

## MY VOCATION, A MYSTERY AND A GIFT

BY SR. REGINA HO, fmm

+Peace, Good Morning, good people, Shalom!

When I was asked to share my vocation story, I wondered where and how to begin.

What is a **VOCATION**? It is a sacred calling from God to each of us to a particular **WAY OF LIFE**: to stay single, to get married or to become a priest or a religious brother/sister.

For me vocation is both a **mystery and a precious gift from God**. I will start with my family story: I come from a Buddhist family. My

mum went to the temple for feastdays and on the first and the fifteenth day of each lunar month, she would observed a vegetarian diet, while my dad did not have much devotion. I have one older and four younger brothers, hence I am the **only girl** in the family. Both my parents put much emphasis on our education. Remember, in those days, girls of my generation was generally discouraged from going to school. But my parents were just the opposite! Somehow, God inspired my dad to send me to a Catholic school. Why a Catholic school? My parents felt that Catholic schools offered a good standard of education and good discipline.

In the good old days, we had catechism classes daily in school. I loved to study and so I joined the catechism classes faithfully – not because I wanted to know more about Jesus or the Church. I just simple loved to study. So our Great God attracts us to Himself through various means.

In the final year of my schooling, one of my classmates persuaded me to join a special catechism class on Saturday mornings in preparation for baptism. She needed a cycling companion and I got permission from my mum for this. So there I was, happily cycling from my home in Green Lane Penang to Light Street Convent every Saturday morning. For those who know Penang, it took us 20 – 30 minutes of cycling to reach our destination. The issue of Baptism never entered my mind. My sole interest was to be a cycling companion! But at the end of that year, on the **Feast of Christ the King**, I was baptised instead of my good classmate who is not baptised even until today! Baptism indeed, is a mystery and a treasure from God!

The seed of my vocation can be traced back to the time when I was in Standard 5. In the middle of that year, our class teacher announced that she would be leaving us the next month to join the Sisters. There and then, a flash of lightning went through my mind: *“When I grow up, I want to be a Sister like her”*. I was a non-Catholic then. After that I completely forgot about it, being busy with my studies and growing up. However, God did not forget.

After my Baptism, my good Godma asked me: “Now you have finished your schooling, what are you going to do next year?”

“No idea”, I answered.



She replied: “ There is a brand new Catholic School of Nursing starting next year in Petaling Jaya – Assunta Hospital. If you are interested, I can help you to apply.”

So, a few months later, I found myself in Assunta Hospital, Petaling Jaya. The very first moment I was introduced to the Sisters, another lightning message went through my mind: *“If I ever want to be a religious, I’ll join these Sisters”*. I did not know who the FMM Sisters were, then. Again I conveniently forget about it for another 5 years, busy studying and working.

For Baptism, I had no problems with my parents. They were impressed by how the Catholics worldwide were ever ready to help the poor, to provide good education and medical services. In fact, they were happy and proud that their daughter were joining these good people. However, to the question of becoming a religious Sister, their answer was ‘No’.

My mum tried her level best to dissuade me, using the ‘soft approach’ at first: Example, “You are a pretty girl, you should have no problem finding a partner.”

“Yes mum, God makes beautiful people.”....

She tried again, “Do you have boyfriends? I can introduce you to a few good ones!”

“Mum, I have a dozen of them! Some are running after me. I say ‘No’

Mum decided to change her method: “Girl, if you go, don’t ever come home.” She threatened to disown me!

Somehow, our all powerful God sorted things out for me gradually.

After 7 years training, I made my final vows in January 1974. My superior invited my family to attend my ceremony. My mum came one week earlier. My Superior put an extra bed in my room for her. My mum was very curious. She watched everything that was going on. The Sisters got up at 5.30 am, she was up too. She followed them to the Chapel (she was a non-Catholic) to the dining room and to work, etc. At the end of the week, she came whispering into my ear: “Girl, if I know life is like this, I would also want to join the Sisters!” I opened my big eyes and gave her the broadest smile. So mum fully accepted my vocation then.

I am most grateful to God for this precious gift of vocation, the FMM way of life. There are 2 aspects of FMM living I treasure most. Firstly, the universal mission: We have over 6,000 members worldwide, of 80 nationalities, working in 6 continents and 75 countries. Besides Malaysia and Singapore, I have been sent to 7 other countries for mission, meetings or studies. I thought I went to mission to give, but I soon realized I received much more than I could ever give. I have been greatly enriched in many ways by the mission experiences. How very true, when St. Francis of Assisi said, *“It is in giving that we receive.”* God has magnificently deepen and widen the world horizon for me about people, cultures, events, etc. The second aspect, which is even more important, is my spiritual growth. The in-built balance of prayer, reflection, study, community living and work in our FMM way of life, has certainly enhanced my spiritual growth to be in constant communion with God.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday and also Vocation Sunday. Therefore, I invite all the young people present to reflect on your life journey. Open your ears and your hearts to the voice of the Good Shepherd. He has a special message for each of you. He says: “Do not be afraid. I am with you always” May your prayer be: “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.”

Thank you for listening. God Bless and pray for me.

- *(This sharing was given by Sr. Regina Ho, fmm on Good Shepherd Sunday 2013 at the Church of Our Lady of Fatima of the Holy Rosary, Kota Bharu)*