

Derksen: ‘The Lord smoothes the way,’ says Edmonton woman on journey to become a Sister of Life

“Every woman wants to do something great with her love,” Sister Marie Veritas tells me.

On Aug. 6, Sister Marie Veritas Severin, SV, originally from Edmonton, will profess perpetual vows as a Sister of Life. In addition to the three traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, Sisters of Life profess a special fourth vow: to protect and enhance the sacredness of human life.

I reached Sister Marie at St. Joseph’s Convent in Toronto.



Sister Marie Veritas

“It’s hard to express the indescribable privilege of being completely His,” she shares, “and of sharing His life in a radical way.

“Perpetual profession – when, in response to the Lord’s call and invitation, I profess my vows until death – is my definitive response to the Lord’s proposal.”

Sister Marie has been preparing for perpetual profession for the past eight years. Currently stationed in Toronto, she began her journey with the Sisters of Life in New York, where the community is based. Founded in 1991, the Sisters strive to foster a “Culture of Life,” through their pro-life apostolate. “We

offer practical, emotional, and spiritual support to women who are pregnant and in crisis,” Sister Marie explains. “We also journey with thousands of women in finding hope, healing and freedom after abortion.”

However, their apostolate is just one dimension of the Sisters’ lives. They describe contemplative prayer as their “primary work,” explaining that “all our apostolic labours flow from our daily prayer.”

The pro-life work that they do is very important. However, even more important than what they *do* is who they *are* : consecrated women, espoused to Christ. Their life of prayer and union with God is their first priority.

The Charism of Life was something that attracted Sister Marie to the community, but the idea of religious life was in her mind long before she had ever heard of the Sisters of Life.

“I grew up in a pretty normal Catholic family,” she shares, reflecting on her childhood and adolescence in Edmonton, “but we never really talked about vocations.”



Sister Marie Veritas speaks to youth about the value of human life.

Nevertheless, Sister remembers thinking about the possibility of becoming a sister as early as sixth grade. Meanwhile, she continued to grow in her faith. She describes her summers at Our Lady of Victory Camp in the Archdiocese of Edmonton as “the most formative experience of my youth and young adulthood.” It was at OLVC that her desire for God began to deepen and grow.

“Jesus was wooing my heart,” she explains. “By the time I began my first year of biology at the University of Alberta, I had made the decision to stop hanging out with a bunch of my friends, who had started to go down the partying

route," she remembers. "I wanted something more.

"I discovered that Jesus was in the chapel at St. Joseph's College on campus, and I would spend all my free moments in the quiet nook before Him, praying with Scripture. It was during that 'year in the desert' that I began to powerfully experience His love for me – the real me.

"A dear friend told me about the Sisters of Life. The Charism of Life captured my heart powerfully, and over a time of particular discernment, I experienced that the Lord was inviting me to enter."

I ask if it was difficult for Sister to leave her home and family in Edmonton to enter the community's postulant house in The Bronx.

"Yes and no," she replies. "Sure, it was a big step, going to New York, a place where I'd never dreamed of living. But when you're moving in grace, the Lord smoothes the way. I was so full of joy in following the Lord's call. "

After nine months as a postulant and two years as a novice, Sister has spent the last five years in temporary vows, participating fully in the prayer life and ministry of the community in their Toronto mission. The Sisters' daily routine revolves around the Eucharist.



Sister Marie Veritas, far right, is seen with other postulants in 2010.

"At our house here in Toronto, we normally wake up at 5 a.m., have Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, pray the Office of Readings & Morning Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, and then have a 45-minute silent meditation.

"Then we enter into the Holy Mass. After Mass, we have breakfast in common, with some kind of spiritual reading, then a period of personal time, and then we begin our apostolic work.

"At midday, we pray the Rosary and Midday Prayer, and then have a social lunch. We then go back to our work, and, in the evening, we pray a 30-minute

meditation and Evening Prayer (or Vespers) before a common, silent dinner (with spiritual reading). Then, a time of community recreation, ending in Night Prayer (or Compline).

“On Fridays, we have a day of prayer and silence. Our whole life flows from and back to our Eucharistic Lord.”

After living the life of the Sisters for the past five years, Sr. Marie Veritas is now preparing her heart for her perpetual profession.

“It will be the greatest grace of my life,” she shares. “It means giving myself completely over to the joy of the Lord. It means belonging to Him as His bride.”

When I ask if Sister has any advice for young women who are discerning a call to religious life, her response comes readily.

“First, pay attention to the desires of your heart,” she says. “Every woman wants to do something great with her love.

“Every woman – by virtue of her feminine nature – is called to be Bride and Mother, whether that’s spiritually, or spiritually and physically. It’s a longing imprinted deep in our hearts.”

“And, at the same time, every woman desires to be loved: greatly, particularly, intimately. And that’s a good thing to be able to acknowledge, because it touches on a deep truth: the truth that God, from all of eternity, desired with all His Heart to create you, *you*, simply because he *loves* you.

“Being able to recognize and name the desires of our hearts helps us to discover who we are – *whose* we are – as loved so intimately by God. It also helps us realize that God desires our love particularly, because only you can love God the way you do.”

– *Rose Derksen is a pastoral assistant at the parishes of St. Alphonsus and St. Clare in Edmonton.*