

THE PHILIPPINES

In the mid 1980s, a Japanese sister visited Negros, a very deprived area in the Philippines. Later other Japanese sisters, with some lay volunteers, went to see how they could help the people there. For the past 10 years one Japanese sister has remained there, supporting the local people in their desire for development. She works through a wide network of supportive people, both in Japan and in the Philippines.

Now many of the people in the Negros area have become self-supporting, helped by workshops and formation in agricultural skills. Many have been given scholarships to do further studies, which will also help them to offer some service to their own people.

Currently, Neriza Nicolasora, a local Infant Jesus sister who had been in Nigeria for some years, is back home teaching catechism and values in schools.

Read her story – her call to serve in her homeland

Read about her mission

[Sister Neriza's story of her call and her mission in Cogeo, Antipolo](#)

It was in 2010 that I discerned God's call to me to return as a native missionary to serve my people in the Philippines. I had been away for several years serving God in his people in mission in Hong Kong, Singapore and the last seven years in Nigeria.

The re-entry to my homeland was indeed very challenging. Society has changed and Philippines has changed and is still changing to respond to world trends and developments. It was a call to let go of what I have become used to and to adapt to my people and country.

I needed to get a licentiate for teachers from the Philippines although I had training in other fields when I was away. After years of active ministry like overseeing the development of a school from scratch and being responsible for running it for the children in Nigeria, it was no easy task to start studying again. I managed to pass the exam for the licentiate at the first try.

[... The Search](#)

The next step on my journey was where and who the Lord wanted me to serve. During this period of searching, I began each morning with, *"Lead me, Lord, to where you want me to serve you"*. After three months of visiting parishes and schools and speaking with the relevant people, God directed me to a parish in a small village of COGEO in Antipolo City. The church is named "THE INFANT JESUS OF PRAGUE" as the people in Cogeo have a great devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague. The parish priest and the catechists welcomed me and were happy to have me as the first sister in the parish.

[The story continues ...](#) On July 4, 2010, together with the catechists, I was commissioned to serve the parish as a religion teacher in the schools in the district, a pastoral worker and a person contributing to the faith formation of the laity.

The daily travel from Charles Borromeo Convent in Manila to my place of ministry in Cogeo was very challenging in time and energy especially during the rainy season. After much prayer and discernment, I discovered that it was a call to live near the people I have been sent to serve. I discussed my difficulty with my Provincial and her Council and together we decided that my request was a move in the right direction. As such, with the help of the catechists and the parishioners, I found a small room to rent.

My Mission

As a volunteer missionary, I joined the catechetical ministry where I taught catechism and formed the children in values in public schools. Through sharing with the children, I saw in their eyes their appreciation of the beauty they saw within themselves and their desire for the love of God. It was an education of the heart to the simple and the poor children of our villages. I saw the thirst and desire of the laity to know more about their faith and grow more in their love of God. The little I can contribute to parents, the laity and the children has been rewarding, it is heart reaching out to heart.

The people in Cogeo have been generous in the care they took of me.

Community

Sent by my sisters in the Province of Singapore and though I am the only IJ sister in the Philippines, I feel supported by my sisters and my new and extended community of lay people. The lay groups and I meet regularly to break the Word and share it. In so doing, we enrich one another in our faith and our love of God.

Though “alone” in my own homeland, I have learnt that I am never really alone as God is with me and I must say I have grown in greater trust in the Lord ... indeed, I have complete trust in my God who never deserts her daughter. The words of our founder, Blessed Nicolas Barre - “God’s excessive love is our only security” and “Whatever happens, be always at peace and trust in God” - have always been an inspiration to me and will give me courage whenever the challenges appear to be difficult.

... growing in the gifts of service

The third important event of my journey took place in Jan 2012. I was invited to join the team of health personnel (doctors, nurses, midwives) and the social service group. I was to help in the spiritual nourishment of the indigenous families (most of them are typhoon victims, the urban poor and the informal settlers). Again after much prayer and discernment, I gladly accepted the invitation to journey with this new group as they made their outreach to those at the margins of society.

Within two years, I can see the mustard seed growing in the little ones. The children are happy spending time with God in prayer and in small ways, they practise small acts of kindness as expressed in their thoughtfulness and generosity with each other. The other committed team members provide the children with nutritious food, and see to their health and medical needs, especially during the vulnerable years of

their growth. Walking along with both the team members and the children have kept the spirit alive in my heart.

Our sharing with one another in the professional team has been enriching and grace-filled. The team recognize that they are ready for another step on the journey as they saw the response from both the children and their parents. Thus, the team felt called to give the group a name. The inspiration of having them called "THE LITTLE ONES OF THE INFANT JESUS" will continue to challenge us in our task to help them in their growth and development in the image and likeness of God.

[Challenges of the future – renewal and self-transformation](#)

I feel called at each stage of my journey to look deep into myself and to listen to what God wants ... in the words of our founder, Bl Nicolas Barre, "Lord, I want nothing more, I desire nothing more, only to desire what you desire and as you desire it ..."

It is a call to let go... to change my mindset, to be open to something new and to have the courage to respond with generosity.

This I believe I can do only if I am rooted in Jesus Christ.

I believe that with the deep relationship with Jesus Christ, I can begin to see God in others and to believe that every encounter is a call from God to radiate the joy of the Gospel, the Good News.

My deepest wish is to live a life rooted deeply in Jesus Christ.

[The call to evangelise and be evangelised](#)

I believe that I am evangelised by the people I am called to evangelise. I realize the need to spend time knowing in greater depth my faith, the Bible and the church teachings and to share the joy of the gospel with all the people I meet each day.

How can I become "attractive" to the people in the midst of this world of technology? - to be simple but credible in my actions and words. It is simple but a great challenge to all of us: that people can see JESUS in us. It is not a huge accomplishment but a gift I can give all whom I encounter – the love of God for each person.

[Evangelisation through education](#)

Our IJ mission is to present Jesus as a saviour to all people.

Education of the heart is necessary to bring the Gospel values to the children through our authentic way of life. The children must feel loved and respected by all who teach them. We must appreciate that each child is precious and unique in God's eyes and that is what I want to share with every child and every person who crosses my path.

I have a dream ...

"My journey has led to a DREAM...

I dream of a place where the poor children can find rest and learn. I dream of a small centre where the people they encounter love them as precious and unique persons in the eyes of their Creator. They are

encouraged to develop their God-given talents and given opportunities to learn about themselves, their family, their values and God's love for them. The centre will contribute to develop them holistically especially in areas where a bridging is needed for their academic pursuits too. It is a place of welcome and hospitality where children can be themselves in their play, prayer and learning.”

THE HARVEST IS GREAT BUT THE WORKERS ARE FEW.

I pray for more labourers to the IJ vineyard in the Philippines.

Jun 2014

Sister Neriza writes again ... in 2015

My dream is beginning to take shape. It may be slow but it is always in GOD'S TIME. He will make all things possible and beautiful.

Being involved in the basic ecclesiastical community, I have met a lot of children, some with no home, no family and no education.

During this summer 2015, we visited Sitio Tulagsis which is on a hillside. The people living there are informal settlers; they have no land and they are not allowed to build any permanent structures. Most of them live in bamboo houses. We were invited in to see what we can do to help these many children in this village. We first gathered the children together in a small dilapidated house. Together with their parents, these children spent the afternoon learning values and the Catholic faith. The whole community then spent time praying and singing hymns and songs, followed by fellowship with some snacks.

Many other children and their parents asked to join us when we visited the community the following weeks. They saw that those who attended our weekly Tuesday afternoon classes benefitted from our visits. We are happy to have contributed to the learning of the children especially in the areas of character development and faith formation.

My partners and I feel the support of the parents. At times, the children have to miss the classes as we experienced difficulty in going to this village on rainy days when there are floods.

Some seeds are growing there. The youth too are interested in what we are doing and I hope to involve them to work with us in that village.

This we do very gently in God's time. We hope that some changes can happen.

Every day we visit different villages and we see that there are so many children who need help in their studies, character development and faith formation. Parents especially mothers need a place to come together to share and support each other and be self-reliant. To date, we are grateful to Dr Olive who has kindly offered her place to be used for the education and formation of the children every Thursday. On weekends the parents come with their children after mass to Dr Olive's place. The mothers gather together for sharing whilst the children have their values and faith formation studies.

As our outreach is to 6 villages at the moment, there are many children we can help especially in their academic work and values education. The children go to schools where each class has 80 to 100 children and a Primary school has an average of 7000 or 8000 children.

The 20-30 children we are helping on weekdays have shown signs of growth both in their studies and in their attitude and behaviour. They radiate goodness and kindness in their actions. They have developed self-confidence. On one occasion, the mothers and their children were invited to participate as guest performers in a charity dance competition and they did us proud in their performance. The children displayed confidence in performing for the public.

There is a greater call and urgency for us now to reach out to the many children who are knocking at our door wanting to be included in the group we are helping at the moment. Mothers have also asked for a place to come together for their faith formation, sharing the Word of God and picking up skills to be self-reliant.

I look forward to finding a suitable place for this mission centre to realise their dream and we know we will find it and furnish it with God's help and that of our generous benefactors. Please pray for us.

It is with gratitude that I end my update of our mission in the Philippines. We assure you of our prayers too.