News
Q&As



Josephite Sr. Sally Koch. whose album, "Use Your Voice," was released in 2022, plays piano. "Music is a big part of how I pray and get in touch with my own heart," she said. (Courtesy of Sally Koch)



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When asked how she embodies the charism of her order, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Sr. Sally Koch shared the simple yet profound phrase: "to do all that woman is capable of."

Her order engages this charism on a communitywide level through social activism, pursuit of justice and creative expression of their vows — but Koch also embodies the dynamism of a life spent doing all that woman is capable of as an individual. One of the youngest sisters in the Los Angeles community, Koch aims for a life of profound integrity — a life of deep presence and unity through her creative expression as a musician and full-time work as a communications director.

"Throughout my day I try to be aware of how I am, my presence to whomever I'm with," Koch said. "Am I being love and receiving love?"

Koch has succeeded in embodying love in many places, including through graduate work, volunteering full time in Florida and Portland, Oregon, and finally finding her way to her religious community of sisters in California.

Her album, "Use Your Voice," was released in 2022, but music has been an integral part of her personal spirituality and vocational contribution to the world since she was a child. "Music is a big part of how I pray and get in touch with my own heart, whatever deeper feelings may be occurring there," she said. Her album, and evidently, her life, are aimed toward helping others do the same.

***Global Sisters Report*: How did you discern a vocation to religious life?**

Koch: It was a long journey for me. I grew up in the church — my mother was a choir director — so I was involved from a young age through playing the piano at age 5 and later the organ at age 9. I think it was at around 12 years old that the thought first came to me about the possibility of being a religious sister. I remember responding to my thoughts with an immediate "No way!"

Later on in my life as a young adult, I was earning my master's in pastoral ministry through Santa Clara University, and my vision of God changed. I had seen God as a taskmaster throughout my life — he was a loving God, but also saying to me: "You gotta do this or else." I didn't know what the "else" was, but when in graduate school, that view of him transformed into something far more loving, more present.

I became inspired by the Jesuit principle of "finding God in all things" and felt a call to continue living out that principle through a life of volunteering. I volunteered full time in Florida, as well as in Portland, Oregon. It was in Portland that my heart once again opened to the idea of religious life, and I finally felt ready to actually ask the question; my relationship with God had turned into a more loving relationship, where God didn't need me to be anything, He wanted the best for me — whatever I chose. He would still be for and with me.

I actually found my community by Googling "women, Jesuit, St. Joseph," because of my experiences with Jesuit spirituality, and because St. Joseph had been randomly and repeatedly popping up. I stumbled on the Sisters of St. Joseph in Los Angeles, and a wonderful sister became my spiritual director while I was living in Portland for three years. After that time, I felt ready to commit to my religious community.

What attracted you to Jesuit spirituality?

It's really the practicality of it that attracted me. The Examen in particular is a practice of looking at your actual day, in its reality and ordinariness; written prayers are beautiful, but sometimes prayers can be in my head, using language or words that are too lofty. The Examen grounds me — I can ask myself, "What actually happened in my day?" — and become more aware that God is there.

The question I most like to ask myself in my Examen is "Where in my day did I see or be love? Where in my day did I not see or be love?" I truly just want to be more love in this world. I love the Examen and Jesuit spirituality as a whole because I love the immediacy of Jesus being with me in my everyday life.



Sr. Sally Koch, center front, poses with other Josephite Sisters who have been in the community 10 years or less at the 2023 retreat with Tending the Flame, a group organized by the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph. Koch is one of the youngest members of her community in Los Angeles. (Courtesy of Sally Koch)

What are the charisms of your order, and how do you see those charisms expressed?

Our foremost charism is unifying love — we've also called it "unioning love." We find that term includes other concepts like reconciliation and forgiveness — whatever is truly unifying for humanity. We devote our lives to unity not just with people — that's definitely needed in this world that is so divided and polarized — but also cosmologically; with creation, the universe, galaxies.

It's hard to think about, but we have to look at that oneness of creation and ask ourselves: How am I in right relation with all that is? How am I in relation with creation through my thoughts, my actions? You have to be aware, and it has to be a process; perfection isn't attainable. I just need to do what I can in this present

moment to be unified in all that I do, with all that I am. I have to recognize that I'm called to be one with whatever is in front of me.

Our charism has multiple expressions, because the Sisters of St. Joseph bring whatever they're called to; we all bring our own individual gifts to the community. We have some sisters who are currently devoted to border work, some who are called to be restorative partners and pursue restorative justice for the formerly incarcerated. Essentially, we are all aimed toward trying to be with people precisely where they are, and be a presence of love.

Do you have particular initiatives that you're currently involved in?

In a way, I get to be involved in them all through my community! Every six years, we do chapter directives where we decide together what will be our focus throughout the next season. Currently, our directives are responding to the crisis of earth and global warming, pursuing deeper awareness of our complicity and dismantling interlocking systems of oppression, to articulate and authentically live our vows in ways that witness and speak to today's realities, walk with women as we claim our voice and work toward an inclusive church and society, and to use our collective voice to accompany others in speaking their truth.

Within those, we do each continually ask where we are called to focus on as individuals and as a community. I don't think any of these directives are ever going to be completed, ever — but that can't stop us from using our gifts where and while we can.

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What does an inclusive church look like, in your vision?

To me, the Spirit never discriminates — he gives gifts generously to everyone. I think an inclusive church means hearing more of a woman's perspective at the pulpit, breaking open the Word with a specific feminine voice and energy.

The synod is really talking about raising up the leadership of women. It's beautiful to ask ourselves: What could that really look like? I think women have a particular ability of speaking, then leaving silence for the Spirit to speak our hearts, almost like a circle. To me, that intimacy is an essentially feminine act, one we need more of in

the church.

Additionally, my hope for our church and society is that we stop "othering" LGBTQ+ people, which leads to holding people at a distance and so it is easier to hate, judge, fear or deny their existence. Instead, I want our church and society to get to know them — get to know LGBTQ+ people's experiences in our church and society, what they go through on a daily basis, how they view God, and more, in hopes that more love and inclusion will happen in our church and society.

Ultimately, I want a church that is creative; I just want us to not be afraid of what the Spirit is calling us to, and what truly creating as a church might look like.