

Celebrating Connections and Diversity

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When I was asked about sharing my connection with Precious Blood Spirituality my initial thought was what could I possibly share? It is just part of my life, but it quickly became a wonderful opportunity to reflect on where I have been and recognize how hindsight is 20/20, appreciate where I am now and have excitement about where I want to go. I quickly realized I do have something to share because how we live our spirituality is a gift to share and I have much more to learn and live.

Hello, I am Lori Bengé, I am the Director of the Ministry of Vocations for the Adorers, an Associate and Sojourner. Now that didn't all just happen overnight. It has taken 25 years to get to this day.

Initially, I started by thinking about the different ways individuals are introduced or invited to live our spirituality. I guess that thought process comes from being a vocation director.

I look at it like a love story – is it love at first sight or a love that gradually develops or what I would like to think of as a blind or subtle love that you don't even realize that you are experiencing. Now I think a true love story is often a little combination of all of these, but I think about how we get our minds and hearts to work together beautiful things transpire. And sometimes they don't always play nice together, but we keep working because, by the grace of God, they will.

Whatever kind of connection, it is I do believe that once exposed to Precious Blood Spirituality it takes a hold of you and you yearn for more. But maybe I am a little biased, that has been my experience.

When I use the term Precious Blood Spirituality this is what it means to me-community, reconciliation, compassion, unconditional love, being non-judgemental and being a presence that goes beyond any border.

So to share how I live it today as a layperson, I must share a little about my journey and how in a subtle way I fell in 'love' with this spirituality. I have been working/ministering in the vocation office for 25 years in different capacities. When I started I was a young 29-year-old, (you can do the math for my age), a single mom of my 8-year-old daughter, Sarah. I had worked in the corporate world for 11 years with a promising career until they consolidated and moved out of the city and I chose to stay close to family. Unemployed, a friend said there was an opening where she worked. I knew she worked for a Catholic organization and loved it so I said why not and I applied even though I found out it was a convent. I thought God had quite the sense of humor for a single mom to work at a convent, not the most likely place to find a husband. Anyway, it was the best decision I ever made.

It began with an unusual interview with Sister Charlotte Rohrbach but little did I know or was aware it was the beginning of this love story. I was led to a little bedroom suite on the 3rd floor to a woman in sweats and a t-shirt. Now I grew up Catholic, 12 years of Catholic Schools and was even taught by Adorers and this is not what I remembered that sisters looked like. I found out later they had experienced a horrible flood at their house after torrential rain flooded the pond across the street and were lucky they were even able to get out. I thought to myself later they are really committed women to have wanted to have an interview with someone

through all this. Well, they obviously saw something in me and hired me. I spent the first couple of weeks pitching in and helping them clean up after the flood.

It didn't take long before I knew this was going to be different than any previous experiences with Sisters and this was going to be a great place to be and I haven't looked back since. For one of the few times in my life, I put unwavering trust in our provident God to lead me to apply. Also, I didn't realize it at the time, but I was witnessing what community and presence are all about. These were my first experiences of living Precious Blood Spirituality.

A few weeks later I was actually in the newly created national vocation office as a project manager. I sat through countless meetings strategizing with S. Diana Rawlings and Rita Schilling on how we could connect with women discerning religious life which were terms and subjects that were completely foreign to me. The one very clear thing is that we were going to be helping people follow God's call and I was going to be a part of it in some small way even if just by bringing my business and computer skills to the table.

As time went on I was really intrigued with what all this "vocation" work was about. I would listen to how Rita Schilling guided women and men trying to find their path in life through LifeChoices®. And thought where was this when I was younger or better yet can I sign up for this now?

I began getting to know the sisters with whom I was working for. Listening to their stories and just deepening my understanding of how they lived their lives. I began forming incredible friendships and not only wanted to learn more but wanted to emulate it in my life. Looking back, this was another way I was beginning to live Precious Blood Spirituality. I wanted to be present to people in whatever capacity they needed just as the sisters were. Now I could go on and on about how these subtle changes were happening in my life but we would probably be here for days.

I want you to know I felt like I was always a good Catholic and did all the 'right things', at least I thought. But I had moments in my life, some more significant than others, when I wasn't on the right path and simply felt abandoned by God. I was just tired of doing all the 'right things' that the Church and 12 years of Catholic schools told me to do. I just knew in my heart there had to be more.

I realize now I wasn't living my faith, putting all those 'right things' into action. I was just going through the motions. But being among the Sisters were helping me gain a deeper understanding of Precious Blood Spirituality so I could still do all the 'right things' but also could truly live and challenge my faith.

So as time went on while working for the Adorers my love was deepening. It was no longer a job but a ministry. I had a purpose and I was growing as a person also. My daughter was growing up understanding her faith more deeply all in light of Precious Blood Spirituality. We both were yearning for more and inquired about the Associates. It was my 1st step to being much more intentional about living Precious Blood Spirituality. I became an associate in 2007. Associates began in the early 1970s and we have several local groups across the country and internationally.

I actually discerned religious life for a while along with my daughter and my daughter's best friend who was discerning the priesthood, and so with three of us discerning religious life, we had some really interesting conversations around our house.

In 2008, the Adorers were forming a new group of the laity to be part of the ASC family called Sojourners. I felt a strong call to be a part of something new. So I was part of the original six Sojourners. The Sojourners are a regional group that is different from the local Associate groups and we take private promises of Covenant, Simplicity and Unconditional Love which were formulated to be in line with the Sisters' vows. Associates and Sojourners, Mission Associates and Junior Associates are all part of the ASC family and continue to be another way for lay individuals to live and share Precious Blood Spirituality in their corner of the world.

My daughter got married to her high school sweetheart and now has three daughters and guess what they live, yes Precious Blood spirituality. Life has come full circle with now a new generation. My nine-year-old granddaughter can explain ministering with those on the margins better than some adults. Unlike her Grandma, she is learning how to put her faith into action at an early age.

Several years ago now, I was invited to be the Director of the Ministry of Vocations. And I have to say I was speechless. I thought here I am the single mom that started work here that really had no idea of what discernment or vocation ministry was and really didn't have a path of her own and now I am going to be guiding and journeying with women to find their path. Kind of ironic, I think.

I knew I wanted that enormous responsibility and I knew I wouldn't be alone because that is what community is about. I want women to explore, challenge and most of all live their faith knowing they are not alone on the journey. I want to share Precious Blood Spirituality with all the lives I touch whether they become a vowed member or not. This ministry's mission has become very clear. It is about an invitation. An invitation to explore an individual's own life in light of our spirituality, an invitation to fall in love and be a part of our family in whatever capacity. Every day I thank God for the opportunity and I can tell you I am so blessed to be a part of this ministry.

What do all of my experiences have to do with anything? I simply believe It is because my journey is unique so is everyone else's. We are grounded together in our spirituality. We have to meet people where they are no matter what and allow them to make Precious Blood Spirituality their own. This is why I feel so strongly about our ASC and Precious Blood families because in our broken world what we need is each other. We are a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Like I said in the beginning community, reconciliation, compassion, unconditional love, being non-judgemental and being a presence that goes beyond any border is what Precious Blood Spirituality is to me. It is not something I have simply learned out of a book but I have been living it for the last 25 years whether consciously or unconsciously.

As Precious Blood people I think we exhibit that in all that we do. It has been a beautiful journey of a lived experience of Precious Blood Spirituality. Going forward I want to live my life conscious of my presence, conscious of my thoughts and conscious of my actions.

I also want to continue to invite others to explore our spirituality and begin their own love story and know they will never be alone. All are welcome at our table because that is who we are as a Precious Blood family.

Thank you for the opportunity to reflect and share.