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# Sr. Hillery: Catholic Youth Retention

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Nicholas Martinez

### **Sr. Hillery: Catholic Youth Retention**

Abstract: I interviewed Sr. Hillery in January of 2018 regarding her experiences as a woman religious. This paper includes a portion of the interview where she spoke on her experience with retaining youth in the Catholic Church.

When I interviewed Sr. Hillery she told me all about her life and journey as a woman religious. Sr. Hillery was born and raised on a small island called East Timor located in southeast Asia. This country is predominantly Muslim however Sr. Hillery practiced Catholicism in East Timor. She was inspired to become a sister by a convent missionary that was across the street from her house where she grew up. Sr. Hillery began her journey in 1999 right after she graduated high school and eventually became a missionary sister. She was sent to the US and arrived in Iowa where she went to college to learn English. Sr. Hillery traveled to many states and worked as a youth teacher in religious education as well as ministry. Once the topic of the youth in the Catholic Church was discussed, Sr. Hillery had many interesting points. The question brought up during the interview was “what can the Catholic Church do to retain more youth members?” Sr. Hillery’s main point was that since the US is a democracy, it makes practicing religion optional to everyone which means that the youth can choose not to be involved in the Catholic Church. She went on to discuss that in her home country there is an abundance of young people entering the religious life: “sometimes 500-600 young seminarians enter at once.” Sr. Hillery then went on to talk about how East Timor has so many youth are involved in the church. She stated “All the sisters and priests have a daily schedule where we

meet with the youth group twice a week, this is why we have so many young people.” Sr. Hillery was very passionate about reaching out to the youth. She enjoyed working and teaching because she was able to help those in need.

Another experience that Sr. Hillery had was that she noticed that the youth in America are very busy during the day and do not have time to attend the youth groups. She states: “If I compare East Timor to the US, I see that young people in the US are very busy studying and working. Some young people even work on Sundays to support their studies.” Sr. Hillery said she understood that some young people have to work on Sundays; however she looked saddened by her observation, but still optimistic about the youth that her youth group program serves. Sr. Hillery then went on to compare her experiences of Sundays growing up stating: “My parents taught me Sunday is for God only and you have to go to church. That is why everything is closed on Sunday in East Timor.”

One of the last topics that was discussed in the interview was her first experiences in the US at a Catholic Church. Sr. Hillery talked about her experience saying: “The first week I arrived, I went to church and was shocked at how few young people were there but then little by little I started to learn and understand.”

Overall Sr. Hillery had a positive outlook towards the future for Catholic Church youth retainment. Her insight regarding teaching youth and ministry is helpful for understanding what can be done to retain current and future youth members of the Catholic Church.

## Work Cited

“Sr. Hillery.” In person interview by author. January 3, 2018.