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## Sr. Catherine: Sister for Conversation

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Mary Therese Thomas

### **Sr. Catherine: Sister for Conversation**

This paper includes part of an interview with Sr. Catherine, a sister who has worked as an educator for over 15 years, and her views on inclusivism and the need for political conversation within the United States.

When I had the pleasure of speaking with Sister Catherine, what I found was that what I had stereotypically assumed to be true of her was in fact not true at all: she was not what I had expected a woman religious to be. Sister Catherine comes from a relatively small regional religious community of 200 sisters. Currently, Sister Catherine is a Professor of Religion at a small college, where she focuses on the religious perspectives of genocide. Most of our talk focused on her responsibilities as a citizen of the United States and as a woman religious to participate in politics. Her religious congregation has a particular focus on social issues, so looking at the bigger pictures, asking questions, and keeping the poor and marginalized on the forefront calls her to be active on their behalf.

She felt her biggest responsibility was to create a dialogue and start conversations between people in a world that is changing and seems to constantly be at odds. A large part of conflict stems from the religious diversity that we see between Christianity, Atheism, and other religions. She says that we do not know how to respond to people who are different from ourselves. “Every voice is welcome and needed in the Church,” regardless of the mouth that it comes from.

I do not think there is a more appropriate story that could have summarized what Sister Catherine believes as a teacher, citizen, and woman religious than the one that she told me at the final moment of our interview, and it is a story that we, as religious people or non-believers, should strive to achieve: that all voices be heard and appreciated in developing a dialogue to

induce change and acceptance in our world. Rehearsed, slowly, and purposefully, Sister Catherine told me the story of a junior year student that she taught many years ago in an interreligious dialogue class. He was a DACA student who came to the USA as a child and was taking the class for fun. Part of the class was going on field trips to visit various religious institutions such as synagogues and mosques. An imam came to talk to their class and helped facilitate discussion with the students, which helped enlighten them on the similarities between Muslims and Christians. This one particular student raised his hand and said, "I have been taught my entire life to hate people like you, but after our discussion I have found nothing to hate."

Sister Catherine has written about this particular student's response for years because "it showed that when we dare to have a conversation with someone who we have been taught to hate, or taught to fear, and have the guts to sit down and find common ground? That's where it is and that's where I know I can play a pivotal part in helping my students to dialogue. It's so important." She does her part by educating students, and by fighting for those poor and marginalized communities who cannot stand up for themselves. What we must do is find how we will also do this and facilitate that first step.

## Works Cited

“Sr. Catherine.” Telephone interview by author. December 20, 2017.