



Sister Victoria Batchelor

My vocation story

Both my grandfathers were Church of England clergymen and one of them baptized me.

I always read a good few books and, when I left school, my reading led me pretty much to give up the Christian faith, though I came back to it on occasion. Later I was sharing digs with a girl with whom I had been at a Teachers Training College. She had been brought up without a religion and, as the result of meeting a Catholic teacher at school where she taught, became a Catholic.

We emigrated to Canada and, since she went to Mass on Sundays, I started going to the Church of England. It was a very different story from that Church in England. Gradually I came nearer to the Catholic Church, rather dragging my feet. The deciding moment was on a street car on the way to work. We used to read the Toronto Globe & Mail and this day in 1949 (is she **THAT** old?) it carried the story of the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary by the Communists. My friend – usually optimistic – was downcast.

“This looks like the end of the Church”, she said.

To cheer her up I said, “But the Church will be there till the end of the world!” Then it suddenly dawned on me what Church, and I took instruction and was received.

Reading again, I came across a biography of Janet Erskine Stewart, a Scottish lady, who became a Catholic in her early twenties and went on to become a Sacred Heart nun. Each time I took up this book, I had an uncomfortable feeling.

One day I said to myself, “I must find out what this uncomfortable feeling is.” I put down the book and realized with horror, that perhaps I ought to be a nun too!

“Well,” I said to the Lord. “If that is what you *really* want, so be it.” The next question, what sort?

My first thought was the sisters from whose college I was studying for my degree, but a friend told me they asked for a big dowry which I did not have. Next I read an article in a magazine about the Charles de Foucauld sisters, the Little Sisters of Jesus. I wrote to them in France and found they were just starting their first North American community in Montreal. So I went to spend a weekend with them. It was exciting. They had a tenement down in the dock area. Winter was just starting and a Montreal winter is a cold one. They had no heating and it seemed no prospect of any. By the end of the weekend I was too much of a coward to face the cold and conditions with these courageous sisters.

When I graduated from University, I knew it was time to return to my family in England, which I did, and started looking around for a job. But this ‘nun thing’ didn’t go away. So I wrote to some Carmelite sisters, but their return letter said they didn’t usually take people over 25. I was 29!

Desperation! I planned to go to confession in Westminster Cathedral, but for some reason, the penitents were redirected to another church nearby. I was going to ask the priest about this 'nun thing' but got such a blast on account of the time that had lapsed since my last confession that I changed my mind!

There was only one priest in England I really knew – the one who had instructed the friend I had gone to Canada with. By this time he was the Curate in Guildford.

"You had better talk to our Mother General", he said. This Mother General was away in Africa at the time. I was living in London, away from home by this time, and when the Mother General, Mother Francis Spring FMDM returned, I arranged by phone to come down for the weekend. I would be met at the station.

I wasn't, and I suddenly realized I didn't know the name of the Congregation or where the Convent was. I phoned the Curate, who was out. "Convent? Which Convent?" the Parish Priest asked. I gave him the phone number. "Top of the High street, turn right at the Odeon," said the Parish Priest.

As I climbed the hill I saw the Convent was called 'Mount Alvernia Clinic Nursing Home'. "It's a *nursing* order", I thought.

The next day, Mother Francis came to see me. "How old are you?" she asked.

"Twenty nine".

"Then it's about time you made up your mind." So I did. Five days later I entered our Congregation and I don't think I have ever regretted the decision.