News
Q&As



by Ana Durrani

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

April 2, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

After a long trial, Sr. Helen Wahura arrived into the world as a rainbow baby. For 13 difficult years, her parents in Kenya had struggled with secondary infertility. Their inability to have a third child had caused much strife and conflict within the larger family. But her parents never gave up hope. Their love for one another and trust in God kept them resilient. These traits were passed down to Wahura, and she has carried them with her ever since.

"My parents were business-oriented, and we grew up knowing that we had to work, earn a living and share with others," Wahura said.



Comboni Missionary Sr. Helen Wahura (Courtesy of Helen Wahura)

During Christmas, in the afternoons, she said, the family would visit and share with the poor and abandoned, beginning with their extended family.

"This experience has molded and helped me to be prayerful, love and share with others, especially the people in need," Wahura said.

The experience has greatly influenced her journey as a Comboni Missionary Sister to serve the poor and most abandoned in society. Wahura works with the Comboni Missionary Sisters at St. Mary's Church in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Nearly 1 million Catholics reside and worship in the UAE.

The Comboni Missionary Sisters describe themselves as "consecrated women called by the spirit of God to continue the mission of Jesus Christ according to the charism of our Founder, St. Daniel Comboni." The institute was founded in 1872.

Wahura says the Comboni Missionary Sisters in Dubai are Kenyans and Italians. She arrived at St. Mary's Dubai from Kenya in January 2023 and is involved in parish activities, specifically catechism, spiritual guidance to families and teaching in the school. She says her work involves accompanying married couples and young people experiencing challenges.

"The church here is immigrant, and our presence is valuable according to the time, to be present with the itinerant church, where many people, particularly families, are traveling in search for greener pastures, and this is the reality here," Wahura said. "This is our mission, and we carry on the work of our founder St. Daniel Comboni, who said, 'Do not fear, I am dying, but my work will not die.' "

***GSR*: When and why did you become a sister?**

Wahura: I joined Comboni Missionary Sisters in 2004 and professed in 2008. My call to religious life began through an encounter with sisters from another congregation based in my diocese, the Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Nyeri. They shared their experiences during youth gatherings, about their experiences of working in parishes, hospitals and schools. In their sharing, they expressed their joy and love for their religious life and these inspired me very much.

The most interesting part is that I didn't share my feelings with anyone, since I didn't know whether it was really a vocation to religious life or I was just daydreaming.

Advertisement

After six years, I encountered the Comboni Missionary Sisters, with whom I shared my desire to join the religious life. She gave me a brochure about their ministry and missions. Through reading the brochure, I was touched by their stories and the hardships they encountered in the mission. The sister accompanied me to discern my vocation, and I decided to join them.

This decision created frustration and disillusionment towards my parents due to their expectation of me to get married, be employed and have children. Later on, as time passed, my father openly accepted, but my mum was hesitant to let me go. This caused me a lot of pain [but] I had to make a decision.

Even though my mother had not accepted, I joined the Comboni Missionary Sisters in 2004, and from there, I started my formation.

The words from Prophet Isaiah, "Fear not for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will give you strength, I will bring you help, I will uphold you with the right hand of my justice" [Isaiah 41:10], kept me going. Later on, my mother accepted when I was doing my final vows.

What brought you to the UAE? Tell me more about the Comboni Missionary Sisters and your journey.

The congregation of the Comboni Missionary Sisters was founded by St. Daniel Comboni in 1872 in Verona, Italy. He had a vision of his missionaries, male and female, being "dressed with the spirit of Jesus Christ and animated by charity for the work." The same spirit is seen wherever we are in the world.

The Comboni Missionary Sisters arrived in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on Sept. 6, 1977. During this time, the population of the Gulf was expanding as a result of the oil boom, which attracted people from different parts of the world. This also enhanced the growth of the church due to the flow of immigrants.

As a way to reach out and support the Christians to live the Gospel values, the sisters were involved in education and pastoral work in the vicariate of northern and southern Arabia.

Through prayers, I started my journey, and I am grateful to God and those who were stepping stones in my vocation journey. I love the choice of my life as a Comboni Missionary Sister. Through my profession as a counseling psychologist, each day I feel I am reaching out to vulnerable people, especially married couples in their struggles.

I did not choose to come to the United Arab Emirates. I was assigned, and by obedience, I embraced it. Now, I feel my encounter with people by listening to their struggles. I become a sign of hope because they share their experiences, and I pray

for them. These experiences help me to appreciate and live my vows, accepting the will of God as a Comboni Missionary Sister.



People gather outside St. Mary's Church in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in 2018. (Wikimedia Commons/Christian World)

Talk about your involvement in parish activities, specifically catechism, spiritual guidance to families, and teaching in the school. What do you do exactly?

As Comboni Missionary Sisters, we are involved in different pastoral work in the parish. There is a sister involved full-time as a teacher in the school, and the other sisters are involved in the catechism activities in the parish. More than 6,000 children attend catechism classes every Saturday and Sunday, and about 600 catechists volunteer. The sisters in charge of the catechist program often organize courses for the training of the catechists.

I also work in the office of psycho-spiritual guidance, which has been established by the parish to enhance the psychological and spiritual well-being of families. This service is offered free of charge by the parish to the parishioners.

How has helping married couples and young people experiencing challenges been for you?

Through this ministry, I have grown strong in my prayer life and experienced God's love working in different situations. Through listening, I have become more aware of the suffering of the people and offer them moral and spiritual support.

This ministry is quite challenging, and one has to be committed to prayer life and love the ministry because, most of the time, I only hear negative stories from the people I encounter. But it is also fulfilling to see positive progress in their lives.

What role has your faith played in your life, and what is your favorite passage from the Bible?

My faith has helped me a lot to trust, love and hope that God is present during joyful and painful moments. My faith has helped me to appreciate that there is hope when we trust in God.

The Book of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 14 is my favorite passage that expresses the reality of life as a journey of different phases.

> There is a time for everything
> and a season for every activity under the heavens.
> A time to be born and a time to die;
> A time to plant and a time to uproot.
> A time to kill and a time to heal;
> A time to tear down and a time to build.
> A time to weep and a time to laugh;
> A time to mourn and a time to dance.
> A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them;
> A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.
> A time to search and a time to give up;
> A time to keep and a time to throw away.
> A time to tear and a time to mend;
> A time to be silent and a time to speak.
> A time to love and a time to hate;
> A time for war and a time for peace. ...
> I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it.