

## Sister Anita Thompson

When passing through the corridors of the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse, it is not unusual to see a walker parked outside a common area. Several sisters, including Sister Anita Thompson, use rolling walkers for extra stability. Sister Anita's walker stands out from the others, however, because it is always adorned with a colorful and stylish bow which changes with the seasons. That bow is a fitting symbol for Sister Anita herself, a gracious lady whose elegant simplicity and gentle manner have made her appreciated and beloved wherever she has served.



Few words from Sister Anita are needed to recognize that she was born and raised in Boston (or to be more precise, Roxbury, Massachusetts). She was the youngest of five children and there was a ten year gap between Anita and her next oldest sibling. She fondly remembers being taught the latest dance steps by her older sisters, who practiced the jitterbug with little Anita and fostered her life-long love of dance.

Anita attended public grammar school and grew in her faith through CCD classes taught by Sisters of Charity. The example of Protestant friends who were active in their church challenged her to think about becoming more involved in her own church. Anita's faith deepened in high school, when she attended St. Joseph's Academy. She became increasingly involved with her parish and enjoyed participating in parish musical productions with youth and adults. (She is quick to clarify, "I'm a dancer, not a singer!") More and more, Anita felt called to serve God through religious life, though at the time she had no interest in becoming a teacher.

After graduating from high school, Anita took a job answering phones at Boston Consolidated Gas Company. She wanted to earn some money to give to her family before entering religious life. After three and a half years on the job, she felt it was time to begin her new life. With strong faith in God but knowing little about what would lie ahead, she set out for Convent Station, New Jersey, with five other young women from Boston and two Sister chaperones. The journey marked the first time she had ever travelled outside New England.

Soon after arriving in Convent Station, Sister Anita made friends with the young women in her entering band. She readily adapted to the new routines and challenges of life as a postulant and then as a novice. Even before completing the requirements for her college degree, she was missioned to go out and teach. Although it would not have been her choice, she vowed to do her best in her assigned ministry.

For fourteen years, Sister Anita served as a classroom teacher at schools in New Jersey and Massachusetts. With experience, her confidence and comfort in the classroom grew. She learned from the example of other teachers while developing her own style of relating to students and

managing a classroom. With a calm and caring manner, she worked to impart solid academics and Christian values of service and charity.

During this period, Sister Anita attended summer classes at the University of Notre Dame and earned a Masters Degree in Economics. Before being selected for graduate studies, the idea of pursuing a Masters was one of the furthest things from her mind. Things changed when she received a notice in the mail from the General Superior which read, “Sister, you are to go on to higher studies and these are the three academic areas you may consider.” Sister Anita recalls thinking, “O my Lord, no. Don’t tell me more studies!”

In 1972, Sister Anita volunteered to serve at the Sisters of Charity’s mission in the Virgin Islands. She says, “I had been interested in foreign missions from even before I entered and I came to know about the mission in the Virgin Islands through my friend, Sister Peggy. I thought to myself, if Sister Peggy can do this, why can’t I?”

Again making a big leap into something new without really knowing what awaited her, Sister Anita left for the Virgin Islands to begin a ministry there that lasted for twenty years. She enjoyed island life and quickly became involved in the community and in the parish, where she anchored middle C in the parish handbell choir. For the first fourteen years there, she taught business courses to the high school students at Sts. Peters and Paul School. This ministry was followed by six years as secretary to Bishop (and future Cardinal) Sean O’Malley. She jokes, “The Sisters of Charity are the ones who made him a Cardinal!”



*Virgin Island Handbell Choir – 1970’s - 4<sup>th</sup> from left, Sister Anita Thompson, and 5<sup>th</sup> from left, Sister Roberta Feil.*

In 1992, Sister Anita returned to New Jersey and was delighted to serve as the Director of Guest Services at Xavier Center, the Sisters of Charity’s retreat center. Her gracious manner and organizational talent made her a perfect fit for the job of arranging for rooms, meals, and other guest accommodations. She says, “I particularly enjoyed men’s retreats because they always seemed to be so affable.” Although often perceived as quiet and ladylike, Sister Anita’s fun-loving humor was very evident through her roles in the plays and musical shows staged to raise support for the retreat center. The cast for these shows included

sisters, brothers, and lay faculty. Sister Anita laughs, “The more you made a fool of yourself up on the stage, the more the audience enjoyed it. They would clap and laugh, and it was always a fun night!”

When Xavier Center closed in 2011, Sister Anita moved to the Motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity. She enjoys serving as a very active volunteer in the administrative offices. With a daily routine of checking in at the various offices and offering to lend a hand, she can be counted upon to pitch in and help wherever needed. Her cheerful spirit and ready laugh always make routine work seem to go a little faster and be a little more enjoyable for everyone else. She says simply, “I do what’s there” and she appreciates the variety in her daily tasks.

Ever self-effacing, Sister Anita considers herself to be “a very normal person” living among other normal women who are all doing their best to do the will of God. She finds joy in the everyday occurrences of her life, such as meals shared with friends, walks out in the sunshine, and daily quiet time for prayer. She says she is blessed to have had the opportunity to devote her life to God, and her gentle presence shines brightly with her love of God and her devotion to the mission of charity.