

Nepal

Miriam Therese Kanaya, SSND

In 1982 I volunteered to study about Nepal as a possible mission. But learning about the poverty and conditions of Nepal I lost my desire to go there. Nevertheless I was chosen and accepted the challenge. At the beginning, struggling to learn the Nepali language, hating the unclean environment and being frightened by so many wild dogs, I was frustrated and unhappy in Nepal. Gradually I got used to living there and after five months of language study I started to teach at St. Mary's School. Suddenly, meeting the children of Nepal, my heart leapt with joy.

When the invitation to open a school in Bandipur Village came to us, my dream of a village school started to bloom rapidly. So, on the top of the hill, 1,000m high and 140km away from Kathmandu we opened Notre Dame School of Bandipur for boys and girls, for high and low castes alike. In spite of many inconveniences and a lack of food, creating a school for poor children was very fulfilling and I enjoyed working there day by day.

After 7 or 8 years in the mission, I felt totally worn out and started to think about going back to Japan. At that same time, a questionnaire came from the Region asking us to share about experiences with poorer people. It was the preparation for a General Chapter. Thinking and sharing on the questions, I noticed that as a congregation we were moving toward the poor, justice and peace but here I was tending in the opposite direction, toward an easier life and a richer country and away from the poorer people I was living with. That awareness influenced me to continue my mission in Nepal. And now, 20 years later, we are witnessing the "sturdy roots" and "lovely flowers" – our graduates continuing their education and pursuing careers of service in almost every field.

In addition to school ministry in Nepal, I have also had the opportunity to direct childcare centers, mainly for poorer children. Because many poor women must go out daily to earn a living by working in the fields or carrying sand they have no alternative but to tie their small children and babies to a nearby tree or the frame of a window in the house to keep them safe. These children lose the chance to learn to speak and walk: they become afraid of people and do not develop social skills. These childcare centers have been providing children with the nurturing care of teachers and with nourishing food. These children now respond normally and express their joy by singing and dancing. The mothers too are changed by this opportunity to help their children develop. I know that Mother Theresa's charism is alive here, that these weakest women are being empowered and their children are given the chance to grow and develop their abilities; her mission is happily my mission.

From past experience and looking to our future in Nepal, I recognize the challenge of decision making in the spirit of subsidiarity and collegiality. Whether we are in the situation of creating a new school or restarting the school with diocesan priests, we need to search for the direction of the Spirit among us. While this causes tension and conflict we need to be honest to our own self and aware of the movement of Spirit as we discern with persons in authority. I naturally want to avoid and run away from such conflict, but at the same time, I recognize that this is very much our call as SSND.