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everything changed one day when she was praying for what she described as an important cause, in her room at a Canadian university.

"I suddenly knew beyond a doubt that there is an Absolute — that God is — and I knew everything existed in relation to God. I knew I would be a nun and what kind of nun. The first five years I was here, I was in shock, because I couldn't believe it. It's such a fantastic thing. It's not an easy life to live, but what life is easy?"

She said she misses her Canadian homeland and seeing her nieces and nephews. Later, she added Big Macs and french fries to the list.

"This life is God's gift to us," she said. "That thought permeates me. It's the last thing I ever planned or deserved."

Sister Mary Trinity said there are nights when she wakes up and says to herself, almost in shock, that she can't believe she's there. "I feel very blessed in this life," she added explaining that she entered the monastery when she was 40. She was teaching at a nearby Montessori school and passed the monastery regularly. "I decided to come to Mass here," she said adding that she felt comfortable and at home.

Blessed Sacrament chapel is open to the public. However, the cloistered nuns are separated by a clear glass wall.

Today, these nuns live in the second-largest Dominican cloister in the United States. At Blessed Sacrament, the women range in age from 33 to 95 years old. Two nuns, Sister Mary of the Visitation and Sister Mary of the Pure Heart, are 90 years old and identical twins. They were professional photographers before they entered the monastery.

However, women are entering the monastery later than in the past, usually after attending col-

lege and leaving a job. To be a cloistered Dominican nun, you must have physical and mental health, be a Roman Catholic and single. Oddly enough, candidates need to be social.

"People who live life are the ones who do the best in cloistered life," Sister Mary Thomas said. "People who try to escape from life wouldn't make it here."

A recent phenomenon is that older women are applying and sometimes they have had families, according to Sister Mary Trinity.

"Our community has decided not to accept women with grown children, because it's very difficult for them to leave them," she said.

The future of the cloistered order is tenuous, however, because fewer women are entering and many of the nuns are elderly. Their virtuous lifestyles, they believe, has a positive effect on the world. They help to balance the scales of evil with their goodness, prayers and devotion. The public is invited to call a hotline with their requests for prayer, 810-626-8263.

There have been times people call and say they have cancer, according to Sister Miriam. They'll go in for tests and there are no more signs of the disease. The nuns often hear that prayers are answered.

Each day is planned and like every other day. They awaken at 5 a.m., then have morning prayer, private prayer, celebration of the Eucharist, mid-morning prayer, breakfast and work periods, which involve general house upkeep and caring for the sick nuns in the monastery.

At mid-day, they have prayer, lunch, a short recreation period, rest, reading, study and work. They pray, have dinner and another recreation period is followed by night prayer. A night vigil in

the chapel ensures the sacraments are never left unattended.

For most, the monastery is the only way of life they know or remember. Sister Mary Margaret entered the monastery when she was 18.

"I've been here 30 some years," she said looking much younger than her age. "I felt I wanted to give my life to God. I dedicated it to him in something that was not entire work, like teaching, and found it in liturgical praying and perpetual adoration."

Sister Mary Elizabeth was born and lived in the Netherlands.

"I had to support my parents until I was 30 years old," she said. "I wanted to come into the religious life and I was very much inspired by the Dominican Sisters."

After World War II she was sent to Canada to help establish a new group of Dominican nuns. She was later sent to Michigan. A Dominican order was established in Detroit in 1906 and in 1966 the monastery was moved to Farmington Hills.

Most people don't see all the good in the world, Sister Mary Paul said.

In God's goodness and mercy there will be those, like the Dominican nuns, who praise him and this maintains the balance between good and evil, Sister Miriam said. "He provides occasions in the world to praise him, to balance out the evils and without that, the world would be lost."

In the end goodness will win, Sister Mary Margaret said.

"We do sense that there is very little in society at large to support Christian values," she said. "In a sense I think that our presence, being here on this corner at 13 Mile and Middlebelt, that there is a witness that there is something else other than success and power."

Rose Butler contributed to this story.

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