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Sr. Cecilia: Community Impact

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Dolly Suresh

Sister Cecilia: Community Impact

Abstract: This paper highlights the impact Sister Cecilia and her congregation have on the community they live in and the way the community interacts with the congregation.

Sister Cecilia had a lot of insight coming from her experiences as a woman religious. She became a sister all the way back in 1953 and expressed how these 66 years have gone in the blink of an eye. During this time, she was a teacher for 24 years. She taught 6th grade for 10 years, high school for 11 years and then taught at a Catholic high school for 3 years. After this, Sister Cecilia became a formation/vocation director for the community. She continued this work for 9 years. Subsequently, she worked as a chaplain in the hospitals near her congregation for 11 years. She now works as a volunteer at the hospitals, rather than as a chaplain, and loves it.

This congregation prides itself on having a retreat house for the community. Sister Cecilia emphasized the importance of this retreat house because they are able to help the children of the community who don't necessarily have the means to explore or learn about religion and nature. During the summer, every Friday, they host children in the retreat house and do activities with them around the lake, in the woods, on the trails, etc. It gives them a chance to understand the sisters and also learn about their own community. This is a pillar in which children are able to interact with the women religious outside of the schools and hospitals in a more fun and relaxed setting. The children are able to understand what kind of work these women religious are intending to do and hopefully in the future will decide to help them or become men and women

religious as well. It is also important to note that the retreat house is not constricted, so whoever wants to use it can do so, whether they are black or white, straight or gay, Catholic or not.

Another topic that Sister Cecilia discussed with me was the role of women religious in communities. She emphasized that when communities were just getting started, these women were the ones who started the education systems, hospitals, orphanages, etc. She addressed how the community relies on the sisters not only for religious guidance but also for help in keeping the community together. Sister Cecilia believes that women religious are here to find the needs that aren't being met in the community and fill them. For example, feeding the homeless, volunteering at the hospitals, helping children with their growth, etc.

This discussion led me to the question of what was the most eye-opening experience and what was something she did not expect when she became a sister. I loved the answer I got for this question. Sister Cecilia said the most eye-opening part of being a sister is seeing how much of an impact their work has on the individuals they help. She said the thank you letters and cards they get just speak to how important the work they do truly is. Last week, one of the sisters at her monastery passed away and the amount of letters that were received that explained how many lives she had touched and changed were astronomical. I found it profound that Sister Cecilia said that as sisters they can die knowing they have done good in the world. It shows the true passion these women have for their work.

Works Cited

“Sr. Cecilia.” Personal Interview by author. January 15, 2019.