Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Religious Life



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I discovered my passion for Christian community when I answered the call to religious life.

When I entered, I anticipated a life of service and prayer. I relished the relationship with Jesus the bridegroom that comes with consecration. I liked the idea of serving and praying together. I looked forward to receiving the blessings of community, but my expectations of the common life were limited and a little unrealistic.

My upbringing didn't prepare me for Christian community. As a member of Generation X, I was suspicious of groups and institutions for a long time and felt more comfortable with a few close friends. During my novitiate I struggled because I misunderstood and resisted full engagement in community life. But as I continued to live in community, I began to open my heart and mind, and becoming more fully engaged. I have learned a lot. It certainly helps that I've found my people!

Prayer has played an important role in my experience of Christian community. I've come to see it as a force that supports and unites us. The Gospels remind us that where two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, Christ is present. In community prayer, I have learned that sometimes you are carried, and sometimes you carry others. When one member's faith is strong, it steadies those who may be struggling; when someone wavers, others provide support. It's a steady exchange of gift given and gift received that builds bonds and deepens faith. In community, I have at times been carried and at times done the carrying.

As a sister, the way I live Christian community lies at the heart of my vocation. Our commitment to common life and to one another becomes a powerful witness to the world.

Because of that commitment, I like to be active in my province, in any way I can. I join committees, book clubs and prayer groups, and I attend gatherings and chapters. I enjoy contributing my skills, but I also value the different experiences community life offers. Working with a variety of sisters in different settings continually stretches and enriches me. I've been warned not to overextend myself, yet it's such a pleasure for me.

> We are blessed by brokenness and beauty. We inspire each other to keep trying and challenge each other to rise above our weaknesses and

limitations, with God's help.

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The best part of my ministry is that it's an internal one. Specifically, I serve as the archivist, but the role is about much more than preserving records. It places me at the heart of community, through experiences and relationships. In that space, I am able to contribute and be a part of everything, and get to know our sisters and lay partners.

I have felt tension between being flexible and being my authentic self in community life. I have seen the importance of being willing to do things someone else's way and according to their timing, while also being authentic and contributing my own experiences and wisdom. I've learned that there is a time for both in community life, because the Holy Spirit is in all of us. I've realized that in Christian community, it is more important to be open, to others and to God. This openness holds together flexibility and authenticity and leaves room for God at the center of our lives.

One of my favorite aspects of community life is that it's a combination of the real and the ideal. We experience God's blessings in the present moment and in what we aspire to, sometimes at the same time. We grow spiritually, becoming more and more who God knows we can be. This happens to individual members and the entire group as one. We're also companions on the faith journey, in relationship as we are, as we approach our destination. This support is especially meaningful when life (and we) are complicated and messy. Recently, I've been going through a time of transition and renewal, and have benefited greatly from this spiritual companionship.

I'm finding, too, that my commitment to community has helped me relate to other people: my family of origin, those I meet and work with, and many kinds of people. In the convent, we share life with people we share our values, but there is great diversity in personality. Being able to be sister to others in this way makes me better able to find common ground, communicate and be empathetic. The lifestyle of a Christian community is countercultural in a polarized world. It's a powerful witness.

I love our daily prayers together, in the morning and evening. I also look forward to and benefit spiritually from our annual retreats. I love to go on retreats with my community! Even during a silent retreat, there is such power in us praying together in a place that our community has prayed together in for a long time. I love enjoying

each other's company before and after the retreat and renewing our vows together. It's another way we share this journey.

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Our life in common is the biggest blessing and the biggest challenge of religious life, and I think of Christian community as a whole that way. I know from experience that it isn't perfect. We're human beings living together, after all. There are bumps in the road. We have bad days and hurt each other sometimes. But I always find it worth working through, as we encourage each other to reach higher and do better. There's so much joy in it. I cherish our lives together: the lively conversations around the dinner table, time sharing about our days, and adoration in our local home chapel.

Life in a Christian community reminds us to keep our feet on the ground while we reach for the stars. We are blessed by brokenness and beauty. We inspire each other to keep trying and challenge each other to rise above our weaknesses and limitations, with God's help.

It's energizing for me to connect with community. I experience God's presence in those moments. I used to enjoy being on the outside, but now I love being on the inside and forming deeper relationships in Christian community. What a difference it made in my life!