

LoRayne Anderson – Devote Catholic Teacher

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Naomi LoRayne Anderson was born in 1929 in Ajo, Az., just 43 miles from Mexico. From her first year of life she has attended the Roman Catholic Church.

Her family moved to Houston in 1932, where she attended the Immaculate Conception Catholic School, located in a poor area during the Great Depression.

“We did not understand how hard it was,” LoRayne said, “but mom and dad did.” She and her four brothers and two sisters helped in every way.

She attended the all-girls high school at the Incarnate Word Academy, Houston, where she admired the Sisters of Divine Providence and their love for Christ and care of humanity.

While a sophomore, she entered Our Lady of the Lake Convent in San Antonio to become a Nun. The long process of devotion began as a candidate, then as a postulant for six months and a novitiate for another year. Then came her first vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience which entitled her to change the color of her veil from white to black, and she received a special ring. Five more annual vows would follow.

During this time, one “lives” the vow, she said, intimating a complete way of life. Mass every day, prayers three times a day, and a strict code of rules, yet it was not the work one wept over. It was a privilege to be a part of a great church and an adventure in seeking first God’s kingdom.

According to the World Christian Database, there are 1.2 billion Catholics, almost 75 times larger than largest single Protestant group. The 438m in Latin America alone are 100m-plus more than the entire population of the U.S. According to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey, Catholics in America grew from 46 to 57m from 1990 to 2008, while all the other Christians combined grew from 151 to 173m. The most astonishing figure in the 2008 ARIS is that those choosing “none” grew from 14 to 34m, from 8.2 to a whopping 15 percent in 2008 – America is steadily declining in devote Christians!



How refreshing then that devotion has characterized LoRayne's life for almost nine decades. Christians of every flavor in Tyler County readily know her gentle encouragements. She often carries a joke book, and many in the community look forward to her visits to Brookshires, Walmart, the filling station, everywhere.

How about a joke? Did you hear about the author who suffered from writer's cramp – called authoritis?

However, she is not a jokester. She is better known for her kindness.

"Laughter lifts the soul," she said. To help lift a spirit. To bring a smile. Never crass or cross. Whether she asks you or not, she always has a gentle invite to church.

Long before Tyler County, she "lived" her vows while teaching second and third grade in Harlingen, Texas. She was transferred to El Paso for a year. Every summer, she came back to San Antonio for devotions, to go over her vows, and a seven-day retreat, learning more about Christ and his teachings.

After six years, her final vow was a solemn occasion attended by family and friends.

"There were 12 in our group," she said, and many still keep in touch. Her vows were dear to her and remain a high point in her life, the beginning of her life in a precious sisterhood for about 26 years.

LoRayne told me, too, that it was not too late for me to become a Catholic.

"You need to come," she said in her non-judgmental kindly cultured voice.

After her final vow, she was assigned to "nearly every city" in Oklahoma, as the need for her teaching skills demanded.

To her, it was not so hard, but a way to follow Christ's teachings.

"Today, the habit is very, very important ... a message to the people. It shows how those who wear it are devoted to God, living not for themselves, not for show."

Reflecting back on her teaching, LoRayne said, "It was always so good, the kids were so wonderful."

As the years rolled on, she rose in her order to be one of the four sisters directly under their Mother Superior. She was called Sister Charles Ann, a name taken from her father's and mother's names in the tradition of the church. Some of the sisters wanted her to lead the order, but she declined.

For reasons kept in her heart, LoRayne decided to leave the convent and taught in the Clear Lake public schools.

Robert Lee Anderson entered her life, and she fell in love and married. He worked at NASA, on the Challenger program, among other things, and he was so heartbroken when it blew up.

They were married for three years when he caught a deadly cancer that swelled him up. There were no treatments then, and his diagnosis drove him to give up. He could not eat and the pain was miserable. On the last day, he checked himself out of the hospital. When LoRayne got home to meet him, she was shocked. He had written a note, to say good bye. In the closed garage, he started the car and chose death rather than let cancer continue its certain and terrible path.

She still thinks about him.

"We never argued one time," she said. "We did everything together and never argued." She paused. "I still miss him. I did not know how to cook. He cooked so beautifully and cooked all the meals. I always helped and cleaned up."

She retired from teaching in about 1989, having taught for 50 years.

She moved into her trailer in the Windmill Estates five years ago, just north of Woodville, a place she has had for 15 years in case of a hurricane.

Another joke – What kind of money do fishermen make? Net profits.

Or, how about the time when there was a great blizzard? Only the parson and the farmer showed up for church. The parson said, “I don’t guess we’ll have a service.” To which the farmer replied, “If only one cow shows up at feeding time, I feed it.”

Throughout town, she never meets a stranger and has a good word for anyone.

From a very brief Facebook post, several responded.

Emily Harper said, “I didn’t know her name until now.... Every time I see her, she has something to say to brighten up my day.”

Charlean Ray Wiggins said, “She is such a joy ... true follower of Christ ... spunky, kind, has a kindred spirit and someone I aspire to be.”

Catholic Becky Ramirez said, “We love her so much... a wonderful person to be around.”

Father Michael Strother said, “She is a daily communicant ... present every day for Catholic Mass at the Parish. She loves receiving communion and is faithful to prayer, the sacraments, and the rosary. She is very thoughtful and loves her faith very much.”

“The Blessed Sacrament,” LoRayne said, “one of the most holy and precious parts of the church, allows one – in receiving the host – to receive Jesus.” Solemnly with a conviction proven over nine decades and counting the consecrated bread changes into the Body and Blood of Christ. And one “lives” their vows to Christ each time in remembrance and devotion, grace coming in the sacrament.

Around her home amid some family photos are several Christian books, mostly Catholic, a large relief of the Last Supper, several statues of Mary and a few saints, several crosses, a thoroughly Christian home.

As America becomes less devote, by and by, LoRayne’s refreshing steadfast devotion to God and her church is a witness with an encouraging heart that we all can learn from and admire.

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