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My journey to becoming a deaconess was never a clear path. It took many experiences in my life to see and understand my calling, and for each one I am very grateful.

### **Life Leading Up to My Calling**

Growing up, I was no stranger to the church. I was born and raised a United Methodist! I come from a family of United Methodist pastors, pastor's kids, and deaconesses; including my late parents, Benito J. and Natividad Bote Reyes.

I attended Union Elementary School and then Union High School of Manila, PCU. Both were Christian schools, where faith, character and service were deeply embedded in the curriculum.

Nearing the end of my senior year in high school, my mother asked me to consider attending Harris Memorial College to pursue a career in church work. I had different plans for myself. I felt that I could serve in other ways. So, in 1977, I enrolled at Philippine Christian University (PCU) where I studied Business Administration.

I continued with my studies until I experienced a life-changing event in late December of 1978. At the very last minute, my sister Miriam, cousins and I attended Christmas Institute (CI) in Gapan, Nueva Ecija. Around 300 young people attended! It was one of the most memorable gatherings in my life as it was there where I heard and felt the call of God. Every time a pastor or deaconess spoke, I felt like I was the only one in the room. It felt like the Holy Spirit surrounded me all week pulling my ears, mind, and soul to God's service. However, I kept shaking that feeling off as I planned to go back to PCU.

After CI, I returned to my normal routine. But I became restless. The tug was still there and I couldn't ignore it. One night, I was having dinner with my family, I had an out-of-body experience. In that moment, I responded to God's call and knew I was going to be a deaconess! I withdrew from PCU and enrolled at Harris, where I graduated with a Bachelors in Christian Education (1983).

### **Early Years of Being a Deaconess**

In 1983, I had my very first appointment at Taytay UMC. In my ten months there, I worked with both the Children's and Youth Ministry. I was involved in the development of Sunday school curriculum, leading Junior worship, teaching Bible studies and retreat planning.

In 1984, I left Taytay UMC and went to the United States of America for further studies. In 1987, after obtaining my Master's in Christian Education from Scarritt Graduate School, I served as Director of Christian Education at Florin UMC in Sacramento, CA. The National Association of Filipino American United Methodists (NAFAUM) took place during my time at Florin, which is where

I met and became friends with N. Adiel A. DePano, who I now call my husband of 31 years! For a while, he would come to visit me in Sacramento. However, I chose to leave Florin UMC to be with him, and we got married a year later!

### **Pastor's Wife & Family**

God has always been good to me; God gifted me with Adiel. I did not want to marry a pastor, but God led me to one, and I fell in love!

Adiel and I decided early on that we would serve as a team. Our lives revolved around church! Through the years, together we served First Filipino-American UMC of San Gabriel Valley, National City UMC, St. Paul's UMC in Oxnard, Pasadena First UMC, St. Andrew's by the Sea UMC in San Clemente and now Santa Ana UMC.

When Adiel was appointed as Pasadena District Superintendent in 2007, I went with him everywhere. I personally enjoyed seeing different churches and experienced varying styles of worship.

I was able to use my education and training as a volunteer in the churches we served.

I chaired Christian Education committees, taught Sunday School, mentored teachers, directed Christmas musicals and plays, etc. While other churches needed to hire a full-time Director of Christian Education, Adiel and the church got one for free! Seriously speaking, though I was not appointed as a deaconess, I did serve voluntarily, and felt fulfilled with my calling. Being a fulltime Mom and a pastor's spouse is a vocation as well.

Later, I found part-time work at neighboring Presbyterian and Episcopal churches as an office manager. It gave me joy knowing that what I did in the office was connected to the total life and ministry of the ecumenical church. It was also a bit liberating because there, I was not known as a pastor's wife.

Life of a clergy family is not easy. You never know when you're going to get a call from the DS or Bishop telling you it's time to move. Transitions were especially tough on our children—Katerina, Julian and Pauline. I focused on providing stability in the home front especially during these difficult times. I am proud of my children. They are my love and joy.

### **Theological Reflections**

It all begins with having a clear sense of identity. I know who I am in light of my relationship with God and his son Jesus Christ. I am a child of God. I am a follower of Jesus Christ.

I believe that I am called by God to serve God and God's people. By claiming this call I am also claiming, in all humility, God's power to work in and through me. I find it helpful to constantly ask: What is God calling me to do in this situation? Saying 'yes' to God's call gives my life meaning and purpose. Praying helps me focus.

Why I do what I do as a Christian? It is never about me; it's about God! I try to contribute and do what I can the best way I know how. One person is not better than the other; one task not greater than the other; one role not higher than the other. We need one another and God needs all of us to work together.

All that I am and all that I do is a response to God's redeeming and never-ending love; it is a choice I make day-in and day-out.

## Closing with Gratitude

I thank God for my husband, Adiel, my love, best friend and partner. I thank God for our children: Katerina, Julian and Pauline. Our crown of jewels. I thank God for my son-in-law, Jape. I celebrate my grandchildren: Caden and Malia!

I thank God for my sister, Miriam (Roger) and family. I am grateful to the Church by the Highway (my childhood church) and to all who helped shape the person I am today. I thank God for Harris Memorial College. I thank God for my parents, Benny and Naty, who loved me unconditionally and instilled in me a life of faith and service. I thank God for my in-laws, the Almonte and DePano families, for welcoming me with open arms. Last, but not the least, I thank God for a deaconess sister, Perla Baker, for being the heart and head of this project. To God be the glory!



My family: Rev. Adiel DePano, Katerina, Jape, Pauline, and Julian.