Voices of Sisters
Ministry
Religious Life



A woman carrying a baby walks on the hills of Villa Maria del Triunfo, on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, in May 2017. (CNS/Reuters/Guadalupe Pardo)



by Sr. Hilda Mary Bernath

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It is by deeds and by being ready to sacrifice ourselves, that our love proves that it is real. As a student, I was inspired by the service of the missionaries in my parish in Tamil Nadu, South India.

They taught me both spiritual and moral values through catechism classes. I never thought that I would become a Franciscan Missionary of Mary, but God has planned for me from all eternity to be a missionary in Peru, South America.

I was ready to fulfill his plan for me and offer my life for his mission.

Being a missionary in another country and adapting to all the differences has not been easy. It took time for me to adjust to the climate, food, language and people, but above all, I was open to the culture and ready to dedicate myself to the people of Peru.

Day by day, I challenged myself to face the difficulties with patience. I succeeded because I love my vocation and I am involved totally in the community service of the convent. Because of the pandemic, I had more time to spend with God and to thank him for his protection and his marvelous deeds. I surrendered myself to accept his will.

Our foundress, Blessed Hélène Marie Philippine de Chappotin de Neuville or (better known as Mary of the Passion (1839-1904), urged us to grow each day in the spirit of love and faith. Love calls for detachment, and detachment calls for love. In order to be a selfless missionary, I detached myself from my unworthiness and negative thoughts. I tried to liberate myself from my past to think positively and move toward my future.

Though I am not perfect in speaking Spanish (the language most people in Peru speak), I have improved in reading Spanish, since I make concerted efforts to read the Spanish Bible daily. Compared to other books, the Bible is the best one to learn the language while at the same time to grow in faith. God's life-giving words boosted me to remain in his love.

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One reason I focused my efforts on learning Spanish was to communicate with my fellow nuns in the community and with people who are working in the convent, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The encouragement and accompaniment of the nuns in the community made me feel confident.

Though I did not have any extra external ministry activity during this time, I gathered up my courage to go to the market to buy vegetables and other provisions. I was proud that I had learned how to buy things and communicate with sellers in Spanish.

Initially, I had to encourage myself to speak with them. I collected all the bills and kept my accounts to submit to the sister in charge. I made use of this opportunity to help in the community, and felt perfect joy when I could be fully involved in daily life here, when I was able to speak and manage daily chores. I enjoyed cooking and prepared different items like sweets, food and snacks. I was happy doing gardening, watering the yard and cleaning the house. Online meetings also helped me to develop my learning skills.



Sr. Hilda Mary Bernath, left, and other sisters pack provisions for the needy people of their neighborhood. (Courtesy of Hilda Mary Bernath)

The missionaries of love are those who are steadfast. As a missionary, I have dedicated myself to the community ministry to the poor during the ongoing pandemic and prolonged lockdown, by organizing and packing the charity provisions. I was happy to get involved in distributing the things to the poor.

My mission is not just what I do as a service in the community, but it is also my being who I am, and my communication with my sisters. My attitude is also important in building up my relationship with them. I accept them as a family and have a good rapport with them.

They are sociable and lovable, encouraging my initiatives and efforts to learn Spanish. They appreciate whatever I do for them.

I love this mission — that is why I have not been discouraged. I am grateful to the nuns who are challenging me to grow and support my growth. I salute all my friends and loved ones who are playing a greater role in my life.

Everyone creates a specific place in history by engaging with the unique struggles of their times. I am pleased to think that I created history by being here in Peru for one year!

With Mary of the Passion, *I am consecrated to God, my end is love.*

With love, I can do sincerely

With love, I can be faithful in my entire situation

With love, I can sacrifice myself

With love, I can be honest

With love, I can be simple in my life journey

With love, I can move forward on my journey

With love, I can dedicate my service to people

With love, I can do my very best to hasten the work of love.