News



Sr. Cecilia Nguyen, seen in an undated photo, is a member of the Sisters, Community of Charity and Social Services and lives in Biloxi, Miss. She has spent decades working in catechetical formation of children and teens, and now as she faces kidney failure and a long wait for a transplant, she leans on her own faith to sustain her. She said her best hope is a living kidney donor. (OSV News/Courtesy of Gulf Pine Catholic)

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Sr. Cecilia Nguyen has spent decades shaping the faith of others.

Now, as she faces kidney failure and a long wait for a transplant, she leans on that same faith to sustain her.

"I am a member of the Sisters, Community of Charity and Social Services," she said, reflecting on a vocation that began in 1985. "I've joined the religious life since 1985 and have served as director of religious education at several parishes since 1991."

Her ministry has taken many forms, but always with a focus on the next generation. "My ministry has evolved in the catechetical formation of our children and teens," she said.

It is work she loves deeply — work she has had to step away from.

"My kidney failure has affected my life and ministry tremendously," Sr. Cecelia, who lives in Biloxi, said. "I am no longer healthy enough to continue to serve our Lord in the religious formation of our children."

The illness has also taken away another calling close to her heart. Kidney failure "has prevented me from traveling to Vietnam, Peru and Cuba to serve as a missionary to the poor there, which brings me great joy," she said.

Her diagnosis came quietly, almost unexpectedly, while she was serving in Florida. "I was working as a catechetical leader for a parish in the Diocese of Orlando when I would feel tired just crossing the streets to go to Mass," she recalled. "I was

admitted into the local hospital there for 10 days and found out both of my kidneys have failed due to (being) diabetic."

The news weighed heavily on her. "Emotionally I was deeply saddened, but felt as though God wanted me to rest for a little bit," she told the Gulf Pine Catholic, newspaper of the Diocese of Biloxi.

Physically, the toll was immediate. "I no longer have the strength to continue my work ... and mission work with the poor."

These days, her life has slowed considerably, though her sense of purpose has not. "Mostly daily prayers, attending Mass online, going to doctors' appointments, doing nightly home dialysis and volunteering to work on projects to help the poor in Vietnam," she said. Even from afar, she contributes: "I am currently working on helping to build a much needed church for poor ethnic families at Phan Son Mission in the Diocese of Phan Thiet, Vietnam."

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Still, the reality of her condition looms. She has been told that waiting for a deceased donor kidney could take years. "I can only abandon myself to God's will," she said. "If God wants me to have a kidney transplant, he will make it happen. My life belongs to God, and God can decide when to heal."

A living donor, however, could change everything.

"Having a living donor can restore my health again within a few months so I can continue to serve our Lord by serving our poor brothers and sisters in Vietnam," she said. "Which is very close to my heart."

She speaks with humility and gratitude when addressing those who might consider donation. "I want them to know that I am deeply grateful to receive a kidney so I can continue to serve the poor," she said. "I understand the life span is longer if I have a living kidney donor."

Through it all, her faith has been her anchor. "Without God, without my faith, I would not be able to cope with my illness," she said. "It has been a challenging journey these past two years since I fell sick, but God has always been there to remind me

that this too shall pass, and better days will come."

Her religious community has also been a source of strength. "My community has been keeping me in their thoughts and prayers," she said.

The hardest moments have tested her endurance. "The most challenging moments have been surgeries and hospitalization, doing nightly home dialysis and now doctors' appointments and coping with the daily activities with lots of fatigue and physical weaknesses," she said. Yet her resolve remains steady: "I continue to focus on God, to trust in God and firmly believe that God has my life in his hands."

To those who may feel called to help, her message is simple and heartfelt. "I am profoundly grateful for any person that God may send to give me their kidney," she said. "I also ask for their prayers as I discern God's holy will for me at this time."

And for those who cannot donate, she emphasizes that their support still matters. "I am always in need of prayers," Sr. Cecilia said. "Keeping me in their prayers is a great blessing already."

In a life devoted to service, Sr. Cecilia now finds herself on the receiving end of compassion. Yet even in need, her focus remains outward — on faith, on service and on hope.