Voices of Sisters
Ministry



Sr. Mary Hilda Bernath, left, walking with a student and her mother (Courtesy of Mary Hilda Bernath)



by Sr. Hilda Mary Bernath

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The Lord who chose me and called me has given me another opportunity to bloom in Curahuasi, Peru, in South America. The country is surrounded by mountains and the beauties of nature, and it has goodhearted people who make my life flourish and develop my generosity as I work on this mission.

God's plan is always marvelous because he is generous and showers his blessings upon us like a running stream. As a missionary in Peru, I experience his steadfast love and blessings when I am with the poor in the mission field. Their lifestyle inspires me to be simple and to be one among them. I was glad to be transferred here, because I was happy to work with people with such good intentions and positive thoughts.

There's a saying that we can see God in the smile of the poor, because God himself came to the world as poor. He humbled himself and became one among them, and his life was only for them. I am also dedicated to being with them and trying to develop my values, to be simple and one among them.

Moreover, I am proud of being a Franciscan and living more deeply into my religious life. Adapting to everything in a mission field has not been easy, and I am getting some good experience in changing my lifestyle. I am getting used to this opportunity to be sincere and faithful to my vocation and mission — it helps me to give up my desires that get in the way of growing patiently. I just put myself into the hands of the Lord to help me adjust, because this is a chance to follow Christ and spread his message of good news.

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Mother Church also encourages us to be with the poor and to work for them. Coming from a poor family and having experienced the struggles of being poor, I am eager to lift up the downtrodden and express a deeper love for them. To use an analogy, caring for plants is not easy. We have to water, remove the weeds and allow the precious plants to grow. Just so, I removed my tensions as if they were weeds, gained strength as I would from the water and challenged myself to grow like a plant in my religious life.

The people of God here do not complain, accepting life as it comes, entrusting themselves completely to the Lord. They are humble, simple, generous and sensitive

to the needs of others. They also challenge me not to complain about the food, because they eat what they have. When I am involved as deeply as they are, I don't face any difficulties on this mission. I am happy here because I am contented with whatever I do. When I faced difficulties, I gave up my own desires, worries and negative thoughts. I accepted them positively and I was not so discouraged that I lost hope.

I have learned to stop complaining — not only about food but other needs in community — and I am aware that I am growing in my life journey. I am content with what I have because God has blessed me with good health, a good situation and a balanced life. His love and compassion always accompany me.



Sr. Hilda Mary Bernath, left, is pictured with shopkeeper Mrs. Genoveva. According to Bernath, Genoveva is a cheerful and generous person who manages her small shop and her family with hard work and a simple lifestyle. (Courtesy of Mary Hilda Bernath)

In the market I visit with a woman when I go to buy things from her shop; she is always friendly, cheerful and generous, and I can see God in her smile. I am very comfortable communicating with her — I can understand her conversation so it is easy to talk to her in Spanish. I learn from her life and others — they have difficulties and yet they try to manage their lives.

I have learned to be one among them with motherly affection, and have risen to the challenge to go ahead and dedicate my life as a missionary in this place. I have changed my life positively and enjoy extra activities like gardening; I admire nature and thank God for his wonders. There is no trouble or difficulty that I care about. I am relaxed and serene. I am free from needing to be in my comfort zone. Whatever I do I remember God and thank him.

I met a small family in Curahuasi, Peru. The girl is interested in continuing her studies. Her family is receiving help from our Franciscan Missionaries of Mary community until she finishes her studies. I found her to be a courageous girl. She and her family are simple and hard workers. She lives in our hostel with other girls who want to continue their studies.

The villagers are not very educated but they encourage their children to study even if they have to travel a great distance. They sacrifice a lot to protect girls from danger and help them thrive. This is why we decided to run a hostel for girls who have to travel to come to our school. Sometimes their situations and their family backgrounds make it challenging to provide for their safety and help them keep up their courage.

The nuns are supportive of the girls and the women in the village. Nothing is impossible for them if we encourage them. We only have to listen to them and guide them. Our house is open for them at any time, and they are comfortable with the sisters.

The nun who is in charge of the girls in the hostel in Curahasi is very responsible, knowing their families are far away. She is always available to guide them, and thinks of ways to help them. The people are also generous, bringing us produce from their fields. The girls are generous and lovable, and will always be grateful to the sisters.

As I minister to these girls, I thank God for all the opportunities which he has given to me through my parents, teachers, friends, and all those who encouraged me to study and to grow. God planned everything necessary for me to bloom and flourish in the garden of my life and the religious life. I salute my mother who was supportive and encouraged me to study.

I am grateful to God the Almighty who was poor and among the poor, and who made me poor and put me in the midst of the poor in the mission place.

I have learned from the people to be generous and to be humble in spirit.

> Don't be ashamed to be poor
>
> Don't be ashamed — accept [yourself] as you are
>
> Be simple and humble in spirit
>
> God will reward you and he will make you break the record.

This story appears in the **Sustainable Development Goal 1: No Poverty** feature series. View the full series.