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### Becoming a Deaconess



I grew up in a family of devout United Methodists. Our ancestral home was often a sanctuary to student pastors assigned to our local church for training. My growing up was filled with church activities such as Sunday Schools, Daily Vacation Bible School, Christmas pageants and the likes.

While in grade school, my Dad, who was part time lay pastor to a remote barrio had me practice on the piano hymns he selected for the Sunday worship so I could accompany the congregational singing. At age of 14, I was the organist and I was also teaching simple hymns to the young people at my Dad's new church. These young people were my first Church choir. I also realized there were no youth activities; with the help of a few young people from my home church, I organized these young people into a United

Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF). We actively recruited more members and encouraged them to get involved in church activities such as teaching in Sunday school, extension classes, and in the choir to sing in church and in evangelistic services. These young people eventually became actively involved in the district UMYF. On a side note, it was in this little church assignment where I met my future husband.



During my high school years, I was privileged to attend a month-long, three-year summer camp of the Middle Philippines Annual Conference (Mid-PAC) for young leaders. This was the Inter-District Evangelistic Institute (IDEI) held at the Edna Thomas Hall in San Fernando, Pampanga. The courses ranged from Church History, Homiletics, Introduction to Bible, and Hymnology. The Institute was an effective training ground for future church workers; most graduates became pastors and deaconesses.

These rich spiritual experiences provided the stimulus for me to become a deaconess; however, this intent was met with resistance from relatives, who influenced my mother not to let me go to Harris. Graduated valedictorian from high school 1969 class, my family expected me to follow in my relatives' footsteps, who promised full financial support for my medical studies with the expectation, that in turn, I would support my siblings' studies in order to alleviate the status of the family. What a dilemma! I took the entrance test for the preparatory course in medicine at the University of the Philippines (UP) Manila. I also took the entrance exam and interview at Harris Memorial College; all along praying... "Lord, lead me where you want me. Thy will be done." I passed the test at UP, but I was not accepted due to the quota on the number of new students which was completely filled and closed. On the other hand, I passed both test and interview at Harris. God has shown the way!

## Appreciating Harris Life

Harris training prepared me for what lay ahead. The convent-like living weaned us from clinging too much to the loving arms of our families; trained us to develop independence and self-reliance.



*Sophomore Class - teaching Sunday School  
at the Children's Garden*

However, Mom cried in pity every time she saw my hands and arms full of rashes from washing my own clothes. When she visited me at Harris though, she brought lots of home cooked foods and delicacies to supplement the dorm meals. The Harrissians, as we were often referred to, were assigned different household chores to help maintain the dorms and the school for holy and clean living, which was an added practical and useful education to us on top of academic studies. I graduated in 1973 with a Bachelor's degree in Kindergarten Education.

## Church Appointments

1973-1977 Kindergarten Teacher, Central UMC, San Fernando, Pampanga

Kindergarten Teacher - As the kinder teacher of the church school, I was able to mobilize the Parents Teacher Association - established strong camaraderie with the group leading them to active involvement in projects and various needs of the school. My unique training in Childhood Education acquired from Harris as properly applied yielded apparent positive and progressive growth in the development of the pupils. Case in point, the children were well-rounded in their various developmental skills. The progress of the children's advanced learning abilities gave the parents satisfaction, appreciation, and they were very much inspired. They demonstrated their appreciation by taking upon themselves to be our walking advertisers in promoting the school to gain more students. Soon pupils from different strata in the community - from the common people, the rich families of politicians, and community professionals gave a surge to our enrollment, expanding our original one-class to three class sessions whereby we had to hire two additional teachers and two teacher's assistants.

Christian Education Work - Being a deaconess, it was many of the members' expectations in this church that I put equal efforts into the Christian Education programs such as the bible



studies, visitations, leading in music for the evangelistic meetings, providing good choir music, and be actively involved with the young people's program of activities. However, making myself available to all these various programs, I was spreading myself too thin in the massive and endless tasks that were clearly mentally and physically unsustainable. In the long run, my work was met with frustrations and

disappointments – even to the staunchest of heart. Eventually, the minor misgivings turned to major issues. The very restrictive and micromanaging attitude of the church officials diminished my joy in serving. I was no longer the happy camper. I turned out to be just a regular, uninspired paid employee obliged to do the work because I was being paid for it. My faith in my “moral support person” (referring to my Senior Pastor) shattered as he continued to leave me hanging while defending my actions to the members and officials in confrontation meetings. At the end of my four-year service at this church, I resigned.

1978-1982 Kindergarten Teacher and Choir Director, Angeles City, Pampanga

Things are looking up! My resignation turned into a blessing. My heart felt lighter, my joy in serving the Lord returned a hundredfold. My hometown church, Aldersgate UMC, asked me to head their kindergarten school and at the same time to be the choir director, which I gladly accepted. I also got involved with the youth group program. An unforgettable experience I had here was when one of the UMYers asked me to counsel her Buddhist suitor, a US Airforce young man assigned at Clark Air Base. The young man was full of questions about our religion and our faith and he was willing to learn. He joined the choir, and got involved with youth activities. Through prayers and witnessing to him, this man accepted Christ as his personal Savior and Lord. At present, he is living an exemplary Christian life. He has written and published Christian books focusing on Christ-filled relationships. He and his wife organize Marriage-Encounters, bible studies, and are living witnesses of God’s redeeming love.

### **Continuing Education**

1980 – Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education

1983 - Master’s Degree in Education – completed all academic requirements

1991 - Nursing

1997 - Nursing – Certified Rehabilitation Program

1983-1985 Choir Director, Magalang UMC, Pampanga

After finishing my Elementary Education degree in 1980 and passing the National Teachers’ Board Exam, I took a teaching position at the elementary school in Magalang, while at the same time I was also serving at the church in Magalang as the church organist and choir conductor. Then opportunities for a wider Christian witness to the community through music happened. At the elementary school, I taught the Grade 5 class, formed the school’s first ever children’s choir and the teachers’ choir who performed in school programs and social functions. By introduction, I had the opportunity to meet the town mayor’s wife, who asked me to form a Mothers’ Club Choir from the women’s group she was heading at that time. I obliged and the group performed at their different meetings and social functions as well. I taught at the Magalang Elementary School for three years.

Through the encouragement and help of Mrs. Lila Valencia Lusung (Deaconess, Class of 1952), who was then the Division of Angeles City Schools Music Supervisor, I transferred to the City Division School. At this level the school choir I was handling always managed to win the Division Choir Competitions and became the designated “representative” to the Regional level in Choir Competitions. At these Regional level competitions, to my surprise and delight, I

discovered that other competing choirs' conductors were also deaconesses! How amazing was that! God's blessings to the deaconesses continue to pour! To further enrich my music abilities, I attended additional music trainings and seminars in Manila, and brought back my newly acquired knowledge to the School Division in Summer In-service Seminars in Music that benefited my co-teachers. My efforts not only completed my academic requirements for the Master's degree in Education, but also promoted me to "Master Teacher 1" with a salary equal to that of a Principal 1. I praised God!

### **God's Work in Progress.**

While teaching, I again went back to school. This time in the Nursing Program. Throughout my studies, the mantra I had was: "If this is your will Lord, make it happen. Provide the way as you guide me in the place where you want me." I completed the nursing course in 1990, passed the Nursing Board in 1991 amidst the havoc caused by the eruption of Mt Pinatubo.

### **Coming to America**

I came to the US as an Overseas Filipino Worker in 1992 leaving behind my husband and three children. I worked at different hospitals. My busy work schedule plus the loving support of my siblings here in California, and sister deaconesses here locally made life's loneliness and heartaches bearable. Meanwhile the children back home completed their studies: two are now Medical Doctors and one is in Food Technology. My praise and thanks to God Almighty! I became a US citizen, and my husband and youngest son were able to join me after 10 years. I retired in 2017. My husband and I are spending more time with our children and grandkids in the Philippines. While officially retired from employment, my question to the Lord continues, as to how my family and I could serve him next.....

### **Conclusion**

I praise and thank God for the individuals who supported me, encouraged me, and sustained me throughout my life journey – to my family, especially my loving husband, Willie, my sister deaconesses like Miss Leonarda Sibug, Lila Valencia Lusung, Eunice Bautista Laureano, Zenaida and Ben Pangilinan, Perla Cunanan Baker and many others, who all surrounded me with love and kindness. Thank you all!

*My early days in California,  
with me here on a boating excursion are:  
Late Zenaida Magtoto Pangilinan (Class of 1967)  
Perla Cunanan Baker (Class of 1971)  
and Eunice Bautista Laureano (Class of 1955)*







*With my husband, Willie, and our growing family.*

