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Sr. Lucille and Mary Anne: Choice in Ministry

Abstract: I interviewed Sisters Lucille and Mary Anne regarding their experience as women religious within the Church. This paper highlights a portion of the interview dedicated to the changes for women religious relating to the choice in ministry and the decreasing number of women entering the church.

Sisters Lucille and Mary Anne have been women religious for over 60 years, dedicating more than half of that time to education. Both taught early childhood for 37 years and currently hold religious classes at a retirement home, open to religious and lay people. Both are sisters in the same congregation. I learned that both Sisters Lucille and Mary Anne fell in the 65+ age group when identifying women religious. They had more than enough experience and information when it came to the Church and being women religious.

I asked them if there were anything they wish they had earlier in their careers that people have access to now. Sisters Lucille and Mary Anne both agreed on one central theme: choice in ministry. When they first entered the Church, they were told where to go and what do with their lives. They had no say in how they served the community. Sister Lucille broke down the term “obedience.” Women religious take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She went on to explain the interpretation of the vow to obedience:

Obedience in the European model was you go where you’re supposed to go, and you do what you’re supposed to do. When they told us we could have a choice people thought we don’t follow obedience but we do. And it’s harder because you have to weigh whether or not you really want to do this. In other words, obedience is totally different insofar

that you make the choice and you live with your choice. That is sometimes harder than them telling you what to do.

Women religious were forced into a career or call to service because they were successful in a specific field. Sister Mary Anne was a successful teacher after beginning her life to service and as a result moved from place to place teaching wherever the Church wanted. She did not necessarily like this type of service. She mentioned meeting Sister Lucille after they both were given the same assignment. They were told to give demonstrations on how to teach to 72 different schools. They found that many of the people they were teaching did not want to teach for the rest of their careers. Sisters Lucille and Mary Anne knew they were good teachers and decided to begin a new type of education in the diocese. They were the first to go into early childhood education in the area. From that point on, it was always a choice of where they went and how they responded to the call of obedience to the Church.

When the topic of numbers and the number of women religious in the Church was brought up, Sisters Lucille and Mary Anne agreed that the freedom to choose ministry played a part in the dwindling numbers. Sister Mary Anne stressed this point:

People were so confined or told what to do at that time, that they didn't know how to handle that freedom that was given to them. They did not know how to handle that choice and freedom. Today the reason we are so low, and nobody is entering I think is based off what Sister Lucille said. There is so many other opportunities for younger people today in the Church that we didn't have in our time.

The changes in the late 1960's regarding women religious freedom was a major factor in the decreasing number of women entering the Church and remaining part of the Church. Sister

Lucille and Mary Anne commented on this drastic shift in religious culture and agreed that the freedom to choose played a big role in the shifting trends.

Works Cited

“Sr. Lucille.” Personal Interview. December 17, 2018.

“Sr. Mary Anne.” Personal Interview. December 17, 2018