



Sr. Arlene sits in a big comfortable chair in a conference room with her legs tucked up under her. She tilts her head, looks off to the side and smiles as she thinks about how she came to the IHM community. She attended a high school in Mount Clemens where IHM sisters taught. She switched high schools for her senior year to a school where the Racine Dominican Sisters taught. The draw to join each community was strong. Sr. Arlene visited each community during her senior year in high school

During her visit to the convent of the Racine Dominicans, Sr. Arlene lived with the postulants for a couple of days and enjoyed many activities that introduced the community. Later, she came to Monroe to spend the day with the IHM community. It was a dark and dreary day and Sr. Arlene remembers thinking, “No way, no how am I coming here.” But in the end, a gift she bought her mother made her choice apparent.

“The way I made my decision was we had gone to Bob Lo and I always bought my mother something when I went away. Well, I bought this planter, and the nun who was mentoring the trip looked at the planter and said, ‘I guess you made your decision.’ I looked down at the planter and it was a nun in blue. I thought ‘yes, I guess I did make my decision. The blue nuns.’”

Sr. Arlene was drawn to the community because it would afford her the opportunity to teach. Her first mission was teaching second grade at Sacred Heart in Dearborn. After the two years of teaching second graders, she taught high school. While at Sacred Heart, Sr. Arlene became involved in the civil rights movement supporting the work of Martin Luther King Jr. She attended civil rights meetings and worked on getting the word out to others. She remembers the day Dr. King was killed.

“The day that Martin Luther King Jr. died, I found it out as I was going over to the school. Our practice for prayer was always mentioning a few things. So I did tell the students that day that today was something special. And I started crying. I had this little boy whose family was very active in that movement. He was in the back of the classroom and said ‘that’s all right sister that’s all right, I’ll tell them about it. Go to the back of the room and get a hold of yourself.’ He was in kindergarten.” Sr. Arlene laughs as she recalls the precocious boy.

Sr. Arlene then went to Florida where she taught high school juniors and seniors for two years. During this time, she became certified to teach high school. Shortly after getting her certification, Sr. Arlene’s career path made an abrupt change. She went to work as the head of the secretarial pool for the Archdiocese in Miami. She worked with the superintendent of schools and people in charge of other areas of education. Then she substituted for the bishop’s secretary, which led to her going with the bishop as his secretary when he was given a diocese in Pensacola-Tallahassee. This required Sr. Arlene to perform tasks she had never done before, such as setting up

the entire office, order equipment and supplies and overseeing the move. Sr. Arlene was undaunted. Later she would come to appreciate her ability to roll up her sleeves and learn on the fly when she found herself in another novel situation.

The bishop was once again moved to Corpus Christi and Sr. Arlene was asked to join him. This time she was made executive secretary. During her last two years at the Corpus Christi diocese, Sr. Arlene was appointed chancellor, only the third woman chancellor in the United States. Unsure of her role, once again she rolled up her sleeves and dug in. She oversaw the administration of pastoral care and the offices of archives and human resources. She recalls fondly her time as chancery.

“When I was chancery in Pensacola I use to go down and visit the offices. When they gave me my good-bye party, well you don’t know what kind of effect you have on others. But they were very warm. And they told me at that time, when I came down to the offices, they thought I was checking up on them. It wasn’t until a year later that they realized I wasn’t... It was amazing to me. This guy was in maintenance, he really didn’t take part in anything, but on my last day, the day I left, he dressed all in black because he was sorry I was leaving. That really touched me.”

After being a chancellor for two years, Sr. Arlene took a sabbatical for a year where she concentrated on spiritual renewal. Feeling refreshed, she took a job as a secretary at St. Louis Community College in Missouri. She came back to Michigan for a time to take care of her ailing parents. While in Michigan she worked in several offices: the Congregational Business Office in Monroe, the Detroit Health Department and Convent House. She also worked in the Development office at Marion High School. She discontinued working in these offices to take care of her parents full time until they died. Currently, Sr. Arlene works as the secretary in pastoral care office at the Motherhouse.

Sr. Arlene enjoys working in pastoral care; however, it is hard for her to see other sisters’ health decline. “That’s one of the hard things about living here, watching the sisters who I’ve interacted with over the years get sick. But more if they get dementia and remembering how they were.”

