



**School Sisters
of Notre Dame**
Atlantic-Midwest Province

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Joan Pikiell, SSND,
makes First Profession of Religious Vows**

During a Eucharistic celebration attended by more than 200 friends, family members and School Sisters of Notre Dame, Joan Frances Pikiell made her First Profession of Religious Vows on Saturday, July 26, at the SSND chapel at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, Conn.

"I ask for the grace to listen attentively and respond audaciously to God's call to serve by living as a consecrated member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame," Joan told Sister Kathleen Cornell, Provincial Leader of the Atlantic-Midwest Province, at the altar before stating her promise to live consecrated celibacy, gospel poverty and apostolic obedience in community.

A native and longtime resident of Bristol, Conn., the 50-year-old woman has spent the past four years deepening her commitment to God in study and service. She has lived with or shared experiences with School Sisters in Connecticut, Maryland, New York, Illinois and Missouri, all leading up to Saturday, when she agreed to enter into the heart of SSND life. As a professed sister she will daily practice the integration of prayer, community and ministry.

Next month, Sister Joan will move to Timonium, Md., where she will live in community with three other SSNDs. She will minister as a middle-school science and math teacher at Mother Seton Academy, a Nativity Miguel model middle school for low-income girls and boys in Baltimore.

Sister Joan has been in the teaching profession for many years. She taught science and technology as well as religious education to pupils at St. Joseph Catholic School in Bristol for seven years. Before that she held graduate assistant and adjunct faculty positions while working on advanced degrees at Connecticut universities. She also worked with college students as director of residence life at St. Anselm College in Manchester, N.H., for four years after earning her bachelor's degree there.

"I spent my whole life in Catholic schools, and I first thought of becoming a religious back in 7th grade," said Sister Joan, who is the middle child in a family of nine children. Then high school and its many distractions came along and diverted her attention to other interests. "But I always knew that God had a plan for me, and I always had an interest in discerning religious life."

Joan first became interested in the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Spring 2009 after attending a retreat for women who were interested in possibly pursuing religious life. A month later she attended a discernment weekend in Connecticut and met more sisters in the Atlantic-Midwest Province.

"I was impressed with SSND's focus on education, which had always been a big part of my life," she said later. "And it blossomed from there."

In 2010 Joan became an affiliate of SSND, the initial stage of exploring the call to religious life. During the next year, while continuing to teach science and computers at St. Joseph, a parish school, she got to know the SSNDs better, regularly visiting them in Trumbull, Conn., discovering SSND-sponsored organizations and learning more about the sisters' communal life.

"I knew I had a great job at St. Joe's," she said. "But I also knew that God was asking me to do more with my life. And I came to know that it was to be in religious community. At each phase [in the process] I became more convinced of that."

In August 2011, Joan moved to the North American Postulancy of SSND in Chicago. As a postulant, she began a one-year period of living with five SSNDs to experience the day-to-day reality of religious life. While in Chicago, she served as a receptionist at Old St. Mary's School.

A year later, she was received into the Interprovincial Novitiate of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in St. Louis, where she has spent most of the past two years. Five months of her novitiate were spent in Woodhaven, Queens, N.Y., where she lived with a small group of sisters and engaged in ministry with the women and staff at the SSND Educational Center. The center provides GED, English language and life skills classes to adult, mostly immigrant women.

The final phase of her novitiate — a time of prayer, further study and discernment — culminated in her expressing her first vows Saturday as a woman religious. The next six years will be a journey toward perpetual profession, or the expression of her final vows.

During Saturday's ceremony, after professing her vows, Sister Joan was presented with the SSND pin, which depicts a cross, for Christ; the letter M for Mary, mother of the congregation; and a circle, the sign of the sisters' striving for unity in the church and the world. After Sister Maria Iannuccillo, former vocations director and the first SSND Joan had met, attached the pin to Joan's lapel, Sister Kathleen accepted Joan's vows on behalf of the Church and SSND. The congregation then erupted in applause. There were smiles all around and tears of joy from sisters and members of Sister Joan's family.

Sister Joan is the daughter of Mary Faith [Crowley] and Joseph Pikiell, both natives of Bristol, Conn., and former Catholic school educators. Her large, extended family includes four brothers and four sisters as well as many nieces, nephews and cousins. Most of them attended and some participated in Saturday's ceremony, for, as Sister Joan has said, "They have all played an important part in my life's journey."

Sister Joan is a graduate of St. Matthew School in Forestville, Conn., and St. Paul Catholic High in Bristol. She attended St. Anselm College in Manchester, N.H., where she earned a bachelor's degree in natural science. She later earned a master's in educational studies from the University of Connecticut.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame is an international congregation of women religious with nearly 3,000 sisters serving in 34 countries. For more information about the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Atlantic-Midwest Province, visit www.amssnd.org.

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