



**Sister Monica Witte** was assigned to many different houses of the province. These included St. Francis Mission in St. Francis, South Dakota and Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Of all the places, Sr. Monica's heart was captured by the Lakota people on the two reservations of South Dakota. She felt utterly at home and was with where her vocation to "love God and serve people" was lived out with Franciscan simplicity, joy, and hospitality. Sr. Monica thrived there for 39 of her 59 years of ministry and served faithfully the children she so ardently loved and respected. Sr. Monica was well-loved as a teacher of 'English as a Second Language' to the Lakota children, primarily in the Red Cloud High School. The children knew they were loved and cared for and returned respect and love to her.

The poor people of the reservation were of special concern to Sr. Monica. Many elderly women would come with grandchildren in tow, needing food or clothing. When they needed food, she often would give canned nonperishable food and when they needed warm clothes, she would raid the common closet. The beadwork the women elders made was often exchanged for items of food and clothing. Then Sr. Monica would bring these beautiful pieces to our community meetings, which the Sisters were happy to buy, thus contributing back to the people of the mission. Sr. Monica will always be remembered as a gentle, humble woman of God, modeling for us the true spirit of St. Francis and Mother Magdalen.

Sr. Monica retired from teaching at Red Cloud Indian School, Holy Rosary Mission, in 2006 and moved to Marian Residence in Alliance, Nebraska. She continued to receive visits from her good friends on the Pine Ridge Reservation and continued to give some financial assistance through the sale of their beadwork. After a funeral at Marian Residence with the sisters and community there, her body was taken to Holy Rosary Mission at Pine Ridge. There at the mass and burial in the old cemetery alongside other Sisters there, she was memorialized and honored by the Lakota people who loved her so dearly.

Delphine Red Shirt, a former student, graduate of Red Cloud Indian School, and Author, wrote of her memories of Sr. Monica Witte... "Lakota, "inawakinjin" meaning "I leaned on her." She was a source of comfort. That is why, I say, I was one of her children... "ina" meaning "mother.""

Monica was truly home with her God and her people.

*She walked among a people not her own by accident of birth,  
But by a conscious choice of the heart,  
And they took her into their hearts, as one of their own.*



**Sister Helen Borszich** was born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota where her grandparents homesteaded and went to elementary and middle school there. She was baptized and attended summer religion classes at St. Francis Mission in South Dakota where both her parents worked. It was at St. Francis that she was introduced to the Sisters, “The Sisters were very generous and hospitable to my family. I believe the seed to become a Franciscan was planted there early in my life.”

Sister Helen was a teacher and administrator who spent many years at Holy Rosary and St. Francis Mission schools. In 1983, the Archdiocese of Denver appointed her as religious director for its native peoples. Sister Helen had a great love and dedication to the Lakota people, and they for her. She was given a Lakota name Wakan Win, which means Holy Woman.

She facilitated the 1996 opening of the Rosebud Reservation’s [Icimani Ya Waste’ Center](#) (Lakota for “on the good journey”) which provided welcome for many who visit the Rosebud, but its main goal is to empower local people with culture, spiritual, physical and educational opportunities. At the opening ceremony on September 6th, Sisters Helen, Carmelita, and Sister Marie Therese were present with Father Strok. Tobacco and holy water were used in the blessing ceremony throughout the building, representing the two traditions. Sister Marie Therese remarked, “We hope, as we bless this home, it will become a place of healing and hospitality.” Sister Helen directed the center until 2005, when she retired to Alliance, Nebraska.



**Sister Rose** Wentz was one of thirteen children, born in North Dakota. She professed her first Vows at Stella Niagara, New York in 1929 and took the name of Sister Anella. Her entire life was spent in service as a cook, then for emergency housing food bank work. She spent over 15 years cooking for the St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions in South Dakota. She served as the excellent cook she became, feeding three meals a day, often to several hundred children and sisters.

One example of this service was feeding the hungry during her work at Holy Rosary Indian Mission, where her day began at 5:00 a.m. and never ended before 7:00 p.m. She would feed 500 boys and girls at the boarding school as well as the sisters, priests, and brothers. Just one meal required 100 pounds of meat, two and a half bushels of cabbage, 80 loaves of bread and 30 gallons of milk! She would only be away from the kitchen for mass and the divine office. Sr. Rose received help from several older children. She had

many wonderful memories and stories of her time with the Lakota children, who were welcome to detour through her kitchen for a cookie, a kind word, or a pat on the head. During this time, Sr. Anella returned to her baptismal name after the Vatican II Council. She was now Sr. Rose once again.

Robert Manning wrote an article of Sister Rose, "Angel in white, among the pots and pans" for Red Cloud Country, May-June 1965, Volume 2, No. 2, Pine Ridge, SD. In that he quoted her as stating: "...I love children. That's all I really care about. I've given my life for children..." and "...with any children, you have to learn each child, and do for that child what's best for that particular child. You must adapt yourself and learn to do the best with what you have."

She retired to Marian Residence, Alliance, Nebraska in 1988 where she continued to make baby clothing and blankets for the Otomi children in New Mexico.



**Sister Bernadette Clifford** is Ogalala Lakota and was born in Pine Ridge, South Dakota. She was the oldest of twelve children and grew up attending the Holy Rosary Mission School. After becoming a Sister then earning her religious and elementary education degrees, she taught for more than 50 years with some of those years at St. Francis Mission on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. She also was a religious educator at Our Lady of Lourdes in Porcupine, South Dakota, part of the Pine Ridge Reservation. A highlight for her included teaching in Rome for three years at an International Grade School and working within the Vatican. This allowed her the privilege to see Pope John II twice!



**Sister Geraldine Clifford** is Ogalala Lakota and born in Manderson, South Dakota within the Pine Ridge Reservation. She felt the call to relationship with God at an early age. Her father and mother had a deep belief in a loving God and shared this faith experience with her. Her extended family influenced her spiritual experience, as well. Her grandmother taught her the Lakota ways and how to pray. She graduated high school from the Holy Rosary Mission where her father was a coach, and her mother was a teacher. After becoming a Sister, she earned a bachelors and then two Masters, one in Political Science for the Improvement of Instruction and one in Theology.

Sister Geraldine taught for many years with some of those at St. Francis Mission in South Dakota and at Ogalala Lakota College in Kyle, South Dakota. She also has ministered at St. Francis and Holy Rosary Mission and spent a few years serving as a pastoral assistant in St. Agnes Parish.

Sister Geraldine was a founder and board member for the building of the St. Francis Home for Children in Manderson, South Dakota on the Pine Ridge Reservaton from 1981 to 1983. She returned to serve as Director from 1985 until its closing in 2018. At that time, Sister Geraldine was 87 and did not have the energy to continue the ministry. For over thirty years, St. Francis Home served to foster children of the Lakota in need of shelter, care, and safety. She and her staff not only fed, clothed, and loved these children, but also supported their identity as Ogalala Lakota and mirrored the values of their culture.



**Sister Genevieve Cuny** was born and raised on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota and is a member of the Ogalala Lakota Nation. She attended Holy Rosary Mission, later called Red Cloud, from the age of six until graduation from high school. After two years of college, she entered to become a Sister. After earning a bachelor's in history, she taught at for many years to include at Red Cloud School, Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, and St. Francis Mission in South Dakota where she was the Local Superior from 1967 to 1973 after completing her Master's in Business Education. She returned to St. Francis Mission in 1975 as Pastoral Minister. From 1977 through 1983, she also served on the board of the Tekakwitha Conference, a North American Catholic Indian organization who had turned its focus on the "role of the Native American

in the church, and the importance of the gifts of the Native American to the church." She moved to Holy Rosary Mission from 1981 to 1984 to serve as Pastoral Minister. She earned her Master's in Religious Studies in 1985 and then accepted the position of Director of the Native American Catechetics in Rapid City in South Dakota where she served until 1989. From 1990 through most of 1991, she served as the Director of Religious Education of the Tekakwitha Conference National Center in Great Falls, Montana. In 1996 through 2000, she returned to Red Cloud School, Holy Rosary Mission in Pine Ridge, South Dakota to serve as Director of Catechistic Formation and Local Minister.





**Sister Marie Therese Archambault** (1939-2007) was born a member of the Teton Lakota nation of the Hunkpapa tribe, educated on the reservations, and brought up Catholic. She held bachelor's in education, languages, and theology. She also earned four master's degrees to include Native American Religious Traditions as well as becoming a Theologian, educated in Rome. She was a teacher, scholar, spiritual director, writer, editor, and Franciscan formation minister. Though she was to experience at times "intense inter-cultural, religious conflict and depression" from the intolerance of some Church leaders to Native culture and beliefs, the thrust of her ministry was to incorporate Native religious heritage and traditions into the Church's life, helping Native Americans integrate their Indian and Catholic identities into their spirituality. She would give the witness of a Lakota-Catholic

Franciscan woman following a non-violent, contemplative lifestyle.

At the age of nine, she was sent from her home on the Standing Rock Reservation, Fort Yates in North Dakota to the Catholic mission boarding schools on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota.

Quoted in an article that appeared in Twin Circle, March 23, 1997, Marie Therese recalled that at the time of her mission schooling of the 1950's, the Church was making no effort to understand Native American religious beliefs or culture. Only after becoming a nun did she discover her identity as both Catholic and Native American and begin to appreciate the holiness of both traditions. She found within herself a new understanding of who she was in God's eyes. Through contact with Native people around the nation she grew in awareness of their inner struggle, not wanting to deny the sacredness of both traditions and reluctant to let go of either. "I cannot see where they come together except in a place inside the individual where they meet the sacred and holy," she stated.

In the same article she gives us insight into her kinship with nature and her contemplative prayer: Catholic and Native beliefs coincide in these two aspects, she observed, but in Native tradition they are more developed. The connection to the earth or nature is a key element in Native spirituality, but this also has biblical roots. And, in regard to prayer, Native tradition is at home with the sacred, with an intimate and ever-present awareness of God's presence in earth, people and events, and they respond with gratitude. The mystical life is familiar to Native Peoples, more so than to many Catholics, she said.

She talked and wrote about how at the boarding school they were cut off from their parents and siblings. It was a very strict environment where they were not allowed to practice their Lakota heritage. She attended the boarding school until graduation at the age of 18 from St. Francis Mission. Even though she felt she received a good education, she also recognized the profound effect on the Lakota children. Often years later, as adults, they start dealing

with their feelings of being sent off and separated from their families. “We’re beginning to figure out why some Indians are alcoholic and dysfunctional adults.” She “held on” to her vocation despite negative feedback from fellow Indians, and the turmoil brought on by the ‘60’s and changes in the Church.

When she returned to the reservation and in dealing with fellow Indians, she started facing her own history. “I began to deal with my past as a product of a boarding school, and I began my journey of healing in the early ‘70’s.” “It has been a profound journey of faith as both an Indian and a Franciscan.” In the 1990’s there still were boarding schools that were more humane with more attention focused on the Indians and their culture.

She joined the [National Tekakwitha Conference](#) in Great Falls, Montana, and created her own position as Native American Urban Outreach facilitator where she worked (1992-1995) out of Denver and traveled to urban areas visiting Native Americans to help them realize “we have to be who we are before God.” Despite progress, she still encountered Church misunderstanding of Indians, and found it “very distressing. Many Indians still feel excluded, but with outreach, that can change.” “I’m here to try to bridge the gap between Native Americans and their dioceses, to raise awareness that Indians need to be reached in sensitive, cultural ways. We’re making progress.” – Eastern Oklahoma Catholic, October 17, 1993. She believed there was a healing process through her participation with former students and graduates of St. Francis Mission.

Sister Marie Therese also had teaching assignments at Regis University, the [Iliff School of Theology](#), the Catholic Biblical School, and in Native American studies at Metro State college. She wrote articles for publications as well as Native American catechetical materials and gave talks in the area of inculturation and dialogue. From 2004 to 2007 she created the first draft towards a revised Family and Teaching Guide Workbook with a 12-book series of work-color books for preparing Native American children for First Communion.

Her book, *A Retreat with Black Elk: Living in the Sacred Hoop*, published by St. Anthony Messenger press in 1998, was the text for numerous retreats that she offered. She identified strongly with Nicholas Black Elk, the Ogalala Lakota holy man whose life she reflected on and about. In 2003, she co-edited the book, *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States*, Orbis Books. In a personal greeting written to one of the Sisters in the book, Sister Marie Therese wrote, “At last, maybe Native people are getting a voice in the Church.” Her voice was heard with us and is being heard in the Church.