



Born in Detroit on Feb. 3, 1932, to Robert and Laetitia (Connolly) Lariviere, Sister Laetitia was baptized as Helen. She attended St. Cecilia (elementary) and graduated from St. Cecilia High School in 1950. That summer, Helen entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Monroe, and received the religious name Sister Laetitia.

After earning a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit, Sister Laetitia spent her early years teaching elementary students at Annunciation, Gesu, Holy Redeemer and St. Mary of Redford (Detroit) and six years at St. John High School in Benton Harbor, Mich. During the summer breaks, she received a grant to pursue higher education in chemistry and attended Purdue University (Indiana) and Bowling Green State University (Ohio), where she eventually earned a Master of Arts degree. She continued teaching chemistry and related sciences at Sacred Heart High School in Dearborn, Mich., through 1972.

In 1974, she accepted a position at St. Stephan Indian Mission in St. Stephan, Wyo. Her ministries there included science teacher, parish ministry and pastoral assistant and much of the ministry was dedicated to those suffering from alcohol addiction.

Returning to Monroe in 1982, Sister Laetitia joined the staff of Visitation House of Prayer, where she later served as director. She earned a Master of Arts degree in pastoral ministry from Marygrove College during this time. Soon after, parish work called to her, and in 1987, she accepted a position in Thorne Bay, Alaska, serving the parish of St. John Catholic Mission. She greatly enjoyed the native people and natural beauty of Alaska for more than 10 years. Upon her return to Michigan and time of renewal, Sister Laetitia volunteered her pastoral skills for parishes in Monroe and Northville. She then moved to Minnesota and served the parishes of the Diocese of New Ulm. In 2007, she returned to Michigan and served her community as pastoral care staff, retiring in 2012. Only recently, did she become ill and enter the IHM Health Care Center.

Sister Laetitia died April 8, 2017. She requested green burial.

Remembering

What a colorful and energetic life Laetitia had. Her mother, also Letitia, was born on a ship en route from Ireland. She went first to Canada where eventually she met Robert Andrew Lariviere. Both immigrated to New York, and eventually married. Laetitia's heritage was French, Irish and a bit of Scottish. The family name was actually Lariviere de Chapdelaine.

The Larivieres had four children, Robert, Laetitia, Pauline and John. Laetitia was born in 1932, in Detroit, and was named Helen Mary. The children attended St. Cecilia School in Detroit – it was directly across from their house. Baby John was born in June 1944 and their mother died in November that same year. Suddenly, young Laetitia had to assume the role of caretaker for Robert, Pauline and five-month old John.

At their mother's request, it was arranged that Laetitia would stay home while Robert would go to school, to ensure that he would finish high school. Every day when Robert came home, he would resume care of the younger children. Laetitia went to school for the last hour to receive and turn in her assignments. Laetitia spoke very highly of the kindness shown to her by the sisters at St. Cecilia. I think it was a great testimony to Laetitia that she could keep up with her schoolwork under those circumstances.

This arrangement continued for about three years until Aunt Winifred came to live with them and Tish was able to return to school. She graduated with her class and entered the IHMs. At some point in high school someone mentioned becoming a sister. Tish's response was "I will never be a nun, and if I ever am a nun, I will never be an IHM." Maybe not! In her senior year she began looking seriously at her vocation. What had changed? Perhaps, the vocation was there all along, but she had to live through all the other life experiences before she recognized it.

And so, in a rented car, the family drove Tish to Monroe in August 1950. She recorded that Sister Verita was postulate director, Sister Mary Hubert was novitiate director, and Sisters Catherine Siena, Immaculee and Clotilda were assistants. Laetitia was received in 1951 and made her final vows in 1956. Upon finishing college at Marygrove, Monroe, she began her teaching experience at Annunciation, Gesu and Holy Redeemer, all in Detroit. In 1960, she was missioned to teach high school in Benton Harbor, Mich., then back to Redeemer

and then to Sacred Heart, Dearborn. For three years, she served in religious education and in service to the Southwest Province; then in 1974, she began her work out west.

Tish and Sister Janet Provost began a life-long friendship in formation days. And so it happened that Tish and Sister Terry Lenihan went to visit Sister Janet in New Mexico. "We were climbing to a Native American village where cars weren't accessible," she wrote, "when we came upon some children. They saw we were thirsty and offered us water, which was in a depression in the ground. They pushed the scum away and gave us water to drink from their hands. From that moment on, I knew I wanted to minister among them."

Soon Tish got her chance and was sent to the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming. There she joined Sister Joyce Duroske and Sister Julia Seim. "I was at St. Stephen Indian Mission as a teacher and pastoral minister," she said. Supplies were limited – my classroom used bingo tables and camp chairs, and textbooks were cast-offs from other school districts." She taught there for several years and later began ministering to alcoholics and still later became a pastoral presence at St. Joseph Church in Ethete, Wyoming.

"I lived in a very small room in the back of the church, I could see outside through the cracks." She actually climbed the walls to her bedroom. Brother Frank had made a ladder against the wall that went up through the trap door. He also made a basket connected to a pulley so that she could bring things up. Coming down the ladder she had to be careful not to sit on the stove. That first winter, the temperature was -60 degrees. Tish found a wedge to put against the step into the hall where she could park her car in order to be available for emergencies in the extreme cold weather. Ron Mamot, who was the foundation director of the Wind River Rendezvous Magazine for the mission, would take Tish hunting each year so that she could stock up on deer meat. She indeed was a pioneer, shooting her own game.

Laetitia was changed by her experience with Native Americans as she participated in their culture. She received an Indian name from some of the tribes with whom she worked. Translated, her names are Singing Turtle, White Haired One, Petite Slave and Eagle.

After her years at Wind River, Tish returned to Visitation House of Prayer in Monroe in 1982. She wrote: "After nine years among Native Americans, I wondered if I would ever fit anywhere again. The Arapaho and Shoshoni people had touched my life; nothing was the same. But when I entered the Visitation gate, a feeling came over me. Here was space – trees, nature, the Barn with its earthy beauty – but there was more. I felt a sacred energy that emanated from the earth, that connected with my Indian experience." Native Americans believe that the earth is a living organism with special points on the surface where the life force intensifies. "I felt this force every time I enter the Lord's Barn or walked the lane."

As her years at Visitation drew to a close, Tish felt called to Alaska and wrote to the bishops of the three dioceses there, looking for her next ministry. "There was an opening on Prince of Wales Island. I was hired – and I accepted, sight unseen! The local priest was a licensed pilot, and we flew from community to community – the entire island was the parish – St. John's by the Sea – and it was huge. It took a month to reach everyone there."

"We provided pastoral service and taught faith formation to the parents so they could teach their children," Tish continued. "When the priest (the pilot), was transferred we traveled by jeep or canoe or commercial float planes." Tish even learned to fly and land the float plane. Rosaline Carbott, another long-time friend, traveled to Alaska to visit Tish. She wrote about her experience, "My travels with Tish felt truly like a reliving of the journeys of Paul in the early Christian community. Her gifts prepared her well to cope with the needs of survival and isolation in a world she simply summarized as frontier."

When asked 'what has it meant to you to be an IHM' Tish responded: "Many gifts have been given and growth in ways I would never have thought. The gift today is that the community is becoming aware of the majesty of all creation. The faith-vision of the Native Americans is coming full circle. All this adds to the immensity of God."

After Alaska, there were five years in Minnesota as pastoral minister in Catholic area parishes and then a return to Monroe in 2006. Laetitia worked as a pastoral minister in the Health Care for a few years, and then she retired. Most recently she moved to Memory Care.

As I close this Remembering, I am quoting from a letter written to Tish in 1992 on the occasion of the dedication of the new church, which the people themselves had built under the encouragement and guidance of Laetitia.

The letter is by the Bishop of Juneau, Bishop Michael Kenny:

Dear Laetitia, Words cannot adequately express how grateful I am to you for all that you have given to Prince of Wales Island in terms of leadership, support, encouragement and direction. I have a keen sense that not only the ceremony of dedication but the completed project itself is a tribute to your many talents and dedication. The project simply would not have been completed in the manner, form and beauty it holds without the kind of leadership you gave. Again, Laetitia, thanks so much for all that you have given to the island.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Michael H. Kenny, Bishop of Juneau

Written and delivered by Sister Roberta Richmond, IHM.