

Nashville Dominicans in the national spotlight



NPR Photo

The Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, the Nashville-based order of religious women who do a bang-up job running [Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville](#), are getting some national exposure. NPR recently featured the thriving congregation on “All Things Considered.” The program reported that 27 women joined the Nashville Dominicans this year and 90 entered over the past five years.

A snip:

This is the Pope John Paul generation, coming of age. Of course, that may explain why they chose to enter a convent — but why this convent? Most visited several orders, and the novices nod as Sister Joan of Arc says the minute she met the Nashville Dominicans, she felt as if she had come home.

“I was blown away — seeing them in their habits, seeing their joyful witness, listening to them sing. Oh! It was captivating, it was so captivating,” she says.

Of course, not everyone is cut out for this life, and a few drop out in the first two years.

“The day-to-day is hard,” says (Beatrice) Clark, who is in her fifth year. “The day-to-day can be mundane in little stuff. But in the large choices, this is the most freeing thing I could have chosen, because everything else would have been trying

to find this — this defining relationship that would give value to everything.”

*Including her work teaching sophomores at St. Cecilia Academy, where Clark is, on this fall day, grilling her students on *The Scarlet Letter*. Clark, who had planned to become a litigator, handles discussion like a cross examination, peppering the girls with questions and the girls firing their answers right back.*

Catholic bishops beg the Nashville Dominicans to send their young sisters to their parochial schools, and more than 100 of them now teach in 34 schools in 13 states. The sisters are a big hit with the students as well because they don't fit the stereotype.

“You hear stories from your parents about getting spanked with rulers and stuff, and that's not true at all,” says Breanne Lampert, one of Clark's sophomores. “But seeing the sisters here compared to other schools — they're so much younger. I don't know, they understand you really well.”

“The young sisters are really inspiring,” says Brady Diaz-Barriga, “because you're like, ‘Oh, I could never do that. I just love Facebook and my cell phone and my computer too much to give that up!’ But you see how much joy your life can be with less and not having all of that.”

Isabelle Aparicio says the young sisters' lives have a surprising appeal. “Seeing these young women make these really hard decisions and then seeing so many of them make it, it's kind of inspiring,” she says. “And it's actually made me think about it, possibly.”

Much more [here](#).