

Sister Maria Iannuccillo SSND - 25 Year Jubilee!



A Radical Love

Choosing between different directions in life, figuring out what we are called to do, can be challenging for anyone. The discernment of a call to religious life is distinct from other kinds of vocational discernment and requires an openness and prayerful listening to the will of God.

Sister Maria Iannuccillo entered the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 1990, when she was 23. Not many women were lining up to become sisters at that time. When asked what drew her to this vocation, she says, "I felt a call – in the same way that a person feels love for someone."

She recalls that "I first felt this call when I was 12. I remember feeling upset that God was calling me to become a nun, because I didn't want to be one. When I confided in my mother about this, she said two things to me, 'God does not want you to be unhappy,' and 'Go outside and play.'"

Sister Maria credits her mother, a devout Catholic who prayed daily, for instilling in her the Catholic faith. Maria also participated in the sacraments and Catholic religious education with the Religious Teachers Filippini at her parish. "I remember growing up and being very curious about sisters and the convent. I volunteered to help clean the convent, so I could go inside and see how the sisters lived!"

Sister Maria attended public primary school in Bristol, Rhode Island. From the sixth through twelfth grades, the Sisters of Mercy taught Maria. In college, she encountered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Boston and the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

Maria was a sophomore at Regis College, fully immersed in her studies and life as a young woman in Boston, when she felt called once again to look at becoming a sister as a real option. She had attended a retreat, a day of reflection hosted by campus ministry, and during the time of prayer she realized that something was planned for her. It took Maria months to finally tell someone. She sought out the campus minister to help in her discernment process.

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When she shared her interest in exploring religious life for the first time - out loud - to Sister Elaine Polcari, SSND, Sister Maria described it this way, "I felt kind of an exploding inside," she explains. "As soon as I said I wanted to take the next step, I felt God pouring peace over me - it was very tangible."

Sister Elaine was very welcoming and invited Maria to various events and introduced her to other sisters and congregations. "She did not recruit me per se - she was just very welcoming and open."

In 1988, Sister Maria took another step on her path of formation to become a School Sister of Notre Dame. She became an SSND affiliate. This was a time of deeper discernment for Maria, where she lived independently but became more involved in religious life.

Following this discernment, Maria took another step forward and entered the postulancy at Villa Notre Dame in Wilton, Connecticut in the summer of 1990. She entered with one other postulant and moved to Englewood, N.J., where she lived in community with two professed sisters and worked at The Community School in Teaneck. Over her two years as a postulant, she continued to grow personally and spiritually.

Maria was received into the novitiate on August 23, 1992, where she deepened her relationship with Christ. Through solitude, prayer, study, life in community, and ministry experience, she got to know more fully the aspects of SSND life, including the vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. She spent her first year in St. Louis at the interprovincial novitiate with two other novices from other provinces. The second year was in ministry and living in community in what was then the Wilton Province in Connecticut.

The discernment process takes time, habitual prayer, and profound honesty. During her discernment, Maria became aware of her own inner spirit and how God was calling her. "I think we do the best we can to respond to what God invites us to - one step at a time. At each step, I've been called to the next step. It gets clearer, your desire to take the next step. During the difficult times, I have to recommit, and each time it deepens the relationship and commitment."

At the time she professed her first vows in 1994, traditions were changing, and new ways of living the SSND charism were emerging - "bridging" is how Sister Maria described it, "a strong foundation and steadfast traditions with many new ways of living out our charism unfolding. Even now the way we live out our charism continues to evolve."

When asked what sustains her on her spiritual journey, Sister Maria said, "On a foundational level it is God – a relationship with God – sometimes in spite of me; a deep sense of call – a call that deepens with time; community – my congregation and other congregations – my whole religious life has been connected to other religious; and family and friends."

She adds, "We are called to try to respond to God as best we can. It's a challenge and a gift ...and it's not always easy."

Sister Maria, as one of the younger sisters in the province, was asked about what she sees the future holding for SSND, "I believe there will always be a place for vowed religious life – it is a separate and distinct call. The SSND charism is still relevant. The world needs transformative education, advocacy and action for social justice – and the striving for unity."

This May Sister Maria, who is now in her second term as a member of the Provincial Council for the Atlantic-Midwest Province, celebrated her silver jubilee. "God has been so faithful," she says.

