to continue on for her Ph.D., she declined. She was already a full-time teacher and thoroughly enjoyed teaching. When offers to teach at two different colleges came, she again refused, as she very much enjoyed the challenge and

spontaneity of high school teenagers.

Sister Jean was a born teacher. She spent eight years as a directing teacher for Sr. Marie Winifred. She very much loved the innocence and beauty of young children; however, she was put into high school at St. Mary's, Wayne and Holy Redeemer (10 years), where her Spanish came in handy with adults. After receiving several calls from Lumen Christi High School in Jackson, Michigan, she responded and spent 23 happy years there. Her motivation and guidance were appreciated by the honor students, as many of these students were advanced placed in college, saving their parents' tuition money.

Sister Eileen Mills, her principal at Holy Name, Birmingham, told her when she was teaching younger children that one little boy said, "I like being in Sister's room because the bad get good and the good get gooder." Jean always tried to live up to these encouraging words. Her students knew she cared about them, and they tried never to let her down. There was always harmony and joy in her classroom. Her students seemed to sense that she was genuine.

Jean had a knack for writing inspiring letters to those who needed a kind word, a talent she received from her mother, who was an English Major in college and a freelance writer. Jean felt that her ease with languages came from her father, who was fluent in many [languages]. Also, her friends in Brazil were all multilingual.

In the year of Jean's graduation (1950) from St. Mary's Academy, her mom and dad and young brother Jack returned to the States. During her first year of novitiate, her dad was offered an administrative position in Boston, so her family moved there, taking her maternal grandparents with them. Because of the distance, our former strict rules, her dad's five-year battle with cancer and his death at 52, Jean did not see her family after her first profession. After her mom died at age 68 from a heart attack, and we were able to drive, Jean and her good friend, Rosemary Creteau, who gave directions well, visited Massachusetts several summers to see her sister Marie and brother Jack. After Jean returned to the Motherhouse, she called her brother and sister regularly. She was so proud of them and their dedicated lives as teachers and administrators of children with special needs. Distance did not dull her love and concern for them.

Anyone who lived with Jean was aware of her generous, caring spirit. She was always trying to lighten others' burdens while carrying some heavy ones of her own. Sister Rosemary Creteau said she would always be grateful for Jean's loyalty and help as she struggled with health problems and her loss of vision. Jean was self-sacrificing and most capable in any emergency, whether in school or later at the Motherhouse.

When Sister Rosemary received "the letter," Jean returned to the Motherhouse with her and volunteered to be a driver. She was a pro in the emergency room situation at the hospital. She felt that helping the frail get to doctors, etc., opened her eyes to a new depth of living and serving the Lord. She considered it a blessing to be of service and have time for contemplation. She was frequently seen around the building helping someone or seeing to their shopping needs. One pastoral minister observed that she was "a behind-the-scenes" spiritual presence. She broke the tension in many difficult situations with her gentle humor and quick awareness of what was happening.

Even though Jean had taught for 48 years and missed young people, she felt that the years at the Motherhouse were to be years of service and deepening her relationship with God. And to this, we can testify that she fulfilled well. We will truly miss our gracious caregiver. She is

probably chatting away with Jesus, telling Him who could use his help here. We are sure he is smiling at her and telling her He will take care of things for her now.

The following addendum to "Remembering for Jean McInerney, IHM" was written by Barbara Stanbridge, IHM, Dec. 2025.

I first met Jean, then known as Sister Jean Pierre, as my directing teacher in 1963, in the fourth grade at St. John, Monroe.

Being in her classroom was like being in an energy field of love. Imagine that, after almost five years of what I experienced as a grueling formation of striving for perfection, to be fortunate enough to have Jean, who loved the fourth graders and junior sisters, each in their own way, hoping to have a little bit of what she had. Jean taught in a way that made learning fun and where the sky was the limit as to what you could try. After learning all the teaching methods from Sr. Marie Winifred (including not smiling until Christmas), Jean said teaching was about three things ... Love the students, be prepared and be yourself.

When I began to get reacquainted with Jean in these later years, it was easy to see that she still lived by a somewhat similar code, which translated as ... love, serve and enjoy ... her Constitutions.

These last years were a time of confinement and trial for Jean. Still, her room became her new practice field of loving those who cared for her, the housekeeping crew I know as Thelma and Louise, otherwise known as Angie and Loretta, and the many devoted caregivers who attended to her every need. It was touching to see the loving attention Jean received from the health care staff, and the attention she gave them, including sharing her favorite chocolate caramels.

Perhaps the most fitting way to close this Remembering is with words from her students at Lumen Christi in Jackson, documented on Facebook and painting a perfect picture of how Jean was.

- *I loved her class and her teaching approach. Sister Jean, the Spanish machine!*
- *One of the all-time great teachers. Sister Jean brought smiles and laughter to her students.*
- *Great teacher, even better person.*
- *Smart and funny and she loved her students. ...can't ask for anything better in a teacher.*
- *She was awesome, loved being one of her coochiepoos! She always had great stories. (Apparently, "coochiepoos" is a slang Spanish term meaning lovable teenagers.)*

These are only a small representative number of comments from her former students.

Delivered by Barbara Stanbridge, IHM, Dec. 4, 2025