

Crispina Estaris  
Born: January 7, 1931  
Camalaniugan, Cagayan

### **Becoming a Deaconess**



I was born Roman Catholic. Here is how I became a Methodist deaconess. My Aunt Mercedes, who was educated by the American missionaries, was the Treasurer of the Methodist church when I was a little girl. She walked me to Sunday school and to the Vacation Bible School. Deaconess Natividad Briones Tacipit, visited our home; played with us and shared Bible stories. That relationship with her gave me a beautiful feeling. I wanted to be a deaconess too. At age 15 I attended an evangelistic service where the Spirit moved me. I responded to the altar call accepting Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord. From then on, I devoted much time in church work. After high school, I entered Harris Memorial School in 1951, and graduated in 1954 with a major in Christian Education.

### **Church Appointments**

1954-1957 – Resident Deaconess with the following circuits: Sanchez Mira, Gattaran, Capissayan, Gallao circuit; Dacal, Misisit, Nagrangtayan, all in Cagayan, Luzon.

My primary responsibilities were children's work, youth, and some young adult ministries. We conducted Sunday school programs, Daily Vacation Bible School, Junior leagues and extension classes.

#### In ministry with children, we

- Recruited and trained teachers for Sunday School and Daily Vacation Bible School (DVBS) in local and district levels.
- Visited local areas where we planned to hold DVBS with the help of the local people.
- In collaboration with parents, we held children's Christmas programs and worship.

#### Youth Ministry

It was always fun being with the young people – singing, studying, doing visitations, holding Christmas Institutes, Inter-District Evangelistic Institutes, Leadership Trainings, picnics, swimming, etc. I was a counselor, a mother, a sister, a deaconess to them.

#### Other Responsibilities:

- Preaching in church, and Religious Instruction in public schools.

### **Relocating to Mindanao**

Bishop Jose L. Valencia and my District Superintendent recruited me to fill the need for deaconesses in Mindanao. When I told my mother, she asked, "Why do you have to go so far?" I simply said, "Ask God!"

In the next seven years, I served in the following church circuits: Kapalong, Kamuning, New Agno, Mabantao, Obrero; Tagum in Davao City; Nabunturan, Panabo circuit; Bantakan and Katipunan circuit. My deaconess work in these places (1957-1964) was pretty similar with the previous posts, but the context in those pioneering years was different.

Let me mention some of the highlights in these church assignments.



- Drama Group – In Kapalong church, I directed a Christmas play that involved the young people and some adults. The production was a success, and we took the play to Kamuning church five kilometers away. There were no roads or transportation to get to Kamuning, only the vast rice fields to cross. So,



*Like this*

the entire crew, with props on their heads, marched on foot along rice paddies in single file!

- How to Establish Churches in Pioneering Areas? In 1961 Bishop Valencia transferred me to Nabunturan, the next town. The church was abandoned with only one family left. Well, against my brooding heart, I went! I had to look for prospective members. After much prayer for guidance, I knocked at doors, introduced myself, invited their children for bible stories and songs. Twenty-one children came. I visited more families and invited them to church.
- Transportations in those pioneering days in Mindanao were only the logging trucks, if one could get a ride with them otherwise it was a long, long walk. One time, with the District Superintendent and few pastors, we visited a sympathizer to the faith at a distant barrio. We arrived late and they fed us boiled gabi (white potatoes). The family offered lodging for the night in their humble dwelling. It was through visitations like this and holding family altars with the host and establishing genuine friendship and brotherhood with them, and witnessing for Jesus Christ were the seeds in the making of a church!



- In some areas visiting members and potential members took crossing roaring rivers like this photo. One day I was determined to visit a new family across the river. I talked to God to help me cross, and soon it will be dark. I picked up my courage and lifted up my skirt a bit and proceeded to move towards the water. A man suddenly appeared and asked if I wanted to cross. Seeing my skirt folded up a bit and shoes in hand ready to step into the water, he suddenly grabbed my hand and instructed me to hold on tight to his arm and assured me we will across safely. We crossed safely! My prayer answered!



The next 22 years were spent serving different churches in Cotobato: 1966-1970 - Deaconess at Branscomb Memorial UMC; Manager of the Conference Book Store in Kidapawan. 1971-1972 - Chaplain/Teacher at the Greene Academy, UMC School in Makilala. 1972-1974 - Pastor at

Branscomb Memorial UMC in Kidapawan. After 17 years of deaconess service, one is qualified for ministerial work. After 2-year probation, I was ordained minister! 1974-1975 - Minister in Bulakanon UMC and Chaplain at the Greene Academy.

### Study Leave - USA



As an ordained minister, I felt I needed additional schooling to be better equipped at my work. I was granted scholarship to attend Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. I completed my Master's in Divinity in 3 years. After graduation, I returned to the Philippines.



### Back to Work

1979-1983 – Administrative Pastor at Branscomb, Kidapawan. 1983-1986 – Principal at Greene Academy. 1987-1993 – I went on sabbatical leave.



1995 - The Bishop Emerito Nacpil assigned me as the Administrative Pastor at the University UMC in Kabacan. However, the congregation could not decide whether to take me or not. They said the parsonage was not ready. I moved in anyway. Oh my, they were right, the parsonage was hardly livable; the doors were made of makeshift plywood, the ceiling slab was falling. Cats and dogs freely entered through the windows. I did my studying inside a mosquito net.

We had problems with drug addiction in the community. No rehab facility then. One night my kitchen was vandalized. A troubled guy who fell into addiction took up permanent residence at the church porch where the kindergarteners grew afraid of him. Finally, the sheriff took the man back to his relatives. The University UMC was the district's center and became the home church of college students.

At that time, in Kabacan, the Muslim rebels were bombing the neighborhoods; they were demanding the government their freedom to form their own republic. With the eminent danger, the fearful congregation wanted to close the church uncertain where the bombs would land next. I stood fast to keep the church open, and, by God's grace, no harm fell to the church.

I retired in 1997. But in 2002-2003 – I was back to Kabacan as the Administrative Pastor. 2003 – I retired for good. Saying goodbye was the hardest part!



**Conclusion:**

I was called, and I responded to serve God and the church faithfully - 42 years of active service. I was a little woman and extremely shy, but looking back through the years of service, God equipped me with all that I needed to bring his gospel and the gift of salvation to the people in the remotest areas of the southern Philippines. Surely, God works in mysterious ways!

Nowadays, I remain active at the La Mirada UMC in California, singing in the choir, attending/ leading prayer meetings, volunteer home visitations.

Lastly, I am grateful for Harris Memorial College where I trained as a deaconess, for the numerous missionaries, deaconesses and ministers, and individuals like my Aunt Mercedes and Deaconess Natividad. I pray for the continuing mission and ministries in the Philippines, especially in Mindanao. Glory be to God!