

2019

Sr. Anna Marie: Education and Mentorship

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Schar, Amanda. "Sr. Anna Marie: Education and Mentorship" (2019). *Ask a Sister: Interview Wisdom from Catholic Women Religious*.
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Amanda Schar

Sr. Anna Marie: Education and Mentorship

Abstract: This paper includes part of an interview with Sr. Anna Marie, a member of an order whose charism focuses on service. Sr. Anna Marie has been involved in education since she joined her order 70 years ago.

The day of my interview I made my way through the monastery's main entrance and was immediately greeted by Sister Anna Marie, who was waiting for me at the welcome desk. Before I could say anything, as I was still walking toward the desk, she asked if I was Amanda. When I confirmed that I was she said, "Wonderful, I'm Sister Anna Marie," and took my hand in a warm embrace that made it feel as if we had known each other for years.

I was immediately put at ease by Sister Anna Marie's hospitality and she wasted no time in beginning my tour and introducing me to every sister we passed. At 90 years old, Sister Anna Marie uses a walker, but the energy that exuded from her had me convinced that she could leave it behind at any moment. Her voice was clear and sharp and she looked me in the eye when she spoke to me, that is until she turned and hurried off to the next location, keeping up a steady stream of comments and introductions and trusting that I was right behind her.

Sister Anna Marie was obviously comfortable at the monastery and she wanted me to be as well. Though her order has only lived in this location for about 20 years, Sister Anna Marie has been a part of the congregation for 70. Her story is similar to that of many of the young women who joined religious orders in the 1940s and 50s— she joined the order of the sisters whose school she attended. Sister Anna Marie enrolled in her order's boarding school in the fourth grade, when her father decided their family's constant moving was having a negative

impact on her education. The boarding school was Sister Anna Marie's introduction to the order that she now calls home. She said that she was "practically raised by the community" and that since she did not want to go to college after she graduated high school it just made sense for her to join the order. At that time the order's apostolate was the boarding school, so Sister Anna Marie became an elementary school teacher and a piano teacher. Though she no longer teaches elementary school, she still teaches piano lessons throughout the week.

After describing how she came to join her order, Sister Anna Marie began to tell me about her years as a teacher. She spoke fondly of her many students, many of who she's still in contact with today. There's one group of girls she taught in elementary school who she still goes out to dinner with. She told me that it was amazing to her that she has been able to walk with people for so much of their lives. She shared one story of a little girl who asked her if she had any children. Sister Anna Marie replied that she had 50, which was the number of students in her class at the time. The little girl said no, not students, *children*. Sister Anna Marie's answer did not change.

Though Sister Anna Marie loved teaching, when she first began she had no idea what she was doing. Teaching was Sister Anna Marie's first assignment after joining the order and as she did not go to college she had no prior training. She said that she and the other young sisters attended summer school, but that during the year they had to rely on older and more experienced sisters to help them. Sister Anna Marie said that she loved being able to rely on her community and the mentorship of older sisters to help her during those first few years. Today, sisters may be required to receive the appropriate degree or certification before being assigned, but Sister Anna Marie still emphasized the importance of mentorship within the community. Sisters are

(hopefully) no longer thrown into situation they are not prepared for, but their community is still behind them, waiting to offer support and advice.

Works Cited

“Sr. Anna Marie.” Interview by author. January 13, 2019.