

**“OUR CIRCUMSTANCES MAY NOT ALWAYS FIT OUR PLANS,
But God’s Plans always include our Circumstances.”**
(Sara Horn)



The call to religious life is a gift from God and I feel blessed to have received this gift. As the above quotation from award-winning author, Sara Horn, explains so beautifully, God’s plan for me included my circumstances in ways beyond my wildest dreams.

I am Sr. Monika Fernandes, rscj: happy to share with you my call to this journey of religious life in the Society of the Sacred Heart - a call which has only deepened with the years.

My family hails from a small fishing village called Devbag, located in the Malvan taluka of Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra. My father was a fisherman and my mother looked after the home. They were not highly educated but had a deep faith which they shared with my three brothers, two sisters and myself. The sudden death of my father, when I was just nine years old, shook my whole family. In those moments of sorrow, I experienced God’s love through different people.

Overnight, our family situation changed. My mother was left with the responsibility of looking after six of us, and the challenge of educating us as well. Though my eldest sister stopped going to school and took up some work in the village, her earnings were not enough to feed seven mouths.

So, when I was in Std. 5, because of the financial crisis and the reality of our family situation, I was forced to discontinue school in spite of my desire to study. Deep down I kept praying to the Lord, as I remembered psalm 37, v 4: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart”.

As if in answer to my prayer, some distant relatives of my mother began to be interested in the desire of my heart to complete my studies. This incident, which I will always treasure, gave direction to my life. Suddenly I began to see God’s hand working wonders and I became aware of God’s purpose for my life. I loved going to church, reading the bible and joining in the family rosary. These were the moments when I fell in love with Jesus.

When I was in Std. 8, I met two sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart. They came to our village to teach us English, and help us with our studies. Since we did not have a college in Devbagh, they invited me to stay in their community in Malvan so that I could complete the H.S.C. Thus, the Lord helped me to fulfil my initial desire. After the 12th, I continued staying with the sisters in their

convent, as well as in different places, until I completed my graduation. During these three years, I felt attracted to the charism of the sisters: *“To discover and make known the love of the Heart of Jesus through the service of education, youth / pastoral ministry, and accompaniment of women, especially those who are marginalised.* Their joyful service of the people of God and their missionary spirit inspired me to make Jesus the centre of my life.

My family supported my decision of joining religious life. For them my happiness and joy were most important. And, so, I joined the Society of the Sacred Heart in 2007 in Torpa, Jharkhand, which was the first place of my formation. There I learnt English and began my study of the life and mission of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat, our foundress. I was inspired by her life, deep spirituality, her love of God and her remarkable simplicity.



Her words, *“Be simple, be humble and bring joy to others”*, made a strong impression on me. Her life strengthens my call.

I was then sent to Pune for two years of novitiate to affirm my call, after which I made my first commitment in 2010. In my ministry of teaching in different places, it has been my greatest joy to share the spirit of our Society - the love of the Heart of Jesus - with all those I have encountered along the way. To help me bond with the “International Society” and to deepen my relationship with my Jesus, I was sent to Rome for a six-month period, called “Probation”, where I reaffirmed my vocation and made my final vows in 2019.

During the years of my formation I discovered God’s love and tender mercy, and experienced deep joy in serving God’s people. In moments of struggle and doubt God has been my strength and refuge. I treasure His love and want to continue sharing it with others by committing my life completely to God. At present I teach in the school at Malvan, my hometown.

I feel happy and humbled to be called to serve in God’s mission.

Monika Fernandes, rscj