

Sister Joan Franks, OP

Interviewed by Emily Thomas and Andy White



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

Sister Joan was only 17 years old when she made the decision to join. When she was young, she romanticized the idea of being a Sister. Her older sister was a Sister of Charity and she was taught by Sisters in grade school. In high school, she learned from the Dominican Sisters.

Sister Joan went out a lot when she was young, but didn’t think marriage or a family would be enough and couldn’t picture herself doing housework. She appreciated the intellectual level of the Dominican Sisters.

Sister Joan’s parents expected that she go to college; they were not actively opposed to her becoming a Sister, but didn’t think it would last long. Sister Joan then spent a month in Panama while her brother was in West Point, and then she entered the novitiate and college.

Do Sisters ever think about leaving?

Sr. Joan explains that a lot of Sisters left in the 70’s, but Sister Joan “has always been very happy in her religious life.” She has been fortunate in friendship and built wonderful relationships. Sister Joan has a very “rich life” filled with friends and family who are very good to her. She even has one niece who flew her to China for a visit when she was there. She keeps in touch closely with her sister and two brothers.

Sister Joan has a Dominican priest who is one of her best friends, and she is thankful that she has been able to travel as much as she has. She has even lived in Africa.

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

Sister Joan has worked extensively in education. She has taught the 8th grade and high school. She received her master’s degree from OSU in philosophy, and has subsequently taught college at Ohio Dominican for 3 years. She received her PhD in Toronto for philosophy. Sister Joan has

held the position of Dean and has worked in Florida and in New York City at Dominican Academy.

Sister Joan has even taught in France with Dominican Sisters International and traveled to Rome in the summers to write grants with a friend. She lived in Africa for 3 years in both Zambia and Kenya. She was then called back to Columbus to lead the Office of Mission and Identity at Ohio Dominican.

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

Sister Joan believes there is a “bit of a blip” facing religious life. Many Sisters entered in the late 19th century, and religious life could be appealing as a way out of poverty in places such as Africa.

Sister Joan sees there are three options: living as a single career person, living as a married person with a family, or becoming a Sister. When the options were made available seems to be the time when many people left religious life.

Sister Joan had friends who left religious life; some of them said they didn't really have a vocation.

It doesn't occur to Sister Joan to leave. She is fortunate to have this life, she feels motivated by the people and their love for God. Sister Joan enjoys her prayer life and her work.

What would you like to share with this group?

Sister Joan loves teaching and meeting people she wouldn't have normally had the chance to meet.

Some pieces of advice from Sister Joan as life moves forward:

- “Stay faithful to the liturgy, that will sustain us” as it has sustained her (even when you don't feel like it)
- “Never stop learning”

Which Saints do you find the most joy in learning about?

There are so many Saints that Sister Joan enjoys learning about and learning from. Some that she mentioned include:

- St. Dominic and the whole medieval period
- St. Thomas who was a remarkable theologian
- St. Catherine of Siena
- St. Joan of Ark
- St. Anthony

Sister Joan “sees Saints as leaning out of heaven waiting to help.” They want to help us on this journey.