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## Sr. Celia: Improving Education

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Jackson Phillips

### **Sr. Celia: Improving Education**

Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Celia in January of 2018, where she discussed her life as a woman religious. The portion of the interview included in this paper involves her explanation of why she chose to become a teaching sister.

Sister Celia is a Salesian Sister of St. John Bosco. She is starting her thirty first year as a woman religious, and while she has recently started working with elderly and retired sisters, most of her work up until now has consisted of teaching. A lot of her drive for teaching comes from her experience growing up in the Catholic school system and her goal to improve it for her students.

When I asked her about her decision to become a sister, she briefly expressed a feeling of awe when thinking about Jesus' suffering. In her explanation of why she felt awe, she said "I was very familiar with suffering, you know, especially long term suffering." The reason for that is the fact that her father was a veteran of World War II. Growing up, she and her family would visit and help other veterans in her area, which made her familiar with the different kinds of loss and pain that a soldier can experience.

However, her primary reason was the fact that she felt cheated, in a way. One of the freshman year requirements at the college she went to was a class called Basic Catechism. Sister Celia explained that it was that class that first started her thinking about the possibility of

becoming a sister. Her description of the class and her reaction to it was “Really learning about my faith was what made me feel so... I was just so over awed. And I kinda felt a little bit on the angry side. I mean, I had been in Catholic schools all my life and I never learned this basic stuff.” I found this anger and dissatisfaction to be a common thread throughout our interview, though not aimed towards anyone in particular. It seemed to me to be more of a frustrating motivator to do better. Sister Celia told me that in high school, she wasn’t the best academically, and in college she ended up having to leave the school due to grades. In addition to overall grades, she felt she didn’t learn enough about her faith until college, despite having been in Catholic schools all her life. All of this combined to make her feel angry at the system itself. This was really emphasized when she talked about the thoughts she had before first meeting the Salesian Sisters: “I was, like, so fed up. Like, ‘Why has the educational systems, the Catholic school systems, failed me so badly? Why didn’t I know this stuff? Why was I unable? Why don’t I have the skills to learn?’ So I was like ‘Yeah, man, I’m gonna do something about that, I’m gonna put my money where my mouth is.’” She also wasn’t given much preparation on the teaching itself. The way she described it was “This is not like ‘sink or swim,’ this is like ‘Drown!’” Despite that, she was able to get a hang of it and soon became accustomed to teaching.

Throughout the interview, I could tell that Sister Celia cared deeply about what the students get out of their education – strongly influenced by her own experiences as a child and how she felt that the Catholic school system had failed her. Yet despite that feeling, she has a lot of hope for the Catholic youth of today. I asked her how she thinks the young people in the Catholic community are doing in terms of being actively religious and she was very optimistic

and enthusiastic about their participation in the church, saying “What we find in our schools is that the kids struggle, but there’s this renewal in the church now and it’s really just amazing.” In her area in particular, she told me that the students themselves are the ones who ask for more chances to improve their faith.

We talked a little more after we got through all my initial questions and it really resonated with me. One thing she said was, “All you have to do is be” in reference to God’s love and it led into a discussion about learning not to be angry with God for things that happen. She definitely has a lot of passion for making sure that people know that God has love for all of them, and it was easy to hear that passion as she spoke. I ended the interview by asking Sister Celia what she thinks is the most important thing that someone can take away from the work that she and her sisters do. Her response was “God is love. That’s the key.”

## Works Cited

Phillips, Jackson, and Sr. Celia. "Phone Interview." 2 Jan. 2018.