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Sr. Lucy: Vocational Conflict

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Cindy Johnson

Sr. Lucy: Vocational Conflict

Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Lucy in January of 2018 to explore her life experiences as a woman religious. This paper includes a portion of the interview in which she spoke about her vocational conflicts over the years, and how she overcame them.

Sister Lucy is a Franciscan sister, who is part of an order based in the midwest. For over fifty years, she shared her role of being a woman religious with being a nurse. The original plan for Sister Lucy was not to become a sister. Though she went to a Catholic university, her intentions there were to become a nurse, and then later a nurse practitioner, and to marry her significant other. In the first two years at college, Sister Lucy became known by all of the sisters in the area. A sister actually challenged her to become a sister! However, the man she was involved with meant a lot to her, and she almost took a semester off school to really think about this lifestyle of becoming a woman religious. She entered her congregation on August 28, 1960, and the sisters encouraged her to continue her nursing degree. The man expected to become her fiancé was beyond confused, but eventually came to understanding when Sister Lucy explained her relationship with God and the women religious in her life. Her family was not so understanding though. Timing was not good for Sister Lucy to tell her mom; the weekend that she came home to tell her was the weekend of Mother's Day. Instead of hearing how her daughter was going to get married and provide grandchildren, she was breaking the news that she was going to enter the life of women religious. Her mother was furious thinking that her only daughter was taking away her chance to have grandchildren, and she felt this was a selfish act. A

year of tension went by, and her family finally started to come around to the idea. Her father was always more understanding than her mother, but they both needed a lot of time to consider this life change. Becoming a sister was not exactly what Sister Lucy had planned for her life, and during the year in which her family was not speaking to her, she questioned if she even made the right decision. The process of making this her reality was conflicting for Sister Lucy, but the journeys that lay ahead of her displayed that her decision could not have been anything shy of God's plan.

To live out God's plans was never always easy for Sister Lucy. Though she knew that being both a sister and a nurse was her calling, there were times in which juggling the two was hard and she continued to question herself. From 1960-1963, Sister Lucy stated that her life had "a lot of structure". Her nursing program and her process of entering into her congregation as a woman religious were highly organized, making the integration of the two parts of her life somewhat less challenging. She stated how "this structure helped me facilitate these two walks of life that I was taking", and how sometimes she was still confused (Bahl). One obstacle that interfered with her ability to integrate her two professions was the science versus religion contradiction. Her nursing degree is science based, and she stated that integrating and understanding that with her life as a woman religious really was a struggle. Thankfully her school offered some philosophy classes that lead her to start making discernment on bringing the two dimensions together. Across the world, there are other sisters who have similar situations. Some live a completely different life in their other vocation, and pursue all types of professions other than just being a woman religious. For women religious such as Sister Lucy, having both vocations made her whole. Sister Lucy's experiences in her field of nursing, within her studies in

Native American tribes, and the social activism that she partakes in, diminished any questioning that she was going down the wrong or right path. It is not uncommon for women religious to have multiple vocations, and it is admirable how well many of them handle keeping their multiple vocations equally prioritized in their lives. As Sister Lucy's story displays, vocational conflicts do arise for women religious; but it seems as though having the different experiences through multiple vocations allows for the problems within the conflict to resolve itself.

Work Cited

“Sr. Lucy Bahl.” Telephone interview by author. January 9, 2018.