

Erie woman joins contemplative order

Sister Macrina (Catherine) Caulfield is pictured walking in the snow-covered woods that surround the Immaculate Heart of Mary Monastery in Vermont.

SISTER MACRINA (CATHERINE) CAULFIELD, a longtime parishioner of St. George Parish, Erie, and a Gannon University graduate, made temporary vows last November with the Immaculate Heart of Mary Monastery, a cloistered Benedictine community in Westfield, Vermont.

In a ceremony attended by her parents, Michael and Stephanie Caulfield, and several of her siblings, all of Erie, Sister Macrina, 26, made the Benedictine vows of stability, conversion of life and obedience.

At the close of three years, Sister Macrina may renew these vows annually for a minimum of another three years before final and perpetual profession of vows.

Sister Macrina recently shared her thoughts on her vocation journey and her new community — known for its life of silent contemplation (www.ihmwestfield.com).

Below is an excerpt of her letter to *Faith* magazine:

A LETTER FROM A CLOISTER

The first thought in my mind when looking back over my journey to this point is gratitude. I am so grateful to God, my family back home in Erie, and my new monastic family here in Vermont. It is through the grace of God, as well as the support and prayers of those around me, that I have reached this point.

The community of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Monastery has been friends of my family since before I was born. My whole life, we would get Christmas cards from the monastery, hear different stories about them, and whenever my family was on vacation in the New England area, we always paid a visit.

My dad tells the story of coming up in 1992 and the nuns tossing a balloon back and forth over the parlor grille with my older brother and sister. Mom was pregnant with me, so that was my first visit to the monastery! When I was young, I always thought I would be one of them when I grew up. And now I am!

Our daily life here is structured around our most important work, the *Opus Dei*, the Work of God, the prayer of the universal Church. We gather in choir eight times a day to sing God's praises, thank Him for His gifts,

and ask His blessing on ourselves, those who rely on our prayers, the whole Church and the whole world!

In between the liturgical hours, we have time for work, for meals, for private prayer, for study and reading (*Lectio Divina*), for recreating. But no matter what you are doing, whether sweating in the garden, enjoying a rollicking game of "Uno" with your sisters, or pounding your head against your Latin grammar [studies] in your room, you know that very soon the bell will call you to choir to bring you back face-to-face with the reality of why we are all here, which is Him, the Lord.

We sing the psalms, ancient hymns of the Jewish people, in Latin, the language of the Church, to the melodies of Gregorian chant. Some of these very same tunes that I sing with my sisters have been sung by the Church for a thousand years! We have the privilege and responsibility of carrying on this great tradition.

Our main source of income is making altar breads. We make hosts to supply many parishes around the country for

their celebration of the Mass. This work is so fitting for our lives as contemplatives. Since we work in silence, as we measure flour, sort and bag hosts, or do any of the other many steps in the production process, we can pray for those who will later receive these hosts in the Eucharist.

The work also brings me closer to my home parish [St. George, Erie] because it has started ordering hosts from us. So, in that way, I am once again connected to daily Mass at St. George. It is a blessed work.

Despite the close connection to our monastery and my childhood dream of being a nun, I did have many doubts about entering. What if it didn't work out? What would I do if I had to leave? It is a big risk to leave all behind and enter a religious community. But we take risks for so many reasons, many of them selfish and many of them don't pay off. Why not take a risk for God?

God is so great there is no question that He deserves to have people dedicate their lives completely to Him, to serve Him and to praise Him. I know that I am far from being worthy of this vocation, but He chooses whom He wills, and if He wants me, who am I to say no?



Sister Macrina Caulfield

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Surprisingly, the most striking blessing of cloistered life that I have experienced is freedom! There is a deep, interior freedom in this life, hidden in the house of God.

It is a paradox that one should live behind a cloister wall to find this freedom, but I think it fits well with the way Christ works. After all, He wanted to give us eternal life and He chose to do that by dying. He wants to give me the freedom to be who I truly am. So He has allowed me to live this cloistered life which creates a special intimacy with Him, a unique sharing in His poverty by “renunciation not only of things, but also of space, of contacts, of so many benefits of creation” as St. John Paul II said in *Verbi Sponsa*.

This call to follow Him into the desert is our way of conformity to Him. And we know in faith that the closer we are to Him, the closer we can be to all those whom He loves, which is everyone!

This is the “mysterious fecundity” of which our [Benedictine] Declarations speak: “If we are separated from the world, it is in order to be more present spiritually to it.” †

Yours in Christ,
Sister Macrina



Many members of the Caulfield family of Erie traveled to Vermont to see Sister Macrina make her temporary vows with the Immaculate Heart of Mary Monastery, a cloistered Benedictine community in Westfield, Vermont.

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