

Sr. Mary Catherine, cont. What did I do with the dream I had? What had become of the missionary work I had thought about?

Twenty years earlier, when I was in the Refugee Camp, a young Australian volunteer had been buried alive in the sand while digging a well for the refugees. I still remember the announcer’s voice, paging a doctor and telling myself that I would dedicate my life to missionary work.

After refusing many times my younger sister’s invitations to go with her on a charity mission, I decided to return one more time to Vietnam, 27 years since my escape. We stayed and worked with Vietnamese nuns, giving food and aid to the poor. I admired the sisters’ courage caring for lepers. My heart ached for the orphans. I thought I would change the lives of the people there but it was they who changed me.

I began to look for something deeper. The thought of becoming a religious crossed my mind. On my return to California, it took me months to finally volunteer for charity work. I struggled. I didn’t want this new activity affecting the quality of my life with my family. And more importantly, I did not want to be converted by the people doing such charitable works. They were too religious for me and would pester me to come back to the Church. I wanted to return on my own terms. I turned again to the Bible. The Gospel of John mesmerized me. I was touched. I felt Jesus was speaking to me and praying for me. Although raised a Catholic, I had never felt close to Him.

After half a year fighting my own battle, I yielded. I had met an elderly nun from Vietnam who was in this country visiting her Community. There was something very holy and practical about her that made me feel at ease with her. She asked me to join her for a day-long retreat at the Seminary. I accepted without hesitation. While there, I met Father John and was able, finally, to pour out my heart to him. Far from scolding, he consoled me as Jesus had Mary Magdalen. It had been twenty years since I had last received Communion. After Mass, I told Father John, “I lost God once and I don’t want to lose Him again.” I was a lamb gone astray; was lost and now had been found.

I began going to daily Mass and joined the Cursillo Movement along with other prayer groups. I attended retreats and continued with my volunteer charity work but still felt empty. The idea of becoming a Sister occurred to me more frequently now. But I couldn’t answer my own question, “Why do you want to become a Religious?” I was sure of my love for God and the sincerity of my consecration to Him. I decided to make another trip to Vietnam to see if missionary work was what I was being called to do. Half way into the trip, I wanted to abandon it. I didn’t have the zeal I had had two years earlier



although my admiration for the nuns there and my love for the orphans hadn’t wavered. While praying alone in the chapel, I began to cry and told God I wanted to abandon it all. It was then that I heard the words, deep within me, “To whom will you go?” God’s Presence was suddenly very real. I understood at that moment how greatly loved I am.

Two days before I left Vietnam, I broke my ankle. Confined in a cast at home, I began doubting. Fear of losing the security of my job plagued me. All sorts of questions tormented me. “Am I too old for religious life?” “What will happen to my family?” “What if I don’t persevere?” “What will happen to my career?” A year slipped by. Following 70 days of the Spiritual Exercises, I made an 8-day silent retreat. Now I truly believed in my call to religious life.

I flew to Vancouver, Canada to speak with Father Tran whom I had met two years earlier. I told him that I felt God was calling me to religious life. He suggested that I visit the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood in Canada. He also mentioned contacting a mutual friend who had visited there. I began to have cold feet! “What is this Precious Blood Institute? I don’t want to go to Canada.” I searched the Internet and found the monastery in Watertown, New York. “Too far from California and home” was my excuse. Along with all of this, came an opportunity to accept a different position at work after 19 years as a research quality scientist. I declined.

Again having second thoughts, I went on retreat in the California desert. I entered the chapel and knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, a hand tapped me on the shoulder and a familiar voice greeted me. Instantly I understood God’s will for me. I prayed every day that if it was His will for me to be a sister, He would have to send someone to take me by the hand and show me where He wanted me to be. The familiar voice was that mutual friend Father Tran had told me to contact. I almost passed out then and there!

In January 2012 I flew to Watertown for a two-week visit. From the plane over Watertown Airport, all I could see was snow and frozen lakes. I wanted to cry. “What have I done? I’m coming to no-man’s land!” There were only 8 other passengers on this 30 seat plane. Many months later when I told Bishop Terry LaValley this story, he said “Didn’t you know? The North Country has more cows than people.” I received the habit of my Community last year on the 50th Anniversary of the Watertown Foundation. I am here because I truly believe this is God’s will for me. God loves me and He loves those to whom He sends me. Please pray for me and our sisters and especially for vocations in our country.

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.
I will be glad and exult in you, I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.
(Psalm 9:1-2)

Vocation questions?
Maybe you can start finding some answers at
www.rcdony.org/vocations.html



for the parishes of Ogdensburg, Heuvelton & Lisbon

Vocations Newsletter

Vocations Committee
Rev. Jude Nnadibuagha, Patricia Conger, Larry & Theresa Crowe, Dcn. Jim & Rita Crowley, Lil Daily, Sr. Mary Eamon Lyng, Clare Murdock, Dcn. Rod Roca, Judy Sholette, Mary Sovie and Jesse Sovie

Consecrated Religious

The term “consecrated” has its roots in Latin and is often translated as “dedicated, devoted as sacred” or “set apart.” A person living a “consecrated life” is someone who has dedicated his or her life to God in imitation of Christ and publicly professes poverty, chastity and obedience.

Religious life is a form of consecrated life that consists of men and women who make specific **vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to a religious community.** These communities can consist of sisters, nuns, brothers, monks, or religious order priests. The Diocese of Ogdensburg is blessed to have a number of religious communities serving within its boundaries. Visit www.rcdony.org/vocations/consecrated-life, where this was taken from, for more information.

Sister Linh Therese, APB

I was born in Communist Vietnam, one of 8 children. My childhood was filled with hard work, great faith and strong family bonds. My father is a wonderful example of one who truly lives his faith. Every morning his booming voice would echo through our home at 4:30 am calling us to prayer: “In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit....” We rose immediately to pray for a half hour at our family altar, returning again at evening. There were no days off from prayer! The seeds of my vocation were planted there in the midst of pagan Vietnam.



I wept with gratitude at the gift I received! Upon graduation I entered the novitiate of that convent, while my family prepared to come to America. Unlike my younger siblings, I had to remain another year in Vietnam due to visa requirements.

In 2000, I arrived in California to join my family. I found a job, purchased a car and obtained the necessary material possessions to live the American way. But, the desire to live religious life continued to burn in my heart. Through a friend who had seen an interview on EWTN, I was introduced to the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Despite my poor English, I contacted the Sisters in Watertown and arranged to spend two weeks in discernment at their monastery. Following that visit, I left for home, full of enthusiasm, planning to return for a 2 month stay. I felt God’s call and said in my heart, “I am ready!” A 2 month stay is required before a woman is accepted for entrance to the monastery.

As a postulant, I lived and studied the Rule of our Foundress, Mother Catherine Aurelia. Soon the time came for me to receive the habit of the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood. It was a long and eventful road from the fields and poverty of pagan Vietnam to this great land of opportunity. God seemed to be asking me to make a commitment that would bring me ever closer to Himself.

With St. Therese as my model through years of preparation, I took the steps toward Final Profession. Like her I try to do all for the greater glory of God, devoting every moment of my life to adoring His Precious Blood. My daily life now is spent in reaching, out in prayer and often in action, to those who long to know Christ, His Will and His Love. Many are called but few are listening! I believe firmly that God still calls women today. It takes faith and courage to see past the material things of this world and to place one’s entire trust in the One Who calls!

We lived in the center of the country but later moved inland while my Father served in the Vietnam war. As a youngster, I attended school half days and worked in the fields of rice, sweet potatoes and coffee trees the other half. Growing up, I never saw a priest or sister in our village. In fact, it was dangerous even to go beyond one’s home. Religious education was not tolerated.

Twice a year, at Christmas and Easter, in order to attend Mass, we travelled 9 miles with one bike for 9 people! It was exhausting! I think of my Mom and what those trips must have cost her; ironing of our clothes, packing lunches, a thousand little things that only Mothers do. At the same time, she held the household together, the only adult with 8 in her sole care. In the midst of it all, Mom actually raised 2 pigs, too!

When I was 15, my parents were able to pay a small fee for me to board at a convent where I continued my education.

Sister Mary Eamon Lyng, SSJ

This is what faith is, a journey of the love of God poured out in my life that has come in unexpected ways and surprises. Faith is believing that God in some way will unfold and manifest His love if we trust in Him at all times.

My vocation to be a Sister of St. Joseph began at home with my parents. This faith was learned, practiced and lived within my family. I am deeply grateful for the gift of my parents who lived and practiced the faith that had been nourished from their own family lives. Their love was expressed in having five children of which I am the oldest. For each of us, we knew that we were loved by God, when my mother traced the Sign of the Cross on our foreheads as infants. We prayed for each member of the family. It was in the home that we began to know God, His presence, and His love. Each room had a crucifix and our living room, not only had the crucifix on the wall, but holy pictures of Jesus and Mary as well. Our home was dedicated to the Sacred Heart and that picture hung over our piano in the center of our living room. There was never any question that God always came first, especially Sunday Mass together as a family and regular practice of receiving the sacrament of Penance.



There was never any question that Catholic education would be the foundation that strengthened our Catholic faith. I went to Holy Family School and Immaculate Heart Academy (IHA) where I was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph. My education continued when I entered the Sisters of St. Joseph at Mater Dei College, Ogdensburg and received Bachelors and Masters Degrees from the State of New York College at Potsdam and Providence College, Rhode Island.

As a Sister of St. Joseph for almost 60 years, the gift of living Community life with the Sisters has empowered me to carry forward the charism and mission of our Congregation as a member of the Community and in Congregational leadership. I have been privileged to teach children of all ages from as far away as the Champlain Valley, to the Adirondack Mountains, to the farmlands in Franklin County and finally to the St. Lawrence Valley. It is also a tremendous gift to be part of the Permanent Deacon Formation Program for over 20 years.

I thank God each day for the call and gift of being a Sister of St. Joseph of the Diocese of Ogdensburg. It has been a gift of grace each day to give honor and glory to God and to serve the "dear neighbor" through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. May God be praised, may He always be praised.

Sister Cindy Sullivan, BVM

I was born in Massena NY in 1953 and graduated from Sacred Heart School and then Massena Central High School and graduated in 1971. I did not attend Holy Family High School because they did not offer sports programs for girls. After high school, I attended Onondaga CC for dental hygiene to have something to fall back on if I failed to become a professional golfer. That was my plan at least! I headed off to California to work as a dental hygienist and to become a professional golfer. The long and the short of it is they wanted me to work at playing golf, which did not sound like fun. So I joined the Peace Corps to go on an adventure until I figured out what I would do next. I applied to Peace Corps, requested Africa, and was accepted and sent to Ecuador, South America. I arrived in Ecuador on June 24, 1974 and there turned 21.

I was fortunate to meet a Jesuit priest and BVM sister who had a wonderful mission working with shoeshine boys. We, volunteers and religious, lived together, forming an intentional community. Fr. Halligan, SJ and Sr. Miguel Conway, BVM were open to



new ideas. Before long we began inviting the families of the shoeshine boys and became the only total family development program for working children and their families. We offered educational programs, medical / dental care, religious instruction, technical education, alphabetization for adults, values formation, budgeting, home building, nourishment and more for the whole family.

I remained a PC volunteer for four and a half years before finally accepting that God was calling me to be a BVM sister. I thought I was in charge of my life, until I finally realized that God led me to Ecuador and was the one in charge of my life and had a plan for me. After my novitiate in Dubuque, Iowa, I returned to Ecuador and served there as a BVM sister until 2017. I returned to Massena to help care for my elderly parents and continue as the main fundraiser for our mission in Ecuador.

I continue to listen to God and happily wait to see what the future holds.

Please join us for the Holy Hour for Vocations every Thursday before the first Friday of the month at 7 pm in the Deacon Winter Chapel at St. Mary's Cathedral!

Sister Mary Catherine, APB

I never thought of becoming a nun when I was young. I arrived in the United States at age 14 with a goal to graduate from college and help my family. Two brothers and a sister who left Vietnam with me, were trying to make ends meet for the four of us while also supporting our family in Vietnam. To earn extra money, my sister brought work home with her and I would help her sew.

Three months after my arrival in the U.S. I started high school as a freshman. Two of my six class periods were Reading and ESL (English as a Second Language). I remember feeling like a dummy in American History! I didn't understand what Mr. Cross was teaching or what my classmates were reciting. History homework was really painful. I hardly understood the questions, let alone answer them. I would find a word or phrase in the questions that matched the text and write that same text as the answer. Mr. Cross thoroughly understood my predicament. He always graded my homework despite my never having to recite publicly. He gave me a "C" so that I could pass the class. What I lacked in history, though, I made up in mathematics. The very subject I had dreaded most as a junior high student in Vietnam became my pride and joy! No more worries about "English words." I didn't graduate from high school as an honor student, but I did receive two college scholarships.

California State University of Fullerton was my choice . It was being near to home, reducing stress on my brothers, transportation expenses and so forth. The first two years of college were challenging, switching from Computer Science to Civil Engineering to Biochemistry with the goal of becoming a pharmacist. News of the rest of my family's imminent arrival in California coincided with my final year in college. I decided to postpone Pharmacy school and look for a job to help my family because only one of my brothers was working at the time. In 1992 when my family had first arrived in the United States, we couldn't afford a large apartment or home. My Mom, younger sister and brother had to stay with another sister who lived thirty miles away. The other seven, my father and my five siblings, were crammed into the two-bedroom apartment. The economy of the early 1990s was in a long recession. Six months after graduation, I was lucky to be recruited as an associate scientist by Beckman Instruments which is

APB, BVM, SSJ? Alphabet soup?

Religious orders or congregations use abbreviations to identify themselves. 11 orders are currently in the Diocese of Ogdensburg. Of the thousands of congregations around the world, over 40 have served the people of the North Country.

1. Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod, SCC
2. Daughters of Charity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, FCSCJ
3. Dominican Sisters of Hope, OP
4. Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, BVM

now Beckman Coulter. By the end of that year, my brother and I had saved enough money to buy a house so my whole family could be together again.

Having my mother with us again brought order back to my life. Once again, we prayed as a family at night. I attended Sunday Mass more regularly because I was driving her to church. It was painful for her to see me not receiving communion because she knew I had not been practicing our Catholic faith. She did not ask me why. From time to time, she told me that she would like to see me go to confession and receive communion. I know she kept praying silently for my conversion.

Mom was in the United States for six years when she was diagnosed with stomach cancer. I was devastated. I was working away from home and was going to school at night to prepare myself for Pharmacy school. Alone, I began reading the Bible given to me by a nun friend. I read the Gospel of Matthew over and over. "No one can serve two masters, for he will love one and hate the other" constantly came to mind. I started questioning the importance of prestige, honor and life itself. The Sciences in which I had been working and in which I believed, could not answer my questions. I turned back to God. Every weekend I commuted back and forth to help care for my Mom and be with my family and stop in at Mission San Juan Church to pray for her. A year later, I was able to find a position near home and moved back. I had two years and a half to fulfill my Mom's dying wish, but I could not let go of my own pain and past. The doctors had given her only eight months to live, but she survived more than two and half years. Mom died at home. She was 63.

My Mother's death left a big hole in our family. To help fill our emptiness, my younger siblings and I took every opportunity to travel, especially to Colorado to visit our sister and brother. I was awestruck and captivated driving through the desert landscape of Utah. The miles and miles of vast desert land and majestic mountains whispered to my soul of their eons old existence. Magnificent and mysterious! Who could create it but GOD? I felt smaller than a grain of sand. I couldn't deny that my own existence had to have come from God. God Who had seemed so far away was now so near! It was the first time that I truly believed God exists. I began questioning my purpose in life. *Continued on page 4...*

5. Mid-Atlantic Community - Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, RSM
6. Sister Adorers of the Precious Blood, APB
7. Sisters of Charity of St. Louis, SCSL
8. Sisters of St. Joseph, SSJ

The Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church (SMMC) have just arrived to live in Lisbon and serve in the Ogdensburg area! Two orders of religious men serve as priests in diocesan parishes:

1. Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, MSC
2. Heralds of the Good News, HGN