

IF MY LIFE HAD BEEN DIFFERENT, I WOULDN'T BE WHO I AM TODAY



I was born into a family of 9 children, two girls and 7 boys. When I was born, my parents weren't practicing Christians, but I studied in Catholic schools and went to Mass, a compulsory practice at school. I was baptized and made my first communion when I was nine years old.

In 1990 my father fell ill and, feeling that he was close to death, he decided to return to the Church. He even became very involved in various parish ministries. During this time, I began to exercise the service of lector.

My vocational story is a true adventure of God and with God. I never dreamed of becoming a religious Sister. My dream was to be a good wife and mother. In my parish, there were Sisters from a diocese in the Congo. One of them, the principal of the school, was very harsh with the children. She mercilessly beat those who arrived late for class. The women who knew her said she was like that because she never had children. But in spite of this, at the end of secondary school, I felt the desire to become a Sister. I was inspired by God's Word: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Lk. 10:2). This statement of Jesus awakened in me the desire to be a worker in the Lord's vineyard. This would not be easy; there were obstacles to overcome. I wondered if my parents would agree; and then there was my uncle, who held a prominent role in our cultural tradition and who believed that the second daughter was expected to marry and the dowry be handed over to him. Therefore, I needed his permission to free me from these obligations so that I could enter the convent! I announced the news to my dad, who was now a devout pastoral worker. He accepted my decision but told me to finish my studies first. Instead, my mom was hesitant to agree because of my tribal obligations to my uncle. She reminded me that I had to ask my uncle for permission to be

set free of these obligations. It wasn't easy, but after prayer and reflection I went to speak to my uncle, who fortunately did not object.

As mentioned above, I knew nothing about religious life nor about the different religious Congregations that existed. I knew however that I didn't want to join a Congregation whose mission was teaching in schools or working in hospitals. I felt called to do something different. I spoke to my parish priest, and he gave me a booklet with the names of the various Congregations in the Congo and their mission. It was in this booklet that I learned about the mission and charism of the Daughters of St. Paul.

But why did I choose the Daughters of St. Paul? First because their mission was unique and different from the communities I knew. I was very excited with what I discovered even though I didn't understand much. The second thing that attracted me was the name "Daughters of St. Paul". I said to myself: "Even when I'm old I will always be a 'daughter' of Saint Paul". That is what confirmed my choice: mission and name.

In the year 2000 I started my formative journey; in 2005 I made my first profession and in 2012 my perpetual profession.

A PERIOD OF DARKNESS, BUT THE HAND OF GOD WAS UPON ME

After four years of perpetual vows, I experienced a period of severe crisis. Religious life no longer meant anything to me. Everything—apostolate, prayer, community life—no longer made sense for my life. In 2016 I asked for a leave of absence from the Congregation. I left for almost three years, to experience life outside the convent. But I soon realized that when God wants a person, even if he leaves us free to choose, he always finds a way to bring us back to himself. "Go, sell everything you have.... Then come, follow me" (Mk. 10:21). These words were a second call for me. I felt once again God's invitation to leave everything: "leave your job, your home, your host country, your friends, and return to the Congregation".

Yes, I had to "sell everything" for him, because I understood now that I just wasn't running away from personal difficulties but from the One who died for me on the cross. So, in 2019 I returned to the Congregation. I am serene and happy in living my Pauline religious life. I thank the Lord for this beautiful adventure that continues. As long as he leads, I am at peace and open to his will, because he loves me so much that he won't permit anything to harm me.

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