Voices of Sisters
Horizons
Spirituality



Nadine Tibia, left, and Lourdes López Munguía, right, are pictured in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Oct. 5, 2020. (Courtesy of Lourdes López Munguía)



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"*When a friend leaves, an empty space remains that cannot be filled by the arrival of another friend.*"

—Facundo Cabral/Alberto Cortez, "Cuando un amigo se va" ("When a Friend Leaves")

The freedom of love

We met in Chile, just as I was arriving for my first mission as a young religious. Ana María was Chilean by birth and South African at heart; I was Mexican by birth, carrying a dream for the mission that I did not yet fully understand. From the beginning, her open and loving heart welcomed me. Looking back now, I can see more clearly her ability to listen, her deep love, and those endless conversations. She created a space where I could bring my vulnerability and my brokenness, and there I experienced what it meant to feel loved and worthy of being loved.

With Ana María, I rediscovered a passion that remains with me today: a passion for this life in its fullness, the life the Risen One offers, which we receive and share in daily life. Sitting together for afternoon tea became a profound time of sharing.

I remember she gave me a picture of the Visitation, and I think that is the image that best describes what we experienced as friendship. This experience of each of us feeling filled with the presence of a God who humbles himself to be with his people; and there, our encounter in sharing joy, tears, dreams and failures.

The gift of her presence allowed me to savor moments of crisis, shared dreams, tears and embraces.

Oh, what a way she had of embracing — a hug where the broken pieces come together again as one.

In this presence, she was able to listen to my darkness and my light, without turning away, and by accompanying me so that I too would not turn away.

With her, I dared to look tenderly upon the beauty of my life.



From left to right: Ana María Campos Barraza, Cristina Escobar and Lourdes López Munguía at the Retreat House of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Linderos, Chile, on Jan. 26, 2016 (Courtesy of Lourdes López Munguía)

I remember that somewhere in the world, as we said our goodbyes, she shared with me her decision regarding possible treatments, and we parted ways. At that moment I didn't understand much, and the truth is I didn't want to accept her decision.

And life allowed us to meet again in her country. There she was with me when my dad passed away.

When she told me the cancer had returned, I felt helpless and wanted to hold her back, knowing that her free spirit needed rest. She let me walk with her on this final stretch of the journey; once again, those heart-to-heart conversations. I think she was accompanying me to help me to accept that time had come.

And yes, those final hours were a gift from God. She had already given me the list of songs she wanted sung at her funeral. At first, my stubbornness didn't want to let her go; and there she was, with her patience, with her freedom that allowed me to embrace her and let her go, amid those songs she wanted. Surrounded by the people who mattered most in her life.

Yes, this is what I learned from Ana María: a stubborn freedom of love that allows me to be the best version of myself.

The joy of living

My heart feels heavy with sorrow at dear Nadine's departure.

What a true adventure we shared together! We built a community over two years — a short time, I guess, but an intense one in terms of our mission and the friendship we gradually built.

Together, we lived one of the most beautiful missions alongside the children in Goma. What a challenge! To be a glimmer of God's love for these little ones whose lives have been so hard due to the realities and violence they face. In Goma we lived a 24/7 mission, without rest, carrying a great responsibility. It was a beautiful mission that opened our hearts.

Many times we sat in the chapel, exhausted, simply to share the Word and a laugh that brought us back to life. I do not remember which Gospel passage it was, but I said something about how, in our mission, we are just passing through, and you took those words as a source of encouragement for our daily service.

When I arrived in Goma, one little girl was barely a year old, always ill and always with her little sad face. Nadine gave her something I cannot explain, but life returned to her, along with the joy of living. She even insisted on being dressed like Sister Nadine, with her scarf — a mini Nadine. I think that Nadine gave her unconditional love, to her and to every little one in the center, something they had perhaps never experienced before and which restored their love of life.

Many times we discussed decisions and she had the ability to listen and to let go. Then came COVID-19, and the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano, but nothing could extinguish her desire to live and to give her life for God's *anawim*.

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I remember that when she said goodbye to that mission. The children didn't want to let her go and Nadine told them she would remain very much present. Who could have imagined that the illness would bring her back to her country, even though she

herself didn't want to?

Her wish right to the end was to return to her mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

During those months of illness, her unshakeable faith and her love for life kept her going, fighting and hoping.

I tried to be there for her from afar, but it was actually Nadine who was always there for me. Thank you, Nadine, for that deep love for your mission, for the people God placed in your heart, and above all for your deep and joyful love of life.

Certainly, throughout my life, there have been dear people who have passed away, and each one leaves a different void. Today, as I reflect and talk with these two women, my heart is filled with a sense of mourning, but this is a mourning that springs from a deep love, from an experience that has left its mark on my life.

How can a person touch my soul so deeply? I believe that is the miracle of friendship.

The experience of breaking bread and recognising the Risen One is this experience of being able to touch my deepest vulnerability and to allow the other person to touch it as well. It is a recognition of how God becomes incarnate and rises again amidst our broken and redeemed humanity in love.

My heart is deeply moved by the gift God has given me in Ana María and Nadine. They live within me, and though their presence is now different, it continues to accompany me on my journey.