

Sister Germaine Conroy, OP

Interviewed by Bethany Molnar



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

Sister Germaine had attended a Catholic school all her life, the denomination being of the Josephites, and got along well with the Sisters. But she had never fully considered religious life until she attended Ohio Dominican College and met the Sisters there. The Dominicans seemed to have an openness that called to her, and after a year of being at ODC, she entered with 3 other young women. When discussing the Dominican pillars and which she felt most drawn to, the preaching aspect that Dominicans focus on is her favorite; it is a direct line to the people and a way that she can help the community. In addition, she knew that justice work was part of her calling, and she continues to ask herself, “What would Jesus do?”

Do Sisters ever think about leaving?

Sisters have left the religious life before and there is no ill will towards them. Just like in any job, sometimes it is not what you expected and you find your passion could be served better elsewhere. In fact, 2 of the 3 girls that Sister Germaine entered with did not finish their schooling to enter the congregation. Sister Germaine went on to say that she never felt like leaving, but she did have feelings of inadequacy and that the Grace of God fought through her to keep her on this path. People fall in love, want children, or want to seek more life experiences and the Dominicans wish them well on their journey.

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

Sister Germaine has had extensive experiences during her time as a Dominican Sister, sending her to Puerto Rico, Pennsylvania, and Peru. But no time was more challenging than when she was sent back to school for hospital management; allowing her to be sent down to Cincinnati, Ohio to open and run a hospital all before she was 30 years old. Sister Germaine says this was her time of being faced with feelings of inadequacy. However, she persevered and was eventually elected to a position on leadership for 4 years. When she was not re-elected, she was sent to Puerto Rico to teach 7th, 8th, and 9th graders about science. She also worked in Pennsylvania teaching elementary for 1 year and high school for 2 years. Eventually, she was re-elected to leadership, serving for 8 years, and focusing on AIDS patients. Yet, ever since Sister Germaine had set her journey on religious life, she had wanted to go to Peru to work with the community. She finally got her dream and spent 21 years doing various work in Peru. These included working with abused women to find them safe havens and get them away from their abusers, teaching in the mountains once a month and having to ride a horse along narrow paths to get there, and working with 18-22 year-old men in prison to improve their self-esteem and prepare them for the “real world.” After centering herself on social justice in Peru, she felt like it was time to retire and planned to return to the United States and live with her sister for a time, but instead she was called to return to the campus she realized her calling, and now is the coordinator at the Motherhouse.

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

Religious life seems to be more of a unique lifestyle as of late, but that is because many Sisters are passing away. In fact, the 560 members of the Dominican Sisters of Peace have a median age of 80 years old. Yet, newer communities are forming every day and this shows promise. Religious life will continue, but it is shaping into something completely different from recent years. In the end, religious life has to be a calling from God that you become firmer in your belief every day, and it is not something that can be forced upon a person.

What would you like to share with this group?

After interviewing Sister Germaine, Bethany left this reflection:

In my time of being a student at Ohio Dominican University, and even after, I have never felt so welcomed by a group of individuals, nor learned so much. The Dominican Sisters truly do have such a welcoming and engaging atmosphere that you never see someone more excited to talk to you than when you meet them. They always have a smile waiting, an engaging question about your life, and a desire to help in any way possible. Being around the Sisters has taught me so much and drives me to become the person I want to be. All I can say is thank you for sharing your life experiences with me, for helping me through mine, and for being a friend, new or old, that I can pick up right where I left off with.