

There is a question from our Catechism lessons that I thought about quite a bit when I was growing up and that was – Why did God make me? The answer being – God made me to know Him, love Him and serve Him and be happy with Him forever in heaven. So I thought if this is our purpose in life then I want to do it in the very best way possible. For me this meant consecrating my life to the Lord. Now this certainly wasn't all my doing – I didn't come to this conclusion on my own. We read in John 15:16 "It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit." So it is always God who takes the initiative and there is also a great JOY in working with the Lord for there are so many times that I can say – Wow! I could not have done that on my own but because I have been relying on the Lord's strength, I succeeded in this or that task. But the actual following of Christ by entering a convent came later, with some resistance, but I am certainly happy that I said YES to the call. This unique invitation of Jesus is called a religious vocation and we are entirely FREE on how we respond. I now see this as God's tremendous gift to me and can never thank Him enough. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever." Psalm 89:2.

The lifestyle of a religious is to bear witness to the Kingdom of God, both present and to come. I am most grateful to have been missioned to Dauphin, MB in 1972 and worked in St. Paul's Nursing Home (operated then by the SSIMs) as Business Manager until 2002 (with a few breaks – one being a wonderful sabbatical year of Religious Studies in Spokane, WA). Our Ukrainian Catholic Parish in Dauphin provided me with ample opportunities for involvement in parochial activities – the catechism program, counselor with our active Youth Group, parish and ecumenical choir, visiting the sick and elderly at home and hospital, and offering a pastoral care course for our staff. Those were truly fulfilling years of activity and spiritual growth.

Our SSIM community is privileged to have a mission in Lourdes, France where we have a Ukrainian Catholic Church serving pilgrims in our Byzantine rite. The Church is open daily - year round, for anyone to come and visit and pray. Approximately seven million pilgrims visit Lourdes yearly. I never dreamt that I would be missioned to Lourdes but to my great surprise I was offered the opportunity in 2002 and served there for seven years. What a privilege to be able to pray at the grotto where the Blessed Mother appeared 18 times and to participate in the daily Eucharistic and Candlelight Rosary processions with thousands of pilgrims from all over the world. I grew up in a village where in the month of May we honoured the Blessed Mother each evening with the Moleben service and hymns to Mary. Devotion to the Mother of God was central in my life from an early age. How wonderful it was to be able to honour Mary in an international shrine in Lourdes! What a tremendous grace and gift from the Lord.

What is very special in my life is that I live under the same roof as Jesus, the One to whom I have consecrated my life. In every convent we have a chapel with the Blessed Sacrament present. Also I am able to participate daily in the Divine Liturgy (Mass) and receive the Eucharist. I have time for daily meditation, spiritual reading and rosary plus an annual retreat for prayer and reflection in silence. The support of my community is of great importance to me. These are all means which help me grow closer to Jesus and Mary. Consecrated life becomes more meaningful as one grows in intimacy with Christ and His Mother. This inward spiritual growth is a lifetime journey. Each day, filled with new challenges and possibilities, is brought before the Lord, knowing He will guide us and will be with us. Is this not the answer to the words of Jesus that promised "I came that you may have life and have it more abundantly." John 10:10