

Sr. JoAnn Hohenbrink, OP

Interviewed by Andrea Haller



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

Sister JoAnn says that her parents always told her that when she was 4 she (Sister JoAnn) announced that she would grow up to be a nun. Throughout her life, she has been surrounded by Sisters within her family and within her school. When she attended Ohio Dominican, Sister JoAnn loved the people she was around. She felt comfortable with Dominicans because the Sisters were always happy and joyful. She loved that she could be her crazy self around them. Sister JoAnn also enjoyed the involvement of the congregation in many areas of ministry. She joined the Dominican Order following her graduation from Ohio Dominican.

Do Sisters ever think about leaving?

“Yes” is Sister JoAnn’s quick response. She says that discernment is never ending. Sister JoAnn experiences this discerning by regularly asking how God is calling her now. Discerning happens on a regular basis, but one time that is always full of discernment is seen during the yearly retreats, which allow the Sisters to focus their energies on the will of God.

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

Sister JoAnn has always ministered in the field of education. She began as a teacher, then became a principal, and then became a university faculty member at Ohio Dominican where

she is now the Chair of the Education Division and the Director of the Graduate Education Program.

As a middle school teacher, Sister JoAnn was teaching her students about how we as individuals try to fit God into a box in order for us to attempt to understand even though God does not fit in that box. The next day, one of her students came in and said that her sister said Sister JoAnn was wrong. Sister JoAnn then realized that the students are taking what they learn home, and therefore, the most important thing for her to teach them was that God will love them no matter what.

When Sister JoAnn first became a principal, she wandered into her office and wondered what she was supposed to do all day because she was used to teaching and being around the students. She quickly realized that there was plenty to do! While at first, Sister JoAnn was wary of not having students to connect with throughout the school day, she discovered that she was able to connect with them through parents, teachers, and community members. Sister JoAnn loved being able to touch their lives through the adults that influenced them the most. She also shared that she would often have coffee with the Home and School officers, but would always spill it on her white clothing.

One of Sister JoAnn's favorite memories comes from her interactions with an Ohio Dominican student teacher. Every day the student would come into her office to discuss teaching, friends, family, and faith. Together, they would exchange stories and laughs. The best day was when the conversation was about Les Miserables. Sister JoAnn and the student sang together (with a lot of help from YouTube back-up vocals!) and shared their favorite songs and characters. Sister JoAnn's favorite song is the Epilogue. She is especially fond of the line "to love another person is to see the face of God." The student learned this line to be true because of her friendship with Sister JoAnn and is forever grateful to her for their daily talks.

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

Sister JoAnn sticks around so that religious life does not die. She says religious life is not dying, but that it is changing. As John C. Maxwell said, "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional." She said that religious life is changing, and we need to grow and change with it. She believes that religious life is growing in ways we cannot see or comprehend. Sister JoAnn is always hopeful and prayerful that young women will continue to join religious life.

What would you like to share with this group?

Sister JoAnn would like to remind the group that God always surrounds us with love and care, no matter what. We should always strive to be like God and love and care for one another.