Blog
Spirituality



Honorine Uwimana, bottom row fourth from left, with the other St. Joseph Workers in her community and their administration team in Orange, California (Provided photo)



by Honorine Uwimana

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Editor's note: *Notes from the Field includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with Catholic Volunteer Network, the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is part of the Assumption Mission Associates in Chaparral, New Mexico. This is Honorine's first blog post. Read more about her.*

"*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fishes, but how far will they go among so many?*"

—John 6:9

ORANGE, CALIFORNIA — I grew up in the East of Africa, where poverty and conflicts rage and it is impossible for social injustice to pass one's eyes unnoticed.

I hail from Rwanda, a country that witnessed one of the greatest atrocities of the 20th century, and my proximity to widows and orphans who were left helpless and hopeless made me question my humanity.

I have seen people dying in their houses because hospitals are too far or too expensive, and children younger than 7 years old, pregnant women and physically disabled people begging on the roadsides for water, butter and shelter.

And all the rest of humanity could do was say: "These are definitely children who turned into thieves, prostitutes who got pregnant, and disabled people you can't help enough at the end of the day."

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But what else could we say? Judgmental lenses do not leave room to compassionate eyes.

I complained to God, the maker; I blamed him for a long time for his ill will, for having the power to undo situations and not doing so.

I blamed it on our leadership institutions, governments and churches, those we believe have the power to influence, make laws and take control of the poor

conditions around us. Needless to say, in my own thinking, I could create for them a thousand ideas that could work.

Lastly, the finger pointed at me.

Wait a minute. Me? What can I do? I am also poor; I have no resources and no experience. I am helpless; I have few talents and knowledge that cannot turn poor into rich or perform the miracle of healing.

But what if they are enough for God to use my hands and perform the miracle? What if my five loaves and two fishes can nourish society?



(Honorine Uwimana)

God didn't give me resources to distribute to the starving, but he gave me the simplicity and the attitude to share what I have and understand that there is enough for everyone. When I prayed, God didn't give me five loaves, but he gave me my daily bread, and it was enough for the multitude.

I dedicated my life to service when I completed high school, allowing God to use me as an instrument of his love. I realized that because I am willing to participate in God's universal plan, he equipped me with the right instruments to bring love to his people.

After I completed high school, I served with various organizations in East Africa, starting with the Salesian youth movement in the Great Lakes region of Africa to reach out to young people, especially the poor and at risk, as modeled by St. John Bosco. Later, when I finished college, I reached out to refugees, patients in hospitals and homeless kids.

I did not have much to offer. I only had my pharmacy degree, talents I was willing to unlock if they would contribute at all to putting joy on the faces of those affected by the injustice of our times, and a gratitude song in my heart that urged me to be thankful for what I have and use it to give back to the society.



Honorine Uwimana, second from left, with a group of young African student leaders after a December 2017 visit to and day of service at the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda (Provided photo)

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange brought six ladies from four corners of the world (North America, South America, Asia, East Africa and South Africa) with a powerful zeal to serve into one community. In such a diverse environment, every day is a learning experience. I am practicing living a simple life and how to look to my neighbor beyond the social stereotypes of race, nationality and economic class.

We live in a community. We belong to one another. Isn't it how the whole world is supposed to live? Embrace diversity, come together and serve together?

The world has various needs. I can only address one at a time and love one at a time.

I serve in a retirement home for the sisters. I have no degree or honors in geriatrics, but my fresh background as a pharmacist and experience as a health equity activist is enough for God to feed a thousand people. I said: "Here are my five loaves and two fishes. Lord, please use them."

Indeed, I see him working. Every day, I go home content that I helped someone push their wheelchair outside to breathe fresh air. I go to bed happy that I have been able to transmit love in the simplest ways possible and that it is making a huge difference in the hearts of those I serve.

God is using and multiplying the little I have because I allowed him to use it.



Some of the St. Joseph Sisters at the Regina Residence in Orange, California, where Honorine Uwimana serves, do their morning exercises. (Honorine Uwimana)

[Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker from Rwanda currently serving at Regina Residence with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. View the full series.