

A Day in the Life of a Sister

The Sylvania Franciscans share common goals through their mission of "joyful servanthood among all people," but they are individuals who each bring unique talents to their calling to be women of peace and seekers of justice. Following, is a story about the typical day of one of our Sisters, which expresses her uniqueness in living out her Baptismal Call expressed through her vowed commitment.

I'm a nun! So – what do I do all day? Pray? Put flowers on the altar in church? Teach in an elementary school? Hardly! Of course, I do pray, but you probably won't find me decorating any altars (although I am very active in my parish church) or standing in front of a class of third graders (although I occasionally have opportunities to teach adults). You see, besides being a nun, I'm also a lawyer. I work on a judge's staff at the trial court ("district court") level of the federal court system. My official title is "law clerk," but that's a little misleading because my ministry is not clerical. In fact, you have to be a lawyer to hold my position; so a better description would be "staff attorney."

My days are fairly routine. I spend most of my time researching and drafting legal opinions for my judge. I'm also assigned certain civil cases to manage and I have to make sure these cases keep moving so they can be resolved as quickly as possible. This entails keeping an eye on what's called the "docket" of each case – a listing of the various procedural matters, including "motions" (i.e., requests) the lawyers file on behalf of their clients who are parties in the case. I read the motions and draft orders for the judge to approve. I also attend all of the case conferences along with the judge. After each one, I draft the minutes which describe what took place at the conference and these are eventually added to the docket. Of course, I also spend some time in the courtroom assisting my judge with trials and various kinds of hearings, but not nearly as much time as you might imagine if your only exposure to the legal field is through T.V. When I do have a trial to help with, it's my job to assist the judge in drafting the legal instructions, specially tailored for each case, which will guide the jury in its deliberations.

Needless to say, my ministry is fascinating and challenging! I've been doing this for 21 years now (before I started law school at age 35, I did teach junior high for 11 years and I was an elementary school principal for another 4 years). Sometimes the legal issues I confront are very difficult and they can be even more difficult for the litigants themselves. I try to always remember that, although I might be managing 50 or 60 cases at any given time, for the parties involved, their case is the only case. It can really take over their lives. Mine is a ministry of peace and justice. I take seriously the fact that, on a daily basis, I am helping people peacefully resolve their disputes and, hopefully, reach a just result in the process. I feel blessed to be entrusted with this ministry.

Sister Sharon Derivan
Lawyer/Law Clerk

