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Sr. Linda: Interfaith Collaboration

Alyssa Twilbeck
Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois

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Alyssa Twilbeck

Sr. Linda: Interfaith Collaboration

Abstract: By examining the work of Sister Linda with collaboration of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian denominations, this paper analyzes the importance and widespread use of interfaith cooperation by the Catholic Church.

Similar to other Catholic women religious, Sister Linda was called to her vocation in order to help people. Yet, she felt a very different pull towards helping those around the world, not just in her community. Her interest lies in connecting people from around the globe despite their social, economic, and religious differences through interfaith work. By growing her own understanding of other religious groups through numerous classes and books, Sister Linda found a deep-set curiosity for how she could improve relations between Muslim, Jewish, and Christian men and women. While living in a diverse community, Sister Linda began working in interfaith collaboration through her church in order to promote change for the homeless community and structural issues. Yet the Catholic Church was unable to do this without the support of other churches in the area, including the work of a Rabbi and numerous Muslim women. Working with other religious men and women allowed Sister Linda to make connections which led to the installation of a Muslim-Christian women's group where women from around the world could discuss scripture from their perspectives. These women met for three years and helped to battle the "ignorance and fear" which is prominent in today's society, especially towards those who practice Islam. The relationships formed by Sister Linda and the other women of the interfaith group was a "gift" allowing each of them to see their "tradition in a new way." Each of the

women would reach out to the others at various holidays important to them; Muslim women would wish the Christians a Merry Christmas, for example. More importantly, they found principal similarities with varying application—the Quran has an entire chapter dedicated to the Virgin Mary and she is considered a prophet within the Islamic community. While there are still differences in the practices the various religions hold, interfaith work, like the women's group, helps open lines of communication between those of different backgrounds.

Interfaith work is not a new concept amongst Catholic women religious in the United States. During the early establishment of Catholic schools across the nation, many of which faced very low funding, Sisters were asked to work as teachers for the female students. As more women recognized the opportunity to work outside the home as Catholic sisters, more congregations began to implement their own school systems which:

...in the early nineteenth century admitted non-Catholic students. In addition to the firmly held belief that all Americans needed a basic education if they were to succeed in life, the presence of tuition-paying non-Catholics was vital... Women religious did not attempt to convert their non-Catholic students, but did try to offer all their charges some instruction in... the general principles of Christian religion and morality.¹

By allowing non-Catholic students, parish schools allowed for greater diversity and open discussion among the students. While they were still required to uphold certain religious traditions, such as attending prayer with the sisters and taking a religion class, the children and sisters at the school were potentially exposed to Protestant, Catholic, indigenous, and African belief systems. Today, the focus of interfaith work is to bring Muslim, Jewish, and Christian

¹Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 71.

groups together, similar to the work of Sister Linda. When speaking with top level Catholics, 2018 was expected to be year of interfaith mass movements like the Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative launched by Margari Aziza Hill.² Groups like the MuslimARC are working on “recalibrating our nation’s moral and ethical social agenda” to fight to “protect the most vulnerable.”³ As Catholic sisters, like Sister Linda, continue to open their minds and hearts to members of other religions, the world will grow into a strongly interconnected and supportive community.

² Aysha Khan, “What’s next for religion in 2018?” National Catholic Reporter, January 03, 2018.

³ Khan, “What’s next for religion...”

Works Cited

“Sr. Linda.” Telephone interview by author. January 11, 2019.