

“Exploring your experience of growing in Religious Life and what you have discovered about yourself on the journey”.

Life is a mystery that constantly takes me by surprise. God calls everyone, not according to our expectations, but in His own way. When I reflect on my vocation call, sometimes I wonder whether it was my destiny to become a sister? The feelings are very scattered. However, I see how everything that has happened in my life has been God’s plan for me, and I know that God chose me, since He knows me better than I know myself. Throughout my life, I have often had doubts whether it was truly God that called me; whether God set me apart to fulfil a particular task for Him? Looking back at my life, and looking back into my heart, I am confident that becoming a religious sister is the best decision I ever made in my life, even though there was much fear and hesitation in the beginning. I thank the Lord that there is nothing more rewarding than following him.

In joining the religious life I have gained much knowledge, experience, and wisdom, and become aware of my many weaknesses and flaws. We are all on a journey to discover who we truly are, and I try to accept myself with humility and vulnerability. When I accept myself, I am able to radiate joy, which flows from the smile on my face and in the way I relate to others; I can radiate an inner peace and serenity. Our former Mother General, Yvonne, said to us: *“God created us and wants us to be happy, God doesn’t need us to do marvelous things, to prove what humans are capable of. God only desires us to simply be who we are.”*

What I have discovered about myself, through self-knowledge and self-awareness, is that I need to make changes to my life, to know when to let things go and when to hold on to things. This can be done by recognizing the impermanence of all things and freeing myself from attachment to these things. Hence, I place all my trust in God, knowing that only He can help me to transform myself and do all he asks of me. *“Seek and you will find;*

knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7) I have to push past my mediocrity, live authentically, and be open to the Holy Spirit.

I only become full human when I can accept others with openness, compassion and love. Indeed, religious life has taught me to open my heart and accept myself and others as they are and where they are at. I find this very challenging. I cannot change anyone; I can only change myself. As I journey through life, the more I come to accept my own self, the more I become compassionate and charitable in bearing with the weaknesses of others. My life journey feels like the ‘stations of the cross’ – falling and getting up, over and over – the important thing is never giving up on the mission I look forward to accomplishing. The benefit of realizing my weaknesses is appreciating how desperately I need God in my life. Like the branches need the vine, so I need God; like the seed needs soil, water, and sun to bear fruit, so I need God at every step of the way to bear fruit in my life.

Through each person I live with, God breaks into my life...what is He doing...saying...through them? Sometimes it is not easy for me to live in a community with people from many different perspectives, cultures, ages, and backgrounds. Living community life challenges me to be open and clear of what it means to let go, to let become, and to let be. Community life is a penance sometimes and has taught me many lessons and brought me many experiences. Through community life I have learnt about my weaknesses and my strengths, my gift, and my talents. But most of all, I have learnt to accept others for the love of Christ.

Many times I am confronted with the question of why community life is so hard. Am I a ‘good fit’ in community life? Perhaps at the same time other members also have unrealistic expectations of me. We all place expectations on each other. Then I come to realize that, because we all different, and unique in our own way, we bring who we are into the community: our gifts, our talents, and our humanity in its weakness and strength. Humans are very complex creatures. We can never come to understand each other if we

never share our feelings, our thoughts, and our vulnerabilities to reveal who we really are. Through time I come to accept each member of the community as they are. I can't expect them to be the person I would like them to be, but I don't want to lose my inner peace just because of my expectations. Once I let my expectations go, I find the peace within myself, and I am free to move beyond myself. I am happier and more serene within myself.

Indeed, the wise words of St Mary Mazzarello are very true, and I often take them into account: *"Never look at the defects of others, but rather at your own. Never get discouraged. With humility, run to Jesus...love everyone and all your sisters. Love them always in the Lord, but don't divide your heart with anyone, let it be totally for Jesus."* How do I contribute to community life to make it a house of the love of God? How can I live and create the environment of 'one heart and one soul' in the community? This is very challenging and requires the energy and efforts of everyone in the community. I am called to move out of my comfort zone and face the challenges and take risks in order to grow and blossom where I am planted.

What I have learnt on my journey is to *"never let the sun set on your anger"* (*Ephesians 4:26*); nothing lasts forever, and we should let our heart be serene and free to embrace the new day without anger or hatred. Once Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother's sin: Jesus said to him, "not only seven times, but seventy times seven." I find this very hard to comprehend and it has taken me a long time to accept the full meaning of it. Now I realize it is because Jesus doesn't want us to be unhappy; life is worth more than holding grudges against others. Grudges bring bitterness that deteriorates and does not give us life.

I believe community life creates the atmosphere to be holy, a space to grow in faith, and a space to live the Word of God. Through prayer, meditation, and contemplation, I find the joy to live more intimately with God. I learn to be aware that life is a daily journey towards growth and maturity. I believe that everyone will try their best to give their best to

the people they live with. At the same time, we have to accept the limitations of human nature and be happy with the people we live with. Nothing is perfect in this world, except God.

When I place my heart more firmly in Jesus each day, I always feel I could be a better person, trusting in Him to transform my life. When I open myself up to God and to other persons, I feel that I give God a channel to work in my life. Many burdens and worries are taken off my shoulders and I feel God's goodness in so many ways, renewing my energy and zeal to love and to serve others. Life becomes more meaningful, like it did for the Samaritan woman who encountered Jesus at the well. I am grateful that God has initiated the journey within me. The love of God burns ever brighter within my heart, leading me through moments of darkness into the light. I have learned to trust in God, to forgive hurts, to loosen every burden, to let go, and to follow where He leads.

In any path of life, there will always be ups and down. The most important thing to remember is that: where is your treasure is, there your heart will be. I have a dream to become a fully alive person: a joyous person with compassion in love that can embrace the world and always be ready to take on the mission of God. God is very good to me, and He always guides me safely through the snares of temptation and harm. I know God gives me the strength and courage to continue my journey and to broaden my horizons in the mission that He has entrusted to me. By my own strength I know I cannot do anything, but with God's help I know that I can do everything. The journey towards God is a journey of joy, and with St Augustine, I pray fervently:

“Give me what you have chosen for me,
and bring about in me what you desire for me.” Amen