

Film Review: ‘Novitiate’ Goes Inside the 1960s Catholic Church

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on November 3, 2017 - 1:13pm

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CHICAGO – In a “mystery of faith” narrative disguised as a feminist statement, the new film “Novitiate” goes inside a nunnery in 1964 America, just as the Catholic Church was about to make some radical changes to their procedures. How it affected the church is how it affected the nuns, and the intriguing insider story is full of back room shocks.



Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The title refers to being a “novice” nun, as the main character is, and it follows her journey through her calling – and the background in her life that led to it – all the way to the point when she lives her vows. This film goes deep, both into the methods of the novice years and the backlash to them. It is anchored by one of the best actors working today, Melissa Leo as the Reverend Mother. The tics and anger she puts into this character are both insane and justified (at least in the universe of the character’s soul). This is a must-see for those practicing the Catholic faith, as a history lesson, and for outsiders it provides a glimpse into the strange and ritualistic mannerisms of an ancient rite of passage.

Cathleen Harris (Margaret Qualley) is a 17 year old girl in 1964. In flashbacks, her problematic childhood is shown – her father abandons the family, her mother (Julianne Nicholson) is bewildered and depressed, plus by happenstance her younger self ends up in a Catholic school, although she isn’t Catholic. Within those gates, she finds her “calling,” and decides to become a nun, much to the horror of her mother.

The type of nunnery Cathleen joins is one where the participants worship God and Jesus all day, and have radical silence and punishment techniques. It is controlled with an iron ruler by the Reverend Mother (Melissa Leo), who demands perfect obedience, but is distressed by the news of Vatican II changes. Meanwhile, the class of novices are having issues, which includes the now Sister Cathleen, who is feeling a pull of something else besides her vows.

“Novitiate” continues its nationwide release in Chicago on November 3rd. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Melissa Leo, Margaret Qualley, Julianne Nicholson, Eline Powell and Denis O’Hare. Written and directed by Margaret Betts. Rated “R”



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Sister Cathleen (Margaret Qualley) Gets to a Nunnery in 'Novitiate'

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics



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