



***St. John in Montana  
Congregational Novitiate  
Ein Kerem, Jerusalem***

**Issue: 2**

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**"Follow me, and I will make you fish for people...Immediately they left the boat and their family and followed him."**

**- Matthew 4: 19-21, NRSV**

Theme for the month: Sharing our Call

This month issue is about our call. Sharing our call to follow Jesus enabled us to become acquainted with each other in a profound way.

Also our sharing became an opportunity to talk about the thoughts of Fr. Theodore on religious life. We had learned that for him it is a "covenant which embodies the idea of solidarity with the people of God, a sharing in God's mission and at the same time a free commitment." Lastly it helped us to reflect deeper on our call and challenge to grow up as we continue our journey to Sion.

**"RELIGIOUS LIFE IS ALL ABOUT LOVE AND SOLIDARITY God' S CREATION."**

**-- Fr. Theodore, paraphrase**



**It's Mystery**

**Alejandra Vásquez Mejía**

My call is a mystery, and it is a call to become a sister of Zion though we do not have a community in Guatemala yet. I came to know Zion through one of my best friend. I grew up in a protestant orphanage in Guatemala where Bible reading and study were part of my early childhood. To meet Zion become a dream for me; it was not easy to contact Zion, first because it was in another country, and second, because a phone call would be expensive.

The first sister whom I met was Maria Luisa Castillo. She was so kind to me, and she was the first to say to me, "You are welcome in our Congregation". She explained that our Congregation has Jewish roots, and she told me about the conversion of Mary Alphonse. After that we communicated by email; we could not meet frequently because of the distance between our countries.

I remember especially the surprise and joy and tears of one of the sisters when she learned that I had entered the community. Actually, the things I love about the sisters are the kindness and the generosity and the understanding that they have shown me. That is a big part of why I am here.

My favorite texts in the Bible are Luke 13, 10 -17, the story of the bent over woman, and John 4, 1-42, Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. And the symbol of my call is this: a woman freely expresses herself.

**A Call to love and solidarity to the plight of struggling masses for justice**

**Arlyne del Valle Casas**

During my early twenties searching for meaning in life led



me to the Society of St. Teresa of Jesus (STJ). I met them in 2002, I was then thinking about the purpose of my existence and discerning about religious life. I saw their poster in Quiapo Church. My attraction to the words written in the poster gave me the courage to get in contact with them. I text Sr. Bea and told her that I wanted to visit them. That was the beginning of my encounter with them. STJ is an



international congregation founded in Spain and just beginning to take roots in the Philippines. All the sisters came from Latin America and Spain. They had only one Filipina who was an aspirant at that time. After a few visit and knowing their charism, spirituality and ministry I decided to have a live-in experience. I stayed for a month in their community located in Navotas. My experience of solidarity with the poor deepened my desire to serve God as a religious missionary. We also went to Louisiana, US to continue our formation. Another horizon was opened up to me. After a year I was sent to Texas for my pastoral experience. In Texas I met the Mexican-American culture. In May 2009, the five us of went back in the Philippines to start the refoundation in the province. However all beginnings are not easy. Things did not work out well with all of us so in March 2010 my companion and I left STJ. Also in 2013 the congregation decided to leave Philippines for good.

As soon as I left STJ I continued my studies in IFRS. I took Master of Arts in Religious Studies major in Scripture. Studying in IFRS opened a new horizon for me and called me to get involved in society. In IFRS I had learned many things and gained new insights about faith and responsibility. The text that played an important role in my life back then was the call of Moses in Exodus 3:1-10. Farthermore all the insights that I had learned did not only happen in the four walls of our classroom but also outside. It happened through the various student activities and social involvements. As students of theology and scripture we are called to be aware of our social responsibility and to be in solidarity with the plight of the masses for justice. It is a moment of integrating all theories learned into praxis. For what profit a person who is well versed in theology and scripture if she/he does not know how to commit to the emancipation of the poor and powerless in society.

### **A Gift from God**



My name is María Clara Luz Gutiérrez Menchú. I grew up in a very supportive and loving family in Aldea Argueta, Sololá, Guatemala.

I experience my call as a gift from God. My family has encouraged me in responding to this call, especially my sister Cristina who has been an inspiration for me in choosing religious life.

I often sense the Lord saying, “This is my daughter, whom I love; I am pleased with her,” Matthew 3, 17b, and “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly” John. 10,10b.

The Lord has been merciful to me; since I met Sion, my whole life has changed. I can sing to the Lord the Magnificat with my whole self – spirit and body.

In Sion the most important thing I desired is to live religious life, and Sion has trusted my vocation. I feel that for now God wants, and even needs me in the religious life, and He has led me up to this point. That is why I am here.

I am grateful to the Lord and to the congregation, I feel at home here in Sion. Thank you so much for yours prayers.

### God has his Plan

#### Rozeni

I Begin my history by saying that God has a plan for my life. When I was a child, a sister assembled together a group of children to speak to them about God, Jesus and Holy Spirit. I listened to this elderly nun almost all day. I grew up believing in God, Jesus and Holy Spirit. When I was seven years old my mother took me to an Evangelical Church. For me it was terrible to pray out loud. From then on, I did not go to Church anymore. When I was fifteen years old a friend of mine invited me to participate in a meeting for youth. It was the missionary month of Mary. I loved being in youth groups and it was then that I felt my call for Religious Life. After some years I began to work and dropped the meetings with young group. I forgot all about my first meeting with God. People were asking me about my boyfriend because they said you are beautiful



and have no boyfriend. What's happening with you? When I was nineteen years old I found a boyfriend, and our friendship lasted only three days because when he said to me "I want to marry you", I remembered my first meeting with the Lord and my call for Religious Life. So I finished with my boyfriend and continued with my work and study. One day I told my friend about my unclear feeling of a religious vocation She invited me to join her for a vocations meeting. It was after that discernment that I decided to enter Sion.

### Challenged to become a witness and steward of God's love for humanity

#### Joey

The reading from the Acts chapter 9: verse 1-9 for me, is expressing the deepest feeling of one whose life has been touched by God. Like Saul, who hear the voice of Jesus and got up from the ground unable to see, even though his eyes were open. me too, I was blind folded by fear but God led me to discover the gifts and graces that are within me. The Spirit also leads me to recognize that even in the depth of my misery, God is there. At the age of 17 I answered God's call and by that time I was studying in the University.



Many things happened along my journey with the other congregation and one of those problems was my health situation. My doctor advised me to stop my formation, and to have time for my self and for my medical treatment. I was confronted by other challenges, the reality of life and I found myself searching for an explanation to every situation in life.

As I look deeper into my heart, my deep desire to search for God and to answer His call is still there. When I finished my medical treatment, I decided to look at

another congregation. It was a great blessing for me because when I was still in my previous congregation one of my classmates in IFRS (Institute of Formation and Religious Studies) was a Sion sister. I started to contact her, and that was the beginning of our on-going communication. I decided to have my community experience with the Sion Sisters and that led me to know Sion's spirituality, charism, mission and their simple way of living. I was impressed by Sr. Pat Fox's apostolate in the Philippines. She is totally involved in her work for justice and peace, among the struggling masses of poor people. I decided to enter Sion in 2012, I know that Sion can lead me to a deeper knowledge of God's love for me and for those in need especially the least of our brothers and sisters- the forsaken, the poor, the suffering, the oppressed and marginalized which shows a more radical presence of Christ.

Like Saul, I feel challenged to become a witness and steward of God's love for humanity.

["Leave everything behind and come follow me"](#)

Victoria

I am Victoria Nabil Helmi, an Egyptian, from a poor and simple Catholic family. I have a high school diploma in the sewing section, but my hobby is drawing and handicrafts. After graduating from school I worked in the Kindergarten because I love children. The Sisters of Sion knew me well from the time I was a child and they also knew my family. As a youngster I used to think of



becoming a sister, however growing up as a teenager this was forgotten. But the Lord reminded me of my forgotten dream to be a sister. God had used the scripture verse to remind again this thought, it says "Leave everything behind and come follow me." Also the mission of the sisters in the village had an effect on me and so I began to think again about religious life.

Sr. Juliana was working then in the village had helped me to discover my call and to know how to make a decision in my life. Then I decided to live with the sisters for a period of 3 months. After that I decided that I would stay for one year. During this time I was working with the special children in Berba, the kindergarten of Notre Dame de Sion. This was a beautiful experience but I need more training for this field. Also I made a retreat

and had the same verse “leave everything behind and follow me”. Amazing thing happened to me. I was sleeping and when I woke up my lips were saying this verse. I was really astonished. After the retreat I made the decision on the basis of this verse, which stayed for me for a long time. I am happy living with the sisters and had learned many things from them. I am grateful to the Lord who chose me despite of my weakness as a human being.

### **Sr. Colette A gift from God**



Sr. Colette sees her Call as a gift from God, a seed that developed after being planted by the hand of God. This letter is a way of sharing some of that story.

Growing up in a very poor family where sometimes, as a child, she had to go to school without breakfast because there was just nothing to eat for a family of seven in post-war Ireland. Things changed when a sister of Sion, a distant relative, working in the school in Worthing, England helped two children of the family to continue our education in the boarding school in Worthing. That meant that as child I never went home during the school year, as we just did not have the money for traveling. So I stayed with the sisters.

After finishing my education, it was quite naturally the next step to enter the sisters and become one of them. I went to France for my novitiate and the next couple of years seemed to proceed very naturally, I experienced no big surprises or difficulties; I saw my life like a tapestry woven by the hand of God. At that time we observed silence through much of the day; only necessary words were spoken, which prevented gossip and other perhaps unnecessary forms of communication.

We also never went home after we entered the Convent. On the 14 of August the whole community gathered to learn our “obediencies” for the coming year: it was then that I heard, “Sr. Collette is going to the Community of Ein Karem” and I accepted this as in obedience without question, “why me, not her?” With that, I left Ireland in 1954 as a young professed knowing I

probably would not see my family again. My life belonged to God and only to God.

When I arrived at the gate of Ein Karem after a long voyage by ship and then by bus from Haifa, the sisters were just coming out come out with a dead cow that had to be buried somewhere! Ein Karem was a farm at that time. My first home visit would be after the Six Day War in 1967. At the beginning of my time in Ein Karem I was responsible of milking the cows and taking care of the animals and working the land. Ein Karem began to be a guesthouse in 1965.

So, this year, I am celebrating 60 years of living in the Holy Land and 60 years of my commitment through vows in the Congregation of Notre Dame de Sion. During these years in Israel I have served in the ministry of our institutions as well as, for 25 years, working with the mentally handicapped in the Illwen Center for mentally handicapped which is known now as the Swedish Institute. In Sion I have learned how important it is to follow the signs of the time and God never asks of you more than you can do.

## **How I found my vocation!**

### **Sr. Juliana**

Abram starts out on this venture and leaves his home. He abandons all his safety, all his security. Since that tale of Abraham we know: a promise can only be fulfilled if we start out.

Never in her life, after the death of my father, had my mother worried about her own wishes. It was hard for her, in post-war times, to bear the responsibility for three small girls (I was just three). Often, she did not know how to pay for the next school excursion or for the warm midday soup during winter months, or for the school milk; to say nothing of our children wishes! In this atmosphere of uncertainty, of want and hardship, we grew up, the three half-orphan girls of Holzackern, a village of Upper Austria, amidst fields and woods. We probably had no material security, but Mother was always generous, even though we had very little. No beggar left us without something to eat, and missions were also supported with a little money. For: even when there is little money to help others, when everybody contributes, great things can happen! That was Mother's conviction. This was the atmosphere in which we three girls grew up: sharing, getting involved for others.

Why was missionary activity and church-going so close to my heart? During the long prayers of Mother, who took me with her everywhere (since I was the youngest of the three): in these prayer times I found peace and security. And so, God's calling grew in my heart. At first, I



understood nothing, since I had my own plans for my life. Only on my 24th birthday, I began to feel and hear God's calling very clearly.

Go, read my word and follow me where I shall lead you. These were the words that made a turning point in my life. And it was no sooner said than done: I put the bible into my backpack with all the other things, and off I went by boat and rail to Israel, the Holy Land, following my call. During my voluntariat in the Holy Land, Sister Ann Kathrin of the congregation Notre Dame de Sion and I start out together trying to fathom my calling to be a Sister.

Walking, opening myself, reading the scripture, in apostolic work together with the sisters, and in praying with the sisters, it became clear: this is my vocation, this is what gives abundance to my life. And so, my motto is the sentence from John 10:10: I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. God's calling always wants to lead us into abundant life. And now, within the congregation, I am called to accompany young women who start out to follow Jesus within the congregation of Notre Dame de Sion.

### The Feast of The Annunciation

By: Sr. Juliana

The Feast of the Annunciation this year was a very special day for the Sisters Sion. At *Notre Dame de Sion* in Ein Karem, six women, from Guatemala, the Philippines, Brazil, and Egypt, began their "Canonical Year" in the newly established Congregational Novitiate there. In this village, some 2000 years ago, Mary the Mother of Jesus confirmed her "Yes" to the unknown, to the seemingly impossible, her humble, "Yes, let it be done to me as you have said."



Two names, Mary and Maryam echo through the millennia, in the Jewish and Christian communities. Countless girls, and even boys, have been given this name because of the promise it holds. Alphonse Ratisbonne, the brother of Theodore Ratisbonne who founded the Congregation, chose to be known as Marie-Alphonse, after the "Event of 20 January 1842, as a way of expressing what had occurred in his encounter with Mary that day.

In a much earlier time, on the shore of the Sea of Reeds, Maryam, the Sister of Moses, danced and sang God's gift of freedom to her people. Fr. David Neuhaus, our celebrant at the Eucharist, reminded us that it is only people who know their freedom that also know how to dance, and he invited us to remember the lovely liturgical dance of the novices at the opening of the liturgy.

All of us who had gathered to celebrate this moment had come because of our own call and commitment to follow Jesus. We want to do it well, to be witnesses, in the Church and world

today, of God's faithful love for the Jewish people, and of God's promises to them for all humanity.

As a novice, or a sister, or a brother of Sion, the crucial question is not how much education I have, or how good I might be in ministry, but rather, in the light of the teaching and example of Jesus, how much love do I want to give? How deep is my commitment to give myself to God, in following Jesus so that, like John the Baptist I can say, "Jesus must become greater, while I must become less" (John 3:30). It is about allowing love to grow in my life, the love I know in Jesus.

The six novices are beginning their "Canonical Year," or as we Sisters of Sion call it, the "Sinai Year," recalling that mountain of God, that was a place of powerful revelation and incredible intimacy, in a divine-human encounter. The question of the Canonical Year that one ponders over and over again is a gentle invitation and a great challenge: Is God enough for me? The year is a process of deepening my commitment to religious life, and letting go of myself, in order to follow Jesus. How can I respond to this call to love, as Jesus did?

**Thank You!**  
**Merci!**  
**Toda!**  
**Gracias!**  
**Salamat!**  
**Obrigada!**

Jesus Christ."

"We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord  
-- 1 Thessalonians 1, 2-3

[Thank you for being part of our celebration and beginning of Canonical Sinai.](#)

Love and prayers,

Alejandra,  
Arlyne,  
Clara,  
Joey,  
Sr. Juliana,  
Rozeni,  
Victoria,  
Sr. Colette  
and  
Sr. Michelle