



Sisters and laywomen bring in the New Year in hands-on ministry

Nine women, mostly in their 20s and 30s, gathered overnight in Seattle with the Sisters of Providence on December 30 for A Compassionate Service Experience for a New Year, 24 hours combining presentation, prayer and hands-on ministry.

“As a vocation minister, I am always looking for creative ways to invite young people to a Come and See experience,” said Beatrice LaFramboise, SP, a member of the Sisters of Providence Vocation Team. “I suggested that we do a live-in weekend experience where we would pray, be of service and live together. I got the idea from a 7-11 ministry day concept where women and men interested in religious life go to different ministries and meet the sisters, brothers and priests in their environment.”

The women met at St. Joseph Residence in West Seattle on Friday evening, beginning with a presentation on the spirituality of the sisters’ foundress, Blessed Emilie Gamelin. Then they shared dinner and watched a DVD on the spirituality of the Sisters of Providence, followed by a Holy Hour in the chapel. “We gave thanks for the opportunities for service we have enjoyed this past year,” said Clare Lentz, SP, a member of the Vocation Team, “and then we looked

◀ Providence Hospitality House was bursting with smiles and laughter from participants in a year-end Compassionate Service Experience.

forward to how God may be calling us to serve in the new year." The evening ended at Caritas Court, the residence of several sisters, with socializing and faith sharing before bedding down in sleeping bags.

"There was a wide range of ages and experience in giving service in the group," said Celia Chappell, SP, one of the event's organizers. "I found it very helpful that the afternoon and evening before were given to getting to know each other and sharing about our foundress as a model for reaching out to help persons in need, along with times for prayer and quiet reflection. I was struck by the two themes expressed by the women: their desire to give service to others in need and their desire to do it with others in community."

The morning found the participants eager to roll up their sleeves and get to work. After a light breakfast and prayer, they headed to Providence Hospitality House, a shelter for homeless women and children that the Sisters of Providence founded in 1979. Since then, more than 1,170 women and 1,900 children have been served by this ministry.

"Having just completed 12 years at this ministry, I was excited to share about my passion for women and children in crisis," Sister Bea explained. "The women were able to experience firsthand some of the behind-the-scenes work of running a shelter." The women prepared breakfast to share with the residents of Providence Hospitality House, then tackled cleaning the shelter and sorting clothing for the poor. They also played with the children.

Part of the group went to visit a Laotian family who once had called the shelter home. Dara was 33 in 2004 when she and her young daughter, now 5, endured a homeless Christmas. "Dara welcomed us into her home and freely shared her story," Sister Bea recalled. Today she is excited to be an advocate for homeless families. She is involved with First Place, a school for homeless children,

REFLECTIONS from two of the retreatants:

and is on the advisory board at Providence Hospitality House.

"I have seen this woman grow so much in her ability to trust, share and assist others," Sister Bea said. "I keep regular contacts with the family."

Saturday afternoon the women involved in the service experience returned to Caritas Court for lunch, where they debriefed and participated in a ritual to close their time together. "We gave each participant a candle and a ribbon with the corporal works of mercy on it as a symbol of her call to service," Sister Clare explained.

"This weekend's live-in experience was a reminder of how much the Sisters of Providence are in ministry to the poor," Sister Bea added. "It was very easy for me to get back into the spirit and work of compassion for the poor.

I shared what it means to walk in the shoes of others, how to feel at home, and how to listen to the spoken and unspoken words." ●

It was a good time to get away from the worldly rush and reflect on what I've done this year, not for myself but for others. In giving of ourselves, we receive... I enjoyed the visit to Providence Hospitality House and meeting the guests. It left very sweet memories in me. I also find this time to reflect on what I am called to do for God and for neighbors in the coming new year. – Allison Pham

I thought the retreat was enjoyable, introspective and rewarding... It was enjoyable because I got to meet a group of wonderful women and selfless, compassionate sisters. It was introspective in that it provoked thought of gratitude for what I have and whether I can (or want to) change careers and go into religious life. Looking at the sisters, and dedicated and giving people like Jessica and Sarah (a shelter volunteer and staff member, respectively), it made me think of what else I can do for others. The retreat was rewarding because I got a chance to help others, even though I played a small part." – Nancy Ito

● 9

"Come and See"

Sisters of Providence

**A vocation discernment live-in weekend
for single women age 18 and older**

6:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 24,
through 1 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 26

Free meals and lodging are included.

Caritas Court, 4415 SW Oregon St., West Seattle

For more information or to register:

Contact Sister Clare Lentz
(206) 923-4028 clare.lentz@providence.org



One "first" after another

Vietnamese women "Come and See" in Seattle

Sen and Hong Nga could not be more full of life. Whether you meet these 20-somethings at the home they share with three Sisters of Providence in a Come and See relationship in Seattle, or while they are visiting sisters at nearby St. Joseph Residence, you can count on beaming smiles, warm hugs and heartfelt conversation.

In mid-November, Sen Nguyen and Hong Nga Nguyen came from Vietnam, settling into the house shared by Sisters Blanca Sagles, Jessica Taylor and Karen Hawkins. As they learn about living in community, they also are learning English from Sister Carla Montante. The education in Vietnam is quite different, Sister Carla notes, with grammar and writing studied in English classes but not conversation or new vocabulary. Sen and Hong Nga are thriving in their English immersion.

Sen, 22, whose name means "lotus," is sometimes called Rosa, which means rose. She is the youngest in her family of

Sen Nguyen
and Hong
Nga Nguyen

three brothers and five sisters and has felt drawn to religious life since the age of 18. One of her sisters is a candidate in the Notre Dame religious community. Originally from North Vietnam, she grew up under the communist government in a family of strong Catholics. When Sen finished high school in North Vietnam, she moved south to study and live independently as her first step in pursuit of religious life. She lived at a boarding house with Sister Mary Vu and some Lovers of the Holy Cross Sisters. Sen shared that Sister Mary Vu took good care of her while teaching her to adapt to the new culture in Ho Chi Minh City and gave her birth into her spiritual life.

Hong Nga, 20, is known as Mary, "like the mother of Jesus." She is from South Vietnam and was living at a boarding house with Lovers of the



Holy Cross Sisters while studying business management in the university at Ho Chi Minh. She was a ninth grader when she first received the call to discern a religious vocation. She also is from a Catholic family and has two aunts in religious life. She has an older brother, a younger brother and two younger sisters.

The Lovers of the Holy Cross Sisters talked to Hong Nga about a vocation. "I finished high school while I kept my desire in my heart,"

she says, and she went to college for two years, still harboring that desire.

Both young women are cousins of Sister AnnMary Vu, who lives in Spokane. She is a second cousin on Sen's father's side of the family and on Hong Nga's mother's side. Rosa knew Sister AnnMary from visits she made to her blood sister Mary Vu, whom Sen took care of after she suffered a stroke. Sister AnnMary gave Hong Nga information about the Sisters of Providence, then her two young relatives met, living together for a year with the Lovers of the Holy Cross and with young women discerning a vocation.

"She asked if we wanted to become Sisters of Providence and to visit with the sisters in America to become acquainted and to do self reflection," Sen recalls. Sister AnnMary also gave them the e-mail address for Sister Clare Lentz, a member of the Vocation Team. Before long, they also

10 ●

Suzette Bautista

Getting to know Sisters of Providence

...And so, for the first time in my life perhaps (although I am supposed to meditate every day!) I took the lamp and, leaving the zone of everyday occupations and relationships where everything seems clear, I went down into my inmost self, to the deep abyss whence I feel dimly that my power of action emanates.

"But as I moved further and further away from the conventional certainties by which social life is superficially illuminated, I became aware that I was losing contact with myself. At each step of the descent a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me.

"And when I had to stop my exploration because the path faded from beneath my steps, I found a bottomless abyss at my feet, and out of it came - arising from I know not from where - the current which I dare call my life."

- Teilhard de Chardin, *the Divine Milieu*.

"That quote put together everything I was experiencing and cemented my decision," says Suzette Bautista, SPC, who began a probationary transfer process into the Sisters of Providence in a simple ceremony in Yakima in June 2006.

"God is calling me to a more authentic way of living my vows."

After 33 years of religious life as a member of the Sisters of St. Paul of Chartres in the Philippines, she had been meditating and becoming acquainted with other religious communities, looking for something that was missing. When she first met Sisters of Providence in Seattle, Sister Suzette says, "I witnessed their values, their discernment and dialogue and their love for the poor."

As a young sister, she had struggled with decisions reached without discernment, Sister Suzette explains. "The Sisters of Providence pray together and make discernment a serious matter, listening to the spirit as the way of making decisions."

Born in 1953 in Tuguegarao City, Cagayan, the Philippines, Sister Suzette entered the novitiate in 1975 and professed final vows in 1982. Her ministries have included serving as vocation director and novice director, as a university teacher of psychology and religious education and as an administrator in Tuguegarao City, Paranaque City and Manila, and pastoral ministry. She holds a BA in psychology from St. Paul University, Manila; an MS in guidance and counseling from De La Salle University, Manila; an MA in religious sciences from Pontifical Institute Regina Mundi, Rome, Italy; and a Ph.D. in education from De La Salle University, Manila. She also took a one-year sabbatical to study theology and spirituality in Dublin, Ireland.

had a formal invitation to a Come and See experience from Sister Margaret Botch, provincial/Leadership Team coordinator.

They came through customs dressed in identical white suits which made them feel unique and special. Customs agents had lots of questions for Sen, who went first, then Hong Nga quietly slipped through. They requested an R-1 visa for religious, expecting approval for a stay of three months, but were surprised to be granted three years because they had been living with a religious community.

Their 15 ½-hour plane ride to Seattle via Taiwan was the first of many firsts to come for Sen and Hong Nga. "First is a big word in our house," Sister Karen acknowledges. First time sleeping on a bed rather than a mat. First snow, which Sen wanted to see, touch and eat, but she settled for making a snow woman with a skirt and red scarf. (The sisters in Seattle joke that God brought the unusual weather just for Sen and Hong Nga.) Another biggie was their first movie, the animated "Happy Feet." (You can read their thoughts on that experience on our website, <http://www.sistersofprovidence.net>). Other firsts include their first New Year's Eve party, at the home of Sisters Jacqueline Fernandes and Felma Cerezo, first time celebrating a birthday, complete with cake and candles, and the first road trip, to Portland, where they served soup at the Table of the King to mark the closing event of the 150th anniversary celebration.

"Everything is new," Hong Nga exclaims: the culture, the food, the language. "The first time I spoke to the sisters, some of them did not understand me." In just a few short months their English has become very good. They love time spent with the sisters in their house, and the parent/aunt relationship that has developed. "They are a special gift God gave us," Hong Nga says. They pray together, laugh together and share, unlike the Lovers of the Holy Cross requirement to keep silent for five hours after prayer. Another thing that has taken some getting used to is the way that decisions are made in their house. The whole community makes decisions, so as part of the household that reflects three distinct cultures, Sen and Hong Nga participate. "That can be very challenging," Sister Karen says.

In the beginning, Sen and Hong Nga were volunteers at Mount St. Vincent, one working with children in the day care and the other with the elderly. Now, thanks to Sister Maureen Newman, they work in the after school program at St. George's parish. Monday through Friday finds them there after riding two buses for an hour. They get a ride home with one of the sisters each night.

Evening and weekends they take turns cooking and doing chores with their



Sen (left) and Hong Nga bundle up as they experience snow, one of their many "firsts" since coming to Seattle from Vietnam.

housemates, and playing an occasional Skip Bo card game, even winning a time or two. Each weekend they attend a Vietnamese church with Sister Karen, who has learned to say "Peace be with you" in their native language.

Sen hopes to become a Sister of Providence to serve people all around the world, offering physical and spiritual help. "Where God calls me, I will always respond," she says. Hong Nga wanted to become a doctor when she finished high school, but became convinced it would be too difficult. The sisters she lives with in Seattle assure her otherwise.

Whatever the future holds, Sen and Hong Nga are extremely grateful for this Come and See experience. Sen speaks for both as she says, "I thank God and cousin AnnMary and I thank her sister Mary Vu in Vietnam. I thank all the Sisters of Providence who take care of me, now and in the future. And I ask all the Sisters of Providence to pray for me for perseverance." ●

In September 2005, "while reflecting what was really coming from my heart," Sister Suzette met SP Vocation Team member Sister Clare Lentz in Seattle. "Sister Clare took me to St. Joseph Residence and introduced me to the sisters." She met more sisters in a group interview and then Sister Margaret Botch, provincial/Leadership Team coordinator. "Sister Margaret's spiritual demeanor attracted me," Suzette explains. "She was down to earth and simple, and that was confirmed by the way the sisters related to her and the rest of the leadership."

Leaving a conservative congregation, Sister Suzette encountered some she viewed as too radical. She wanted something in between.

Suzette Bautista, SPC, interacts with students at St. Joseph School in Yakima.



When Sister Margaret e-mailed to tell Sister Suzette that the community of Sisters of Providence in Yakima was ready to receive her, Sister Suzette was ready. Sister Alice St. Hilaire became her companion on her spiritual journey and continues to be as director of her transfer process, which will be for a minimum of three years. Initially, Sister Suzette volunteered at Casa Hogar in Hispanic ministry, then settled into being a volunteer at St. Joseph's parish, meeting regularly with Sister Alice to read and study about Providence. Currently, she teaches religious education to third and fifth graders and works in mission effectiveness at St. Joseph School and also in the parish.

Though she has spent most of her years in ministry in schools, Sister Suzette says her "strong commitment and passion" are to serving the poor. "Even in the schools, I always worked with the poor," she adds. The small town of Yakima offers many possibilities for ministry to the poor, she says.

With its growing Hispanic population, improving her Spanish learned in college and classes taken at Casa Hogar is important. By making an effort to listen, she is learning a lot, including customs practiced by various cultures and vocabulary that includes the nuances of the ways English is spoken.

When Sister Suzette is not in the classroom, she is singing in the church choir, participating in faith sharing after Sunday Mass, reading, making rosaries while watching television, and occasionally stealing a moment for a walk, to take photographs or to play with the computer. "Yakima is a good place to adjust to the American way of life," she says. She is looking forward to exploring other communities where the sisters live and serve in ministry, as well. ●