



The St. Joseph Workers in Orange, California, from left: Annie Voegele, Mary Furlong, Honorine Uwimana, Lutonia Naicker, Chelsea Yu-Hsein Lin and Ana Maria Feijoo (Provided photo)



by Honorine Uwimana

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**Editor's note:** *Notes from the Field* includes reports from young people volunteering in ministries of Catholic sisters. A partnership with [Catholic Volunteer Network](#), the project began in the summer of 2015. This is our 10th round of bloggers: Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, and Samantha Kominiarek is an Assumption Mission Associate in Chaparral, New Mexico.

How do young women between the ages of 21 and 35 decide to adjust their sails and change the direction of their lives to serve the most underserved in communities?

How do people at the peak of their careers or the debut of a promising adventure pause their clocks to respond to the needs of the times?

Meet the St. Joseph Workers, five young ladies serving with me in Orange, California, to redefine social justice in their sectors of interest and aptitude.

The [St. Joseph Worker Program](#) brought six women from the four corners of the world with different backgrounds under one roof to respond to the needs of the times in the tradition of the [Sisters of St. Joseph](#) through a yearlong service opportunity in preparation for a lifelong commitment to social change and personal transformation.



Showing off St. Joseph Worker, or SJW, pride at Seal Beach in Orange County, California (Honorine Uwimana)

Lutonia Naicker from Durban, South Africa, took a break from her career as a chef in Malaysia and decided to use her culinary skills both at [Isaiah House](#) and [Mary's Kitchen](#) to raise the banner of being mindful of the dear neighbor.

Among the many career options offered to registered nurse Annie Voegele in Columbus, Ohio, what she chose was to serve alongside the poor and vulnerable at [Mission Hospital](#) as a community health nurse.

Ana Maria Feijoo hails from Cali, Colombia, and has devoted her life to service for the last three years. Today, she also serves at Mission Hospital in the family resource center and believes that solidarity is the axis around which all social life revolves.

Mary Furlong found joy in service during her college years, when she was involved in [Best Buddies](#) and [My Brother's Keeper](#) at Stonehill College. After she graduated, she traded her winters and summers in Maine for service at [L'Arche Wavecrest](#).

Chelsea Yu-Hsein Lin, originally from Taiwan and a recent graduate of Loyola Marymount University, resolved to bring her freshly acquired skills in health and human science to the needs of society by serving at [Hurtt Family Health Clinic](#).

It takes a walk with the Workers to understand how they made such big decisions, the impact they are having, and the transformation the program is bringing in their lives.

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Some of the St. Joseph Workers of Orange, California, with other young volunteers serving in South California at a Catholic Volunteer Network gathered in September at L'Arche Wavecrest in Orange County. (Provided photo)

***Honorine:* How did you learn about the St. Joseph Worker Program?**

*Lutonia:* I heard of this program through the [Catholic Volunteer Network](#) website. After finishing my volunteer profile, the St. Joseph Worker Program director for Orange, Sr. Joanna Rosciszewska, contacted me to tell me about the mission and values of the program, which I embraced. I completed my application, and in August 2019, I was in Orange, ready to serve.

**Why did you choose a year of service among the many other options offered to you?**

*Annie:* Having trained as a nurse, most people thought it was strange to enter into a year of service after so many clinical hours, tests and practicums. However, service had played a large part of my years in nursing school. Whether it was serving at the soup kitchen or planting trees for neighborhood communities, I knew there was something special about giving of my time and talents to reform the world around me. My soul seemed to come alive in these moments, and I could see a transformation within me and others and thought, "Why not give one year of the many years of my life to make a transformation within the vulnerable community of Orange County?"

### **Through your ministry as a St. Joseph Worker, are there hopes down the road for social justice?**

*Ana:* Through my ministry, I have been filled with hope for the road ahead, from people who motivated me to walk toward social justice and be a light of change.

I have seen marginalized communities empowered and integrated in the mainstream by people who cared, and that was a call for me to dream and believe that small actions can turn into big changes. I don't see the future of social justice in the big systems or models; I see it in the common hardworking people and in all those who have the courage to go against the tide.

### **How is the year of service bridging the gap between the person you are and the person you want to be?**

*Mary:* Before taking off to California for my year of service, I did not have clear prospects for what the year would look like. I was simply craving a change of pace in my life, and I wanted more clarification about who I am as a person and what I want to do with my life. Over the past four months, the people I have found around me have helped me to open my heart and be present and loving. I can say that I am already becoming someone I did not even know I had the potential to be.

### **How is the year of service changing your perspective of the world?**

*Chelsea:* This year allowed me to interact with many cultures and learn how people's customs and upbringings influence their way of life. This year is teaching me to be humble as I learn everyone's story and borrow from them lessons I can adapt in my own life.



Chelsea Yu-Hsein Lin, a St. Joseph Worker in Orange, California, plays violin at a recent Sunday Mass. (Honorine Uwimana)

### **How is your experience of working with the sisters?**

*Lutonia:* My experience thus far has been uplifting. I enjoy listening to the sisters in Regina Residence at our monthly dinners: their stories, background and wisdom.

*Annie:* The values and mission of the hospital and sisters have shaped my work as a nurse. The core values of compassion, dignity, justice, excellence and integrity help me to serve as an expression of God's healing love. The fact that the sisters I serve with are concerned beyond physical health and nurture mental, emotional and spiritual health has been transformational witness for me.

*Ana:* Learning how faith has taken the sisters on various missions has been enriching and surprising for me. I have been able to share their call to holiness and how through people, they have met Jesus as a human. I am fortunate to work with Sr. Martha Ann Fitzpatrick, a sister dedicated to the health care system for over 25 years. She is a version of Micah who has taught me to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly.

*Mary:* "Intentional living" is my word for the lessons I learn from the sisters. I am amazed by their friendship, hospitality and their availability for one another. They display a positive attitude toward life that I am always ready to absorb.

*Chelsea*: I love interacting with sisters around our dinners. They are always open to share the lessons they have learned through life, and that always leaves me with an optimistic outlook.

Being able to go to Mass with them, play violin during service and see the joy and appreciation on their faces always warm up my heart.

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St. Joseph Workers serve to improve the well-being of the local community in Orange. Each in their ministry strives to remind the people they serve that they fit in the salvation picture and that demographics do not determine the dignity and love they deserve.

[Honorine Uwimana is a St. Joseph Worker from Rwanda serving at Regina Residence with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, California.]

This story appears in the **Notes from the Field** feature series. [View the full series.](#)