

July 2005

Missionary to Japan...Sister Elreda Huser



“For the Japanese Sisters, Sister Elreda’s presence is like the air which gives us life,” said Sister Maria Fidelis, Japan Province Provincial Superior. “The seed planted by the American Province has been cultured by many missionaries and now that life shines through her,” she added.

Following in the footsteps of two of her sisters

Sister Elreda Huser, OSF, learned of the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis through her two older sisters, Sisters Elaine and Elvon. “Though I had thought of becoming a Sister, I was not attracted until I spent part of my summer in Springfield to visit my sisters,” Sister Elreda said. “While they were working at St. John’s Hospital, I spent time with Sister Josephine at the Motherhouse. Watching her joyful manner in everything she did, I began to think that this life had what would satisfy my yearning for the best in life,” she added.

After making her Final Profession, she graduated from St. John’s Hospital School of Nursing and began working in the care of the sick. However, she felt that she would become so involved in the patient’s physical care that she might forget the real purpose of her religious vocation in devoting her life to Christ. “As young religious women, we sometimes struggle to find a balance between our prayer life and ministry. But from then on I felt a calling to a mission where I would be reminded of the duty to work for the glory of God and souls,” Sister Elreda said.

Beginning of missionary life in Arizona

Soon after, she was assigned to the Navajo mission in Arizona and although she missed practicing nursing, she enjoyed learning about the Native American culture. She witnessed God’s beautiful open country, the mountains, and the rugged roads. She found satisfaction in teaching catechism and prayers to children who could only speak the Navajo language, helping the missionary priest prepare for Mass and instructions, and distributing medicines in the dispersed Indian villages.

One day, a letter arrived from Sister Canisia, Provincial, who asked for volunteers for the American Province’s mission in Japan. Though thoroughly content with her life on the Indian Reservation in Lukachukai, Sister Elreda volunteered in hopes that it would give a more permanent assignment to her missionary life. “Deep in my heart, however, because of my attachment in Arizona, I hoped that if many more Sisters would volunteer then my letter would be overlooked,” she explained.

While she was at the Motherhouse several months later, she was given a letter of acceptance and obedience to spend her future in Japan. With Sister Noel, Vicaress, she and three Sisters sailed on the President Wilson in November 1956.

Arrival in Japan

Soon after arriving in Himeji, she learned the Japanese language and began working in the hospital with the Sisters. She was also asked to help in the formation of the Japanese young women interested in joining the Hospital Sisters of St. Francis “in our dedication to God and our mission of alleviating the sufferings of humanity.” So for the next eight years she lived in Tokyo in this ministry.

In July 1967, she served in various administrative positions and was Regional Superior when the Japan Mission Region received the status of a Province of the International Congregation of the Hospital Sisters in 1977.

“I was one of the American missionaries who chose to become a member of the Province because I wanted to be united to those with whom I continued to live and work,” Sister Elreda said.

Though there have been ups and downs, this missionary vocation has helped her stay focused. “At one time, I was thinking perhaps it was better to terminate my stay. Then the Lord said to me, ‘But I am staying.’ I then learned that it is His presence that counts wherever we may be or whatever we may do.”

Reflections from Sister Elvon

Sister Elvon Huser has watched her sister work as a missionary and how she has shared 49 years of her life with the Japanese people. “Our family is so proud of her perseverance, humility, and leadership,” Sister Elvon said. “After a time now of physical and spiritual renewal, she will continue in Japan with her words: God’s will – for His love,” she added.

Sharing the Franciscan charism

Over the years, Sister Elreda has encouraged the Japanese Sisters to participate in the International CCFMC (Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism). Through participation in the program whether in the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Korea, or Japan, all the Sisters have had the opportunity to learn of the Franciscan charism, meet other Franciscans internationally, and experience the wealth of God’s love. The Japanese Sisters are especially grateful for this because it has strengthened their spirit of mission.

Sister Elreda has retired from administrative duties and now works in the Himeji retreat house. For the Japanese Sisters, her presence as a missionary and member of the Province continued to be an invitation for their experience with other cultures. Her faith in God is a testament to her life of service.