

Sr. Anne Rutledge, OP

Interviewed by Justin Parrett



Talk about ‘your call’ and/or ‘your discernment.’

She had no intention whatsoever of becoming a sister; instead, she had hoped to have a large family (she is from a family of five). Her older sister was a Dominican Sister of Peace, however.

She was worried that moving away to become a sister would mean she would never see her family. This fear was rooted in the experience of her parents, who immigrated to the United States from Ireland and were never able to return to see their parents. With her family in Pittsburgh, she wasn’t sure if she would ever be able to return.

Despite her initial dismissal of religious life, she did feel a constant pull, tugging at her in the background. She summarized her calling well by saying, “when God keeps calling you, you better answer eventually!”

Do Sisters ever think about leaving?

She answered with a resounding “yes,” explaining that not all callings are for a lifetime. She told me about other Sisters that came through her ministry sites, only to serve for a few years. Despite their short tenure, she explained, those Sisters left a lasting impact on the communities in which they served. Likewise, those that moved away from religious life were enchanted by their time spent with the Sisters of Peace and continued to work toward social justice.

Name some of your ministries you were involved in – tell about one in detail.

Sister Anne worked in Education, serving as Teacher, Principal and everything in-between. She studied at then-Saint Mary of the Springs before completing her education at Duquesne

University in Pittsburgh. Her ministry at Our Lady of Peace in Steubenville, Ohio shattered her conventional wisdom regarding the struggles of students. She discovered a gambling ring amongst the fathers of football players, who would bet on their sons, creating an environment entirely hostile to proper development.

Her draw to education is deeply rooted. Her father never completed anything past the 7th grade, and worked as a smelter at a steel mill. He was responsible for calculating the mixtures necessary for producing the desired qualities in the steel products. With this on-the-job training, he helped young Anne with her Math homework, demonstrating an ability to make the most of all education one receives, no matter the quantity or formality. She remembers her father as a hardy, stoic man that worked tirelessly to provide the best life possible for their large family, going as far as denying promotions that required him to leave the safety and stability of his union. Despite his hardened exterior, Anne recalls tears streaming down his face at her sister's college graduation.

Though education has been Sister Anne's vocation, issues of immigration have had a constant presence. As demographic trends shifted in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, animosity boiled. The waterfront suburb of Detroit welcomed European immigrants that, only a few generations prior, were struggling to flourish in their new lives. As the African-American community grew in the area, the neighborhood—and the schools in particular—were not as welcoming as before. After working for 35 years in education, Sister Anne took a sabbatical in Boston, Massachusetts, where her father had arrived from Ireland many years prior, while her mother was in New York Harbor, en route to Ellis Island.

When her mother's health began to decline in the early 1980s, Sister Anne and her sister moved back to Pittsburgh to care for her. Anne took a temporary job that allowed her to be home while her sister was working, and vice-versa. She kept that "temporary" job for 15 years, working with children whose parents were undergoing divorce.

It seems that religious life is 'dying' – what do you think; why do you stay?

Again, immigration resonates through Sister Anne's historical survey of a response. She spoke of the need for religious vocations during the formative years of our nation, as it carried the opportunity to further cultivate young spiritual communities. The Dominican Sisters of Peace is a great example of this. A total of eight orders, founded throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and spanning the country from Somerset, Ohio to New Orleans, Louisiana reconfigured into one congregation. The rapid expansion of the country spread out many communities, leading to several reconfigurations of similar communities.

What would you like to share with this group?

Sister Anne wished to stress the amount of opportunities that exist for young adults today. Disadvantaged youth have the ability to attain higher education and pursue their passions while the world is more connected than ever before. With a strong faith and dedication to service as a foundation, there is nothing stopping the young people of today from receiving their vocations.