

FIFTY YEARS CONGREGATION



PASSION FOR PEOPLE

I AM READING A POEM "THE EVERYTHING SEED." Reflecting on the golden years of my religious life as a Medical Mission Sister the poem titled 'the everything seed' came to my recall. The poem begins "Have you ever watched a seed grow? Have you ever noticed how it begins, so small, so still, so quite like a gift wanting to be opened..." The seed of my being is unfolded in the palm of my hand as I recalled the seed Alice sprouting and unfolding its petals in the garden of life to be what I am today. As the saying goes 'today's beautiful moments are tomorrow's indelible memories' the images, the events, the stories, the places of my being, the many involvements, the journeys, the doings, the giving's, the joys and the tears and all other events of my life flooded my being filled with joy and bliss. I share some of these precious moments to thank God for the marvels he has done in my life and together with to thank Him for his presence in my life as a religious for the last fifty years.



SR. ALICE MYLADY

A family of love and laughter but firm and disciplined was Mylady House at Kozhuvanal near Pala in Kottayam district. They are ever fresh in my mind as I recall them with joy in my heart with the chirping of the birds and beasts in those thick forests that surrounded my home. My father Mr. George was a teacher by profession and a great father in loving and caring for the family. My mother Mrs. Marykutty, was a simple lady who toiled for the wellbeing of the family in the home garden. We are eight siblings consisting of two boys and six girls. It wells up my being even now whenever I enter the courtyard of my home those by gone days where we all had memorable times together as one family. It vibrates my being even now as I recount them with great pleasure. Miracles do happen and it is true in my life as many would like to ask me how did I get this call to religious life? My memories tell me that it was straight from the skies that I received this call to follow the Master. No one ever imagined that I would choose to become a religious as in the school and in the parish as I was not even noticed as one to be counted for the religious life. Yet God chooses the weak and makes them strong for his mission.

God does not call the qualified but He calls and qualifies in whom He is pleased and it is true in my life as I vividly remember visiting Marygiri Hospital at Bharanaganam and meeting the sisters who were joyful and the dedicated services of the sisters there attracted me and ignited passion for religious life. This desire made me to contact Sr. Ann Kayathinkara the Vocation Promoter and her reply was via an Inland Letter that made the news to everyone at home through my younger sister. Initially there was some resistance from everyone but later with everyone's consent and good wish I travelled to Ithithanam on 20th July 1969 the formation house of the Medical Mission Sisters.

The seed Alice began to grow in the garden of MMS at Ithithanam with 14 friends learning about the religious life and the call to follow the Master in a deeper manner. The plant began to grow and new leaves unfolded in diverse forms to make our first commitment on 25th March 1972 with only three to make it. I would like to mention here the radical decision after the Chapter in 1967 that brought more challenges in formation and on the formatters to train the young minds according to the vision and mission of the congregation with dedication and commitment to meet the challenges of the present time. I gratefully acknowledge and thank each one of them for their contribution towards my religious life. A new way of formation for the future that made us to learn more new things and enhanced our ministry.

I fondly remember the turn of events that came on my way as I was allowed to carry out my interest to become a nurse and I moved out to Delhi Holy Family Hospital for the training. The capital city, the holy family campus, the interactive MMS communities, the companions from different States, the mingling of the different languages, four days long train journey, the hostel life with other girls, new friends, new contact persons for formation, new spiritual father from St. Xavier's... all brought many a new opening in my life. When I look back at those times of my life, 'the everything seed' poem has a quote... "then you know whatever comes from a seed usually ends up, looking very little like the seed it came from." which is true of my seed as well? I was qualified from the nursing school and reported back to Kottayam in the year 1976.

The new lease of life unfolded when I was sent to Poothura village community among the fisher people, Anjengo, Trivandrum a shift from the central Delhi to Kerala south sea coast. It was from the high profiles of the capital city of aristocracy and beurocracy to the low profile of the poor working class fisher people. That was real challenge and change as they are still fresh in my mind. Elder sisters had already moved thither with a real radicalism. Moving to these very poor and simple settings where they identified themselves with the fisher people, living in a very small rented house, with no furniture or furnishings, with no walls of protection around, waiting in queue at the public tap with other women to avail drinking water were all new. The waiting for water would last to midnight in some days. Keeping an open house always, where people could walk in at any time, day or night to buy medicines, to offer a fish from the sea and to sit with sisters for sharing a meal, making no privacies, no inhibitions, no hoardings, no hidings,. the living was singular in style opting to the Nazarenes life style that said "like us in everything".

As a young and aspiring youth this call to live among the fisher people was a real challenge for me.

But I was sharpened and shaped by the seniors in mission, supported by the Redemptorist fathers under the leadership of Tom Kochery. I learned to identify myself with the poor and the ordinary. It brought a radical change in my being as a religious which has carried me to the present moment, living joyfully and loving unconditionally totally for the One who called to follow Him.

As I was called to grow, grow to live and live to change, a new challenge dawned on my life that made to choose the path of living for the poor and marginalized. This challenge was to choose between private and government hospital care that changed the entire course of life as a religious. As I have mentioned earlier it was from the high system of holy family hospital in Delhi to the living situation of Poothura and the reference to a Govt. hospital nearby. The choice before me was either to go to the highly proficient hospitals or to the Govt. hospital, where commons went. We the medicals had made life options in regard to the hospital system after Prof. Francois Houtart who did socio-political analysis of our hospitals and had asked us to get out of the best care system to reach to the least and the last. The challenge stayed with us not only to give away our hospitals but as well to walk the path of the poor in our own health care styles. And so I decided to go to the government medical college, Trivandrum and that became yet another challenge in my nursing option. My eyes opened to the very poor nursing care offered to the poor in the public sector as against the high quality offered to the well to do in private sector. We already have learned from our Chapter documents that vow of poverty is to take us to the side of the poor, standing with them, fighting with them ,walking with them to the end destinies of the kingdom of God. This experience of mine compelled me to leave out of our own hospital care system and to work in the government sector. I hold credit in being the first medical missionary to have opted out to the public sector working in Govt. Medical College.



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PROTOCOL NO. 6

16 August 1977

FROM: 10 CA

First Assignment of Sr. Alice Mylady

The first assignment of Sr. Alice Mylady to work in a Govern-
ment hospital in India, by district South India, has the
endorsement of the 10 CA.

Godelieve Prové

Sister Godelieve Prové
Superior General

cc: Sector Asia
District South India
✓ Sr. Alice Mylady

Sr. Pia Poovan - please acknowledge receipt of this protocol to
the CA Secretariate.

Acknowledged by _____

Date _____

Emen, August 17, 1927.

Dear Sister Alice,

I have just signed - with joy - your first assignment protocol. The whole A likes to endorse the decision to work in a government hospital.

We, who are in India, have no experience with this as yet, except for sisters who did so during their studies.

It will be very meaningful to share and evaluate your experiences after your time. It will not be easy,

but definitely worth trying.

With my best wishes and prayer that this assignment may give you great joy in serving the Lord in this particular way. Yours,

A. Jackson

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Then the socio-political analysis taught us that the best does not reach the last and the least in the society. Thus we gave away some of our plans, projects and institutions. Transformation concepts took us to the notions of taking hospitals to communities through community health programmes, prevention before cure, justice vindication for a healthy community. As I volunteered to work in community health the leadership asked me to do the public health nursing training of one year at Delhi Lady Reading Public Health School in 1985-1986 that brought me back to the capital.

Exposures, experiences and trainings gave me confidence to move out to work in the village situations but the turn of events came to be that I got the appointment order from Govt. to join the health services and finally I joined on 12th June 1986. It was a Real change and a Real challenge. Life of that little seed was taking a turn- to become larger... larger... larger... to grow and to bloom. 21 years of my life as a Nurse in the Govt. Hospital from 1986 to 2007 from Being a sister of the Medical Mission Society and Becoming an employee of the State Government has made me to be what I am today as a faithful witness to the religious life as well as to the public health care systems. It was totally new to the society as well to the community to balance life between as a religious and as a nurse in Government Sector. The first thing to reckon with was the community itself. I had to live in by my vows attached to a community of sisters. And I had no community to join in the neighbourhood of my employment. This gap threw me open to the wider community of people and the hostel community of the nurses working with me. This became my first challenge to witness to the healing presence of JESUS WITH THAT BIG COMMUNITY of nurses and the other greater challenge was the one solitary witnessing by the person of me of the healing presence of Jesus Christ.

I felt overburdened in the wards as I was assigned on the whole. It was a tough game. At these moments the words of Mother came to my support:-“if you really love you accommodate yourself. If you love, you want to give. You are tireless, selfless and generous. If you love you really try to give and not just work. One does not spare oneself if one loves.”

The burn cases, cancer cases, accident cases, assault cases- all demanded my attention and demanded my time totally.

This definitely was not the experience in the MMT circumstances. Over a period of time I began to love my situations and circumstances of work and living. To connect myself to my religious community I opted to be part of the Mampally community. After three years in Medical College, I moved to the Taluq Head Quarters Hospital in Chirayinkeezhu which is closer to MMS Mampally. So I got replenished by my community every day, placed in the midst of traditional fish workers. There were experiences in the hospital campuses that demanded the best of my profession and there were experiences and exposures to nourish me from the socio-political involvements of the two MMS communities in Anjengo area. My sisters there had matured to be high activists of the trade union movement in the sea coast of Kerala, India and the World. Some of them were holding responsibilities in KSMTF in the State and in NFF at the national level.

We were not highly ritualistic but we were highly spiritual, drinking deep from our own wells of life and involvement, connecting our very selves to the Divine. We sat in planning and prayers for long hours among ourselves, along with our people around and with the many leaders of the movement. The God-quest, the passion for life, the friendship with people all took us to a communion of living. Hearts on fire was our constant experience. We lived simple. We loved profusely. We readied our own meals and managed our house jobs by ourselves. In the end it was a busy life all the while and a happy one with fond memories.

Some of the lived experiences are really enrapturing. I wouldn't want to elaborate all that. But I would just put the caption that came out in a Malayalam Weekly with the photograph of one of our sisters in front that read "SHEPHERDS TO LEAD THE AGITATION". (SAMARAM NAYIKKAN IDAYANMAR.) That is where we had come to as to lead the people in agitation fronts to vindicate their rights. I myself joined them in demonstrations and agitation fronts as duty permitted. While I lived the experiences of involvement and work, what struck me most were the different options that were set before me. One was to stay with hospitals of our own. The other was to move to the profession of teaching in nursing schools as a tutor with higher pay and honour. Definitely I pride in the option that I took to stay with the poor as a bedside nurse and to live with in their midst. This has given me joy, satisfaction and life fulfilment and I feel contented with my choice of being with the community.

The journey of the seed Alice continued until I retired from service in the year 2007. The movement in the public sector have come to an end as one moment like the Agony of Jesus Garden. This path was chosen by me or better and rather the path chose me. Times of deep involvement and commitment of joy and sorrow, of creativity and despair, death and life lay strewn on the path that I walked. Now I have come to the tip end. The beyond unseen but I looked back on to the faces that I was leaving behind from the time of my nursing studies to the time of retirement as Head Nurse of the Taluk Head Quarters Hospital - a count of 35 years. Thank you... my years... places... people...patients... friends and collaborators.

The retirement is not the end of the ministry for a religious and neither the full stop for work and involvements. Out from the corridors of the Govt. Hospital systems as I stepped out and there behold the MMS community was there waiting to welcome me back to new pastures of service. My religious society intermittently had requested me to fill gaps in the hospitals of ours. I stuck to my option to work in the Govt. service. But no more could I go with those choices of mine, for reason of the norm of age limit in government service.

Now I was asked to join the Northeast Sector of the society's mission. We have five communities involved with the Tribal in the North East of India. For the reason of my professional background, my placement was with Shalom Rehabilitation Centre for Drug Addicts and Alcoholics. A totally new pasture and experience with so many persons coming for treatment and recovery. Caring for the substance abusers was another fulfilling moments of my life as a health care professional.

Till now I was caring for people with body ailments. Now the turn was to care for the physical and mental illnesses.

The situation was quite different. I had to attend to many youths, adolescents, sometimes very elderly people who were victims of drug addiction and alcoholism. They and their families were in depressive situations. For me it was a very heart rending situation. In those years I tried my level best to avail myself heart and soul so that they could be cured. There were moments of joy, of cure and freedom. And Shalom stays close to me even now. I remember the commitment and earnestness of the team there. I thank them profusely for their support and their holding. My appreciation and thanks to my sisters who cared and supported me all those five years of stay and involvement.

Times and seasons change so too my life had changed and conditions at my parental home were different. My father had expired in 1990, when I was part of the community at Angengo, serving in the Taluq Hospital. That event had affected me terribly and it took me such a length of time to come out of the gush of sorrow and agony of pain. Now my mother was already ninety plus and somewhere deep within my heart felt the need to be around home. So that I could offer some presence and some bit of help for her. We were two children - me and my elder sister Agnes Marie Mylady - who were given to the service of the poor in the healing mission of the congregation of the Medical Mission Sisters. As both of us were far away in the missions, we felt that one of us should come to Kerala region to be available and to be availing to our mother in need.

I was assigned to Anna Dengal Home, Changanachery, and not very far from home village that served the purpose of being close to my beloved mother. From time to time I could reach to Ammas needs on one hand and on the other hand I could take care of the senior sisters in ADH. Enclosed into the community of elders was definitely a big challenge again. Amma moved away from us into the land of paradise on 27th October 2018. We had celebrated her 100th birthday in great grandeur with family gathering around her reminiscing her love, care and concern for us all for a whole century - for all of us, the eight children of hers, in laws, their children, grandchildren and all. I cherish her memories and learning's from her in love, motherly care and compassion. Thanks to the divine for having given our mother to us for such long years. The family always stood by me in my options and decisions. In all my involvement places they have visited me and it had been comforting and strengthening in my religious life. Thanks to everyone. May they and their families be blessed and this is my constant prayer.

At 68, my openings still continue. Petal by petal the seed in me has been opening all these years. The new layer of petal got opened in the year 2019, when I moved to Seluid village in Chattisghad. It is a small place with a long tradition of 41 years of services to the rural people over there and the communities around. The initial stages of clinic and health care have dwindled due to the new Govt. policies that do not allow a qualified nurse to work on her own, without a doctor's presence. We can be only a healing presence standing by them, listening to their cries and doing the very little that we can offer. Yet there is gladness in our lives and joy in our hearts as we witness the healing presence of Christ in our midst. He is our life model and inspiration. I join with the Medical Mission Sisters all over the world trying to radiate joy to the world and witness the healing presence of Christ and mother Mary. As the senior member in the community I try to offer the best of me as a mother, teacher, healer and a person with a vision for the future. Having lived these golden years as a religious, I stay still in this fiftieth year, recognising God within me and magnifying his name saying with Catherine of Genoa, 'MY DEEPEST ME IS GOD'.

Thank you my God. Thank you my beloved parents. Thank you my brothers and sisters and all my family. Thank you my sister companions in the Society. Thank you every companion on my journey. Thank you doctors, thank you nurses and all hospital teams. Thank you my formatters and leadership teams. Thank you my mentors and friend companions in Priest's roles and lay promoters. I repeat that you have carried me in your shoulders and that I am because you are, may we travel on together into that kingdom of God... together, fulfilling our call differently. I just pray: thy kingdom come and I offer my yes to the last breath of mine in love and service to the poor of Yahve.