

2019

# Sr. Joey: Power Structure Within the Education System

Emily Tokarz

*Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/reigsister>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

## Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Tokarz, Emily. "Sr. Joey: Power Structure Within the Education System" (2019). *Ask a Sister: Interview Wisdom from Catholic Women Religious*.

<https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/reigsister/43>

This Student Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Religion at Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ask a Sister: Interview Wisdom from Catholic Women Religious by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@augustana.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@augustana.edu).

Emily Tokarz

### **Sr. Joey: Power Structure Within the Education System**

Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Joey on January 17<sup>th</sup> regarding her experience within the Catholic Church. This paper includes her experiences with the power structure and how it affected her life's work.

Sr. Joey had begun her journey with the Catholic Church by attending a Catholic elementary school. Her first brush with women religious was with her elementary school faculty, which happened to be staffed with Dominican Sisters that were not particularly warm. She saw how they lived sheltered and obedient lives and remembered going with her father to take the sisters to out to do their laundry because they could not get anywhere on their own. That level of obedience was something that Sr. Joey could not see herself committing to because she had recognized from a young age that she wanted to maintain her independence that she had worked hard to obtain. As she grew up she stayed involved within the church and played the guitar with the choir and when they got a new priest that disapproved of the music that they were playing because he found it inappropriate. His orders to stop the folk style music ultimately turned her off and caused her to step away from the church during the majority of her college career. She did not go into college with any intent to go on to seminary or major in any religious field, but during her senior year of college she received what she described as her calling back to the church. She had gotten a job at a Catholic summer camp that was run by the congregation of sisters that she is a part of now. She said she did not know a single person but they were warm and inviting and she felt for the first time that she was choosing to accept God into her life on her own accord. The sisters were a part of a smaller community that allowed each person to have a

say in the choices that were made, and they had already come to terms with the changes that Vatican II had brought forth and allowed each person to maintain a bit of their own autonomy.

We then had a brief discussion of her teaching career, which revolved heavily on the role she had versus what she was allowed to say and talk about. She was a high-ranking member within her school and would have conversations with a few classes and in one distinct conversation she was leading about the ordination of women within the church, a younger priest had shut her down and told her to stop the conversation. As an independent woman and the leader of the discussion she wanted to continue the conversation. Due to the power structure within the church, she was silenced on the issue and she had a full on collision with the priest who had told her to end the conversation. When she had first told me that story it reminded me of chapter six of the book *When the Sisters said Farewell: The Transition of Leadership in Catholic Elementary Schools* written by Michael P. Caruso where he systematically alludes the fall of the Catholic education system on the women religious for leaving in the first place. Within his book Caruso gives examples as to how poor the conditions were for the sisters to teach in as well as the limited amount of independence that they were given. In the early days of Catholic Education the women did all the work while the men held the administrative roles and held the most control (Caruso, 52). Years after Vatican II and the progress that came from it, Sr. Joey was still being silenced by the men in power due to the hierarchical nature of the church. After that disagreement Sr. Joey left her role within the Catholic education system, and she said that she did not think that she would get hired again anyway because she was not blindly obedient and that was what the church wanted. Her story gave me a whole new perspective to why so many sisters may have left the education system post Vatican II, because they were not apart of any conversation and there were other places where they could work where they could use their gifts

how they saw fit. Caruso believed that without Vatican II that the Catholic education system great critical point here would not have collapsed as it did because the women religious would not have left, but he fails to realize that the reason they would have stayed would be due to blind obedience rather than their love for teaching.

Sr. Joey told me that she did not regret her time within the Catholic education system because it taught her how to articulate what she was thinking in a way that allowed anybody to understand what she was thinking but it also reminded her that teaching was not her calling. She could not use her gifts to their fullest extent while being censored by the hierarchical structure that was still present within the Catholic education system. It was after that experience when she returned to the group of women religious that brought her back to her faith, where she could use her God given gifts in a way in where she maintained her own independence and dignity.

Work Cited

“Changes in Religious Live Lead to Departures” *When the Sisters Said Farewell: the Transition of Leadership in Catholic Elementary Schools*, by Michael P. Caruso, Rowan & Littlefield Education, 2012, pp. 51–64.

“Sr. Joey.” In person interview by author. January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019.