

A CONGREGATION
TAILOR-MADE FOR ME



The vocational testimonies that I have either read or listen to are always dynamic and stimulating. They tell a story of expectations, desires, anxiety, and struggle—either hidden or manifest. They are moving testimonies that capture the reader’s interest. In contrast, I consider my own vocation story to be a very simple one—the story of a person “born with a vocation.” The religious life was already in my DNA.

From the time I was very young (about 3 years old), I enjoyed paging through magazines—which in my family were always religious ones—and whenever I happened upon a picture of a nun I would stop and not go any farther. When I was asked, “What do you like about this page?” I would point my small finger at the nun and say, “I want this!” Perhaps it was the sisters’ religious garb that fascinated me—I don’t know, but what I *do* know is that those pictures powerfully attracted me and served somehow as a sign for me. The thought of becoming a nun was a very clear within me: I was sure that would be my life. I didn’t consider any other options because nothing else drew me so strongly. What I was unclear about was what Congregation I should enter. On this point, I faced a number of problems:

1. The fact of leaving my family forever was inconceivable to me, while the testimony of all the nuns I knew was precisely this: *you have to leave your family.*

2. I had no interest in working in hospitals—an apostolate carried out by many of the nuns in my region.

3. What I wanted to do was *to teach people about God, to speak to them about Jesus*, but none of the sisters I knew did this as a specific apostolate.

4. Furthermore, I was a fanatical reader, passionate about books, and while the sisters I knew talked about schools and training to be a teacher, they never spoke explicitly about *working with books.*

What to do? I was only ten years old, but I was in a hurry and wanted to make a decision as soon as possible. I could give up something, if necessary, but *wanting to teach others about the things of God and help them* was definitely what I wanted most.

And the Lord, well aware of my “fixation,” brought the right Congregation to my doorstep. I didn’t go looking it: the Congregation came looking for me!

One day, without any advance notice, two of my cousins, Ester and Tarcila, who were Daughters of St. Paul and whom, by the way, I had never even met, came to see my family and they told me about their Congregation. What they had to say resonated deep within me. The life they described was exactly what I was looking for so I didn’t need much time to think things over. Like a famous proverb says: *food and the desire to eat hooked up with each other.*

When my cousins told me that their mission was to communicate the message of Jesus with the means of social communication and that they made books, magazines, etc., I was in seventh heaven. As a matter of fact, I too was “making” catechism texts at that time because my mother was a catechist in our parish but there were not enough catechism booklets to go around. I had pondered the problem and concluded: why can’t I make copies of the text for the children? I knew





nothing about copyrights but my family had a typewriter so I decided I could handle the matter myself. This was my first experience as a “publisher.” I spent my afternoons making copies of the *Little Catechism of Christian Doctrine* to give to the children.

My meeting with Ester and Tarcila made me realize that I could be a nun and at the same time carry out this service. Was it really possible that there was an Institute that used machines to make books and magazines, and that I could enter it and do the same? That I could speak about Jesus by means of radio programs? My joy knew no bounds!

All this took place in the 1950's and even though at that time the Daughters of St. Paul accepted girls as young as 12 years old, I was only 10.... My mother was very pleased with what I wanted to do with my life; my father, less so. But two years later, he was more reconciled to the idea, especially after some people advised him: “Let her go. She'll be back home within a week.”

I didn't know what to expect in the religious life. My first months with the sisters were very, very hard: I cried every day because I was so homesick and I wrote several letters to my parents, asking them to come and get me. They wrote back to me, but I was very surprised that they never said they were coming to take me home. When they came to visit me six months later, they told me with surprise that they had never received any letters from me in which I said I wanted to go back home. Many years later, when I myself was involved in formation work, I came to learn that the formation mistresses at that time read the letters of the aspirants to their families before mailing them, and since the mistresses were very familiar with the girls' reactions to their new life in the convent, they

would do some clever editing of the letters to help nurture a fledging vocation. It was this cleverness on the part of my own formation mistress that saved my vocation.

Out of personal experience, I can say that a vocation is a gift of God that grows and matures day after day. There are joyful times, when the Lord leaves us breathless with the manifestations of his love, and there are darker periods when it seems he is playing “hide and seek” with us so as to help us cultivate an even more profound and personal relationship with him.

I am convinced that the Pauline vocation is a marvelous gift and that it contains all the elements needed to fulfill us on both the human and spiritual levels. If I had to start all over again from scratch, I would make exactly the same journey, with only a few corrections to the “first draft.” In all these years, along with a multitude of joys, successes, conquests, challenges and wonderful apostolic adventures, I have also experienced crises, problems and dark moments, but I have never had any doubts about my vocation. In two years I will be celebrating my 60th jubilee of religious profession, so those who predicted that I would stay in the convent for less than a week have lost their bet. Perhaps I have disappointed a number of people, but not God and not my mother!

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