

Remembering Anita Pfeiffer, IHM
Dec. 4, 1939 – June 30, 2025

Anita titled her funeral program, “Sing and make music to our God.” That musical theme weaves its way through her whole life. From her early years, her voice was recognized in school programs, whether solo or in chorus; music held a favored spot throughout her teaching years with children and into her adult years in choirs. The external involvement with the art of music supported, yet only hinted at, her inner songs of sad laments as well as vibrant praise.



The circumstances of her parents' upbringing formed some foundational chords. Both were from large families. Leon Frank Pfeiffer was born on a family farm in Ohio, the third youngest of 18 children and Madeline Dorothy Pegouske was born in Wyandotte, Michigan, one of 14 children.

From enduring hard times, they developed hearts of understanding for those in need and a generous spirit to help as they could. As a couple, Leon and Madeline opened the doors of their small home to several of Madeline's siblings over the years, while caring for their own six children. Somehow, they managed to provide enough space and food for all.

Early harmonization of experience came from befriending her neighbors. “Billy was a fragile boy born with a hole in his heart ... He and his younger sister became my close friends and we often played together. I learned how to play tag without running ... Occasionally, one of his blind friends would visit ... and I found out that one doesn't need eyes to successfully play hide and seek ... It seems God was preparing me for service to others at a very young age.”

Those years impacted Anita's view of life, her work ethic and her compassion. Anita combined divergent melodies. While we all know her as caring *and* tough, intelligent *and* avid tablet game player, seriously spiritual *and* one with an ever-ready sense of humor. Co-workers and friends recall her wit and quick, even sassy retorts. She did not miss a beat with a comeback.

Without a doubt, she sang in up-tempo as one incredibly efficient! How many examples could come from any mission or job or assignment? Actually, I think it gave her satisfaction and even joy. For example, for this remembering, I had her biography (plus revisions), listing of places of ministry, etc., with the Liturgy items fully prepared by at least 2021.

But how did she find IHM? Anita started in the neighborhood public school. She talked about sitting with her older brother while he did his homework and she caught on quickly, so that by the time the work was given to her, she already knew it. When the new curriculum was introduced, she completed the books for the year on her own within a week. Her parents wanted her to be double-promoted, but that took until the seventh grade.

In fifth grade, the Pfeiffers became active members of St. Joseph Parish in Trenton, and that was Anita's introduction to IHM Sisters. "I became enamored with the Sister's blue habit, life of prayer, sense of dedication, wonderful peacefulness and creative teaching...It was the first time I had to really study and work hard...This was thrilling to me and I thrived."

The time for deeper pondering came later in her high school years. During the first month of high school, her brother Frank was in a car accident that took the lives of two friends and left him seriously hurt as well. Then Anita recalls, "The following year, my boyfriend Billy died. These two events were traumatic for me, especially since I had planned on marrying Billy and taking care of him for as long as he might live." All her plans were totally upended.

I felt that God might be calling me in a different direction. It was at this time that I began to seriously consider a religious life as an option...As graduation drew closer...I knew it was time to make a decision...When I met with my pastor to discern between congregations that interested me, he was adamant that I join IHM, stating that they planted the seed of my vocation in my heart and nurtured the necessary skills to become a successful teacher. Once decided, I never regretted that choice.

So, in September 1957, Anita walked through the front door of the IHM Motherhouse. Let's hear an Alleluia! That is when I first met Anita and we began a lifelong friendship.

Anita's ministry years might be recalled as "How can I keep from Singing?" Her page in the IHM *Book of Life* reads,

I loved what God called me to become and do in each place and ministry. Armed with the invitation of God, guidance of the Holy Spirit and assistance of many caring and talented companions, I was able to live the Liberating Mission of Jesus of compassion, freedom and service with and for others in three major areas: education, clerical and volunteerism, all equally significant in my life."

EDUCATION

"From my first mission, I loved the wholesomeness and vitality of the children and began activities that would follow me for the rest of my teaching years:

mentoring/directing new teachers, working with music, piloting new programs (i.e., Workshop Way), and ministering beyond the classroom.

In most places of ministry, she initiated, directed, and administered new programs, secured grants for the necessary equipment, and focused on those in greater need. This included recognizing that, as true teachers, our mission does not end with closing the classroom door. “In Mobile, during the Civil Rights days, we often had to guide young minds and raging emotions to look at history and the current violence, with Gospel values and act accordingly, especially during the marches.” Heavy-hearted laments and songs of resilience were called for in those days.

In her clerical ministry, we all would agree with Anita’s assessment that, “I was born with a strong sense of organization, responsibility, efficiency and thoroughness.” These gifts of God sustained a multifaceted secretarial ministry at several organizations, with duties including managing finances, designing programs, training and supervising employees. She brought her cheerful, engaging and caring self along with her skills.

Anita’s volunteer ministry may carry the same tune with different lyrics, “Lord, Lead me. Guide me along the way.” When health issues became a challenge, service at Hospice of SE Michigan became a blessing. Anita began by working in the office and later moved into direct care. After completing a unit of clinical pastoral education and returning from surgery, she was hired as a chaplain. Anita reflected, “Being able to relate with cancer patients because of my own cancer opened heavy hearts and doors to spiritual healing.” A perceptive listener, she noticed details and nuances that could invite deeper sharing. Always holding confidences carefully, she was fully trustworthy. “Transitioning to retirement allowed me the freedom to move into volunteer areas that provided pleasure without the stress of requirements or time constraints.”

In coming full circle and for the centrality of music, Anita wrote, “I remained in the choir at St. Mary’s Monroe, this has been part of my life for nearly 20 years.” Music director John Raymond said, “Anita is a character...feisty, full of wit. It’s great fun teasing her ... and waiting for a response ... the choir would laugh at the two of us.” Choir members noted she always had a smile and a twinkle in her eye, genuine and full of love.

Anita’s work in the Congregational Business Office (CBO) was, in recent years, being a “Jill” of all things because of her previous service. She was always welcomed in CBO, even if only for one hour at a time. We don’t have the hours for Mary Trawinski to tell all the stories of their many adventures but do ask her about them.

And a final song from Anita. “I can truly say that I received much more in each ministry than I could possibly give. The words of Article 43 in the *IHM Constitutions* ring true: *For we believe that God uses the weak to effect great things and that God’s “power at work in us can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.”*

The past few years brought more physical challenges and medical complications. With her usual reality-based approach, she made consequential decisions on treatment. It was clearly summarized in a choice for “quality of life, not quantity.”

What is not mentioned enough here is the melody of love and trust she sang daily: *O God, you are my strength and my song.*

Anita’s reflections on how God was leading through the real circumstances of her life are a consistent theme. She listened and took in life lessons all along the way, learning over and over the great lesson of letting go of control in order to let God lead. She did it, not begrudgingly, but with curiosity, courage, and even a chuckle when she figured out what grace was being offered.

Dear Anita, daughter, sister, aunt, friend, confidante,
you never stopped teaching
the subject became, how to *live fully* in grace,
the song of the *actual* life we are given.
Thank you, dear one.

***Written and delivered by Betty Leon, IHM
July 3, 2025***