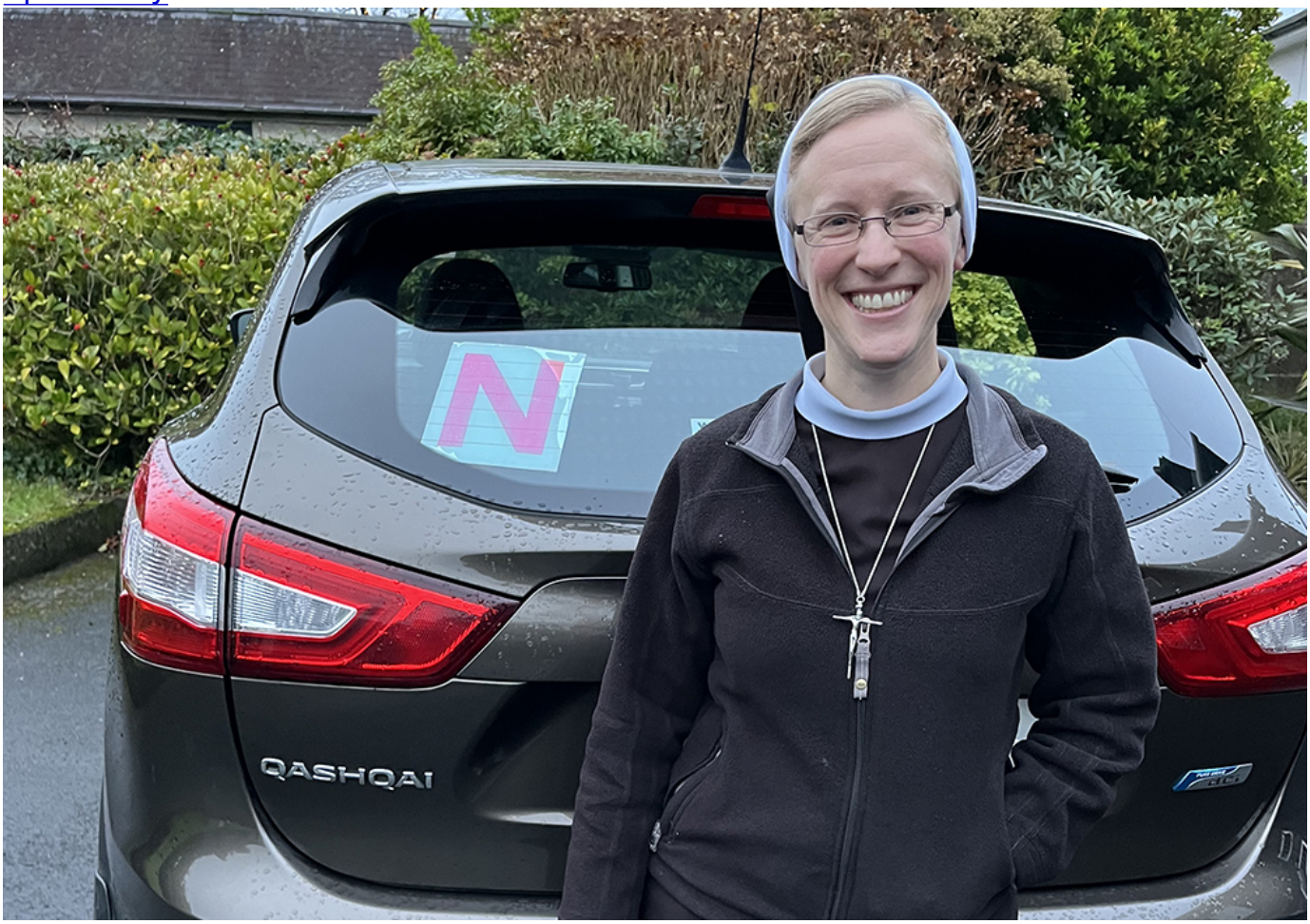
Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



Sr. Kathryn Press poses with N plates on her car (N for novice driver). After moving to Ireland and passing a driving test, Press had to keep the plates on her car for two more years. (Courtesy of Kathryn Press)



by Kathryn Press

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For a long time — and I'm talking decades — I resisted the urge to make New Year's resolutions. Perhaps it was a hang-up from how the academic year ordered my life. Or because I considered a new chapter of my life opening when I moved or it was around my birthday (both of which are in North American summertime). Or maybe I resisted because I failed at many of the resolutions I attempted or because I found them cliche or performative.

Over the past 10 years, I've softened my view towards these resolutions. Just before my 30th birthday, my community asked me to take on a new ministry. With nerves I'm sure I didn’t hide well, I moved from our formation house to a "regular" community and started teaching high school. As I opened a new decade in life and a new ministry, I made a conscious choice to embrace this opportunity and declared this time as "a year of doing new things." It was an authentic "New Year's" resolution. Doing new things became my mantra, or my battle cry, to cheerlead and encourage myself lest fear paralyze me.

During that year, I did a lot of new things: helped plan all-school Masses, taught a new curriculum, wrote and graded exams, navigated faculty room politics, promoted the charism of our foundress, lived with a dog, lived with four sisters I'd never lived with before, chaperoned school dances, and attended countless sporting events.

What did I learn about myself that year? Since I had only taught in elementary school up to this point, enjoying older students came as a great surprise to me. I also learned that I don't always have control over the "new" things that come my way but God meets me there nonetheless. I met him in my students. I met him in my sisters in community. I met him in the faculty and staff I worked with.

At the end of my year of doing new things, the Lord gave me an equally blessed experience: getting to do it all again for a second year. After moving five times in five years, the stability was a great blessing.

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The "year of doing new things" ended, and its memory faded. But God has a sense of humor! A few years later, I moved to Ireland and faced the task of becoming a

legal driver. I passed my driving test at the age of 38. With more than two decades of driving experience under my belt, Ireland now categorized me as a "novice driver."

My previous experience as a novice was in the two-year period of initial formation into religious life. It's a time where you think you know things, but really you don't, where the initial joy and fervor of religious life meet the challenge of choosing to live this way day in and day out, and where the rules and regulations are much like a greenhouse — lots of sweat (and maybe blood and tears too!), but marked signs of growth.

Needless to say, it was a stage in life I preferred to look at through the rearview mirror, certainly not a place I wanted to revisit. Yet, as I drove around on the road with my scarlet letter firmly affixed to the front and rear of the car, I noticed how common it was for drivers to have "L" or "N" plates (or both!) on their cars. (L is for learner drivers and N is for novice drivers. It is a legal requirement to display them on your cars in Ireland.) Instead of feeling embarrassed and singled out, I felt like I fit in.

Eventually, I forgot my "N" was there, until last month when I turned my calendar to December 2023 and saw the note I put on Dec. 17 two years earlier when I passed my driving test. Now, I had graduated. I could remove my N-plates!

What surprised me was the emotion I felt when removing these two letters from the car. Firstly, I felt gratitude for the time that had passed since I took my driving test and for the events that had transpired since then. Secondly, I felt accomplished. Something that once seemed so daunting: passing a driver's theory test, taking six to twelve private driving lessons, passing my driving test on the first go (not an easy feat), and two years of probationary driving. Now I had "graduated"!

It's January and I'm ready — not so much for resolutions. After all, the year depends far less on me and far more on Him. So, I won't resolve to *do* things, but I can change the posture of my heart: open my eyes to see and my ears to hear and live by a different set of rules — much like how I did as a new driver. I do desire to be a new creation. I long to meet Jesus in new ways, in unexpected places. I, for one, am excited for this new year. Are you?