Sister Nancy Fischer, born on April 26, 1932, in Chicago, was the youngest of the three children born to Jacob and Emma (Danforth) Fischer. The family did not have a lot of money to buy “things” but they knew how to enjoy the gifts and talents each possessed.

In her autobiography, Sister Nancy provided examples of their creativity. “We made our own fun. My sister [June] and brother [Jim] were very creative! We had plays in our basement for the neighborhood children. June was the producer, Jim the director, and I was a performer and/or the “pin taker”—a pin was the entrance fee!

Sister Nancy attended St. Brendan School with the Sinsinawa Dominicans. She attributes her vocation to her second-grade teacher, Sister Mary Enos, who was her favorite teacher. Nancy wanted to be like her “in every way.” This was not case with her fifth-grade teacher, who told the children that only Catholics go to Heaven. Here is how Sister Nancy recalled this experience.

'I remember being very upset since my dad was not Catholic and I announced to my mother that I wasn’t planning on going to Heaven. I was going wherever my dad would be sent! Needless to say, Emma (my mother) was furious with this teaching. She had me speak with a priest friend who assured me that God loved my dad, and he would be going to Heaven. It was a gift to us later in our lives, but especially to my mother, when my father did indeed become Catholic. In fact, it was in a birthday card for my mom that he announced his decision.'

After Nancy finished seventh grade, the family moved. Nancy attended eighth grade at St. Nicholas of Tolentine School, where she was introduced to the Adrian Dominicans who staffed the school. She attended Lourdes High School and after graduation worked for a year as a secretary before entering the postulate on June 24, 1951, at the age of nineteen.

She received her religious name, Sister James Claret, at reception at December 27, 1951. In her autobiography, Sister Nancy explained the reason both she and her sister June had “Claret” in their religious name was to honor their brother Jim, who had entered the Claretian Congregation.

Because of illness, Sister Nancy had to be out of the novitiate for a period of time, but to her relief and joy she was able to make first profession with her crowd, known as My Mother, My Confidence, on December 28, 1952.

After profession, Sister Nancy was assigned to Blessed Sacrament School in Toledo, Ohio, where she taught for two years. Blessed Sacrament School and her four months of substitute teaching at St. Gabriel School in Detroit during her postulancy were Nancy’s only ministries outside her home state of Illinois.
In 1954, she was assigned to teach primary grades at St. Patrick’s School in Joliet, Illinois. In her autobiography, she described two events that occurred during her eight years at St. Patrick School. “My brother, Jim, was ordained to the priesthood this year [1954] in England. Also, while I was at St. Patrick, my father died in 1956.”

In 1962 Nancy was sent to St. Matthew School in Chicago’s inner city. She wrote:

*I loved the [six] years I spent here. There was a very deep bond among the sisters, although there was conflict in different types of administration. I belonged to a West Side Association, an ecumenical group organized to discuss the injustices of the day. We were active in many areas, for example, in going to Springfield, Illinois, to address issues affecting the people with whom we were working.*

During her time at St. Matthew School, Nancy completed her studies at Siena Heights College (University), received a bachelor’s degree in 1960, and began graduate study in guidance and counseling at DePaul University. She received her master’s degree in February 1968.

From August 1968 to June 1969, Nancy was assigned to teach at St. Bridget School in Loves Park, Illinois. It was a big change to move from an inner city school to a lovely suburban school in Loves Park.

“In August of 1969, I began my ministry at St. Joseph’s School in Homewood, Illinois.” With these words Sister Nancy marked the beginning of a new era in her ministry and personal life. The Congregation’s open placement policy gave Nancy the option of continuing to minister as principal of St. Joseph School for thirty-three years. Sister Nancy wrote:

*During this time, I almost completed a second Master’s degree in Administration at DePaul, but did not finish because of time restraints. On September 10, 1971, my sister June Anne (Sister Claret Marie) became ill and died at the young age of forty-seven. My mother, Emma, also died while I was at St. Joseph’s in 1977, leaving my brother Jim and I as the only family members. Jim and I were very close from our earliest years, when he taught me important things like climbing a tree! I realize that he influenced me in so many ways, especially in how to relate to people, as well as developing my sense of humor, and how to be loyal to my community. I learned much of this through my observation of his relationships. It was a great sorrow to me when he died on April 19, 2012.*

Eight years before her brother’s death Nancy developed what she described in her annals as “a rheumatoid arthritic condition which caused me to stop and put many things in perspective in a positive manner.”

After ministering thirty-three years at St. Joseph (1969 –2002), Sister Nancy retired and continued to live in Homewood, Illinois. Her last year at St. Joseph School also marked the fiftieth anniversary of her religious life. The parish celebrated Sister Nancy’s Golden Jubilee with
a Mass and dinner, attended by more than 300 people. One of the teachers prepared a video with pictures of Nancy’s life. The article that appeared in Daily Southtown, June 6, 2001, read:

What she knows is that after 32 years as principal at St. Joseph’s and 50 years in the Adrian Dominican order, her hair has turned gray and her attitude has mellowed. “The world is different,” Sister Nancy said. “Kids are exposed to a lot more now.”

Sister Nancy also received an award from the Association of Chicago Priests for her 30+ years of service to Catholic education.

On March 25, 2015, Sister Nancy Fischer died in Riverside Medical Center in Kankakee, Illinois, at the age of eighty-two.

During the wake and remembrance service, Sister Kathleen Klinge, Prioress of the Dominican Midwest Chapter, said the following about Father Jim’s death.

Back in December, Nancy had some heart problems and though she was treated with surgery, I suspect her real heart condition began three years earlier with the death of her loving brother, Father Jim. Her heart was broken with his passing in April 2012. Once during her hospital stay she told me that Jimmy went through the same heart surgery, and if he could do it, so could she!

Sister Jane Zimmerman, delegate of Nancy’s mission group, Dominicago, gave the following reflection:

Nancy was always aware of the other. There was a welcoming graciousness about her. It was always a delight to be a guest in her home when she hosted our mission group. Even when we weren’t in her home, we felt at home in her presence. I believe this is because Nance was a woman who was very at home with herself, and therefore she was to put everyone at ease.

In the mission group, we knew Nancy as someone who would take time to affirm the gifts that she recognized in each of us. We knew her as a woman of depth and good insight. It came, I believe, from her inner authenticity.

Sister Frances Fitzpatrick’s homily was based on the readings (Isaiah 42:1-7; John 12:1-11) selected for Nancy’s funeral liturgy. Here is an excerpt from the homily.

We have the capacity to look back but do not have the capacity to know what is ahead. Nancy entered the hospital expecting to come home the next day. Her coming home occurred nearly four months later; the final destination was not initially as expected. Now she knows.

She took each day as it came; despite pain she never lost heart, she never gave up. Once she realized that she had given it her all, she accepted without fear that she was being called home, the ultimate destination for each of us. The gift given her to die peacefully is one that each of us
desire. At different times during her illness she struggled with the inevitable...dying. The night before she passed she said, “I’m not afraid.”

Nancy now knows why she is not afraid. She has been welcomed by a loving God. Those who preceded her to God’s holy place are overjoyed... She no longer wonders....she is home!

In Isaiah’s words, “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am well pleased.”

Father Jim Hug, SJ, offered this prayer during the funeral liturgy.

Let the faithfulness and truth of our lives join with Nancy’s in compassionate, prayerful service, and in unwavering commitment to You, the saving Mystery of our lives. Amen