

'Happy' wear, for clapping along

The joyful craze started with the catchy little ditty called "Happy" that pop star Pharrell Williams wrote for *Despicable Me 2*.

Then came the "24 Hours of Happy" video that went viral. The day's worth of blissful boogie-ing by Williams and his celebrity friends spawned cheerful YouTube copycats all over the world, from Hong Kong to Philadelphia.

Even ABC's *Good Morning America* capitalized on the musical merriment — the likes of which haven't burned up Billboard since Bobby McFerrin's 1988 hit "Don't Worry Be Happy" — posting viewers' happy dances on social media with #GMAHappy.

Now, after an Andy Warhol-esque paint-
See **MIRROR, MIRROR** on C2



ELIZABETH WELLINGTON

@EWellingtonPHL

Victoria Lipson in smiley orange boyfriend tank, \$55, cut-off sweatpants, \$92, by Peace Love World at Coeur.

MICHAEL BRYANT / Staff Photographer



Rebecca Gutherman, a senior at Immaculata University. Her blog chronicles her journey toward her final vows as a nun. COURTNEY MARABELLA / Staff Photographer

A millennial nun-to-be

By Catherine Laughlin
FOR THE INQUIRER

Consider some of the so-called defining characteristics of the millennial generation — narcissistic, entitled, suspicious of institutions, especially religious ones — and then consider the future that 22-year-old Becca Gutherman sees for herself.

She wants to be a nun.

For the last five years, Gutherman, a senior at Immaculata University, has been in discernment, a spiritual-training process that can last up to 15 years before final vows are tak-

en, involving prayer, outreach projects, and convent visits. Her blog, "Road Less Traveled" (the title a nod to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"), chronicles her pilgrimage in preparation for the final vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity that she plans to take one day when she joins the sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary or the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

Her posts are what you might expect from a nun-to-be — they reveal her dedication to God, her study of the sacraments — but they

See **VOCATION** on C2



LOVE | C3

A mutual friend said they might get along. And how.

A millennial blogs on her path to vows

VOCATION from C1

also disclose when she feels beautiful; her fear of, as well as excitement for, the future; and her writing abilities. Recently, she compared the stretching qualities of Silly Putty to her heart that "is definitely flexible and able to wrap around anything and anyone."

"The blog gives a face to religious life," says Gutherman, who is majoring in English and secondary education, with a minor in theology. When she graduates in May, she would like to teach in the inner city and someday write a young-adult fiction book. "People see that this is still a real life choice."

Gutherman appears smart, spirited, savvy, and predictably, steadfast to Catholic doctrines. Like others in Immaculata's dining hall, she is dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt. Despite wind chills in the 20s, flip-flops round out her garb. But the footwear is more about sacrifice than devotion to a trend; she has given up proper shoes for Lent after meeting a homeless man with a frostbitten foot.

"I know it seems a little drastic," Gutherman confesses, sticking out her feet with pink-polished toenails. She says people relate to her action. "And it starts a conversation."

Gutherman, who turns 22 in May, grew up the oldest of three girls in a traditional Catholic home in Croydon. She liked to act and sing in plays, and she learned to play the piano.

She attended grade school at the now-closed St. Thomas Aquinas School. The first time she was taught by nuns was at Nazareth High School in Northeast Philadelphia. By sophomore year, she had a boyfriend.

Shortly thereafter, she experienced a spiritual restlessness. "I had thought about being a nun when I was a little girl, and I started to feel those feelings again." She said she felt a deep desire flowing through her to work and serve God in a consecrated man-

ner. "And while I still cared very much for my boyfriend, I knew I needed to explore that option."

She credits one nun and her overall character — happy, energized, peaceful, independent — for having a profound influence on her calling. "I wanted what she had. She's been a very strong mentor and confidante in my life."

Terrified she would be derided, Gutherman initially kept her thoughts to herself, not even telling her parents until college.

"I thought people would say, 'What are you thinking? You'll be throwing away your life.'"

According to a survey conducted by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 67 percent of women who professed final vows in 2013 said a family member or friend tried to discourage them.

In retrospect, Gutherman's parents, especially her father, would have fondly accepted her decision

— as they ultimately did. Her father, Robert Gutherman, is listed as the first miracle that cleared the way for St. Katherine Drexel to become a saint, after his deafness was cured in 1974.

"My parents never pushed me to be a sister. It's what I want to do," Gutherman said. But there is the occasional doubt: "There's a part of me that still thinks about getting married and raising a family. But I'm 95 percent sure that God is calling me to be a religious."

Admittedly, it's quite a zig for a woman whose contemporaries are devoted to the lifestyles of HBO's *Girls*.

Brother Paul Bednarczyk, executive director of the National Religious Vocation Conference, adds another perspective: "Our culture in general praises sex, power, and money, everything religious life isn't."

Furthermore, 29 percent of millennials, a group that grew up

amid church scandals, say they are affiliated with no religion, according to a Pew Research Center report released last month.

"I can't speak for all millennials," Gutherman said. "But the young women I've been meeting who are becoming nuns are bringing a depth and excitement with them."

Laura Ashley Walker, 21, Gutherman's friend since high school, says she herself was raised a Catholic, but does not "really practice anymore." Yet she understands that for some women like Gutherman, "it feels natural for them."

Indeed, although there are only 54,000 nuns nationally (average age about 60, 1 percent younger than 30), compared with 180,000 in 1965, one statistic shows that interest is on the upswing.

Patrice Tuohy, executive editor of Vocation Match, an international online site that matches women with an order, says that since 2007,

there have been 1,300 to 2,300 annual inquiries, double from the old days, when candidates filled out inserts in the back of Catholic magazines. Nearly 85 percent have come from the United States.

Other benefits of technology: Discerning women can research convents, view theological talks on YouTube, and meet other women in discernment, all online.

But it's unlikely the life of a nun will ever be as popular as it once was, say Bednarczyk and Tuohy. As Catholic schools have shuttered, there is less need for teaching nuns. And, besides the culture change after Vatican II, when women realized they could serve the church without being nuns, there are also the modern-day concerns of feminism.

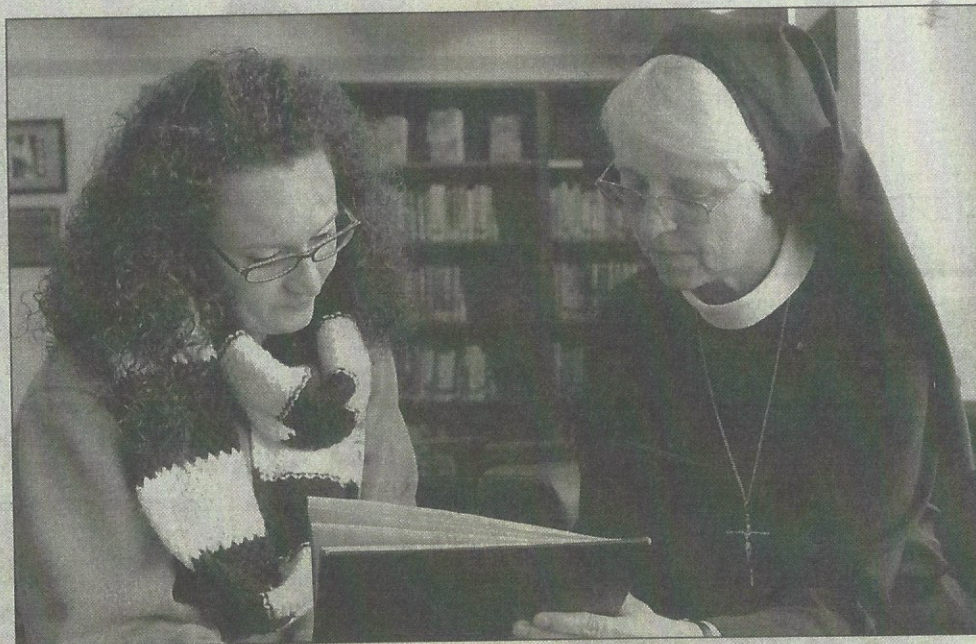
Gutherman, who says she considers herself a feminist, counters that skepticism. "Popular culture says you can't be feminist and Catholic," she says. "You can. I believe that women should have equal pay with men. And let's not forget about all of the religious women before me who started schools, hospitals, and missions."

As for her thoughts on why women can't be priests: At least for her, "it's not an issue of men and women not being equal. The Catholic theology is that men are priests and women are the Church. It's a beautiful marriage between the two. ... I don't want to be a pope. I've got another job to do."

For now, Gutherman is burdened with a load that mirrors most of her peers: student debt. When she lands a job, her goal is to pay off her loans before she takes her final vows. In the meantime, she is trying to spend her last months in school as a typical college student who likes to hike, kayak, read, and indulge in an occasional bit of red wine.

What will she miss the most when she becomes a nun?

"The hardest thing will be giving up all of my shoes," Gutherman says, laughing. "I have about 30 pairs of them."



Senior Rebecca Gutherman, with Sister Annette Pelletier, professor of theology, at Immaculata. Through her blog, Gutherman says, "people see that this is still a real life choice." COURTNEY MARABELLA / Staff Photographer