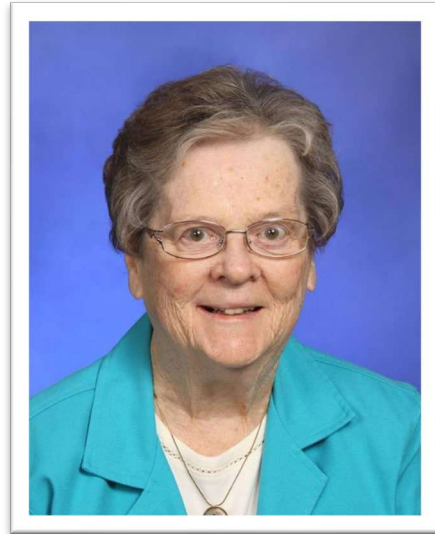


Remembering Patricia Ann (Helen Mary) Aseltyne, IHM July 25, 1927–Sept. 7, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Just a little over a month ago, we were all gathered in this chapel to celebrate my final profession on August 3. About a week before my vows, I went up to Pat's room to visit with her. When I walked into her room, she took one look at me and without even saying hello, she said, "Well, they're keepin' me on ice for another week." In this humorous encounter, we see deeper truths about Pat: She was a woman of her word, a woman of abiding love, generosity, wisdom and impeccable humor.

When reflecting on her life, Pat wrote, "When I ask myself, what do I value most in life? Where do I feel most at home (at ease)? The answer comes readily: When I am with people who share their life with me and I with them." Relationships were central to Pat's life. All of us here—you, her family, you, her Sisters, you, her friends and co-workers, the staff at the Motherhouse—were all important to Pat. When you were in her presence, you knew you were loved, cared for and heard.



Pat's relationship with God fed all the other relationships in her life. She grounded herself in prayer, and out of that prayer grew a Love that nourished her over a lifetime.

EARLY LIFE

Patricia Ann Aseltyne was born in Detroit on July 25, 1927, in the home of her parents, Arthur Wesley Aseltyne and Kathlyn Juanita Burke. She was the third of four children. Her older siblings included Arthur and Helen Mary and her younger brother Bill. As many of you know, Helen Mary would later take the name Sister Ann Arthur.

Pat's parents were ahead of their time in treating their daughters with as much respect as their sons. They encouraged them to excel in education, play sports and compete with the boys. Their opinions were always respected, too. For example, when Ann and Pat decided to follow their calling as IHM Sisters, their parents affirmed and supported them in this decision.

The Aseltynes were known for their charity work. They donated their time and resources to organizations such as Little Sisters of the Poor and House of the Good Shepherd, which cared for pregnant, unwed young women.

Pat's sense of social justice and advocacy work clearly stemmed from her familial roots. As we all know, half of those roots were from the Irish on her mom's side. Irish heritage

was a point of pride and no doubt her humor, wit, and knack for storytelling stemmed from the influence of Irish culture and tradition.

VOCATION

Not only was Pat's family formative for her, but her education also shaped who she would become as both an IHM Sister and educator. In grade school, she felt like the Sisters were an extension of her family. And she thrived.

One particular moment in second grade would stay with her for the rest of her life. As she was preparing to make her first communion, she recalled Sister Mary Albert telling the class that they would meet a new friend in the Eucharist who be their friend forever. Later in life, Pat would say, "I have carried this with me always."

Later in high school, in Sister Mary Pius's classroom, Pat encountered a teaching style that piqued her interest. This style welcomed input and questions from the students and laid the foundation for Pat's approach to education and being with people. It was in these days that Pat discerned a vocation to religious life.

Pat entered the IHM community in 1945, the year of the Centennial Celebration. When it came time for Pat to choose a religious name, she requested the name Ann Kathleen after her mother. However, she was told that the name sounded too much like a doll's name. Instead, she was given the name Helen Mary, which, as you recall, was her sister's baptismal name! We now had Sister Ann Arthur, who was born Helen Mary and Sister Helen Mary, who was born Patricia Ann. Confusing, to say the least!

After Vatican II, sisters were given the option of returning to their baptismal names. The story goes that Ann didn't want to take back the name Helen Mary because she didn't want to inherit Pat's reputation!

Ann and Pat were different in many ways, but they shared the same love for the IHM community, family, friends and ministering with and to those on the margins.

TEACHING YEARS [1948-1989]

As an IHM Sister, Pat embraced the teaching ministry of the congregation, serving in education for 41 years, first as a teacher and then as principal. She ministered in Catholic Schools in places such as Detroit, Monroe, Battle Creek, Grand Rapids and Chicago, to name a few. Reflecting on her years teaching students at various grade levels, she said teaching "isn't only knowing your ABCs; it's how much love you put into caring about children." Her love for children was a lifelong love, and one that would continue to be central to her call even after she stepped out of formal teaching roles.

A TURNING POINT

A turning point came in Pat's life when she made a 30-day retreat. During retreat, she came to a deeper awareness of God's love for her and the freedom that came with just being herself. With a renewed sense of identity and calling, Pat responded to an ad for

a case manager with *Casa de Esperanza de Los Niños*, House of Hope for Children in Houston, Texas.

THE CASA YEARS [1994-2014]

Pat's role at CASA varied from house parent to social worker, to community outreach to aftercare coordinator. I remember visiting Pat in 2011 at CASA and getting a firsthand glimpse of the impact she had on the community there and that the community had on her. Many of the children who came to CASA were born with HIV/AIDS and had no one to care for them properly. Ministering at a time when HIV/AIDS was still highly stigmatized and frightening, Pat showed no fear of holding the children who needed to feel human connection, love, compassion and safety. Reflecting on her experience, she said, "CASA is the place where I learned to love more than any other place."

Anyone who has visited Pat's room has seen pictures of very important CASA children in Pat's life: Rosa Tatiana Rosales, the first baby that Pat took care of at CASA, Alexis Steele, who affectionately called her "Momma Pat," and Darius, who would later become her grand-nephew.

In particular, Pat's relationships with Rosa and Alexis shaped the second half of her life. She once told a story about an experience with Rosa: "One day as we danced to the music of 'Sleeping Beauty,' Rosa looked at me with her radiant black eyes. Her message became clear to me that this life is the DREAM and Heaven the REALITY." These relationships were transformative. And out of these relationships, she gave even more than she knew she had. Pat truly knew what it meant to be human. So much so that others recognized her impact on the Houston community.

In 2010, Pat received a local Jefferson Award for dedicated service to children and families, with one reporter calling her a "true unsung hero to families living in the Houston area." In 2011, Pat was invited to the National Jefferson Awards, where she was one of five recipients of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Award for Outstanding Public Service Benefitting Local Communities. Dubbed the "Nobel Prize" for public service, Pat attended the awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., where she also had the honor of meeting Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

When reflecting on these moments in her life, Pat recalled C.S. Lewis' sentiment that when people honor us, it's a sign that they love us.

CONCLUSION

In 2014, Pat retired to Monroe. She continued her HIV/AIDS advocacy work and also served as a Court Appointed Special Advocate, where she provided a voice for at-risk children. During her last decade in Monroe, she saw her ordinary life as ministry. She reveled in her relationships. Her joy was found in sharing with those whom she loved: her family, her friends and her IHM Sisters.

When I would come crashing into her room in the midst of a discernment crisis or ministry overwhelm, her greeting to me was always the same: "Ohhh my gosh!!!" as if it was the first time she had ever laid eyes on me.

Pat was a wisdom figure to many -- this deep wisdom was gained through personal experience. She knew heartache. She knew loss and true love. She knew what it was like to feel like you lost your relationship with God and then find it again. Her pathway to God was not linear and not always serene, but it was real.

Let us hold these words from her Book of Life in our hearts.

"My tree of life is peaceful now in the risk and wonder it affords, as all of us go hand in hand toward the mystery of God's hidden plan.

Eternal gratitude for all those who have shared my life."

***Written and delivered by Jane Aseltyne, IHM
Sept. 12, 2024***