



News Release

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"It felt like home" - God's plan leads young woman to monastic life

CLYDE, Mo. – Clarisa Cutaia was no ordinary teenager.

Other students her age were busy with normal high school activities while Clarisa was more interested in something else.

Religion.

"Most of my friends weren't practicing Catholics," Clarisa said. "So it wasn't cool for me to suggest, 'Hey, let's go to church,' when we were looking for something to do on a Saturday night."

Regardless, the young woman was being pulled by a desire to learn more about the religion she was born into but had little knowledge about.

Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Clarisa and her family moved to the United States when she was just 3 years old. They settled in Metairie, La., a large suburb of New Orleans. Growing up in a large city meant everyone was "always on the go, doing their own thing," Clarisa said. Life was busy for her, her two sisters and parents.

Clarisa attended a Catholic school until the third grade but became more curious about her faith when she reached 13. So she asked her mom if she could attend a Catholic religion education class.

"I was so eager to learn more, but the class only met once a week," Clarisa said. "I started getting jealous of the other kids who had class each day."

So she began reading on her own after her class ended. She read anything she could get her hands on. She read about the Bible and the Bible itself.

"I was doing *lectio* (spiritual reading) before I even knew what it was," she laughed.

The years went by and Clarisa graduated from high school. Having worked since she was 15, she decided to take a year off from school to contemplate what the future had in store for her.



Postulant Clarisa Cutaia is the newest member of the Benedictine Sisters.

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“It wasn’t that I didn’t want to go to college because I love to learn,” she said. “I spent a lot of time in prayer asking what I should do with the rest of my life, not just the next three or four years. I was searching for a long-range answer.”

While working at a daycare, the same one she attended as a child and where she had learned English, Clarisa decided to attend a local community college and earn a degree in early childhood education. After that, she was off to study theology at Our Lady of Holy Cross in New Orleans.

At least that was the plan.

“I danced with the idea of religious life for a while and felt a marvelous sense of peace with the idea,” she said. Her spiritual adviser gave her a copy of “Vision,” a vocation guide. She checked out the Web site and put out feelers to the religious communities that caught her eye.

“The next day I was swarmed with e-mails from communities all across the country,” she said. “I read every single one because I didn’t want to miss out on anything.”

However, it was a message from Sister Ruth Elaine Starman, vocation director for the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Mo. that caught her eye.

“Sister Ruth mentioned that the community was a semi-cloistered one. So I looked at their Web site and immediately fell in love with it,” Clarisa said.

She began a correspondence with the sisters, which led to her attending their Summer Monastic Program, a weeklong residential program for young women discerning a call to religious life.

“I had never done anything like that before. I had never heard of the Liturgy of the Hours. It was all very new to me,” she said, “but it felt like home.”

She returned that fall for a two-week visit, realizing that the sense of home she had felt in the summer was still there. She began the process to apply for entrance, a procedure that was unfamiliar for her since no one in her family had ever entered religious life. She returned once more for a month-long stay the following spring.

Her application was accepted, and in August Clarisa, now 22, entered the postulancy of the Benedictine Sisters. As a postulant, she will participate in communal prayer and develop her personal prayer life. She will work within the monastery and take classes that aid in her transition to monastic life. After a year, her progress will be evaluated and the leadership will decide if she is ready to be admitted to the next level, the novitiate.

While her original plan to study childhood education and theology didn’t work out, Clarisa doesn’t seem to mind.

“That’s OK,” she said with a smile. “I prefer God’s plan any day.”

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