

Sister Lucy Lalsangzuali, CSC

August 13, 1974–June 4, 2020

These memories were lovingly prepared and written by Sister Catherine Osimo, CSC, and Sister Pushpa Teresa Gomes, CSC, and include contributions from Sister Lucy's community of sisters in Shillong, India. Sister Pushpa read them at the memorial Mass on Thursday, November 19, 2020.

Before I share about Sister Lucy, I would like to take the opportunity to give you a few historical facts about the Sisters of the Holy Cross' presence in Shillong, India. In 1927, Sisters of the Holy Cross returned to the Indian subcontinent, having served there from 1853 to 1897, and in 1933, purchased the property in Shillong to be used as a vacation site for our U.S. sisters. At that time, there were no sisters from the subcontinent in the Congregation. In 1971, after the Liberation War of Bangladesh, the sisters couldn't go to Shillong until 1998. From 1993 to 1997, the sisters studied and resided in Bangalore and Pune and solicited vocations from South and North India. In 1998, Sister Joann Hevelka, CSC, and two Bengali sisters moved to Shillong to look at the possibility of establishing a ministry and promoting vocations.

She called herself a pioneer. Sister Lucy Lalsangzuali was the first young woman from India to enter the international Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross. Sister lived fully her 21 years in Holy Cross, her formative years beginning and ending in Shillong as a daughter of the Church and spiritual mother to many. She died during the week of the feast of Pentecost in the Civil Hospital in Shillong, Meghalaya, India, on

June 4, 2020. She now joins previous Holy Cross pathfinders of other generations, her parents and her sister Helen, who predeceased her.

Lucy's father, John Rualpela and mother, Carmeli Rokhumi Varte, were simple farmers in Lungtan, a small, remote, multi-ethnic village in Northeast India in the highlands of the Champhai district of Mizoram. Lucy was born in Lungtan on August 13, 1974. She was the fifth child of four girls and four boys. Her parents, despite some hardship, arranged to educate their Children as well Lucy at the Holy Cross Brothers' School in Champhai, where she also boarded and worked from 1988 to 1993. Eventually her parents settled in Khawzawl, where the Holy Cross priests had opened a parish. Lucy completed her higher secondary education in 1996 and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Khawzawl Government College in 1999. For six years she had considered a religious vocation as she accompanied various clergy on their pastoral visits. However, she felt an obligation to her family first and helped support them while teaching. It was Father Simon Fernandez, CSC, and Father Harry D'Silva, CSC, who encouraged Lucy to enter the Sisters of the Holy Cross, who five months before had established their first mission in India, in Shillong. If it had not been for the Holy Cross priests, Lucy would have entered the indigenous Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), the sisters she knew best and who initially inspired her vocation.

With her parents' encouragement, Lucy Lalsangzuali began her formation in Holy Cross in Shillong on May 24, 1999, as an aspirant, then as a postulant. On December 7, 2000, she began her novitiate in Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. In God's providence, I was the novice director there at that time.

I have many happy memories of life with Sister Lucy. She was the only Indian among her peers in Bangladesh. It was a blessing for us to have an intercultural group in the novitiate with Mizo, Mandi and Bengali novices. We shared different cultural traditions and food. In the beginning, Lucy was shy and hesitant, but as time went by she took the initiative to come forward and lead. She was eager and enthusiastic to learn Bangla, and she and other novices learned English together so they could communicate with each other. There were many challenges, too, which helped us to grow in our international community.

On November 29, 2002, Sister Lucy made her initial profession of vows because, “I enjoyed the hospitality, equality, friendliness, freedom and openness of Holy Cross—traits very similar to and connected with the culture from which I had come.” She felt called to serve all people “in the plains and hills, over the mountains and across the ocean.”

She was 28 years old, full of life, with zeal and joy. She ministered in Shillong, Marngar village, Nongpoh. We are no longer serving there. In 2005 she was a pioneer in the new mission in the State of Tripura. She took responsibilities in various positions with the orphan boys, including as a teacher at St. Andre High School, Bodhjungnagar, Tripura. Her motivation was “to serve God and share her knowledge with the children who are not getting an education.” She was a very loving, authentic and creative teacher. Students felt free and comfortable to come to her. She was good in music and a nature lover.

Sister Lucy subsequently completed her professional government teaching degree (equivalent to a Bachelor of

Education degree) at the College of Teacher Education in Shillong in 2010 and earned a Master of Arts in sociology at Madurai Kamaraj University, Shillong, in 2011. During those years of study, she was simultaneously engaged in ministry, not uncommon in the life of an apostolic woman religious. She was an enthusiastic teacher of youth and a social worker with women in her years of ministry from 2002 to 2017. She taught in Agartala, West Tripura, India, twice at Saint Andre High School and at Our Lady of Holy Cross School.

When Sister Lucy lived in community in Bodhjungle, while teaching and studying, she found time to sing and plan activities for her neighbors, the orphans of Holy Cross Boys Town, a ministry of the men of Holy Cross. She had as much fun as her young charges when she used her guitar to help them settle down and focus.

From 2012 to 2014, Sister Lucy crossed several borders by participating in the Sisters of the Holy Cross Leadership Development Program, beginning in Ghana, West Africa, where the Holy Cross sisters had established ministries in 1967. The hospitality and experience of the Ghanaian sisters made her realize that she was not the only pioneer in Holy Cross. Her administrative internship continued in Salt Lake City, Utah, at Holy Cross Ministries and at Saint Vincent de Paul, Our Lady of Lourdes and J.E. Cosgriff Memorial schools.

After all these experiences, Sister Lucy was called to become the headmistress of Our Lady of Holy Cross School, Barakathal, Tripura, in 2015. Her first 13 years of religious life and ministry involved education in Tripura, where she visited families and specialized in catechism and methods of teaching. She was admired by the priests in the parish, brothers, sisters and

parishioners, with whom she collaborated. In her pursuit of perfection, Sister Lucy always wanted to be or do something more. Not only had she felt drawn to the sacrifice and silence of the contemplative life, but she experienced love and asked, “What more can be done?” She had missionary zeal, and in 2017 she received a call to open a new mission in Laitlawsnai, Nongstoin Diocese.

In her journal she wrote, “I am happily sharing my life and have placed my future in God’s hands. I am deeply grateful for all of the opportunities and different experiences of my life, which are all signs of God’s unconditional love for me. I hope and believe that God will continue to bless me and the Congregation so that we may all work together uniting ourselves with a loving heart to further the coming of the reign of God with its justice, peace, joy and love to win eternal life. I am grateful to you, Lord!”

Sister Lucy’s last mission was at St. Paul Higher Secondary School in Jatah village, East Khasi Hills District, in Meghalaya, India, which belongs to the Holy Cross fathers. She had great dreams of establishing a school there that would be run solely by the Sisters of the Holy Cross. We, too, had great hope for her continued ministry in India.

Sister Lucy’s leadership was affirmed when she was elected a delegate to the sisters’ General Chapter in May 2019. Those of us who were present at the General Chapter experienced Sister Lucy as a vibrant and energetic person. Later elected a councilor for the Area of Asia, she assumed office in November. A short time later, she took seriously ill and never fully recovered.

When Sister Lucy made her perpetual profession of vows in Shillong on October 31, 2008, she committed her heart forever “to Jesus who died for me.” Responding to God’s love song, she likened herself to “a guitar in the hands of my Music Master.” A chorus of alleluias is now being sung in the Mizo language in the heavens above, among those of every tribe and nation.