



A Woman of Providence . . .

“Leave your country, for the land I will show you”

Sister Aura Ninfa Arellano, who works as a pastoral minister at Casa Maria in Holyoke, Massachusetts, knew at an early age she wanted to be a missionary. What she didn't know was how far that call would take her.

BORN IN CARLOSAMA, COLOMBIA, in a small farming town tucked in the highland plains of the Andes, she was the second youngest child of a large, close-knit family. Her father spent his days managing the family farm.



confessed, laughing, “I answered, ‘Jesus gave me permission to play with my friends.’”

Dealing with hardship

Sadly, Ninfa's mother died when she was nine and her father when she was 13. Although many loving relatives were happy to care for her, Ninfa decided to attend a Franciscan boarding school. She developed a deep appreciation for the Community, “But in my heart,” she noted, “I wanted to be a missionary. I waited for my vocation to happen.” And it did.

. . . has a prophetic stance and vision that enable her to reverence the past, live in the present, and embrace the invitation to share in the ongoing creation of the future.

Sister Ninfa (left) stands with Sister Conception, one of Ninfa's co-workers at Casa Maria and a Holyoke SP who learned Spanish to help Ninfa adjust to her new country.

Before finishing her studies, Ninfa met two missionary Sisters who would change her life. After completing school and one year of teaching for the Franciscans, Ninfa entered the Missionary Sisters of Mary Immaculate and of St. Catherine of Sienna in Medellin, Colombia – it was Christmas Day 1951.

Beginning missionary career

Upon her profession, Ninfa worked as a missionary in the cities, fields and jungles of her homeland. “We (missionaries) did everything,” explained Ninfa, “nursing, dentistry, teaching, pastoral and social work – ministering to the needs of the people, whatever they were.”

During her 23 years as a missionary, Ninfa ministered in a variety of locations in Colombia, Bolivia, Peru and Chile. She deeply enjoyed her work and had no intention of coming to the U.S. Providential circumstances dictated otherwise.

One day in 1963, Ninfa was traveling through the jungle to aid a dying woman when she hit her leg harshly on a moss-covered stone. The leg, especially her knee, hurt for a number of days but then the pain subsided. Four years later, the pain reappeared and grew worse. Within six months it became unbearable. For an entire year, area doctors tried unsuccessfully to determine the problem.

EVENTUALLY, doctors removed a tumor the size of a corn kernel from Ninfa’s knee, but the pain persisted. Later, her leg literally splintered into several pieces. Further surgery revealed another tumor and doctors suggested amputation but Ninfa refused. Only after enduring a body cast and three years of walking with crutches did she agree to come to the Springfield Diocese to seek medical help.

“I went to the chapel to talk to God,” Ninfa recalled tearfully, “because I didn’t want to go.” But realizing her leg was necessary for her ministry, she left Bolivia in search of answers that, maybe, doctors in the United States could provide.

In April of 1971, she arrived in the U.S. requesting to stay with the Sisters of Providence who gladly accepted her even though she could not speak a word of English. As Ninfa crossed the Gamelin Street bridge that led to the Mother House, she experienced a remarkable feeling that can be considered nothing short of providential. “I had a very strong feeling inside myself,” Ninfa said softly, wiping a tear from her eye. “It said to me, ‘You are a Sister of Providence.’ But,” she continued carefully, “I loved my present Community and did not want to be in the United States.”

Getting to know the Sisters of Providence

As she met with doctor after doctor and grew to know the SPs, Ninfa felt this new call increase. She fought that call, yet on the many occasions she would open her Bible at random, the

same reading always appeared: “Leave your country, your family and your father’s house for the land I will show you.”

Only after returning to Bolivia and confiding in her Sisters there did Ninfa make the difficult decision to leave her

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former Order and join the SPs. With loving understanding, her Sisters told her, “Be brave. The United States is where God wants you. If not, you can always come back.”

Continuing as missionary

Ninfa made her final profession as a Sister of Providence in 1978. Today, she is very happy to be here and in many respects, still acts as a missionary, bringing her gift of faith to Holyoke’s Hispanic population which she so willingly serves. The close friendship she founded with Sister Mary Immaculate Conception during her first visit to the U.S. still thrives today as the two minister side-by-side at the Casa Maria.

Ninfa still experiences leg problems and since being an SP has twice declined doctors’ recommendations to amputate. She is “a dedicated and deeply spiritual woman,” said Sister Conception, a woman who has answered her call to spread God’s word, wherever it has taken her.



To learn more about life as a Sister of Providence, phone Ann Horgan, SP, at (413) 562-3627, write her at Genesis, 53 Mill St., Westfield, MA 01085, or e-mail her at sisters@sisofprov.org. Or, visit the SP Web site at www.sisofprov.org