

PROFILE

Face2Face with Joanne Slugocki

Frank Johnson spent a few days recently enjoying the warm hospitality of Madonna House in Robin Hood's Bay, North Yorkshire. He interviewed the newest resident there: a 27-year-old Canadian called Joanne Slugocki.

Joanne, tell me something about your family:

My family lives in Canada, both of my parents are Polish. I have two younger brothers, one of them is studying in the U.S and the other is still at home.

Was faith important to you as a child?

Faith was modeled to me by my parents as early as I can remember. Dad would get down on his knees with me every night for prayers and would read me Bible stories before bed. My parents were both involved in parish life as well as the charismatic movement. We often prayed together. It was naturally important to me as well but it wasn't until I was older that I really made it my own.

When did you get the first feeling that God was calling you to something different?

I think the first time I really considered it was with one of my friends on the playground when I was around twelve years old. She said to me: 'What if we're not called to marriage?' I had never really thought about it. When I was about seven, we had a family friend who was a religious sister and she came to visit us. I was really quite inspired by her. Something about her was so beautiful and maternal, so I'm sure a few seeds were sown then. I remember thinking 'I want to be like that,' but that quickly went. It came up in my heart in a more tangible way at World Youth Day in Spain in 2011. One experience I had was during the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament – I really felt that the

Lord was present and that I was walking towards him, like a bride walking towards the groom on the altar. But after that I was in denial for quite some time. I was frightened. Growing up I always hoped that marriage would be my vocation. Then in the spring of 2013 I decided I would walk the Santiago de Compostela Way with a friend. I wasn't really doing it for any faith reasons but rather for the experience. I had no passion for what I was studying. I felt that there was something missing and when I was walking this pilgrimage, I liked the simplicity of this life, every day walking along with just what was on my back. The struggle within me really came to the forefront, because I was discerning a relationship and really didn't feel at peace with it, but I was trying to make it work. In the midst of this struggle I thought: 'Wow, if you can live so simply like this, every day, why do we complicate our lives so much with all this stuff?' One day when I was going through this internal struggle this thought came into my mind: 'If I gave my life completely to God, none of this would matter.' I felt a deep peace and deep joy. It is such a vivid memory for me.

So what happened next?

Well, I kind of packed those thoughts away, went home and did my own thing. When I got home I realised I needed some time to stop and just ask myself: 'Where am I going?' So I decided not to go back to school and I quit my job. I remember hearing about this place called Madonna House from someone in my (Catholic) community who had been there for a long time. So I decided I needed something like that. I thought it would be a period of discerning, but God had a different plan for me. There was a lot of healing that happened there – going through my past. It was a really beautiful time. When I went back home, I moved out of my parent's house. I felt a new-found freedom and



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The Madonna House Apostolate

is a family of Christian lay men, women, and priests, striving to incarnate the teachings of Jesus Christ by forming a community of love. Members of Madonna House come from all walks of life and from various countries and cultures. They have in common a desire to serve God through a humble way of life. The spirit is that of a family – modeled on the holy family of Nazareth, which was a community of perfect charity and love.

Founded in 1947 by Catherine Doherty and her husband, Eddie, the community has approximately 200 lay men, women, and priests, dedicated to loving and serving Christ through promises of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

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I felt I could really follow my heart. I moved into a flat with three other women and when my job came to an end I decided I really had to make a decision.

How did you finally come to live in the Madonna House community?

Madonna House kept coming up and I said: 'No, I'm not going back there.' For me that was over and done with, but it just kept coming back. I realised that I had to stop running and think seriously about my vocation. It was very scary for me because I said; 'If I know that God is asking me to do this, I can't say no and continue in my faith. It would be a lie.' So it was either, 'I'm going to follow him, or I'm going to turn round and go completely in the other direction,' and that was terrifying. It was like there was this battle raging within me. I tried to distract myself and put it off. In the meantime, I was offered another contract for a job, and in the end I decided to turn it down and go to Madonna House. It was a difficult decision to make but I knew I was doing the right thing and was filled with peace. I started living at Madonna House and just felt so much joy, peace and love while I was there. After six months I decided to give my life completely to God. I felt a great sense of joy. The next evening as we were praying I had the realization, 'Maybe this is my vocation'. The more I thought about it the clearer it became. I thought to myself, 'Yes, I do love this life.' Looking back, through my time of struggle and running away from God, I had committed myself to an hour of adoration every week. However, there were weeks when I just couldn't pray, I felt so dry. I would just read a book and not even a spiritual book! However, looking back I feel that, during that time, God was doing something in me and that I owe the fruit of my vocation to those moments. What I've realised is that God wants me to be happy. He has placed the desires there in my heart and he wants to fulfill them. His desires for me and my deepest desires are one and the same, and it is by following his will for me that I will truly be fulfilled. 🍷