Sister Ann Romayne Fallon, OP
1928-2019

“Looking back over these fifty-two years of life, I am overwhelmed and awed by the presence of the Lord in every moment, at every turn of the road.”

This was the opening sentence of Sister Ann Romayne Fallon’s St. Catherine letter of September 19, 1980. Her second such letter, on October 1, 1980, expanded on that thought: “The years have brought many experiences — some pleasant and others difficult. All have been a means of growth for me, and I feel my friendship with the Lord has been strengthened through each new opportunity to share in the ministry of His Church.”

Mary Patricia Joan Fallon, who went simply by Joan until entering religious life, was born on August 29, 1928, in Detroit to Joseph and Anne (Gough) Fallon. Both Joseph and Anne were born in Ontario, Canada, he in Norwood and she in Belleville, and met in Detroit. Anne’s family had moved there in the 1920s, and when Joseph, who was a tool and die maker, came to the city looking for work, he lived with a friend who introduced him to Anne.

There was a ten-year difference in their ages, but that “was no obstacle to a wonderful marriage,” Sister Ann Romayne wrote. The couple went on to have five children, Joan being the oldest. Margaret followed five years later; Sister Ann Romayne said in her autobiography that Margaret “always claimed that her parents needed five years to muster up the courage to have another child.” After that came Kathleen, then Gerald, and nine years later Virginia Marie, who died of pneumonia in infancy.

Anne Gough Fallon was twenty-one years old when Joan was born, and “this young but mature woman was able to manage her family during the hardships of the Depression and, together, my parents struggled to provide a happy home and a sound Catholic education for each of us,” Sister Ann Romayne wrote.

Her grade school years were spent at Precious Blood School, where she was educated by the Adrian Dominican Sisters. She attended high school at nearby Immaculata High School, which was staffed by the Monroe IHM Sisters.

Between the foundation given her at home and the one laid by the Adrian Dominicans of Precious Blood – and the fact that she had two cousins in religious life, one a Grand Rapids Dominican and the other, Sister Mary Margaret Fallon, in the Adrian Dominican Congregation – Joan felt called to become a Sister from an early age. On June 23, 1946, two weeks after her high school graduation, she arrived in Adrian to begin her postulancy. She was still two months away from her eighteenth birthday, but she was “very certain that I had made the right choice,” she wrote. “The call to religious life had come early and I was very happy,”

Her reception into the novitiate that December 30 was a joyous moment, made all the better because she was able to receive a religious name that meant much to her: Ann for her mother, and Romayne

1 St. Catherine letters were begun in 1980 to mark the 600th anniversary of the death of St. Catherine of Siena. Sisters were invited to pair up to write a series of letters to each other, telling about their lives.
for the teacher at Precious Blood who had been an inspiration to her and served as her sponsor, Sister Mary Romayne Gregory.

Her first assignment after her canonical novitiate year was to St. Edward's School in Rockford, Illinois. She spent three and a half years there – the beginning of what was to be fifty-six years as an educator.

Over the next several years, she taught at St. Mary School in Fort Walton Beach, Florida (1951-55); Rosarian Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida (1955-57); St. Laurence School in Chicago (1957-58); and Infant Jesus of Prague School, Flossmoor, Illinois (1958-59), where she was one of the first three Sisters to open the school.

"Those were wonderful years and I loved my work," she wrote. "The two years spent at Rosarian gave me the special challenge of being both teacher and mother to several of the young residents, and I was very sorry to leave after such a short time."

In August 1959, three days into what would have been her second year in Flossmoor, Sister Ann Romayne received a very surprising phone call from Mother Gerald Barry: she was being sent to Queen of Angels in Chicago to be principal and superior. What's more, she needed to report there that very afternoon.

"Many surprises have come my way over the years, but none was as shocking as my assignment to Queen’s," she wrote. "I was twenty-nine years old and facing one of the greatest challenges of my life." Had she written this St. Catherine letter any number of years later, of course, she would have found by then that still more surprises had come her way – including some quite major ones.

She had earned her bachelor’s degree from Barry College (University) in 1955, majoring in home economics, and by her second year at Queen of Angels she had completed her master’s degree in educational administration and supervision.

In 1964, Sister Ann Romayne received what she called “Shock No. 2”: she was named Supervisor of Schools for the Congregation’s St. Dominic Province. She spent four years in that role, and wrote in her St. Catherine letter that it was a difficult and unsatisfying time. Among other things, she knew that her first love was teaching.

Her request to return to the classroom as of the 1968-69 school year was granted and she was assigned to St. Jude School, Detroit. But it was not to be; she had been elected as a delegate to the Congregation’s General Chapter of Renewal, and she spent the summer of 1968 in Adrian. When at that Chapter Sister Julita McCarthy was elected to the General Council, Ann Romayne was sent to replace her as superior at Dominican High School, Detroit. It was a role that changed significantly over the next two years as the transformation brought about by the Chapter of Renewal took shape, and she left that ministry after two years.

She taught at St. Agatha High School, Detroit, for the 1970-71 school year, and was blessed by being able to be close to her parents’ home during her father’s illness and at the time of his death that year. The next school year, she was offered a job at as junior high principal at what had just become Thomas Beahan Junior High School (the former Our Lady of Sorrows High School building) in Farmington, Michigan, and spent six very happy and fulfilling years there.

In 1977, she was asked to become principal of the Congregation’s high school in Wilmette, Illinois, Regina Dominican. She was in this ministry during the time of her St. Catherine letters, and wrote, "The responsibility is heavy and the work is demanding, but my acceptance seemed necessary when
I considered the gifts that I have received through my Congregation. Sharing one’s talents in institutions sponsored by the Congregation seems so right and I have found peace in this new effort."

It was far from the last time her gifts and talents were requested on a Congregational or diocesan level. At Regina Dominican, she served as principal until 1983 and as the school’s president until 1988, when she was asked to become the Congregation’s treasurer. She resigned that position two years later when the Archdiocese of Detroit invited her to become the associate superintendent of the archdiocesan school system, and ministered in that capacity from 1990 to 1995 and again from 1996 to 1998. The Congregation called her into service as development director for Dominican High School and Academy (1995-96), as director of annual giving for the Congregation (1998-2000), as interim president of Regina Dominican (2000-02), and as Weber Center’s interim director (2002-04). In that capacity, she oversaw the building’s interior renovation, with Sister Joella Miller seeing to the exterior.

In her autobiography, Sister Ann Romayne noted that the project needed to be complete by February 2004 for the Congregation’s General Chapter, and “the final nail was being struck as the delegates arrived! Sister Joella and I breathed a sigh of relief and actually appeared perfectly calm as we welcomed Chapter delegates.”

She was still ministering at Weber, this time in the Women’s Resource Room, when she was called forth once again, and to a great adventure at that: in April 2006 – at the age of almost seventy-eight – at the request of the Archbishop of Anchorage, she and several other Sisters undertook ministries in Alaska. As an educational consultant, she opened the archdiocesan school office, served as superintendent, started a school, and handled countless other duties. When she left Alaska in September 2011 after five years, an article in The Catholic Anchor (October 2011) by writer Effie Caldarola referred to Sister Ann Romayne as having helped “change the face of Catholic school education in the Archdiocese of Anchorage.”

Returning to Adrian did not mean retirement, however. She continued to serve the Congregation, this time as assistant in the Holy Rosary Chapter Office, for six more years until August 2017, and until the time of her death found many other ways to help others.

Sister Ann Romayne died at the Dominican Life Center on October 6, 2019, aged ninety-one and in her seventy-second year as an Adrian Dominican Sister. She was remembered by her friends and those with whom she ministered as a combination of Mary and Martha: a contemplative woman who served in active ministry whenever and wherever she was called. Many also recalled her countless acts of kindness, including a former Queen of Angels student, Kathy Almaney, who in an email remembered how the Sister who to her seemed tall, stern and imposing was actually a kind and generous woman, giving Kathy’s mother assistance with Kathy’s tuition and uniforms.

“It was one of so many kindnesses that she performed in her life,” Kathy wrote. “She will be missed for all the big and important things she did, but she will also be missed for those many small kindnesses that meant so much.”
From left: Sister Ann Romayne at six months. The future Sister Ann Romayne celebrates her First Communion with her sister Margaret.

Right: Sister Ann Romayne Fallon celebrates her 80th birthday with a special Mass celebrated by Archbishop Roger L. Schwietz, OMI, third from left, and priests from Mat-Su Valley, Archdiocese of Anchorage.

From left: From left, Sisters Anne Worcester, Claudia Hinds, Lorraine Morin, and Ann Romayne Fallon line up for refreshments during the annual leaf-raking party at Oakwood House, Adrian, November 3, 2002. Members of the Anchorage community are, from left, Sisters Lorraine Réaume, Jackie Stoll, Ann Romayne Fallon, and Josephine Gaugier.

From left: Sisters Nadine Foley, left, and Ann Romayne Fallon. Members of the 2006 Diamond Jubilee Crowd are: back row, from left, Sisters Jean Fitzgerald, Laura Pesick, Ann Romayne Fallon, Joan Donovan, Edith Kathleen Zemke, Jean Librizzi, Georgina Luznicky, Beverly McEachin, Helen McDaniel, and Mildred Ann Huber; middle row, from left, Sisters Anne Richard Baker, Ann Patrice Remkus, Mary L. Russell, Anne Bernadette Stein, Joyce Mary Rybarczyk, Patricia Cecile Slattery, Denise Walsh, Therese Groulx, Elizabeth Francis Tekaucic, Sheila N. Flynn, Jean Irene McAllister, Jeri Renner, and Winifred Lynch; and front row, Sisters Barbara Wetterer, Marie Therese Guigar, Virginia Therese Conway, Jean Anthony Sporer, and Michele Gebhardt.