

YOU'RE TOO YOUNG!



While visiting my uncle, Fr. Joseph, my mother's brother, I was fascinated by the library in his study. Whenever he was out, I would seize the chance to examine the titles, leaf through some of the books, and read a few pages here and there. One day, one of the books I picked up was an album about the Daughters of St. Paul. When I left my uncle's study, I took the book with me and for the next few nights, before falling asleep, I would read the book and admire the pictures. It was the beginning of my desire to become a nun.

In the 1950 Holy Year, I heard that several girls from the Catholic Action group in my parish were planning to go to Vicenza to make a three-day retreat with the Sisters of St. Dorothy and I asked if I could go with them. On that retreat, I prayed hard to the Lord and St. Bertilla Boscardin to grant me the grace to become a religious and go to the missions.

After my older sister Caterina entered the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Paul in Alba, the FSPs in Verona often came to visit our family. Even Maestra Assunta Bassi came to our town one day to guide a retreat for the young women of the parish. She mentioned that the Daughters of St. Paul also held these days of recollection in Verona. I started to attend them with my cousin (the future Sr. Eusebia, fsp). There was always

a big group of girls, including Sergia Ballini, who enlivened the gatherings by playing her harmonica.

After lunch, we would all help with kitchen clean-up. Once, as I entered the kitchen with a pile of plates, I stopped to watch two of the sisters who were talking and laughing as they washed dishes at the sink. I never forgot that scene: the image of those happy sisters entered not only my eyes but also my heart. I said to myself: "I want to be as happy as they are!" It was a beautiful day thanks to that simple experience, which gave me great joy.

At that point I made my decision: I would go to Alba...but not right away. However one day my cousin Eusebia dashed into the house. Bubbling over with joy, she told us that she was getting ready to go to Alba. Turning to me, she urged, "Why don't you come too?" Her words scared me and I began to cry. My mother was speechless but my father became angry and exclaimed: "You're too young! (I was 16 at the time.)" "I believe Caterina has a vocation," he continued, "but not you!"

But in the end Eusebia and I entered the FSP community in Alba on 15 March 1952. My father accompanied us there....

My years in Alba, then in Rome...the formation I received: how many graces God poured out on me and how much goodness he showed me! Then there were my first steps in carrying out propaganda and working in the book center, after which I was assigned to the vocation apostolate.

I was 31 years old and stationed in Trent when I received a letter from Maestra Ignazia asking me if I would be willing to go to Chile. After 20 years in that country, another 6 in Venezuela and 19 in Peru-Bolivia, I can say that the Lord has had great patience and mercy with my littleness and poverty. I owe a big debt of gratitude to all my superiors, from Prima Maestra right down the line. How much kindness and compassion they showed me, and how much encouragement they gave me.... I am also grateful to the many sisters who have offered me their esteem and affection (perhaps too much!) over the years.

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(15th anniversary of the death of my sister, Sr. Caterina)