



Norma Jennings, S.D.S.

Date of Birth *October 10, 1934*
Date of Commitment *August 13, 1995*
Date of Death *December 28, 2015*

Norma Dean Jennings was born in Sacramento, California on October 10, 1934, to Dr. Ray Bartlett Dean and Grace Victoria Dean. She was the middle of 3 children, with an older brother and a younger brother, both of whom are deceased. Her father was an educator with a PhD in Education. He held administrative positions in the Sacramento area as well as professorial positions at USC and UCLA. Norma's mother did not hold a job outside the home but took in boarders and foster children, as well as mothering their own three! Norma's early education was in Sacramento schools. Though she was baptized at Sacred Heart Church in Sacramento on 12-15-34, once they moved across town she and her mother became active in parish life at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, also in Sacramento, where Norma received her First Communion in 2nd grade and her Confirmation during her 7th grade year.

As a child Norma had a love and passion for dance. At the age of 15 her parents allowed her to go to ballet school in New York City. She lived in a safe environment at Salvation Army and learned to live independently and speak up for herself. She then came back to California, to the Hollywood area to finish high school, returning again to New York following her high school graduation. Pain in both feet ("neuromas", as she learned in later years) eventually caused her to have to give up her dream of a dancing career. This was difficult, she said, in her younger years. It was while living in New York that Norma met a Columbia University Engineering student, Hal Jennings, who was to become her husband. They returned to Sacramento to marry at Immaculate Conception Church in Sacramento on July 17, 1954, after which they returned to New York.

While living in New York, Hal finished college and Norma went for a year to Finch College in New York City taking classes in the fine arts. She also worked for B. Altman's Dept. store for a while. Once Hal had his engineering degree he accepted a job offer at Aerojet, which was based in Rancho Cordova, California. Thus, they moved from New York back to California living first in Rancho Cordova and then in 1970 moving to Fair Oaks. They had 7 children, 3 girls and 4 boys. Six of the seven presently live locally in the Sacramento area. The other lives in southern California. Norma's husband Hal had early-onset Alzheimer's. He died in 1995, due to bladder cancer, not Alzheimer's. She said this ended up being a "blessing".

Norma's Salvatorian journey began when her youngest daughter was in high school and unhappy in the parish they were attending in Fair Oaks. The Salvatorians opened a new church in Orangevale, Divine Savior, in November of 1987. Norma connected with Fr. Bob and Fr. Neil right away, and then later on with Fr. Patrick. They provided much support for Norma when Hal became sick and it was in a Bible study group with Fr. Neil that she was encouraged by him to consider becoming a Lay Salvatorian. She went on an SDS retreat asking herself the question "How can I be on this Salvatorian journey with Hal needing so much help?" When she was told, "Hal is your ministry now", she became an Interested Person. The rest is history. She made her commitment on August 13, 1995.

Norma has been active in numerous ministries, both in the parishes where she has lived and also within the broader community. At St. Mel's parish in Fair Oaks Norma at one time started, and directed for 5 years, a pre-school age Sunday school program. She herself taught the 5 yr. olds. When she became part of Divine Savior parish she became active in ministry there. Among these ministries was her service in the ministry to the homebound--whether it was going to assisted living facilities or taking communion to private homes when needed-- and her service for after-funeral receptions. There were other ways also in which she served; these are but a few. In addition, Norma was an accredited Tai Chi Chih (moving meditation) instructor who holds classes at Divine Savior and, before her health began to fail, also at Christ the King Retreat Center in Citrus Heights. For many years Norma has been active as a volunteer at the Casa Garden Restaurant in Sacramento. This restaurant is run by volunteers of the Los Ninos Service League. All gratuities benefit programs at the Sacramento Children's Home. Norma has helped in many capacities during her service there--- as a server, a gardener, cook, special events planner, and décor person.

A common thread running through Norma's life, and in many of her chosen ministries, has been her love of the arts and her corresponding talents! It was dance in the earlier years, followed by her sewing for self, family and others, Later it was her membership in Ikebana International which is a Japanese flower arranging group within which is the Sogetsu school of flower arranging. Norma has arranged flowers for many funerals and parish events in addition to her doing so for events at the Casa Garden Restaurant.

It is only in the last few years that Norma had to slow down due to her own lung disease. Though her condition was not cancer, it was progressive and there was no treatment for it other than to provide her with as much comfort as possible. As the days went by and her energy diminished due to the progression downward of her lung condition, she courageously put herself in God's hands daily to take care of her.

Norma died peacefully on December 28, 2015. A memorial service will be held at a later date.