Voices of Sisters
Ministry



Franciscan Missionary of Mary Sr. Marian Champika Hanzege poses for a photo with girls at Immaculate College in Abancay, Peru, in 2011. (Provided photo)



by Sr. Marian Champika Hanzege

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

September 17, 2020

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

"*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying: ... Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the world*" (*Matthew 28:18-20*).

This Bible verse touched my heart in 2005 when I was preparing for my perpetual vows. My early training had focused on our Franciscan Missionaries of Mary life and mission. During that time, I had mixed emotions in my heart: On the one hand, I was very interested in this study, but at the same time, my heart was saddened to know how many places in the world did not know Jesus. This grief was compounded by seeing so many children, youth, men, and women who were unaware and not involved in this command of our Lord: "Go and make disciples."

Finally, I was ready to go for ministry! From this moment, moved by the Lord, I felt the need to serve him with all my being, in the different roles that I had to live.

I am from Sri Lanka, but God called me for missions far from my land. Always trusting in the words of Jesus, I answered: "Here I am, send me."

With joy and enthusiasm, at the age of 32, I went to share my life in mission with the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary nuns of Peru. Then I was sent to support the Curahuasi community, in the Peruvian mountain range, sharing the mission with three sisters of different nationalities.

My first responsibility has been my community. I had a lot to learn from the sisters, as I had no idea how to start contributing to this mission. They would start at 5:30 a.m. to visit people in the village and the settlers in the mountains.

The people are kind, welcoming, trust in missionaries and value their service. I learned many things from them, too, especially how to love and embrace new cultures, customs and values. People always helped me with any need — in the market, on the street, and in the hospital.

The sisters with the support of laity operate a boarding school for girls from nearby towns and remote places where there are no secondary schools. I was asked to support these young ladies in their human and spiritual formation. Every day, we

grew together in values, relationship and in forming brave women for a machismo society.

I learned other responsibilities also, working in parish sacramental preparation with children, youth and adults. At other times, I went to different schools to teach religion classes.

In the Women's Center, I taught embroidery, knitting and painting, as a basis for their income generation. With the crafts, I offered human and spiritual formation. This Women's Center has been a place of relationship and healing for them, because many had difficult home situations, with drinking husbands and disobedient children. They found peace and harmony in this place by talking to me and also by sharing this with the other ladies.

The inhabitants of the mountain range are deeply religious. Popular religiosity is strong, especially at Easter. The Easter experience helped me personally in living the paschal mystery; I have never experienced it so significantly in my homeland. It has changed my life, deepening my faith in God.

And a life surrounded by nature helped me see the wonders of creation as a gift from God to all. Every morning when I woke up contemplating the mountains and how they give life and hope, God touched my heart and said: "Champika, you can! There is a lot to do here."

Advertisement

Doing things with love no matter how small they seem — even holding a ladder — I know that all this comes from God and is for the service of others. I got used to my ministry and learned to love this town very much. After five years of service, superiors sent me on a mission to another community in the Sierra del Perú.

I was appointed to the Arequipa mission, in a more developed city. There, the sisters provided education for girls and adolescents. My new community consisted of seven older nuns, and they chose me as the person in charge of the house! This position made me feel afraid and I asked myself: "Am I in a position to accompany the sisters and the community?"

But gradually, I learned how to encourage them and give my life for this new mission. I worked with the youth ministry group of the Santa Rosa de Viterbo School and the students who came from various provinces for their higher studies.

I also did all sorts of household chores. This helped me to be humbler and understand my sisters, according to their ages, and to form a community with a Franciscan spirit. My experiences and communication with the sisters greatly enriched my vocation and nourished my daily life those days. Another opportunity to help the province in youth ministry has been a beautiful experience, meeting young people from different parts of the Peruvian mountains.

The parishes and villages encouraged me to organize workshops, talks, and retreats. I realized that it was a waste of time to try to convince families of the value of religious life for their young women, but I intended to make our religious life known and help them make a good vocational discernment. I accompanied many young women; only a few responded. But I found joy in helping them with their concerns and needs and giving them moral and spiritual support.

Many of them suffer from past experiences. Family composition is often challenging — they live with their stepfathers, stepmothers and grandparents. Each young person has a unique story. It makes me thank God for my parents, honoring them for everything they have done for me.

I completed 12 years in Peru on July 26, and thank God with all my heart for my life and experiences in this precious land. I have been able to adapt to the culture, the food, the climate and the mission. Every experience and opportunity gave me life and encouraged me to give myself more and more to the mission.

I have had the encouragement, guidance and help of my community for my vocation and mission, and I likewise find strength for mission in prayer and Eucharist. I can see the good fruits that I have sown in each part of my mission, where I experienced the magnificence of God, and saw how God has allowed me to be part of his work, by his grace and glory.

I thank my fellow missionaries. It is an honor and a privilege to serve God in the missions.

[Marian Champika Hanzege is a member of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary from Sri Lanka. She has studied psychology and counseling, craft work, rehabilitation of drug addicts, and parish catechetics. Beginning a new mission to Peru in 2008, she carried out pastoral work in rural areas.]