



News Release

July 2, 2007

Benedictine Sister to make final monastic profession

CLYDE, Mo. - Even through struggle there is hope.

Benedictine Sister of Perpetual Adoration Mary Sophia Becker will make her final monastic profession during the Eucharistic Liturgy beginning at 9 a.m. Saturday, July 21, at the congregation's monastery in Tucson, Ariz.

However, throughout her journey of discernment, the road has been full of bumps, bruises, obstacles, questions and conversations with the Lord.

After a teaching career that spanned almost two decades, Sister Mary Sophia began to wonder if her life was destined for something beyond the classroom walls. Now, years later, she wonders if perhaps it was a destiny that had called earlier in life but hadn't realized it at the time.

While attending Catholic school back home in New Mexico she recalls going to Mass each morning during the Lenten season and making an observation that didn't leave an impression at the time.

"It was in this big church, and all the lights were off except for one above the altar," she said. "I would look over to a space in the back where the sisters were always deep in prayer. I remember thinking that must be an absolutely beautiful life. But I was only in junior high. At that age, once the bell rings, you go outside, go on with your day and don't give (religious life) another thought."

So she went on to earn a degree in special education from Vanderbilt University and a master's degree in elementary education from the University of New Mexico. She spent most of her career in classrooms in Albuquerque and later served as an administrator of a large middle school's special education department.

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QUICK FACTS

- ◆ Born in North Dakota and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico
- ◆ Entered - August 2001
- ◆ First Profession - August 2004
- ◆ Vocation director at Tucson monastery
- ◆ Member of St. Charles Borromeo in Santa Fe, New Mexico, before entering
- ◆ As a novice, helped develop recipe for low-gluten altar breads
- ◆ Education – B.S. in Special Education, Vanderbilt University; M.A. in Elementary Education, University of New Mexico
- ◆ Spent almost 20 years in education before being called to religious life
- ◆ BSPA has more than 100 sisters residing in four communities in Clyde, Mo.; Tucson, Ariz.; Sand Springs, Okla.; and Dayton, Wyo.

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Teaching was her life – it defined her – so it came as quite a shock to friends and family when the 30-something professional announced she was making a drastic change in her life.

“I didn’t feel fulfilled, something was missing,” she said. “I was spending time in adoration, in daily prayer and celebrating the Eucharist. Everything a person would do if she were in a community.”

She consulted her spiritual director who advised she pray three years before letting her explore different communities.

“I guess he wanted to make sure I was serious,” she laughed.

Her friends assumed she would enter a teaching community, but Sister Mary Sophia kept an open mind when exploring her options. This strategy led her to a monastic summer experience sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Mo.

The weeklong event invites women who are looking for options for their future a chance to experience monastic life, to give them time away from busy schedules and to share with other women who might be thinking about religious life.

“I loved the idea of experiencing a community with no strings attached,” she said. However, when she arrived at the congregation’s motherhouse in northwest Missouri she quickly felt she’d make a mistake.

“I arrived on a Saturday and by Sunday evening I was pacing the halls begging sisters to give me something to do. I’m a do-er!” she laughed. “But they just told me to relax and enjoy the quiet.”

It worked because when the other participants returned home, Sister Mary Sophia stayed a bit longer.

“The sisters had touched my heart,” she said. “They couldn’t find me the morning I was scheduled to leave because instead of waiting in the car, I was sitting in the chapel praying.”

However, instead of solidifying her calling it scared her. By the time she had returned home to New Mexico she was terrified. Such a calling would mean leaving her comfort zone as an educator and leaving behind a widowed mother, family and friends.

So she did what she did best. She prayed.

“I asked God what I was supposed to do. He answered, ‘I want you here (in Clyde).’ I asked him why. He answered, ‘Because I love you.’ And that was it,” she said.

She entered the postulancy in 2001 and struggled with the transition to religious life. However, she continued on her path, entered the novitiate but then hit a “spiritual brick wall.”

“I decided to go home,” she said. “I didn’t feel ashamed about leaving. I just didn’t understand why.”

It was during Christmas Eve Mass at her former church that showed her the light. She had only been absent from the parish for a year but realized even though the church was packed that night, she recognized only a handful of people.

“I came to realize my deepest desire – which is God’s will – was to return to community and continue surrendering to God’s love,” she said. “I knew God was giving me a choice that night, and I made the choice to come back.”

She had only been absent from the monastery for six weeks, but that short time felt like an eternity when she faced the sisters.

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“It was hard to tell them I was leaving but even harder to tell them I was coming back and to know that my leaving was very painful for them,” she recalled. “But there has been no doubt in my heart since then. In difficulties, there is growth. These are holy, spirit-filled, faithful women who understand that even through struggle there is hope. It’s an honor to be called to this life.”

Prioress General Sister Ramona Varela is thrilled that Sister Mary Sophia is making the final commitment to her calling.

“She exudes joy and enthusiasm,” Sister Ramona said. “We are blessed as a congregation to have such a talented woman who truly desires to give her whole life to God in a life of prayer and work.”

As the date nears for her final monastic profession, Sister Mary Sophia prepares for a day that will allow her to continue a tradition that dates back 1,500 years to St. Benedict.

By making this step she will wear the small black and gold ring symbolizing her commitment as a perpetually professed sister. Tradition allows sisters to pass rings onto one another after they have passed away.

“I love that another sister, faithful to this life, wore it until God called her home,” she said. “I pray to do the same.”

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