

Japan Prepares to Open a Mission in Nepal

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At the General Chapter of 1972 working with the poor in developing countries seemed an action commitment too drastic for us (Region of Japan) to undertake. "How can we afford 5% of our sisters for another ministry when we need more sisters in schools?" we asked. Yet we responded with "Go." God, being a good educator himself, helped us grow through a consciousness-raising period of ten years.

The decision to open our first foreign mission in Nepal was reached December 31, 1981, and the process for discernment for sisters experiencing a call to be missionaries began in April. These sisters came together for several weekends of input and for a live-in community interaction in August. The regional council had been with the volunteers throughout the discernment process. After prayerful reflection they selected Sisters Evangela Imamura, Miriam Therese Kanaya, Ambrose Kawase, and Janet Tanaka for the new community.

During the entire process God has been with us. He first opened us to an awareness of the materially poor through the AMOR (Asian Meeting of Women Religious) program held at our college in Kyoto in 1975. Encountering representatives from developing Asian countries made us realize our affluence and called us to evaluate our life style. Some of us experienced the needs in the Philippines and India through exposure programs in 1976 and 1977. The region likewise sponsored a "5% workshop" for consciousness' raising. When, in 1981, we received invitations to Nepal, the Philippines, India, and Brazil, we wanted to do "whatever he tells us" and that was a call to Nepal.

Nepal, a sovereign kingdom of about 14 million, is bounded on the north by Tibet and on the west and south by India. The caste system, though officially abolished, still permeates daily life. Women hold a low social position with a strikingly low literacy rate.

In 1951 a democratic system of government opened the kingdom to the world. The Jesuits and IBVM sisters opened two schools and three other religious congregations engaged in social work. The church, still primarily occidental, is young with a Catholic population of less than 200. The major religion is Hinduism and converting anyone to another religion is forbidden. Recently, however, the government nominally stated that "freedom of religion should be fully respected and guaranteed."

In Japan, where the major religion is Buddhism or Shintoism, most Christians are converts, influenced by missionaries who came after World War II. Brought up in a non-Christian country, we witness that members of oriental religions can be Christianized and we can help make the western church in Nepal more Asian. We want to bring the good news to people who have not had the chance to hear it and be evangelized

together. We want to reach out to our Asian brothers and sisters by sharing the Christian values we have received. We are drawn to the poor, especially to women oppressed because of a lack of education.

In Japan, too, the Catholic population is small. We dare to go out to a foreign mission, not because we have plenty, but because we want to share our meager resources with others. We go with trust in God though we are accompanied by many anxieties and difficulties. Witnessing to Christ by our very being and living in radical poverty spiritually and materially will give a new view of our faith and provide an opportunity for renewal for the whole region.

In the spirit of Mother Theresa, we respond to God's call to Nepal where his Spirit has already been working from the beginning of the world.