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## THANK YOU, SISTERS

Posted by [John Feister](#) on Dec 12, 2012 in [Featured](#), [Inspiration](#), [People](#) | [1 comment](#)

A few weeks ago my friend, Sister Mary Ann Walsh, RSM, Media Director for the US Catholic bishops' conference, asked me if I would write a blog post for her. The annual national collection the Retirement Fund for Religious was coming up (it was last weekend in many parishes). I had told her about a book we are working at Franciscan Media, one about Sisters. I worked last summer gathering up essays from folks around the country who have stories of the positive impact people have had on their lives. I'll put in a plug here for [Sister Mary Ann's media blog](#). Here's what I wrote for her, published last week:

**Thank You, Sisters**

By John Feister

I married into the Catholic sisters. It's not that I married a Catholic sister; it's that my sister-in-law is a Sister of Charity. And two of my sisters-in-law were in the convent (though, for their own personal reasons, they left). For that matter, my own mother's aunt was a Catholic sister—provincial of her Ursuline community, some years back.

None of my five biological sisters entered the convent, but we all were educated at some time by Sisters of the Humility of Mary. Like a lot of older Catholics, say older than 50, vowed religious helped to shape us into the people we are. I personally went on from college to work as a lay missionary in Appalachia and the South, where I was inspired and formed by sister after sister, from a variety of religious orders, throughout young adulthood.

So imagine the scene in my house last April, when people across the land started taking pro and con sides *vis a vis* Catholic Sisters. It was a reaction to several Vatican investigations, which are beyond the scope of my interest here. But suddenly last April it had become, for some, open season on Sisters.

Among coworkers at Franciscan Media, there were differences of opinion, and the fault lines seemed to be as much about age as anything. People who really didn't know sisters, mostly younger people, were picking up notions that Sisters were somehow suspect. So I decided to write a book.

Why not tell the stories of the many women religious who have been such model Churchwomen, who have been such an inspiration in society itself? My coworkers at Franciscan Media did me one better: Why not get a bunch of people to share stories about how women religious have shaped *their* lives? Maybe I could use my journalistic contacts to recruit some high-profile essayists. (But get us a manuscript within 8 weeks!)

The result is a book that's heading into production now for release in February: *Thank You, Sisters: Stories of Women Religious and How They Enrich Our Lives*. (I admit it I stole the title, partially, but with permission, from my friend Jim Martin, S.J., who used the expression on Twitter and in a *Washington Post* op-ed piece.)

The book is a collection of 12 essays by some well-known and some less-known writers. Some are about unknown Sisters; others are about newsmakers. The essay about Amazon martyr Sister Dorothy Stang, for example, is written by Stang's Doubleday biographer, Binka Le Breton. Award-winning journalist and special correspondent for *Vanity Fair* Maureen Orth contributed an essay that she first published in *O* magazine about a Sister working against gang violence in L.A. (Orth's aunt was a Sister in that same community). Cokie and Steven Roberts contributed a syndicated column. Liz Scott wrote a close-up story about her close friend, Sister Helen Prejean, best known for *Dead Man Walking*.

Maurice Nutt writes about our good, late friend **Sister Thea Bowman**; best-selling author Adriana Trigiani writes about sisters from her upbringing. Then there's the rest of them, with great stories, if lesser known.

All things considered, I think it came out well. Oh, for the fish that got away! But we didn't have much time. One of my favorite stories is of my friend Benedictine Sister Evelyn Dettling. Way up a mountain hollow in western Virginia, she unwittingly learned that she needed as much help from an Appalachian family as the help she had come to give them. Oops, I'm out of room! The book will be out in February.

[John Feister](#)



John Feister is editor in chief of *St. Anthony Messenger* magazine and other periodicals at Franciscan Media. He has a B.A. in American Studies from University of Dayton, and master's degrees in Humanities and in Theology from Xavier University. He writes and edits for various publications and contributes to *American Catholic Radio*. He is married with three sons. His new book, *Thank You, Sisters: Stories of Women Religious and How They Enrich Our Lives*(Franciscan Media) will be published early in 2013.