

Three years as a missionary and evangelist stretched into 26

Sister Silvia Troncoso leaves Hispanic ministry

in Yakima to return to Chile



Sister Silvia Troncoso (Sister Maria Silvia de Jesus) came to Washington State's Yakima Valley from Bernarda Morin Province in Chile in 1992 as a missionary with many gifts, enthusiasm, and "with the spirit of Mother Bernarda, who often said a Sister of Providence must be like water: useful for many purposes."

Sister Silvia spoke to the experience in her autobiography, written in her golden Jubilee year celebrating 50 years as a Sister of Providence:

"This has been a big challenge for me because I accepted the assignment without knowing the English language. However, I have trusted in God and have given all that I am and have to this work."

"This has not been an easy ministry for me because it has involved working with people from different cultures and living in a foreign country. At first, everything was so different. But the Lord has helped me and only He knows the good that has been done."



▲ *These beautiful flowers were given to Sr. Silvia Troncoso by young adults whom she had taught and worked with over the years.*

Today, Sister Silvia Troncoso is 86 years old and has been a Sister of Providence for 68 years, the last 26 of them in Yakima. That chapter of her story began in 1992, when Diocese of Yakima Bishop Francis E. George, OMI, asked the council of Bernarda Morin Province in Chile to send sisters to minister to the burgeoning Hispanic population there. The province leadership missioned Sister Silvia, who brought to her new role as a missionary a background in education, catechetical work and leadership development, as well as optimism, joy and a zest for life.

Sister Silvia arrived in the former Sacred Heart Province in Seattle and began living at St. Joseph Residence as she prepared for her new ministry by enrolling in intensive English classes at Seattle University. Bishop George wrote the fathers, deacons and sisters of the

diocese to let them know Sister Silvia was preparing to come and work out of St. Joseph Parish in Yakima and St. Peter Claver Parish in Wapato. The thrust of her ministry was two-fold: home visits with Hispanic families and religious formation of parents preparing their children for reception of the sacraments. She would live with sisters from her religious community and was expecting to stay for three years.

Sister Silvia has been a force in motion ever since, working in evangelization and catechesis of adults, adolescents and youth. She began ministering to the Hispanic population at St. Joseph Church in Yakima and St. Aloysius Church in Wapato through the catechesis and evangelization programs. For the first year she worked for the Diocese of Yakima, but when economic conditions in the parish no longer made that possible, the Sisters of Providence sponsored her ministry.

For 26 years she has touched countless individuals, thousands through her classes to prepare for Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation; her counseling of couples preparing for marriage; her insights shared with 15-year-old girls readying for their traditional Hispanic "coming of age" celebration, *Quinceanera*; her fundraisers and events like the annual Valentine's couples dinner and dance she initiated; and thousands from all over who have returned to Yakima each year for the *Congresso*, a three-day Hispanic charismatic conference that fills Yakima's Sun Dome the weekend

▼ *She is surrounded by some of the Hispanic youth who grew up in the Yakima Valley under her influence.*



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following Easter. She initiated and led the *Congresso* until it became an independent non-profit corporation, supporting it by collecting donations and selling food, books, tapes and religious articles. Her efforts were so successful that each year's collections for the free event brought in money to pay the bills, to donate to the parish, make a down payment for the facility for the next year, and put money in the bank.

That just touches the surface of her reach and influence. Sister Silvia has delighted countless people with her amazing culinary skills, turning out mouthwatering dinner rolls, Chilean treats like flan, empanadas and *Afajol* (candy), to gourmet meals for celebrations. In addition to cooking, she has shared her love of sewing, knitting and gardening with members of *Grupo Emilie*, a group of women ages 16 to 35 to further evangelize and to foster vocations. And she has been the embodiment of Providence for the area's Spanish-speaking Providence Associates and a tireless community volunteer.

Sister Silvia truly has been blessed and has blessed others in her time in the Yakima Valley as "one sister who would do the work of three." Here are just a few of the highlights:

- Sister Silvia accompanied 20 young people from the Yakima Valley to Denver, Colorado, in August 1993 to see Pope John Paul II. They traveled on a chartered bus to attend World Youth Day and camped out for five days in Denver's Mile High Stadium.
- In October 2001 she was one of hundreds of Providence pilgrims – Sisters of Providence, Providence Associates, family and friends -- who traveled to the Vatican for the beatification of foundress Emilie Tavernier Gamelin.
- Sister Silvia was welcomed as a member of Mother Joseph Province in December 2004. In a letter from Provincial Superior Barbara Schamber: ". . . Sister Silvia has discerned that she is now called to become a member of Mother Joseph Province, while cherishing her love for and roots with the Sisters in Chile." The transfer was supported by the Bernarda Morin provincial and council and approved by the general superior and council in Montreal.
- As part of the yearlong celebration of their first 150 years in the West, Sister Silvia and other Sisters of Providence who lived and served in the



▲ Provincial Superior Judith Desmarais came to Yakima to join those saying thank you to Sr. Silvia Troncoso at a Valentine dinner-dance held in the gym at Christ the Teacher School in Holy Family Parish.

Yakima Valley renewed their vows on December 8, 2006, during a Mass at St. Joseph Catholic Church.

- In September 2007, Sister Silvia made a perfect score on her oral exam for citizenship and became a U.S. citizen on September 28, while still retaining Chilean citizenship.
- In 2009 she celebrated 60 years of religious life as a Sister of Providence.
- Sister Silvia was given special recognition for her ministry at the St. Joseph Parish picnic at the Ahtanum Mission in Yakima on June 13, 2015, during the Year of Consecrated Life.
- Sister Silvia visited Chile in December 2017, and while there she was very happy to attend the Bernarda Morin Province meeting of Providence Associates, which was held in Vicuna.

Most of all, Sister Silvia has been a friend – to the Sisters of Providence who have lived and ministered with her through the years, to the Hispanic Providence Associates who have come to know the mission of Providence through her, and to the people for whom she has been a friend, a confidant and champion as they struggle through issues of poverty, family life, immigration and deportation fears, illness and death. She never took a day off and grateful people with little else brought fruit for canning and making jam as a thank you.

"I love my work," she has said. "This is not a job to me; it's my life."

On January 4, 2018, Provincial Superior Judith Desmarais announced that Sister Silvia would leave her ministry in Yakima at St. Joseph Parish near the end of February.



▼ Diocese of Yakima Bishop Joseph Tyson and Sister Silvia take one last turn around the dance floor.



Events planned in her honor included a celebration and thank you from the people of the annual *Congresso* for Spanish-speaking people, on February 3; a parish celebration and Mass offered by Bishop Joseph Tyson on February 10; and a Valentine couples dinner and dance on February 17. A thank you gathering with Mass followed by lunch was held February 24 in Sister Silvia's honor at St. Joseph Residence, Seattle, before she returned to her native Chile.

Father Felipe Pulido, pastor of St. Joseph Parish, offered a tribute to Sister Silvia in the parish newsletter of January 7, 2018. "As we look back, we believe that we are a better parish community because of the presence of Sister Silvia, or as many parishioners call her: MADRE SILVIA." ●

"We are most grateful for the 26 years, 1992 – 2017, that Sister Silvia has spent living and ministering in this province. She truly has been the presence of Providence for hundreds of people. With love and gratitude we say goodbye to her after these many years as a missionary in the United States."

– Provincial Superior Judith Desmarais

**Providence of God,
we thank you for all!**

V Encuentro in Diocese of Spokane

is an “amazing”
experience

By Margarita Hernandez, SP

I was invited in 2016 by Bishop Thomas Daly to be part of the team leading the *V Encuentro* process in the Diocese of Spokane. Sister Marisol Avila was also part of the team, but she later moved to Yakima. The team has met monthly. It has been a long and hard road, but the results have been incredible and being part of the diocesan team has been a great learning experience. At the beginning, it was my first time planning this kind of big event with a lot of masculine ideas. At the end, I was the only woman on the team.

The *V Encuentro* is an ecclesial process of reflection and action that invites all Catholics in the United States to be part of an intense missionary activity, consultation, leadership development, and identification of the best pastoral methods in the spirit of the New Evangelization.

On January 13, 2018, I had the pleasure of participating in the amazing Spokane Diocesan *Encuentro* in Othello, Washington. It was just amazing to see about 300 people gathered to work, plan and celebrate our Catholic faith.

▼ About 300 excited Catholics filled the gym in Othello to listen and participate.



▲ Iglesia en Salida means Church on a Mission.

This process started in the parishes, continued in the diocese, and later spread to geographic regions and nationally. Father Matthew Nicks, pastor in Walla Walla, also asked me to lead the process in the Walla Walla parishes, which I started doing in 2017. I formed a team that helped me go door by door, inviting people to attend five different sessions. What an experience to meet people wherever they live! As we were visiting and inviting them to attend, we also asked them about their lives and how the parish could support them better.

The result of this *V Encuentro* process in Walla Walla and in other parishes in the diocese has been growth in leadership and participation. Some new leaders have arisen, and more people are participating in the activities we offer. However, the thing I am most proud of is that people are taking ownership. They are becoming stewards and missionary disciples. They seem to be excited about their faith.



▲ *V Encuentro* team members are (from left) Sister Margarita Hernandez, Diocese of Spokane Bishop Thomas Daly, Father Alejandro Zepeda, Deacon Chalo Martinez, and Scott Cooper.

When we gathered as a diocese in Othello to work and celebrate this process, Bishop Daly drove for two hours in the early morning to be with us all day and to listen and participate. I was able to borrow a bus from a neighboring parish to take most of the people from Walla Walla. They met at 6 a.m. at St. Patrick Parish to start their two-hour journey. Unfortunately, I was not able to travel with them because the team had gathered the day before to set up the gymnasium where we had the *Encuentro*. However, I saw pictures of happy, sleepy people boarding the bus and proudly wearing their *V Encuentro* cross.

The gym was filled with about three hundred excited Catholics. It was a day of work but also of a lot of fun. Bishop Daly welcomed people and I had the privilege of leading morning prayer. We had two main talks followed by small group discussions. Before Mass, the groups were able to express to the Diocesan Planning Team and to Bishop Daly their observations, dreams and recommendations. The day ended with the bishop celebrating Mass in Spanish. The choir from Walla Walla led us in wonderful praise and worship. We all were singing and praising the Lord. It was amazing. You could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in that gym.

This beautiful celebration is not the end; it is only part of the process. A regional *Encuentro* and a national one are going to be celebrated later in the year. I am sure they are going to be amazing, too. The process continues as we pray for the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to become a missionary Church that goes out with joy to proclaim God's love and encounter God in others. I pray, and invite you to join me in prayer, that the hard work and consultation of the people in the parishes and in the diocesan *Encuentro* may bear good fruit in the Diocese of Spokane. ●

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