

Remembering C. Vita Pierce, IHM

Dec. 24, 1943 – Aug. 17, 2023



Good morning! I echo Pat's words of welcome to each of you who are with us today to mourn the loss of Vita but also to *rejoice* for "she fought the good fight, finished the race and now has won the prize of life eternal." She diligently searched for God throughout her life, probing with her brilliant mind and engaging with her loving heart.

Vita was born in Detroit to Gustave and Catherine (Cosgrove) Pierce on Christmas Eve 1943. She was joined by brothers Gustave and William and sisters Pearl and Mary Eleanor, all of whom she joins in heaven. Vita joined the IHM community in 1962 and would have celebrated her 50th Jubilee in 2024. She held a long career and ministry at Wyandotte General/Henry Ford Hospital for over 30 years and

multiple ministries in the private sector and as a supervisor to psychologists in training.

I met Vita as I transferred from IHM Immaculata (West Chester, Pennsylvania) to the IHMs of Monroe. She invited me for a day with her classmates at Sister Regina Affholter's family cottage in Irish Hills. Everyone relaxed and enjoyed the day away from ministries and studies. I was well received by the group and to my delight became an honorary member of their IHM class. As Saint Paul said, "All are welcome--some by birth and some by adoption!"

I came to appreciate Vita's many gifts: her thoughtfulness and generosity, the sense that she was always listening (even when she pretended not to be!), and her ability to offer benign interpretations of everyone with whom she came in contact and musings on the "wonderful world of the unconscious." So strong in her training and faith, she claimed that she never feared her patients in the closed inpatient unit.

Vita and Sister Therese LeBlanc lived in the Wyandotte area of Vita's ministry for many years. They offered their home as a haven of hospitality to guests. If ever you watched a movie with them, within the first 10 minutes, you experienced Vita's insight to immediately diagnose the protagonist and offer a detailed prediction of the outcome. She was so often correct that she was the winner of the dime and quarter-cent bets that had been waged.

Another benefit of Vita's hospitality was her home as a place for reflection, solitude and contemplation through the beauty of flowers, art, music and many books! It was as if the ways she recharged from psychological ministry, as well as being an intensely private person, were gifts offered to her guests.

Vita was diligent in life-long learning. She loved discovering new things and the future edge of her career ministry. As a young clinician, Vita went alone to a conference

featuring keynote speaker Jean Houston in Washington, D.C. She listened intently as Houston expounded the step-by-step human psychological evolution process and the earliest stirrings of humanity.

On Vita's page of the *IHM Book of Life*, she shares her love of the sea. She found God easily at the seaside. Mary Fran Gilleran once suggested that five class members celebrate our 50th birthdays with an overnight sailboat adventure. Captain Sarah, the skipper of a 30-foot sailboat, was hired and the classmates donned bright blue "Great Lakes Sailing for Women" tee shirts. While the shirts looked very nautical, our seamanship needed help! Captain Sarah attempted to teach us how to tie basic knots used aboard the little skiff. On Sunday, as we were supposed to enter choppy Lake Michigan, the Lake was alive with rolling waves. As Captain battened down the hatch, she sent Mary Katherine Hamilton forward to lower the sails. With the power of the wind and the waves, Mary Katherine decided she did not want to end her life bobbing up and down on Lake Michigan. I was then sent to rescue Mary Katherine, who had wrapped her arms around the boom. Instead of saving her, I, too, wrapped myself around the boom as we both hung on for dear life. We looked back and there was Vita, fearlessly at the helm, enjoying every minute of our perilous journey! This episode was the epitome of Vita: a touch of adventure while enjoying the camaraderie of a boatful of friends. It calls to mind the Gospel where Jesus stills the storm to a whisper. With God's help, Vita could bring the boat ashore, for she knew that the real captain of that boat was God. She trusted that God would help her get that little boat home.

Last Thursday at St. Mary Livonia Hospital, after a tempestuous journey of ups and downs, God stilled the storm of her life to a whisper and helped put her hand on the wheel and steer peacefully toward the shore of everlasting life.

Vita's *IHM Book of Life* page shows a picture of a sailboat and the words of John Masefield, "I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and the sky, and all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by."

Vita, as we gather all hands on deck until the sailors hear the skipper's call, "Cast off, mateys! May God be with ye all, tossing on the deep blue sea." Blessings on your Grand Voyage, Vita! Ships Ahoy!

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Delivered by Mary Bea Keeley, IHM, Aug. 24, 2023

NB: Additional biographical and ministerial information was added for publication.