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Women To Profess Vows To Become Sisters Of Holy Child Jesus

Their career paths led them elsewhere to nursing and social work, yet Mary Kerner and Aquilla Peterson always felt something was missing from their lives. Answering God's call to live a life of service by becoming Sisters in the Society of the Holy Child Jesus has replaced that missing link.

During a Mass on Nov. 15 at 4 p.m. in the Immaculate Conception Chapel at Rosemont College, 1400 Montgomery Ave., Rosemont, Mary, 54, previously of Lansdowne, and Aquilla, 59, previously of Bryn Mawr, will profess perpetual vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience and become Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus during a Mass. They will also sign handwritten vows; be presented with a ring that is a sign of their commitment to the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and which all Holy Child Sisters receive upon their profession; and receive a Solemn Blessing by Geraldine MacCarthy, SHCJ, the Leader of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus, and Rev. Lucien Longtin, SJ.

Sister Mary and Sister Aquilla's Profession of Final Vows follows a Temporary Profession in 2004, after which both women began living in community with Sisters of the Holy Child and undertook ministry work. Sister Aquilla served at the Society's mission site in the Dominican Republic and Sister Mary began doing home health care, before moving into hospice care with Wissahickon Hospice.

Although she heard the call years before, Sister Mary worked as an operating room nurse for 26 years before finally answering God's call to her by becoming a Sister. "Nursing is a career and it only goes so far. It doesn't involve everything," she said. "Being a Sister of the Holy Child involves

every part of my life. It's not just a job. It's a ministry it's how I interact with people in every area of my life, in every minute of my life. As a fully professed sister, I am looking forward to living in community with other women who are passionate about the Society's mission and with whom I share values of service to others."

As to why women become Sisters, Sister Anita Quigley, who is a member of the Society's American Province Leadership Team, said, "You become a Sister because you're deeply committed to serving God and others, and because you are passionate about the mission of the religious order in which you become a Sister. Together, you share similar values of service, as well as spirituality."

Sister Aquilla and Sister Mary are among a handful of women who are entering religious orders later in life. Because of the many different opportunities women have today, those who enter religious orders have often spent many years experiencing life on their own and developing a great certainty about giving their life to God.

Sister Aquilla is no exception. She attended college during a period in U.S. history marked with Vietnam protests and the Civil Right movement. She notes that her own life often mirrored this turmoil. As her graduation approached, she became aware of what she deems a vast emptiness in her life, "a futile quest for happiness without purpose."

Coupled with losing her mother to cancer, Sister Aquilla admits that it brought her to a point of darkness in which she had no choice but to cry out to God. "It was at this bottom, this dark place that I was able to experience a personal revelation of God and self," she said. "With new awareness, my life began to



Mary Kerner

change for the better, going in directions I never dreamt possible. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know about faith, life, and self."

As she makes her final vows, Sister Aquilla says, "I am here because I want to make life better for others. I believe I can do that better by being joined with women who are actively seeking solutions to the needs of the world today."

Women interested in becoming Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus undergo a five-step process over several years culminating with the final vow profession. Sister Carmen Torres, Vocation Director, said candidates must be mature; have a desire to listen to how God is calling them and have an openness to explore God's call; have conversations with a spiritual director; and show a willingness to participate in events important to the Society, such as vow professions and celebrations. "Whoever enters is a gift for us," Sister Carmen said. "The process is designed so that women who are thinking of becoming a Sister of the Holy Child have the opportunity to make sure that this is truly where God is leading them and where they want to be."

For more information, contact the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in Drexel Hill at 610-626-1400.