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## Sr. Jay: Social Justice

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Shayna Smith

### **Sr. Jay: Social Justice**

Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Jay in January 2019 regarding her path to becoming a woman religious, and her experiences within her chosen order. This segment of the paper details her order's partaking in social justice oriented activities, and how that connected to course content.

A distinct portion of my interview with Sr. Jay was our discussion on the order of St. Benedict's social justice-mindedness and solidarity with various groups; this was a topic that I was able to connect to our course topics on women religious participating in immigration activism. Following our discussion on the volunteer efforts the women religious of the order of St. Benedict have made to aid the community, Sr. Jay went on to explain her order's engagement with social justice, and encouraging people power. Across multiple areas, Sr. Jay described how the order of St. Benedict has expressed solidarity and support for marginalized groups. She recounted to me a time when the sisters of St. Benedict gathered under a billboard in prayer and protest of a business's anti-semitic hate speech, despite cold weather conditions. Similarly, the sisters hosted a prayer service under the bell outside of their monastery in support of immigrants and refugees, which included prayers from Muslim, Jewish, and other faith groups. Sr. Jay explained that the sisters encourage interfaith dialogues to promote understanding and a listening environment. Very importantly, she explained the significance of people having a space to speak their truth without being attacked. From these instances of social activism and solidarity, I was able to connect conversations from our interview to an article we've read in the course titled, "Brains, Bodies, Borders, Biases and the Circle of Holy Belonging" by Rhonda Miska. The

article details the author's participation in an interfaith protest to combat the dehumanization of undocumented people, in which the author:

stood in a prayer circle of about thirty...to pray and remember those who have died making the journey north... calling out the names of some of the estimated 6,000 migrants who have died along the nearly 2000-mile US/Mexico border... We held up white crosses and named them present – presente – proclaiming their lives as dignified and their deaths as worthy of commemoration. Like John the Baptist, that marginal voice in the wilderness we had heard about in the week's Gospel readings, we were seeking to speak truth (Miska).

The conversation on social justice that arose during my interview with Sr. Jay deepened my understanding of this text in that both explain the tremendous commitment women religious make to ensure the just treatment of different groups in the community. Contrary to what some may believe, women religious are very active in communities and work to protect fairness. This has expanded my understanding because from what I have gathered from our readings and the interview, women religious are very people-centered and wish to alleviate human suffering. Again, this connects to the concept of human dignity that has been so prevalent and important throughout the course. As was indicated at the end of the article, I recognized within Sr. Jay and her order a commitment to, “expanding the circle of belonging, saying yes to solidarity and no to dehumanization, recognizing all as ‘made in God’s image and likeness, and beloved by God’” (Miska).

## Works Cited

Miska, Rhonda. "Brains, Bodies, Borders, Biases, and the Circle of Holy Belonging." *Patheos*, 5 Feb. 2017,  
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/voxnova/2017/02/05/brains-bodies-borders-biases-and-the-circle-of-holy-belonging/>

"Sr. Jay." Interview by author. January 18, 2019.