

Sister Lawrence Ann Liston

All things Possible

Current ministry: Administrator, St. Ann Clinic

Years in Congregation: 49

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Q. Why did you choose to become a Sister of Providence?

A. I started school at a public school. I came to St. Ann School in fifth grade. I had not really had any contact with the sisters prior to that. At first, I didn't really like the sisters. I felt like I didn't really understand them. They really took me under their wing and I became a helper in many ways. I had an artistic flair and so I did bulletin boards for the lower grades and worked with the first-grade teacher. I really came to know and understand a lot more about their life and their dedication. I really like people and I wanted to serve people and help people. I had that opportunity early on, from like fifth grade on. By the time I was a junior in high school I had pretty well decided I wanted to dedicate my life to giving to others and the Sisters of Providence seemed like a good way to do that.

Q. What was your time like here at St. Ann School? Was there a particular sister who had influence on you?

A. They all reached out to me. Primarily, I was able to work with Sister Eleanor Marie, the first-grade teacher at the time. I did bulletin boards and things for many of them, but she was probably the person who stole my heart. Sister Gertrude Helene Black was the principal and superior and seventh- and eighth-grade teacher.

Q. And the ministry that brought you back was to provide health care to those who are without adequate care and adequate health insurance through St. Ann Clinic.

A. Yes, it is really sad to see what people go through. The need is so great. One of the great pleasures is the dedication of the volunteers. We see it all here: Huntington's Disease, different cancers, hypertension, heart issues. A lot of them are "working poor," who have jobs where insurance is not provided or they can't afford the insurance.

Q. What is it like to be ministering in the same building where you attended school? And your office is in one of your former classrooms?

A. This office is in the area that was the back side of the seventh- and eighth-grade classroom. All of this office area was actually one room. It was a four-room school. It's wonderful to come back. I had been gone 50 years from the school, and I had been gone from Terre Haute 40 some years. To be able to come back and to be able to serve the poor is really a gift to me. Many of the older parishioners, many of my classmates are

still here, and a lot of them come and volunteer here at the clinic. It's good to renew those relationships.

Q. How has the St. Ann Parish geographic area and its culture changed since you were here years ago?

A. It is much poorer. Many of the houses that were here when I was in grade school are no longer here. They have been taken down. The Corner of Caring here with Catholic Charities being here, has a tremendous outreach to the poor. I considered it to be fairly middle class 50 years ago. It has transitioned into a very poor neighborhood. But the outreach to the city of Terre Haute primarily happens in this whole city block with the food pantry, Catholic Charities, Bethany House, the dental clinic and health clinic.

Q. What do you value most about the ministries you have experienced?

A. I kind of grew up in ministry, I guess. I never saw myself as being in leadership or doing some of the things I have done. My primary focus was to be helpful to other people, to reach out to others and to share in ministry. What I value most about this ministry, currently, is to share and work with a diverse group of dedicated volunteers, and dedicated people who were there when I was superintendent of schools. People really were dedicated and committed to what they were about. That's been a great asset for me to be able to share a relationship with them.

Q. Did you like being a teacher?

A. I liked being a teacher, but I taught only three years before I became a principal. That's kind of a surprising element to me. I always felt like I didn't necessarily have those skills. I guess I learned over the years that I had more skills than I was aware of. So I taught for three years and became principal and taught at the same time. I didn't have a really high self esteem. People kept encouraging me to do different things. When I became principal, those were the days when you received a little letter, saying, "You will be ..." Oh, they must have the wrong person. But, I enjoyed it. I was encouraged to apply for superintendency. I said, "Oh, no. That's not me." And yet, I continued to be encouraged and I became the superintendent of schools in the Archdiocese (of Indianapolis). So, I think I grew into those ministries. I became a principal before I was ever educated to be a principal. I did principaling for one year then went back to school to become a principal. You know, I'm not saying it was bad, but it was a challenge in trying to live up to expectations and not really have the undergirding for what I was supposed to be doing. I sort of learned by the seat of my pants. That seems to have been the case all along. Even though I was a principal in the archdiocese, I knew folks and that was an advantage. When I came here, I had not a clue. I had management and administrative skills, but I really didn't have any background in health clinics. I learned by doing. I did go back to school to get an administrator's license for health care. I was a nursing home administrator for 10 years before I came here.

Q. Why would a woman today find the Sisters of Providence lifestyle and commitment attractive?

A. I think our ministry has always been one of education. Originally, it was more in a classroom. I think the Sisters of Providence really have reached out in many diverse ways to educate people and to have the ministry of education reach out to many, many avenues that fit our sisters and people's lifestyles. I think the availability of fitting ministries or lifestyle into the education piece from different aspects creates an attractive opportunity. I think a woman would find a wide range of opportunities for education in diverse ministries, not necessarily a classroom. Education is a lifelong process, so I think we have taken it to the max and try to expand how we help people to learn throughout life.

Q. There have been big changes in the Congregation since the time you joined.

A. I think we have broadened the scope of ministry. We have opened things up for people to be responsive and not necessarily dependent totally upon obedience, but to take responsibility for who you are and what you do in light of the charism of the Congregation.

Q. How important is the community lifestyle to you?

A. I was in the transition group of the '60s. I still very much appreciate the training I had and the self-discipline and the disciplines we had really prepared me for many years thereafter. It really grounded me. I didn't always understand all of the practices, but I learned to appreciate them more as I moved forward in life and I look back at how that prepared me to cope with many challenges.

Q. Do you have any role models in the Congregation?

A. I think Sister Alexa Suelzer is the one who stands out in my mind. I have several. She was one of my formation leaders in the juniorate and she has been a very constant support throughout the years. I think the other person might be Sister Paul Marie Gutgsell. She was probably the one who gave me a grounding in prayer. She was a gentle spirit to other people.

Q. What role does prayer have in your life?

A. Prayer is very important. It is the focal point or the center of my life. Without it, I don't think I could function. My more focused prayer time is in the morning when I get up. It kind of starts my day. I do a lot of praying throughout the day in simple ways for things that are happening and not happening with a ministry like ours, depending on finances coming from other ways, and the volunteers coming. Sometimes you have a quick prayer that this person will show up or some other need in relation to our ministry. Quiet time also is very important, reflecting. It keeps me centered and gives me the energy to go on.

Q. What role does Saint Mother Theodore Guerin have in your life?

A. I did not go to Rome for her beatification, but I did go for the canonization in 2006. I was very grateful. I have great devotion to her and I try to spread that devotion to people here. I am attracted to her simplicity and her love and care for the poor and the sick, as well as her influence in education.

Q. Has your life turned out as you might have imagined?

A. I don't think I would have imagined all of the leadership and administrative kinds of things. I grew into that. I tend to still like the behind the scenes role and just quietly going about what I need to do. I was thrust into being out front many times, doing presentations, leading people. I had 3,000 employees as superintendent of schools. I am grateful for those opportunities and they helped me to grow tremendously into the person I was really meant to be.

Q. If you would have had an opportunity for a different lifestyle or career, what might it have been?

A. I think I probably would still be single and working with other people, trying to reach out to those less fortunate.

Q. Please complete this sentence. Sister Lawrence Ann is ...

A. A caring and compassionate person who enjoys people, enjoys helping people and helps to make a difference in the way she impacts other people's lives.

Q. What is the most important thing in your life right now?

A. The most important thing really is my ministry and working with the volunteers and encouraging them, as well as reaching to those we serve.

Q. What were you like as a child?

A. I was very independent. I was an only child on one whole side of the family. I was the center of everybody's life. Everyone wanted to tell me what to do. I learned early on to do what I please because I couldn't please them all. That made me very independent. If I wanted to do it, I did it. I was spoiled. I grew up in an adult world. There weren't a lot of other children around to interact with, or play with. Perhaps that's where I developed some leadership skills because I had to learn to do things for myself and by myself. I don't know that I really had a lot of opportunity just to be a child. All of the folks expected me to act as an adult.

Q. What is your fondest childhood memory?

A. My grandparents had a farm. I used to enjoy being out with nature, gardening, tending to the animals, canning, butchering. I remember raising the animals at the barn, having the fire for the cracklings, just getting back to the simple things in life.

Q. Anything you'd like to share about your family?

A. We were just a very simple family. Both of my parents worked. Dad was like a common laborer, a jack of all trades. He worked at the same place for 40 some years. He was very quiet. He was not Catholic. He would take my Mom and me to church week after week, go home, and come back. He converted to Catholicism a month before he died. Mom worked at a local department store. She worked in the office. Just common, ordinary folks.

Q. Of all the things you learned from your parents, what do you believe was the most important?

A. Their work ethic, the simplicity of life and generosity toward other people.

Q. How is the world different now than it was when you were a child?

A. In regard to how it is for me, as a child, I really was the center of attention. My Dad has 10 siblings. On my mother's side there were no other children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews. Sometimes I really worked to not be spoiled and not be the center of attention and to be able to not have everything that I wanted. I really feel like the whole consumerism issue today is so overwhelming and not necessary. Consumerism today is something that I kind of fight against. We didn't have a whole lot, but I felt like I had everything in the world that I needed or wanted and much more.

Q. What world events have had an impact on you?

A. I think the death of Kennedy, Martin Luther King, the people in leadership who have given their lives, or bringing change for the common, ordinary person, are the things that have affected me the most.

Q. Any particular life philosophy?

A. Keep it simple, be honest, work hard, give to others of yourself.

Q. What gives you your most pleasure or satisfaction?

A. I really like quiet interaction with a friend, sharing a simple, home-cooked meal.

Q. Favorite meal?

A. A roast with potatoes, carrots and stuff around the roast, and another vegetable. Breakfast might be biscuits and gravy, fried potatoes and eggs.

Q. What has been your favorite vacation destination?

A. The East Coast, Washington, D.C., up the coast to Maine. I don't go often. I get one every 10 or 12 years. I'm wound pretty tight.

Q. What was the favorite place you ever visited and what was it like?

A. Rome is my favorite place. I visited there in 1981 and again in 2006. I had a minor in art. The art and architecture in Rome entralls me. I'd like to go back sometime.

Q. Do you have any crafts or hobbies or interests outside of your ministry?

A. Well, I like to do bulletin boards. In the 1970s, I did a lot of sewing. I made a lot of banners and vestments, maybe 60 of them. The one we use today for the funeral pall is one of my creations. I love to cook. Food brings people together in special ways. I usually give gifts of cookies or cakes. I like to give of myself instead of giving something from the consumer world.

Q. If you could have three wishes granted, what would they be?

A. That people see the many blessings they have in their lives, everyone enjoys one another, and that people give of themselves only to make others happy.

Q. What would be the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

A. That I'm a caring person who gives to others in special ways.

Quick connections

Q. What do you like best about Saint Mary-of-the-Woods?

A. The beauty of the outdoors, the quiet peacefulness of the woods. It is a gift from God.

Q. When I am not officially at work or involved in ministry, you're most likely to see me ...

A. Working a jigsaw puzzle.

Q. On weekends, I love to ...

A. Walk at the woods and visit folks in health care on campus.

Q. I am passionate about ...

A. My ministry.

Q. What the world needs now ...

A. Is peace and tranquility, caring people.

Q. Name one thing most people don't know about you.

A. I was a drum majorette in high school.

Q. Name one thing you miss about being a kid.

A. Going fishing with Dad, frogging early in the morning.

Q. What would you like to hear God say when you arrive in heaven?

A. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Q. What is your biggest pet peeve?

A. People not being direct and honest with one another.

Q. What is the highlight of your week?

A. Meeting the challenge of each day in a peaceful way. Sometimes it gets to be real chaotic and overbearing.

Q. Have you ever met anyone famous?

A. I had an opportunity to be in audience with Pope John Paul II. There were 72 of us. There was a charm about his manner.

Q. What is your least favorite chore?

A. Working in the yard.

Favorites

Food: chocolate chip cookies

Flower: yellow rose

TV show: Extreme Makeover

Recreation: working jigsaw puzzles

Hobby: sewing

Sport: basketball

Pizza topping: sausage, mushroom

Quotation: Providence will rise before the sun

Holiday: Easter

Scripture passage: Sirach 2:1-11, Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Dessert: blackberry pie

Time of day: morning

Season: autumn

Comic strip: Family Circus

Course in school: math, art

Saint: Mother Theodore Guerin

Sinner: St. Paul

Least favorite food: cooked spinach

Course in school: chemistry

My best friend sa1ys I'm: caring, organized, hard working

If I weren't an SP, I'd be: a caregiver