

2019

## Sr. Sara: 21st Century Catholic Education

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### Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Bastida, Molly. "Sr. Sara: 21st Century Catholic Education" (2019). *Ask a Sister: Interview Wisdom from Catholic Women Religious*.  
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Molly Bastida

### **Sr. Sara: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catholic Education**

Abstract: This paper gives a snippet of the life, discernment, and practices of Sr. Sara. Within this paper, Sr. Sara wrestles with her own discernment story and discusses how she believes Catholic education today should look like.

The Catholic church believes and teaches that each person has a specific vocation to fulfill in life. A vocation is more than a profession or something that person is passionate about. A person's vocation is essentially the work they hear as a calling from God to serve Him and his people on Earth. A person's calling experience and vocation is specific to that person; hence each person's calling story is unique to them. A calling from God can come in any shape or size and does not need to be "answered" right away. Many people do not answer God's calling until much later in life, or do not even realize that God is "calling" them when it is starting out. Usually, when a person understands that God is calling them to move in a direction, the next step-usually the scariest-is to either follow God's call or ignore it.

Sr. Sara heard what she would later realize was her first call from God in high school. She found herself asking her biology teacher many different questions about religion and the religious life. She shrugged this off and went to college where she worked as a CNA for Sr. Carol, a Franciscan. Thoughts about religious life ran through Sara's mind, but it was not until a family friend asked her and for the first time ever, Sara said the word "yes" to the infamous of "have you thought about joining the religious life?" This was a very big step for Sara, as it is for many women religious during their discernment process. Finally answering, out loud, to another person, "yes" to God's calling can be a very big and sometimes scary step. From there, Sara

lived with a community in Cedar Rapids while teaching kindergarten. She found herself not loving the place she was at. The community she was at did many things by themselves and Sara longed for more of a connected community feel. After many thoughts and prayers, she decided to leave that community and stay in Cedar Rapids teaching kindergarten as a single person. Sara thought that she was to give up on the idea of religious life and just stay a single person. Then, Sara and her father took her sister to a Special Olympics event and ended up going to church in Nebraska. There, a group of sisters were attending mass as well, and it seemed to Sara that was an obvious sign that God did not want her to give up on his calling of religious life. Sara used a search engine to narrow down her searches on specific communities that focused on connections between their sisters and ones that would allow her to see her family often. She soon found her order. The minute she visited, she described her experience as a “sense of peace and belonging”. She found a group of women who supported her and allowed her to be her true self, she was not introverted at all the first time meeting the community. After about a year and a half of discerning with the community, Sara decided to proceed with the application process in October to become a part of the community. Her nerves were on high alert around April when her current job as an elementary teacher was up for renewal and she still had not heard back from them. Luckily, in May she heard of her acceptance and started the journey to her final vows made in 2013. She currently lives with her supportive community.

Sr. Sara focus when it comes to Catholic education is on the children. She believes that everyone can learn so much from children in the good, the bad, and the ugly. Sr. Sara’s focuses on teaching children that God is also always around them. She hopes that her students, even as preschoolers, can learn that God can be in all things. She talked about her own personal faith is influenced and strengthened by daily blessings such books, music, and movies. Caruso describes

the atmosphere of Catholic schools as one that was “spent in silence to focus more on the internal movements of the Spirit” (Caruso 36). After listening to Sr. Sara and seeing her face light up as she talked about her own classroom, I can see this is not the case for her and other Catholic classrooms today. This shows that Catholic education has evolved from Caruso’s description and its evolution is one for the better. Sr. Sara advocated strongly for seeing God throughout your daily life and she loves to incorporate this in her teaching. She writes a blog that gives advice and anecdotes about her times teaching at a Catholic grade school. In one post, “The Most Wonderful Time of the Year”, Sr. Sara describes her advent project with her preschoolers. Her class settles for a minute, hear the Gospel for that Sunday, reflect on the words they heard, and share if they would like. Then, “we move quietly to our tables to color Advent pictures. I remind them that coloring can be a prayer when we think about God”. This atmosphere that Sr. Sara is creating within these children is completely different than Caruso’s. Yes, the respect and the quiet elements are still there, but Sr. Sara has shifted the emphasis on building a relationship with God around them rather than following strict rules. Sr. Sara has taken her passion of education and her love for God and infused them into welcoming atmosphere for even the smallest of God’s children.

Enter to learn, exit to serve. Sr. Sara said this phrase as she was describing the purpose behind her school and Catholic education. I see this applying to many, if not every, aspect of your life. I came into this interview to learn. To learn about Sr. Sara’s life. To learn about her order. What I did not expect was to learn so much about myself, my faith, and my own “community”. Community is a word that is constantly thrown around when speaking about women religious. It is very apparent that Sr. Sara’s community is a group of incredible women who mean the world to her. After some time reflecting, I have learned that women religious are

not the only ones with a community. I truly believe that every person has a “community”. A group of people-family, friends, coworkers, anyone-that love you unconditionally, support you, encourage you, and challenge you to become the best version of yourself. Communities look different for each of us, but the foundational values seem to all be very similar. I entered this class to learn. I entered this interview to learn. I am exiting ready to serve my own community.

## Works Cited

“Sr. Sara.” Personal Interview. 9 January 2018.