

Young women religious reflect on their transformation



Young women religious at various stage of discernment and of vowed life held a 20s and 30s retreat at Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery in Phoenix Jan. 17-19. (Courtesy of Giving Voices)

Younger women in religious life make up a mere sliver of the women in the religious-vocations picture. Being spread out among a host of different communities makes peer support even more difficult.

Giving Voice, a peer-led organization of women religious, is using regular retreats and networking to change that. The latest retreat, held Jan. 17-19 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Monastery in west Phoenix, was aimed at women in their 20s and 30s.

The retreat drew 23 women, all at various stages of discernment, who are living vowed religious life with 12 different communities. The annual gathering gives voice to the hopes, dreams and challenges younger women religious face.

Sr. Rejane Cytacki, a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth, a Kansas-based order that follows the charisms of St. Vincent de Paul, just returned from her fourth and final 20s and 30s retreat. The 39-year-old, who made her final vows in July 2013, embraced the time for fellowship and reflection.

“It’s wonderful to connect the different stages of formation with other people,” Sr. Rejane said. She attended the retreat with three other sisters from her community, two of whom are early in the formation process.

The young women spent the weekend discussing the journey of transformation interspersed with time for prayer, Mass, and fellowship. They discussed transformation in their own lives including “the thin places where we become vulnerable and our essential selves,” Sr. Rejane said.

They also dreamt about what religious life could be for them in the future.

Sr. Sarah Heger, one of four Sisters of St. Joseph on the retreat, called the experience a workout. She said she worked her core “through lots of deep belly laughs” and her body while hiking and playing kickball. Several sisters, she said, were athletes or gym teachers.

More importantly she noted, “It is my heart and soul that come back most strengthened. Giving Voice gives me the energy and hope I need to embrace the next stage of personal and communal transformation.”

The first Giving Voices retreat for discerning and professed women religious in their 40s will be held this August. Giving Voices welcomes women under 50 to a national gathering held every two years.

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