

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 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.

Molly: [00:25](#) Hi everyone. Welcome back. Today I'm sitting down with sister Laurentia Koehler sister Laurentia. Thank you so much for joining me today.

Laurentia: [00:33](#) I really am looking forward to talking with you. I'm excited about this. They tell me it's going to be lots of fun. It is. I'm a lot of fun to hang out with if I do say so myself. You know when you write your biography it is like what was your influence for becoming an adorer? Okay. I can always say that I had three aunts that were in the community. My mother's three sisters. Of course, they were an influence, but I thought of one that's really unique. My oldest aunt, mother's oldest sister, was an adorer of the blood of Christ and she was a housekeeper. Yeah. And she had been missioned to a rural out in the country parish, Manchester. Oklahoma. Okay.

Laurentia: [01:16](#) Okay. The sisters that were, the teachers were gone all day and she was in the house all day alone and she was very introverted. So she was not one who went out or had things. So her family, mom and dad and my, her sisters, they all were concerned for sister Martha because she was so alone out there in the country. So she needed a Victrola.

Molly: [01:41](#) Hey everyone. Molly here, for those of you like me who had no idea what a Victrola was, Victrola is an early version of a record player. If you've ever seen on old TV shows or movies, the record players that look like they have a big megaphone attached to them. That's what she's talking about. All right. Now back to the show.

Laurentia: [02:00](#) Yeah. For some music or something for during the day. Right. So my grandpa and my momma and two of her sisters went to Manchester, Oklahoma and took a record Victrola and old retro for Sister Martha so she could have music during the day. Well of course this is a distance from where they were from Windhorst, Kansas. This is Manchester, Oklahoma. You're talking about back in those days, you know, 3 days or better anyway, you don't make that in one day. No. And it wasn't a place where you would find a hotel. Ah, this was one of those

country places where someone came and needed an out a place to stay. You play, you stayed at people's places, right? Well, it's so happened that my grandpa and grandma Koehler accepted to have grandpa and a couple of the girls and one of the girls that stayed at the Koehler residence was my mom. Oh my goodness. And she and my daddy kind of made a little liking for each other, each other. And on Sunday before they left, my dad invited mom to stay for their choir part, bad picnic in the Anthony Park, which is just south of this north of Manchester.

- Laurentia: [03:16](#) But that was the beginning cause mom and dad connected on and they liked each other. They connect to your doors. So was Martha part's did she intend for that to happen?
- Molly: [03:26](#) I think she was part of the beautiful order of things.
- Laurentia: [03:29](#) Exactly, exactly. So I would say that was my first influence. I love that. I love to do, I never thought of it before. I mean I've known it. Right, but you just thought of it this way and I've already had some fun just recollecting connection that I had never thought of it that way before.
- Molly: [03:48](#) And fun has been a big part of your life because you were a clown for awhile. How did you come to be a clown?
- Laurentia: [03:59](#) I came to be a clown because I was working in the a as associate superintendent of Catholics, Oklahoma City Catholic schools. Oh Wow. And one of our secretaries was into clowning and she got me excited about it and it was enough for me to try it.
- Molly: [04:17](#) So you were an assistant superintendent of a school district and you took up clowning because the secretary invited me too. What was your clown name at that point?
- Laurentia: [04:30](#) I was Marigold. Okay. I simply took Marigold because I love Marigolds
- Molly: [04:35](#) Then what you developed after that?
- Laurentia: [04:37](#) Later when I was back at this center, the province center at that point in time, yeah. Sister Lucille Kurshan was also into clowning and I was into clowning and I had an outfit I borrowed, I got took my dad's old overalls and I made, I was just an old yup. I was just an old, what do you call it? A country clown, you know, kind of a whole bowl. And that's kind of what I wanted to be. And uh, but we were both invited to do a farewell program, farewell play as a farewell for our outgoing leadership team.

- Laurentia: [05:20](#) So Lucille and I, we actually went to a class up north here in Wichita somewhere and found out about, you know, putting on a real nose taping and pasting it to your nose and, and the type of clown that you were and how you would dress accordingly. She was more of a fancy type and she had a pink hair, pink hair, and she was, had a white, I think, I think it was a white face. But anyway, she was a fancy clown. Not a, not a, not a whole bowl as a whole bowl. I was done, you know, I had colored my cheeks and I had green hair and I had my dad's old hat on. Yeah. And big old shoes. And uh, I just kept my pockets full of candy. That's what I did. Yeah. And uh, but we had, they had a program for us.
- Laurentia: [06:07](#) They had a written script and so then I became troubles and she was sparkles, troubles and sparkle. And so that kept that. So after that I was still always troubles. Wow. So sad to say at this point in time, I have nothing left. Not even the nose. No clowning, things left. I'm sure we can find a picture. Oh, I've got one. You got, I've got a picture of, sure. We can find one. You mentioned briefly when you were talking about that, that you were the assistant superintendent, which means of course, that you were a teacher for a period of time. What did you teach? I started teaching back in 1954 right out of college to Sacred Heart College. And I was teaching first grade. First grade. How many years did you teach first grade? Oh, you would ask. I taught first grade at all saints for three years.
- Laurentia: [07:03](#) And sister Macrina was, I was in a room next to sister Macrina who was a what? She had been a teacher for years. She was, she was my mentor. I say it always that she saved my life and I think she saved the life of my first graders those first couple of years. But Macrina God rest her soul was my mentor and got me started. And of course I'm always proud to say that one of my first grade students who was also a second grade student for me, but his now sister Nylas Moser. Oh my goodness. So she's in community with you. Absolutely. That's so lovely. We were proud of it. Both of us. So you taught for [inaudible]. Then I taught first and then I moved to another school here in Wichita. And I think at that point I had second grade. I basically was always a primary teacher first, second, third or fourth, either one grade or two grades, or then I was in a country school and I had four of four grades.
- Molly: [07:58](#) So you covered it all. I've covered it all. You're a bit of a Jack of all trades.
- Laurentia: [08:02](#) That's exactly what my great, that's what my daddy called himself. I think I could say that I've had lots of experiences. So I

was teacher and I've probably a total of 30, 40 years all together. But, and I ended up learning to really love and work with intermediate and upper grade students like sixth, seventh and eighth. Yeah. And that was usually in teaching religion. And uh, what was something that being a teacher, especially little kids taught you? I always said if it had been the Lord's wheel and I had gone from being a religious to a married woman, I think I would have made a really good Mama. So this I love children and I would have wanted a bunch. Okay. The children, there's, there's such a trust about them.

- Laurentia: [08:57](#) They're so open, they're so honest about who they are and they, they're, there's no fake about them. Yeah. And uh, watching them get excited about learning to read or do whatever math, whatever it was, it was just a lesson lesson all the way around, all the way.
- Molly: [09:16](#) And you actually get to teach again these days. Um, we have asylum seeking families staying at the center. So what do you teach the students in the evenings?
- Laurentia: [09:27](#) First of all, I ask if they have any papers from school. Yes. When I say you have any papers from school that they know they've got homework or they don't. So if they've got a paper from school, I help him finish that and do it. And a lot of times there's no way they could do it without me doing it with them and actually showing them. And I have them repeat sentences in English because they still like to use the Portuguese.
- Laurentia: [09:54](#) They don't understand English too well. They don't always even understand what I'm asking them to do. Like erase that. I don't know what that means and that that's, that's a lesson really. But the dear little souls, I tell you before we leave, when we pack up everything to go, yeah, I get a good night hug. Oh, good night sister. And I say it in English. Yes. God bless you sister in English. Isn't that precious? That's whee that give me a hug every day, every night. So that's very special. But I'm trying to help them to gain, they're moving along with their number facts, English reading. We haven't done much yet. These little kids, the two that I have have not been with us too long. And so they haven't even been here for the whole, since Christmas time. I think they didn't come to a march or something like that or was it maybe the late February could be something like that, but it's, they haven't been here long.
- Molly: [10:56](#) So. So after you, uh, were a teacher at principal, you became, uh, an assistant superintendent.

- Laurentia: [11:04](#) Superintendent were such that I was teaching in one of our larger schools here in which Saint Francis of Assisi, I was there eight years and how many students were there? And I was principals. So that's another story.
- Molly: [11:19](#) Uh, how, well, how many students were there?
- Laurentia: [11:22](#) Um, close to 300, I think. Okay. It was a big school. It was a big school. It was one of my principalship experiences, but my father's health, they lived in Oklahoma. I know Karachi, Oklahoma. And uh, my father's health was declining and mother was the primary caregiver. And so it was like she needed some help too. And so I was, I asked the community about my mu going down there, working down there so I could be close and be able to help my mom at least on weekends or something.
- Laurentia: [11:59](#) And that's exactly, they were always very open to what those needs are just right. I've always found leadership. If I asked them for, I'd like to be this, to do this or that, they were always very open. And, uh, anyway, I was able then to be missioned to Oklahoma City close enough to where I could help out on the weekends. And it was through sister Loretta Gagan who was at that point in time, superintendent of the Catholic school, Oklahoma City Catholic schools. And so Loretta was also then instrumental in my getting a job as associate superintendent. So I'm sure they're finding stories from that because superintendents, they don't oversee one school, they oversee it district and we had about 20 of them.
- Molly: [12:47](#) So I mean what was that like? That's a huge responsibility.
- Laurentia: [12:52](#) First of all, it's like being a leadership in the community. You learn to know all your schools, you learn to know all the other principals and you get acquainted with each one of the Catholic schools. That's so terribly enriching. And it was always very, I love to visit with people, I love to be with people and I enjoyed going to schools and I still have friendships because of that. What was, there were fun things we did because her mom loved to travel and Loretta traveled with family and they went and did fun stuff together. My mom is a country lady. Jay never went anywhere. Never flew a plane. Oh my goodness. So it was through sister Loretta that my mom had her very first plane ride from Oklahoma City to where did we go? I'm going to say New York, I think it was New York. Imagine the country lady culture shock.
- Laurentia: [13:48](#) Oh, it was a culture shock. We'd get to the corner and you know in New York you just got to go. Yeah. I said, come on mom, we

got to go. She's only from a cart. She from us a little, you know, more country than Wichita. Yeah, poor thing. She thought I was leading her into death row. Did she enjoy it at the well she did in the end. Yes. Very much so. Anyway, those are experiences that were good too. Oh, I was one of the craziest things that ever happened to you and your associates, your granddaughter, craziest this. Oh my gosh. Craziest thing. I'm at a blank right now because it was always, you know, you went from school to school and sometimes I got involved in doing curriculum work. That was always very beneficial in working with some of the teachers who were part of the committee. Another thing we got involved in was looking at values. It was part of our diocesan um, plan for the schools and just doing those and being, having a successful day. And not nobody booted me out. Nobody went off the rails. No. So, uh, I found out at lunch today that for most of your life you were a dancer.

Laurentia: [15:04](#) Something Fun was talking, Huh? Somebody was talking, honey, I grew up dancing.

Molly: [15:10](#) What kind of dance did you do?

Laurentia: [15:11](#) My folks would, we would go and my mother and dad were, they love to dance and we went as a family. And this was back when you go in as a family. You went to where there was a family that you, you didn't just, it was like the hall. I grew up in a little country place called Danville out here just west about 45 minutes to an hour west of here. And they had a parish hall and I don't know how often it happened, but there would be dances and the whole family, the whole kids, everybody came. So I grew up, mother and dad were dancers and we kids were dance. We danced with them. It could be the plain old two step. Or then when we got down to Oklahoma, I got into the poker.

Laurentia: [15:55](#) Oh, I love Boca and, and there's the cheque hall in Yukon, Oklahoma. And again, mother and dad always went over there every Saturday, almost every Saturday night, evening. And it's a family place. So we kids all learned how to dance and do it as a family. You do your circle and you, I mean there's, and there's games, there are dances that you do as a group. Wow. Or you can dance just the two. Anyway. And, and even after I came to the convent, I didn't give it up. I still could go down to the check hall with my family and dance. And who did I dance with? Mostly my sisters. I had two, a sister next to me and two sisters next to me and age. And my sister Alice lived in, Oh, Yukon am I I could be a leader and I would tell you we would really dance to the, we could, we could do the, there's different kinds of dances, whether it's the Schottische or whether it's another

kind. But anyway, I didn't give it up when I came to the convent and we did lots of dancing right here. The polka that dance a step. Yeah. The nuns that poppy told on me today are the ones I danced with. We had lots of fun. We do the Virginia reel and all kinds of things. It was so much fun. And now as I keep saying this one thing I cannot do anymore, but it's okay, I can still wiggle around to the music. Oh, wiggle around in your, in your scene. Um,

- Molly: [17:32](#) I think a lot of times people assume that sisters don't have hobbies. Like all you all do is just sit around and teach and pray and, and have no fun. Of course, I know that's not true because I laugh all day with you guys. But can you talk a little bit about what life is like as a sister outside of going to mass and daily prayers? But what I mean just what's it like being a sister as like a normal human like now, even the day?
- Laurentia: [18:01](#) Yeah. Okay. Well it's, as you say, it's not like you said, it's, it's not, it's not stoic. It's not, ugh. If I sit and read a little bit more or pray a little bit more would be good for my soul probably. But I have to go do puzzle or I have to go to the computer and do some puzzle games on the computer.
- Laurentia: [18:23](#) Right. Or, uh, I like, I love gardening. I love to go out and work in my flower beds. I've gotten raised beds out here on the south of the house and a close. Now with my disability, I always take my walker out and as long as I've got that, I'm safe and I can sit down and do what I need to do that. I love to work outside. I always, I come in with my hands all dirty and I say, you want some Earth Lotion? You wants an earth lotion and some people will take my hand and they rub it and they know they're getting nothing but dirt. But it's earth anyway. So I love to do that. I do. So Duco I'll pick that up and work on that. I love to do Mandela coloring. I've done different hobbies in the past. I used to crochet but that's when Loretta was with me cause she was my, she was the one who taught me how to do it and encouraged me and I've almost forgotten how to do it now.
- Laurentia: [19:16](#) Don't do it at all. So there's a lot going on. There's a lot going on. He prayers in the morning. I might have now the advantage of as, as an older sister, I now am retired. Yes. But I'm working part time so you know, you just never really totally retire.
- Molly: [19:34](#) And what do you do part time?
- Laurentia: [19:36](#) So what I'm doing part time is I'm pastoral care coordinator for our sisters in Caritas, which is our car tosses, our health care unit. It's a 22 bed licensed in Kansas, licensed longterm care for

all of our suits for our sisters who need seven seven day, 24 hour care. Okay. So in other words, total care and it is housed in the same building with y'all [inaudible] so you still get them together. It's in a different wing. Our, our house here is three stories high. I live on second floor, what's called B wing, just south of there is d wing going north going south.

Laurentia: [20:20](#) And that's where the 22 bed unit is Tess's behind two doors that have had locked doors for safety. Just safety. Let's clarify that. Yeah, it's if you would find that in any nursing home, right. It's coded for safety. Take care of, for people who are having sexual issues or you know, just to keep talking. Right. So I have the privilege, I call it a privilege of being back with our sisters in Caritas and I say I'm working back there and praying with and spending time with a bunch of saints. Yes, they are such all that. They are our elders. They're very saintly people. They're just, they're very, they have a beautiful attitude. Some of them hardly know what's going on anymore, some of them, but they're so beautiful. They're so holy and they're so loving. And I'm privileged to be with him and if and when their health is such that they become confined to bed, uh, that's when my role as pastoral care, I spend more time just being with them.

Molly: [21:30](#) I think a lot of times, especially young people can see the process of dying something scary or, um, I comfortable. Can you talk about the joys that you get from providing pastoral character to aging and dying women?

Laurentia: [21:48](#) To spend time with someone that is aging first of all, and they're still, you're able to even talk with them yet or they're able to move around using a walker or wheelchair. They know there's a better place waiting. Yeah. And they know, I mean, they're very present. They're smile. They're, they're just the handshake there greeting to me each day. That's a gift. Cause sometimes it's like, oh, I don't know why I'm still here. I'm already a hundred and why am I still here? I don't understand. I'm doing, I'm ready to go. Yeah. Yeah. They're ready to go. But they also know, and they'll tell you that the next sentence, there's a reason why I'm still here.

Laurentia: [22:32](#) So when someone, it reaches the point, which we just experienced recently as you know, we just had a death and I was privileged to be able to spend considerable time with her. And it was a painful time because it was, it was a very, very hard couple of days for her til we got, until we got a really comfortable, and again, with hospice care, hospice care is wonderful and because there are people who don't know or have never looked up, you know, hospice is really the um,

providing a place and comfort level where you can die in peace. Exactly. Exactly. And she did, she died. She was the most beautiful just cause she died with such peace. He was a smile on her face.

Molly: [23:20](#) So the adorers do something very, uh, I find it really profound when someone is dying. When one of your sisters is dying, you all, uh, create a schedule to pray over. That sister said that she's never alone. Can you talk about that process?

Laurentia: [23:40](#) Yes, we do that we have signed up in the sisters in the house, have the sign that thing up. We'd go by half hour or hour, depends on, we're getting fewer in numbers too. So, and for those who are able to spend a half hour, they can spend an hour depending upon the status of the person that's dying, um, through the night. That's, there's not always, but we do sign up and we try to, we don't want them to die alone. It's your to spend quiet time. You might be praying with them, you might, and not praying with them necessarily, but praying with them and, and uh, while they are, they're in the process with you once they enter the dying process. I don't know. For me it's a joy that comes over my heart because they've earned heaven. It's, I mean, it's, heaven is a gift from God to us and they're now going to be able to g share that. And I don't want, I don't wish for a sister that is dying to just have more time to just, to be with me. No, I would not hold her back at all, dear Lord. If you're ready for taker. Yeah.

Molly: [24:54](#) It's a remarkable thing to watch. Um, especially for someone who's not a sister who doesn't, well now I do cause I work for y'all, but didn't spend much time around sisters growing up. It was remarkable to watch. Um,

Laurentia: [25:13](#) yeah,

Molly: [25:13](#) all of you come together and just, it was, it, it was instinct. It was someone you know, put a sheet and they made the block times and you all come together and choose who's going to sit with her when and um, it's, uh, it's a privilege for all of you. It's a, a piece giving, um, opportunities so that you know, your sisters never die alone. And it really is a beautiful thing that I had never heard of or seen of. And it was a, I think a, a beautiful tribute to the sisters who are dying. So there's a question I ask everyone who comes on the podcast.

Molly: [25:53](#) Obviously the podcast is named habits. Our daily habits make us who we are. And so I ask everyone, what is your best habits?

Laurentia: [26:02](#) What's my best habit right now? My best habit when I get up in the morning, the first thing I need is my cup of coffee and then I used that next 30 minutes for prayer. That's my best habit right now.

Molly: [26:20](#) And what's your worst habit?

Laurentia: [26:22](#) My worst habit? Oh my. Um, probably that I had. I get too involved. I get involved in doing all these other things. I like to do like going to the computer and playing the game or go working on puzzle. I can get lost in that and not spending as much time. I've been real honest. I don't spend as much time with spiritual reading or with a centering prayer. I could do a lot better with that. Well, it's real family. Cool. Alrighty. Thanks so much for taking time on your day to talk to me. I really enjoyed hearing your stories. They were wonderful. Thank you. It's been fun.

Molly: [26:59](#) Thanks for joining us for show notes and behind the scenes check out our website adores.org habits is brought to you by the adores of the blood of Christ u s region, co-produced by Cheryl Wittenauer. Laurie Bengé and Molly McKinstry edited by Molly McKinstry. Thanks. We'll see you all next week.