



## Alicja Banach (POL)

Contemplation and silence.... community and joy.... the lake against the horizon.... icons.... painting.... bicycling..... -- these images are a summary of my "profile."

Why am I in the Society of the Sacred Heart? Because of a longing for ONE deep personal Reality, whose Name is God -- the Holy Trinity.

My family is from Masuria, a place located at the northeastern part of Poland which has lots of lakes and forests. Not knowing anything about consecrated life, I gave it no thought. My brother is married and has two children, and it has been my joy to see the beauty of having a family, of course with its share of happiness and difficulties.

High school was an important moment for me of deep reflections and relationships. It was then that I started searching for something more, for the essence of reality. Though I desired to pursue studies that would allow me to delve into psychology and spirituality, I still did not have the inner strength to follow my dream. Instead, I decided to take up European Law, as well as German Language Studies, because I was considering the possibility of living and working abroad.

In the first year of my studies, I met a girl who introduced me to the Jesuit ministry, through which I got to know about Ignatian spirituality and the spirituality of the Sacred Heart. Three years later, I went through the *Principle and Foundation of Spiritual Exercises*. This experience made me realize how I was escaping life, and not living it fully, and thus inspired me to redefine my values. I continued my pursuit of European Law, but I wrote my thesis on a topic that allowed me to explore deeply the life-giving reality of Mercy and its legal implications in Catholic Churches. I was so impassioned by the Sacred Heart that I hoped that one day I could buy a ring and engrave on it these words: "*Ad maiorem Cordis Jesu gloriam*".



"The Night"  
- a painting by Alicja

As I was going through the *The Principle and Foundation*, I met an RSCJ and I thought: "She is a normal and gentle human being..." The following year I took part in the *First Week of the Spiritual Exercises* in the same retreat house, and this time I asked about the lifestyle of the RSCJ. What I discovered made me whisper within myself: "But that is my lifestyle, too.... I have been living in a similar way for four years now." I asked for a copy of the Constitutions of the Society of the Sacred Heart and when I read this sentence "We are consecrated to glorifying the Heart of Jesus," I felt I found the answer to my deepest longing.

I started to re-read in my heart all my experiences and all that was coming to pass. I asked myself: Where is my heart? I discovered that I belong to Jesus and I want to belong to Him. Then I began to discern my vocation. I talked with other RSCJ, and through their accompaniment, I was able to thresh out my motivations. After more weeks of *Spiritual Exercises* and deepening of my personal relationship with Jesus, I was then able to make the decision to enter the Society of the Sacred Heart.



*With the novitiate community*



*With some children during a biking trip*



Two years ago, after the beautiful and intensive time of novitiate, I made my first vows as an RSCJ. I then began to work with my Sisters in the vocation ministry, organizing days of silence for young people and accompanying them in retreats. My dream is to work one day with children and young people as a psychologist.

A year ago I worked with schoolchildren between 9 to 12 years old of age, organizing for them their free time after their lessons. Now I am managing our hostel in Poznan, which has 51 young women, with ages ranging from 19 to 26 years old, and who study at different universities. While my work is administrative in nature, I continue to be inspired by Mercy and concern for persons remains to be my passion. So I make it a point to make known the love of Jesus by accompanying our young women, and helping them grow in their relationship with God and with other people. By listening to their problems, organizing workshops and conferences for them, creating a beautiful space for them to learn to live and work together, I am able to live God's Mercy – and this is my great joy!



*"Wholeness" - a painting by Alicja*



*"Transformation" - a painting by Alicja*

Another most important joy of my heart is community! We are four Sisters here in Poznan. This would be my third community now since I entered the Society. In each community that I have been a part of, I see that each Sister is unique, and my relationship with each one is a unique lesson that allows both of us learn our own strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, each person in community is like a "word" from God, inviting me to get to know my heart, her heart and His Heart better.

I am happy to be in our Society. Truly, in life there are no coincidences, and the grace of God is always present.