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Becoming a Deaconess



Our house was the regular free boarding house for the workers assigned to our church and for the visiting deaconesses. I grew up admiring these women for their sheer kindness, gentleness, and friendliness to all of us kids. I felt I belonged in their circle; I loved the singing, storytelling, and everything we did in church. In particular was Ms. Mila Mobasa, who rounded up all the kids from house to house and walked us up to the church for Sunday school and Daily Vacation Bible School. The deaconess I became acquainted with made a lasting mark in my life - a joy to remember!

I had a serious case of hypopituitary gland tumor that made it necessary to take a leave from high school (I was down to 65 lbs.). I was so weak I could not peel off the boiled egg shell, or even use a spoon to feed myself. My mother, who was a Home Economics and Music teacher also had to take a leave of absence from work to care for me. I was told the whole Philippine church was praying for me at that time. I believed that everyone was praying for me, and I felt the blessings of wellness and healing! I recovered and went back to school.

My mother was an active member in the Ilocano Service at Central church where she helped teach choir. There I met a lot of deaconesses, (Harris campus was behind the Central Church) which brought back a lot of my early childhood memories, admirations, and inspirations from these hard working and dedicated women. Since then, a nagging call to be a deaconess kept creeping in my head and in my heart. I tried to ignore it, but the more I saw the deaconesses, the stronger the feeling persisted. I prayed about it, and one day I finally decided to go for it.

Upon telling my parents the news, Mama Elring doubted a bit, but accepted my decision. She eventually said, "Ok, God healed you, we can now dedicate you to His service." However, my siblings opposed this decision, particularly my elder brother who was very familiar with the economic living situations of church workers. My brother said, "I am afraid she will be very poor with hardly any salary from the churches." Mother answered him wisely with a question, "How many of you siblings (6) are there? If each one of you provides her P100/month, then she will do ok." Finally, I entered Harris in 1979, and completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in Kindergarten Education in 1983 with honors: 1) **Casuco Awards**, Excellence in Field Work (at junior year); 2) **Arichea Award**, Academic Excellence.

Church Assignments

1983-1984 Taytay UMC – Kindergarten Teacher

Taytay UMC was a well-established church with a congregation of mostly professionals and in commercial businesses. It had an outstanding Kindergarten School headed by Deaconess Elvie Marie Laroza. As the second Deaconess teacher, my assignment was to handle the additional enrollment that were slotted for a morning and afternoon session (12 & 15 pupils). The trend in our teaching practices in those days was in “Child Focus Learning.” Assessment on each child was conducted in areas of basic learnings and comprehensions in: language, reading, arithmetic, and social adjustments. Following the study materials, if a child fell behind, we provided extra time for learning on one-on-one sessions with the help of teacher’s assistants. This personal connection with the child played an important role in boosting the child’s morale and confidence for further learnings and for better social adjustments. The parents understood and were happy with the developmental progress of their children.

Two nights a week, I assisted in Bible studies led by the Pastor and my classmate, Brenda Bote (DePano), the Christian Education Director of the church. And, I was involved teaching Sunday school classes on Sunday mornings. I would say that the Taytay UMC had the nicest and most generous members who loved their workers. For me, it was an easy and an enjoyable assignment. Praise be to God!

1984 – 1993 – Faculty – Harris Memorial College (HMC)

I was pulled out of the Kindergarten school for a fulltime faculty position in the college level. My assignment included, teaching organ/piano on one-on-one basis with the students. Handled subjects in Music Theory, Church Music and Hymnology. Eventually, I was made fulltime music teacher that lasted for nine years.

This assignment included handling Field Work Education Class, college level. This was supervising students’ Sunday Internship in different churches where they were observed in their teachings, organ/piano accompaniments of the congregational singing, and their general interactions with the members and peers. From the Sunday fieldwork, the students submit a write-up on their experiences: how they carried out the study materials they developed for the class – the positives and the challenges. The reports were shared and discussed in class for info, and provided the students guidelines to improve their performances.

Migration to US

In my second visit to America in 1994, California in particular, I married my fiancé, Clyde Villanueva. God’s gifts were abounding:

- I was hired pianist/organist at the National City UMC, with the help of by Rev. Adiel DePano.
- My precious son, Timmy, was born.
- I was hired pianist for the Sweetwater School District in San Diego
- I formed a private piano tutorial school at home
- God provides Clyde a wonderful/steady job

- We bought a house, which is the popular destination for Deaconess Meetings in San Diego.
- I survived an open-heart surgery!
- Timmy, graduated at Berkley.
- Halleluiah, praise the Lord for the many blessings!

Conclusion

Remembering what my brother's concern when he learned I wanted to enter Harris, "No, she cannot be a deaconess. She will end up being poor begging for living." God calls even a sickly child to serve. My deaconess life story tells me that the Lord has always been my guide and help, in sickness, and in life struggles. I hold on to this biblical truth, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. 12:9 NRSV

I rejoice in everything that God has provided, the health I enjoy now, my family, my church work, and making music with my students. I praise God for my parents and siblings who supported me, as well as the deaconesses who inspired me. With all these, I feel rich and indeed blessed! I praise our God Almighty for all the provisions, and for life itself!

