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## Sr. Carol Navitski: Importance of the Laity

Sofia Vacca

*Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois*

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Sofia Vacca

### **Sr. Carol Navitski: Importance of the Laity**

Abstract: This paper includes part of an interview with Sr. Carol Navitski, a woman religious and teacher. During this portion of the interview, she discussed her love for teaching, changes the Catholic Church has made over the years, and some of the challenges she believes are still prevalent today.

When I spoke with Sr. Carol, she discussed her vocation and thoughts on both the changes the Catholic Church has made during her time as a woman religious and the inevitable challenges that Church continues to face today. Sr. Carol began her teaching career at a Catholic high school in 1973, but after receiving her master's degree, she began teaching graduate level classes in 1995. Today, she is still teaching graduate classes, but also teaches classes for lay adults who are preparing for ministry. While she loves teaching in general, the ministry classes are her favorite because of the large quantities of life experience the students already have—she enjoys hearing their personal and unique experiences. Although in total she has been teaching for over 40 years, it was not until 10 years into her career that she entered religious life. However, this did not change her gift for teaching or her overall approach to help lead her students to “discover what they already know within them.”

Since she has been in religious life for 35 years, Sr. Carol has been able to see a lot of changes within the Catholic Church. She says the Catholic population where she lives has become more educated. Overall, she thinks that there is also a better understanding that the Church is made up of the people of God, not just the clergy. The Catholic Church has historically

been very separated in terms of the clergy and the laity. Dating back to third century A.D., the clergy was thought of as superior to the laity both religiously and socially. In the Roman Empire, the clergy were exempt from civil and military duties and from paying taxes. The laity were originally seen as lesser, and they were to be passive regarding religious affairs (Shaw). Throughout history, the role of the laity has been controversial, but it has become more pronounced over time. Sr. Carol has seen the role of the laity increase throughout her time as a woman religious and views this change as both important and necessary to the success of the Church.

Sr. Carol's love for community life was prominent in all her stories and answers. She was adamant that there is so much more to Catholicism than the clergy and religious people. Community and togetherness are important aspects of the church, especially in regards to lay men and women. She is happy to see that more lay men and women are becoming involved in ministry and sees their contributions as gifts and aid in making the Church stronger. This, along with the mention that her favorite classes to teach are those for lay adults preparing for ministry, emphasizes her beliefs on the importance of the laity in the Catholic community. I thought this was an interesting contrast to the historical view that the laity should not play an active role in ministry. After talking with Sr. Carol, I realized that the Church has grown a lot and that the combination of clerical and lay people has been extremely beneficial. Although this is one of many positive changes within the Catholic Church, Sr. Carol also discussed inevitable challenges that need to be addressed.

The major challenge that Sister Carol sees is the dwindling number of priests. Due to this decline, she believes the Eucharist will be lost unless those allowed to preside in the

Eucharist “gets opened up to married priests and women priests.” Because the Eucharist is central to Catholicism, she views the continuation of those teachings as a higher importance than the traditions of who can preside over the Eucharist. She is optimistic that the possibility of married men and women becoming priests will become a reality in the future and she believes that Pope Francis is leaning towards trying to move the Church in this direction eventually.

Overall, I loved hearing both the positive and negative views Sr. Carol held about the Catholic Church. It is evident that she is aware times are changing and the Church needs to change in order to continue being successful. Sr. Carol’s passion, selflessness, and love for teaching and serving God shone throughout the interview and listening to her talk about her experiences was inspiring.

## Works Cited

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