

Reflection on my daughter's first profession as a Sister of St. Joseph

by Susie Bass, June 2013



Thirty one years ago as I was holding our first redheaded baby girl, if someone would have told me that she was going to be a religious, I would have laughed! Five years ago, Clare announced to us that she had been discerning being a religious sister. I cried for a month and Mike smiled for a month, no for five years, because he's weird.

Even though I was a cradle Catholic and was one of the faithful praying for more young people to make vocations I didn't mean my own child. Clare had been looking at the many orders of sisters and decided on the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in St. Louis, MO. Really, St. Louis! I didn't even like her going as far north as Starkville, where she attended college at Mississippi State!

Where did all this holy thinking begin? Clare was a normal child. She had her early education beginnings at Linda Bourgeois' (whom she and Chele call Nanny). At Nanny's with Aunt Vetsie as a side kick, Clare learned the joy of good eating, a Croatian tradition and how to love and serve God joyfully.

She attended First Baptist Church Pre-School and Kindergarten, it was good thing I moved her to Catholic school or today I might be calling her Preacher. She was educated from first grade to twelfth in Catholic schools. She was one of the fortunate students to be educated by the Mercy Sisters from Ireland. So I credit them for helping influence Clare's decision. At Mercy Cross Clare was on the campus ministry team and loved it. At Perk, Clare sort of waivered toward the protestant movement again as she was a paid Methodist youth leader because the Catholic group was not active. But at Mississippi State she found her way back St. Joseph's Church. He must have started working on her then.

Another influence was our extended family. They are faithful Catholics, and like my cousin FoFo said last week at his father's funeral, we were all pushed to go to church. Certain things were expected and being fully Catholic, sacraments and all were not negotiable. So there you have it!

I guess in today's world the call to religious life only gets to one in a million and Clare answered it. When I tell people about Clare many of them say, and I quote "I'm not surprised, Clare was always different!" Different, maybe, but after these five years of getting familiar and closer to the Sisters of St. Joseph, I am changing different to SPECIAL! For Clare has picked her community wisely.

The Sisters of St. Joseph are a super dynamic community of spiritual ladies with a rich history and love of God. The consensus statement found in their constitution states: The Sisters of St. Joseph moves always toward profound love of God and love of neighbor without distinction from whom she does not separate herself and for whom, in the following of Christ she works in order to achieve unity of neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God directly in apostolate and indirectly through works of charity.

The Sisters trace their origin to the foundation made in Lepuy, France about 1650. The French Revolution interrupted the community until the Archbishop of Lyon requested that the Sisters re-establish their community in his diocese.

Mother St. John Fontbonne, Superior in Lyon sent six sisters to America in 1836 to open a school for the deaf of St. Louis. The settlement at Carondelet was destined to become the cradle of the American Congregation. Today the United States Federation has 5,000 who work in ministries of various capacities which include doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, accountants, and even farmers. If the work is needed one of these sisters can and will do it!

And they do it well. On one of our visits to St. Louis, Mike and I were shopping and someone asked us where we were from and for what reason were we in St. Louis. When we told him about Clare joining the CSJ's he replied, "Those sisters have hearts of Gold!"

If in all of my life work I have been successful in imparting a heart of love and concern for others, I will be pleased. I think I have with both of our daughters. I know Clare has been a good student in learning about her community. She is smart, a rule follower, a team player and oh so loyal. She is a loyal daughter, sister, friend and sports fan.

I am told that the first group of sisters she lived with were forced to participate in more sports activities than they wished. She calls her dad and they discuss sports events, teams and games endlessly. That's weird!

But no matter what happens in her everyday chores, and work I know that Clare is dedicated and committed to following her call to be a sister of St. Joseph. Her happiness for this quest spills over into everyone she encounters and in 2017 I will be proud to put a bumper sticker on my car that reads, "A proud mother of a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet!"