

2018

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McDaniel, Keridwen. "Sr. Colleen: Teaching as a Passion" (2018). *Ask a Sister: Interview Wisdom from Catholic Women Religious*.
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Sister Colleen: Teaching as a Passion

Abstract: This paper dives into some of the adventures that Sister Colleen Clair has experienced throughout her life as a Catholic educator in America and across the globe.

If you go on Facebook and visit Sister Colleen Clair's page, you will see a wide variety of things: dozens of pictures of her working with children, posts of quotes from her favored saints, and even a photo of a sister on a motorcycle with "Always take the high road" embellished on the bottom. Sister Colleen is a Catholic school principal in New Jersey and has been teaching children for 25 years as a sister. She is a part of the Salesian Sisters of Saint John Bosco which is one of the largest orders in the world with some 12,000 members! Sr Colleen has led an exciting life from thinking you only became a nun if you couldn't make friends, to making some of the best relationships of her life in her own religious community.

Sr. Colleen first felt the tug of the Catholic lifestyle when she was in 6th grade. She was sitting in mass, being attentive as always, and felt God speaking to her, telling her that he wanted her to become a sister. As any 6th grader would do, she shoved the thought aside and stuck to her ideas that nuns only become nuns because they can't get a date. And Sr. Colleen could get a date. But as time went on, she considered this path more and more. High school came around and Sr. Colleen met some really cool nuns, as one does when they talk to any number of women religious. Sr. Colleen spoke with her parents and finally decided that she would begin formation right out of high school. This led to years of spectacular work with children not only in the US, but also nearly half-way across the globe in Egypt. Sr. Colleen recently spent two years in Egypt as a principal teaching young Catholic students. While this was the vocation of a lifetime, it did

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not come without sacrifice. There's always homesickness, struggle fitting into a new community, and of course learning a new language. While she didn't have to be fluent, Sr. Colleen did end up picking up some Arabic while in Egypt and, as she expressed very pointedly, Arabic is *hard*. Prior to this calling across the world, Sr. Colleen was not sure if she wanted to teach, or even become a sister at all. As she was deciding to become a sister or not, Sr. Colleen had some help along the way. In high school, she babysat a couple of children for a woman she knew. One day as the mother returned, she asked Colleen what she planned on doing after graduation. Sr. Colleen replied with the generic answer that she had been telling everyone which was that she was going on to college to become a nurse. The mother's reply was simply that Colleen wasn't allowed to do that. Confused, Sr. Colleen defended her case saying her sister was a nurse all the while feeling in her heart that that was not the path she wanted to follow. The mother told her that Colleen *had to* work with children as her kids looked forward to the days Sr. Colleen would come to babysit them. Though she didn't often, Sr. Colleen admitted to the mother that she had contemplated becoming a sister after interacting with the friendly and wonderful women religious at her school and seeing that they work with children. The mother's response was something that Sr. Colleen would remember to this day. This mother told Sr. Colleen that she also had thought about becoming a sister and that she still wonders what her life would have been like if she would have followed that thought. Sr. Colleen considered that and made the decision to become a sister. Prior to this her plan had been to become a nurse and hopefully one-up her mother by having seventeen children. But as she looks back on those thoughts now, she is glad she chose the religious life because even though her mother had sixteen children, she is all alone now with no one else to raise. Sr. Colleen prefers her life of community with her fellow women religious. She is more than happy with the life she has chosen to live.

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