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Sr. Theresa: Service in Healthcare

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Sister Theresa: Service in Healthcare

Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Theresa on January 2nd, 2019 about her life in the ministry and service in the Catholic Church. This is a portion of the interview where she discusses her career in healthcare during her ministry.

When Sr. Theresa started her service as a woman religious, the most common professions were in education and healthcare. Sr. Theresa worked in both sectors with the majority of her service being in healthcare. Although her service as a woman religious has come to an end with her retirement, she has made a lasting impression on her community and order.

Sr. Theresa worked in education for a few years before entering the healthcare industry. Teaching young Catholic students, she found out, was not her true calling. Shortly after leaving the parochial education system, Sr. Theresa helped treat retired sisters in her order's infirmary which was her introduction into the healthcare industry. Eventually, she attended a local technical college to train to become a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). While serving at a hospital in Nebraska, a government ordinance disallowed her from treating patients by herself. Since this was a small hospital, this meant that she did not work many hours after this ordinance. Her order back in her hometown decided that they couldn't let her sit in Nebraska doing nothing at her age, so they called her back to the order to take care of sisters in the retirement wing of the convent.

Just like many sisters did, Sr. Theresa followed the path of nursing. Since Catholicism owns a major stake in the healthcare industry, many of the hospitals were staffed with women religious like Sr. Theresa (Wall). In the modern Catholic healthcare industry, however, lay

people have taken over the staff of many Catholic hospitals and clinics. This has been a necessary step for the Catholic church as the number of sisters in the Church has drastically decreased post-Vatican II. Sr. Theresa

Not only did Sr. Theresa work as a nurse in healthcare, she also worked in the maintenance department. Sr. Theresa started off as the Director of Facilities for the college connected to her order's convent. After feeling that she was being swindled by contractors due to her lack of experience, she stepped down from that position a few years later. She would then go on to work as an assistant in the facilities department at the Catholic hospital that was also connected to her order.

As we see the number of sisters in the United States drastically decrease, we no longer see sisters like Sr. Theresa regularly staff the Catholic parochial schools or hospitals like they did in the past. There were 55,944 women religious in the United States in 2010, down from 179,954 in 1965 (McGuinness). As a result, we see lay people taking the positions that sisters once held. The average age of a woman religious is steadily increasing as more are heading into retirement. Sisters will be seen in Catholic healthcare or education less frequently than ever in the coming years.

Like most sisters in the modern era, Sr. Theresa is retired happily. During the interview with Sr. Theresa she said that she has no regrets entering sisterhood and she would do it all over again. She has lived a very happy life and an even happier retired life.

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