My name is Joanna and I’m a novice sister in the Society of the Sacred Cross, and Anglican contemplative Religious community. In other words, a trainee nun!

I’ve been aware of Religious brothers and sisters since I was a small child. I have a memory of visiting a convent where my parents are friends with one of the sisters, and feeling a great sense of happiness – of real joy. At some point while I was at university, it began to come back into my head, and then I grudgingly let it into my heart. I thought, ‘Surely this isn’t something young people actually *do* these days?’ As it turns out… we do!

There was always a lot of pressure on me to work out what my role in the church would be. For a while I thought I had to be a missionary. And a lot of people presumed I’d consider priesthood, but I knew it wasn’t for me. One of the joys of monastic life is that it encompasses many callings, and many different types of people. The church needs different kinds of vocation. I think of the work of contemplative Religious as being like the Sanctuary candle in church, which burns constantly beside the tabernacle, always reminding us of the presence of God. In the daylight, it’s nearly invisible; in our nights it casts light out into the whole church. And when others are tired, they can come to that light, to find the flame of God’s love always burning for them.

I think discernment is a lifelong process of constantly seeking God’s will. In joining a religious community, I have the joy of sharing that discernment with a group of loving, faithful people, and the privilege of helping discern the future of our community. The process of joining a religious community takes a few years, and allows time to grow in relationships, in self-awareness, and in understanding of your calling: the aim isn’t to ‘make a perfect nun’ but to become more open to God’s will – thankfully! The Novitiate usually takes around two years, after which the community and I will consider whether I continue to Simple (temporary, three-year) vows, or if my vocation as a Christian lies outside the convent.