

A call to mercy



By Sister Duyen Nguyen rsm

I come from a close-knit family of 11 children. Growing up in a small village in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975, I witnessed how the poor people lived in Vietnam and how blest my family was.

My father was a public servant, working with the democratic government before 1975. After the fall of Saigon, Dad was put in gaol which the Communists called a "re-education camp". After Dad was released from prison he saw that there was no future for his family in Vietnam, so he decided to send his five older children in search of freedom in another country.

This experience of family separation was "tough love" for us all. After 10 years, my family was reunited in Australia in 1991. I came to Australia with my parents and three younger siblings under the sponsorship of my older brothers and sisters.

Once in Australia I did English classes and then a Bachelor of Commerce. I joined the Sisters of Mercy in 1999 and completed teacher training with ACU in Ballarat and a Bachelor of Theology at Flinders University.

I was professed as a Sister of Mercy in 2009. Since then I have been involved in different ministries including teaching at Caritas College; organising and coordinating the sacramental program for children and families of the school and parish community in Port Augusta; assisting in the RCIA program and visiting and supporting the Vietnamese asylum seekers in the local detention centre.

I currently work as a religious education coordinator for the junior school of Mercedes College. I love working with the staff and young people and supporting them in their awareness and relationship with God as part of their everyday lives.

What made me join religious life was a strong call in me to follow God and God's mission of mercy. It was the name of "mercy" that drew me to the Sisters of Mercy. I was inspired and challenged to imitate the boldness of our foundress, Catherine McAuley, in her vision and

action. She gave the entire fortune she inherited from her foster parents to build a "House of Mercy" for the poor and uneducated in Dublin.

This image reminded me of the woman in the Gospel who anointed Jesus at Bethany with most precious and costly ointment (Mt 26:6-13). By her loving action she healed and proclaimed the Good News. Jesus spoke highly of her as one of his disciples: "wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her".

I value the richness of diversity in my religious order, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, and the many opportunities for me to learn, grow and share my faith.

Religious life today offers me a way of being true to myself and following what I value most – my search for a deeper relationship with God. It gives me the freedom to live my daily life so that I can have time for personal and communal prayer, being engaged in my ministries as well as offering hospitality, spending time in my garden and enjoying music.

Religious life teaches me a way of life that expresses and develops deep human relationships, that offers possessions without being possessed by them and power that serves and listens to others.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, urged us to hear and respond mercifully to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.

In response, the Sisters of Mercy have invited all their Sisters around the world, together with co-workers and partners-in-Mercy to join in a reflection process. I am a facilitator, coordinating and organising this Mercy International Reflection Process, looking at areas of need in South Australia. Responses from this process and resources are posted on our websites. Everyone is invited to our global reflection process and justice visions to make a difference for our human and earth community.

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