

Molly: [00:00](#) Habits are who we are, and we get to choose every day. Who that is. What's remarkable about these women is that their habits are changing the world. Hi and welcome to habits, the good, the bad and the holy. I'm Molly and I'm sitting down every week with the adorers of the blood of Christ religious sisters to hear their stories and learn how habits have become more than a symbol for their vocation. They become the means to which they change lives. Hello and welcome back. Today we're here with sister Joann Mark. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Molly: [00:31](#) Oh, you're welcome. Glad to be here.

Molly: [00:32](#) Awesome. Uh, so your really interesting to me when I was doing research on your story as an adorer, uh, for two reasons and I'm hoping we'll get to talk about both the reasons that you spent, um, a lot of time in Tanzania. And the second is that you're a liaison. You were liaison to the United Nations before you were a teacher or a sister or liaison. Did you grow up with a big family, a small family? Where did you grow up?

Joann: [01:03](#) I grew up with four brothers. One was older and three were younger. I grew up on a small farm in Nebraska outside of Humphrey, which is a town of about 800. Went there to grade school and high school, Catholic Grade School and Catholic high school.

Molly: [01:19](#) uh, what was it like being the only girl in a family of five?

Joann: [01:25](#) It was like, that was where I belonged. I mean, I couldn't compare it to anything. I always wanted a sister, but, and you know, when I hear to see how other people relate to their sisters, I think, well, I never had that experience but, but my brothers had been very good to me and you know, it's, it's, it's very fine.

Molly: [01:43](#) Oh, and were you a Tom boy growing up?

Joann: [01:45](#) No, I was not a tomboy. No. No. Um, my mother, uh, my mother was the oldest of 10, grew up on the farm and so she had to do things like milk cows and all that. And she said, once I have only one girl and I have four boys and the boys can do that kind of thing. And so I stayed in the house and I sewed and I fixed meals and I did all those kinds of things. Did you like it? Yes, I did. I was in four h and I got some good awards and made some, I made wool suit and my prom dress and oh wow. So yeah, and I think

you're, you're good to have around when I don't do much of that anymore.

Molly: [02:26](#) So I'm excited. Let's start with Tanzania cause I think it was first, what did you do in Tanzania? How long were you there and did you love it?

Joann: [02:34](#) When I went to Tanzania to teach English to our, uh, postulants candidates and uh, sisters, the official language of Tanzania is Swahili, but the, in order to get pass a test to be a midwife or a physician assistant or a teacher or anything, you have to pass a test in English. And our sisters were not passing that test and they wanted to move on to those kinds of services to people. So, um, you know, I was there primarily teaching English to them, but then in addition to that, um, I also conducted some retreat days, some recollection days. Um, and I, um, taught the novices community history. So you know how it is when you're someplace and things just kind of evolve and you do and provide. That's right. You provide services. And I really did love the people. Um, tens in the end, people are really very, very gentle, very kind, very nice.

Joann: [03:41](#) So, so yes, it was a very good time for me. The only negative, I guess you could say would be a little bit the heat, but, um, you know, it didn't do me in, I knew it was going to be, well, y'all was closed. We were close to the equator. So what do you expect? Right. So, yeah, and I had gotten prepared with the right kind of clothes and that kind of thing. And in fact, my brother, who, one brother who plays golf, he had given me this little van, a battery operated fan that I could wear around my neck. So like at night if I was too hot than I couldn't see it, I would turn that little fan on. So, so you know, there's all kinds of ways to do that. How long were you in Tanzania? Well, actually it turned out just to be 11 months. It was supposed to be a year, but the other sister that went with me, she had some health issues and so she felt we needed to come back. And so, you know, I came back at the same time.

Molly: [04:32](#) And when were you in Tanzania?

Joann: [04:34](#) Uh, the 2007 2007 that was right after I got out a leadership basically.

Molly: [04:39](#) So what position did you hold on Leadership Council members does your cancer. So if you went to Tanzania in 2007, you had a full life before then with the adorers. What did you do before you went to Tanzania?

- Joann: [04:54](#) Well, like I said, I was in that leadership team that was in office when the three provinces became one. So that was an exciting time in our history. Exciting for me. I think it wasn't so exciting for some other people, but you know, anyway. And then before that, um, I was at, um, well I was one year, set up the consecrated life offices in the archdiocese of Omaha.
- Molly: [05:20](#) And what, for those who don't know, what is the consecrated life office?
- Joann: [05:24](#) Well, it was really an office, uh, designed to try to improve, increase the number of women who went into religious life or the number of men. But the priesthood had pretty much had their own, um, individual, but I worked with them, so, you know, and that was, I was a good year. I enjoyed it. It was a very different kind of work because for the 13 years before that, I was an academic dean, um, uh, vice president for academic affairs at Bresha University in Owensboro, Kentucky. Wow. And before that I had that same position here, Newman University. So education, higher education has been my primary career profession.
- Molly: [06:04](#) So what did you teach?
- New Speaker: [06:06](#) Well, I taught maths and computer science when I, um, my doctorate is in, uh, it's an EDD in higher education mathematics. But then of course that was at the time, you know, this goes back cause we were using punch cards when I got my graduate degree. But anyway, then when I came to Newman I helped to get the first computer over there and to put our registration system online and those kinds of things, which that was real interesting. Working with the students. One of the students I had actually wrote the program to register people at the coding program. Yes, yes.
- Molly: [06:43](#) So you worked in stem, science, technology, engineering and math way before it had a fancy name stem and way before women were really involved in it at all. What was it like, you know, getting degrees in teaching in a field that was so predominantly male?
- Joann: [07:02](#) Well, I grew up with four brothers and so it was no issue for me whatsoever, you know? And I had excellent advisors at Oklahoma state. Very, very good. And there was another sister there, a sister, the blessed sacrament and the two of us roomed together and we um, you know, we're both getting our degrees in math and so, well, I don't know, it was a good time for me now.

- Molly: [07:27](#) He had a lot of fun. Um, so then you came back from Tanzania and how did you uh, end up being a liaison to the United Nations?
- Joann: [07:41](#) Well, you're not to think how exactly how I did, I applied for the position. No, I didn't apply for the, exactly apply for the position. I had been involved with the Partnership for Global Justice for many years. What does partnership for Global Justice do there and nongovernmental organization, NGO with two kinds of status at the UN, a DPI, which is responsible for getting word out about the United Nations and ECOSOC, which means that your members can come and in certain meetings you have a right to speak and you can send in documentations and had those, your thoughts included in documents and, and policies and so on. And so I had been involved in that. And then of course when I went to Tanzania, I really wasn't that involved, but the sister who, um, here in Wichita, another sister, sister, Mariella lock had also been very actively involved. And before I left the board, I got her to be chair of the board and then the partnership came across, came upon some financially difficult days.
- Joann: [08:52](#) And so they were really had a divided as to whether they should continue or not and that's periodically Mary Yellen would talk with me. And so that's how I really got involved. And then when it came to a decision, you know, and they needed somebody and other, if they were going to keep it going, I said, well, you know, I'd be interested in doing that. So they hired me. So, um, and those were, there were three very interesting years. The reason I came back from that, I fell on the ice coming out of church and broke my femur and I just, the walking, I lived on Long Island and like I had, I parked my car, I had to walk, you know, to how I was trying to do things at this point, like before I ever went back to the u n I clocked how many steps with my fitbit from my brother and sister about how many steps it was from the parking lot to the train station.
- Joann: [09:45](#) That was a thousand steps. Okay. Then I took the train, which was about an hour ride into Penn station. Okay. And I had been walking at some points from Penn station, but at that point I started to take a bus outside of Penn station. So it took one bus and then I had to change buses. So I had to talk across the street and walk down and take another bus. So I had to allow two hours to get to the u n for any kind of a meeting or anything. And two hours of course to get home. Although the two hours coming home, never seen it quite so bad, but anyway, and it just got to be too much for me. And once you get at the u n the building is huge. And so even to walk from one meeting to

another was a lot of steps and it just was more than I could really manage.

- Molly: [10:35](#) So what years were you at the UN?
- Joann: [10:38](#) 2015 to 2018.
- Molly: [10:41](#) and how old were you and you're doing that?
- Joann: [10:43](#) Well, let's see, I was, must've been 75 to 78 I guess. Something like that.
- Molly: [10:51](#) Spring chicken.
- Joann: [10:51](#) That's right.
- Molly: [10:53](#) And what kind of work did you do at the UN? You said, I mean your face lit up when you were talking about it. So obviously it was really fulfilling work, but what kind of work were you doing there?
- Joann: [11:02](#) Well, I didn't, you know, you have to distinguish between actually working at the union and being like, yes, yes. You know? So I guess the wonderful thing about it is you know, what's going on in the world and on these critical issues. If you have members or if you want to, you can make some statements and have some impact on the kinds of decisions that are reached. And you know, part of it was just keeping, we were a member organization, so keeping the members informed and that met a lot of really wonderful people, you know, worked a lot with Malawi college and they were really great. So, and I, I missed the people and I miss some of that interaction with them, but the broader spectrum of the world, but you have to accept your limitations at some point and say, you know, this is what I can do at point. Yeah.
- Molly: [11:53](#) So, uh, which, which has a bit of a change of scenery from long island. Um, what was it like coming back from a place that is the city that never sleeps, uh, coming back to Wichita?
- Joann: [12:05](#) Well, I, you have to understand, I was living on long island, not in the city. Right. So the long island is, it's, you know, it's not that different. I mean, it's a more like a, more like a Columbus, Nebraska. But I mean, you know, um, so it was, and I had been lived in Wichita for so long, so, um, that, that transition. Yeah, that's no problem.

- Molly: [12:32](#) So when you were in Long Island, did you live alone?
- Joann: [12:35](#) Well, I did because that's how it very interesting too about how I got that place where I lived. You know, I was going and I didn't have a place to live. And of course we say the divine providence prayer all the time, so, but okay, God, if you want me to go, you have to provide someplace. Right. So one of the board members called and said, you know, I don't, I know I why I didn't think of this before, but there's this house I kind of been watching over because my friend is in Florida and she thought she was going to come back, but she fell.
- Joann: [13:04](#) And so now she can't come back. And you know, I talked with her and she said, you could live there temporarily. So, so I had a house, I'm on an island and gas. I mean, it wasn't a fancy house, but it was very nice. You know, plenty of space and it had, what I loved about it the most was this back porch and then I had this green area bordered by trees because on the other side of that was this water catchment. And so, you know, I could sit out there and enjoy the birds and the weather and everything. So I was really very blessed with that.
- Molly: [13:36](#) Okay. So a lot of people assume that all sisters must live in community, um, like college dorm style. Uh, so can you talk a little bit about, uh, you know, obviously you have lived in community for large portions of your life, but the decisions to either live in community or live alone and the, I guess which one you liked better?
- Joann: [14:02](#) I enjoy living in community more, but not necessarily in real large communities. I have not lived in, um, you know, at the center here, this is the first time since I was a novice or whatever, that I've really lived here. I usually lived in communities that had maybe about five people or something like that. Shared houses. Yes. You know, and I, I'd prefer that to this, but as I say, you just at certain times you just accept it.
- Molly: [14:32](#) Um, and now you are, you know, full circle, back to teaching in a way. So can you talk a little bit about what you do every evening here?
- Joann: [14:44](#) Well, let me tell you first. I do still go back to Newman. Well, I tried to work about 10 hours a week in research. Okay. What kind of research are you doing? Well, you know, about how many students and how many females and how many African Americans, all that kind of thing. That's the end. All these surveys, they'd come and you have to answer. So I do that. Um, and then, you know, in the evenings, well, during the day I'm

involved in the asylum, hospitality or hospitality to the asylum seekers here at the Wichita Center. I'm your host, a number of asylum seeking families. That's right. With children ranging from currently six weeks old to 11 as you've got that right.

Joann: [15:36](#) And so, and so we have 10 children and seven adults at this point. I don't know, just like a little village. That's rough. Anyway. So you know, like with any families, all kinds of things come up when, so you have to respond as best we can. Um, and the most unusual thing that happened was, um, this family, what I didn't know was that they were already on the bus. So at four o'clock we get a call that this, um, family, husband, wife and three children are at the bus depot. Right? So we did go down and pick them up. I mean, wouldn't you can, I mean leave 'em that's fine. So we went down and picked them up. What they didn't tell us was that the mother was eight and a half months pregnant. And so, um, a day later we welcomed a new member of the adores a sweet little child has.

Joann: [16:37](#) So that's been the most, I mean, the language has been a big problem, right, because the families are not all from the same country. There's a lot of different languages. Well, most all of them are from the Congo. There's one family from Angola and most people think they're going to be Spanish. Speaking from the middle, mid America. But that's not true. These are all from Africa. Right. So what language they speak? Um, well we speak to them mostly using the translator in Portuguese, but they speak French, Portuguese Lingala and now they're learning English. So they certainly put me to shame with their language knowledge. But anyway, they're great people. You know, when we went down to get that new family and then little Maria comes and hugs man.

Joann: [17:25](#) She melted resistance. Yes. So you're back to teaching in a way in the evenings. Well I don't do a, I have other sisters who are tutoring the students. Yes. So I don't actually do any teaching. I mean, you know, I suppose you could say, I mean it's probably teaching me more than I'm teaching them actually. What's the, what? What have you learned from these families? Oh my goodness. How do I even begin? You know, I didn't really know the Wichita public school system that well and they've been amazingly helpful. Very familiar. So as soon as they come, we take them to Dunbar and get the children evaluated and get them placed in a school. And of course, then you have to go to the school and take that information and they have to have acceleration. So then we have to go to them, the a county health and get their vaccination records. Okay. And so we do all that. And then, you know, just learning, um, what resources are

available. We were very fortunate that we belonged to this, um, network of people who are engaged with immigrants. So many other services. There are a lot of services available in Wichita that I did not know about now. So,

Molly: [18:36](#) and, um, uh, the kids eat dinner with you guys every night. Um, so there's, I'm sure some just, you know, new noises, new, uh, they're very rambunctious. They're very sweet kids. But like you said, they're a lot of them. Uh, and they run around. What do you, I mean, what does that like, uh, going from, you know, uh, a life where, you know, it's a bunch of adult women living together who've known each other for years, um, and now welcoming in, uh, children again, who are so full of just so much rambunctious energy all the time.

Joann: [19:19](#) You know, whether you're teaching or whatever you're doing, you're relating to individual persons and you know, and you see somehow the person before you. Now I don't think of them. Okay. Now this is an African American six year old, you know this, uh, this is Maria. Yeah. Didn't know before me. And so

Molly: [19:44](#) is it, is it fun having the families around? Do you guys, cause you guys now get to go to like school activities and, and formed the cheer squad, so the children up there when they're doing performances and things like that.

Joann: [19:58](#) Well, it's exciting having them around, but um, you know, since they've come, I fractured my kneecap. Oh my goodness. And so I was out of commission for a while and so I'm still doing physical therapy and so I'm very cautious and then, you know, they're kind of swirling around young. I mean if I go up there and the union, sometimes they all come and rug me, you know, and I can't now Greg low camp, you know, they can all come and hug him and he'll toss them around and all, they're not going to knock him over. For the listeners, who is Greg? He is the person in charge of our physical plant here and he manages Wichita buildings and the people and the coworkers. Yes. Yes.

Molly: [20:38](#) Um, so you've had this, you know, really wide range of experiences, um, living in New York, living in Wichita, teaching an academic dean, um, what has been the most fulfilling role you've held over your life?

Joann: [20:54](#) We're going to ask something like that. And all I have to say is I have loved everything I've done.



Molly: [20:59](#) Yeah. It's all held a special place in your life. Needed to be. Yeah. So a question we ask all the sisters on the show is about habits, which is of course the namesake of the show. What is your best habit?

Speaker 4: [21:17](#) Prayer?

Molly: [21:19](#) You sounded Oh, just like, oh yeah. Prayer.

Joann: [21:22](#) Well, I was trying to figure out whether you meant close or whether you meant really my [inaudible]

Molly: [21:26](#) oh, but no, no, no. Your the daily habits you do not avast. [inaudible]. Yeah.

Joann: [21:32](#) Okay. Well really it is prayer. You know, my morning time of silence with God and then the liturgy and the Eucharist, you know, those, and that's what keeps me going. Yeah.

Molly: [21:47](#) And what's your worst habit?

Joann: [21:50](#) Probably sometimes just going to my room and not seeking out others. Um, I do get tired of having people talk about nothing or tell me this same story over and over again. Yeah. I guess I something that I've learned working with the outdoors, um, over my time here as you all know each other so well because you've known each other for so long. So I can imagine that there would be some repetitiveness in conversation and you really imagined that I could, I could see that potentially.

Joann: [22:31](#) Yeah. Sometimes it takes a real discipline to stay and listen appreciatively to the same story. Right. You know, but that's part of Christian re witness and presence and all that too. I remind myself.

Molly: [22:46](#) Well, thank you so much for coming on the show. I've really enjoyed talking with you and hearing your stories.

Joann: [22:52](#) Well, thank you very much for having me, Molly.

Molly: [22:56](#) Thanks for joining us for show notes and behind the scenes check out our website [adores.org](#) habits is brought to you by the Adorers of the blood of Christ u s region, co-produced by Cheryl Wittenauer, Lori Bengé, and Molly McKinstry edited by Molly McKinstry. Thanks. We'll see you all next week.