

Sister Mattie Sterner, OP

Interviewed by Kelly Litt



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

Sr. Mattie explained that a call is not a one-time occurrence or revelation, rather, every call and every commitment is made daily. In Somerset, Ohio, Sr. Mattie loved the Sisters that she grew up with. In the 5th, 6th, and 7th grades Sr. Mattie thought of being a Sister one day. When she went on to high school, Sr. Mattie forgot about becoming a Sister, but every once-in-a-while, that call would push its way back out.

When Sr. Mattie was a senior, she had a boyfriend who she thought she would like to marry, but she also felt the call to become a Sister. She spoke to her boyfriend, Leo Michael, who was called Mickey, about it. With a great deal of understanding, Mickey told Sr. Mattie to give it a try as a Sister. While she was “trying it out,” Mickey enlisted during the Korean War for 2 years. They agreed that at the end of the two years, they would decide what would be best for both of them; they would know.

After graduation, Sr. Mattie entered as an apostolate to “get it out of her system.” She began to take it more seriously and made her first profession after her third year. Mickey was still in the Army. At one point, he came to visit Sr. Mattie with her sister. After the visit, Mickey mentioned to Sr. Mattie’s sister that he was glad she joined and he believed that is where she belongs. Mickey said he wasn’t sure about a future for himself. Shortly after, Mickey was killed in Korea. Sr. Mattie’s sister said, “well, God got both of you.”

Sr. Mattie now believes that Mickey had a great sense of awareness and grace. Mickey was a very important part of Sr. Mattie's life and was essential in helping her make a decision between two goods. Sr. Mattie explained that "the Lord puts people in our lives when we need them – it's a gift."

Do Sisters ever think about leaving?

Sr. Mattie explained that she thought about leaving many times. When she first entered, she would tell her Superior every two weeks that she wanted to go home and get married. Her Superior would tell her to give it two more weeks. After those two weeks, Sr. Mattie would try again.

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

- Sr. Mattie taught grades 1 through the college level
- She worked at the Diocesan level for 34 years
- She worked as the Director of Religious Ed in Steubenville
- She worked as the Assistant Director of Religious Ed for the Arch-Diocese of Cincinnati
- She has worked at Ohio Dominican University
- She was the prefect at a girls' boarding school
- She has lived and worked in Ohio, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New York

Sr. Mattie never thought she would ever become a teacher.

It seems religious life is 'dying,' what do you think? Why do you stay?

Sr. Mattie doesn't think religious life is dying, but rather it is changing. She believes religious life is what it always was, but now we have more religious groups like associates.

Sisters are important in the church because there is often little spiritual direction. Sr. Mattie grew up in a church where even the priest thought he was the Pope. During the Second Vatican Council, there was a call to be a 'people church.' Sisters are prepared to help people in the church move beyond rules and regulations.

Sr. Mattie believes that religious life is re-rooting itself; it doesn't have to see strength in numbers, but rather in what we do in our lives. Sr. Mattie explained, "I stay because I stayed." She often finds herself asking the Lord, "why am I so happy here?"

What would you like to share with the group?

Sr. Mattie believes her life at ODU has been the icing on the cake. With a chuckle, she explained to me that it will look good on her resume as she prepares for her next interview (Sr. Mattie is retiring from ODU this year).

Sr. Mattie explained that her life has been a great ride; she's tried to help where she could. She is not sure how much good she's done, but "we just till the soil."

She concluded by saying "you are on a journey, let go, and let it be."