

Obituary



Sister Lucienne LeBlanc, IHM, 93, died Feb. 26, 2016, in the IHM Health Care Center, Monroe.

Sister Lucienne was one of six children of Hormisdas and Mary (Poisson) LeBlanc. Born on Sept. 20, 1922, in Tingwick, Quebec, Canada, she was baptized Lucienne. Her early education began at St. Patrick in Quebec and continued at the Dart School, St. Michael and St. Mary High School when the family moved to Flint, Mich. After graduation from St. Mary High School, she entered the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe in 1941 and received the religious name, Marie Gonzaga.

Sister Lucienne earned a bachelor's degree from Marygrove College, Detroit, and a Master of Arts from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. She taught in formal education for 48 years at St. John, Jackson, Mich.; St. Cecilia, Detroit; St. Joseph, Monroe, Mich.; Assumption, Albuquerque, N.M.; St. John, Fenton, Mich.; Sacred Heart, Auburn Heights, Mich.; St. Michael, Flint, Mich.; St. Felicitas, Chicago; and St. Peter Claver and Bishop State Community College, Mobile, Ala.

Following 10 years at Bishop State College, Sister Lucienne served in pastoral ministry at Holy Family Parish in Mobile, before moving to Arizona in 1986. She returned to teaching in adult education at Rio Salado Community College, Phoenix; Glendale Community College, Glendale; and Mesa and Phoenix Community Colleges, Arizona. She later served as a tutor and volunteer at Glendale until her retirement in 2006. Sister Lucienne returned to the IHM Motherhouse in 2005 and entered the IHM Health Care Center in 2007.

Remembering

In her *Book of Life* entry, Lucienne wrote,

I was born September 20, 1922, in the village of Tingwick, Quebec, Canada. My first recollection of life around me was that of singing on the telephone while sitting on my father's lap.

I made my First Confession and First Communion at age seven in Saint Patrice (Patrick) Church in Tingwick. That January my mother brought her five children to Flint, Michigan, where my father was settled and working in a GM plant.

I learned English in the Dort and Saint Michael schools [in Flint]. Meeting my first IHM sister I felt the first sign of a vocation....

My sister Jeanne (Sister Lucine) told me in my senior year to make a novena to Mary before the Feast of the Annunciation, 1941. In the evening of that day, I was strongly moved to write to Mother Ruth to be accepted in the IHM community. There was a bright light in the room and I know that I could not, not have written that letter. Mother Ruth... sent a welcoming letter. On June 21, 1941, I arrived at the Motherhouse in Monroe. I was received on January 2, 1942. I was professed January 2, 1944.

That brief introduction was Lucienne's preface to a long and active life as a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Of French ethnicity, she was the proud daughter of Hormisdas and Mary (Poisson) LeBlanc. Lucienne, given the name Laura at baptism, was the loving sibling of Maurice, Irma (who died in infancy), Jeanne, Rita and Paul. Like her older sister Jeanne, she joined the IHMs in that same spirit of faith and action for the poor with readiness to go wherever needed.

And go she did. Lucienne began at St. John, Jackson, Mich., in 1944, teaching third- and fourth-graders. She continued in elementary school until 1971-72, when she taught grades five and six at St. Peter Claver School in Mobile, Ala. Following a year as education coordinator in Mobile, Lucienne moved into education with junior college students and into pastoral ministry in parishes in the American South and West. In 2006, after completing seven years as reading specialist at Glendale Community College in Arizona, Lucienne retired to the Motherhouse.

From those early years through her final years of ministry, Lucienne was a busy learner. A bachelor's degree from Marygrove College and a master's degree from the University of Albuquerque, N.M., gave her firm footing as a teacher. She became an educator with specialization in teaching reading and English as a Second Language (ESL). Along the way she pursued studies at the University of Detroit; the College of St. Joseph, New Mexico; Michigan State University; Whittier College, California; and the University of South Alabama. These learnings equipped her to help many a challenged student and to offer adult learners responses to take their place in a changing Church. Kim Hendrick, an IHM Volunteer, noted that Lucienne "liked anything that made her mind work." Lucienne willingly tarried at the art displays on Ground Floor and "checked out the books on the bench" outside the Amazon storage room. She often bought a book or two and wanted to purchase a few for Kim. Lucienne loved to go everywhere, see everything. "She was quite the social butterfly," said Kim. When Kim took her on Tuesdays to Mass and to supper in the Motherhouse Dining Room, Lucienne always "sat facing outward at table" so she would know what was going on.

Active faith, ministry to the marginalized and willing service expressed the heritage of her family and of the IHM congregation, but Lucienne has left her own mark among us. Her singular personality evokes multiple memories. With a lively sense of humor and sociability and a love of people and parties, she drew friends from Michigan to Illinois, from Alabama to Arizona. A dedicated sports fan, she rooted for any team of the city where she resided. When the games were televised, she followed them closely. She could not be visited during a game. No interruptions were allowed.

She had a big commitment to care of the environment. Even during her most recent stay at the hospital, Lucienne tried to save all the newspapers and magazines. She directed the sister visitors to take them to the Motherhouse for recycling.

Friends smiled as they described Lucienne: "independent," some said. Several remarked, "Lucienne was a character!" She was "feisty." Nurses and aides found her to be a lively and grateful resident. Co-workers described Lucienne as "popular with students" and noted that she called herself "a renegade nun."

Mary Ann Mahoney has known Lucienne over the years. She recounts an incident when both were in the Frequent Flyers Mission Unit. Members came from long distances and Lucienne packed her bags for an overnight stay. This included the paring knife she used to cut her breakfast apple.

Of course, the paring knife was discovered at the airport and the agent removed it. Very distressed, Lucienne begged to keep it. That failing, she asked the agent to save it for her so she could reclaim her paring knife on her return trip. Regrettably, Lucienne lost her paring knife.

In another story, Celeste Schoppy recalls obliging Lucienne's desire to renew her French speaking ability. Celeste signed out one of the few Motherhouse library books in French, a Christmas tale. Several attempts to return the book failed because Lucienne said she was still using it to perfect her French. Celeste moved on to other tasks and forgot about the book until Anne Marie Murphy contacted her. Where was the little French volume? Lucienne claimed to know nothing about it. It took some searching before it was retrieved from Lucienne's room. She had already put her own name inside the volume. She was certain it was hers. After all, she grew up speaking French.

Celeste recalls how Lucienne loved to "go fast" in her wheelchair. She obliged her now and then with a swift trip down an empty corridor just for the pleasure of it.

Ever the participant, many of us recall that Lucienne usually had a question or comment at community meetings. And we came to know her well in Chapel, armed as she was with her voluminous handbag stretched precariously across her lap and her extra books and pamphlets stashed on either side. Since her hearing was impaired, sometimes we recognized Lucienne's voice singing the last line of a song everyone else had completed.

Lucienne treasured her family ties. Lucienne was in Mobile in 1981 as was her sister Jeanne, who died in a tragic car-and-truck accident there. It was a blessing to be living near Jeanne in this painful time. Not long after, however, Lucienne moved to Phoenix to help her nephew in the care of his three young children. How she loved her nieces and nephews and their children. When their children grew older and left home, her sister, Rita, and brother-in-law, Al, invited Lucienne to live with them.

At the same time, she taught ESL at local junior colleges did pastoral work at St. Jerome Parish and volunteered at the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Later, in Phoenix, Lucienne became a member of the Religious Life Committee for the Diocese of Phoenix.

In 2006, Lucienne drew her many active years of ministry to a close and retired to the Motherhouse. Here we discovered her lively presence in community gatherings. Whether she was at a social event, a liturgy or retreat offering, an educational session, we soon knew Lucienne was actively present. She took to heart the advice of St. Alphonsus, our patron, to "never stop walking." Her legs might not move her along anymore, but an inner energy to run the race of which St. Paul speaks drew her ever forward. Her eyes are closed to time's dailiness, but now she sees by eternal light.

God welcomes you, Lucienne. You have outrun your wheel chair. Thank you for your energetic presence among God's people. Be an advocate for us, as we, too, pursue the call into our evolving future.

Written and delivered by Joan Glisky, IHM
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