

BREAKING THROUGH THE GLASS CLOISTER: THE SISTERS
OF ST. JOSEPH OF PHILADELPHIA, SOCIAL JUSTICE,
AND GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS AFTER VATICAN II

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ABSTRACT

Since the Vatican's widely-publicized criticism of American Catholic nuns in 2012, religious sisters have risen into the public consciousness. For decades, thousands of religious sisters in the United States have served within a rigid patriarchal Church that does not always recognize their contributions, yet relies on them to carry out its ministries. Through an emphasis on their missions of service to the poor and work for social justice, religious sisters emerged from this contentious situation with Rome as intelligent and dedicated women who lead dynamic lives that often go unnoticed.

Through a case study of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, I analyze individual sisters' lived experiences. In this research, I seek to understand the congregation's institutional culture to uncover how religious sisters develop strategies to live out their mission of service to the poor and marginalized, and how they continue to advocate for social and structural change in the Catholic Church and in secular society. Specifically, I conducted interviews with 23 Sisters of St. Joseph and analyzed archived writings, letters, and congregational documents dating back to the late 1960s. I submit that over the past 50 years since the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the Sisters of St. Joseph actively embraced gender consciousness and social justice as a means of empowerment toward social change, despite the institutional pressures within the Church and society that discourage this. I argue that the progressive spirit and commitment to social justice indicative of a feminist orientation created a dissonance between religious sisters and Church leadership, while simultaneously increasing their integration into secular society. Ultimately, I contend that their congregational mission of unity and

reconciliation, their status as sisters in a religious community, and privilege as educated women allows the Sisters of St. Joseph to be courageous risk-takers in advancing social and structural change in both the Catholic Church and the world.

In addition to the 23 semi-structured interviews, I used qualitative content analysis to explore the congregation's primary archival documents, especially those published from the periodic general chapters just after Vatican II through the most recent chapter in summer 2014. These chapter meetings are called roughly every five years, during which time the Sisters of St. Joseph elect congregational leadership and articulate the community's organizational vision and direction. At each chapter's conclusion, the congregation publishes a document(s) that informs its mission and work for the next several years. In addition to these public documents, I was granted access to the Sisters of St. Joseph congregational archives, where I analyzed notes, letters, minutes, voting records, proposals and enactments, and personal recollections of the general chapter meetings. In total, I analyzed nearly 300 documents from the Sisters of St. Joseph congregational archives.

In my textual analysis, I used subjective interpretation of language in the text with particular attention placed on its content and contextual meaning in order to identify themes or patterns. Once I identified the major themes, I grouped them into three theoretical areas, which became the empirical chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this study. Chapter 4 argues that the sisters' move toward active social justice work and advocacy after Vatican II is evidence of lived religion for this congregation. Chapter 5 analyzes how the Sisters of St. Joseph navigate issues of gender and sexuality in the Church, in their congregation, and in society. Chapter 6 looks at how the congregation contends with race and ethnicity

within their own community, but also in the lives of the people they serve in their various ministries. Finally, in chapter 7, I conclude by examining how the congregation moved toward a more democratic, corporate structure focused on long-term viability in the decades after the Second Vatican Council.

Ultimately, I argue that as the congregation evolved after Vatican II, they broke through what I call a “glass cloister.” Through the renewal process, the Sisters of St. Joseph emerged from decades of restriction as sisters reborn, reclaiming their original congregational focus and eager to live out their lives in service to others. As convent rules loosened and the sisters claimed their voices within the Catholic Church structure and in secular society, the congregation defined itself as a dynamic community of women dedicated to social justice and advocacy for the poor and marginalized.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

In April 2012, after a nearly four-year doctrinal investigation authorized by Pope Benedict XVI, the Vatican reprimanded the largest group of American Catholic nuns, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), which represents more than 80% of the approximately 50,000 vowed religious sisters in the United States. Simultaneously, in late 2008, Cardinal Franc Rodé, head of the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, began an Apostolic Visitation of noncloistered American women religious communities in response to growing concerns about secularism and a feminist spirit.

In its doctrinal assessment, the Vatican's arm for doctrinal investigations, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), censured the LCWR and affiliated social justice lobby NETWORK for "serious doctrinal problems." The report concluded that the sisters promoted "radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith" and made public statements that "disagree with or challenge the bishops, who are the [C]hurch's authentic teachers of faith and morals." Specifically, the CDF questioned the American nuns' positions on 1) women's ordination, 2) the correct pastoral approach to ministry to homosexual persons, thus disagreeing with the bishops' teachings on family life and human sexuality, along with 3) their "commentaries on 'patriarchy' [that] distort the way in which Jesus has structured sacramental life in the [C]hurch." Similarly, in an examination of their work toward promotion of social justice, the Vatican determined that the sisters remained largely silent on certain right to life issues like abortion and

euthanasia, as well as those related to discussions about the traditional family structure and gay marriage. The CDF assessment concluded that the LCWR committed crimes of omission and thus embraced significantly flawed positions directly in opposition to the bishops' official doctrinal teachings.

Catholics and non-Catholics were outraged and saw this attack on American women religious as misplaced, unnecessary, and mean-spirited. For instance, in a June 2012 article on The Huffington Post, Rabbi Arthur Waskow writes,

I deeply identify with these gutsy nuns. But even beyond the admiration due to them is the real issue: Who is “The Church”? Is it male priests, ruled by male bishops, appointed and controlled by a male Pope? Or does The Church include the whole community of Catholics — including nuns who serve the poor, women who use the Pill, men who use condoms, men who ache to celebrate their love for a man through marriage, couples who find divorce less painful than a disordered marriage...

Cynics believed that the Vatican authorized this investigation to distract from the clergy sex abuse scandal that had plagued the Catholic Church for much of the previous decade. Others suspected that Church leaders were outraged at women's religious communities who supported the Affordable Care Act, seeing this as public provocation of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), who actively spoke out against the Affordable Care Act because it extended abortion coverage. Many people wondered if Pope Benedict XVI—a known conservative—himself ordered the inquisition, perhaps frustrated at seeing progressive sisters associated with NETWORK and its popular “Nuns on the Bus” campaign out claiming to represent tens of thousands of Catholics concerned with social justice, thereby giving the optics of internal division and potentially contradictory Church messages. For their part, religious sisters' responses to the

investigation ranged from stunned disbelief to outright anger; many were deeply hurt. Sister leaders in the LCWR called for dialog with Rome, and vowed to remain at the table with Church officials to clear up misunderstandings and resolve disagreements. Over the next few years, the LCWR met with Vatican officials several times, each time emerging from the closed-door meetings offering non-committal and guarded statements reaffirming their cooperation and restraint.

The doctrinal investigation of LCWR and Apostolic Visitation of American religious communities seemingly ended quietly and unexpectedly in April 2015, with both the LCWR and the Vatican sharing a widely-publicized photograph of smiling sisters meeting with an equally cheery Pope Francis. While on the surface both parties seem pleased with the outcome, and by all accounts the sisters emerged from this process with aplomb, lingering effects of this inquisition remain. For instance, in June 2016, fifteen religious communities were invited back to Rome to continue the conversation on issues uncovered during the apostolic visitation, raising questions that the investigation is not completely finished. Further, the Vatican's criticism of the LCWR is notable for the ways in which it largely ignores the strides that American nuns have made in poverty reduction, immigration reform, education, universal healthcare, and racial equality. The CDF report is evidence not only of the Church patriarchy's refusal to entertain discussions about gender parity, but also of its public admonition of dissenting opinions. Though this rebuke brought disagreements between Rome and the American religious sisters squarely into the public sphere, tensions between the two parties had been mounting for several decades. In fact, the sisters' relationship with the Vatican has been

occasionally tumultuous dating back to the landmark shifts brought on by the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) in the 1960s.

In citing the sisters' "commentaries on patriarchy" and challenge of the bishops who are the "[C]hurch's authentic teachers of faith and morals," the CDF report speaks to a larger discussion of how power is structured in the Catholic Church and how women are subordinated. The primacy of official Church teaching residing solely with the Church patriarchy has its roots in the concept of papal infallibility, one of the key outcomes of the First Vatican Council (Vatican I) in the late-nineteenth century (Swidler 1971). Essentially, the dogmatic constitutions emerging from Vatican I reaffirmed the notion that official Church teaching is legitimized only through the pope and cannot be challenged. Consequently, writings or actions regarding Church doctrine that deviate from official teaching are not only unrecognized by the hierarchy, they are automatically rendered incorrect by default.

Purpose of the Study

Through a case study of one congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, I analyze individual sisters' lived experiences. In this research, I seek to understand the congregation's institutional culture to uncover how religious sisters develop strategies to live out their mission of service to the poor and marginalized, and how they continue to advocate for social and structural change in the Catholic Church and secular society. Specifically, I conducted interviews with 23 Sisters of St. Joseph and analyzed archived writings, letters, and congregational documents dating back to the late 1960s. I submit that over the past 50 years since Vatican II, the Sisters of St. Joseph actively embraced gender consciousness and social justice as a means of empowerment

toward social change, despite the institutional pressures within the Church and society that discourage this. I argue that the progressive spirit and commitment to social justice indicative of a feminist orientation created a dissonance between religious sisters and Church leadership, while simultaneously increasing their integration into secular society. Ultimately, I contend that their congregational mission of unity and reconciliation, their status as sisters in a religious community, and privilege as educated women allows the Sisters of St. Joseph to be courageous risk-takers in advancing social and structural change in both the Catholic Church and the world.

Like many congregations of women religious that underwent both formal and informal processes of institutional renewal in the years after the Vatican II, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia were emboldened by the zeitgeist and looked inward to reevaluate their roles in the Church and in contemporary society. Some outward signs like the abandoning of the religious habit were obvious, while others like a recommitment to the service of the poor and oppressed through education and advocacy were subtler, yet equally powerful in defining personal and institutional identity. While the Sisters of St. Joseph were not specifically named in the doctrinal assessment, they were subject to the Apostolic Visitation and the congregation continues to navigate its relationships with the institutional Church, the laity, and secular society.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia are an excellent case study because, women religious are understudied in the sociological literature, as Patricia Wittberg (1994) demonstrates in her social movement analysis of American nuns. Though there have been several congregational histories written about the Sisters of St. Joseph (Byrne 1985; Coburn and Smith 1999; Vacher 2009) and their ministry in Philadelphia (Beirne

2015; Kashuba 1999; Logue 1950), there has been no comprehensive sociological analysis of this congregation. Further, the most recent congregational history (Beirne 2015) chronicles the Sisters of St. Joseph only up to 1999. Therefore, it does not include significant Church and world events in the twenty-first century, including the 9/11 terrorist attacks and ensuing War on Terror, the clergy sex abuse scandal, Pope Benedict XVI's resignation and the election of Pope Francis, the legalization of gay marriage in the United States, progressive legislation like the Affordable Care Act, the election of Donald Trump, and the recent nativist/anti-immigrant sentiment propelling conservative and right-leaning politicians to power in Western nations.

Given the historical nature of this research, and that I do not test any hypothesis, I adopt a grounded theory approach in data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is a method of inductive qualitative inquiry aimed at theory construction, where data collection and analysis are conducted simultaneously and inform each other (Charmaz 2005; Charmaz and Bryant 2008). Grounded theory was most appropriate for several reasons. First, I work at a college sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph, and I am also an Associate of the congregation. As an Associate, although I do not profess religious vows, I share the congregation's values and choose to live the same mission and charism that guide them in my own life. While I make every effort to maintain objectivity, I entered this research mindful of the ways in which my personal biases may influence this study, even unintentionally. For instance, Roberta Sands and Michal Krumer-Nevo (2006) caution that as researchers, we enter each interview encounter with predispositions based upon what we already know or think we know about our research subjects (968). Similarly, sociologist Mary Jo Neitz (2013) points out that "[r]esearchers' own

locations—as an insider, an outsider, an apostate and/or an advocate—have consequences for the questions they ask, and to whom they address them, as well as how they interpret the data they collect” (131). Secondly, my insider status with the congregation afforded me extraordinary access to data for this research, and gave me background knowledge that informed the focus of my work and research questions in immeasurable ways. Therefore, I specifically adopted a constructivist methodology in grounded theory, where I reflexively look at data, the social and historical context of the research, my relationships with interview subjects, and my prior knowledge and biases. In constructivist grounded theory, researchers are conscious of their interpretive frames, research context, and relationship with research participants (Charmaz 2005).

Research Questions

In this study, I seek to answer several research questions. My main research question is: How do the Sisters of St. Joseph understand, articulate, and perform their sometimes-conflicted identities and roles as vowed religious sisters, women in the contemporary Catholic Church, and women in secular society? This overarching question is supported by several additional research questions:

- How have the Sisters of St. Joseph articulated gender consciousness in the past 50 years?
- How has gender influenced the sisters’ work and relationship with the Catholic Church?
- How have relationships with clergy impacted individual Sisters of St. Joseph and the congregation?

- How has gender influenced their work and relationship with secular society, especially in the years during and after the Women’s Movement?
- How do the Church and society shape gender for the Sisters of St. Joseph?
- How does institutional culture impact the Sisters of St. Joseph?
- What roles do religious sisters see for themselves in the twenty-first century Catholic Church and secular society?

In investigating these research questions, I seek to privilege the perspectives of religious sisters, as their voices are conspicuously scarce in the sociological literature.

Albert Mills and Catherine Ryan (2001) write that as a patriarchal institution, the Catholic Church has largely constructed the identity of the Catholic nun over the past two millennia. Therefore, given the relative absence of their own voices in the literature, I specifically look to analyze the sisters’ perspectives on their own lives through narrative interviews and archival research of the congregation’s writings and documents. In most cases, I endeavor to put the sisters’ narratives at the fore, and then provide background data and information from the archival sources. These methods revealed new insights into the identities and roles of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and how religious sisters negotiate their multilayered relationships and identities.

Definition of Terms

Historically, “nuns” referred to religious women who professed vows and lived contemplative lives in prayer separate from the world in cloister. “Sisters” on the other hand, referred to religious women who engaged in active social ministries and were not bound by cloister walls. For the sake of ease, and borrowing from sociologists Helen

Rose Ebaugh (1993b) and Patricia Wittberg (1994), “nuns,” “sisters,” “religious sisters,” “women religious,” and “religious women” are all used interchangeably, though I try to remain consistent and use “sisters” wherever possible. Likewise, Mary Johnson, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier (2014) write that groups of vowed women religious have been referred to as “orders,” “communities,” and “congregations,” with each having varying meanings according to canon (Church) law. Similarly, I use each of these terms synonymously to refer to groups of sisters who profess religious vows, but generally try to settle on “congregation” for consistency.

Like other religious communities, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia have their own unique mission and charism. The congregation’s mission directs its overall institutional focus, and generally guides the ways of life for individual sisters. The mission of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia is one of unity and reconciliation, focusing primarily on service to “every kind of dear neighbor without distinction, from whom we do not separate ourselves” (Sisters of St. Joseph 2016). Similarly, their mission statement says that sisters in the congregation “live and work so that all people may be united with God and with one another” (Sisters of St. Joseph 2016). Sociologist Thomas Gannon (1979) contends that while all religious communities profess vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, each order also has its own unique spiritual perspective or charism. This charism distinguishes each congregation from one another and influences the ways in which it carries out its ministerial duties and lives its spirituality. Further, Johnson et al. (2014) write that each community’s identifying charism is the “particular spirit or collective personality developed and passed on by its founder...considered to be a particular gift of the Holy Spirit for the benefit of the entire Church” (83). For the

Sisters of St. Joseph, the congregation's charism influences the ways in which the sisters interact with each other, the Church, and society in general.

Overview and Summary of Findings

In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I offer a review of several bodies of sociological literature on women religious, gendered organizations, feminism, and the Catholic Church, as well as demographic information about women religious and a historical overview of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia. The third chapter outlines the research methodology I use for this study and the study's limitations. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters, I discuss my empirical findings in three broad theoretical categories. In chapter 4, I argue that the congregation's embrace of social justice activism in the years after Vatican II is an example of lived religion, or their actual experiences, as contrasted with prescribed institutional religious beliefs and practices (McGuire 2008). In chapter 5, I analyze the lived experiences of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia through the lens of gender and sexuality, and look specifically at the congregation's relationship with clergy and the institutional Catholic Church. While my research questions focus primarily on gender, in my interviews, race emerged as an important topic for the sisters. Therefore, in chapter 6, I analyze the ways in which race and ethnicity have impacted the congregation internally, as well as in their ministry with the poor and marginalized. Finally, in chapter 7, I examine the congregation's move toward a corporate structure focused on long-term sustainability over the past few decades, and I discuss the implications of my empirical findings for this congregation both now and in the future.

Ultimately, I contend that in the 50 years since Vatican II, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia have broken through what I call the “glass cloister.” This congregation is an active community, not an enclosed, cloistered one, yet many sisters who I interviewed described life before Vatican II as very constrained. They were not free to live and serve as they felt called, and needed permission from the congregation and, in some cases Church leaders, for everything. Like the metaphorical glass ceiling that prevents women from achieving equality with men in the workplace, I submit that the rigid Church structure and similarly strict convent life prior to Vatican II constrained women in this congregation as if they were members of a cloistered community. As the Sisters of St. Joseph embraced renewal after Vatican II, they gained greater gender consciousness and recommitted themselves to social justice, lending their voices in support of the voiceless. Thus, they emerged from decades of restriction as sisters reborn, reclaiming their original congregational focus and eager to live out their lives in service to others. While I make no attempt to generalize my findings to other religious communities, I argue that there is much that women religious—marginalized by both the Catholic Church and secular society in distinct ways—can teach us about the strategies of action they employ to claim their identities both as women and religious sisters while pushing back against structural inequality and institutional repression.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender

In this study, I explore the ways in which the Sisters of St. Joseph have embraced gender and how gender consciousness has impacted their work and relationships. Barrie Thorne and Zella Luria (1986) define gender as “cultural and social phenomena—divisions of labor, activity, and identity, which are associated with but not fully determined by biological sex” (176). Further, drawing on Erving Goffman’s (1977) ethnomethodological understanding of gender as a routine, Candice West and Don Zimmerman (1987) contend that gender is not a defining category of what one is, but rather a recurring activity that is constituted through interaction with others. Christine Delphy (2003) suggests, “it is the social division of labor, and associated hierarchical relations, which lead to physiological sex being used to differentiate those who are assigned to be dominant from those who will be part of the subordinate gender/class” (1).

Similar to how biological conceptions of race have been rejected, sociologists and gender theorists argue that while not completely disconnected from the body, gender is a social construct rather than a result of biological sex differences. With this understanding, concerns turned to how gender was performed or enacted in social situations. For example, Judith Butler argues that the gendered body is entirely performative and that the interior notion of self is socially constructed through public and social discourse about the “surface politics of the body” (1990a:336). This serves to create and recreate a perceived “gender core” that is “discursively maintained” to fit within the framework of our heteronormative society (1990a:337).

As Delphy (2003) points out, the ways in which genders are separated have significant theoretical implications for power and subordination. In elaborating how biological differences between the sexes have been used as justification for the social division of labor between genders, Pierre Bourdieu (2001) submits that men have assumed a position of domination over women due to anatomical sex difference between male and female bodies, which he argues are also social constructs. This hegemonic domination is both reified and reproduced through habituation and in particular, through the social statuses assigned to men and women (15). Bourdieu further identifies the family, the Church, and the educational system as three institutions that reproduce male domination primarily by acting on unconscious structures (2001:85). In other words, routine social interactions and a division of labor attributed to biological sex differences are the principal methods that reify the subordination of women in society.

Women Religious: Demographic Information

According to Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), there were 47,170 religious sisters in the United States in 2014, compared to 179,954 in 1965, a decline of 73.8% (CARA 2016). These sisters are generally divided into two types of communities: contemplative and active. Historically, contemplative sisters lived in cloister, that is, physical separation from the outside world. These women take vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience—promises lived out through lives of meditation and prayer. Active congregations on the other hand also take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but their lives are lived in service through active ministry in the Church (Ebaugh 1993b). As of 2009, nearly 70% of women's

religious congregations in the United States consider themselves active communities (Johnson et al. 2014:35-36).

The change in the number of priests over the same time period has not been as stark, with 58,632 total priests (diocesan and religious) in 1965 and 37,192 in 2016, a decline of 36.6% (CARA 2016). While the numbers of vowed religious men and women are decreasing, the total number of U.S. Catholics has increased considerably over the same time period. CARA notes that the number of self-identified Catholics in the United States was 48.5 million in 1965, and is 79.7 million in 2014, an increase of 64.3%, with this change largely coming from Latino immigration (CARA 2014).

Communities of religious sisters in the United States typically belong to either the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) or the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR). Though obviously the complexities and nuances of individual congregations get lost in oversimplifications, generally speaking, the LCWR communities are more progressive while the CMSWR are more traditional (Johnson et al. 2014). Mary Johnson, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary Gautier (2014) note that popular journalistic characterizations of these two groups are overly reductive and typically contend that no women are entering LCWR congregations, while CMSWR communities are bustling. However, the authors found that actually in recent years, vocations in both LCWR and CMSWR communities are roughly equal, but generally few in number. In fact, in 2009, 32% of LCWR and 27% of CMSWR congregations had no one in formation at all. Even though vocations in both groups are similar, the ages of entrants are remarkably different with younger women gravitating toward CMSWR congregations and women over 40 years of age choosing LCWR ones (Johnson et al. 2014:20-22).

In their overall demographic analysis of women religious, Johnson et al. (2014) note that numbers of women entering religious congregations increased steadily for much of the early twentieth century—peaking in the 1960s—before declining to levels today similar to those in 1905. Further, they point out that more than two-thirds of vowed women religious in the United States are over age of 65, and only 9% of women religious are younger than 60. Since women are not entering religious communities at levels to sustain older sisters aging out, the overall numbers of sisters in religious congregations will continue to decline (Johnson et al. 2014:17-19).

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia are an active community, and have followed a similar demographic pattern to other religious congregations. For example, in 2016, the Sisters of St. Joseph currently have 735 sisters in the congregation with a median age of 76 (SSJ Archives). Like the national trends of American women religious, the Sisters of St. Joseph reported an all-time high of 2,685 sisters in 1967, which reflected a continual increase for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before steadily declining in the latter part of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Figure 1 shows the estimated number of vowed members of the Sisters of St. Joseph on December 31st from 1847-2016 in ten-year intervals. Figure 2 highlights median ages of members in the same date range.

Women's religious communities are also classified by two distinctions recognized by the Catholic Church: diocesan and pontifical congregations. Diocesan congregations are under the direction of the local bishop, who may control the community's finances, require that they minister in only one diocese, and who may have veto power over congregational elections. Pontifical congregations on the other hand receive their formal

approval directly from Rome and may serve in several different dioceses, or indeed, even different countries (Wittberg 1994). In 2009, 87% of women’s religious communities in the United States were pontifical communities, compared with 13% that identify as diocesan congregations (Johnson et al. 2014:36-37).

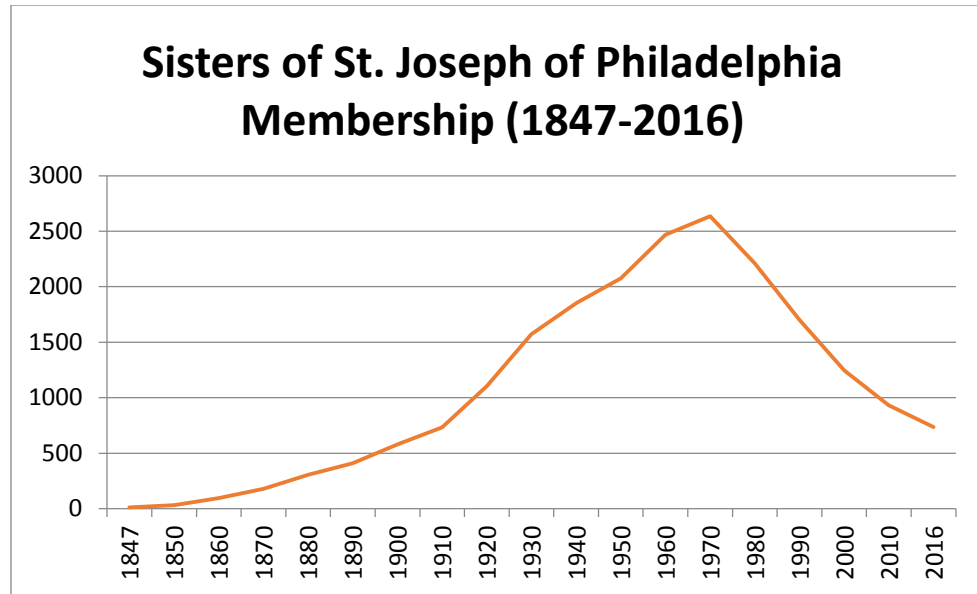


Figure 1. Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia Membership (1847-2016)

The Sisters of St. Joseph are a pontifical organization and therefore they are ostensibly free from the oversight of diocesan leadership, but my research shows that this often plays out differently in the historically conservative and dogmatic Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

The Sisters of St. Joseph: Historical Context

As I explore the lives of American religious sisters, it is important to recognize the distinctions between the Sisters of St. Joseph and other communities of religious women.

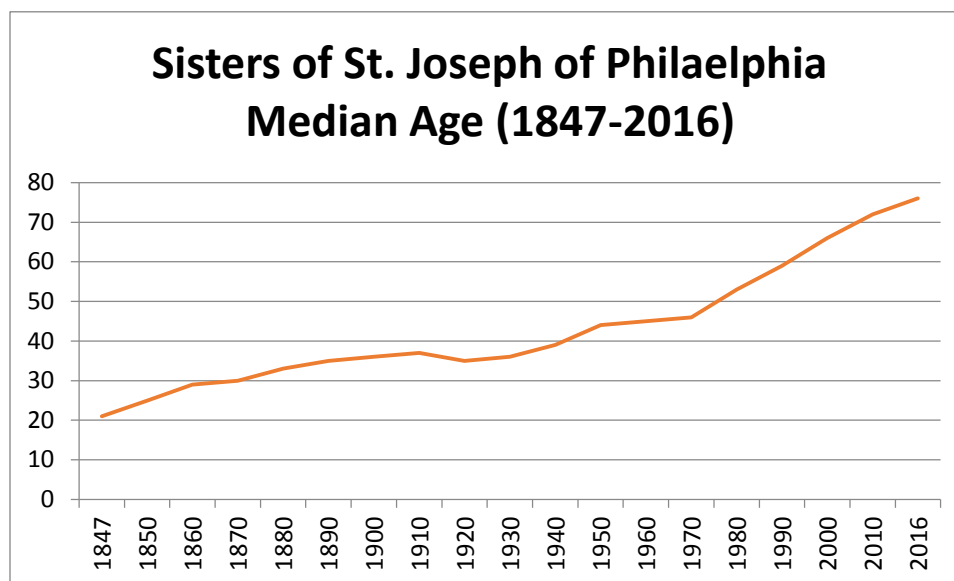


Figure 2. Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia Median Age (1847-2016)

There is a strong tendency to homogenize Catholic religious sisters, no doubt fueled through stereotypical images of nuns found in films and television (Sullivan 2005).

Though there are clearly some commonalities in their religious devotions, social works, and profession of religious vows, the differences between the Sisters of St. Joseph and other women's religious communities are significant. The Sisters of St. Joseph have their own unique mission and charism as an organization, and of course sisters within the community each have their own perspectives as well that shape the congregation's direction.

The congregation traces its roots back to the mid-seventeenth century, when a French Jesuit priest named Jean-Pierre Médaille founded the Sisters of St. Joseph in Le Puy, France (Vacher 2009). The congregation's founding came at a time of profound physical and spiritual misery in France, particularly for the lower social classes (Byrne 1985:6). Further, the first half of the seventeenth century in France was ravaged by wars

and other religious conflicts, and periodic epidemics like the plague were distinct concerns (Vacher 2009). In collaboration with Bishop of Velay, Henri de Maupas, Father Médaille envisioned a religious community that would be both contemplative and active, and respond to the needs of the poorest people, who were suffering from famine, poverty, and the ravages of war (Logue 1950; Vacher 2009). At the time, women's religious communities were not permitted to minister in public (Coburn and Smith 1999), but instead were confined to lives of prayer in the cloister. Patricia Byrne (1986) writes that as the first six sisters took control of a hospital-orphanage around 1650, their founder envisioned a new way of life for these sisters, one that would be lived outside of cloister walls. Médaille wanted them to attend to "all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy of which women are capable" (Kuhns 2003). Certainly considered revolutionary for the time, Médaille desired the women to be free to respond to the needs of contemporary society and the sisters went on to do whatever was needed, especially ministering to women, visiting the needy, and caring for the sick and orphans (Byrne 1986). Marguerite Vacher (2009) writes that the congregation's founding documents describe a non-cloistered form of religious life that "was innovative enough to trouble the ecclesiastical or religious authorities of the time" (54). While many Sisters of St. Joseph eventually went on to become great educators, initially, Médaille cautioned the young community "not to teach" if other religious communities were already teaching (SSJ Archives).

Four of the original six sisters were from middle class backgrounds, and along with Médaille, the young congregation sought the support of influential religious and community leaders, a move that Carol Coburn and Martha Smith (1999) argue allowed the Sisters of St. Joseph to survive as a community at midcentury. In just 25 years, more

than 20 other small groups of women religious appeared in Le Puy, and within a century, the Sisters of St. Joseph were among the foremost religious congregations in France (Logue 1950; Kashuba 1999). During the French Revolution, the congregation dispersed and several sisters were executed for refusing to denounce their faith, and thus died as martyrs (Riveaux 1886). Jeanne Fontbonne, later known as Mother St. John, continued her work quietly and “met imprisonment and had faced death unflinchingly” (Logue 1950:10) was spared execution with the fall of Robespierre, and in 1807, she refounded the congregation in Lyon, France (Logue 1950; Kashuba 1999). By 1836, the Sisters of St. Joseph responded to a call from St. Louis’s Bishop Joseph Rosati and six sisters crossed the Atlantic Ocean, establishing the congregation’s first roots in the United States in Carondelet, near St. Louis, Missouri. In the St. Louis area, the sisters began a number of schools for neglected populations, including those for deaf persons, girls, orphans, as well as those for black and Native American students (Kashuba 1999:13).

During a trip to visit his brother the Bishop of St. Louis in early 1847, Philadelphia’s Bishop Francis Kenrick noted the love and care that Sisters of St. Joseph provided to children in a local orphanage. Recognizing this need in his own city, Bishop Kenrick pleaded with his brother and the superior of the congregation Mother Celestine Pommerel, for the sisters’ assistance back East. Though initially reluctant, Mother Celestine and Bishop Peter Kenrick eventually assented to the request and, led by French missionary Mother St. John Fournier, four sisters made the three-week trek to Philadelphia later that spring. In the days following their arrival in Philadelphia in May 1847, Bishop Kenrick once again wrote his brother, this time, in gratitude for sending the sisters and pronounced them as having “a generous spirit ready for any good work”

(Logue 1950:15-30). Once in Philadelphia, just three years after the city's anti-Catholic Nativist Riots in 1944, the Sisters of St. Joseph ran St. John's Orphanage on Chestnut Street in center city, before expanding their work to education and ministering to the sick and infirmed (Logue 1950). Over the next two decades, the Sisters ran numerous schools in Philadelphia, St. Joseph's Academy in McSherrystown, Pennsylvania, and nursed wounded Confederate and Union soldiers in the Civil War. During this time period, their care for the sick and wounded also led them to operate North Philadelphia's St. Joseph Hospital for 10 years (Logue 1950). Byrne (1986) argues that as the community developed American sensibilities of "individualism, activism, aggressiveness and adventure," there were notable marks of resistance toward the traditional convent living, which emphasized hidden lives of docility and obedience (265).

Their tenacity paid off, and as the congregation continued to grow in number and in ministry in Philadelphia, in 1858 with the help of Bishop John Neumann, they purchased property from the Middleton family on the banks of the Wissahickon Creek. In their new location, the Sisters of St. Joseph quickly began Mount St. Joseph Academy for girls, established their Motherhouse, and later Chestnut Hill College in what is now the Chestnut Hill section of the city of Philadelphia (Logue 1950; Kashuba 1949). Today, the Sisters of St. Joseph have 16 different congregations serving in four regions of the United States: The Atlantic Coast (Boston, Brentwood, Philadelphia, Springfield, St. Augustine, West Hartford, and Winslow); The Lakes (Albany, Baden, Buffalo, Erie, Rochester, and Watertown); The Heartland (Carondelet Center, Concordia, Congregation of St. Joseph, St. Louis and St. Paul); and The Pacific Rim (Hawaii, Los Angeles, and Orange) (Lek 2016).

As the congregation evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Sisters of St. Joseph became even more detached from their French roots yet remained faithful to their original foundation. For example, Byrne (1986) writes that the sisters brought with them from France,

a congregational heritage of remarkable openness and flexibility that enabled them in many ways to be home in the American context. The long history in France had provided a model for adaptation to the exigencies of the local situation. Their spirituality...provided a coherent identity for women involved intimately with people through all kinds of service (Byrne 1986:270).

In other words, it was precisely through remaining true to the congregation's original focus that the Sisters of St. Joseph in the United States emerged as a unified body of women who were both capable and willing to address the human and social needs in each locality where they served. It is easy then to see why religious communities like the Sisters of St. Joseph embraced the Second Vatican Council's call to return to their original missions for inspiration, as this process of reflexivity and renewal had always been embedded in their organizational identity. While the Sisters of St. Joseph primarily assumed the roles of educators in Philadelphia, particularly in the Catholic schools boom in the twentieth century where their work was directly connected to the education of immigrants (SSJ Archives), their original foundresses desired the congregation to respond to any and all needs.

Vatican II and Renewal

It is easy to slip into a mindset where one views the Catholic Church as an immutable institution, but the reality is that the Church is quite fluid and has been modernized by contemporary politics and changing society over time. This is no more

evident than the landmark shifts brought forth by Vatican II in the 1960s. At the request of Pope Saint John XXIII, who called on the faithful to “open the windows of the Church to let in some fresh air,” the Second Vatican Council was commissioned in 1962 and “set in motion a process of formal reflection, innovation, and reform that dramatically transformed the culture of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as its central institutions” (Koehlinger 2007:9). Envisioned as an opportunity to reconfigure the rules of the Church, Vatican II developed into four sessions over the next several years that brought together theologians and other Church leaders to examine all aspects of Catholicism, its place in contemporary society, and its relationship to and with other religions. Among the many institutional changes, the call toward reformation initiated by Vatican II motivated the Church to specifically reexamine its relationship with the world in the context of living in solidarity with all people (Bartunek 1984). Concluding in 1965, Vatican II ushered in historic changes to the ways in which Catholics experienced their faith, the mass, and both men’s and women’s religious congregations in general (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Fialka 2003; Wilde 2007).

In her sociological analysis of Vatican II, Melissa Wilde (2007) argues that its most profound changes—the elimination of the Latin mass, relinquished claim to being the one true Church, and relaxed rules for the laity regarding diet and attire—were largely due to the bishops’ cultural shifts on authority. Specifically, Wilde (2007) points to a disagreement that emerged between two factions of bishops: the progressive *Domus Mariae* and the more powerful, conservative *Coetus Internationalis Patrum* (CIP). Wilde (2007) suggests that *Domus Mariae* championed the notion of collegiality, which contended that when acting together, the college of bishops had authority equal to that of

the pope. The CIP feared that this liberal interpretation of Church teaching could potentially challenge the legitimate authority of the pope and the doctrine of papal infallibility (Wilde 2007:59-62). Despite their informal nature, Wilde (2007) contends that the progressive group of bishops was more successful in mobilizing an effective organizational structure to forward their priorities during the Council. Drawing on Ann Swidler's (1986) "cultural toolkit" framework, Wilde suggests that Domus Mariae's success was due in large part to the group's strategy of action that prioritized "building a participatory democracy within the hierarchical and nondemocratic structure of the Church" (Wilde 2007:63).

Inspired by this progressive spirit of reformation, communities of women religious responded to the calls and promise of Vatican II with zeal, as many were already undergoing a process of institutional renewal and had a long legacy of service through education and ministry to the poor and oppressed (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; McNamara 1996; Kaylin 2000; Briggs 2006; Koehlinger 2007; McGuinness 2013). Vatican II theoretically signaled a great liberalization in the Catholic Church and women's religious congregations were understandably optimistic about the possibility for a greater inclusion of women in decision-making and leadership. Yet, the gendered boundaries within the Church remained stark in the decades that followed Vatican II. For instance, Albert Mills and Catherine Ryan (2001) argue that while the Council suggested women's autonomy and influence in the Church was growing, during this time period even greater power was given to male Church authorities to "govern the lives of religious institutes, particularly those of women, than had been the case in previous times" (Mills and Ryan 2001:61).

At the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI continued what his predecessor started and directed religious communities on how they should specifically respond to this call for renewal. The pope instructed religious congregations to hold periodic general chapters— formal meetings that gathered elected order delegates, provincials, and other leaders. These chapter meetings were designed to examine the most appropriate ways to institute the Council’s calls for reformation in the spirit of each order’s intrinsic mission and charism (Bartunek 1984).

By the 1960s, many congregations refocused their efforts in particular support of the poor and marginalized (Ebaugh 1993a; Fialka 2003; Koehlinger 2007). Helen Rose Ebaugh (1993a) argues that religious sisters grew more outspoken in their feminism at the same time, actively engaging in social justice activism, withdrawing from traditional roles in parishes, and advocating for women’s issues. In the years after Vatican II, women’s religious communities also experienced a significantly heightened gender consciousness, which correlated with trends in American society in general (Wittberg 1989; Ebest and Ebest 2003; Henold 2008). Peculiarly though, the post-Vatican II years have also revealed a sharp decline in membership of religious congregations (Ebaugh 1993b; Wittberg 1994; Johnson et al. 2014). Roger Finke (1997) explains that when religious communities blend in [to society], they often fade away. Further, he found that those congregations that limited non-group activities had more to offer new recruits in the way of social networks and religious experiences that were distinctive from those of the laity (Finke 1997). Further, Patricia Wittberg (1994) writes, “those orders that have retained distinctive charisms based on some particular spiritual emphasis have been the

most successful in avoiding the periodic extinctions that have afflicted religious communities” (49).

Sociological Literature on Women Religious

Religious sisters are an understudied population in the sociological literature (Wittberg 1994). Though some social science has explored the lives of religious sisters, much of this research comes from the humanities. In the literature available, there are generally two characterizations of women religious that inform my research on the Sisters of St. Joseph: the first constructs religious sisters as meek servants of the Church who carry out the will of the Church patriarchy, while the second demonstrates how religious sisters have articulated their own roles in the Church and emphasizes women’s agency. These two themes illustrate the structural and cultural forces at work in secular society, in the Church, and within the congregations themselves that both empower and limit the roles of women religious. Like all women, religious sisters were impacted by specific moments in American social and political history, including the Women’s Movement, the different waves of feminism, the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, the neoliberal Regan era, and the War on Terror. Yet religious sisters were also significantly affected by defining moments in the Catholic Church, including Vatican II, the clergy sex abuse scandal, and the different ideologies represented by Popes Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. Understanding the evolving social position of religious sisters within the Catholic Church and in the United States in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s situates the lives of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the broader context of the Women’s Movement.

The Catholic Church as a Gendered Institution

Mills and Ryan (2001) write that as we understand modernist notions of organizations, the Church evolved as one where the rights to rule over the larger organizational membership rested exclusively with the male hierarchy. Since the Catholic Church is hierarchical and power is collected in the hands of a few men, I turn to the literature on the structure of gendered organizations. Joan Acker (1990) writes that an organization is gendered if “advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine” (146). Specifically, Acker offers five criteria that serve to establish gender differences in organizations:

1) divisions of labor, of allowed behaviors, of locations of physical space, of power; 2) the construction of symbols and images that explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose those divisions; 3) interactions between women and men, women and women, men and men, including all those patterns that enact dominance and submission; 4) gendered components of individual identity...such as...choice of appropriate work, language use, clothing, and 5) gender is implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures (Acker 1990:146–147).

In other words, by enforcing separate rules for men and women in regard to the use of space, types of work, acceptable language use, and appropriate work attire, organizations reproduce gendered assumptions about men and women’s work.

Applying Acker’s work to women religious, the Catholic Church has a long history of segregated spaces, distinct clothing, and similar methods of control that Church leadership uses to subordinate women. In fact, Mills and Ryan (2001) point to the Church’s gendered rules for men and women that were shaped by centuries of cloister and celibacy. These restrictions served as the primary tools for reifying notions of

masculinity and femininity in the Catholic Church. Thus, religious sisters in the Church were poised to ascribe to the discourse surrounding archetypal feminine roles, including teaching, ministering to the helpless, and nursing. Moreover, this gendered division of labor may be interpreted through a functionalist perspective, where women religious must fill certain ministerial roles in the Church in order for the institution to carry out its mission.

Similarly, in the corporate world, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) argues that the ideal boss-secretary relationship is one of fealty, where “secretaries were expected to be bound by ties of personal loyalty, to value non-utilitarian rewards, and to be available as an emotional partner. The image of what secretaries wanted—and, by extension, working women—was shaped by these expectations” (89). Further, Kanter suggests that the situation for secretaries becomes self-perpetuating: the nature of secretarial work is such that “doing a good job” simultaneously prevents women from earning managerial roles while at the same time making them more indispensable as administrative support in the organization. Thus, women become stuck and are unable to climb the organizational ladder and break through the glass ceiling. In the Church, women religious provide the leadership with de facto administrative support through teaching, nursing, and other social services. This is most apparent in the United States where for decades, religious sisters staffed Catholic schools for paltry salaries. In fact, historian Margaret McGuinness notes that these salaries were typically half of what male clergy were paid, making the potential for non-religious replacements more difficult and expensive (McGuinness 2013:157-158).

Despite being barred from positions of authority, religious sisters have their own unique standpoint as women in the Church and in secular society. Sociologist Dorothy Smith (1987) writes that the standpoint of women is not a unique perspective or worldview,

but one that does not universalize a particular experience. It is rather a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds (107).

Essentially, women religious offer sociologists an opportunity to understand how women unite to address the realities of their lives lived in two disparate spheres—the Church and society—both of which marginalize them in similar yet also distinctive ways.

In the Catholic Church, this subordination has primarily manifested itself in the separation of women and men into different social spaces. Religious sisters have long been integral to the work of the Catholic Church in America, assuming roles as teachers, nurses, and other care professionals since coming to the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (McNamara 1996; Koehlinger 2007). In 1900, congregations of American sisters were granted official status from Rome that encouraged them to live out their missions of service, but this mandate also required the communities to be partially cloistered to prevent secularization through interaction with the outside world (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Briggs 2006; Koehlinger 2007). Unlike their male counterparts who were free to take up specialized vocations as monks, priests, or secular clergy, “women religious have been torn between lay and clerical status, between episcopal and monastic jurisdictions, between active or contemplative vocations as defined by male authorities” (McNamara 1996:2).

Similarly, in her meta-analysis of church teaching on rules for women's religious communities, psychologist Megan Brock (2010) writes that three themes emerge: 1) religious sisters are called by God, 2) they lead lives of self-sacrifice, and 3) work for the Church (478). Specifically, Brock (2010) contends that discursive practices and controlling language in these documents regulate the religious sister's subjectivity as a particular kind of woman. The author writes,

[u]sing language overlaid with sexual connotations, the Church prescribes the ways in which the nun will be a fertile woman, despite her vowed chastity. Hers will be a spiritual fertility; her life itself the spiritual seed of the Church. Though her body is involved in work for the Church, it is through her self-sacrificing spirit, not through her fecund body, that the Church will be fruitful (Brock 2010:479).

In other words, Brock (2010) argues that by drawing on what Judith Butler (1990b) calls "a compulsory obligation on women's bodies to reproduce" (115), male leaders use language laden with images of reproduction and archetypal gender roles to maintain the structural position of women religious within the Church.

Max Weber and the Religious Virtuoso

Several scholars apply Max Weber's ideal type of the religious virtuoso to help understand the structural position of religious sisters in the Catholic Church (Wittberg 1994; Schneiders 2000). According to Weber, the religious virtuoso is one whose religious participation transcends that of a layperson in that particular faith. Weber explains:

intensive religiosity has a tendency toward a sort of social stratification... virtuoso religiosity is opposed to mass religiosity.... By "mass" we understand powerful influence over the religiously "unmusical" laymen; this influence might not be in the direction of his (the virtuoso's) own religious way of life; it might be an influence in

merely ceremonious, ritualist, and conventional particulars (Weber [1948] 1991:287-290).

Feminist theologian Sandra Schneiders (2000) argues that the category of religious virtuoso is ambiguous and must be used with caution to describe what makes those who enter consecrated religious life different from the broader congregational participation. The author criticizes Weber's definition as it has the potential for an understanding of the religious virtuoso to be superior to those in lay positions in the Church, an interpretation that theologians and the Second Vatican Council have also rejected. However, she identifies two main points in Weber's theory that help to explain the difference: "the sociological distinctiveness of the life," that is, separate from a lay Catholic life that one may live as married or single, "and the exclusive concern with the religious/spiritual dimensions of life as the only legitimate foundation and finality" (Schneiders 2000:36).

Sociologist Patricia Wittberg (1994) argues that as religions define the ideological framework for religious virtuosi, they must also declare what role, if any, they have in the Church. Some might be classified as "prophetic witnesses," whose spirituality is a protest against the lack of structure in the Church or against abuses from the hierarchy. Religious virtuosi might also demonstrate the legitimacy and holiness of that religion to a secular society that is unsympathetic or aggressive toward it. The author also proposes a third possibility, where the religious virtuosi fulfill roles in the faith like teaching, modeling appropriate moral behavior, and caring for the sick and elderly (Wittberg 1994:14-15).

Wittberg (1994) also points out that in the Catholic Church, religious communities of women and men are distinct from ordained clergy. Unlike diocesan priests, men and women in religious congregations profess public vows of celibacy,

poverty, and obedience, and often live in community. Though the laity often groups these men and women into the larger category of “clergy,” religious communities maintain “lay” status within the Church, and have limited voice in its policies and formal government structure. Given these distinctions and though some brothers and monks may be ordained, male and female religious congregations have more in common with each other, than either group has with ordained diocesan priests.

Women Religious and Agency

The other strain of literature that I draw on emphasizes where religious sisters have been agents in their own lives, in the Church, and in society in general. This literature therefore rejects the limiting notion of the Catholic nun as a meek servant of the patriarchy. Sociologist William Sewell (1992) argues that the capacity to change structures, or human agency, is inherent in all human beings and that this agency is both collective and individual (20-21). Drawing on Anthony Giddens’s work (1976), Sewell views structure as being “dual,” or enabling, meaning that structure shapes peoples’ actions, but peoples’ actions also shape social structure. Sewell contends that human beings can coordinate agency with others to bring change to social structures in a dual, dialectical way.

In her history of the Sisters of St. Joseph, historian Patricia Byrne (1985) argues “a change in the attitudes of sisters themselves has allowed them to recognize their own identity by examining the secular roles of women in society” (4). Similarly, sociologist Helen Rose Ebaugh (1993a) writes that women religious exercised social mobility and asserted their status within the Church and secular society through three methods: 1) as educated women, 2) as professional women in various career settings, and 3) as a social

support group conscious of their subordinated position in the male-dominated Catholic Church (402). As the primary educators in Catholic schools by the mid-twentieth century, women religious taught tens of thousands of American students even though many of these women had only barely completed their own high school educations (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Fialka 2003; McGuinness 2013). By the 1950s, Pope Pius XII was concerned that religious sisters in Catholic schools were not adequately trained to teach, and therefore the Church had a responsibility to ensure that these women received the appropriate professional training (Ebaugh 1993b). Consequently, the development of the Sisters Formation Movement in the 1950s encouraged many congregations to empower their members to pursue higher education in order to maintain equal status and credentials with their secular colleagues (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Ebaugh 1993b; Koehlinger 2007, McGuinness 2013).

As religious sisters completed undergraduate and graduate degrees and were exposed to newer strains of intellectual thought, they established themselves as competent professionals in their respective fields and not just servants of the Church (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Koehlinger 2007). Through increased access to education, women in religious communities trained for administrative roles in other areas beyond just those available in Catholic schools or parishes and eventually became one of the largest bodies of educated women in the United States (Thompson 1986; Wittberg 1989; Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Koehlinger 2007). In fact, historian Margaret Susan Thompson (1986) contends that women religious who oversaw large-scale institutions like hospitals, asylums, schools, and colleges could be considered among the first “sizable cohort of female executives” (275).

Similarly, in the early twentieth century many congregations who had been running convent academies opened Catholic women's colleges of their own (McGuinness 2013). Carol Coburn (2004) suggests that some larger women's religious communities convinced bishops for permission to open their own institutions because of three significant barriers to education for women. Namely, men's colleges were only open to women in the summer or at off-campus locations, because women religious were already attending secular institutions, and finally because of the fear that lay women who attended non-Catholic colleges might negatively impact the faith through their secularization (10).

Ebaugh (1993b) argues that prior to the Second Vatican Council, women religious were under strict control by congregational leadership, who significantly limited their exposure to laypersons and to secular society in general. Once they entered the convent, sisters were not permitted to visit family, except for once every five or six years, and when they did, they were not allowed to spend the night. If a sister did need to travel beyond the convent walls –say to a doctor's appointment or to buy groceries –she was always accompanied by at least one other sister. Thus, even those women religious who were members of active congregations experienced profound social isolation. With Vatican II's changes and calls for renewal however, these rules were relaxed and sisters interacted much more frequently with the laity. Ebaugh (1993b) writes that for some sisters, this decline of monasticism initially produced individual-level anomie for some sisters, which eventually extended to congregations as a whole as they examined what role and mission they held in the Church and world in the twentieth century (24-26).

Women's Ordination

Still another outright way in which to view gender inequality in the Catholic Church is through the institution's ban on the ordination of women. The modern Church's official position prohibiting women's ordination as adopted and maintained by Pope Saint John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI was originally put forth by Pope Paul VI in 1976 (Daigler 2012). Known as *in Persona Christi*, the argument asserts that women cannot be ordained priests because their gender prevents them from sharing a physical resemblance to Jesus Christ. Similarly, Church authorities also argue that the Scriptures are the primary sources for Church law and as such, no evidence can be found in them that Jesus Christ ordained any women during his ministry (Daigler 2012). Former nun Lavinia Byrne (1994) goes further in suggesting that women's bodies and essentialized gender roles have also been used as less obvious, yet equally powerful means of supporting the ban on women's ordination. For example, Byrne (1994) offers, "our theology of the proper role and dignity of women is equally skewed because it is determined by our biological function" (100). Even more clearly, the author continues,

the present system is based on two theological presuppositions. One has a scriptural basis; it says that Jesus chose women to be disciples and men to be apostles. The other has its basis in the symbolic ordering of reality: it says that the Father sends the Son into the world and so it establishes a male chain of command. Both of these are about leadership and the exercise of authority because, inexorably at present, in the Catholic system, you cannot exercise fullness of any leadership role unless you are male and you are ordained. *Only the ordained may lead* (Byrne 1994:103). [emphasis added]

Essentially then, since women religious and indeed all women of the faith vowed or not, are unable to be ordained as clergy, they are prohibited from any executive leadership roles in the Catholic Church structure.

Emboldened by the Second Vatican Council's focus on social justice and the document *Gaudium et Spes* in particular, which called upon Catholics to fight abuse and anything that devalues human beings, many Catholics began to revisit the question of women's ordination in the latter half of the twentieth century (Briggs 2006:133–134). Recognizing that they have been victims of injustice through gender discrimination, religious sisters also became more vocal about demanding equality through the priesthood. New York Times religion journalist Kenneth Briggs (2006) discusses two groups in particular that raised the issue in the wake of Vatican II: the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the Women's Ordination Movement (later, Women's Ordination Conference), founded in 1975.

Originally founded in 1956 as the Conference of Major Superiors of Women, the LCWR faced one of its first major issues of contention with Rome when it looked to change its name in 1971. Church leaders initially objected to the use of the word "leadership" in the title of LCWR, as they feared it conveyed a false sense that the group was less deferential to male authorities and would be taking matters into its own hands (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Briggs 2006). In drawing on calls for social justice and in turn, women's ordination, the LCWR and the Women's Ordination Movement essentially were told that this form of gender equality was beyond the scope of what the term *justice* meant. Church leaders and theologians once again attempted to quell the call for women's ordination through a reminder that,

God had created the Church as a hierarchy of authority, whereas the world was run by political arrangements on a human level. According to this line of thinking, the Church worked in a top-down fashion, God revealing the sacred truths through the pope and the "teaching authority" of the bishops downward to the people. It wasn't for ordinary Catholics to bring their

own standards of social justice to these truths, which included a ban on women priests...Those things, the Church authorities had decided, were beyond categories of social justice; they were what they were because God said so (Briggs 2006:141).

As I have argued elsewhere (Murphy 2014), I submit that this reasoning provides evidence of Weber's pure type of Traditional Authority in the Catholic Church, where he describes how "it is impossible for law or administrative rule to be deliberately created by legislation. Rules which in fact are innovations can be legitimized only by the claim that they have been 'valid of yore,' but have only now been recognized by means of 'Wisdom'" (Weber [1915] 1978:227). In other words, the Church hierarchy was able to dismiss the calls for women's ordination by religious sisters and others based solely on the notion that it has been invalid since the beginning of Christianity, and as such cannot be changed now just because some people wish it.

As the women's ordination movement gained momentum, religious sisters were joined by other Catholic clergy and laypersons in their calls for women to be ordained as priests. In fact, historian and Sister of Mercy, Mary Jeremy Daigler's (2012) detailed history of women's ordination in the United States highlights the fact that the movement did not originally begin with vowed religious sisters, but rather with laywomen. Evolving from the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, initially founded in England in 1911 to secure right to vote for women, the St. Joan's International Alliance eventually expanded its mission "to promote the equality of rights between women and men in political, social and church life" and specifically to work toward the ordination of women (Daigler 2012:13-14). The St. Joan's Alliance quickly expanded across the globe, establishing chapters in 24 countries on five continents by the 1970s (Daigler 2012). Further,

sociologist Robert Wuthnow (1988) argues that while initially the Women's Ordination Movement began solely to promote that particular issue, eventually it increased the scope of its progressive agenda to "condemn all forms of sexism and for Christians everywhere to work for 'justice and equality for women'" (228-229).

Though the Second Vatican Council may have helped to bring the issue to the forefront of Catholic consciousness, there is evidence of women being ordained in the Mediterranean region going back to the first few centuries of the Christian Church (Byrne 1994; Daigler 2012). Considered rogue and not sanctioned by the Church, some bishops took to ordaining women not just as priests, but also as bishops, thereby making the ordination of women a self-sustaining process through the Church's tradition of apostolic succession (Moon 2008). Similarly, Daigler (2012) points to considerable evidence of theologians, priests, and bishops offering their support for gender equity in the Church in regard to women's ordination. Even more encouraging for supporters is the fact that advocates of women's ordination found papal support over the years through speeches, encyclicals, pastoral letter, and similar official documents that promoted the advancement of women's issues and calls for increased roles for women in the Church. The author quickly qualifies this however with the observation that this support was "almost certainly unintended" (Daigler 2012:107). In other words, any perceived connection between support for women's roles in the Church and women's ordination was misinterpreted and needed swift and firm correction. Surely, the overwhelming evidence from the Vatican, particularly in the past two decades, has been categorical denunciation of women's ordination, first with Pope Saint John Paul II's 1994 writing *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone*, which not only required

that all of the Catholic faithful recognize that ordination was the exclusive province of men alone, but it also forbade further discussion of the subject (Byrne 1994; Daigler 2012).

Catholic studies scholar Marian Ronan (2007) argues that liberal worldviews like those of the Roman Catholic Womenpriests (RCWP) movement and Women's Ordination Conference risk forwarding the causes of white women while essentializing women of color and women in the developing world. In focusing almost exclusively on the ordination of women in European and American societies, Ronan contends that these groups fall victim to perpetuating the Western hegemony that so many feminists of the third wave seek to eliminate. Consequently, Ronan (2007) levels harsh criticism on the comparisons to institutionalized racism through apartheid with the exclusion of women in the priesthood and calls on the RCWP to "revise its goals, theology and actions in light of the massive and world-historic ruptures of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries" (Ronan 2007:159).

Daigler (2012) and Hellena Moon (2008) also point to other troubling issues with the womenpriests movement. Daigler remarks that the movement has been largely void of racial and class diversity, essentially belonging to privileged white women. Similarly, Moon (2008) questions why those in favor of women's ordination feel the need to legitimize the movement through an adherence to apostolic succession, which she criticizes as fundamentally patriarchal and therefore a device that perpetuates institutional hierarchy. Instead, the author suggests the movement rethink its model and embrace one that disregards this convention altogether.

Sociology of Religion

Recent scholarship from the sociology of religion is also relevant to my research. Religion was a focal point of sociology's European founding fathers (Smith 2008; Vásquez 2013; Turner 2014). For instance, Manuel Vásquez (2013) submits that for them, religion was the "womb of civilization" and the sociology of religion an epistemological point of departure for their theories of society (27). Though for much of the 20th century, the study of religion was marginalized by mainstream sociology. Instead, most sociologists adopted a theory of secularization that essentially embraced the notion that religion would become less relevant to society and eventually wither away and die (Smith 2008; Turner 2014). However, the late 20th and early 21st centuries have proven that religion is an aspect of social interaction that needs further attention from sociologists, and in fact, Bryan Turner (2014) argues that religion will continue to be a powerful political and ideological force across the globe for the foreseeable future. Christian Smith et al. (2013) contend that sociologists of religion need to refocus efforts toward "big" questions, such as those that probe "the role of religion in generating or sustaining or challenging different cultural structures in the modern world," and those that explore the role of religion in creating and rectifying social inequalities (928).

In pointing toward new areas for research, several scholars suggest that the body has largely been neglected as a focal point for sociologists of religion (Neitz 2004; Smith 2008). For instance, Smith (2008) writes, "[r]eligion is very much about the body, its comportment, treatment, and enactments (1565). Following sociologists Christian Smith (2008) and Mary Jo Neitz (2004) then, my research on the Sisters of St. Joseph and how

feminine embodiment has impacted their social interactions in the Church and society can help to fill this gap in the sociology of religion literature.

In his meta-analysis of recent scholarship on the sociology of religion, Christian Smith (2008) argues that our understanding of the cultural and organizational structures of religious congregations has been deepened through both ethnographic and survey research. Similarly, David Smilde and Matthew May (2010) analyzed 30 years of journal articles in the sociology of religion, and found the emergence of a “strong” program. The notion of a “strong” program comes from Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (2002), who called for a cultural sociology that sees culture as a causal, independent variable. A “strong” program in the sociology of religion likewise views religion as an autonomous independent variable in society. Yet, Smilde (2013) cautions that sociologists of religion must move beyond a “strong” program to a “broad” program that includes a breadth of phenomena, conceptual tools, and analytic intentions. Specifically, Smilde (2013) argues that a “broad” program in the sociology of religion must not simply view religion as an autonomous structure that works behind people’s backs, but instead assume “[a] multidimensional explanation in which sometimes religion will be causal and other times will be caused” (62-63). In my research on the Sisters of St. Joseph, Smilde’s (2013) conception of a “broad” program is important. Obviously, Catholicism plays a central role in the lives of the Sisters of St. Joseph; however, it is too limiting to assume that their social lives are dictated solely by their faith, as this fails to recognize their identities as women and educated professionals. In her discussion of feminist spirituality, Kristin Aune (2015) writes that some scholarly approaches see “spirituality” and “religion” as analytically distinct features. The author instead suggests the more useful term, “lived

religion,” which recognizes that “religio-spiritual approaches are socially located and tied to social practice, social interaction, and the wider context of their biographies and lives” (Aune 2015:142). In other words, an analysis that focuses on the sisters’ lived religion, through social and cultural actions in particular, allows for richer explanations for how they negotiate relationships within the congregation, the Church, and society in general.

In this light then, I am particularly interested in the intersections of gender and religion. Orit Avishai, Afshan Jafar, and Rachel Rinaldo (2015) argue that in the last 25 years, the literature on gender and religion stresses how women can be agentive even within oppressive institutional and cultural structures. They suggest that sociologists turn a “gender lens” toward religion by taking neither gender nor religion as variables, but instead as social constructs that are performed and interpreted. Further, the authors suggest that a gender lens on religion should use intersectional approaches and recognize religion as “a powerful but versatile cultural schema” (18). Neitz (2004) proposes that sociologists of religion focus their attention toward “how relational selves are constituted in performance and narrative, and can be studied through looking at practices. To understand these practices as enacted by embodied individuals requires that we attend to gender and sexuality” (400).

Finally, several scholars argue for a particular critical feminist perspective on religion that investigates domination, power, and exploitation. For instance, feminist theologian Mary Hunt (2000) stresses the need to recognize what she calls feminist “theo-politics,” which helps to explain “religious women’s work for reproductive health, against the death penalty, in favor of foreign debt reduction and against the dismantling of welfare programs” (10). Similarly, another feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schüssler

Fiorenza (2013) argues that feminist inquiry “needs to locate itself *within* religion rather than just deconstruct and objectify religion as the ‘other,’ making it an object of the scholarly, allegedly value-neutral gaze” (45) [emphasis in original]. In my own research then, I use a critical feminist lens to unpack the social and political dimensions of the sisters’ religious, social, and political work, which leads to a richer understanding of their multilayered identities.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

A Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach

Much of the extant literature on religious sisters describes the discursive practices that serve to maintain their structural and gendered position within the Church, and what some congregations have done to exercise agency and reject images of religious sisters as self-sacrificing women. Many researchers point to visible actions like support of the Women's Ordination Movement as evidence of religious sisters asserting their positions within the Church (Briggs 2006; Ronan 2007; Moon 2008; Daigler 2012) but few have examined the internal organizational processes like general chapters or the writings of the individual congregations that emerged through them. Sociologist Helen Rose Ebaugh (1993a) suggests that as congregations periodically revise their official Constitutions to submit to Rome for approval, many carefully word their documents, leaving considerable room to define their missions and collective lives as they see fit (413). Thus, through an examination of the writings and lived experiences of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Philadelphia, this study contributes to the existing body literature on individual and collective agency in congregations of religious women. Further, while there have been several congregational histories written about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia (Logue 1950; Kashuba 1999; Beirne 2015), there has been no sociological study of this congregation.

Since I do not try to test a hypothesis, and given the historical nature of this research on one particular religious community, I used a constructivist grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis (Charmaz 2005). Grounded theory has origins

in the research sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss on terminally ill patients in the 1960s, and unlike quantitative positivistic research, grounded theory relies on an inductive process where theory emerges from data (Bryant and Charmaz 2007; Charmaz and Bryant 2008). Strauss and Glaser were both informed by symbolic interactionism (Ralph, Birks, and Chapman 2015) and their discovery of grounded theory allows qualitative researchers to use social and historical contexts to make meaning from data. With grounded theory, issues of importance emerge from the data (Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006) and in dialog with the researcher. Also, in grounded theory, both data collection and analysis are done in tandem and inform one another during the research process (Charmaz 2005; Bryant and Charmaz 2008). For my research on the Sisters of St. Joseph, I specifically used a constructivist model of grounded theory, where the data is placed in social and historical context, and where I acknowledge how my role and identity as a researcher influences the reconstruction of experiences and meaning (Charmaz 2005; Mills, Bonner, and Francis 2006).

Grounded theory is appropriate for this research for several reasons. First, there has been no sociological study ever done on the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, and while this research was informed by sociological theory and literature on women religious, the Church, and gender, ultimately this research is a case study. My goal is to understand how their lived experiences inform and guide the Sisters of St. Joseph in negotiating their roles and layered identities in both the Church and secular society. Sociologist and grounded theory researcher Kathy Charmaz (2005) argues that grounded theory studies are useful in showing “how inequalities are played out at interactional and organizational levels...[r]esearchers must define how, when, and to what extent

participants *construct* and *enact* power, privilege, and inequality” (512) [emphasis in original].

Secondly, my insider status with the congregation allowed me access to data that may not ordinarily be available to the public, especially the general chapter documents in the congregational archives. Though this is undoubtedly a benefit, throughout this research I was conscious of the ways that my prior relationships with many Sisters of St. Joseph and my personal biases may influence this study, even unintentionally. I recognized that I needed to bracket any preconceived knowledge in order to remain objective, and allow the sisters’ multilayered identities to emerge from both the interviews and archival documents. Using the constructivist grounded theory approach, I was reflexive as a researcher during the data collection, analysis, and writing stages of this project.

The third reason for a constructivist grounded theory approach is my own gender and privilege. In this study, I entered into the researcher/participant relationship cognizant of how power dynamics can emerge from qualitative interviews, and was vigilant in phrasing my questions in ways that attempted to reduce any real or perceived power differential. Further, in addition to the constructivist approach, I incorporated principles of a feminist epistemology as well to attend to these concerns. For instance, feminist sociologists Patricia Lengerman and Jill Niebrugge-Brantley (1990) call for a reflexive, researcher-centered perspective in social analysis. They write, “(t)he researcher is obliged to recognize and reflexively monitor her/himself as a socially located actor engaged in a project. This project is not a separate ‘objective’ research undertaking but an activity socially located in the researcher’s interests and meanings” (327).

Research Design and Data Collection

This study explores the complex and layered relationships that religious sisters have with both the institutional Church and secular society through textual analysis of the congregation's archival primary documents and through individual face-to-face interviews with 23 Sisters of St. Joseph. Specifically, I analyzed the documents that emerged from the periodic general chapters from 1968 through 2014. Through this research, I illustrate how individual sisters employed certain strategies of action to advance social justice and gender equality, while navigating competing institutional pressures within the Catholic Church and secular society.

First, I used qualitative content analysis to explore the congregation's primary archival documents, especially those published from the periodic general chapters just after Vatican II through the most recent chapter in summer 2014. According to Canon lawyer Elizabeth Cotter (2008), chapters for religious institutes are bound by canon law and date back to the year 1215. The author writes that chapters are,

[r]ecognized by the Church not only as a vehicle for good government, but also for renewal and fidelity to the mission of the Church...[w]ith its in-built processes for the application of the principles of consultation and participation, representation, a collegial approach to decision-making and the capacity to adjust and conform to contemporary needs...(Cotter 2008:311).

In particular, I analyzed the documents that emerged from the general chapters held in 1968, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014. These chapter meetings are called roughly every five years, during which time the Sisters of St. Joseph elect congregational leadership and articulate the order's organizational vision and direction. At each chapter's conclusion, the congregation publishes a document(s) that

informs its mission and work for the next several years. In addition to these public documents, I was granted access to the Sisters of St. Joseph congregational archives, where I analyzed notes, letters, minutes, voting records, proposals and enactments, and personal recollections of the general chapter meetings. In total, I analyzed nearly 300 documents from the Sisters of St. Joseph congregational archives. Sociologist David Altheide (1996) submits that documents allow for an understanding of culture that makes up social reality shared by members of a community. He contends that through analyzing documents for relevance, significance, and meaning (1996:2) researchers may 1) place symbolic meanings in context, 2) track the process of their creation and influence on social definitions, 3) let understanding emerge through detailed investigation, and 4) use understanding to change social processes (1996:12).

In addition to the content analysis of archival documents, I also conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with sisters about their lived experiences. Looking to recent literature from the sociology of religion, I was drawn to inquiry methods that would highlight lived religion in the sisters' stories and lived experiences. Sociologist of religion Christian Smith et al. (2013) argue that in order to bring the study of religion into prominence within sociology, scholars must rethink how they conduct new research. Specifically, Smith et al. (2013) call for a methodological shift that favors thickly historical, ethnographic, and comparative approaches, along with survey questions that "capture aspects of everyday 'lived religion'" (925-926).

From July 2015 through August 2016, I conducted semi-structured interviews (Kvale and Brinkman 2008) with 23 Sisters of St. Joseph. Specifically, I used an active interview style (Holstein and Gubrium 2003) to interact with the sisters during the

interviews and to create meaning from the text produced from transcription. This method allowed me to investigate the subtler cultural elements that set the Sisters of St. Joseph apart from other congregations of women religious, but also because it permitted me to add a human narrative to the themes that I found emerging in the congregational documents.

Restatement of Research Questions

For this study, my main research question is: How do the Sisters of St. Joseph understand, articulate, and perform their sometimes-conflicted identities and roles as vowed religious sisters, women in the contemporary Catholic Church, and women in secular society? This overarching question is supported by several additional research questions:

- How have the Sisters of St. Joseph articulated gender consciousness during the past 50 years?
- How has gender influenced the sisters' work and relationship with the Catholic Church?
- How have relationships with clergy impacted individual Sisters of St. Joseph and the congregation?
- How has gender influenced their work and relationship with secular society, especially in the years during and after the Women's Movement?
- How do the Church and society shape gender for the Sisters of St. Joseph?
- How does institutional culture impact the Sisters of St. Joseph?
- What roles do religious sisters see for themselves in the twenty-first century Catholic Church and secular society?

Participants and Setting

The congregation provided me with this list of all eligible Sisters of St. Joseph. In conversation with congregational President, Sister Anne Myers, I determined a sister to be eligible for an interview if she was actively engaged in ministry, or if retired, she was physically and mentally capable to participate in a face-to-face interview. From this list, I separated the sisters into two cohorts: those who entered the congregation before Vatican II began, that is 1962 and before (cohort A), and those who entered after Vatican II began, or 1963 to present (cohort B). I randomly selected 20 potential interview subjects from each cohort and sent those 40 sisters a letter inviting them to participate in one hour-long interview with me. A copy of the invitation to participate in the study is included in Appendix A. In addition to the sisters I recruited from these invitations, I also personally contacted some sisters that I knew inviting them to interviews. Finally, I also relied on the sisters' personal and professional networks and used snowball sampling to recruit interview subjects (Morgan 2008). Most sisters who responded to my request for an interview were enthusiastic and willing to participate in this research.

I conducted all of the interviews at sites convenient for the research subjects, and they ranged in time from just under 38 minutes to nearly one hour and 25 minutes. Most interviews lasted about one hour, and every interview was recorded and transcribed. Since the interviews were semi-structured, I did not follow a particular script, however, I did refer to a list of questions and key topics. A copy of these questions is included in Appendix B. I asked all interview subjects for permission for a follow-up interview for clarification, if necessary. I compensated the interview subjects for their time with a \$5 gift card to Wawa, though many sisters refused to accept this nominal token of

appreciation. During transcription, I assigned each sister a pseudonym and where appropriate, changed minor potentially identifiable biographical information to protect her anonymity. Additionally, all parish names and in some cases their locations have been changed to further ensure the participants' anonymity. In all, I interviewed eight sisters who entered the congregation before Vatican II (cohort A), and 15 sisters who entered after the Council began (cohort B). Cohort A consists of sisters Theresa, Margaret Anne, Beatrice, Jane Katherine, Anne Rita, Susan, Claire, and Doris. Cohort B consists of sisters Alice, Mary Lynn, Donna Maria, Regina, Joanne, Lucia, Cora Rose, Moira, Marguerite, Madeline, Bridget, Frances Anna, Annette, Elizabeth, and Jacqueline.

Data Analysis

Sociologist Kathy Charmaz (2005) writes that grounded theory researchers compare data with data, data with categories, and categories with categories throughout the data collection and analysis process (517). In my textual analysis, I used subjective interpretation of language in the text with particular attention placed on its content and contextual meaning in order to identify themes or patterns (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Through reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and the archival documents, I compared the themes that emerged in the data, which led me to identify several theoretical codes (Holton 2007). As I refined these themes, I would go back and re-read older interviews and archival material to check if the theoretical codes shed new light on the data (Charmaz 2005). Occasionally, the emergence of a theme in the data—the wearing of the religious habit for example—guided me in my questions for future interviews and archival research. Once I identified the major themes, I grouped them into three theoretical areas, which became the empirical chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this study.

Chapter 4 argues that the sisters' move toward active social justice work and advocacy after Vatican II is evidence of lived religion for this congregation. Chapter 5 analyzes how the Sisters of St. Joseph contend with issues of gender and sexuality in the Church, in their congregation, and in society. Chapter 6 looks at how the congregation contends with race and ethnicity within their own community, but also in the lives of the people they serve in their various ministries. Finally, in my conclusion chapter 7, I examine how the congregation moved toward a more democratic, corporate structure focused on long-term viability. In analyzing these themes, generally, I make every attempt to foreground the sisters' voices in this research and back up their narratives with archival data from the congregation.

Limitations

This research is a qualitative case study of one particular congregation of women religious, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia. As such, I make no attempt to generalize my findings to all communities of women religious, or even to the other sixteen United States congregations in the Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Instead, through in-depth narrative interviews and qualitative content analysis of primary archival documents, I try to make meaning out of the varying lived experiences of individual sisters and the congregation as a whole. In socially and historically contextualizing these lived experiences and writings, I propose a sociological understanding of a dynamic community of women religious who continue to work for social justice and equality in both the Church and the world.

CHAPTER 4 SOCIAL JUSTICE AS LIVED RELIGION

Introduction

In October 1988, Philadelphia City Council approved a resolution commending the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia for adopting their first corporate stand against apartheid. The resolution, introduced by Councilwoman Augusta A. Clark, says in part,

WHEREAS, This is the first time in its long history that the entire congregation has polled itself on a social issue and taken a “corporate stand” to join other Church and civic leaders who have already taken steps to resolve the dignity that is theirs to the black people of South Africa; and,

WHEREAS the Sisters began deliberating three years ago and have concluded that it was racism – notably racism in its most blatant manifestation, apartheid, that has disrupted their mission of unity and reconciliation. Through prayer, fasting, education, legislative action, participation in public forums, and workshops for Catholic elementary school teachers, the nuns will implement their stand (Philadelphia City Council 1988).

This official citation capped a multi-year process of planning and prayerful discernment for the Sisters of St. Joseph, and was in direct response to a grassroots movement begun by several sisters and under the direction of the congregation’s Commission for Justice. Sisters called on the congregation to sever ties with organizations that had financial investments in South Africa and symbolically destroyed their Mobil and Shell gasoline cards in public demonstrations. Following the advice of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, the congregation offered countless workshops and retreats on racism, white privilege, and nonviolence. Superior General of the congregation, Sister Dorothea Newell, sent letters defining the stand to President Regan, South African President P.W. Botha, every United States senator, and all American bishops and their

auxiliaries. Though certainly not alone, as many congregations of women religious had mobilized to take similar actions (Taylor 2009; Williams 2012; Connolly 2014; Ciliberto 2016), following the adoption of this –their first corporate stand –the Sisters of St. Joseph actively embraced the social justice component of their mission through social and political action at the individual and congregational level.

The Sisters of St. Joseph have a long history of commitment to social justice, yet 1988's corporate stand marked a watershed moment in the congregation's history. In her recently published history of the congregation, Sister Mary Helen Beirne (2015) writes, “[f]or many, taking the corporate stand in 1988 symbolized the congregation's transformation” (211). In enacting a corporate stand against apartheid, each Sister of Saint Joseph was challenged to incorporate social justice activism into her individual and institutional religious identity. Rather than working through separate ad hoc political and social actions, the corporate stand signified the congregation's first unified public statement on social justice.

In their public actions and through examining the ways in which the congregation addressed institutional racism both internally and externally, the Sisters of St. Joseph helped to push Church and civic leaders forward in condemning systemic oppression. I suggest that as they initiated the first corporate stand and solidified their commitment to social justice, the Sisters of St. Joseph experienced a profound internal cultural shift that oriented the congregation much more toward activism.

Further, I argue that for this congregation, adopting an identity focused on social justice is evidence of lived religion, that is, the actual experiences of religious persons rather than prescribed institutional beliefs and practices (McGuire 2008). Through the

process of developing and enacting the corporate stand, social justice activism became a constitutive element to living authentically as a Sister of St. Joseph, particularly in the years of renewal after Vatican II. In the course of my semi-structured interviews, sisters reflected on the changes that they experienced individually, and as a congregation during these years. Social justice emerged as a point of pride for the Sisters of St. Joseph, and many sisters spoke at length about the considerable amount of time they spent on incorporating these principles into their congregational identity. For instance, Sister Joanne reflected,

As women religious, now there are all these justice issues and all that happened after the Vatican Council that we got involved in too, I meant to say that, it's not just all prayer, I mean the fact that we could go into other ministries was a big deal...but yea, just our commitment to justice on so many levels, you know, our statements and – against the death penalty, and educating all of our sisters at the same time through our, what used to be called CCRs [Centers for Corporate Responsibility]...we were all reflecting on the same thing, we were all making decisions on the same thing, but justice is a very important element that came out from the Vatican Council too. (Sister Joanne, entered after Vatican II)

Here, Sister Joanne weaves several threads of her identity together, and also refutes what she believes people think about women religious. She is clear that as a religious sister, her life is not spent entirely in prayer, and that freedom to work in other ministries opened opportunities for her and other sisters. Sister Joanne specifically highlights the communal education around justice issues and corporate stands as key parts of the congregation's institutional identity after Vatican II.

Social Justice, the Corporate Stand, and Lived Religion

In his ethnographic study of Italian immigrants in Harlem, religion scholar Robert Orsi (1985) draws distinctions between the traditional study of religion as a set of sacred

rituals, prayers, symbols, and the overall faith of a community, with the “totality of their ultimate values, their most deeply held ethical convictions, their efforts to order their reality.... More simply stated, *religion* here means ‘what matters’” (xvii) [emphasis in original]. Similarly, as sociologists of religion have explored lived religion, Ganzevoort and Roeland (2014) stress that the focus must be on praxis, or what people *do*, rather than on the religious institutions and doctrines that constitute the sacred (93-94) [emphasis in original]. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of agency as capacity for “invention, rebellion, distancing, and improvisation with respect to the broader social and cultural order,” the authors reinforce historian David Hall’s (1997) assertion that, “the approach to lived religion...opens up a fundamental rethinking of the place of religion in the American experience, one that emphasizes dissent, subversion, and resistance, rather than harmony, consensus, and social legitimation” (15). In light of the congregation’s first corporate stand against apartheid, the Sisters of St. Joseph began to take a more focused look at issues of privilege and how they negotiated racial inequalities closer to home. I submit that this marked shift toward social justice activism and particularly how the sisters incorporated it into all aspects of their public and private lives represents an example of lived religion for the congregation. With this expressed transition, the sisters incorporated social justice into their day-to-day lives. It informed their decisions in ministry, what type of foods they bought for their convents, and which companies to patronize. The congregation examined its investments for social responsibility, and regularly exercised its corporate voice through shareholder proxy votes. Social justice was not just an aspect of one’s life as a Sister of St. Joseph, it became part of her identity.

Though the process of implementing the first corporate stand officially got underway in 1988, roots of reorientation toward social justice can be traced to the general chapter meeting in 1974. Archival documents from this chapter demonstrate significant emphasis on solidarity with the poor and the recommendation to create a Social Justice Committee, the precursor to the congregation's Commission for Justice. For example, proposals from the Poverty Committee dated July 11, 1974 recommend,

1. The sisters, both individually and corporately, will evaluate the current practice of poverty and search for specific ways of making the Sisters of Saint Joseph lifestyle bear more resemblance to the life of Jesus Christ.
2. The sisters, as Pilgrim People, will not accumulate sums of money or personal supplies and equipment for their exclusive use. Donations will be given to the superior to be used for the common good.
3. Each local community will decide, according to the principles of dependence and accountability, their use of the cash box and/or a small amount of money each month for incidental expenditures.
4. Each local community will create a budget, based on a moderate-to-low standard of living, providing for the physical, cultural and spiritual needs of the sisters.
5. The administration of the congregation will establish a committee for social action in order to stimulate the sisters' concern and coordinate their activities to support the Church's position on the causes of social justice (SSJ Archives).

The congregation adopted these proposals, and following the general chapter of 1974, the Social Action Committee was created. Over the next five years, the committee met 26 times, including eight full-day workshops. Recognizing that the committee and its work would be major topics guiding the direction of the general chapter of 1979, and in order to free sisters at chapter to pursue social justice as the congregation saw fit, the committee actually voted itself out of existence at the May meeting preceding that summer's chapter (SSJ Archives).

At the general chapter of 1979 then, a series of proposals to the congregation demonstrated deeper integration of social justice into the lives and religion of each sister, and contend, “[w]e are aiming not so much at social actions, but at an integration of a concern for social justice in our day-to-day living.” Here, we see evidence of the congregation’s characteristic style of considerable time spent on knowledge and prayer before action, as they rarely are among the first religious communities to change. While certainly one may assume that social action was in the long-term plans, initially, the sisters were more concerned with each sister embracing social justice as part of her individual identity as a Sister of St. Joseph. These proposals culminated in a pointed request to congregational leadership to formalize the sisters’ commitment to social justice through the creation of the Commission for Justice. Citing that “[o]nly 48% of our sisters agreed that they felt ‘adequately informed regarding social justice issues in our world,’” the chapter body asserted in 1979,

Since justice calls us to a “radical sense of mission”...we propose that the Superior General and Council “direct the course of the institute” toward a *lived-out stance of social justice*...[and] establish, by January 1980, a Commission for Justice” (SSJ Archives) [emphasis mine].

The Commission for Justice, officially inaugurated in March 1980, began in earnest to change sisters’ hearts and minds through education and action, moving the congregation toward greater justice in living the Gospel (Beirne 2015). A few years later, the chapter of 1984 mandated education toward taking a corporate stand. Using resources from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), in the fall of 1987, the Sisters of St. Joseph defined a corporate stand as “a deliberate public statement and/or action by a group with regard to an issue of human concerns, gospel values, and/or

ecclesial, societal systems. The stand, expressed non-violently, may be one of assent or dissent.” The Commission for Justice outlined the process of adopting the corporate stand, which included a vote requiring a quorum of more than 66% of sisters to approve, steps for promulgation of the corporate stand by the General Council to media outlets, clergy, and civic leaders, and strategies for ongoing evaluation and accountability (Beirne 2015). The corporate stand, they argued, was rooted in the Gospel, in directives from the Second Vatican Council, and the congregation’s founding documents and mission. Similarly, in the year preceding the first corporate stand, congregational leadership released criteria and protocol for actions of civil disobedience, whether they be undertaken by individuals or groups of sisters (Beirne 2015).

After soliciting suggestions from the congregation, the Commission for Justice selected apartheid as the first issue. Out of 1,804 Sisters of St. Joseph, 1,489 participated in the vote. 80%, or 1,188 sisters voted in support of the corporate stand, while 301 or 20% opposed, and thus the corporate stand was adopted in September 1988 (SSJ Archives).

Over the next year as the corporate stand was implemented, the sisters lived this stand through social justice activism, reflection, prayer, dialogue, and education. This newly expressed commitment to social justice and mission was solidified at the 1989 chapter as each sister was expected to hold each other accountable for living their mission of unity with a special preference for the poor (Beirne 2015).

Despite the overwhelming support for the corporate stand, some sisters in the congregation questioned its efficacy and potential negative repercussions they may incur as a result of this public declaration. While acknowledging the possible impact on the

congregation's pool of benefactors given that the stand could be at odds with prevailing societal norms, the Commission for Justice concluded however that "In a corporate stand, our union with the poor challenges us to give up our security and status as we become one with the victims of oppression. The severity of the critical situation moves us to speak publicly" (Beirne 2015).

By 1989 after the first corporate stand was adopted, social justice was integrated even more completely into the congregation's identity. At the beginning of the chapter of 1989, in an opening reflection to the congregation titled *Embracing Our Contemporary Situation*, the general council stated,

The miseries of our time include the drug culture and the underlying reasons for it, AIDS, unemployment, apartheid and the forms that racism takes in our own neighborhoods, and the increasing marginalization of many groups who are often women, or their dependent children, or the aging. One development of the past five years has been a deepening social awareness among us. We can see signs of this gradual development, signs that include taking a corporate stand against apartheid in South Africa, doing volunteer work with groups such as victims of AIDS or the homeless or raising awareness of the marginalized with people with whom we work and live. Through education, personal experience, and contacts with sisters working with the poor overseas and closer to home, in year-round and in summer ministries, we are coming a little more in touch with the situation of people living on the margins of society. There are signs of a deepening social awareness in many sisters' ways of perceiving the direction and meaning of all of our ministries, of our prayer, and of our community life (SSJ Archives).

In highlighting the "miseries of our time," this statement uses similar language to that found in the congregation's founding documents from mid-seventeenth century France—a clear response to Vatican II's calls for religious communities to return to their roots. Further, by adding this section to their State of the Union-style, introductory address to all Sisters of St. Joseph, congregational leaders sent a clear message that social justice

was no longer something extra in which sisters could get involved. Rather, the social and structural challenges facing marginalized persons in contemporary society required their participation and action.

Over the next several years, in order to fully incorporate the social justice as lived religion, as I am suggesting, the sisters effectively altered the institutional culture of the congregation toward a more deliberate forms of activism. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman (1994) contends that religious congregations provide an arena in which to organize strategies for public action, but that “the cultural work that goes on inside the congregation does not always emerge visibly into some larger ‘public’” (294-295). Thus, I turn next to this behind-the-scenes cultural work.

Cultural Shifts in the Congregation After Vatican II

Sociologist Ann Swidler (1986) defines culture as “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including benefits, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life” (273). She argues further that an analysis of culture consists of three main steps: 1) viewing culture as a “tool kit” that people may use to solve problems, 2) focusing on the “strategies of action” that people create from culture and 3) viewing culture’s causal significance not in defining the ends of action, but in providing cultural components used to construct these strategies of action (Swidler 1986:273). For the development and implementation of the corporate stand, the Commission for Justice led the congregation through a lengthy, multi-phase process of prayer and discernment. In phase I, during November and December 1987, the Commission provided materials for local community meetings of reflection and discussion about “the what and why” of a corporate stand. In phase II,

during January and February 1988, the Commission provided materials to local communities about the logistics and technical process of taking the corporate stand. In phase III, from March through May 1988, the Commission offered the community resources on the voting process and evaluations of the entire period of preparation, and how these results would be communicated to the sisters.

In each of these phases, the Commission for Justice supplied each local community with resources for prayer services, links to documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Vatican II, statements from prominent theologians and social justice advocates, as well as connections to the congregation's foundational documents and Constitutions. Additionally, in each phase the Commission for Justice solicited feedback from sisters and the results of these evaluations indicate significant support for the corporate stand, but also considerable dissent, which Swidler (2001) would argue must be acknowledged in any study of culture. For example, in a letter to the congregation in August 1988 after the vote to adopt the corporate stand was affirmed, the Commission for Justice provided a sample of the comments returned with voting ballots, indicating transparency of the process. The Commission noted that more than 800 sisters returned evaluations, and emphasized that the majority of the comments were overwhelmingly positive. The evaluations included comments like,

The process is well thought out and carefully developed;
The educational materials were excellent;
We are obliged as Christians to support this stand;
The corporate stand shows our unity as a congregation—in unity there is strength;
This corporate stand is faithful to scripture, to our charism, and to our mission

The Commission for Justice also included a sample of some of the negative comments on the evaluations. For instance,

I do not think we should take a corporate stand on anything;
I oppose apartheid but I do not think that we should take a corporate stand on this issue;
There are many other issues in our country and/or congregation which are unjust;
Do not get into politics; I am afraid of the implications: legal and financial;
Not enough sisters will return votes to make the corporate stand representative of the whole congregation (SSJ Archives).

The positive comments reflect faith-based justifications for adopting the corporate stand, while the negative comments skew more toward pragmatic and political concerns. The challenge for the congregation after this first corporate stand was to unite these two perspectives, and the Commission for Justice was a force in stressing that faith and political action are not mutually exclusive, but instead compulsory parts of one's identity and responsibility as a Sisters of St. Joseph.

Though overall support for the corporate stand against apartheid was relatively strong, the congregation's 1998 corporate stand against the death penalty was decidedly more contentious, with lengthy internal debates about process and implementation dominating the conversation. For instance, Sister Frances Anna, who entered the congregation after Vatican II and served on the Commission for Justice, remembers,

I think everyone was agreed on the Apartheid, I don't think anyone was opposed to it. That's an easier one. I mean, not there – obviously it's a huge issue. Like we had to boycott Mobil, Exxon, how would that ripple effect affect also our investments and so forth? Even with that, people were still on board with that... People wanted to understand more, they wanted to raise a social conscience about it, but it was easier to take a vote about it. The death penalty was not as easy as that... It was a harder dialog

and not as unifying in the one voice, that we were all on the same page together. That took more time.

Sister Frances Anna highlights that the dialog process about taking a stand against the death penalty was more difficult. Unlike apartheid, which the sisters were removed from in both physical and emotional distance, the death penalty was an issue that hit sisters much closer to home. Any public statement opposing the death penalty had the potential to be politically unpopular in the United States and in church pews, and thus the sisters had more to lose in making it. Ultimately, the congregation moved forward with this, their second official corporate stand, but as Sister Frances Anna points out, the community lacked the unity that it had in opposing apartheid.

To understand this internal process of cultural shift, I turn to the theoretical work of sociologist Amin Ghaziani, whose writings on group internal conflicts, or infighting, point to organizations “engaged in definitional debates, wrestling for answers to abstract questions of identity and strategy” (Ghaziani 2009:589). While much cultural work focuses on cultural objects (see Schudson 1989), Ghaziani’s examination of cultural processes allow for a richer empirical understanding of collective self-definition and strategies for action. Specifically, the author analyzes what he calls the “nuts and bolts” discussions about minutiae, and how they signify deeper internal debates about institutional direction (2009:585). In the case of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the corporate stand, the shift toward more active social justice work and advocacy was profound, as the lengthy process was painstaking and not without internal conflict and questions of congregational direction.

While it was during the late 80s that this cultural shift became most visible, the internal changes in culture were much subtler, and at times, tedious. For instance, many sisters recounted to me the protracted and laborious debates in chapter and subcommittee meetings in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Debates over adopting inclusive language, concern for the earth, and those about remodeling chapels to be in the round rather than static with pews or rows often required extensive dialogue. Discussions about the roles of women in the Church and secular society were similarly long and occasionally difficult. Several sisters, in hindsight, laughed at the time spent discussing the length of the hem of the congregation's habit, and whether the move to a 4-inch hem was too radical a change. Of course, this was years after many other congregations abandoned the habit altogether. One sister, Sister Anne Rita, who entered the congregation before Vatican II remembered these debates about culture and direction saying,

[I]n some cases, some places, people caused some friction because some women religious were wanting to get on that bandwagon. They kinda caught it early, others were holding back, others questioned it, even feared it to a certain degree...luckily enough there were enough of us that gently and lovingly wanted to move forward and I can remember the Chapter of 69 [68], being a chapter where we were first asked to look at the poor as a model for what we were doing or should be doing, who we could be. And that whole attention to the poor kept coming up. So each chapter – 69, 74, 79...I believe that each chapter, including right up until the last one in 2014, that as a body, we felt a call to go more deeply into who we could be and I think each time we got more courage to do that because we were together. Not everyone. There are sisters who suffered because of those changes, they really did, and we were asked to be so aware of that. If you were more on the liberal end, “be aware: some people think that’s really hard.”...that’s still among us and so we have to hold both with love. Hold both with love, not judge people; wonder about them maybe, but not judge them. Try to meet them where they are. So if we could do it with one another, it could help us to do it wherever we are, but we had to start with one another.

In this, we see again where the congregation directly responds to the Second Vatican Council's calls to return to roots, specifically in looking to the poor as a model for how to live their lives. Sister Anne Rita's recollection of solidarity with the poor being a focus of the special chapter in 1968, the first general chapter after Vatican II ended, also emphasizes the significance that the congregation placed on poverty and justice issues above other reforms. She recalls those who eagerly embraced the progressive agenda to renew warning other sisters these changes will take time, and to be mindful of the challenges that this brings to the community.

Sister Marie Clare Kleschick, an observer to the 1974 general chapter described these internal debates on strategy and action writing,

[s]ince proposals would directly affect the practical, day-to-day lives of the Sisters...their discussion took longer than discussion on principles. For example, while it is just about impossible to argue with fidelity to prayer (principle), there might be endless arguments about *what* prayer(s) and *when* and *how* (proposal) (Kleschick 1974:135) [emphasis in original].

Sister Marie Clare's published account of the chapter of 1974, and comments from sisters who I interviewed highlight the protracted quarrels over specifics that beleaguered larger discussions about strategies of action. That the congregation invited all sisters to voice opinions about organizational direction certainly contributed to discussions devolving from big-picture, visionary work to those focusing on minutia.

The sisters I interviewed acknowledged that their congregation was never one to be on the forefront of public progress and declarations, but focused instead on internal renewal before moving forward with visible outward changes. Months and months of dialogue would often precede major decisions. For instance, Sister Anne Rita continued,

We worked hardest as a congregation at the inner freedom, the inner life, our spiritual lives, we worked very hard at that. Some people thought we weren't gonna change, we were late in changing, and some people thought we weren't really changing but we were really working on the interior life. Hard, long, and still, because that's always so important to us.

Sister Anne Rita points out that though slow and not visible to those outside the congregation, the cultural work being done internally during these years of renewal after Vatican II was transformative. Similarly, many sisters told me that this reluctance to rush into any decision is characteristic of their congregation, and decisions both great and small were made only after significant dialogue. The sisters are very self-aware of this congregational trait relative to other religious communities, and nearly all the sisters who I interviewed expressed at least a marginal desire to be braver and quicker about decisions. For example, Sister Regina reflected,

You know, it's, we want to change, we want to reform, we want to renew, we're a little scared of it. We're, when I look at us over/against other congregations, even in terms of median age, in terms of when we had the exodus of people leaving, we're about 10 years behind the curve and it's really odd, but it's always seemed to come out that way. (Sister Regina, entered soon after Vatican II ended)

Speaking both quantitatively and qualitatively, Sister Regina recognizes the differences in her congregation and how the Sisters of St. Joseph are about a decade behind other communities of women religious. She points out that in some instances this is a good trait, e.g.—the delay in large numbers of women leaving religious communities in the latter part of the twentieth century—but also acknowledges how their fear of change prevents quick, decisive action.

Sister Mary Lynn, who entered the congregation after the Second Vatican Council, attributed this reticence partly to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, which has historically been more conservative. She says,

I think the congregation really reflected the Church of Philadelphia, you know? So if we were going to change, it was going to be slow and deliberate. On the positive sign we began our renewal with the deepening of prayer. Uh, rather than external changes. And that has stood us in good stead –you know that was the value. But I think it was just, it was just persons were formed with certain internal traditions that weren't let go of easily. The best example I can give you is 1st vows summer. We had this incredible priest/theologian who taught us liturgy. On the day that we were making our 1st vows, the dispensation to receive communion under both forms [bread and wine] was going to be promulgated, I mean it was the first time it could be used, it was the Feast of the Assumption in August. So of course, we said “Gee, well you know, here's this all this education, here's the very day, wouldn't it be great to change the vow ceremony?!” – “No.” So it was, there were those kind of like forward movements, then kind of like reining in. That was challenging.

Sister Mary Lynn and her like-minded young sisters, who were encouraged by the spirit of renewal that was beginning to take root in their congregation through the lessons of this theologian, thought that this enthusiasm would carry over to all aspects of religious life. She recounts how they asked to publicly embrace these changes by receiving the bread and wine at a special mass, yet congregational leadership denied their request. This evidence of internal tensions within the congregation about reformation was a common theme in my interviews, and other sisters supported what Sister Mary Lynn describes. While they said many sisters, including those in leadership positions, were enthusiastic about change after Vatican II, they were often hamstrung by a hesitancy to react quickly.

This apprehension to make the first move is a combination of the congregation's style which focuses first on internal change and prayer first, and also the result of a

watchful clerical system in the Philadelphia Archdiocese that loomed large. For example, Sister Beatrice, a respected academic who entered before Vatican II shared,

I went to a Passionist Institute in Pittsburg, and I was with two other sisters, and we were the only ones there who were wearing our habits, and at the end of the time, some of the sisters told us that they had kinda misjudged us and thought our congregation wasn't renewing. We were renewing from the inside out.... We were really, our renewal was more interior and I think that has really benefited us in our prayer life and community life and so on.

During our interview, Sister Beatrice shared a couple of instances with me about her experience wearing her habit, including the curious looks she received when she attended graduate school at a large public university. While she was used to people being fascinated with her religious garb in public secular spaces, here she shares how she experienced comments about it from other Catholic sisters at a religious institute. In this situation, the other sisters—presumably not in habit—made a snap judgment about the congregation as a whole because Sister Beatrice was still wearing the habit at a time when other communities did not. These other sisters incorrectly assumed that because the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia were still wearing the habit, they were therefore not adopting Vatican II's spirit of reformation, and likely then made the leap that the congregation must be more socially and politically conservative.

In her observations on the general chapter of 1974, Kleschick reflected upon the dramatic changes resulting from the chapter of 1968, and how despite significant internal struggle over controversial topics, all sisters' voices were respected and incorporated. She writes,

What, no arguments? No disagreements? Then there couldn't have been any hot issues on the floor. Judge for yourself. These are just a few of the issues deliberated openly and at length: the acceptance of the "prophetic"

sister; legislating for the mature majority; a strong plea to answer the cry of the poor; the witness of a “moderate to low” standard of living; ...criticism of lavish lifestyles (Kleschick 1974:137).

In this, Sister Marie Clare Kleschick (1974) highlights how the congregation examined several controversial topics surrounding institutional identity, but is clear that this was done respectfully. Consistent with the congregation’s mission of unity, all decisions are made with unified, but not necessarily unanimous voice, whether they be as large as taking a corporate stand against apartheid or as small as a local community debating whether or not to purchase another refrigerator for the house. Kleschick (1974) comments, “In the ‘instant’ climate of the Seventies, the rhythm of prayer *and* reflections *and* action, along with the insistence on openness and trust, proved that it was possible to produce the best kind of unity among the most diverse thinkers” (136) [emphasis in original]. Sister Kleschick writes about the synergy of the chapter of 1974 with great pride, and holds her congregation up as a model for other groups on how to work through difficult issues of identity and direction.

Amin Ghaziani (2009) contends that organizational debates over the mundane signify much deeper internal debates about collective self-definition and strategies of action. He argues that overlaying conflict onto routine tasks allows for an understanding of the culture concept through an empirical measurement of the construction of identity and collective understandings of group activity. The author proposes thinking about these internal conflicts about nuts and bolts activities as a resin onto which definitional debates can stick (Ghaziani 2009:5). Using this theoretical framework to explore the Sisters of St. Joseph then, I submit that these internal dialogues of dissent about smaller activities like community purchases and habit hem lengths actually shed light on a congregation

grappling with its own multilayered identity and how to live out strategies of action for larger social justice initiatives like the corporate stand.

Despite the initial apprehension and dissent among some sisters, the congregation's calls for social justice were eventually more unified. Sister Doris, who was instrumental in the development of the Commission for justice remarked, "If anyone encounters a sister on the street and asks her, she would have to know about the [corporate] stand." Though social justice had always been part of the congregation's mission, much of this work was done ad hoc and failed to fully mobilize the larger body of sisters. However, Sister Doris points out that as the cultural shift toward social justice took hold, this work moved toward the center of the congregation's identity. Sisters began to express their support of justice issues through public actions and advocacy, as well as private methods like prayer and fasting. Each sister was encouraged to live out support for the corporate stand in her own ways, both visible and invisible.

The congregation's evolution toward a social justice orientation is expressed most clearly in its 1994's vision statement that was unanimously approved at that year's general chapter. Many sisters who I interviewed reflected fondly and proudly on the progress made toward a social justice identity at that general chapter. Several sisters recited the vision statement verbatim from memory, and Sister Margaret Anne who entered before Vatican II, even did so with her eyes closed, clutching her heart. For me, this striking visual underscored the sincerity with which she shared the words that continue to inspire her in her ministry. In the vision statement, the Sisters of St. Joseph declare in poetic fashion that they are "Rooted in a contemplative life stance and challenged by our broken world, we proclaim our prophetic voice as women to stand with

marginalized persons and to treasure and care for the earth.” In just over thirty words, the Sisters of St. Joseph affirm that they will use their collective voices to advocate for the poor and marginalized in a broken world in need of their unifying presence.

Individual Strategies for Action

In addition to these larger, congregational justice initiatives, individual sisters also raised their voices and actions against what they viewed as harsh dogmatic structures in the Church, and therefore what they considered justice concerns for the faithful. During Communion or Prayer services at their respective schools and ministries, a number of sisters disobeyed directives to only grant the Eucharist to Catholics in good standing. Two sisters in particular saw this as a justice issue and one where these actions of inclusivity truly spoke to the heart of their congregational mission. Further, the sisters were emboldened by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, which they feel gives them cover to be more progressive and justice-oriented, despite misgivings of the clergy. Often called the Roman Catholic Church’s “best kept secret in the United States” (DeBerri et al. 2007; Curran 2003), Catholic Social Teaching or Catholic Social Tradition refer to the collection of documents published by the Catholic hierarchy that guide the faith’s rich social tradition. Generally consisting of papal encyclicals on social issues beginning with Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* in 1891, documents authored by the Synod of Bishops, the national conference of Bishops, and those from the Second Vatican Council are also often included in the body of writings that make up the Catholic Social Tradition (DeBerri et al. 2007; Curran 2003). Many of the sisters I interviewed cited the principles of Catholic Social Teaching as inspiration and guidance for their work.

To carry out their respective ministries, the sisters often draw on the seven major themes of Catholic Social Teaching, which are:

- 1) The Dignity of the Human Person
- 2) The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- 3) The Person in Community
- 4) Rights and Responsibilities
- 5) Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- 6) Solidarity
- 7) Care for Creation (DeBerri et al. 2007).

As a congregation, the sisters find themselves doing ministry work that calls on several of these principles, specifically supporting human dignity, working for the poor and vulnerable, and standing in solidarity with those on the margins of society. Occasionally, sisters find themselves in situations where their congregational mission and adherence to Catholic Social Teaching principles are in opposition to other Church teachings or respective institutional rules where they work. For example, Sister Frances Anna says,

I remember [school principal] saying to me, there were a few issues with students and I said, “I would respond pastorally” and she goes, “Well what does that mean?!” I said, “It means what it means. It’s who we are— pastorally.” They wanted me at one point to say non-Catholics couldn’t come up to receive [communion] and I said “I really can’t do that” and also if you’re in good standing or something like that, and I said, “They’re in high school, they’re teenagers!” Nobody is gonna...you have a row of 22 seats in the middle, you’re not gonna ever make a kid feel like they couldn’t walk up. All are welcome! I said “I’m not gonna do that.”...but I think those kinds of things. Like a letter comes from the bishop for the Diocese and it comes to the school sometimes and they’d be like, “We have to blah blah blah.”

Here, Sister Frances Anna was concerned more with the experience that these young people would have in church than the dogmatic rule that non-Catholics and those Catholics who had not been to confession cannot receive communion. To Sister Frances Anna, this was a justice issue about the dignity of each person in her school that day.

Sister Frances Anna concluded that the social stigma that these teenagers would face from their peers, and the shame they would feel from being denied communion by the Church would create have been a far greater affront to their dignity, and thus, she chose to ignore Catholic doctrine and offer communion to all present. The spirit of the law trumps the letter of the law for Sister Frances Anna, and many other sisters respond in like ways to similar situations. For instance, Sister Marguerite commented on the struggles she deals with as a school administrator, navigating being a pastoral presence in an institutional structure that is often inflexible. She says,

And Catholic Social Teaching gives us such a wonderful way to be in the world, and for me, for myself even, like ok, “How do I live those?” The Church says, “we have, workers have the right to unionize.” OK, Catholic school teachers can’t unionize. How do we hold that? Or how do we reconcile that so that’s not, well for me that’s a big thing. It is. You know, we just recently [had] Archbishop [Chaput] saying, “We need to deny them communion.” How is that the gospel?...I had a family come here and they said to me, “I just came from a funeral of one of my best friends growing up and I was told I couldn’t go to communion. What’s gonna happen to my children here? [at this school] Are they gonna be told they can’t go to communion?” I said, “Well, your son’s class is preparing for communion...he receives communion in your church? He believes this is Jesus? He can go up and receive communion.” Thank you, Holy Spirit, for that answer, but I can’t say that publicly, but I can say that if you believe that’s the body and blood of Jesus, by all means come forward because you’re taught to follow your conscience. We as Catholics are taught to follow our conscience. I’m not really articulating it well, but it’s those kinds of things that this is who we are, who we say we are. These are our documents, and yet we can’t promote all of them.

Sister Marguerite experiences significant frustration with the incompatibility of her own conscience—which she extends to that of her congregation as a whole—with the prescribed formulas for certain Catholic sacraments, like Holy Communion. She is especially bothered by guidelines issued by Philadelphia Archbishop Chaput in July 2016 that prohibited divorced, remarried, cohabiting, and Catholics in same-sex relationships

from receiving Holy Communion (O'Reilly 2016). Sister Marguerite is also troubled with the apparent contradiction of Catholic Social Teaching's principle on the Dignity and Rights of Workers, which affirms the rights of workers to form associations and join labor unions (Leo XIII 1891; John Paul II 1981), with her practical reality of running a Catholic school that would not be able to sustain the financial burdens incurred by its faculty unionizing. She asks the rhetorical question, "How do we hold that?," but it was clear that she was prepared to ignore Church teaching in favor of respecting the dignity and rights of those families in her school. Finally, she questions why her congregation does not proclaim "our documents," that is, those of Vatican II, Catholic Social Teaching, and the Sister of St. Joseph, more loudly and forcefully. Sister Marguerite and other sisters feel that the teachings on social issues contained in these documents more accurately reflect her own faith and religious identity, and she looks to them to guide her in her day to day ministry.

Immigration and Courageous Risk-taking

The Sisters of St. Joseph direct and operate twelve "sponsored works" that respond to human, educational, and community needs, and the sisters "have a unique relationship with our sponsored works, places founded and supported by our Congregation where our mission of unity directs the mission, philosophy, values—the very life of each place" (Sisters of St. Joseph 2016). During the 13 months from July 2015-August 2016 that I conducted the in-person interviews for this research, the United States Presidential campaigns were well-underway. Several of the sisters I interviewed expressed considerable concern for the harsh campaign rhetoric, and though rarely mentioning him by name, the xenophobic, anti-immigrant, nationalist sentiments from

Donald Trump were especially troubling. Of their sponsored works, the congregation takes particular pride in the Welcome Center, a small converted funeral home in the Kensington section of Philadelphia that works with immigrants on English language skills, education, and connections to social services leading to self-sufficiency. Through working with poor newcomers to the United States, the Sisters of St. Joseph have made an explicit commitment to this marginalized population and it was no surprise that they found Trump's rants particularly offensive. Sister Moira, a respected and easy-going sister who has served in congregational leadership and entered the Sisters of St. Joseph after Vatican II, has worked with immigrants and her commitment to them was clear. She shared,

Just in people feeling safe and people, because again, [our congregation] opened the doors to the Welcome Center thinking we were gonna be this happy little place of teaching English, when this whole anti-immigration thing erupts, we didn't know we were getting involved in that, so now you find yourself with people who are frightened, people who are watching all of the news on Spanish TV saying, "I can't come anymore" because there was that whole time when, even if you're – if you don't know you're helping somebody who's not documented, even you're gonna go to jail. I remember a woman saying to me "I'm not gonna come to class anymore because you could go to jail." I said to her, "I'm not gonna go to jail!" like "No no no no no! come back!" – she was so worried about that um, and even to this day, this has been going on for years, this anti-immigrant sentiment. This vilifying, you know, folks who are only here because being at home was filled with fear, war, poverty, no opportunities, do you know?

Convinced that her work with undocumented immigrants is just, Sister Moira is unconcerned about her own potential legal trouble and laughs off the implication from one of her students. She relates being somewhat surprised that her work teaching English would be bound up in the anti-immigrant sentiment of the early 2000s, but remains committed to it, and more importantly, to the people she serves. This mutual, protective

nature was evident in many of the stories that the sisters shared with me. The sisters at the Welcome Center became the face of the Catholic Church, or in this case, really the face of an empathic, just, and welcoming American society, when few others would grant these immigrants the same dignity. Some sister though, expressed added frustration that their congregation was not on the forefront of those faith-based groups condemning the remarks and taking a more courageous stand. For instance, Sister Elizabeth says,

I think we're being called to be a radical voice in the Church. I really do believe that with my whole heart. To really say like "This is not ok." You know, that people are excluded on any level, it's not ok. Um, I believe that we're being called to really stand with, I think we need, I think we're trying to be a voice for immigration, but I think politically, I think we need to be a voice. Like what are we saying about Donald Trump? Like really? We're just like shaking our heads, but like, there are a lot of good Catholic people who are taking this man seriously. Like what are we doing? Do you know what I mean? So I think that's a piece of what we need to be doing, and I think we really need to be saying who's marginalized today, who's on the outskirts, who's left behind. (Sister Elizabeth, entered after Vatican II)

Sister Elizabeth related this to me with equal parts disbelief and shame. She is frustrated that her congregation is not more actively condemning the anti-immigrant rhetoric, and believes that women religious can and should be a more radical voice for social justice. Speaking more broadly about justice issues in the Church and in the world, Sister Elizabeth continued,

Um, but I just think to not say anything you know, we're, sometimes I think we've become middle ground to people. Like we don't want to upset either side, so we operate and do our thing, and you know, and I understand it, we don't want to alienate anybody. Sometimes I think you might have to, like risk that, you know, in order to take a stand.

Here, Sister Elizabeth feels strongly about the need to risk upsetting some people to take a stand for what she and others in her congregation feel is just. She is bothered by what

she views as a tendency for her congregation to operate under the radar. Entering the congregation during the time of renewal after the Second Vatican Council, Sister Elizabeth never experienced the more monastic, cloistered lifestyle that sisters lived for decades before. It is easy to understand then that as the congregation incorporated the spirit of renewal from Vatican II in the 1970s and 1980s, Sister Elizabeth joined the community at a time of great change and promise. Yet despite her and other sisters' eagerness to propel the Sisters of St. Joseph toward bolder, progressive social and political statements, the congregation's characteristic slowness to make outward changes frustrates her.

Other sisters shared Sister Elizabeth's desire for the congregation to be more courageous and outspoken. Sister Cora Rose, who entered the Sisters of St. Joseph after Vatican II, offered a compelling perspective on her congregation's—and those of women's religious orders in general—ability to be a leading voice in the Church and in the world on justice issues. She says,

I believe that, I think everybody can be prophetic, but I think sometimes sisters can be a little bit more prophetic because we have a congregation or a community behind us. And we don't have anything to lose. We lose our job, we lose our job. You lose your job, you know, your wife and child are dependent on you. Umm, so we have a freedom to be able to, I don't want to say criticize the Church, but to love and encourage the Church to be true to who she is, and who Jesus established her to be. So, that's one of the biggest reasons that I would hope that religious life continues, because of that freedom to be able to speak the truth and love. I don't want to say just to the hierarchy or to the priests, but to Church, to all of God's people. Umm, I think religious women have that freedom to be able to do that, and so I would hope that freedom continues. And I believe that our charisms are definitely gifts to the Church and inspired by the spirit and so for me, that charism, "That All May Be One," it has to continue because that's why Jesus came... And I also believe, as a Sister of Saint Joseph, because of the "Contemplative in Action," that balance always has to be there. And that we are, we are a gift to the Church in ways that monastic

communities, you know, they're so mysterious, let's put it that way. And there are so many times that I'd like to just run away and you know, enclose myself in a cloister, but I think the bigger challenge is to be a religious in the midst of the world, and to find that stillness within me, and to share that with others

To Sister Cora Rose, religious women are duty-bound to be a voice for justice precisely because they belong to religious communities. Many sisters shared with me times that they or members of their congregation were fired or laid off from their jobs because of conflicts with clergy or organizational downsizing. Though this was often personally and professionally upsetting, practically speaking, it presented the befallen sister with little worry about her next meal or her ability to pay bills on time. By its nature of course, her congregation would continue to provide for her basic needs while she found new employment. Thus, Sister Cora Rose wishes that she and her peers would be more courageous risk-takers and speak up for justice issues, recognizing that they are free from the everyday fears and practical concerns that might hinder those who are not protected by community living.

Conclusion: Reoriented Toward Social Justice Activism

In the years that followed the first corporate stand, the Commission for Justice continued to navigate the political waters for the congregation, leading the Sisters of St. Joseph through an emerging social justice identity in adopting a corporate stand against the death penalty in 1998, and one against human trafficking in 2008. At the time of writing, the Sisters of St. Joseph are expected to follow their contemporaries and call for

humane immigration reform, and in June 2016, the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph released a statement affirming human rights for farm workers.¹

Through an analysis of archival documents and personal interviews with sisters, I demonstrate how the process of taking their first corporate stand marked a significant internal cultural shift in the Sisters of St. Joseph, one that embodies a social justice orientation. Though actions like lobbying and destroying corporate credit cards were visible to the larger public, in the years of renewal after Vatican II, the congregation was emerging from lengthy internal debates about identity and collective understanding of strategies for action: about who they were and where they were going. Never a congregation to be quick in making any changes, ultimately, the Sisters of St. Joseph responded to grassroots calls among sisters for a more expressed commitment to social justice, transformed the ways in which individual sisters lived this component of their mission, and how they collectively constructed their intersubjective reality (McGuire 2008). Instead of being episodic and cause-specific, after adopting their first corporate stand, strategies of action to oppose injustice became woven into the fabric of the lives of the Sisters of St. Joseph. It became what mattered and what they did. It became how they lived their religion.

¹ This statement can be found on the Sisters of St. Joseph website: http://www.cssjfed.org/images/2016_Federation_Statement_Farmworkers_Human_Rights_2_1.pdf

CHAPTER 5 GENDERED OUT OF HABIT

Introduction

One of my main goals in this research was to probe how the Sisters of St. Joseph understand and perform their gender, in light of the ways in which women are marginalized in both the Catholic Church and secular society. In their archival writings, the congregation frequently speaks of the gifts of women, and how the Sisters of St. Joseph bring their mission and charism of unity and reconciliation to a Church and world in need of both. Similarly, during the course of my interviews with sisters, gender and women's roles in the Church were often guiding topics of our conversation. Sisters shared with me their experiences of empowerment, frustration, and self-awareness of being a woman, along with the complexities that being an avowed religious sister layers on top of that.

I did not expect however, the extent to which sexuality emerged as a subject that the sisters wanted to discuss at length. The sisters I interviewed were quite frank with me about their own sexualities, and some shared about the times that they were in love and engaged to be married prior to entering the congregation. Some sisters even experienced being in love as professed sisters, but their religious vows prevented them from acting on these feelings. Others discussed sisters in their congregation who publicly announced that they were lesbians, and how they admired them for their courage, especially in a Church whose historical relationship with the LGBTQ community is tenuous, at best. Overall though, the sisters were much more concerned with the ways in which the institutional

Church treats sexuality in general, and how its preoccupation with sex prevents it from fully serving the needs of the faithful.

In this analysis of gender and sexuality, I demonstrate how the Sisters of St. Joseph navigate prescribed gender roles in society and the Church, and the emergence of a feminist consciousness within the congregation. Specifically, I examine their relationships with male clergy, and how the sisters challenged institutional structures that prevent them from full gender equality. Finally, I show how the sisters' progressive understanding of sexuality and human relationships has the potential to be a guiding voice in the Church in the Pope Francis era and beyond.

Gender Roles, Boundaries, and Relationships with Clergy

In the decades after Vatican II, as the congregation wrestled with internal cultural struggles about identity and direction, sisters employed strategies to disrupt the prescribed gender roles in their individual ministries as well. Within the structure and rigidity of an institutional Church that significantly limits the participation of women (Fialka 2003; Mills and Ryan 2001), many Sisters of St. Joseph took it upon themselves to respond directly to the needs of those whom they served. This occasionally happened with permission from the local clergy, but often times without a priest or bishop's knowledge, and sometimes even against their wishes. For instance, several sisters shared with me how they fell into ministerial roles generally reserved for male clergy, specifically funeral services, annulments, and other sacramental events.

Sister Theresa, a retired sister who entered the congregation before Vatican II spent several years working in the Southern United States and the Mid-Atlantic region.

During her time as a Pastoral Associate in New Jersey, Sister Theresa enjoyed a cordial and inclusive relationship with the local pastors. She remembers,

I had two pastors there, and both of them were very inclusive, so I was, like I would, we'd take turns doing the Stations of the Cross. We'd take turns doing almost anything, like funerals. I got really into funerals, haha, really into funerals...and I did a lot of funerals there, cause my pastor there didn't know the people. You know you went to the cemetery and met them for the burial, and he was into, like not knowing people.

Sister Theresa recounts how she stepped into the role of ministering to people in need, especially in their times of grief, partly because she had a pastor who was willing to let her, but also because he was seemingly unwilling to do it himself. She clearly delighted in these relationships, and her reputation for her pastoral presence became well-known in the local Church community and even among parishioners she did not know. She continued,

I got to know different undertakers and a lot of times they would have somebody who just wanted a service in the undert—uh you know funeral parlor—and they would call me, even for people we didn't know.

Here, Sister Theresa shares how the funeral parlors would bypass the priest altogether and just call her directly, indicating both her ability to do the job and relative autonomy in the parish structure. Sister Theresa was also empowered to minister in other nontraditional ways by the pastor in her parish in the South. In an area where Catholic Churches were fewer in number and more widely distributed than in the Northeast, Sister's skills in advocating for annulments were called upon as a matter of pragmatism. She remembers,

[O]ne thing I did in [the South], but worked for, volunteered for the Tribunal for Annulments. You know, I was an advocate for annulments and um, that you know, that whole thing of, for me was – you know so many bad situation and they were stuck in them, you know what I mean

kinda thing? And it's funny because when people would come in for annulment, the pastor was supposed to interview them and all that, and it went to the diocese. Well, because it was only the two of us, you know, we did everything and so I would interview people. So the pastor was supposed to sign the interview thing. Well I started to sign them you know because he didn't even see the people! [laughs] So then one day I get a call from the Diocese, and I'm like, "Ohh, interesting" and so they said "This is Tribunal" and I'm thinking, "Oh no, what did I do now?" And they said, "We noticed you've been signing peoples' annulment requests." I thought they were gonna say, "You can't do it" but she said "The bishop has decided to make you an Ecclesiastical Notary" and I thought "What in God's name is an Ecclesiastical Notary?" [laughs]

Sister Theresa is surprised by the reaction from the diocese to her signing the forms for annulments. Initially, she thought that the call was to reprimand her for overstepping her bounds by doing work reserved for male clergy. Yet, she was surprised to hear that the bishop not only approved of her work, but encouraged her to continue it by granting her an official title, one that presumably never existed before or that she was at least unaware of.

Sister Alice, who entered the congregation after Vatican II began, had a similar experience of inclusivity and partnership with her pastor during her years in Baltimore. She, too, was empowered to minister at funerals and also found these times to be among the most meaningful that she had with people. Sister Alice says,

when I was in Baltimore, that was my best experience of being respected and included, I mean, I did all the funerals that were not masses, I did all the burials. I did all the, almost all the wakes. Now, if the family asked [for a priest], that was different. But basically, I did all that. Yeah, so I was really respected then, I felt. And I had two different pastors, one of whom was very conservative, became the Bishop of Jacksonville. And yet he let me preach at a funeral as conservative as he is.

Sister Alice is surprised that her one pastor allowed her to preach at funerals. Her presumption was that because of his more conservative Catholic views, he would be less

inclined to empower women in the Church. She connects her inclusion in this ministry into feeling respected by clergy in that parish.

Other sisters expressed a similar desire to step in when male clergy failed to meet the needs of the faithful. For example, Sister Annette shared,

I had a friend whose mother passed away in March and she, you know, the person who was facilitating the funeral, the priest, like got their names wrong. Like her siblings and her—their names wrong. And then like spoke about something. Like spoke about a casket—her mother was cremated, like just totally not pastoral at all, so insensitive, or whatever the case, it was horrible. And I had written the intercessions for the funeral and helped her plan the mass, and she said, “I wish that you could have just facilitated the whole thing.” And so did I! Because it would have been done thoroughly, and carefully, and like to meet the needs of her family and here is one of the most important days, most significant days, most painful if not the most painful day of her life, and she wasn’t ministered to, she wasn’t fed. (Sister Annette, entered after Vatican II)

Sister Annette was both annoyed and embarrassed by this situation. She ignored all impulses to make excuses for the priest, because to her, his actions were so inconsiderate and careless that they did not warrant her maintaining professionalism. Like many other sisters I interviewed, Sister Annette is prevented from ministering in the Church in ways that she feels called, and the faithful suffer for it.

While many sisters recalled relationships with individual clergy members that were both empowering and mutual, more often than not like Sister Annette, sisters shared with me their frustrations with the broader institutional Church and patriarchy. Further, nearly every sister I interviewed expressed a desire for the Church to recognize the unique gifts of women, and more importantly, use them. These women cringe at the thought of the Catholic faithful who return week after week to mass, only to be held

captive by priests who deliver homilies that are out of touch with people's needs, or worse, downright offensive. Sister Frances Anna says,

Someone said to me once, not a sister, "You're just held! Most people are free to get up and go, you're just held captive. You're there to receive Eucharist, but you have to sit there. You're in prison and held captive!"

Indicative of their orientation toward the needs of others, much of the concern that the sisters had about these experiences with repressive priests and their sermons was how it affected laypeople. They seemed resigned to their having to deal with them, but the sisters are protective over lay Catholics and the messages that they might take away from priests and their homilies.

Other sisters choose to shop around for masses where they know the homilies will be reflective of their own Catholic ideology, but are disappointed that they need to do this to live out their faith. For instance, Sister Elizabeth shared,

I think at this point, I find that um, I feel like oppressed in church when pastors are talking about things they shouldn't be talking about. So like I do church in a way that I never wanted to do church, which is like I go where the best liturgy is, where there's gonna be a good homily. And that never feels right to me, this is something that [another sister] and I talk about all the time because church is about parish, it's about community, it's about the whole deal. It's not just "What mass fits best into my schedule?"...Um, so I think I struggle with that, but I also struggle with somebody, just because he's a priest, can hold somebody hostage for like an hour [laughs] and say stupid stuff. Like I can't take it! [laughs again] You know?!

Sister Elizabeth is comfortable enough with her faith and relationship with the Church that she regularly disregards priests who, as she says, "say stupid stuff." Her fear though, and the fear of other sisters who I interviewed is that not all Catholics feel the same freedom. She worries that too many people are stuck and do not feel empowered to leave either the mass or parish, and thus they are forced to listen to homilies that veer beyond

the scope spiritual nourishment. Sister Elizabeth's perspective is different from what some dismissively call "cafeteria Catholicism," where Catholics pick and choose the dogmatic bits of the faith that suit them, and disregard the ones that are undesirable. Instead, Sister Elizabeth seems to advocate finding a weekly mass where the priest delivers a homily that is spiritually enriching, as opposed to one that oppresses the faithful.

Occasionally, a sister found herself in opposition to the local pastor and risked overstepping her bounds of responsibility. Sister Marguerite, a lifelong educator who entered after Vatican II ended spent several years as a principal in a grade school in New Jersey. Sister prides herself in her pastoral sensibilities, and particularly how these gifts served her in working with both her faculty and students. Always one to do all that she could for those around her, Sister Marguerite angered her pastor when she once offered to help out a grieving colleague. She remembered,

I find myself to be very pastoral and when staff had death in their families, [I would say] "How can I help? Is there anything I can do?" and I had a man call back and say, "What did you mean?" [I said] "Well, if you wanted somebody to pray with you or help you pick out music, or make suggestions for readings, or just listen to you." so [he replied] "Oh I would like that." So the day after the funeral, the pastor called me and said, "Look, you do your job and I'll do mine." Now what I wanted to say was "Well, if you had done your job I wouldn't have had to." – but that I get. I tread on his toes but that didn't stop me from being present to people in bereavement, but it's trying to find the way and be true to the way that I believe is the way to be present, you know, and let him be that way.

Like Sister Theresa and her work with funerals, Sister Marguerite stepped into this role of supporting those in grief because the pastor was unwilling, or not present. Unlike Sister Theresa though, Sister Marguerite's pastor resented her interference and advised her to stay in her own lane. Sister wanted to respond in anger with a snarky retort, but her

ability to bite her tongue and not give into this temptation is admirable. This certainly speaks to her congregation's mission of unity and reconciliation, but also to the position of women religious in the Church structure. Sister Marguerite was definitely aware that her role in that parish was at the discretion of the pastor, and she could be terminated at any time. Thus, she chose to more or less let this situation go, but she is also clear that his response was not going to stop her from ministering in the way that she feels appropriate.

Similarly, Sister Joanne ran into problems with the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church when her parish got a new pastor who was not as inclusive of women as the former one. She says,

[H]e [the original pastor] would say, "You should be preaching." So he had me preaching on Monday morning masses. It was a young group, he had a following, like everybody loved him. So I would give the three-minute reflection on Mondays and uh, then he left the priesthood, and so this guy that came in, he was in the diocese office and he got this parish when [the original pastor] left and said, "So do whatever you did when he was here, I just wanna, you know, I'm just interim and just do what you do."

Initially, Sister Joanne was encouraged by the laissez-faire attitude by the new pastor, but this optimism was short-lived. Sister Joanne began to advocate for a Jesuit priest friend of hers who was making the rounds in local parishes preaching about justice issues with which the local diocese was not entirely comfortable, and thus they denied him space to speak. She continued,

I said how much it saddened me that the diocese would not accept a Jesuit priest in good standing to be in Church property, I said, "He's the prophet in today's world who has not been accepted in his homeland." Well, that got back to the bishop. He [the new pastor] swore he didn't do it. I said, "You know I got a letter from the bishop and uh, he's concerned and um, I said I'm concerned that you found that offensive." And he said, "Oh oh that must have been [another priest in the parish who was visiting]" So I went to [the visiting priest], I said, "Did you mention to the bishop? You

weren't even there." He said "I didn't mention anything to the bishop! No, I have hardly any contact with the bishop." And we were friendly, so I believed him. So this guy [new pastor] denied everything, and then months later...the bishop said "We could not afford you any more in your parish." So he came and told me, "Oh I feel so bad, you've been such a help to me, you know, you told me what to do, where to go, and who's this one and tried to give me background and da da da but the bishop said we can't afford you." Oh, so I said "I'm done?" "Oh yeah, yeah, two weeks. Finish up. I feel so bad, I just feel so bad. I'm gonna tell the parish council if it's OK with you, to let them know." I said, "Oh yea." The council was 2 days later and he announced that, "Oh the bishop said we can no longer afford Joanne." Right at that table, somebody said "I'll help pay her salary." Somebody else said, "I'll help pay her salary." "We'll pay her salary." [The pastor replied], "Oh no, we can't let you do that. No, no, the bishop...we have to be able to run our parish on our money and uh..." [The council responds], "What's the difference? It's a donation to the Church! We're donating our money for Joanne's salary, AND, we'll keep up with what we've been paying in our Church collection." I mean somebody said it, "I'll keep paying!" Nothing. "No, no. The bishop won't let it. I'll ask him. I'll ask him." Came back, "Ah, the bishop said, sorry to say, the bishop has refused to accept Joanne's salary from the parish da da da." And the important thing here, I think...we have no recourse...but anyway, we don't. There's nothing to protect us. Our hiring and firing is at the whim of the pastor.

In this lengthy recollection, Sister Joanne recounts how a new pastor was uncomfortable with her autonomy and justice-oriented ministry in the parish. According to Sister however, rather than confront her himself, the pastor quietly got word to the local bishop who sent notice back to the parish that they could no longer afford to pay her salary, and therefore, had to lay her off. The fact that members of the parish council volunteered to not only pay her salary, but to also continue their usual weekly donations is notable. This points to the relationships that Sister Joanne had cultivated with the people in the parish, and how she was ministering to them in a way that was personally and spiritually fulfilling. The new pastor expresses doubt that this will convince the bishop, and offers a halfhearted assurance that he would check with him anyway, but ultimately informs the

council that the bishop will not allow parishioners to pay Sister Joanne's salary. When she recounted this story to me, it was obvious that Sister thought his promise was dubious, at best. She doubted that he even asked the bishop, and given the financial strains that challenge the Catholic Church, her skepticism is understandable.

Sister Jane Katherine, a retired sister who entered before Vatican II recounted a similar story of being dismissed by a new pastor, and she too struggles with the lack of protection that sisters have in their ministry. She recounts a time as a Pastoral Associate in a suburban Philadelphia parish,

I was at St. Michael's parish and again, the first two pastors I had were wonderful and they really believed in you know, you being a real Pastoral Associate. In fact, the first pastor used to take off the Friday after Thanksgiving, and you would do a Communion Service². Two of them, the second pastor I had would get up on the altar and say, "I couldn't do it without Jane Katherine" – that kind of stuff. Well then ha, number three came along! And he, first of all he has no people skills. Basically a good man, but no people skills, and I don't think women are at the top of his totem pole. I used to write a column in the bulletin every Sunday—it was like common sense spirituality, and the people just loved it, I mean they were hungry for it. I think that was a problem too because I was doing what he wasn't doing. And eventually my regional [congregational superior] came and you know, they would go visit the pastor and [he] told her. And she came into my office and said, "I need to talk to you." ...he had told her he was letting me go, there was no reason for it, um, that it wasn't my work, etc. etc. And he wanted her to tell me, and she told him he had to call Mary, what's her name who's in charge of ministry. OK, Mary calls me...so she called me at 4:00 and told me I was terminated, basically...I had to go to the table at 5:00 and act like everything was fine. Um, it was the hardest meal I ever sat through haha. So he didn't tell me, he didn't tell me, he didn't tell me, and Friday of Thanksgiving, I actually told the house and I called Mary and told her I was going down, and she

² In the Catholic faith, a Communion Service is used in lieu of the mass when a priest is unavailable. Laypersons, including religious sisters, are able to preside over Communion Services. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provides guidelines for these "Weekday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest" on their website:

<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/frequently-asked-questions/weekday-celebrations-in-the-absence-of-a-priest.cfm>

said, "Wait for him to tell you." And finally he came in and said, "You know why I'm here. Nothing wrong with what you're doing." OK...And that happens to a lot of nuns, you know. "I don't have money to pay you." Or because a new pastor comes in or that kind of thing. Or the convent closes. There's a couple closing this year. Um, and all the years we taught for next to nothing. Now we get a stipend, but these guys, there's like one priest in the rectory, and they have a cook and a housekeeper, you name it. Things are probably better than they were at one time, but they have a loong way to go haha, a long way.

Sister Jane Katherine's termination speaks to the tenuous position that women religious have in the patriarchal Church structure. In her situation, the pastor did not seem to even have the courage to terminate her himself, but instead called upon the Sisters of St. Joseph congregational leadership to do it for him. In highlighting the fact that religious sisters worked for next to nothing for decades, Sister Jane Katherine exposes one of the most significant barriers contributing to the glass ceiling that women religious face in the institutional Church structure. In the United States in particular, religious sisters were integral in building the expansive network of Catholic schools, largely because they were willing to work for low or no wages (Ebaugh 1993b, Dolan 2002:119). Sociologist Patricia Wittberg (1994) points out that for teaching congregations in the United States, which includes the Sisters of St. Joseph, the stipend that they received was less than what was needed for basic subsistence (52). Similarly, Sisters of St. Joseph historian Patricia Byrne (1986), cites Sister de Chantal Keating writing in 1900 about the "slavish" work that the Sisters of St. Joseph did. Though Sister's analogy to slavery is dated and awkward given its racial implications, Byrne (1986) argues that this was the price women religious paid to secure a place in Church and secular society in the United States at that time (262). In situating their roles primarily as teachers within the sociological literature on gendered care work (Hochschild 1983; Reskin 1988; England

2005; Jacobs and Gerson 2005; Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2006), I argue that religious sisters have traditionally done the “women’s work” in the Church, and were compensated in much the same way as their secular counterparts, that is, little or not at all.

Sister Jane Katherine’s experience of being terminated also likely indicates the ubiquity of religious sisters in schools and parishes for much of the twentieth century. At the height of the Catholic school boom in the United States, which reached its peak in the 1950s, religious sisters taught tens of thousands of American students (Fialka 2003). The number and availability of other sisters to step into teaching roles, along with the fact that they commanded salaries far less than their male or secular counterparts, made them easily replaceable. While that situation no longer exists due to fewer women in religious congregations today and decreased rates of entry, women leaving congregations, and an aging population dying out (Ebaugh 1993b), the legacy of their presence has undoubtedly left a mark on clergy and the faithful.

The Religious Habit

American religious sisters’ collective reformation before, during, and after Vatican II is no other way more visible than the shedding of the religious habit and veil. The habit generally refers to the clothing ensemble worn by women religious, consisting of a long tunic worn over the body like a robe, and the veil, which covers the head and flows down the back (Kuhns 2003). While each religious community’s habit and accompanying veil are unique and have changed over time, and congregations could design how they looked, Church hierarchy ultimately dictated a general pattern for how sisters should appear. Unlike the priestly collar, the habit could not to be taken off at any time, especially in public (Kaylin 2000:58). Religious sisters and scholars of women

religious Lora Ann Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner (1992) contend that the identity of “woman” was not important or valued in everyday life for religious sisters, so the habit served to render them gender-neutral. In his research on women religious and American society, journalist John J. Fialka (2003) points out that the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) believed that the habit functioned by “covering up your sexuality” (Fialka 2003:273). Holscher (2012) links the recent banning of the hijab in France and the numerous legal challenges to religious sisters’ wearing the habit in American public schools in the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, theologian Kathleen Holscher argues “Like the niqāb in France today, the habit, with its archaic air and resonance of concealment and submission, represented the limit of what many considered appropriate clothing for American democracy at mid-century” (Holscher 2012:62). Further, author Lucy Kaylin (2000) suggests that prescribed codes of dress like the habit served not only as a way to identify religious congregations, but also acted as an evocative, visible outward sign of one’s vow profession as a religious sister. With the changes of Vatican II, more and more religious communities began altering the habit and many abandoned them altogether in the years that followed. Kaylin (2000) argues that congregations discarding the religious habit is akin to the post-Vatican II transition to the English mass, in that it is both “humanizing and democratizing” (Kaylin 2000:58).

Yet not all religious orders stopped wearing the habit after Vatican II, and within some communities, sisters still wear the habit today. Kaylin (2000) writes that the decision to wear or not wear the habit is often viewed as a statement of one’s political leanings within the Church. Unlike those who dress in plain clothes, those sisters who

cling to the habit are seen as traditional, conservative, and reticent to change or to embrace progressive ideologies.

As a non-cloistered religious congregation founded to be active rather than contemplative, the first Sisters of St. Joseph originally wore a simple black dress modeled after the plain clothing worn by widows of the day. Author on Catholic traditions Elizabeth Kuhns (2003) notes that the congregation's founder, Jesuit priest Jean-Pierre Médaille believed that this would allow the women to move about the streets, serving the needs of the sick and poor without raising suspicion (108). After Vatican II, when congregations revisited their earliest documents and were encouraged to return to their roots, many communities of women religious rediscovered this forgotten feature of their lives.

Sisters of St. Joseph who were in formation during this time period in the late 1960s and early 1970s were among the first to learn about their primitive documents, as they had been recently translated from the original French. Sister Regina, who entered the congregation just after Vatican II ended remembers,

And the year that I entered... was the first year that there was a noticeable change in the habit. So it was June, and I was entering in September, so I never wore the habit that I had always seen [other sisters] in. A modified version of it, and then another modified version of it. And then haha, eventually we went into what we referred to as "secular dress." Uh, partly because we did the research and we started to realize, "Ah, we weren't supposed to look different. We were supposed to look like the ordinary widow of the day." So, my whole formation was this era of discovering. You know Vatican II had said, "Signs of the times, charism of the founders, and scripture" and that's what our formation was about, with this little and mixture of the way we used to be.

Sister recounts how the congregation's move toward secular dress was in line with what Vatican II commanded, because the original documents noted that sisters were always

meant to blend in with those around them. As more and more women entered the workforce in the 1960s and 1970s, the long black garb became more of a barrier between sisters and those whom they served. The tepid, piecemeal way in which they transitioned to secular clothing is another terrific metaphor for this congregation, which is slow and deliberate in making any changes. Other sisters remembered the stages of changing their habit with humor and exasperation, in equal measure. Sister Margaret Anne, who entered before Vatican II says,

[Y]ou know, our changes were so simple. You know, the hem of our habit or the lining. Then you know, the lining or the facing was shorter, and the sleeves were narrower, and haha oh Lord, you know! And if you ask the Holy Child Sisters at Rosemont, the first thing they did was, you know they had like a million buttons and then they had fewer, or none, or something, I don't know [laughs]. You know, some of the changes were imperceptible to people outside of the congregation. So I think the fact that we were educated so well, and the fact that we approached renewal in a real holistic way, it was intergenerational, interdisciplinary you would almost say. We were so blessed.

Sister Margaret Anne mentions how the Society of the Holy Child Jesus sisters in Rosemont, Pennsylvania moved much more quickly with outward changes like the religious habit. As a congregation in a densely populated urban area, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia almost certainly would have noticed how other communities of women religious were adopting Vatican II's changes. This awareness, coupled with momentum from within the community itself propelled the congregation forward, but as Sister Margaret Anne notes, at their own measured pace and in their own way.

In my interviews, I was struck by how generally indifferent the sisters were to wearing the religious habit. Most shrugged it off as something that they did, almost subconsciously, without giving it too much thought. Very few sisters had strong opinions

about the habit one way or another. Many commented that it was heavy and hot in the summer, but that for the rest of the year they really did not mind wearing it. Some sisters missed the simplicity of lifestyle that the habit offered, and a few remarked that they would love to still wear it today to formal occasions where dressier clothes are expected, like weddings and funerals.

Of those sisters who had any strong feelings on the habit, two in particular, Sister Doris and Sister Madeline, spoke to me at length about their concerns that they had at the time, and still do, about the congregation making it optional. They were both in favor of wearing the religious habit, which surprised me. In both their social justice-oriented ministry work and sociopolitical ideology, these two sisters skew liberal and progressive and they also self-identified as strong feminists. In their interviews, they voiced considerable concerns with the patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church. Their support of the religious habit is remarkable then because this generally goes against much of the feminist literature on the religious habit, which contends that the religious habit is a controlling image that neutralizes gender (Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Fialka 2003; Kuhns 2003). Yet, both sisters overlooked this interpretation, because for them, the significance of the simple garb kept them closer to their original purpose and ministry. For instance, Sister Doris, who entered the congregation before Vatican II, told me about how she experienced some of the Council's recommended changes. She says,

I was probably one of the ones who was clamoring for change. Especially with social justice. Not so much the habit, because I used to think, "I don't want to worry about what I'm wearing." It was a convenient thing, and I thought, "What do we do if we don't have the habit and we're gonna have to think about what we're wearing?" and to me, that wasn't a help, you know? So it wasn't that I wanted to get rid of the habit, in fact, I kept making defense statements that, "I think it's fine that we have this simple

garb, or you know, simple veil, where our hair shows.” Then when I found out about the veil about being subservient to males, I was like, “Get rid of the veil!” So, ha, you know, it was all about learning what was under and the meaning of it, and I felt our habit had a simple, you know, it helped you to do what you were supposed to be doing, rather than thinking about how you looked, and it also helped take away from comparing yourself to other sisters with how you looked, so I thought it was a good idea. And then, you know when we discussed it and so on in chapter, I was all for, “If we’re gonna do it, let’s just do it.” You know, not halfway. Like wearing the veil with clothes or something, I wasn’t excited about something like that.

For Sister Doris, the habit allowed her to remain closer to the poor because neither she nor the other sisters in her community would fall victims to the trappings of materialism. As a strong voice for social justice in the congregation, Sister Doris explains that she argued for keeping the habit for its simplicity so that the sisters could focus more on what mattered in their mission, which was working for social justice and with the poor and marginalized. Her sentiments were supported by Sister Madeline, who entered after Vatican II, and who told me,

I didn’t mind wearing the habit, probably because I was younger. I just did not mind it. I did not like wearing the veil, I’d wear that when I was in my official teaching ministry, but then I would take it off and put it on the doorknob, even when the kids were there after school, but wearing the dress with the crucifix, I really didn’t mind it. I thought it was, I always saw the habit as helping me to relate more to all different socioeconomic groups of people, that’s what I thought the habit did. I felt I wasn’t wearing fancy clothes...Uh, I felt, especially working with the poor and marginalized as I have, I felt it kept me not attached to a socioeconomic group. I felt it kept me – and I loved that I could wear it to a fancy wedding, or I could wear it out to the playground playing with kids or something. You know, it like served any purpose—I felt it helped me stay simple in my life. I felt it helped me stay detached. I felt it helped me stay not focused on how I looked...But I liked it. Now these sisters, in the first mission, they’d be like, “That’s not true! When we wear a habit, we are higher above all the people! That’s a status whatever!” They were adamant about that with me...But I thought the habit was a really convenient symbol, helped us live more simply, like all these stupid clothes I have now that mostly people give to me—I hardly ever buy

anything. Too many clothes. Worry about what I have to wear. Things come up, it's like, "Now what am I gonna wear to this?" I hate it! I really hate it! I would wear a habit again tomorrow. If they said, "Wear black suits." I'd wear a black suit! It's like, you know, not a veil. I don't like the veil anymore. The veil is too much submission, and old fashioned, and all of that. And the men aren't wearing anything on their heads. So we should not be wearing anything on our heads!...but no, the sisters were adamant with me. When I couldn't even say I liked wearing a habit, that was the one thing, this was before 1984, oh!!! I learned to keep my mouth shut... They could not – these older sisters, I guess they wanted out of it, they could not tolerate the thought of, they told me I was absolutely, 100% incorrect that wearing that habit that we had kept us able to relate to all groups of people... And it was after I started wearing it and being with people that I realized how people would react to me. Strangers would walk up and talk to me and ask me for prayers and things. They felt they could tell you anything, you were this consoling figure in this outfit. I don't have it anymore. It's been years since that happened.

Like Sister Doris, for Sister Madeline, the habit was an equalizer, uniting her with people from all social classes. Sister Madeline notes how when she was in habit, she would be approached by strangers for prayers and assistance, a notion that sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) calls an "opening person" or "open position" where religious sisters' distinctive dress gives them "built-in license to accost others" and be approached themselves (Goffman 1963:129). Sister Madeline exposes some of the internal congregational struggle happening at the local community level, in addition to the larger congregational body. Surprising too, is how Sister Madeline, a young sister at this time, remembers that it was the older sisters in her house who wanted to move to plain clothes. Given the congregation's reputation for being slow to adapt, one would expect that the older sisters in the community would be less-inclined to make such a dramatic outward change. For these older sisters, the symbolism of higher social status embedded in wearing the religious habit puts issues of social class ahead of any concerns about patriarchal gender control.

Actually, for sisters in the one camp who wanted to keep the habit, like Sister Doris and Sister Madeline, and sisters in the other who wanted to leave it behind, eliminating class distinctions was really the deciding factor. Each group was focused on being united with the poor, they just interpreted the symbolism of the habit from different perspectives. Sisters Madeline and Doris focused on the habit's simplicity, which thus allowed them to be free of the materialism and shallow concerns about outward appearance. They also enjoyed how it made them recognizable, and therefore people felt free to approach them in times of need. To them, this allowed sisters to live their mission of service more fully. The other group however saw the habit as a garment that separated sisters from those whom they served, with its long flowing robe elevating the sister's social status and importance relative to those laypersons around her.

Sisters were united however in their desire to abandon the veil. Sister Doris and Sister Madeline explicitly pointed to the veil as a means of reinforcing their subordination to male clergy in the patriarchal Church. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2001), theorizing on power, argues that symbolic violence helps to explain the domination that exists in social structures and hierarchies. Further, he contends that the Church, along with schools and the family, are three primary spheres where masculine domination is reproduced (Bourdieu 2001:85). Applying Bourdieu's notion of symbolic domination to the relationship of women religious to male clergy in the Catholic Church, the Sisters of St. Joseph take a more nuanced approach with the religious habit. They separate their understanding of symbolic meanings in the religious habit (class) from that of the veil (gender inequality). The sisters themselves could be perpetuating symbolic violence against lower social classes by wearing the habit, and with the veil, the male

clergy were reinforcing their gender dominance over women religious. In both cases, the sisters sought the most democratizing solution to unite them with all people, and eventually this led to their wearing plain clothes today.

Ultimately, it was the rediscovery of the habit's original meaning after Vatican II, and a series of gradual changes in the 1970s that propelled the congregation to move to make the habit completely optional in 1984. A 1974 report from the Poverty Committee to the general chapter community calls for a study to be done on alternate, less expensive forms of the habit, and the potential for a lighter, more comfortable one in the summer. Documents from 1979's general chapter focus more explicitly on the habit and potential changes. For instance, in a report to the congregation at chapter, the Habit Committee updated all sisters on their work over the previous few years. In the lengthy, detailed report, the Committee describes its lack of progress at the beginning due to sisters being quite entrenched in their own opinions of the habit. Yet, the report notes that after spending extensive time

listen(ing) attentively with open minds and willing hearts and we were enriched by our listening... We prayed together. We reflected. We shared. From then on things began to happen in our group. We witnessed a mini-Pentecost! Sisters, who had not been vocal formerly became articulate—our minds were opened and we began to understand one another... From this understanding and listening, we drew up proposals which we hope will bridge the gap and address the question of the habit and its alternatives (SSJ Chapter Archives 1979).

The report notes that the sisters on this committee celebrated the unifying way that their group eventually worked together, as much as the proposals that this synergy brought forth. Tellingly, the Committee was motivated by the phrase “choicefulness within limits,” which gives equal attention to each sister's agency to wear the clothing she

deems fit for her ministry, but also the institutional structure of her living a consecrated life as a Sister of St. Joseph. Not surprisingly, the changes to the habit then, as with other changes in this congregation, would be gradual and done in stages. The committee recommended that the congregation continue to wear the habit, but that each sister be given the freedom to make a responsible choice to wear alternatives to the habit in appropriate situations “both within and outside the convent.” Expecting simplicity of life and always reminding the congregation of its solidarity with the poor, the committee proposed, “[i]n fidelity to vow and to the demands of social justice, sisters adopt a non-consumerist attitude and lifestyle and avoid the accumulation of clothing as well as other things.” Finally, the committee recommended that further study be done about a simpler habit and an optional replacement before 1983 (SSJ Chapter Archives 1979). By 1984, the results of this study were complete and the congregation allowed all sisters to wear plain clothes in their respective ministries. Today, nearly all Sisters of St. Joseph –and every sister who I interviewed –wear secular clothing.

While the Sisters of St. Joseph as a congregation are one of many communities of women religious who no longer wear the religious habit, its lingering effects as an identifying feature remain. Sister Elizabeth, whose work often has her meeting with women religious in other communities spoke to me about the significance of the habit as a symbol of religious life. She said,

I find myself in places where I’m the only sister not in habit, and I think, “How does that make me feel? Do I feel funny about that? Do I feel judgmental about people who do wear the habit?” Not necessarily, I think what I’ve come to notice in myself is that I think there is room in the Church for all ways of living this life, and all, whatever. Unfortunately, what I have found to be true in my experience, and this is not always, is that often the sisters who wear a habit are judgmental toward the sisters

who don't—not all. Um, but I, so that makes me stop and think, “Wait a minute. I'm not gonna be judgmental because you're wearing one, and you need to give me that same like...” And I also find, like the explanation about why people wear habits, like I'm not comfortable with it. Some people talk about it like it is a wedding dress—not cool with that. And I know that about myself, uncomfortable thing. I don't mind it when people say that it's about simplicity. That, I can like really get behind and understand and that desire to like not be concerned with what you're wearing or any of those things... Like when a lot of people talk about the identity and like seeing the value, I believe that that's true, and I think that there's some way we need to figure out a way to share our identity and share our life in a way that's like more out there, but I also think there's potential for, you know, creating a divide too. Um, that idea, of just doing your thing and I hope people know that by living the way that we're living, rather than by what we're wearing, so, I'm glad that we don't wear a habit, and you know, sometimes in terms of this ministry, it seems to be attractive to young people because of the visibility and the clarity that it seemingly provides, I don't know that that's really true once people like really arrive.

Sister Elizabeth comments that she finds it problematic when sisters who wear the habit are judgmental about those sisters who do not, and also when some sisters compare the habit to the wedding dress. This image has roots in the notion of religious women consecrating their lives as virgins and “brides of Christ,” instead of committing themselves to marriage and domestic life with mortal men (Coburn and Smith 1999). She also notes how she hopes that when women are attracted to religious life today they identify more with the work, rather than the clothing. Yet, she notes that many new sisters seem drawn to the visibility and status that they associate with the habit, but that they find that its symbolism does not deliver on whatever expectations they had of religious life before entering. Other sisters spoke to me about this phenomenon as well, but often with more skepticism of the young women who are attracted to the habit at first. For instance, Sister Jane Katherine talked to me about the declining numbers in her congregation and how she does not think they will ever achieve the numbers that they

saw in the 1960s. In speaking of women joining religious congregations who still wear habits today, she dismissed some of their motivations as disingenuous, saying,

I don't think we were meant to have the numbers we had at one time. I think people came to religious life just like they came to marriage, for all kinds of reasons. Some of it was to get away from home, some of it was a romantic idea of what marriage was, you name it. And they came to religious life for the same reason. And I think the habits kinda helped that romance. And I think young people today are more realistic, and care about phoniness more. I hate to use that word phony, because I don't think they do it to be phony, but it's not the real deal. Um, and I think that's why we don't get more than we get. We won't get 50, 25—but I think if I'm happy, because I don't think anything attracts more than people who are happy and loving. They'll be attracted just, they'll be able to look at you and see it! You don't have to declare it.

Like Sister Elizabeth, Sister Jane Katherine thinks that when women are attracted to the romantic, flashy sides of religious life, which they see embodied in the habit, they will be disappointed. That is “not the real deal,” she says, and her commentary could be interpreted more as an indictment of the need for instant gratification associated with the millennial generation, as much as it is a criticism of the habit as a symbol of consecrated life. Still, she believes one's religious vocation must have authenticity beyond outward signs like the habit.

Similar to Sister Jane Katherine, Sister Madeline questions the motivations of young women joining religious communities today who wear the habit. She commented,

These young women I mean...I'm just watching the whole thing. These young women, joining these orders, wearing these big veils and all this, that I think is an extreme. But I think to be like other people who wear things that symbolize their commitment, their commitment, what socioeconomic group they're attached to, I think is significant. I think young people think that way. I think they do think that way, I think they are looking for that. I think they're looking for an escape, some are. Some of us were. Some before me were. But you know...yea. I was never like “Oh, I can't wait to get the habit!” like some of my friends were...ok, this is part of a life, and I would wear it.

Sister Madeline's analysis of women entering convents with the habit is that they are looking for an escape, and while she clearly does not agree with it, she seems to understand why they are drawn to the superficialities like the habit and veil that some religious communities offer. Like Sister Jane Katherine, Sister Madeline's criticism is likely more to do with the motivations that younger millennial women have for entering religious life. She believes that they see the habit as the entrée to an intriguing life, one offering status, an escape, and a romantic idea of what it means to be a different kind of woman in the twenty-first century. The irony of this, of course, is that the same life that many women in previous generations saw as too controlling and limiting, is the one that women today are attracted to precisely because of its foreign, almost glamorous qualities.

Whether women religious are in the habit or not, its striking visibility still connotes meaning in the Catholic Church, especially with clergy. Some sisters shared with me that they occasionally felt disrespected by members of the clergy, especially the younger priests and seminarians. For example, Sister Jacqueline, a sister who entered the congregation after the Second Vatican Council, has had a good bit of experience in religious formation with both men and women from other religious communities. Sister Jacqueline told me about an experience she had in 2015 during the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, which coincided with Pope Francis's first visit to the United States. She remembers,

They don't know what to do with me. Um, yea, and there's always...I think like when I talk about them in general, when I talk about the clergy in general, there can be an antagonism or like a there's a frustration of like what the Church is like larger embodied in the clergy. And like I'm, I'll

feel it whenever I'm with a clergy person who says like, "Oh, you're not a real sister. You're not a real nun because you don't have a habit on."

Interviewer: Has that happened?

Sister: Oh yea. Haha. I've had it happen a couple of times! At the World Meeting of Families. We had clergy say to us directly, we were trying to get through a crowd, and they let a group of habited sisters through and so it was a group of Sisters of St. Joseph and a group of Mercies [Religious Sisters of Mercy], and so they, the Mercies were like "We can go too, we're religious sisters." And this guy just turned flat-out into our faces and said, "You're not real sisters." It was like, ok! Ha. So like that, it's sad and it also makes me angry, that experience... The more traditional guys, in the clergy, they're frustrating and they're funny in the way of like, ok, sometimes they just need to be educated and they need to know more about you. Um, sometimes they just need to loosen up a bit too. So like with the younger guys, anytime I've worked with the seminarians, it's just a matter of making them realize, "You're just a human being" and like "YOU'RE just a human being and I'M just a human being and we're in this together and we both have the same goals in mind so we really have to be able to work together because I really don't think you're any better than me and I don't think I'm any better than you, so how can we do this?"
haha.

Sister Jacqueline's story exposes gender and class issues in the institutional Church structure. She shares how some members of the clergy "don't know what to do with" her, because she does not meet their expectations of what a religious sister should look like. The clergy member who acted as a bouncer at the World Meeting of Families was empowered to both police the boundaries of who gained access to certain areas, and evidently, who was a *real* religious sister and who was not. What was unspoken, but palpable, in this exchange is how women religious do not enjoy similar privileges or authority, and as Sister Jacqueline goes on to describe, her community's mission of unity and inclusivity prevents her from judging the authenticity of another person's faith. She found voice to knock a young seminarian down a few pegs in telling him that she "was no better than"

him and vice versa, but her experiences highlight the problems of separation between men and women, and the clericalism that still permeates the Catholic Church's institutional structure.

Working with Younger Clergy

Sister Jacqueline's experiences with younger clergy being more challenging than older ones was not unique. In fact, several sisters lamented working with newly ordained priests, as opposed to more seasoned clergy. Initially, one might assume that the younger men have more progressive worldviews and favor institutional change and gender equality, since they grew up in a time where women were more empowered in secular society and the Church. Yet, sisters told me this was not the case, and actually, was the opposite of their experiences. For example, Sister Cora Rose, who entered the congregation after Vatican II and currently works outside of the Philadelphia Archdiocese remarked,

Our young clergy over here, are just like the young clergy over in Philly. They need to wear their lace and they need to have their hands folded or God doesn't love them. Umm, I don't have much patience with them, I really don't. And, umm, deacons are another breed. Although right now, my boss is a deacon, and uh, again, he was taught by our sisters. And again, although I think he is very rigid and old fashioned, there is something about an interaction with me because he knows our sisters that I feel there's respect. Umm, parishes that I go out to, umm, I think for the most part, the priests are, if they're middle aged, are very respectful of sisters. We have a lot of sisters in, uh, this diocese that are still in habits, so that's who the younger people, the younger priests, gravitate to.

Interviewer: Are they sisters from different orders?

Sister: Yeah. And they're from Mother of God, Cousin of John the Baptist, Sisters, Brother, I mean, their names are unbelievable. A lot of them are foreign communities and umm, and they seem to be bringing in

more of those sisters. Umm, they're getting the vocations, what can I say. What is interesting is that they've been giving talks on, umm, vocation talks once a month, and last year I was invited to a vocation talk...but umm, the young priest who is like, the MC for the bishop, who as far as I'm concerned is too young to be in that position and he's one of these guys, umm, he said to me, "I heard you gave a talk, and the young people, the young women, really enjoyed it." I wanted to smack him [laughs]. How about, it was kind of like, such a surprise that I could give a talk and that the young women would enjoy it, so I, you know, that's where I am. But I have to say, for most of our middle aged guys, they're great, they're wonderful, uh, I don't know that they agree with everything that we would say as sisters, but I think it's kind of a respectful kind of agree to disagree. Umm, again, the pastor that I work with...he's wonderful, and our sisters do live in the convent there and umm, Peter is great. And he's very, he's probably much more progressive than even I am to be honest with you. Umm, so you know, I think that's where I am.

Sister Cora Rose says that she has no patience for the younger priests who are more concerned with appearance than how they minister to their people. She notes how middle-aged priests, though they may not see eye to eye with them on every issue, have better working relationships with sisters. There is a mutual respect there that is productive and functional. She is offended when the young priest offers her a surprised and patronizing congratulations on her vocation speech, underscoring the gendered hierarchy that flows through the Catholic Church, all the way to the local parish level. Given that women are forbidden from positions of power in the Church, more often than not, sisters experience this gender inequality in the day to day. For the most part, they seem resigned to just deal with it, but there are more extreme examples of clergy treating sisters poorly, like Sister Cora Rose's experience in a suburban Philadelphia parish,

[T]he priest there was a Monsignor, and he would ring the bell, OK, and the women would wait on him. And he had a retired pastor that was there, so the retired pastor emeritus still lived with him. And I remember one time he came over to dinner with us, and I remember, he was a big man, and he smoked a cigar. And he still wore his cape, and he wore his little hat. And, I remember, uh, we were talking about umm, what we wanted to

do, it was like the beginning of when our sisters were going into other ministries, and I'm sure they were doing it a long time before that, but more and more of our sisters were moving out of school. And I remember uh, being asked at the table, because I was the youngest, uh, what I would like to do. Because I was still studying, and had gotten my degree. And my degree was in English, it wasn't in Elementary Ed, and I said I thought I would like to work on a college campus, with young people. And I remember him laughing at me. And from then on, I was like, who is this guy?

Sister Cora Rose's story of outright sexism and condescension was one of several like it that I heard in my interviews, but more often, the sisters told me about clashes with clergy that were much subtler and institutional. When I asked them to be more specific, the sisters were candid and indicated two main reasons for the problems they have with clergy and the Church in general. First, diocesan priests have no other ways to grow personally and professionally than by climbing the institutional ladder in the Church, which means entering the clerical structure. For the most part, the sisters were more forgiving of the priests themselves, and instead blamed the system. Sister Doris summed this up, saying,

I think the trick for me is anti-clericalism, and priests who know themselves, who are themselves, who don't have to have a veneer or have to put on airs. And I know a lot of them and those are the priests that I feel struggle as much as sisters with being authentic and being true to their vocation. So I think it's the anti—I'm anti-clericalism and um, anti-climbers, you know, those who, it's sad: a diocesan priest has nowhere to go unless he goes up. He has to be a bishop to feel some kind of self-worth, and they need, I think they need much more psychosexual education and immersion formation um in order to just be themselves. Just be who you are and I think that would make a big difference.

Sister Doris believes that a diocesan priest's identity is nearly entirely bound up in his clerical role in the Church, and in order for him to feel validated, he must become a monsignor, and then bishop, and so on. Unlike order priests like the Jesuits, Vincentians,

and Augustinians for example, diocesan priests are not bound by the same communal vows and mission, nor do they live in community. Their “self-worth and authenticity,” as Sister Doris puts it, comes from increased levels of power and prestige in the Church. Sister Doris, along with several other sisters who I interviewed, painted a picture of a diocesan Church structure that is isolating for parish priests, who in turn, often times lack the relationship and social skills needed to truly connect with the faithful. Highlighting this perspective, Sister Mary Lynn offered the following,

I'd say most of the men in the Church have not been encouraged or supported in dealing with their own personal issues. In integrating their own personal story, in recognizing wounds that they may have received from women and dealing with them so they can be free. So there's much less support for men in the Church to do that. Uh, and that's sad. Whereas in religious congregations, if I have issues with pastors, or let's say I have run-ins with three pastors, the congregation will say to me “What's that about?” and you know, I'll be moved into places and persons who can heal whatever it is in me that's causing division, which isn't our charism. You know, without blame. So I feel men have gotten short shrift in the Church. Religious congregations are better with their men than diocesan. That's my experience.

Sister Mary Lynn believes that diocesan priests are not provided with enough psychosocial support to adequately deal with their personal issues, particularly those with women. In her view, these concerns are just ignored or forgotten about, but their lasting impact damages future relationships. Sister Mary Lynn also indicates how religious communities—both men's and women's—support their members implicitly, especially in difficult times and “without blame.” Sister Mary Lynn knows that she can tap her congregational leadership to intervene on her behalf when needed, and in cases where no workable solution is reached, they can move her into a new ministry that will be unifying and life-giving and in line with their charism.

The second reason that sister gave for their difficulties with clergy was that unlike religious orders, including women religious, diocesan priests did not have a period of renewal after the Second Vatican Council. Religion scholar Margaret McGuinness (2013) notes that women religious were particularly enthused by two of the Council's documents: *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965). The former encouraged sisters to work for the poor alongside clergy and the laity, and at least on paper, removed class distinctions between clergy and the lay faithful. *Perfectae Caritatis* was specifically directed at religious institutes, and requested that they "return to the original inspiration behind the founding of their communities and infuse that spirit into their contemporary lives and ministries" (McGuinness 2013:162). Energized by these two documents, women religious returned to their roots and experienced significant renewal after Vatican II. Diocesan priests were not called to the same type of rebirth, and the sisters I interviewed feel that these men suffered for it. Sister Bridget, who entered after Vatican II, said,

I think Vatican II's mandate to um, go back to why you were really founded and what really attracted you, like why you really came, both like in the big sense and in all the individual members, is probably more imperative today than ever. I think that the fact that the sisters did that – and you can find that in everything you read—I think the fact that the sisters grabbed hold of that and ran with that and guys didn't really...is part of the tension that we feel today, you know.

Sister Bridget believes that men not revisiting their original vocation callings after Vatican II like women religious did is a primary reason for the recent tension between religious sisters and clergy. She directly connected this to the ongoing conflict between the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the Vatican, and to the continued sexist treatment that she and other sisters deal with all the time. Sister Bridget

told me about a number of struggles with priests and bishops during the course of her religious life. As a school administrator, she frequently interacts with Church leadership in her diocese, and often finds the experiences to be frustrating. She continued,

[E]ven still today if I'm talking to the men at the diocese, it is hard to claim your voice. Like to not have it shut down, or to not have them look at you like you know, you're...they're being condescending. "Well, you know sister, well..." Very hard. And if you do come back—like I had one of the people in the facilities office at the diocese tell my assistant that I was "like a bulldozer trying to run over everybody" and that he was the bishop's engineer. Like trying to get an asbestos report done for St. Ignatius of Loyola School! Like, I'm like a bulldozer because I'm trying to get something done that you were supposed to?

Sister Bridget's story, similar to one that Sister Cora Rose shared with me, smacks of the sexism that women have faced in the workplace for decades (Acker 1990; Hochschild 1983; Kanter 1977), but also has overtures of the paternalism that sisters navigate in the Catholic Church.

Overall, the sisters I interviewed had much more positive interactions with order priests, than they did with diocesan priests. Many formed significant, friendly relationships with order priests, and as both groups live in community, they had much in common. Sister Mary Lynn remembers having a deep conversation years ago with a Jesuit friend of hers about her struggles living in community, sitting on the porch at the Sisters of St. Joseph retreat house in Cape May Point, New Jersey. She said,

I was bitching and moaning about community as we were sitting on the porch at Cape May and he said to me, "You know Mary Lynn, I used to think the Jesuits had all the looneys, but now I know every congregation has their fair share. And somewhere on two other rockers in another place, people are saying the same thing about you and me."

Sister Mary Lynn could not have had this shared moment of bonding and understanding with a diocesan priest, as they do not live in community in the ways that religious women

and order priests do. Of course since the Sisters of St. Joseph were founded by a Jesuit, and share much of the Ignatian spirituality that defines that order, it is easy to see why Sister Mary Lynn connected with this Jesuit priest. Their similarities run deeper than shared spirituality however, and likely has more to do with the ways in which these two congregations live out their religious vocations in community. In this shared understanding of the joys and struggles of community life, sisters find sympathetic ears and allies in their desires for a better Church and world. Many sisters told me that some of their best male friends were order priests, and for some sisters, these are the only clergy with whom they regularly interact. This is especially true for those sisters who do not work in diocesan offices, parishes, or schools.

In the end, most sisters shrugged off the highs and lows of working with clergy with an “it’s all part of the job” attitude. Their capacity to deal with some of the more challenging men in these roles was clear, and the confidence with which they shared their stories indicated how they compartmentalize these negative times in their ministry to focus on what truly motivates them.

The Sisters of St. Joseph and Feminism

The 2008 doctrinal investigation and Apostolic Visitation of American women religious sparked heated debate within Catholic and non-Catholic circles about the notion of “feminist nuns.” In my interviews, I asked the sisters pointedly if they saw themselves in the CDF Assessment, and specifically if they or their congregation identify as “radical feminists.” The sisters categorically denied being “radical,” with some even laughing off the term and wishing that their community was more radical in its actions and ideology. Some sisters took exception to the accusation, not because of the Vatican’s use of the

term as a pejorative, but more because it overly generalized the variety of American women's religious communities. For example, Sister Regina said, "Good lord, no. Radical, we are not. Haha. We've always been...we've always been pretty conservative as an order. Um, but we have been conservative with a kind of practical, pragmatic edge." Sister Regina's use of the term "conservative" here speaks more to her congregation's slowness to adapt to change, rather than its political connotation meaning opposite of liberal. However, many sisters did identify as feminists, and there was a wide spectrum of meaning bound up in that label for them. Along with evidence of an emergent feminist identity within the congregation's writings, several themes emerged from these questions: sisters as leaders, inclusive language, women's ordination, and their response to the Apostolic Visitation.

I also asked the sisters to define for me what feminism means to them. Many of the sisters responded with notions of equality, where both men's and women's gifts are included. A few sisters however seemed to give considerable thought to what adopting the identity of feminist would mean for them, and for how power is structured in the Church. For instance, Sister Regina again,

To me, it [feminism] means um, a way of looking at the world that says women have a perspective that needs to be honored and needs to be part of the whole weft of humanity. I don't see it as over/against men, I see it as a movement into partnership. My sister-in-law on the other hand is not a feminist because she refuses to give up her superiority, or so she says. And, but, I'm not there and I'm also not, yes, I've studied enough political science to know it is a patriarchal society, it has been for a long time but that's not necessarily, "Alright, now we're gonna get rid of that and have a matriarchal society." We did that way early on, haha, neither one of them work all that well. So feminist for me is a way of moving into partnership.

Sister Regina is primarily concerned with women having equal rights to men in society, rather than an improved position over them. For her understanding of feminism, the key is partnership and equality. This is indicated most clearly in mentioning her sister-in-law's suggestion that feminism would mean having to relinquish her superiority over men. Similarly, Sister Jane Katherine who entered before Vatican II defined feminism this way,

How I define a feminist would be a woman can do anything a man can do, and I think I got that because my father was Mr. Mom. My father cooked on weekends and was a great cook. I didn't see that male/female difference, except the obvious. I wasn't raised that way.

Sister Jane Katherine's family modeled egalitarian gender roles, which influenced her understanding of feminism. The way her parents divided labor in the household differed from widely accepted male and female roles at the time, and Sister Jane Katherine was empowered as a woman throughout her life because of it.

In conversations about feminism, the concept of power and power structures came up a number of times. Some sisters seemed concerned that with any hierarchical structure, and in this case, in their own congregation, power differences can be damaging. Sister Mary Lynn spoke to me at length about power and its relationship to feminism. She shared,

I used to have conversations with my mom and she'd say "I'm as liberated as I want to be" you know, and she had a relationship where she said "Sometimes I'm right, and sometimes your father's right." So I grew up, my father was a man who really loved women, in the best sense of the word. He respected them, he had, you know, he saw how his mother worked after her husband died, so he, and he had a sense of how good the sisters were to him as this fatherless kid. So, I think, I think there was a form of feminism that was reaction, rather than growth um, but I think they said hard questions. I think they opened up really hard questions about the sense of benevolent oppression that was perpetrated pretty much

in the Church and in kinda that whole Anglo society. So I think like any movement, it has its things that I certainly wouldn't agree with, because my fear is there's a feminism that is simply the shadow side of paternalism, where essentially we're using the same tactics of power. That doesn't work for me... So uh, yea, I think it's important and I think the real key is discovering the gifts and the differences and the fruitfulness, you know the real fruitfulness of that kind of sharing, and vision, and complementarity of gifts. But I would never want to see, when it starts to feel to me that it's all about power in that "me verses you" kinda thing, that doesn't feel right. And so, I mean I guess I'm at a place where I'm as free as I need to be. I mean I know who I am, I know whose I am. And I don't need to stand in opposition, but I certainly, as I said, I recognize power plays where I see them and they're still going on. They're still um, I don't know. I don't quite understand what's so bad about sharing, [laughs] I really don't!

Sister Mary Lynn compares the feminism as she knew it, growing up in a household where her father had great respect for women and religious sisters, with the radical feminist label that the Vatican used as a criticism. In pointing out the "feminism that was reaction" that questioned the "benevolent oppression... in the Church... Anglo society," Sister Mary Lynn acknowledges a third wave feminist perspective that looks past the needs of educated, Western white women and instead toward those of women of diverse backgrounds, races, religions, and locations. As third wave feminists have argued (see Lorde 1984, for example) and like Sister Regina, Sister Mary Lynn is uncomfortable with women adopting the same power structures that men use. Indicative of her congregation's mission of unity, Sister Mary Lynn wishes for each gender's gifts to be equally valued.

For the most part, the sisters I interviewed vacillated between what I identify as second and third wave feminist ideologies. While no sisters used that terminology, their words and actions pointed toward one or the other perspective, and in some cases, both. In addition to their social justice work, the congregation's archival material was more definitive in providing evidence indicating a third wave perspective, particularly as it

relates to the needs of women in the developing world. For instance, in an annual report-type document shared at 2004's general chapter, the Sisters of St. Joseph outlined congregational goals and affirmed, "We accept our responsibility to support and sustain our presence with marginalized persons, especially those who are materially poor, as a *radical* expression of our mission" [emphasis mine]. With each of these goals, the congregation details the steps that they have already taken and steps yet to be completed in order to bring them into fruition. Later in the same document, they also assert, "We accept our responsibility to stand with and advocate for women in society and in the Church as a prophetic expression of our mission." The congregation cites its involvement as a charter member in the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC), a partnership of several communities of American women religious that educates religious sisters in Africa through the support of schools, distance learning, and technology so that they can in turn, educate local children. Additionally, at the 2014 general chapter, the Sisters of St. Joseph approved their "Generous Promise" document, which reads,

Impelled by the Spirit of God, the plight of Earth and the consciousness that all is one, we, Sisters of Saint Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Philadelphia, desire to live ever more boldly the Gospel and our Constitutions. We promise to commit ourselves, our corporate prophetic voice, and appropriate resources to the flourishing of Earth and to the unmet needs of persons who are poor, marginalized and vulnerable.

With a special emphasis on women and children, the Generous Promise has inspired the congregation to be more active in its work toward the eradication of human trafficking, and seeking global solutions to end the exploitation of vulnerable persons. As I argue more in the next chapter, the emergent feminist consciousness in the congregation after Vatican II impelled the Sisters of St. Joseph to expand their advocacy and justice efforts

to the needs of the poor in Philadelphia and around the globe, attentive to racial and ethnic inequality. In expanding justice and equality issues for women beyond the concerns of sisters in their own congregation and in the Church, I suggest that the congregation shifted toward what feminist scholars identify as a third wave feminist perspective.

The Congregation's Transition to Inclusive Language

For the Sisters of St. Joseph, the move to incorporate inclusive language in their daily lives, in prayer, and in their ministries was transformative. Sisters shared with me the struggle they faced when teaching children or young adults prayers or songs that used only masculine phrasing. For instance, Sister Frances Anna remembers,

[I]n school I would still transpose music and not put “He” and people would be like, “You’re transposing music, that’s the lyrics!” and I would be like, “I really can’t in conscience do that [use masculine language] I’m sorry.”

Sister Frances Anna would decide on the fly to change the lyrics in religious hymns, and this clearly upset the students and parents who were used to hearing the music in a certain way. This move reflects one of the many quiet, subversive tactics that sisters use to assert a feminine voice into the patriarchal dogmatic Catholic structure.

In addition to individual sisters like Sister Frances Anna using inclusive language in their ministries, the Sisters of St. Joseph began to look at this issue in 1994 when a general chapter action directed the congregation’s General Council to engage in a process to update the Constitutions and directory with inclusive language. An ad hoc working group convened soon after, and by 1998, the group distributed a video presentation to sisters in their local communities and convents proposing the changes. The video

provided detailed and sound theological justification for the changes, presumably to assuage fears that the move would be heretical, but equally important, it made the case for gender-neutral language from a social constructivist perspective. For example, the transcript of the video states,

All of us know the power and beauty of language, dynamic, ever changing, never static... Words have the power to shape our thinking; they reflect our attitudes; they permit us to praise God as a community of believers... The limits of language, as well as the nuances in meaning, are concepts which are not new to us. They are simply a confirmation of what we know from experience... In our day we are acutely conscious that God is beyond gender, indeed beyond words. (SSJ Archives)

This introduction outlines how the proposed linguistic changes in the constitutions and directory are important in order for all Sisters of St. Joseph, and indeed all people, to be included regardless of gender. The video continues to explain the specific changes in language—replacing “Father” with “Creator” for instance—and argues for their necessity both theologically and socially. Essentially, the congregation felt that gender-neutral language brought them further in line with their mission of unity with all persons, by recognizing that women were excluded before. Over the next several years, the working group continued to incorporate congregational feedback and by 2004’s general chapter, the Constitutions and directory were updated with inclusive language and approved by the community.

While 2004’s revision of the Constitutions and directory was the most outright change toward inclusive language, the congregation had been making incremental changes to their Constitutions going back to 1968’s revision called *Design for Excellence*. The Constitutions and directory were updated once again in 1984, following the incorporation of Vatican II’s calls for renewal. After each revision of the

Constitutions, the document is approved by members of the congregation and then sent to Rome for official Vatican approval.

Design for Excellence is divided into several subsections exploring prayer life, the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, community life, apostolic works, formation, and administration. The document functions as the congregation’s rulebook outlining the ministerial focus of the Sisters of St. Joseph and prescribing the ways in which sisters should conduct themselves in the religious community and in secular society. In the first section detailing prayer life, masculine words like “men,” “he,” “him,” and “his” are used 26 times, which contrasts significantly with feminine language like “she,” “her,” and “sister,” which are used 18 times. Gender-neutral or inclusive words like “ours,” “us,” and “we” are used 25 times. In this same section in the 2004 revision, there are no instances of masculine language at all, 49 uses of inclusive language and four instances of feminine words. Table 1 shows the frequency of masculine, inclusive or gender neutral, and feminine language in the prayer life section of the Constitutions and directory documents from 1968, 1984, and 2004.

<u>Document Year</u>	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Inclusive/Gender-Neutral</u>	<u>Feminine</u>
1968	26	25	18
1984	9	51	5
2004	0	49	4

Table 1. Inclusive Language in Revisions of Constitutions and Directory

More illustrative however are the ways in which these terms are used. For example, in *Design for Excellence*, the writers conceptualize God in masculine language and refer to all people as “men.” The first few lines of the document begin: “I believe that God is and that he loves. I believe that...it is in his Church that this divine plan will be accomplished; men will live as one in the love of Christ, his Son” (7). This language changes dramatically in the 2004 document where we find the lines, “Each day we consecrate a period of time sufficiently long for personal private prayer, to be still in the Divine Presence, to receive God’s unconditional love and to love God in return” (25). Here, the congregation’s parlance subtly changes from conceptualizing a masculine God-as-father to a more spiritual, gender-neutral God figure. Through a gradual elimination of masculine language in these official documents, the congregation demonstrates its commitment to gender equality and points toward a more radical understanding of God and spirituality, replacing the patriarchal authority structure of the trinity that characterizes Catholic dogma.

Similarly, in 1994’s vision statement the writers append questions for reflection and conversation and include the words “inclusion,” “mutuality,” “collaboration,” and “interdependence” throughout the document at the top of each right-hand page. Just as explicitly, the top of the left side of every page includes the phrase “we claim our prophetic voice as women.” Intentional or not, taken together both sections form a consistent header in the document that reminds the sisters of their unique gender perspective and implores them to wholly embrace this feminine voice to achieve solidarity with all people by fighting injustice and discrimination. The authors also cite theologian Kathleen Hughes (1993) who writes that adopting inclusive language

“demands the elimination from our speech any ethnocentric presuppositions, of anti-Semitic overtones, of *the normativity of masculine gender preferences*, of presumptions of the superiority of youth over age, or the able over those with disabilities” (9) [emphasis added].

I found further evidence of inclusive language in the style of writing over the past 40 years, which changes significantly from stark prose to more poetic text. For example, these two passages about community life:

Community life offers optimal conditions for the fullest Christian living and interior growth. It fosters esteem for the dignity and innate nobility of the person, enabling each person to achieve a sense of identity and a sense of personal worth, a sense of belonging and a sense of security. By sanctifying the realities inherent in community life, each sister grows into the fullness of Christ; by her generous fidelity she witnesses to the immanence and transcendence of God. The community itself, by the quality of its fraternal charity, is a sign to the world, a revelation to others of the love of God (Constitutions 1968:31)

We live in community
in a house of our Congregation
to be a sign of Christian unity
and to be a creative and healing presence
in our world (Constitutions 1984:19)

Visually, a side-by-side comparison of this selection from the 1968 and 1984 Constitutions is striking. In the former, the rules outlined are written in long paragraph form and the tone is rigid and instructive. In the latter however, the tone moderates into a statement of solidarity, using “we” statements that suggest more community input in their development. As linguists have argued, this softer, more inclusive, pronoun-forward language is much more indicative of a feminine style of writing than the former, which includes many more noun specifiers and is thus written in more of a masculinist style (Argamon et al. 2003). Moreover, the 1984 statement is also much more outwardly-

oriented than the 1968 selection, stating that the congregation's community life is not just a symbol of their union with each other but with all people as they work for justice and equality in the world.

Sisters as Leaders

One of the more striking themes that emerged from my interviews was how some of the sisters who entered after Vatican II viewed women in leadership. Literature on gendered organizations (Kanter 1977; Acker 1990) discusses the glass ceiling that women face in hierarchical, male-dominated institutions. Many scholars note that American women religious founded and operated large-scale educational and healthcare institutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and therefore assumed positions of leadership that were previously unavailable to women (Thompson 1986; Wittberg 1989; Quiñonez and Turner 1992; Koehlinger 2007). Further, others argued that entering the convent was a way for young women to fulfill educational dreams and goals, especially before these were more readily available to women in secular society in the latter half of the twentieth century (Ebaugh 1993b).

Religion scholar Carol Coburn (2004) writes that many larger congregations opened their own colleges and universities to educate their sisters. Like other women's religious congregations in the United States, the Sisters of St. Joseph run several organizations, or sponsored works, with a focus on education and social service. Many of these schools and centers still have Sisters of St. Joseph in executive leadership positions who oversee the administration and daily function of each sponsored work.

The congregation runs the private, liberal arts Chestnut Hill College, which opened in 1924 in Philadelphia and was a college for women until 2003, when the

institution became coeducational. In addition to more than 10,000 lay students, hundreds of sisters have been educated at the College over the last century. Since many sisters were teaching during the week in Philadelphia's parochial school system, this often meant that they would go to school part-time, one class at a time on Saturdays. Many sisters told me that it was not uncommon for it to take 12 years for a sister to complete her bachelor's degree.

In my interviews, several sisters remarked that they have grown up working or studying in these sister-run sponsored works, so the concept of women in leadership positions was not novel to them. For instance, Sister Elizabeth shared,

I can remember, like this is such a funny thing, but it happened to me in college too because I had that positive experience in church, because I grew up in a time post-Vatican II. I was empowered, and because I was educated in a girls' high school and women's college, where women had every leadership role, right? Like everything around me is this. I can remember being in a class and being like, "Well why are we still talking about this? Like shut up about inclusive language, it's here!" and someone saying, "It's not, it's not. Like, yes, this has been your entire world, you could do anything you want and people have told you that your whole life...but in this Church, there are 6 sacraments for you, not 7. Six for you. And people will actually read in church like, 'We are adopted sons of Christ' – do you hear yourself in here?" and I remember thinking, this is just pushing it too far.

For Sister Elizabeth, whose only experience in education was one focused on women's empowerment and with women as role models in leadership positions, the notion that this is not the norm in society was foreign to her. Women have modeled leadership for her entire life, and it was only when she herself was a teacher at an all-girls' school that the magnitude of this experience dawned on her. She continued,

[W]hat I have come to understand on the flip side now, there was nothing like standing in front of a group of girls and teaching theology and teaching the sacraments. It made me crazy every time I had to do it.

Because here we are in Our Lady of Lourdes High School: “You can do anything you want! You could be the top neuroscientist in all creation, right? But you cannot be a priest even though your gifts more than qualify you to do that. You can study theology, get a Ph.D. in theology, and be at the same mass where some guy, just because he’s a guy, is able to preach, even though you have studied and you have more insight and wisdom to offer, but JUST because you have a female voice, it isn’t able to be heard.” I understood that like nothing else when I was in that position. I was like, “This is hard. This is really hard. Something’s not right.” You know? And I’m always glad that I had that experience, because now I know it’s not ok. It might have been ok, for me to be like, “Ok I got this, I’m not gonna worry about it, like we can work around this. I’m gonna do whatever I want anyway.” But not when there were these people I loved, you know, in front of me, and like, “Well what if I wanted to be a priest?” “You can’t, I’m sorry and technically, we can’t even talk about it!” You know? So and then I think it’s like people who have said to me, like “Do you understand that if we don’t shift our language, you know, then this affects women in other countries who are still treated as property?” Like our claiming of what we know to be the right, the just way to speak, just that even, like affects other women. So, in a sense, that sense of like empowerment and like being a leader, like uh never seeing because I went to a girls’ high school and a women’s college, never seeing like a boy in a position of power that a girl didn’t have, like I didn’t see it!

Sister Elizabeth recognized the inherent inequality for women in the Catholic Church only when she was in a position to teach young women theology. She notes that she was able to disregard this differential treatment in her own life, but not when she was talking to young people in the classroom. Additionally, Sister Elizabeth sees how moves toward women’s empowerment and inclusive language in the Church have symbolic meaning, not just for Catholic women in the United States, but for oppressed women all over the world. For these sisters, the Catholic Church allowing women to preach on Sundays would send a powerful message to people of all faiths about the rights and dignity of all women, especially young girls.

Several sisters also pointed to leadership in their own congregation, particularly just after Vatican II, as having profound impacts on their identities as women and women

religious. One sister, Mother Alice Anita Murphy, was regarded by many sisters as a driving force in shepherding the congregation through the many changes after the Council. Serving two consecutive five-year terms as congregational president—called Superior General at the time—Alice Anita Murphy began her tenure in 1968, just as the Sisters of St. Joseph and indeed many other women’s religious congregations were discovering what Vatican II would mean for their lives. Many sisters who entered prior to Vatican II knew Sister Alice Anita as their Junior Directress –the sister in charge of directing the new novices in the convent. As she assumed the role of Superior General, several of the sisters remarked about her enthusiasm for the changes for women religious signaled by Vatican II. Sister Regina remembers,

[A]fter I entered, Sister Alice Anita became the Superior General. She was an amazing woman. She wrote very long letters, almost weekly, to the congregation. She was herself an extremely conservative person. She tried for a very long time to belong to both LCWR and [CMSWR]. But at the same time, she was trying to figure out how we were supposed to renew. And my image of Alice is always her leading us to this brick wall. She didn’t know how we were gonna get over it, but she knew Jesus wanted us to be on the other side, so she would lead us toward this wall and we would look at her like, “What? Where are we going? What are you doing?” And I just had this image of her looking over the wall, trying to figure out, cause that’s where we needed to go.

Sister Regina shared other fond memories of Mother Alice Anita, but here, she is most taken by her ability to put her own conservative ideology aside for the greater good of the community. Her vision was for the Sisters of St. Joseph to institute the radical changes from Vatican II, even if she herself was reticent to embrace them. Sister Beatrice, who also entered the congregation before Vatican II began shared similar recollections of Mother Alice Anita’s leadership. She said,

Well, Vatican II was happening...and Mother Alice Anita was very much into Vatican II, she was our Junior Directress. So she would talk to us, especially, like we would come back for a month in the summertime and she would use words that we didn't even know what they were, but she was so excited about it. But we weren't watching TV, or reading newspapers, or knowing much about it really that I recall, but she really was exuberant.

Sister Beatrice's recollection is that while in the novitiate, she and her fellow sisters were not reading or hearing about Vatican II, but instead, the developments were filtered through Mother Alice Anita. Given the fact that she herself was known to be a conservative person, the ways in which she shared enthusiasm for renewal for the greater good of the congregation is all the more remarkable.

Like Sisters Beatrice and Regina, several other sisters who were in formation around the time of Vatican II shared how they felt like guinea pigs in the congregation as the leadership discerned how to implement the Council's calls for renewal. They noted that congregational leaders balanced the overall excitement for renewal with measured care and respect for sisters in the community who might struggle with change. As was the case with Mother Alice Anita, these sister leaders may have been personally struggling with change, but were true servant leaders putting their own reservations behind the greater needs of the congregation and its vision for the future.

Doctrinal Investigation and Apostolic Visitation

I developed the idea for this research project after the Vatican's 2012 report on the doctrinal investigation of American women religious. This happened in conjunction with the visitation, supposedly in response to concerns about feminism and a secularist spirit subverting American women's religious communities (Lundgren 2016). For the sake of ease, I borrow from theologian Sandra Schneiders (2011) and use the term

“investigation” to encompass both the broader doctrinal investigation of the LCWR and NETWORK and the apostolic visitations of individual American religious congregations. Schneiders (2011) argues that the crux of the investigation was really in response to a tension between Catholic conservatives—including some communities of women religious—who have never been entirely comfortable with reform in religious life after Vatican II, and those communities of religious who embraced renewal. Similarly, historian Margaret Susan Thompson (2016) writes that the Apostolic Visitation was primarily advanced by two concerns from conservative Catholic circles. First, the number of women in religious communities has dramatically dropped from their historic highs in the mid-twentieth century, and secondly, religious sisters in recent years are more involved in social justice-related activities and other pastoral ministries instead of their more traditional roles of teaching and nursing (Thompson 2016). Schneiders points to a September 2008 conference, titled a “Symposium on Religious Life Since Vatican II” held at Stonehill College as a possible impetus for the overall investigation, where one of the speakers, Sister Sara Butler, called for Church leaders to initiate an apostolic investigation of American women’s religious communities (2011:5-6). Schneiders postulates that Butler, an outspoken critic of both women’s ordination and the ways in which religious communities have developed since Vatican II, evidently had the ear of the head of the Vatican’s bureau that oversees religious communities, Cardinal Franc Rodé. Schneiders writes that Rodé is

well known for his conviction that Vatican II precipitated the first worldwide crisis in the Church’s history and for his deep apprehensions about American Religious, particularly women, whom he thinks are “in crisis” due to their surrender to “secularist” and “feminist” trends, both negative epithets in his vocabulary (2011:6)

The investigation began quickly and without warning. Its impacts stunned American religious sisters and the laity, who were skeptical about the Vatican's timing and motivations, especially in light of the clergy sex abuse scandal. Further, the Vatican was only interested in investigating one particular kind of religious congregation: those who were not enclosed and living in the United States. Cardinal Rodé designated Sister Mary Clare Millea as the official "visitor," charged with assessing more than 400 congregations containing nearly 60,000 religious sisters. The methods of investigation were decidedly one-sided, and "lacking in transparency, mutuality, respect, and even honesty that they could be regarded by most Americans only as totalitarian if not fascist. They made the entire process appear to most sisters as hypocritical and even violent" (Schneiders 2011:9).

Over time, the investigation unfolded in three distinct phases. The first phase required congregations to submit to Sister Millea a self-description of their community, either in person or in writing. Schneiders (2011) notes that most superiors did respond in some form, maintaining that their communities were generally healthy and functional, but also highlighting that the problems that they did face were largely beyond their control. Specifically, the leaders pointed toward inadequate compensation for sisters' ministerial work and a repressive institutional culture in the Catholic Church that devalues women. Phase two of the investigation began with a lengthy and intrusive questionnaire, ostensibly implemented to identify information for the congregation's benefit and self-improvement, but in reality was designed to expose disobedience to Church law, feminism, and secularism. The questionnaire also looked to ascertain private financial

information about the congregations, and other personal information about sisters, which most congregations refused to submit (Schneiders 2011:15). Finally, phase three was the “on-site visitation” of selected congregations. Church leaders and congregational superiors nominated religious sisters to visit communities and “agree to write secret reports on the congregations they ‘visited’” (Schneiders 2011:17). Few women religious wanted to comply with an intrusive process that they deemed unfair, but evidently enough sisters did volunteer to be visitors, as the on-site visits began in early 2010 (Schneiders 2011).

Overall, the Sisters of St. Joseph like other religious communities, feared for the potential practical repercussions. Many wondered aloud if they were found guilty –of what, they were not sure –whether or not the Vatican had the power to revoke the “Catholic” identity of their sponsored works, and thus potentially seizing the congregation’s property and funds. In my interviews, for the most part, sisters responded to my questions about the investigation in two ways. First, they spoke differently about the overall investigation and its distinct parts: the doctrinal investigation, and the apostolic visitation. For the former, some sisters dismissed it outright as irrelevant and ridiculous posturing by the Roman curia eager to distract the world from its mishandling of the clergy sex abuse scandal. Other sisters described the investigation as “offensive,” “inappropriate,” “unfair,” and how they were “appalled” and “disappointed” by it. For the apostolic visitation however, the sisters I interviewed were much more emotional. Many sisters were deeply hurt by it, and could not understand how the Church authorities could be so cold and uncaring in how they carried it out. For example, Sister Margaret Anne, who entered before Vatican II told me,

The visitation was even more hurtful to me. Really. That was, I thought, “What are they doing? They’re spending all this money and they’re coming to see, not that we’re – how can I say it – not that our lives don’t need to be looked at, but we’re looking at our lives all the time! Who looks at their lives more than sisters? Haha. Do you know? Every five years reviewing what we’ve done, looking ahead, seeing how we can be. I don’t know, that hurt me more than the LCWR because I thought, LCWR, this doctrinal thing, that’s something um, I think they just don’t understand, you know, if they had an understanding of some of the topics that the LCWR was presenting at its annual meetings, I think that was their main objection... So that LCWR, even though I was concerned, the visitation hurt me more than LCWR and I feel that the process that Sister Pat Farrell [LCWR President during the investigation] initiated. Oh! I think that woman was just amazing in the kind of leadership that she exercised. Just reading the way she responded and the whole contemplative dialog that was initiated. I think so much was learned from that, you know? And some sisters you know, wanted the LCWR to say [claps hands] “We’re finished” you know? Actually, that would have been hard for me to take that approach because that’s not our style. We’re supposed to be about gathering people, helping them to talk to each other, you know? I guess there’s a point where you say we can’t talk any longer because we’re not speaking the same language. But I’m so glad they went down that path of trying to understand the bishops and the bishops understanding us.

Sister Margaret Anne found the visitation intrusive and hurtful. She does not understand why the Vatican was interfering with American women religious in a way that completely disregarded their good works, and only focused on what it perceived as bad. She speaks highly of LCWR leadership and how they stayed at the table with Church leaders, at a time when many women religious—including some Sisters of St. Joseph—were ready to walk away even if that meant giving up their canonical status as a Catholic religious community.

Other sisters agreed with Sister Margaret Anne’s assessment, but also saw the visitation’s questionnaire phase as an opportunity for self-evaluation, and even a potential positive. They recognized that the manner in which the Vatican approached this was

wrong, but that the congregation should still take the opportunity to look internally and recognize invitations for greater action. For instance, Sister Elizabeth shared,

I didn't give it a whole lot of attention [the LCWR investigation], because I thought, "This is ridiculous, it's taking a whole lot of time away from..." It's like "Great! People are saying we're about justice, like what's the problem? Like why are we upset about this?" You know? And I think as it unfolded, I understood, it was like "Good, I'm glad that's what they're saying about us" you know?... There is a piece of me that thought that we could stop and say "No one does everything perfectly" and there is valid criticism in our, you know, becoming uh, subject to this culture, you know, are we living counter-culturally? I'm not always sure that that's the case. Are we comfortable? Yes, I think we're comfortable. So I think I was playing this like middle ground saying, "Maybe this is an invitation somewhere, of the spirit?" Do I like the way that it's coming? No. Do I think it should be totally uh, handled in a different way? Of course. But totally negated? Maybe not. And so I think there is still that piece of me that says, I think the question of how are we living this life radically needs to be looked at, but I also know for sure that that way was not helpful, nor was it appropriate.

Sister Elizabeth took pride in how the LCWR congregations, including the Sisters of St. Joseph, were criticized. She desires for her community to be counter-cultural and radical in how they are a voice for justice in the Church and society. While she resented the way in which the visitation was carried out, overall, she saw it as an opportunity for a call to action for her congregation.

The Sisters of St. Joseph did not respond to the entire questionnaire, nor were they visited by any of the appointed visitors. Instead of filling out the full questionnaire about how they lived their lives, Congregational leaders decided to just send their Constitutions directly to the Vatican. The General Council ultimately felt that since the community is an apostolic one and has its approbation directly from Rome, they would simply forward these documents to the same Roman officials who approved them in their current revised state in 2006. Sister Madeline said,

I like the idea that the congregation sent their constitutions to Rome. I thought that was brilliant. I would never have thought of that, but I thought, “Right! Rome approved them! It’s all right in there, how we live. And it says how we’re gonna live: stand with the outcasts and the marginalized, and that’s who the marginalized are.” And uh, how could they then say, “You’re causing problems?”

Sister Madeline appreciated the cleverness and confidence that her congregational leadership showed in sending the constitutions directly, a move that other religious communities did as well (Schneiders 2011). Sister Madeline remarks that her congregation pledges to stand in solidarity with marginalized people, and that “the marginalized” of today are precisely the same people the Vatican criticized them for supporting, like LGBT folks. Sister Susan agreed, and likened the move to an act of civil disobedience in the Church. She told me,

I was really glad we didn’t send in all the information, we just got a letter back saying, “You didn’t send in all the information!” haha...”Maybe you’ll do it next?” haha! But you know, we need to do some kind of civil disobedience—thank you Dan Berrigan³—you know to get what we need, you know. And I think the response of the people, the “We love the nuns” and all that kinda thing was really heartening, you know, that people were able to come out and do that for us.

Sister Susan laughed off the implication that a second request from the Vatican would produce a different response than the first from her congregation. She also found the laity’s response to the investigation of American women religious very heartening, and no doubt, this emboldened her community and others to stand firm in the face of Vatican pressure.

The doctrinal investigation and apostolic visitation both seemingly ended in April 2015, likely the result of Pope Francis’s desire to conclude the controversial and highly

³ Dan Berrigan was a Jesuit priest, pacifist, and social justice activist who was arrested for civil disobedience. He died right around the time of this interview.

unpopular actions. Despite the cheerful photograph of Pope Francis and several LCWR leaders that was released that spring, a few congregations were recently asked to “continue the dialog” with the Vatican, including the Carondolet community of the Sisters of St. Joseph from Missouri. While no one knows what direction this next stage in the investigation will take, given the public relations nightmare that this was for Vatican officials, it seems unlikely that it will rise to the level of resentment, pain, and scrutiny of the previous three phases.

They’re Obsessed with Sex!

When the CDF document condemning American women religious was released in 2012, many sisters took particular exception to the accusations surrounding issues of sexuality, ministry to homosexual persons, and abortion. While I was up front with the sisters who I interviewed that I was interested in hearing their perspectives on these issues, I was unsure about their willingness to discuss these sensitive topics, even with the guarantee of anonymity. Along with women’s place in the institutional Church structure, the questions surrounding human sexuality generated the most passionate responses from my interviewees. The general tone of these conversations was that the sisters felt that because the Vatican did not see sisters out protesting abortion and euthanasia, and zealously supporting traditional heterosexual marriage, that the rest of their social justice and ministry work was irrelevant. I was surprised by the lengthy and ardent responses they gave to my questions, and honored with the sisters’ candor in speaking about issues that truly touch their hearts. These are issues that have profound impacts on the sisters’ lives in the day to day, and with the people whom they serve. They

struggle with a Church structure concerned only with black and white when they see their lives and the lives of the faithful very much lived in the grey areas.

Birth Control and Abortion

In her sociological analysis of Vatican II, Melissa Wilde (2007) describes how efforts to liberalize birth control in the Catholic Church fell short. Essentially, the progressive voices at the Council were content to let the issues drop in hopes of advancing other reforms. Besides priestly celibacy, the use of contraceptives was the only other topic at the Council where Pope Paul VI exercised his veto power and removed it from the agenda. Wilde (2007) notes that sociological research shows that despite the ban, the majority of Catholics use some form of artificial birth control. Additionally, she contends that Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968) which reaffirmed the use of contraceptives as sinful, has driven people away from the Church and reduced papal authority in the eyes of some American Catholics (Wilde 2007:124).

The sisters I interviewed are frustrated that somewhere along the line, the issues of abortion and birth control have been conflated. They do not see contraception as being equivalent to terminating a pregnancy, and felt that despite what *Humanae vitae* (1968) declared, birth control should not be considered a settled topic. As Wilde (2007) describes, there was some consensus at Vatican II that the birth control pill could plausibly be given the same consideration as the "rhythm method" in regard to family planning. The rhythm method, where a couple only engages in intercourse during infertile periods in the woman's menstrual cycle, was and is the only sanctioned form of birth control recognized by the Catholic Church. When I asked if birth control was an issue

that Church authorities should revisit, Sister Lucia, who entered a few years after *Humanae vitae* was issued, shared,

That certainly, certainly is one. Um, I certainly think the pope [Francis] is leading the way to being more open with all...all those kinds of issues, because again, I, you know, we just can't turn our back on people.

Sister Lucia sees birth control as a justice issue, and one that needs to be addressed in order to meet the needs of the Church's people. She feels that the Church is abandoning people when it focuses on the letter instead of the spirit of the law, and she is hopeful that Pope Francis will show flexibility with issues like artificial birth control. Sister Madeline was more forceful in her opinions on the topic. She said,

These people talking about uh, you know, talking more about birth control and abortion, stuff like that. I mean, I remember years ago one day picking up the *Catholic Standard*⁴...I mean every article on the front page had something to do with a woman's body. It really did! Every single one! And I thought, "What kind of church do I belong to, that this is what they're focused on? And only focused on!" There was an article on abortion. There was an article on birth control, there was some article on...I start to think, "What is in these guys' heads?" They say they're not into women, but they're into something! I mean it's like what are these underlying? Really!! Obsessed!! Obsessed with sex. Sex! Sex! Sex! Sex! Sex! And money. That's it. And that to me was what that was [the doctrinal investigation], and here we are back to sex and money. Mostly the sex thing. We weren't into birth control and abortion enough, and we were too much into LGBT and whatever else they were saying we were into too much. So yea, it's very hurtful.

Sister Madeline expressed in no uncertain terms that the institutional Church should stop what she sees as its preoccupation with sex. Other sisters too, felt that Church leaders should focus less on what happens in the bedroom—how and with whom—and instead

⁴ The *Catholic Standard and Times* was the official publication of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. It ceased publication in July 2012. Archives can be found at www.catholicphilly.com

direct their efforts toward more pressing problems in the world. For example, Sister Bridget offered,

I think about all the people who feel so disenfranchised, so not welcomed, so you know, and honestly, I think about the Catholic schools that are closing. Catholic elementary schools that fed our Catholic high schools and our Catholic high schools that fed our Catholic colleges, and all those people who filled our churches. And are we thinking about what will happen, what will our Church look like? Who will be in the pews? Like are we thinking about them? And I wish we weren't so like totally hung up on sex, like it makes us look like fools to the world, like it really does. You know? From a Church that has had like a few problems around that. You know, it's very, and not everybody, oh my gosh, not everybody by a landslide, but it's hard! You know, you wanna say, "Just step back from that just a little bit." Like who's whispering in their ear?

Sister Bridget summarized what many sisters either said to me outright, or hinted around: that the legacy of the clergy sex abuse scandal was far too painful and raw to give the patriarchy any moral authority to legislate sexual behavior.

Unlike birth control and sexuality, which the sisters were quite vocal about, they addressed the topic of abortion in more oblique ways. No Sister of St. Joseph who I interviewed expressed support for abortion, but they also did not outwardly condemn it in every situation. Reflective of the criticisms outlined in the doctrinal investigation, many sisters spoke about their need to stand for other justice issues in the Church and the world that need their support, feeling that the anti-abortion voices are already there. They do not reduce their Catholic "pro-life" identity solely to concerns about abortion, but see support for immigrants and refugees, universal access to healthcare, and income inequality as equally worthy "pro-life" considerations. Their mission of unity and desire to be in relationship with those whom they serve gives them unique access to minister people in the everyday, and occasionally in times of crisis. In one of the most emotional moments

in all of my interviews, Sister Mary Lynn told me about a tragic situation she faced when she was working with high school students. She said,

I guess the influence of the Church was really this whole shaming of women, and the attributing, to women, you know, it's kinda like, "It was all your fault." [getting pregnant] Nobody thought about, you know, it takes two to tango here. So um, so I think that was the challenge, you know? And what happened was I began to know stories and I got to know family systems, and be able to see, I did a whole thing at one point how good classroom structure, the classroom teacher doesn't need to be a counselor, but good classroom structure helps the at-risk kid, because it teaches health—even though they might resist it. So that was really satisfying. And there were difficult questions. I mean there were difficult questions with, you know, a kid who was on very severe medication for endocrine stuff, and some mental stability issues, was pregnant, you know? And was being told by all the medical professionals that you know, if she continued taking her medication, the child would be disfigured, damaged. If she didn't continue on her medication, she would go off the deep end and lose it anyway. Um, and so there were times of just having to sit with, and you know, walk with this kid through a decision that the institution would have thrown her out for making. So to kind of hold that in confidentiality, so, yea. You know, I think they were some of the tough questions in the pregnant and parenting piece, you know, and uh yea. I think that was it. Yea, that was probably, that was probably something that threaded through. And one of the things, and you know I think the other kind of really difficult issues, is the whole use of contraceptives. You know, and how to navigate that in the Church setting. I have been fortunate in that I've been with, I've had some really good canon lawyers [lawyers of Church law], you know so it wasn't just me riding rogue, but really to talk about the moral, to talk through the moral dilemmas to walk through that fine line of literally "graduality," you know? How do you help a person move toward the highest moral ideal? You know the last thing they needed was shame. The last thing they needed was more shame, so you know, we didn't go there. No. Which is not to say we didn't pose the challenging questions, but it doesn't have to be done in a shaming way.

Sister Mary Lynn's story reflects the grey areas that the sisters help people navigate, at times when the institutional Church does not. Further, she discusses how her work companioning this young woman through a very difficult decision was also about reducing shame, and finding what would be a lesser of two evils solution. If this young

woman brought the pregnancy to term, which according to the doctors seemed unlikely anyway, it could potentially mean that two lives would be deeply harmed: hers in having a child so young, and the child's, who would likely have significant physical and developmental disabilities. In speaking with canon lawyers, Sister Mary Lynn mobilized a strategy for action that responded to crises she faced with her students, without simply turning to the Church's inflexible morality teachings that do not necessarily apply neatly to every situation. This example speaks to a larger theme in my research, where the Sisters of St. Joseph want the face of the Catholic Church to be one of compassion and support, rather than condemnation and abandonment, and where they step in to meet peoples' needs when clergy does not or will not.

Homosexuality

In addition to sex, birth control, and abortion, many sisters shared with me their struggles around the Church's teaching and ministry toward the LGBT population. Around the time I began these interviews in the summer of 2015, Waldron Mercy Academy, a suburban Philadelphia Catholic school founded and run by the Sisters of Mercy, terminated a popular teacher because she married her partner. While Philadelphia's Archbishop Chaput denied any interference from the Archdiocese, the Sisters of St. Joseph who I interviewed felt this denial was dubious. This situation rankled several of my interviewees, who recognized that this issue is bigger than Waldron Mercy Academy, and that all of these separate run-ins that women religious have had with Church hierarchy are interrelated. For instance, Sister Bridget said,

I think that this whole Waldron Mercy thing...like I, almost every day at lunch at work, like not everybody's Catholic who works with us. I have a little office, six of us, and I think they feel comfortable with me, you

know? So it was like anything you ever wanted to ask but were afraid to. “Sooooo like what about...” But they’re eager to hear but they have lots of questions about the Church, you know? And it’s hard to not be negative or not bad mouth it, and I don’t know that I even want to not do that anymore, you know? Um, I think of somebody like the President of the Mercies and the letter that she wrote... And I want to say, “Tell me you didn’t write that. Tell me some lawyer wrote that and you signed it, and I’m so sorry that you had to do that.”... when the bishop’s spokesperson came out and said, “Hey, we had nothing to...” I SO wanted—that’s why I wish I had the radical boldness—to say, “Ok, so come out and make the statement that if they kept her or reinstated her, their Catholic identity would not be impacted at all. That’s the statement I want you to make. Say that and we’re good.” You know, but then of course he came out with his other stuff. But I want to go back and say to you know this whole censure thing [doctrinal investigation] like what was that? What was that about? Like who had your ear that said what about who? Because we weren’t talking enough about abortion, or because we thought people should have healthcare? Like what was it that ticked you off? But I think that kind of like the Waldron thing. There’s this critical tipping point, which perhaps for the Church of Philadelphia this is it. I don’t know... It’s just one issue on a much bigger piece. And maybe that was a tipping point. I don’t know that. I guess I’d have to defer to the wisdom of folks that were much more embroiled in it, although I think that part of the feminine is being much more reconciling and willing to do that kind of negotiating and conversation. I think that is a gift that is brought by that. It’s kinda like the country thing. Like do you bomb them or do you be diplomatic? And I think that clearly if diplomacy works, use diplomacy.

Sister Bridget feels sorry for the leadership of the Mercy sisters, and believes that they succumbed to pressure from the Archdiocese, despite their denial of any involvement.

Sister Bridget is tired of having to defend a Church that does things that she finds indefensible, and clearly, does not want to be put in a situation where she even has to.

She, like so many other sisters, does not understand why Church leadership was so offended by their work, and felt the need to humiliate American women religious so publicly. Overall, Sister Bridget sees the Waldron Mercy situation as a potential tipping point for the kind of radical boldness that women religious need to live out in a Church that does not value women’s gifts or their dissenting opinions.

Sister Moira, who entered the community after Vatican II, also spoke to me about her coming to understand homosexuality despite her own naiveté on the subject, and how some women in her own congregation identified as lesbians. A few of these sisters eventually left the community, but others remained, and it was through relationships with these women that Sister Moira and others recognized the ministerial void in the Church. She shared,

I came to religious life with a little great uh, innocence of not really, sexual orientation would have been, I wouldn't have even comprehended it, do you know? That would not have been the case. I mentioned [those of us who] entered the community, as people were leaving, it's then that I am learning that people are leaving because they have identified themselves as lesbian and now they either are moving in more of a direction to partner with someone, or it's clearly defined that they have a partner and do you know what I mean, they are gonna move with that. I have to say, that was hard for me to comprehend, just because I never thought of it. It wasn't, I didn't think one way or another about it, it just wasn't in my mind, do you know? So these are wonderful women and they are my friends, do you know? It's not my life, but they have beautiful lives, do you know? That I kinda grew up then, with these experiences, and kinda going through, and every level of experience. People adopting children...carrying children with the help of a donor, they're carrying them....By the time 2012 came, I guess I thought I had lived in a very naïve world, and I knew lots of people. It baffled me that in an institution that knows lots of people, that people didn't know lots of people with different gender orientations [sic], do you know what I mean? So in my little world, I knew quite a few people and it upset my world at the time, more because I didn't understand it, but they were people I loved and they were happy and that was good. I guess I felt that the Church just didn't understand, do you know? And we had some courageous women in the congregation say, you know, "I'm a lesbian. I want you to know about this." I think people were both in awe of people's courage you know to do that, but also rather protective, like "Wait, she's one of us! You don't, nobody's gonna hurt her!" Do you know what I mean? I say all this, and the bottom line for me...was really, "We're just not gonna pay attention to the Church, the institution, man-made." And I had done that in my mind numerous times, you know, this is man-made, it's not flawless...if they knew my friends, they wouldn't want to isolate them, or in any way disenfranchise them from the Church they love. Many of them LOVE the Church, you know, which baffles me, considering how they're often treated.

Sister Moira is candid about her own lack of knowledge regarding sexual orientation, but she argues that unlike the institutional Church, her relationships with these people made the difference in her understanding. Sister Moira explicitly says that she will not uphold what she views as man-made rules, especially when they separate people from one another. Here, for Sister Moira, her congregation's mission and charism of unity and reconciliation trumps her institutional affiliation with the Catholic Church. She questions why some in the LGBT population stay committed to a Church where they are so unwelcome, but like Sister Mary Lynn who counseled the young women during her pregnancy, Sister Moira becomes the face of mercy and compassion to these people.

Sisters spoke to me about gay and lesbian members of their families, and even how they changed a few minds about sexuality. Like Sister Moira, Sister Mary Lynn stressed the need for the Church to actually get to know peoples' lived experiences, and listen to their stories before just dismissing them as "sinful." Sister Mary Lynn, who also ministered to LGBT Catholics shared a story of how she changed her mother's perspective on homosexuality. She said,

My experience is if it's only a concept, it's very easy for people to hold a very black and white concept of it. But once you meet persons, once you know their story, um, it's not. It was really interesting. I took my then 75-77-year-old mother over to one of the meetings and I introduced her to ...this one guy Paul, and he was a teacher, he was David's partner. And it was funny, Paul was Catholic and David was Episcopalian, he always said he was a JV Catholic, you know? So my mother met them and I was going home, and I said, "You know, would you want Paul to teach your children/grandchildren?" ...And she said, "Yeah, yeah." And I said "Can you imagine what it would be like if your relationship with my father was taboo and you weren't allowed to show anything?" And she was like, "Yeah, I get it." I mean it was amazing! And this was a woman who was a catechism Catholic –never worked outside the home, never drove a car, never finished high school –but her intuition in terms of relationships and

faith, she was like, “Well that’s not love.” [how the Catholic Church disregards homosexual relationships] And I’m like “Oh, ok mom. Well, that’s why I do this”

Sister Mary Lynn’s anecdote about her mother illustrates several themes around homosexuality that came up in my interviews. First, reflective of her congregation’s mission and charism, she highlights how being in relationship with people gives her perspective on their lives. The implication here is that Church leaders are too removed from the faithful to understand that most people’s lives do not neatly fall into the black and white categories that inform its dogma. She knows that what she is doing—here ministering to LGBT Catholics—is counter-cultural in the faith. Secondly, Sister Mary Lynn saw that there are some Catholics, in this case her mother, who perhaps too blindly accept the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, but with exposure to real people and with reasoned thought, they might broaden their perspectives. Sister Mary Lynn was delicate with her mother, using language and references to family that she knew her mother would respond to, thereby shepherding her along to a fuller understanding of love and respect for all people. By the end of the car ride, her mother realized that the rhetoric in her faith about love and respect is not always applied equally to all people, and that women religious and other progressive voices in the Church are trying to change this.

Other sisters responded to what they see as the Church’s incorrect position on ministering to LGBT persons by taking matters into their own hands. For instance, Sister Moira told me about a time that she went to mass at a local parish while she was on retreat with other sisters. She said,

And we all went to mass...and all this literature was out about the Church’s stand on homosexuality. And I can remember the church was packed. And I can remember we’re all standing, and I remember it

catching my eye and thinking, “This is awful! People are gonna take these home!” I remember taking a handful of them and thinking, “That’ll at least be 20 people [who] aren’t gonna read it.” And then [someone said] “Why are you taking so many?” [I replied] “I don’t want other people reading this!” Do you know? And we all walked out with bundles of these. Now, what was that gonna help? Nothing. But I remember thinking um, “I don’t want anybody hurting people for being true to who they are.”

Sister Moira recognized that stealing these pamphlets would not make an overall difference in the Church’s teaching, but she was moved to prevent that negative message from being spread to people in mass that day. She, like so many other sisters, is outraged by the dismissive way that the Church addresses homosexuality and found a small, subtle way to correct it, at least for one day.

One of the CDF’s criticism of American women religious was their support of New Ways Ministry, which supports inclusive ministry to LGBT Catholics. In the 2009 general chapter report, the congregation notes under a section on “Collaborative Efforts” that it endorsed the 2007 New Ways Ministry symposium, titled “Lesbian/Gay Catholics in a Sacramental Church.” Similarly, in the section on “Courageous Action,” the report cites a letter that the General Council sent to Archbishop Flynn of Minneapolis and Vatican officials “expressing deep concern about the denial of Eucharist at the New Ways Ministry Symposium.” Similarly, the report notes that in 2006, members of the General Council “individually contacted the Ordinaries of the arch/dioceses where our sisters live and work...discussed the issue of homosexuality and the priesthood, as well as pastoral regard for those with a homosexual orientation” (SSJ Archives). Like many justice issues for the congregation, in addition to outward actions like those taken by Sisters Mary Lynn and Moira, there was considerable internal action in the congregation in regard to homosexuality. The Sisters of St. Joseph mobilize dual strategies of action in

working for structural change in the Church: solo and small group actions by individual sisters, and larger unified acts, that while slower to manifest, ultimately ensure that the congregation moves forward with common voice.

The Sisters of St. Joseph and Women's Ordination

Unlike sexuality, the sisters I interviewed were more restrained in how they discussed women's ordination. Often, they couched their positions on the topic in broader, less specific language surrounding the "complementarity of gifts," how women need to have a full voice in the Church, and how all persons should be free to minister as they feel called to minister. Sister Anne Rita believes that about half of her congregation supports women's ordination. From my interviews, I suspect this number is probably higher, but there was a hesitance to call for ordination outright, likely due to the Church's ban on even discussing the topic. Again, women's ordination was more often grouped in with support for equal rights for women in the Church, and almost no sisters who I interviewed desired the priesthood for themselves. Questions about women's ordination typically elicited a response like Sister Jacqueline's,

[W]omen's ordination always comes up, people always ask about it. I think whoever is called to ministry should be able to minister how they feel called to. I know for myself, like I don't feel called to ordained ministry. Like I would love to preach on Sundays, but I don't know that I feel called to—it's not even a question of want—I don't feel called to be a priest. But if somebody is called to that, in the structures that we have, I would want them to be able to.

Sister Jacqueline does not want to be a priest, but she does not want the Church she loves to exclude other women who might feel called to that ministry.

Several sisters see women's ordination as a natural endpoint in a series of other steps along the way. Sister Mary Lynn feels that before the Church can address women

priests, “we have to answer the question of sexuality. I mean, we have some real basic things to do.” Other sisters pointed toward women deacons as lower hanging fruit, since there is significant historical evidence of deaconesses in the early Church. While the Church has been reluctant to pursue this, likely out of fear that it would create a slippery slope toward women in the priesthood, the sisters I interviewed were emboldened by Pope Francis’s 2016 call for a commission to study women deacons (McElwee 2016). For example, Sister Lucia said,

I would just like to see, you know I think, we were joking a little bit about the study being done on the diaconate and the women... And this is how nice our pastor is, he came over the Saturday morning after that was announced and brought a blue clerical shirt and said, “I just thought you’d want this when this is, you know...” So we all kinda had a you know, we were kinda teasing him about how I don’t know if we’re gonna be alive by the time the study’s finished... you know, and we said, “Now remember they did a study on birth control, and decided [to permit] birth control, and then they came out against birth control” so you know these committees can recommend all kinda things. So it may not happen, but I’d certainly like to see it evolve that way and hope that we can continue.

Sister Lucia expresses cautious optimism for women to be deacons, but also tempers this hope with the reality that progressive developments in the Church can take years and do not necessarily always get approved in the end.

Conclusion: “If Cardinal Kroll Could Sit with Me, We Could Understand Each Other!”

During our interview, in the statement above, Sister Moira summed up her frustrations with the patriarchal Church structure and laments her inability to speak face-to-face with its leaders. This sentiment is representative of the congregation’s overall perspective on women’s roles and lack of authority in the institutional Catholic Church. They are marginalized and prevented from assuming leadership positions, but at the same time are often the primary face of the Church for lay Catholics through their various

ministries. Sister Moira and other sisters note how when they get to know the everyday struggles that people face in their lives, their own perspectives are changed, and often this means that sisters respond in ways that do not neatly fit within the boundaries of strict Church teaching. With some exceptions, the Sisters of St. Joseph I interviewed generally believe that clergy are too removed from the people they serve, and thus are unable to meet their spiritual, human, and social needs. Thus, they see it as their responsibility as women religious step in to fill these gaps.

Most sisters believe that the Church needs to rethink its positions on sex and human sexuality, and some sisters do not believe the Church should even address these topics at all. Instead, they argue for more focus on socioeconomic inequality, war, and immigration. Until a time when sisters are provided equality in the Catholic Church with male clergy and when their congregation is a bolder, more radical voice for justice, many Sisters of St. Joseph are content to claim these spaces for themselves. Through individual strategies of action –like presiding over funerals, changing gender pronouns in liturgical music, and companioning people through times of crisis –they resist clergy where appropriate, but more often respond in subtler ways that meet the needs of the faithful but are less noticeable.

CHAPTER 6 A WHITE CONGREGATION, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

Introduction

The Sisters of St. Joseph went through significant internal deliberations to arrive at consensus for their first corporate stand against apartheid in 1988. Even though some sisters within the congregation needed persuasion, in many ways, this was a relatively easy justice decision for the community, as many other religious congregations had already taken public stands against apartheid. While my main research questions centered on gender, in my interviews, race emerged as an important topic for the Sisters of St. Joseph. However unlike apartheid, much of the discussion about race and ethnicity in my interviews was much closer to home and centered on their experiences teaching in inner city and rural schools on the east coast. As a predominantly white congregation who for decades taught the poor and marginalized, race was and continues to be a salient part of the everyday lived experience for many Sisters of St. Joseph.

In my interviews, the sisters shared with me their experiences with the Civil Rights Movement, hosting secret Black Panthers meetings, sneaking off to hear controversial speakers, and marching in Washington. Many remarked at how deeply they were affected by the assassinations of the 1960s, and how they found Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder especially troubling. They also shared with me the individual struggles they dealt with, occasionally being the only white face in a mostly black or Latino community, and how they recognized that despite good intentions, their own whiteness and privilege could be a barrier. Several sisters also told me about the difficult experiences they had living in local communities, and navigating challenging living situations where a few

sisters in the house might make racist or insensitive comments. In these stories, the sisters I spoke with pulled back a curtain to reveal the humanity of their congregation. They are good women, for sure, but they are not perfect women. Like all people, they have failings and like much of white America, they struggled to make meaning of the changing landscape of American society during and after the Civil Rights Movement. In the end, Vatican II's call to return to roots and focus on their original mission and charism brought the voices supporting racial unity and social justice to the fore. An emergent consciousness of their own marginality as women certainly allowed the sisters to recognize the structural factors that perpetuated racial inequality in the schools where they taught and the communities where they lived. As they spoke to me about these experiences, the sisters shed light on how their congregation and hundreds of other women religious were working on the front lines for racial justice but have gone largely unnoticed in American history.

Women Religious and the Civil Rights Movement

In her analysis of American women religious and the Civil Rights Movement, religion scholar Amy Koehlinger (2007), uses the term "racial apostolate" to encompass the work for racial justice that sisters did in response to the changes happening within the Catholic Church, their congregations, and secular society in the 1960s (12). Sisters who were emboldened to increase their ministerial and educational work with poor and marginalized populations after Vatican II were also faced with the realities of changing demographics in urban and suburban parishes. Koehlinger points out that white Catholics were

[r]iding the winds of postwar economic prosperity...achieved unprecedented levels of economic security in the 1950s and early 1960s...moved from traditional urban ethnic enclaves to burgeoning suburban neighborhoods, taking their parishes with them...forcing the sisters who staffed the schools...to also relocate to the suburbs (2007:10).

These moves led to troublesome segregation for many sisters, and congregations struggled to reconcile their privilege and complicity in this system with their missions of service. Koehlinger quotes Sister Mary Evangeline, a Sister of Mercy who wrote at the time saying, “I love the Church, but I’d also like to be able to respect it” (2007:10).

The Sisters of St. Joseph in Philadelphia experienced much of what Koehlinger (2007) describes. In Philadelphia, many neighborhoods dealt with white flight in the decades after World War II (Perkiss 2012), and although the Sisters of St. Joseph expanded their reach to suburban communities, they remained committed to the urban parochial schools that began to educate more non-Catholic students. Like the sisters Koehlinger (2007) writes about, some Sisters of St. Joseph sought out opportunities to work in poor, under-resourced schools with large minority populations, where their service was most needed. For instance, Sister Cora Rose told me about leaving a parish in a poor, largely white Philadelphia neighborhood for one in a poor black community. She said,

[W]hen I was at St. Mark’s, it was a very, very sad, depressed area. And, although I think the school may have been a beacon of hope, there were a lot of things that the pastor was not, certainly, and even our principal –it was one of our sisters –it was a very difficult experience. Umm...then I went to Sacred Heart parish...the people from St. Mark’s kept saying, “You’re going to work with black people, you don’t want to work with black people.” and I was like, “Yeah, I do want to work with black people.” And so that was a really good experience for me.

Sister Cora Rose explains how she left St. Mark's parish school because of the leadership there, including a member of her own congregation. She saw an opportunity to work with a black population at Sacred Heart parish, and she took it, despite the questions from her former parishioners. The members of both parishes likely had more in common with one another than they realized given their poverty, but racial differences trumped these class commonalities for the white parishioners at St. Mark's.

Sisters were finding their way through the tumultuous years during and after the Civil Rights Movement, balancing commitment to racial justice with heightened awareness of how it impacted their day to day lives. Some sisters reflected on their presence as white women in these predominantly black schools, and questioned whether or not they were actually helping. Best intentions aside, Sister Regina was conscious of her whiteness and the dangers of a "white savior" mentality. She put it this way,

I didn't understand this idea that people were lesser just because they were of a different color. And as I got to know other sisters and I worked for a time in Southwest Center City, at Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which was a black parish, and I watched, and the sisters and the teachers who looked at those kids and saw kids: their students flourished. You know? Haha. And the ones who looked at them and thought, "Oh, the poor little..." their students didn't flourish, and it was eye opening.

Sister Regina recognized how a patronizing attitude from some sisters in her congregation did a disservice to the students they taught. But Sister Regina's suggestion that some sisters were colorblind also indicates an evolving understanding of race within congregation. Similarly, Sister Jane Katherine shared,

My first mission was in West Philly... it was an interesting experience, because the school wasn't totally black, it was a combination of black and white and I remember two little first graders one time. One was white and one was black, and one said, "Sister, she's just like me except my socks" – they didn't see color.

Sister Jane Katherine notes that the students “didn’t see color,” but this likely also reflects her own developing understanding of race. Sociologist Howard Winant (2000) argues that the popularity of late-twentieth century race colorblindness trades on ideas that racial justice has been achieved, but ignores the social, cultural, and political effects of sustained racial inequality. Moreover, political sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2014) explains that post-civil rights conceptions of colorblindness are favored by whites to avoid critical personal reflection about whiteness and privilege and how they contribute to racial inequality. Education scholar Marianne Modica (2015) contends that for teachers, colorblindness in the classroom prevents opportunities to address racial inequality and does not end racism, but potentially increase the likelihood of racial inequality in the future. Sisters Regina and Jane Katherine shed light on how the Sisters of St. Joseph—a congregation of mostly white women—were not shielded from the changing racial landscape in America, but in fact were especially impacted Philadelphia’s racial dynamics because of their ministry in its schools.

Racial Difficulties in the Congregation

The Sisters of St. Joseph remained committed to teach in schools with high minority populations while at the same time navigating racial politics of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and in their own congregation. Some sisters shared with me how they would overhear racist language in some of their local convents, and struggled to reconcile this mentality with their own personal beliefs and the mission of their congregation. For instance, Sister Regina again,

The assassination of Martin Luther King. Um, I was a novice [sister in the initial stages of formation]. We were sent out on what they called

“observation.” So we were sent out to a local convent somewhere where we were gonna watch sisters in the classroom. I happened to go to a convent in North Jersey... On that week, I was there in the community room with sisters I didn't really know when the news came of the assassination. I'm sorry to say that one of the reactions in the room was “Good” because they thought he was dangerous, communist, what have you. I was almost sick to my stomach. I thought, “What are you joining?” haha. “What is this?” And then I realized that was one person and not, eh, nobody really stood up to her because I think she was somebody who had some power in that local community, but there was, there were other looks of shock. And that said to me, “Ok, the Sisters of St. Joseph are a really human institution too.” But this is such a time of turmoil in the country, and you have to figure out where you stand on this. And I knew where I stood and I was for Civil Rights.

Sister Regina's experience of overhearing another sister seemingly find relief in King's assassination were jarring for her and for other sisters in the room, but that sister's position of power in the local community likely prevented confrontation on the issue. Sister Regina's words about how the Sisters of St. Joseph are a “human institution” are especially poignant here, as they speak to the individual human frailties that exist in the congregation. As I explored how the community decided on strategies for supporting social justice in the decades after Vatican II in chapter four, this experience highlights how not all sisters were completely on board with civil rights and racial justice.

Sister Madeline told me about a similar experience. Having spent a number of years as a young sister working in a racially diverse parish in Philadelphia's inner city, she found moving to a more rural community to be eye-opening. Up until that time, her experience was mostly with like-minded sisters focused on social justice and progressive ideals. She remembers,

I left teaching school, grade school, and worked for [social services organization] and lived at the shore. So that was interesting. I lived with a lot of older, older sisters. It was a bigger house. Uh, they were more traditional kind of sisters, you know, it wasn't this inner city group.

Different. Inner city is its own thing ha, which I loved. This is different. I mean, nice women, all of that, I don't know...I mean we lived community life, said prayers all the time, ate together, you know it was school ministry, hospice work, me, somebody did something else there, but that kinda was a traditional school house: a grade school and a high school...I was there for 4 years...It was different for me though. I knew I was in a different house from these inner city houses I had experienced, it was different. It was traditional, it was, you know? Sisters would say things that sometimes I'd hear in the kitchen like, "Don't say that in front of [me]" [softly] Racist things. Because they knew I worked in the inner city, they'd say, "You know, she's for them. She's for them. Don't say that in front of her." I'd be sitting reading the paper in the community room, but you know, it was a good lesson for me in terms of what I had heard people in my, who I had entered with, talk about. I didn't have an experience of that, but then I did living there. It was just different. Again, nice women, but it was more that feel of how everything else was apparently.

Comments like "Don't say that in front of her" and "She's for them" indicate the spectrum of perspectives on race within the congregation at the time. For Sister Madeline, moving out of the inner city took her further away from other sisters like herself who confronted racial inequality. Her everyday work with minority populations in her ministry in Philadelphia became part of her identity as a woman during the post-Civil Rights Movement, as well as her identity as a Sister of St. Joseph. She remarks that she heard about experiences like this from her peers, but this was the first time she experienced them herself. The implication is that at time, sisters who were further removed from this work, either geographically or socially, were less likely to be supportive of racial justice. I suggest that Sister Madeline's use of words like "traditional" and "different" to describe the house where she heard this language are coded words for the subtle forms of the colorblind racism that Bonilla-Silva (2014) describes. Further, she notes several times that they were "older women," "nice women," but also changes her tone to a whisper when she says how they said "racist things." Sister

Madeline is clearly embarrassed by these comments and unsightly examples of insidious racism that she witnessed in her congregation, but at the same time tries to point to things like age to explain it away. Bonilla-Silva calls examples like these “racism light. Instead of name calling, color-blind racism otherizes softly” (2014:3). While it was evident to me that these incidents were rare, they impacted the sisters I interviewed enough for them to bring them up in the interviews.

Sisters, Civil Rights and Activism

As the congregation wrestled with questions of institutional identity after Vatican II, these dissenting voices became even more marginalized as concerns for social justice moved to the fore. Mostly, sisters shared with me how they personally worked for racial justice, or how sister friends of theirs did. Koehlinger (2007) writes that sisters in the racial apostolate emerged as ideologies of black power were gaining popularity in the United States, and a few Sisters of St. Joseph in Philadelphia had firsthand experience with this form of activism in the 1960s. For example, Sister Mary Lynn told me,

There was no one more um, holy, pastoral, open, supportive than [priest at parish in West Philadelphia]. That was like just incredible. We were all in it, we were all in it together. We were, I mean we were meeting with the Black Panthers in the rectory basement, haha you know? We had a black and white exchange with a parish near West Philly. You know, walk a mile in my shoes, it was near the time of the riots in ‘68.

Sister Mary Lynn’s experience is an example of the sisters working in partnership with politically-minded clergy who offered parish buildings as safe spaces for groups like the Black Panthers. Similarly, Sister Regina remembered,

I was pretty conscious of the whole turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement and when we had the riots in Camden, I had a friend who was in Camden at the time, and her story of [how] they tied some kind of cloth on the outside of the convent, and it protected them. It was the neighbors [who]

gave them this, this was the signal, “We like you. Nobody touches you.” And they didn’t. Haha. Which, you know later when we learned about the history of the congregation and the stories of the French officials coming in to throw the sisters out of the convent, and the neighbors saying, “No, no! They teach us how to do weaving, and we need them!” I said, “OK, parallel!” You know? This is what we’re meant to do. We’re meant to help people and to treat people as people, and that is the message of Jesus. And that is in the midst of all this turmoil and change, that’s affecting our Church, our country, our world. That’s how you make it come out right.

Sister Regina’s story of the sisters’ convent being protected during Camden’s race riots is notable for several reasons. First, Sister Regina is clear that the local community instructed the sisters to display the cloth symbol on the convent so that they would not be targeted, reflecting the trust and respect that the locals had for the sisters. The sisters were neighbors not interlopers, and the community responded in kind by protecting them from harm. Secondly, she is able to connect this incident to a similar one in the congregation’s history during the French Revolution. Early Sisters of St. Joseph made and sold lace to sustain themselves and their varied ministries to the sick and poor, a trade that they also taught the locals (Vacher 2010). Sister Regina recognized how when French officials came to find and displace these sisters, it was the community members who spoke out in their defense. She saw the similarity as more than just coincidence, and instead metaphor for how her congregation is meant to immerse itself into communities that others abandoned.

In most cases, this commitment to communities came as teachers. A teaching congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph are legendary for educating tens of thousands of Philadelphians over the past 150 years. As the talents of sisters in the community expanded through education and experience, many sisters pushed the congregation for

ways to improve the communities where they served beyond teaching. For instance, Sister Susan said,

I went to St. Maximillian parish, which was a difficult transition for me, you know, because a new population: all African American students...I think it was one of the best experiences in my life because it was a chance to live with that diversity and to um, you know um, I eventually got onto an inner city committee. You know, we were trying to look at what was really going on, you know how we could really help because we could see that just teaching grade school was not doing the work. I think this was like when things began to um, "Are we really doing the right ministry just by being in school? There's more that needs to be done." And a friend of mine and I wrote a proposal for the chapter right after that, you know, asking for more resources and different approaches and that was a good experience for me too, you know, just to think about what was needed...the experience was very good for me to think through the problems and uh, what more could be done. So I think you know, in that case we did this little tiny bit, and somebody else was doing a little teeny bit, and eventually we began to see that we needed to do something more and things began to change.

At first, Sister Susan was challenged going into an all-black school, but looking back, she now sees it as one of the best experiences of her life because of the diversity. Her eyes were opened to the structural issues of poverty and inequality facing this community, and she used her voice on a congregational committee to propose changes in ministry. Sister Susan's immersion in the community made her realize that her congregation's teaching ministry was not enough to meet the needs of those they served.

Like other justice issues, as sisters were on the front lines finding strategies to meet the needs of the poor, the congregation as a whole was evolving behind the scenes. For instance, in 1968's directory, the congregation writes that the general chapter affirmed, "realizing racial tensions in the world, the sisters foster in themselves and in their students a deep understanding of the brotherhood of all men in Christ" (SSJ Archives). Likewise, 1979's Corporate Ecclesial Commitment to People document

charted a vision for the future of the congregation as it renewed its dedication to those whom they served, with special attention to reparations for social sins. In 1992, the Racism Subcommittee of the Commission for Justice guided the congregation in understanding its complicity in structures that perpetuate racism and ways to seek forgiveness and conversation. For the 1999 general chapter, the Sisters of St. Joseph prepared a state of the union-type document for all sisters called “*A Critical Juncture: Assessing the Viability of Religious Institutes*.” The self-reflective document is broad in scope, covering everything from mission and leadership, to human and financial resources. In a section acknowledging challenges for the congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph note, “As women who desire to *stand with marginalized persons*, we are challenged by our own racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and other barriers to *servicing the dear neighbor without distinction*” (SSJ Archives) [emphasis in original]. Along with what the sisters shared with me in interviews, these writings demonstrate that the congregation was acknowledging what it calls “social sins” and was actively engaging in processes to eliminate these barriers to living the fullness of its mission. Though the Sisters of St. Joseph were committed to working with black and other minority populations, they recognized that as women of considerable privilege, they were not immune to institutional and individual biases.

Race and Ethnicity Outside of Philadelphia

While much of the Sisters of St. Joseph’s experience with race was in Philadelphia, the congregation had a significant presence in the southern United States in the latter half of the twentieth century. A few of the sisters I interviewed were missioned there for a number of years, and they shared with me their experiences as “white city

girls” living and working in the rural, recently desegregated south. For instance, Sister Donna Maria, who spent several years teaching in the south, told me about going to an ordination of a black priest. She said,

So here we went, we were invited to his ordination—he was a black priest—in the south and this is the early 70s. So we went to his ordination and then we went to his celebration afterwards, and it was in a country club in [a nearby city] and when he was giving the toast, he said, “I was refused entrance to this country club when I was a teenager.” And he said “I am so happy to be here celebrating with all of you.” Well, it was so moving for me. To be walking in his shoes and there were the gospel choir, he had them there, his father wasn’t Catholic, but the gospel choir was there celebrating it. It was a grand time, but I thought, “You’re not in Kansas anymore, this is a whole new world.”

Sister Donna Maria grew up in the Philadelphia area and had never spent a significant amount of time in a rural area. She had likely been to many ordinations before, but she was struck by the joyful atmosphere where rituals and other forms of non-Catholic worship were welcomed. She went on to describe several other experiences of how being in the minority status made her reconsider her own identity as a white woman and Catholic. She shared a story of accompanying a Vietnamese immigrant to her American husband’s wake after his sudden death. She remembered,

We go to the wake and the father of the guy in the coffin threw his body across the coffin because Catholics came in, these Catholic sisters came into the wake. And he said, “Get out! Get out!” He didn’t have to tell me twice, I said, “I’m outta here.” You know, it was a whole understanding of prejudice that I never experienced being a white female, you know? When I was in a world that was very Catholic, and very familiar to me, and where I was loved and known. So it was very interesting to walk that walk of “How does it feel to be treated this way all the time?” So there were some major lessons for me at that time in there. I was there five years, and the whole time I was there I studied at [two universities], but the most interesting place I studied was a [Historically Black College & University]. And...there, not only was I white, I was in this full habit at 4:00 in the afternoon. So I get to my class and it was a big lecture hall, it was Western Civ., I can still remember. And all these guys are there, and

they were pleasant. You know I'm smiling at everybody, and what I'm realizing, here are BIG guys, and here was the football team—they were all the athletes that were in this class, and they had note takers with them. So this [coach] was determined these kids were gonna get an education, which I admired him for. So the teacher comes in and he's white, so I'm like, "This is really interesting." ...So after class he calls me up and said, "Sister, I think you would be much more challenged by my class in the morning if you wanted to, you know, change class to the morning." and I said, "Well, unless I can bring 45 8th graders, that's not happening." But it was again, it was interesting. I thought, "This is the lesson I need to be paying attention to.... What does it feel like to be different?" You know, none of this sounds like it's related to God, but it all is in the sense that the grace that throughout my life God offered me invitations. They were always invitations to stretch and to grow and to learn.

Sister Donna Maria remembers the first anti-Catholic bias she experienced, along with being a white sister in religious habit in a lecture hall at an HBCU. In reflecting on these experiences, she realizes now that these were invitations to be mindful of her own status and privilege. They stretched her and she grew into a fuller version of her identity as a Sister of St. Joseph because of them.

Similarly, Sister Alice spent many years in the Washington D.C. metro area, working in racially and culturally integrated communities during the Civil Rights Movement. She remembers these experiences fondly, but like Sister Donna Maria, she was very conscious of her whiteness. She recalled,

I think the Civil Rights Movement has left an impact on me. Yeah. I've always tried to, umm, find ways to stand with, especially the African American community because they're the ones I've been with the most. At Saint Paul's and then when I was at the hospital. Most of my dealings, but not all, were with African Americans, I mean other than people of European decent, were African Americans. And, umm, I've, until I came to Philadelphia, I've always tried to live in a mixed community because that is where my heart is. But in Philadelphia, I came here to Saint Margaret's, which is relatively poor.... But when I was down in Washington...I always tried to be in a mixed community and that was part of the, for me, the civil rights. Part of my way of standing with them, and living with them. In fact, I was at lunch in the hospital one day, and the

doctor, it was an African American doctor, a Jewish social worker, and myself. And the African American doctor was saying “Alice, you are the only one that lives with my people.”...I said, that’s what I want to do. And it just hit her that I was out there and umm, then we had a Martin Luther King Jr. celebration at the hospital. And our student was African American so she was organizing it and she handed me the Klan robe and I said, “Excuse me, I can’t even touch this, it’s so repulsive to me.” She said, “You’re the only one in this whole hospital who I can give this too.” And I said, “I don’t know if I can stand up there and hold this, I really don’t.” It was so repugnant. So I guess the Civil Rights Movement has always been a key, key to my, and when I finish and retire from [my current ministry], I would like to go back and work with a multicultural, in a multicultural setting. Because that’s what I, that’s where my heart is.

Sister Alice remembers being one of the only white people in the hospital where she worked, and because of this master status, was called upon to wear a Klan robe in a Martin Luther King Jr. assembly. She recounts her visceral reaction to the robe, and to the implication that she would even consider wearing it to play a role in the assembly. Her current ministry has her in a predominantly white environment, but it is clear that her commitment is still to communities with persons of color, where she hopes to return in the future.

Unconventional Missionaries

While some, like Sisters Donna Maria and Alice, spent many years away from Chestnut Hill, for the most part, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia have been missioned in urban communities in the Philadelphia region. Until the past 40 years, relatively few sisters served outside of the United States. Unlike many of their contemporary religious congregations with long legacies as missionaries, the Sisters of St. Joseph’s international missionary work is strikingly limited in scope. Some sisters in the congregation traveled to frontier lands in America in the 19th and early 20th centuries,

but it was not until after Vatican II that the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia undertook an expressed commitment to serve the needs of those in the developing world.

I found it surprising then, how many sisters told me that they considered missionary work, and especially in how several considered joining the Maryknoll community prior to entering the Sisters of St. Joseph. The Maryknoll sisters are a missionary community of religious sisters, and,

[a]s missionaries, we cross geographic boundaries engaging and valuing diversities of cultures, societies, races and religions. We seek to respond to the hungers and needs of the times: human trafficking, immigration issues, ecological concerns, peace, spiritual hunger and reconciliation. We offer our talents and expertise while being life-long learners and collaborators with the people to whom we go. We express our vocation through our presence and services as medical professionals, teachers, theologians, social workers, pastoral ministers, journalists, therapists, promoters of peace and trauma healing, supporters of indigenous rights, artists, earth and cosmic care advocates, community developers, and partners in prayer. Our Sisters come from 30 countries and serve in 24 nations around the world (Maryknoll Sisters 2017).

There are certainly overlaps in the types of ministry work for the two congregations, but their primary locations of service are quite different. When I asked the sisters I interviewed about their vocation calling and formation experiences, several spoke about their desire to do missionary work. For example, Sister Moira remembered discerning her vocation during the tumultuous 1960s and early 1970s,

I remember so clearly dreaming with people about “Well, what could it be?” You know, in a sense “How can we change the world?” Now again, I was a child of the 60s, do you know? Coming out of like “What is there to protest?” do you know? What can we protest here? There’s gotta be something! Haha. But there was, society was ripe for new dreams because there had been so much devastation with the Vietnam war, Watergate had just happened, do you know? So many, so many things had happened, that you wanted to be part of a new world and um...there were endless possibilities, and always for me, um, that missionary call...it always baffles me that I landed in a congregation that really didn’t have any

missions haha, do you know? Like this is kind of a funny thing! But that desire to be with people who are poor, that desire to um, not just to sacrifice in being there, but to embrace it and um, you know I had had snippets of service projects and different things, and it captured my heart. Do you know, that's where I wanted to be.

Sister Moira was fascinated with the idea that she could spend her life living with and serving the poor through her religious vocation. Spurred by her activist spirit, she sought out opportunities to protest injustice, and years later, she is surprised that this passion did not lead her to a missionary congregation. Other sisters had similar desires, but for one reason or another, they did not pursue this call to a missionary congregation. Sister Mary Lynn's reasons were practical,

Actually I wanted to be a missionary, but every time there was an opportunity to do missionary service in high school in the summers, I either didn't have the money or didn't know the language. So I was poor and spoke German instead of Spanish haha. So that uh, that didn't, it just didn't happen, so I just thought, "Well, it's not meant to be."

Sister Annette applied to do volunteer service with the Maryknolls in their lay mission program before entering the Sisters of St. Joseph, but she was denied. She remembers,

I applied with the Maryknoll Mission. I had a class when I was in college, I guess I was maybe a sophomore in college, and...I was gonna like save the world. So I applied to Maryknoll and...I didn't get accepted...actually, and I was so disappointed.

Sister Annette was inspired by a college lesson to pursue missionary work, but she was not accepted to the program, to her great disappointment. Sister Doris's interest in the Maryknolls actually surfaced while she was already a professed Sister of St. Joseph. She told me,

And Maryknoll. Maryknoll. The Maryknoll came...much later, but that was at a time when I felt we were not doing enough for social justice, and at that time, [Superior General] said, "Well I think it's time for you to have a renewal as a Sister of St. Joseph." And at that time...I did a

monthly renewal with the Sisters of St. Joseph, it was called “Light Program” and it absolutely spirited me as a Sister of St. Joseph. I didn’t go to Maryknoll.

Sister Doris’s is candid about questioning her vocation because of what she felt was her community’s lack of focus on social justice. When she expressed this to congregational leadership, the Superior General at the time suggested that she have her own period of individual renewal. Sister Doris credits this experience with reenergizing her as a Sister of St. Joseph, and in preventing her from leaving the congregation for the Maryknoll community.

While definitely not a defining characteristic of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, this missionary spirit can be traced back to the congregation’s founding in France. In 1836, Mother St. John Fontbonne, who refounded the Sisters of St. Joseph in Lyon after the French Revolution, sent six missionary sisters to the United States to Carondolet in the newly-formed St. Louis diocese (Coburn and Smith 1999:38). One of these women, Mother St. John Fournier, who herself was called to religious life as a missionary, responded to the need for religious sisters in Philadelphia, and led a group of four sisters to found the Philadelphia community in 1847 (Logue 1950; Kasuba 1999). Four years later in 1851, she left Philadelphia to work in the upper Midwest, in St. Paul, Minnesota (Coburn and Smith 1999). In their analysis of religious sisters and American culture, Carol Coburn and Martha Smith (1999) argue that the roles of women religious in the American frontier lands are critical to understanding the interaction of gender, ethnicity, class, and religion. They write, “American sisters were some of the first white women brought in to ‘civilize’ newly forming towns and other areas of settlement” (Coburn and Smith 1999:98).

The Sisters of St. Joseph grew from their original settlements in Carondolet and Philadelphia, to the urban Midwest in St. Paul, Minnesota and Kansas City, Missouri. From there, they expanded to the American west, with communities forming in Arizona, California, and Colorado (Coburn and Smith 1999). In the southwest, the Sisters of St. Joseph primarily served as missionaries on Native American reservations, work that Coburn and Smith (1999) argue was part of their original mandate upon arriving in the United States, but that was woefully underfunded. Despite the help of millions of dollars from Philadelphia's St. Katherine Drexel, heiress to the Drexel family fortune, the Sisters of St. Joseph and other women's religious congregations working with native populations barely had enough resources to sustain themselves and those whom they served (Coburn and Smith 1999). Faced with geographic and environmental challenges, along with bureaucratic obstacles from Washington, the Sisters of St. Joseph committed themselves to educating children and providing humanitarian service to Native American peoples. Coburn and Smith (1999) contend,

Although the devastating impact of federal policy and the ethnocentricity of whites cannot be denied, the [Sisters of St. Joseph] had strived to do and be what their religious ideals had required of them. Their vows and their sense of charity, particularly in humanitarian assistance, guided their actions; and although they certainly made every attempt to indoctrinate the native peoples in white culture and religion, they also made extraordinary attempts to support and assist them, particularly during times of illness and suffering (118).

The authors concede that the sisters had goals of evangelization and assimilation for the native populations, but that they also went to great lengths to learn about and participate in Native American culture. Apart from these missionary works in the American frontier lands in the nineteenth century though, for the most part as a congregation in the United

States, the Sisters of St. Joseph focused on serving people in urban areas where they had Motherhouses.

Sisters Respond to International Calls

In 1961 however, Pope St. John XXIII challenged communities of religious men and women to commit 10 percent of their personnel to serve the poor in Latin America, which generated significant interest in missionary work in Central and South America (Hartch 2012). At the same time, as numbers of women entering religious communities were on the decline in the United States (Johnson et al. 2014), they were increasing significantly in the global south and developing world. Sociologists Helen Rose Ebaugh, Jon Lorence, and Janet Saltzman Chafetz (1996) attribute this trend to industrialization and social-structural changes leading to upward mobility, with the Church affording opportunities for women not available elsewhere. Historian Anne O'Brien (2016) argues that these stark changes in vocations also directly contributed to the Vatican's 2012 rebuke of American women religious. Further, historian of black women religious Shannen Dee Williams writes that at the turn of the twenty-first century, Africa supplanted Latin America as the center of the black Catholic Church, and "in the minds of many world observers established itself as the future of the [C]hurch...home to more than two hundred million Catholics, up from 55 million in 1978" (2015:506).

The Carondolet branch of the Sisters of St. Joseph responded almost immediately to Pope St. John XXIII's call and sent 14 sister nurses and teachers to Peru. The congregation still has a presence in the country today, as 25 sisters continue this work in Lima, Tacna, Iquitos, and Cusco, Peru (Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondolet 2016). The Philadelphia congregation, always slower to respond to calls for change than their peers,

had very few sisters working internationally until the 1980s. Even then, the congregation's missionary sisters were significantly fewer than those in other congregations. Though the sisters I interviewed rarely gave reasons for this beyond statements like "we are not a missionary congregation," I suggest that their deepening influence in the lives of the Catholic faithful in Philadelphia likely prevented them from responding more fully to calls for international work.

Some Sisters of St. Joseph did serve as international missionaries however, and the congregation supported them through their preparation, service, and in their return. In a letter dated October 21, 1982, the congregation's General Council issued a call for sisters to apply to for missioning in the Third World. Thirty-three sisters responded to need, and ultimately five were selected. The sisters accepted into this ministry participated in a 3-phase Orientation to Cross-Cultural Ministry program, directed by the Maryknoll Center for Mission Studies. Following this period of preparation, sisters traveled to El Salvador, Liberia, the Philippines, and Peru. A similar call was made again in 1990, and in the last two decades, sisters have been missioned to many countries, including Tanzania, South Africa, Guatemala, Panama, and Haiti. One of the sisters I interviewed spent several years missioned in the developing world. To protect her anonymity, I choose not to identify her or her location, but she shared,

I spent eight years in [international ministry]. It was a 10-year period, and that again was another experience of diversity, of learning to be in the not the major culture and deal with differences in culture and I think it was really good. It was wonderful too because people are so warm. And I think I learned a lot from the experience as well as hopefully helping out

This sister spoke about the transitions that she experienced being in the non-dominant culture, and understanding diversity in a new way. She remembered her time in

international ministry fondly, but it was how she integrated these experiences back in Philadelphia that transformed her and her community most. She continued,

I was coming back from [international ministry] and I, you know, did a few things on the way back, you know, I worked in a refugee camp for six weeks and you know, that kinda thing and I thought that was really important...I really was very interested in the change and I worked on committees, and you know, way back we asked the question, “Whom do we serve?” I worked on the questions that were used, you know, in the Centers for Corporate Reflection that we have and those things were really good. In the beginning the CCR was a really dynamic creative, wonderful process. We asked really important questions like you know, we knew something had to give...it was like a next step. We’re saying, “What’s going on here?” And then we say, “Well, whom do we serve and how do we do it?” These kinds of questions, so that was good. You know, I felt like I participated but I was kinda like in the background of all these kinds of things...when I was in [international ministry] it was justice, but it was different. And then I saw justice from a whole other perspective because people were, you know, you were right in the midst. The squatter areas were there and you could see how people really lived with almost nothing, or one thing of rice a day. Uhhh my goodness, you know, what do you do about this? But I think that was a good preparation for that you know, it all works together. Um, so yea. So that was another piece of being involved in changing the, or I guess maybe more moving, not so much changing culture, but moving into you know what I would see as a better way for us: the activities, you know, the kinds of activities that religious should be doing instead of just staying in the cloister.

For this sister, the process of reintegrating into her community in Philadelphia was just as transformative for her as her international ministry. When she and her peers returned to the congregation in Philadelphia, they brought with them challenging questions about organizational identity and direction. She likens these discussions in the Centers for Corporate Reflection to similar, and likely simultaneous, conversations about the community’s cultural shift toward more active social justice ministry. Her use of the word “cloister” here is important, as it reflects the frustration that many sisters shared with me about the congregation’s monastic tendencies before and just after Vatican II.

This sister and several others who I interviewed wished their community would respond more quickly to the changing needs of the Church and world, and particularly to the people they serve.

Recommitment to Philadelphia's Parishes

So, while some sisters served in the developing world, the vast majority continued their ministry in the Philadelphia area. In fact, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Sisters of St. Joseph doubled-down on their commitment to the poor and marginalized, even as the Catholic Church was abandoning these communities. For example, Sister Moira told me about a series of paradoxical experiences she had working in Philadelphia's inner city. On the one hand, she experienced overwhelming unity at the local parish level, in her words what "Church could be," but this was countered by significant disillusionment with the diocese. She begins her story being surprised by her reassignment to teach 6th grade in West Philadelphia, when up to that point she had always taught 1st grade. She said,

Well, the Church, um...I was sent...to a school in West Philly...I was trying to figure out where I would be going so anyway, the change list came out and sister wrote: "St. Michael the Archangel, 6th grade." 6th grade? And immediately somebody said "No, I think that's a mistake. St. Michael the Archangel closed." And I was like, "It closed?!" Do you know? And it's 6th grade! It's not following the rules, like what happened? And I remember um, going to see St. Michael the Archangel – which was in fact still open at that moment –going into West Philadelphia and arriving in the schoolyard. It was in June, the kids were there, but you could tell it was end of school activities and there was all kinds of activities, the convent door was wide open, people were in and out – the kids had all these projects...The priests in the parish were in the schoolyard, and I remember getting caught up in the energy of it. "Wherever this is, this is great!" because I had been living a very um, regulated schedule for four years...I was going for 6th grade, which was disastrous for me, um, and yet, being there changed my life. Like being there, the Church, the diocese, closed the parish, and that was one of the

first big closings. The other thing that happened in the Church in West Philadelphia at that time, is the parishes all came together once a month – the people who ministered—it was called the “Ministerium.” So the priests and sisters gather and once a month, you’d have prayer, and you’d bring a brown bag lunch, and you’d talk about, maybe there’d be a speaker, and you’d just talk about something.

Sister Moira was surprised to find out she would be teaching 6th grade, but she was energized by the bustling atmosphere of her new West Philadelphia assignment. She paints a picture of inclusion, where the priests, sisters, and other religious in the community from several parishes come together once a month to discuss the needs of their people. Like other sisters who spoke about positive experiences with clergy who not only appreciated the contributions of women religious, but encouraged it, Sister Moira thrived in this environment. She continued,

Well I arrived into this hotbed of upset because there’s concern that “a parish” is gonna close—which one is it? St. Michael the Archangel by far had the fewest kids in school, so there was often, we were often the topic of “How are we gonna fight this?!” You know, “We’ll get everyone together and fight.” And there was letter writing, and that had been going on for a couple years with the whole West Philly scene. By the time I got there, it was pretty much zeroing in on St. Michael the Archangel, but consequently, the Church in West Philadelphia was this alive committed body that supported each other, that, you weren’t like just left in your little parish, you were part of a bigger, a bigger Church, that for me, uh, was an example of what could be. All the while, it’s being pulled out from under you. I remember the letter came on Good Friday and it was such a big to-do, that it was such a big thing, that sisters from the Motherhouse, you know, our administration came down, you know because this is such a terrible thing, everyone in West Philly, you know, all the priests and sisters came to be supportive and um, yea... You were the poster folks for, you were the victims of the Church’s inability for being able to see a bigger picture.... Cardinal Kroll was in office at the time, and I remember saying to someone, “Well you know, maybe if we could just meet with him? And you know talk with him. Maybe he just doesn’t understand all the good going on here.” I remember saying, “I wonder if we could just write to him and just ask to maybe meet for coffee.” Now, again, now I realize how silly this sounds but when I was young and changing the world, I thought this was the way to go. “We could just meet with him and

share with him and just explain to him all the wonderful things that go on!” And I remember a priest who worked not at St. Michael’s said, “What makes you think he would ever meet with you?” and I can remember being shocked that he wouldn’t want to meet with me, you know? I just never thought about that!...so it began a period of disillusionment for me haha. I remember I wrote to him and you know I got a very like I want to say curt, but probably the standard “Thank you for your letter.” I was like, “Thank you for your letter?! Like what time are we meeting?” Haha

Sister Moira describes how in her idealism, she was rallying the parishioners in a letter-writing campaign to save St. Michael the Archangel parish. In her perspective, the lively community in West Philadelphia was held together by the Church’s presence. She felt that she was part of something bigger than herself. In retelling this story, her enthusiasm in supporting the people and everyone in the community supporting each other was palpable. Galvanized by this momentum, Sister Moira thought the next logical step was to have a reasoned, evidence-based discussion with Cardinal Kroll and diocesan leaders. She just needed to make Philadelphia’s Church officials see that they were clearly making a mistake, and then everyone could put this little unfortunate mix-up behind them and continue about their business. As she describes in self-conscious hindsight, Sister Moira realizes now how “silly” she was to think that the Cardinal would care to speak with her, a realization pointed out to her at the time by a priest friend.

After St. Michael’s in West Philadelphia, Sister Moira had a nearly identical experience at a parish in North Philadelphia. A few years older and certainly more cynical, Sister Moira describes her time at St. Catherine of Sienna parish. She recalls,

So I left there, and I went to St. Catherine of Sienna which is in North Philadelphia and um, again, there was the energy in North Philadelphia, kind of a duplicate of West Philadelphia, a little different. People who were there, priests and sisters who had been in North Philadelphia were deeper into the disillusionment than my friends in West Philadelphia. Like

it was more alive in North Philly. North Philly was tougher, I'd say in um, they had been hit harder when the gangs and the race riots erupted. North Philly was hit harder...but I was there for six years. And in my six years... places closed. So it was like the heaviness of closing, and then St. Catherine of Sienna closed, do you know what I mean? So then it was like almost the doom of inner city places and it wasn't just white flight of folks leaving African American—as African Americans arrived, it was watching the Church flee, which was, you know, didn't fit in my, again my desire for this missionary world that I think we're all, I think this is what it's about, do you know?...I [went back to school and] got a Master's in Social Work, but my hope was then to work in a school. Well nobody at that time would pay you to do that, so there was no funding at all, but I could wiggle into it. There was a program, to Cardinal Kroll's credit, a program called "Parish Social Ministry," which in poorer places, the diocese would provide a person and they would do social ministry that would vary in each parish...and I went to St. Geoffrey's in Kensington to do that. And um, certainly there was a food pantry, there was um, again now there's a different dynamic because now, [I am] out of the African American world, and I'm in a poor white...creeping into this world were all the African American and all the Latinos that kind of were coming. So there's a Spanish mass...People didn't know this tiny place as a haven. So I was able to do some work in school, worked in the parish, it was great. And then you paid your dues. You'd have to go down once a month to the diocesan office and participate in whatever the programming was so that you could then go back, you know, to wherever you were from. Um, but it was a great program, now that's all but gone now. That moved on. That was no longer seen as worthwhile, a lot of money-driven things. You know, again, I'm becoming very skeptical of "Follow the money." The money was no longer in the inner city, so we weren't gonna follow it as a Church, you know. Now that's what it appeared, now everybody would tell you "No," but...

In her retelling of this story of her time in North Philadelphia, Sister Moira describes how racial boundaries in the inner city began to expand from white and black, to also include Latino persons. She acknowledges white flight, but she is most disheartened because she saw the Church leaving the inner city as well. With the support of her congregation, Sister Moira pursued a graduate degree to contribute more to her local parish community in North Philadelphia that was becoming increasingly alienated. For a brief time, she participated in a diocesan program that provided a social worker for poorer parishes,

despite her mild annoyance at having to “pay her dues” by attending diocesan-sponsored lectures and events. However, a lack of funding meant that this program was short-lived. Here, Sister Moira’s cynicism with the Archdiocese comes through the clearest. Her experiences in three of Philadelphia’s poorest communities—West Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, and Kensington—led her to conclude that the institutional Church was operating too much like a business in deciding which parishes to close and which to maintain. In her view, the Church was “following the money,” which meant leaving the parishes with decreasing viability where she and other sisters were ministering.

Sister Moira continued to work in mixed-race communities in inner city Philadelphia for the next couple of decades. She shared with me a few other stories of cultural experiences where she learned from the people she served, which further integrated her into these communities. Sister Moira’s story is not unique, and several other sisters shared related experiences with me about poor communities where the congregation dug in, especially when the Church and other social supports were getting out. Unfortunately, their persistence was not always sustainable. In an anecdote that I heard over and over again, their position in the Church structure meant that the Sisters of St. Joseph could not always act independently and many times had to rely on diocesan support. Deflated, Sister Moira told me about the congregation’s painful decision to leave another parish in Kensington, saying,

I left North Philly in [the late 1980s] uh, and during that time, there were many, many closings, which again, left you wondering about. And especially for our sisters. We had staffed so many of those schools that it was—we wanted to stay—and I remember clearly being at many, many meetings and people saying, “We wanna stay here!” But the parish is gone, our ministry, the school, like our housing’s gone, we can’t stay, you know? And at that time, we didn’t have any resources to even try to

imagine something else. Like we needed the housing that the Church provided, so you were –well I believe in my heart it started out to be a pure system –but it then became like, “Well, we have your house. We’re controlling the housing. The housing’s going, so are you!”

Lacking in the financial resources to support themselves, in this situation and many others, the Sisters of St. Joseph were at the whim of a diocese that controlled their housing and stipend payments. Sister Moira points out that when a parish and school closed, those resources for the sisters dried up, effectively ending their ability to stay. Some would try of course, as Sister Moira indicates, but many of these attempts simply delayed the inevitable.

The congregation’s model to support their poorer ministries through their better-resourced communities helped to an extent. Congregational historian Sister Maria Kostka Logue (1950) writes that when they settled in Philadelphia in the mid-nineteenth century, the Sisters of St. Joseph developed a clever pattern of opening private academies that attracted wealthier students, so that they could remain committed to poorer schools where students could not afford to pay. The tuition paid by students attending the academies was then funneled to support the sisters’ work in poorer ministries, often in failing or under-resourced schools in the inner city. This model continues today with the congregation’s two notable private academies and sponsored works: Norwood-Fontbonne Academy grade school in Chestnut Hill, and Mount St. Joseph Academy college preparatory school for girls in nearby Flourtown. However, given their abundant presence in schools in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly after the Catholic schools boom of the 1950s and 1960s, this formula could only sustain their work to a degree. Faced with declining membership, and diminishing or non-existent funding from parishes

and the diocese, the Sisters of St. Joseph had to make very difficult decisions to leave some parish communities.

The Painful 1980s: Project Withdrawal Recommitment

The pain that leaving some communities caused sisters in the congregation cannot be overstated. In many of my interviews, the sisters' sadness and disillusionment with this process was evident. Some sisters even feel that the congregation is still dealing with its fallout today. Called Project Withdrawal Recommitment (PWR), the Sisters of St. Joseph began the process in the 1980s and early 1990s. Sister Frances Anna said,

[T]hey were already in the process of PWR, and that whole piece that came out and all the parishes had to merge...but that was another piece that the Church didn't really allow for mourning of people, it was just boom boom boom. Like [one parish] closed and merged with [another], so we dealt with people and families who were just devastated about how all that was coming down from the Church.

Sister Frances Anna remembers the difficult work of having to support the community and help to pick up the pieces after the Church closed a parish. She paints a picture of alienation, where she and her fellow sisters are left to hold the company line and defend a decision that they do not necessarily agree with to a community devastated by the loss.

Likewise, speaking of the PWR process, Sister Madeline told me,

I'm sure you've heard about it [PWR] interviewing sisters. That was a painful time. Very painful time for the congregation because we finally were saying, "We didn't have enough sisters to be in all of these schools we were in" and so we were – yea this project withdrawal –something withdrawal, it's coming back to me, withdrawal and something. See I can't even think of what it is because I –so that was tough...The sisters were quite upset, and the congregation would say, "We're not staying in this place anymore, we're leaving."...a lot of hurt feelings. Because there were a lot of sisters then. People were saying, "Well, why couldn't we stay in this parish? Why couldn't we..." but uh, so that went on.

At first, Sister Madeline does not even remember the name of the process, which she attributes to her painful memory of it. Sister Madeline also notes how many sisters did not understand why they needed to leave some parishes when they had enough staffing. The Project Withdrawal Recommitment process was not about individual parishes of course, but like any unpopular process of corporate downsizing, congregational leadership needed to make difficult decisions for the overall good of the community, their financial viability, and the people they served. That meant leaving adequately-staffed parishes where the sisters determined their presence was not as necessary, to remain committed to those communities where it was needed most. Some sisters resented these decisions and the lingering scars that the PWR process left on the congregation.

Conclusion: The Face of the Church to Philadelphia's Poor and Abandoned

Koehlinger (2007) argues that religious sisters did not have substantial influence on the Civil Rights Movement per se, but the movement did impact many women's religious congregations in the United States. She writes,

public activism and personal transformation were intimately and immediately bound together in the lives of those sisters who participated in the racial apostolate... But experiences of racial engagement that took individual sisters beyond these familiar Catholic settings challenged and changed them, allowing sisters to fashion new identities as vowed religious and to see themselves, their vocations, and their institutes in dramatically different terms. And in the final account, it inspired some women religious to return to their congregations and press for thoroughgoing revisions to the norms of religious life in the late 1960s and 1970s (Koehlinger 2007:4).

The Sisters of St. Joseph indeed emerged from the 1960s as changed women, and their experiences serving primarily in poor, racially diverse neighborhoods directly impacted their organizational identity. As I argued in chapter 4, the congregation was oriented

much more toward social justice in the decades after Vatican II. Many congregations of women religious had already undertaken similar public positions like corporate stands, so in some ways, these actions were easier for the congregation to unify around. Unlike apartheid however, issues of racial equality in the United States were much more relevant to sisters everyday lived experiences –and therefore difficult – and the congregation continued to grow in its understanding of structural racism through the end of the twentieth century.

For some sisters, their personal code of ethics and sense of morality guided their support of Civil Rights. For other sisters, their congregation’s mission of unity with all people made supporting racial justice imperative. Still other sisters were swept up in the energy in many of the inner city parishes where they worked, where progressive priests offered Church space to groups like the Black Panthers and justice-minded community groups. More than social justice or gender and sexuality however, the sisters’ responses to my interview questions about race and ethnicity revealed deeper personal and organizational struggles in the congregation over the past 50 years. Sisters Madeline and Regina shared how as young sisters, they would occasionally overhear older sisters make racist comments, despite the congregation’s longstanding commitment to the poor and marginalized. The sisters emphasized that these were rare instances, but they happened nonetheless, revealing the sisters’ humanity and the congregation’s internal struggles over direction. Since their founding in 1650 in France, the Sisters of St. Joseph have always responded to the needs of the times, and the changing needs of the mid-twentieth century meant that their work for unity and care for “every kind of dear neighbor without distinction” would require an expressed commitment to racial equality.

In their writings from general chapter meetings and in my interviews, on the whole, the Sisters of St. Joseph moved as a unified body to support racial equality in the last 50 years, but it took time. Internally, they were undergoing processes of self-reflection to understand their own identities and privilege, how as well-educated white women, they too were complicit in institutional racism in America. Externally, the congregation recommitted itself to racial and ethnic enclaves in the inner city, especially in parishes where the Church was leaving. Social class emerged as an important part of their ministry to the extent that since their first days in Philadelphia, the congregation used funds from their private academies to support their inner city ministries where students could not afford to pay. Here, class and race overlap, especially in the 1950s and 1960s in Philadelphia, with the congregation's inner city schools becoming more populated with students of color as wealthier whites moved to the suburbs.

Some Sisters of St. Joseph served in the developing world in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, but as they are not a missionary congregation, the community's focus remained largely in urban areas in the mid-Atlantic and southern United States. In my interviews, many sisters spoke about how they felt a vocation call to join missionary communities, but somehow ended up as Sisters of St. Joseph. In hearing about how they stayed with people in parishes that the diocese closed or abandoned, I argue that this missionary spirit served them well. Like Sister Moira, many sisters organized letter-writing campaigns and other forms of civic action to appeal diocesan decisions that affected the lives of many people who were mostly voiceless in the process. For thousands alienated Catholic and non-Catholic students and parishioners, the Sisters of St. Joseph became the face of the Church. When, because of declining enrollment and

high levels of poverty in these communities, the Archdiocese would close or merge certain parishes that were not sustainable, the Sisters of St. Joseph remained with these people for as long as they could. Some sisters were eventually forced out because the Church controlled their housing, but for others, they found creative ways to remain committed and provide quality education to people who otherwise would not be able to access it.

Today, the Sisters of St. Joseph run or partner with other religious communities to operate independent “mission schools,” that do not fall under Archdiocesan jurisdiction. Similarly, their work through organizations like the Sisters of St. Joseph Welcome Center sponsored work in Kensington expanded their reach to immigrants and other ethnic minorities. Overall, I submit that their focus on unity, a hidden an unconventional missionary spirit, and their evolved commitment to racial and social justice made the Sisters of St. Joseph de facto missionaries to the poor and marginalized in Philadelphia. They did not set out to evangelize necessarily, but in their presence ministering to people alienated by society and in advocating on their behalf, for thousands of people over the last 50 years, the congregation became the face of what Church could be.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Emerging from the Glass Cloister

Twelve years before Pope St. John XXIII commissioned the Second Vatican Council, Sister Maria Kostka Logue wrote of her congregation,

The complicated ills of the time which menace the peace of the outer world are not wholly unreflected within the cloister. History gives evidence that the political strife of nations bears in with greater or less emphasis on the life of religious orders. In the unrest and materialism of today's world, the preservation of the cherished spirit of the congregation is a challenge to be met with steadfast adherence to the principles of those who gave their wholehearted devotion to its works, so many of whom are of the hidden saints whose lives go unrecorded (Logue 1950:295).

Logue acknowledges that throughout history, religious communities have never been insulated from the challenges of the world. She implores the Sisters of St. Joseph to remain committed to the same principles and ministries that guided their predecessors, especially in the face of twentieth century distractions.

Logue's reflection is remarkably prescient, considering the profound changes that religious congregations experienced over the past 50 years. Like many other religious communities after Vatican II, the Sisters of St. Joseph returned to their roots and embraced the spirit of their sister foundresses. In my interviews, sisters described how in the years of renewal just after Vatican II, they were given access to English translations of their primitive texts and founding documents. For many, this was the first time that they learned about things like the original function of the religious habit and how Jean-Pierre Médaille and the founding sisters wanted them to live. Within the congregation, despite some personal apprehension, sister leaders recognized the need to modernize and supported Vatican II's calls for renewal, sparking a decades-long process of self-

discovery, cultural transformation, and expressed recommitment to social justice and service to marginalized persons. The Sisters of St. Joseph responded more gradually than some of their contemporaries, but they were enthusiastic about the newness and potential that renewal signaled. Through a reflective and highly interactive process, they began to incorporate these changes into their individual and congregational identities as women religious nearing the new millennium. While many of these changes may have been invisible to the public, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia emerged in the decades after Vatican II as a transformed community.

Like other congregations of women religious in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Sisters of St. Joseph embraced gender consciousness as a means of empowerment, especially within the institutional Catholic Church. Sisters began to exercise more autonomy in their lives and ministries, as they were given more voice in decision-making and congregational governance. Sisters were more involved in choosing their own locations for ministry, and they were freer to move beyond the convent walls and interact with secular society. They were no longer required to travel in pairs and many got driver's licenses for the first time.

Sister Maria Kostka Logue's use of the word "cloister" is telling. Though the Sisters of St. Joseph are an active community, many of the sisters I interviewed likened convent life before Vatican II to a cloister. As rules for women religious in the Church ostensibly loosened after Vatican II, so too did the rigid structure of convent life. For instance, Sister Beatrice remembers,

I felt like we were pretty cloistered at that time, and then when we began to get our own voice and become our own individuals, I think that that –

the fact that the Women's Movement had been going on, certainly enhanced that or affected that, so gradually, we became our own selves.

Similarly, speaking of her experience in religious formation as a postulant, Sister Susan told me,

Well, compared to what happens now, it was pretty rigid. We had, almost a year as a postulant, so we entered in September and then received the habit in April, and then um, we uh, we finished up another year and a bit...the next year then we were out on the mission and then made our first vows. So um, it was um, let's see, it was very monastic, you know? We did the kinds of things the monks would have done, we you know, I think we realized in Vatican II that we were on the wrong track, that as an active order we should you know, not have been so cloistered and so, you know, doing things that monks and you know cloistered sisters would have been doing, but that was the formation.

For these sisters, the process of renewal after Vatican II shed light on how their congregation was "on the wrong track" as Sister Susan puts it. Their practices were too monastic, and resembled contemplative congregations who lived in cloister, which was not what their founders envisioned for the sisters' lives. This community was always designed to be active, and Vatican II energized the congregation to reclaim this identity.

Sister Doris explained how this monastic, cloistered lifestyle not only impacted the sisters lives within the convent, but also in their lack of interaction with lay persons. Vatican II changed all that, and she was eager to learn more. She said,

I welcomed and wanted to know more. I really wanted to know why these changes were coming about and the history, and I loved when we learned about the history of the habit and that that was the widow's dress. And then I said, "Of course! To be with the people they had to be dressed as widows so that they could get out and what does that look like today?" And I would always try to translate into, "What does that mean for today?" you know? And of course, we need to be with the people not separated...when I was a novice and we went out on our first mission, we went out in twos in a line – all the sisters, there might have been twenty-five sisters –would all go in a line and process into church and before communion the veil would be down, [it] would be dropped down, so

you'd have the veil down in front of your face. These huge sleeves would be rolled down, your hands wouldn't show. Nothing was showing, nothing would show, and after communion, you would put the veil up and then you were to go immediately to the convent as a procession –NEVER speak to a parishioner. It was like living in the cloister, but you weren't in a cloister, so it was like, you know, a leftover from the monasticism and that was considered a virtue. The eyes down, you didn't even think of talking to the people, the people didn't think of talking to you because you'd look like...a mummy! Haha

Sister Doris explains how as a young sister, she and others were forbidden to speak with parishioners in church. When she learned how practices like having the veil cover her eyes and walking in silence two by two separated the sisters from the people, she clamored for change. In always asking the question, “what does this mean for today?,” Sister Doris summarizes the spirit of inquiry and change that dominated conversations in her community in the years after Vatican II.

I suggest that these changes in both institutional identity and in the day to day lives of individual sisters indicate the congregation emerging from what I call a “glass cloister.” Like women in secular society in the 1960s and 1970s, sisters in the congregation achieved greater levels of autonomy after Vatican II. Like their secular counterparts who confronted the glass ceiling in the corporate world after the Women's Movement, the structure of religious life relaxed in the Church and within the congregation after Vatican II, allowing sisters to literally and metaphorically move beyond the convent walls to interact with the world. This increased interaction, along with the internal cultural shift in identity toward more active social justice ministry, signaled a rebirth for the Sisters of St. Joseph near the end of the twentieth century, one that still propels them forward today.

Changes in Congregational Governance

A great irony that I discovered through this research is that even though the Sisters of St. Joseph struggled with the institutional hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, the move towards more democratic structures produced frustration with the tendency to fall into bureaucratic trappings. Despite resisting them in the Church, internally, hierarchical structures were reproduced within the congregation. The community moved to much more democratic processes of government in the latter part of the twentieth century, but like so many other changes for this community, this transition was gradual, and not always as effective as all sisters would have liked. In their archival documents after Vatican II, there is a marked emphasis on community, shared responsibility in decision-making, and egalitarianism. This is particularly evident in the amount of text devoted to governance and administration in the Constitutions from 1968, 1984, and 2004. The 2004 Constitutions contain 21 pages on congregational governance, compared to just four pages in 1968. Table 2 shows the numbers of pages of text devoted to governance in 1968, 1984, and 2004.

<u>Document Year</u>	<u>Pages Devoted to Governance/Administration</u>
1968	4
1984	13
2004	21

Table 2. Pages Devoted to Governance in Constitutions

Similarly, the Constitutions demonstrate how the congregation transformed its understanding of leadership and administration. In 1968's *Design for Excellence* we see the first glimpses of this change from a hierarchical structure to a more democratic one. For example, in the subsection titled *Administration*, the document cites the spirit of decentralization that the Church inherited from Vatican II as a model for how the congregation shall form its government. Specifically, the sisters write,

[t]he structures of government are less important than the persons in charge...[r]ules, then, are as few as possible, clearly defined, simple, and adaptable. They respect the common good and the personality of each sister, who is always considered as a responsible adult, never as a minor. The graces bestowed on each member contribute to the growth of the entire institute; therefore obedience, government, and mutual charity are the concern of every sister (Constitutions 1968:46).

Though the initial impression of the first line may indicate a top-down mentality, I contend that the focus on the “persons in charge” rather than the structures of government places an emphasis on relationships, which is a hallmark of the congregation’s mission. Those in authority are instructed to recognize each sister’s personal gifts and autonomy, and in turn, the congregation acts in unity to support its leadership. The 1968 Constitutions document offers considerable guidance to the congregational administration, with particular attention on ensuring that those in leadership positions are seen as equals with other sisters in the community. For instance, near the end of *Design for Excellence* the sisters write, “superiors accept only necessary personal services from the sisters” and “sisters observe rank only when it is necessary for order” (69-70). Further, *Design for Excellence* highlights the spirit of subsidiarity that was encouraged by the Second Vatican Council (47).

This emphasis on the decentralization of authority is implicit in the 1984 and 2004 Constitutions as well, with the congregation placing marked emphasis on developing leadership in all members rather than this power resting among a select few. In 1984's Constitutions this is made clear,

In a particular way
those in authority
need our support and compassion.
We accept the persons who fulfill
this special service among us
and remain open to being called
into this ministry of service (Sisters of St. Joseph 1984:46).

Further, archival information from the 1990s and 2000s indicate that the congregation shifted emphasis toward middle levels of governance. In 2004, the sisters write,

The 1999 Chapter approved a recommendation that “the topic of *middle governance*, specifically the role of Area Delegate, receive priority of attention within the next two years.”...after considering congregational feedback the General Council affirmed the ministry of Area Delegate as part of our government structure (SSJ Archives 2004) [emphasis in original].

Through a multi-year consultative process, the congregation approved further decentralization of authority through the incorporation of area delegates, elected leaders whose responsibilities and function lacked consensus in the community up until that time.

Beirne (2015) writes,

Previously, the area delegate met individually with each sister during the annual visit, but now either the sister or the area delegate initiated the personal interview at least once in a three-year time frame. Although the role of area delegates was becoming more pastoral and less authoritative, they assisted with local governance questions, housing issues, and conflict management as needed (264).

These mid-level superiors connected the needs of individual sisters and local communities more directly with congregational leadership. But not all sisters were satisfied with this, and for some like Sister Susan, frustration with the congregation's hierarchical structure remains. Sister Susan reflected on this quite a bit saying,

[T]here was a survey... we worked on it to try to make the questions tailored to ourselves, and then we looked at the governance, you know and there was always this question about these area delegates—which are still there, you know, we still have area delegates—you know, was that what we need? And even now, and in those days, they would come around, and there were problems in the houses –the local communities, you know, the houses –they weren't really equipped to deal with them, but then the Superior General always said...“Oh well we need to know what's going on, we need to connect.” And now we even say we need that person, you know, the in between person between the president and the sister, so the role always was a question, and we tried to work through that and there was really resistance with uh, you know, the administration even talking about it...the leader, was the one who embodied and needed to know everything so she could make the decisions. We never changed that, so our um, so it's not the fault of the person who's in the power...that they are living by that. They feel they need to know everything so that they can decide what's next...but let's look at you know, what's our essence? What are we doing and why are we doing it and how do we move forward? And you know, not move it up to the administration to make up the question, that you know, almost guides the answer do you know what I mean? But you know, get to the roots, the grass roots and get us to really care about the answer to that question, and not say, “Well, we're getting old and it's going. It's dying, religious life is dying, oh well”—NO! I mean I think we need to make a major transition, I don't know what it is, but I think...it's probably one of the things that is really critical and it's not something that's on the table as much as it should be.

Sister Susan believes that the congregation needs to do a better job empowering grassroots members to ask the big questions. Though she acknowledges some power has shifted to the general congregational body, she still feels that there is a hierarchical nature where sisters in the administration need to know everything, and this stifles movement and ideas. Sister Susan wishes that those sisters who are not called to leadership would

help to point the direction for the congregation, especially in light of dwindling numbers and future uncertainty.

Sister Regina also reflected on her congregation's organizational structure, and particularly about power. She said,

[O]ne of the struggles I've always had with the congregation—particularly in chapters—we have tendency to think power is a bad thing. It's not! In physics, it's the ability to do work. In politics, it's the ability of A to get B to do that which B might not otherwise have done. Um, and there are a lot of vectors to power. Yes, there's violence, but there's also love, respect, authority, um, information—they're all vectors. And my concern often in the congregation is because we have a tendency to say, "Power is bad," people who have power, because people naturally defer to them because of their charisma, their personality, their intelligence, their leadership, whatever—if they recognize that, they know when to give it back and when to use it appropriately. But if they don't recognize it, it's like owning a large dog and not taming it, and that frustrates me haha...there are people who know how to use power appropriately and there are people not that they maliciously use power to gain their own ends, but that they frequently don't recognize the power that they have and they frequently let it run loose and that doesn't always help.

Unlike Sister Susan, Sister Regina appreciates how power works in her congregation, and she contends that when properly understood, power can be a good thing. Sister Regina's conception of power are strikingly Foucaultian. Philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault (1976) writing about power, argued that power is not a tool to oppress or control, but rather "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (92). Foucault concedes that with power however, there is always potential for resistance, which itself generates new spheres of power (1976). This is certainly true for Sister Susan, who represents a faction of sisters in the congregation who want to mobilize decision-making at the lowest level possible. Sister Regina however believes that leaders who effectively use power for the

overall good of the congregation are necessary for this group to function. At no time in any of my interviews, or in any of the archival documents was there ever an accusation of leaders pursuing power for personal goals. Universally, the sisters in the congregation have great respect for their administration, but like all groups, at times disagree on the most effective ways to accomplish their shared goals.

Congregational historian Mary Helen Beirne (2015) argues that a more significant effort to distribute authority within the congregation occurred at the local level, in individual houses and convents. Spurred by the General Council's 1994 *Statement of Intent*, sisters were encouraged to examine government structures in their everyday communities, and houses delineated responsibilities like communication, finances, housekeeping, and care for sick members of the community. Beirne writes, "[l]ocal communities were often stretch to deeper levels of trust, respect, and understanding. Sometimes they succeeded; sometimes not" (2015:263-264). Local convents and small communities developed their own identities within the larger corporate structure of Sisters of St. Joseph, or what cultural sociologist Gary Alan Fine calls "idioculture" (1979). These communities continue to shape the overall institutional identity and culture of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia. Through empowerment at the local level at the end of the twentieth century, sisters can respond more quickly to the needs of those whom they serve in the community and to those of the sisters with whom they live.

Finally, the top position of leadership in Sisters of St. Joseph has undergone a transition in title. In both the 1968 and 1984 documents, the elected head of the congregation is referred to as the Superior General. By 2004, the sister in this role is addressed as the congregational President. While in practice these positions are identical,

I argue that the subtle shift in title signifies another example of the Sisters of St. Joseph embracing the egalitarian principles associated with a feminist orientation. Superior General has harsher overtones and clearly is borne out of a hierarchical framework of authority. Conversely, the title of President connotes democratic ideals and reinforces the fact that all members of the congregation elected this leader through a voting process.

Moving Toward a Corporate Model

There is a notable focus in the archival documents near the end of the twentieth century toward sustainability and long-term corporate planning. Anticipating the inevitability of what fewer sisters in the congregation would mean to their presence in some communities, the congregation's 1979 general chapter made the first reference to the possibility of an Associate program. At the chapter, the congregation proposed,

That the Sisters of St. Joseph form an association of persons who desire both to share and to witness the values and goals of the congregation within their own life style. In forming such an association, the congregation will help the associates respond to the universal call to holiness (SSJ Archives 1979).

Through Associate programs, lay persons who are not called to religious life have an opportunity to join religious communities in living out their respective missions and charisms. The Sisters of St. Joseph pursued the creation of such a program, and in 1984 established the SSJ Associates Mission program in Philadelphia (Beirne 2015). While not "junior sisters" by any means, the SSJ Associates bring another human dimension of mission and charism to the congregation's sponsored works and various ministries.

The congregation's archival documents beginning in the 1980s also reflect a sense of looming financial urgency and uncertainty. For instance, in 1988 the congregation created the Development Office to pursue fundraising and long-range fiscal

sustainability. Decades of sisters working for low or no stipends or below-market salaries, along with an aging population of sisters in the community who needed increasing levels of medical care were creating tremendous financial stress in the second half of the twentieth century. Additionally, sisters who worked in many of the congregation's owned and operated sponsored works often did so under a program known as "contributed services," meaning that the sisters did not earn a salary. The sponsored works relied on sisters to carry out their respective missions, but as sisters aged out of ministry and needed to be replaced by lay persons, the organizations needed to find money to pay fair market value. This was and remains a difficult task for the Sisters of St. Joseph, and leaves many of their sponsored works in precarious financial situations.

In 1990, the General Council recommended that congregationally-owned education ministries begin to transition from the contributed services or stipend model to fair market value for sister employees. The Council acknowledged that the pace of this transition would depend on each institution's respective compensation model and financial situation, but determined that this move was necessary to secure future financial viability and to obtain from its own institutions what it requests from others (SSJ Archives).

In a *Statement of Current Financial Situation* in 1989, the congregation addressed sobering reality of the years of low wages and increasing costs, writing,

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia enter the Chapter of 1989 with a serious financial concern but no outstanding debts. Low stipends given in the past have caused for us and other religious congregations a large unfunded past service liability... We need to join with other religious congregations in seeking just compensation for services so that the present

problem will not repeat itself. . . It is important for the Congregation to keep aware of the large unfunded past service liability as decision are made which have financial implications. We should also realize the number of fully stipended ministries will decrease for us as our membership increases in age (SSJ Archives).

As sisters continued to age out of ministry, the congregation needed to plan for their housing and healthcare needs. This is especially true near the dawn of the new millennium, when the large wave of sisters who entered in the 1960s were at or nearing retirement. It bears mentioning that in my research and experience, sisters typically stay working in ministry well-beyond retirement age, likely due in part to their awareness of the congregation's financial situation but also because of their dedication to their congregation's mission and commitment to lifelong service. The Sisters of St. Joseph can and do collect Social Security and Medicare when they reach the appropriate age, but as with most Americans, these entitlements fall well-short of what is needed to cover the actual costs of living.

The Sisters of St. Joseph had been making internal corporate decisions for long-term financial stability for several decades prior to the 1980s. For example, in 1968 the congregation founded the St. Joseph Villa sponsored work in nearby Flourtown, Pennsylvania. Originally designed as a retirement and nursing home community for elderly sisters, the Villa is now a seven-floor facility for religious and lay persons alike, providing increasing levels of support from independent community living to end of life hospice care. The congregation's wise decision to direct human and financial resources toward the St. Joseph Villa over the past few decades puts them in a stronger position to care for their aging sisters, both personally and financially.

The addition of the SSJ Development Office, move toward fair market salaries for their sisters, and the St. Joseph Villa are all positive steps taken by the congregation to ensure future financial viability. Further, the partnership with Associates allows the Sisters of St. Joseph to increase the reach of their congregation's mission to lay persons and in ministries where sisters are fewer in number or no longer present. Unlike some other religious congregations who ran healthcare facilities that brought in significant revenue over the years, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia primarily are educators. Decades of unpaid or underpaid work and an aging population of sisters needing increasing levels of care have forced the congregation to move toward corporate models of development and financial investment. While staying true to their congregation's mission and charism, administrators have had to make tough financial decisions that impact the lives of sisters currently in ministry and the future direction of the congregation. It is likely then that the current challenges of human and financial resources will continue to burden the congregation for the foreseeable future.

Bringing Their Mission to a World That Desperately Needs It

Given their unique affiliation with the institutional Catholic Church and their lives of service that are very much lived in secular society, especially during the past 50 years, women religious offer sociologists great potential for analysis. For instance, their roles in the Church are unique in that sisters are in an elevated position vis-à-vis the rest of the faithful, yet they have no authority to determine official Church teaching or direction. For centuries, this power has rested entirely with an elite group of men. Though officially barred from institutional leadership in the Church, many congregations empowered their sisters to assume roles as professors, scholars, and college presidents and to oversee

schools, hospitals, and social service organizations. Thus religious sisters occupy a liminal space as stakeholders in a hierarchical organization that has largely marginalized them through the reinscription of structures of gender inequality, while simultaneously requiring their unfailing obedience in order to carry out the Church's ministry. In other words, I suggest that women religious may be understood to be what Collins (1986) describes as "outsiders within" the Catholic Church.

After Vatican II, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia began a decades-long process of renewal. Through significant internal cultural shifts, the congregation was reborn as one with a more outwardly focused social justice orientation. They took public stands against apartheid and the death penalty. The congregation severed financial ties with organizations that opposed their goals, and risked alienating support among their own donors who disagreed with their political activism. In the 1990s and 2000s, sisters were emboldened to be more courageous in their risk-taking, and with the support of the Commission for Justice, protested the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, the Iraq War. In 1999, in collaboration with three other religious communities, the Sisters of St. Joseph founded the African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC), a non-profit organization working to provide education to religious women in developing countries in Africa, which in turn leads to better economic, educational, health, and social outcomes for local populations. They have housed migrant farm workers in their convents, and in spring 2017 are exploring options to provide sanctuary for immigrants and refugees. I argue that this move toward more expressed commitment to social justice is evidence of lived religion for the Sisters of St. Joseph. In the latter half of the twentieth century, social justice became a primary focus for all sisters in the congregation, not just the work

of the Commission for Justice or a few politically-minded members of the community. While proportionally, U.S. Catholics likely had more contact with religious sisters in 1960s and 1970s, I suspect that the social and political activities that congregations of religious sisters engaged in after Vatican II have had more profound impacts on the everyday lives of American Catholics and overall direction of the Church.

With heightened gender-consciousness after Vatican II and the Women's Movement, sisters in the community embraced gender consciousness as a means of empowerment. The sisters I interviewed had a wide variety of experiences with clergy, summed up best by Sister Claire, who told me succinctly that for her, they were, "Good. Excellent. Not so good. Pretty rotten. So, I could say, it spans the uh spectrum." This response was typical, and sisters employed strategies to navigate the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities. Sisters drew on their social networks in local communities for support and on congregational leadership to intervene on their behalf when necessary. They are hopeful that the current structure in the Catholic Church will change, but also recognize that many of them likely will not be around to see any of these benefits. Still, they press on challenging the gender barriers and looking toward women's improving positions in society for motivation. The sisters are saddened by the ways in which the Church alienates LGBTQ persons and how it reduces far too many issues to procreation and sexuality. Through their work, they see how peoples' lives are lived in grey areas, and do not fit neatly into the black and white rules of Catholic dogma. Many sisters wish that the Church would stop talking about sex and sexuality altogether, and instead focus on more pressing issues like income inequality and injustice.

The Sisters of St. Joseph are heartened by the overwhelming support that lay Catholics and non-Catholics gave American women religious in the fallout from the LCWR investigation, and this too, will likely propel them toward greater inclusion in the Church and society. The Sisters of St. Joseph spoke admiringly of Pope Francis. As Sister Mary Lynn puts it,

Francis is a true Jesuit. And as a true Jesuit, um, he doesn't talk. He doesn't know about God, he knows God...I think he's an incredible uh, model for how men can bring the best energy of their masculinity to the service of life, relationship of Church, of God.

Though a few are frustrated at the slow pace of change, a clear majority of the sisters I interviewed are enamored with Pope Francis and see him as a breath of fresh air after Popes Benedict XVI and St. John Paul II. They are hopeful that he has the foresight to guide the Church in new ways, but are fearful that given his advanced age he may be a "placeholder" pope. Yet, the sisters remind themselves that Pope St. John XXIII was also considered a placeholder, and his call for the Second Vatican Council was groundbreaking.

For the most part, the sisters I interviewed do not feel personally called to ordained ministry, but do support equality for women in the Church. They generally take a more pragmatic view, arguing that as a sacramental Church with declining numbers of priests, there needs to be more gender inclusion so that the needs of the faithful are met. Sisters are quite capable and in some cases more equipped to address these needs, but a significant change in Church structure is needed first.

As a predominantly white congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph encountered issues of race and ethnicity directly through their ministry in poor, urban neighborhoods.

Internally, some older sisters struggled with the Civil Rights Movement, which led to considerable soul-searching and dialog in the community. Always returning to their mission to guide them, the congregation recommitted itself to serving persons of color in the past few decades, becoming the face of the Catholic Church to communities that were otherwise abandoned as parishes closed or merged. They became more immersed in these communities, forming deep relationships with the people they served, and class barriers diminished. Sister Donna Maria described one such close community in the South, and how the atmosphere was markedly different from what she was used to. She said,

[S]o they were very close and when something would happen in their families for example—suppose somebody’s father was ill—they didn’t really have family, so we [the sisters] would go and stay with the kids. Two of us would go and stay with them while they, I mean not all the time, but there were times when we had kids in the house and it was like a picnic because somebody’s mother was dying and they couldn’t take the kids with them. So it was a very close experience of community. And what I came to realize was that in the South, I was a person who happened to be a sister. And it was the first time, that was the first place—anybody—any lay person, called me by my first name. In the north, in Delaware County, and in St. Matthias, definitely I was “Sister.” And that title was “Sister,” you know? There was that pedestal of sister, whether I earned it or not, I was still gonna be “Sister.” In the south, they called me “Don,” they called me “Donna” so it was the first time, like the lay teachers called all of us by our first names and we called them by their first names, but it was a wonderful experience of Church.

Sister Donna Maria was welcomed into this community in the South so much that she and her fellow sisters became the stand-in babysitters, in ways that a parent might call on an aunt or grandmother to watch their children for a while. Most striking about this comment however is how Sister Donna Maria was addressed by her first name, and even a shortened version of it. She remarks how the “pedestal of sister” was not there, further reducing and real or perceived class distinctions between her and those whom she served.

In this dissertation, I write about each sister using that signifier before her name, but many of the sisters I interviewed insisted that I, too, call them by their first names.

Conclusion: Do You Want to Take a Walk and Get Some Lunch?

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia responded to Vatican II's calls for renewal in religious communities, but the congregation was slow to make visible changes, leading others to think that they were not modernizing. Characteristic of this community, the sisters focused on internal changes first, ensuring that they moved with unified voice before revealing anything publicly. This is most evident in their decision to abandon the religious habit in 1984, nearly two decades after other congregations had done the same. This contemplative and interactive process served the community well because with each of these changes, there was consensus among the congregation and a sense of certainty. In my interviews and in their archival material, there is great self-awareness in the congregation. They know that they will not be first to react in any situation, but when they do, it will be done thoroughly and well. Highlighting this fact, Sister Regina told me about a conversation with a priest who was helping the congregation with renewal after Vatican II. She said,

And among the many things that we did during that time, we had a series of task forces where we were developing our approach to the future...and we had a retreat with [priest], who was one of Alice's [Mother Alice Anita] friends...And one time he said to us, "I don't really worry about the SSJs, because I know they will follow Jesus. They will follow Jesus kicking and screaming and holding onto the furniture the whole way, but they will follow!" And that is pretty much what we do.

Part of the kicking and screaming is a hesitancy to change, but the other part is ensuring that all members' voices are heard in the decision-making processes. The congregation has had countless difficult conversations over the years, and navigated many dissenting

opinions, but always emerges as a united body of women confident in how they live out their mission. Often, sisters in leadership suspended their own personal concerns to allow the congregation to move forward and evolve. Many of these sister leaders knew that they would not live to see the fruits of post-Vatican II renewal, but their faith in the community guided them through the challenges and uncertainties. Sister Beatrice recalled one such sister leader,

[A]nd she used to say to us, I'll never forget this, "You young sisters, you will live to see this through, I won't. But you will live to see this through." And I always thought that was interesting as I look back on it, because she must have thought [after] a certain number of years, everything that Vatican II said we would do would be done. But we have not yet lived to see it through, so I think that's an important perspective.

Sister Beatrice recognizes that her congregation's renewal is still incomplete, and I expect that this process will continue in perpetuity. As the Sisters of St. Joseph are called to respond to new challenges of the day, it is hard to see how they will ever feel that they have arrived at a destination. Their nature is to constantly evolve, following a path that leads them to serve the poor and marginalized with humanity and dignity, using their relative privilege as educated Western women to be voices for the voiceless. They believe that their mission of unity and reconciliation is needed now more than ever, and see their roles as women religious as builders of bridges not walls. They look to each other, to the faithful, and to their congregational leaders for direction, confident that they will continually evolve in ways that respond to the changing needs of the Church and society.

Sister Claire, who entered the congregation before Vatican II began, remarked about the humility in her community's leaders. She, like many other sisters I interviewed, noted Mother Alice Anita Murphy's strength, foresight, and compassion for the ways in

which the congregation emerged after Vatican II. Sister Claire told me about a time she was visiting another sister friend of hers in a neighboring convent, when Mother Alice Anita approached them. Sister Claire remembers,

Anyway, she said to the two of us, “Do you want to go down to the Chestnut Hill area, take a walk down, and get some lunch?” We thought, “Well this was great!” so we said “Sure!” So she said, “Alright, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll be down in a minute.” Well down she comes in this lovely blue dress, pale blue dress! [laughs] And I hope that she never saw what was going through my mind, and I thought “Oh Mother!” but here she was, putting into practice what was permitted in the congregation. You never saw anybody from the Council [congregational leadership] in anything but the habit. And I remember, she was the first one I saw, and the three of us walked down into Chestnut Hill, had a wonderful lunch, and walked back and none of us in our habit. But it was in the time that we still had the use of habits in our ministries, so she, I mean it was just unheard of that she would do that, but she did it. And she did not make us feel uncomfortable, she was just a gracious lady. She really was.

This anecdote provides a glimpse into how profoundly the Second Vatican Council was transforming the congregation. First, Sister Claire and her friend were shocked that the congregation’s president would personally invite the two of them to get lunch. This was at a time when most sisters did not have regular interactions with congregational leadership, and when they did, they were rarely for social reasons. Typically, if sisters met with the Superior General and her Council leadership, it was to ask for their intervention with a problem, or to be reprimanded for some transgression. Secondly, Sister Claire could not believe that Mother Alice Anita would venture out without a habit, even though at that time, the congregation permitted sisters to wear plain clothes. She was struck by how Mother Alice Anita modeled the change that she desired for her congregation. Finally, and most striking, is that Sister Claire’s story is symbolic of the profound change that she and her fellow sisters were experiencing at this time. The image

of two young sisters and their superior, all out of habit, leaving the convent for lunch is a beautiful metaphor for how the congregation was moving beyond the glass cloister walls of the pre-Vatican II Church. As they walked up the street into Chestnut Hill on that summer day in plain clothes, these three Sisters of St. Joseph moved into the post-Vatican II Catholic Church, and indeed into secular society, as transformed women.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

<<DATE>>

Sister <<NAME>>
Sisters of St. Joseph
9701 Germantown Ave.
Philadelphia, PA 19118

Dear Sister <<NAME>>,

My name is Ryan Murphy and I am a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Temple University. In addition to being a graduate student, I work full-time at Chestnut Hill College and I am also an Associate of the Sisters of St. Joseph. I am currently in the process of conducting dissertation research under the supervision of Dustin Kidd, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Sociology at Temple University.

My proposed study, titled “*A Qualitative Analysis of the Experiences and Identities of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia in the Years After the Second Vatican Council*” explores the lives of religious sisters in the Sisters of St. Joseph congregation over the past fifty years. In this research, I will be analyzing the text of several of the congregation’s archival documents along with conducting individual face-to-face interviews with a number of Sisters of St. Joseph. My goal is to understand the experiences of religious sisters since Vatican II through both the congregation’s formal written statements, but also through the voices of sisters who have lived and served in the post-Vatican II Catholic Church and secular society.

In that spirit, I invite you to participate in a face-to-face interview. Your name was randomly selected from a list of all eligible Sisters of St. Joseph. If you agree to be in this study, I will conduct an interview with you at a place convenient to you. The interview will consist of questions about your experiences as a vowed religious sister in the Catholic Church, your experiences in the congregation of the Sister of St. Joseph of Philadelphia-Chestnut Hill, and your experiences in secular society. With your permission, I would also like to tape record the interview. The interview will be approximately one (1) hour in length.

The records of this study will be kept private and confidential. In any sort of article or book prepared for potential publication, I will change any potentially identifiable demographic information so that it will not include any information that would make it

possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a password-protected electronic file and only I will have access to these records. If I tape-record the interview, I will destroy the recording after it has been transcribed, which will be within one (1) month of its taping. If you agree to take part in this research, I will compensate you with a \$5 gift card to Wawa for your time and effort. Should you withdraw after beginning the interview or choose not to answer all questions in the interview you will still receive your gift card.

Temple University's Institutional Review Board approved this research on March 10, 2015. I also reviewed this research with Sister Anne Myers, SSJ, Ph.D., President of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia, who approved my request to solicit sisters who may be willing to participate.

I am very grateful for your openness to participate in this study. If you wish to be interviewed or would like additional information, please contact me at 215-778-3919 or ryan.murphy@temple.edu.

Thank you again for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Ryan P. Murphy, M.A.
Graduate Student, Sociology Department
Temple University

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Religious Formation

1. When did you enter the congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph?
2. When did you know you wanted to be a religious sister?
3. What other vocations/occupations/life paths did you consider?
4. Why did you choose to enter this particular congregation?

Ministry/Work

1. What was your first ministry/work assignment as a vowed religious sister?
2. Please tell me about your other ministry/work experiences.
3. With whom did you work most frequently in these ministries? (i.e., other religious sisters, male clergy, lay persons, etc.)
4. How did being a Sister of St. Joseph impact your role(s) in these respective ministries/work experiences?

Congregational Life

1. Please tell me about living in community.
2. What is most enjoyable about your life as a religious sister?
3. What do you find challenging?
4. If you ever wore a habit, please tell me about that experience.
5. What are your views, in general, on the religious habit?

Church

1. Please tell me about your experience working as a religious sister in the Catholic Church?
2. How has working within the Church structure enriched your life?
3. Has working within this structure challenged you in any way? If so, how?
4. What has been your experience working with pastors and/or other clergy?
5. In your view, what impact did Vatican II have on the congregation?

Gender/Women's Movement

1. How has being a woman influenced your ministry/work experience?
2. In your view, how has the congregation adapted to the changing roles of women in society?
3. What is your perspective on the women's/feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s?
4. Do you feel this movement influenced the congregation at all? If so, how?

5. How do you define feminism?
6. Do you identify as a feminist?

Future

1. What roles do you see for women religious in general in the 21st century?
2. What roles do you see for women religious in the Catholic Church?
3. Are there any that you wish for?
4. What are the potential barriers?

Closing

1. Are there any topics or questions you would like to revisit?
2. Is there anything that we did not cover that you would like to discuss?