

“We come from the fire, living in the fire/ Go back to the fire, turn the world around!” (Harry Belafonte)

It’s Sunday afternoon and I sit in a circle around a table with six significant women in my life. These Sisters are mentors and guides- people who inspire and challenge me by their everyday living. They are people I can trust with my questions and the longings of my heart. I can also laugh with them, be facetious, struggle, be confused, be myself. In the center of the table is a flame colored cloth and a cross painted with symbols of life. At each person’s place is a small burning candle, representing the passion at the heart of our lives, and the light of Christ’s love, which we endeavor to share with the world each day. My Final Vows as a Sister of St. Joseph of Rochester are coming soon, and these women gather to help me tend the life-giving energy of God.

Some people ask me if I always knew that I wanted to be a Sister, and as I look back over my 31 years of life, I guess I would say “yes and no.” I didn’t even know what a “modern” Sister was like, outside the movies, until I was a college student. However, even when I was a child, I had a strong concern for excluded children at school, people who struggled to learn, people who were fighting over religion, and people who were disillusioned and losing hope. I wanted to find connections and build bridges. I was drawn to people, like my Grandmother, who studied and discussed the Bible and spent time alone in prayer every day by lamplight, before the rising of the sun. I was enriched by community, especially the small Church community in my rural town, where young and old volunteered to take part in anything that needed to be done within the walls of our little building and out in the community. All of these experiences put me in touch with my heart’s desires- that God be the center of my life and that I spend my energy working with others to bring about good on this earth. Even before I knew anything about religious life, I can see that God was calling me.

I first met the Sisters of St. Joseph through a volunteer opportunity as a college student. A group of us from school were invited to minister with the Sisters for a week, and live and pray with them in one of their houses during that time. They helped us learn how to see Christ in the experiences of our day, and they taught us about social justice and Catholic social teaching. I was immediately attracted by their service, their common prayer and sharing, their stories of risk, discovery, and resilience, and their “ordinariness.” They were approachable- laughing, getting on each other’s nerves, shoveling snow, ordering pizza, discussing the news, paying the bills. Makes sense, right? Yet for me, it was all the more energizing to find people dedicating their lives to God and service of the neighbor who seemed more like me than the nuns I saw in the movies.

It was another seven years before I asked to start the process of becoming a Sister in their Congregation. Over that time, I was invited to spend some time living in community and working with the Sisters. I developed from a college student into a working adult (a music teacher). I grew in my relationship with God, and learned more about the Congregation. As I sensed my attraction to their life, I spent a long time wrestling with the many questions I had about whether or not this was really God’s path for me. I noticed that as I got clearer about what is most important to me, I began to pattern my life after the Sisters and desire their company. I grew into my calling naturally, and came to a sense of peace about making a choice. Becoming a Sister has been truly life-giving, and once I began the formal process at the age of 25, I have never looked back.

As all Sisters have had to do throughout history, I join with my Congregation in discerning how to live in a changing world and how to respond to the needs of the times. I grow from the wisdom, example, and friendship of the Sisters in Rochester as well as the Sisters I have gotten to know in other states and other countries. God continues to draw me, and I hope to spend the rest of my life tending and sharing the fire of Christ’s love.

~ Sr. Anita Kurowski SSJ, Rochester, NY