News



Sr. Réjane Cytacki, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, has served as the executive director of A Nun's Life for the past two years. (Courtesy of Réjane Cytacki)



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For the past two years, Sr. Réjane Cytacki, a member of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, has served as the executive director of A Nun's Life. On a typical day, she can be found managing social media accounts, responding directly to messages and emails, preparing for podcasts and videos, managing the website, communicating with sponsors, and doing her best to live an authentic religious life. She does all this because she believes in the purpose A Nun's Life serves: to shed light on the lives of Catholic women religious in U.S.-based orders.

This ministry, started in 2006 by Srs. Maxine Kollasch and Julie Vieira of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan, has served as a tool to help many discerning their vocations find information and community.

Though Cytacki acknowledges that her approach to this ministry — and to life in general — is influenced by the Sisters of Charity charism, she loves being able to help disseminate information about the lives of women in different orders.

"I love that this ministry holds the space for women religious across the board," Cytacki said. "I'm holding the whole perspective. Habits, no habits. It's about the life and communicating the diversity of nuns' lives to the world."

Audio clips

Click here to find A Nun's Life podcast segments Global Sisters Report has published.

One unique advantage of A Nun's Life's existence in a purely virtual sphere, Cytacki said, is that it provides opportunities for education that otherwise would be less accessible in person.

"There's the website," she said, "which is organized with podcasts for those that want to listen, videos for those who want to watch, and blogs for those that want to read. It's trying to appeal to multisensory learning modalities."

Using the internet to provide information about religious life is critical to the future of women religious, Cytacki said. This includes reaching out to discerners, but also to help the broader Catholic and secular worlds understand who sisters are and what

they do.

"When I talk to other sisters my age who are doing podcasts or using technology, we all agree that it amplifies our voice," she said.

One of the most successful ways A Nun's Life has been able to engage others in this ministry has been through their podcasts. Under the leadership of Kollasch and Vieira*, A Nun's Life entered the world of podcasting just as it was taking off between 2009 and 2010. According to Cytacki, this has been instrumental in the ever-growing reach of the organization.

"We've been able to hold that footprint and are approaching 2 million downloads," Cytacki said. "That's kind of crazy, in my mind."



Sr. Ellis McCulloh celebrates Christmas with a Congolese family she worked with as a case manager for several years as part of her ministry. She entered the Sisters of the Humility of Mary in 2014 after previously working for the order's development office. (Courtesy of Ellis McCulloh)

Cytacki credits a good piece of advice from Kollasch for the podcast being one of the most successful projects of A Nun's Life.

"The podcast does the best job, because it's me, or whoever the host is, and the sister having a conversation," Cytacki said. "But, Sister Maxine always told me there's a third person at the table — the listener — and to please bring him or her are into the conversation. They're part of this, too."

Indeed, the podcast has been the way that some people, particularly those discerning religious life, first encounter A Nun's Life. Sr. Barbara Giehl, a Sister of Mercy now based in Pennsylvania, was facing a nontraditional entrance into religious life. Though she had almost entered the Sisters of Mercy at age 20, she postponed the decision, met her husband and had four children. After her husband's death nearly 13 years ago, the idea of professing vows with the Sisters of Mercy became a constant, loud thought that she couldn't ignore. Still, she had some trepidations. A Nun's Life helped.

"I remember there was a podcast with a sister who had been previously married and had children," Giehl said. "So, that was particularly interesting for me, because I was afraid of how the community would accept me, what they would think, and how that was all going to work."

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Though the podcast has served as an entry point for many people looking to learn more about the lives of Catholic sisters, the site has also fostered community amongst discerners in other ways. Sr. Eilis McCulloh of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary entered the community in 2014 after previously working for the order's development office in 2008 or 2009, around the same time that she first encountered A Nun's Life. At the time, she was not discerning religious life.

"I was very interested in their stories, and one day, I was online to learn more, and I don't even know how I stumbled across A Nun's Life, but that was in the very early days of it," McCulloh said. "They had a message board, and I got connected there and met a bunch of people."

This network of people was there when she was ready to engage with the possibility of a calling toward religious life.

"That was the first time I was really a part of a community of seekers," she said. "When I finally felt comfortable enough with discerning religious life, I knew that I was not alone in that discernment."

A Nun's Life was not the only online tool that McCulloh sought out during her discernment process. She also utilized the Vocation Match quiz provided by the VISION Vocation Network run by the National Religious Vocation Conference. This test matches prospective discerners with religious orders that might be a good fit.

"I used the Vocation Match quiz and read the stories on there, but I was pretty set on entering my community," McCulloh said.



Sr. Melissa Cessac celebrates her first profession of vows as a member of the Congregation of Divine Providence in San Antonio, Texas, on July 24, 2020. She said A Nun's Life ministry was helpful when she was discerning religious life. (Courtesy of Melissa Cessac)

Although the quiz did not impact her decision to enter the Sisters of the Humility of Mary, the VISION magazine was particularly useful in illustrating the possibilities of life as a sister.

"I'm always drawn in by stories. So, with Vocation Match, the Vision magazine had stories about what sisters are doing," McCulloh said. " I also read other blogs that were online, even by sisters who had already entered communities, and that showed me there's other people my age that are doing this versus a world of 80-year-olds."

People have also found A Nun's Life through social media. Sr. Melissa Cessac, a member of the Congregation of Divine Providence in San Antonio, Texas, was in the process of discerning religious life, something that she found daunting at times, when she sat down to watch NBC's "The Sound of Music Live!" While watching the show, she checked Twitter and found A Nun's Life because their account was live-tweeting about the performance. From there, she was hooked.

"Especially in those early months of, 'Oh my gosh, is this where my life is going?' they were a tremendous support to me," Cessac said.

McCulloh said the A Nun's Life community was invaluable as she explored her calling. One of the best things, she said, was that there was no pressure from the network of women she met to enter religious life or not.

"We built a community where we supported one another as we were testing things out," she said.

Cessac also noted the honesty of the environment fostered by A Nun's Life.

"It was a safe place where I could ask questions, and where I felt I was getting the real story of what religious life is like," she said. "Not just the beautiful, wonderful things, but also the joys and challenges of living in community."

**This story has been updated to clarify that Sr. Vieira was also involved in creating A Nun's Life Ministry podcast.*