



Lidia Gołębiewicz (POL)

I was born in the south of Poland, in Bochnia, a town near Cracow, which is our country's old capital. I grew up with my grandparents, because my mother left me when I was two years old. I was five years old when my parents got divorced, and my father started a new family, with whom I had quite a good relationship. I continued to live with my grandparents, and I cared for them until they died. I was 23 years old when, after my grandmother died, I looked for my mother. I wanted to know her and to understand her story. And I did. So now, I have two sets of family. I have six siblings (three brothers and three sisters) from two completely different families, and I love them all.

I did not think about religious life, but for most of my life I have been involved in the Light-Life Movement, which was founded by the Servant of God Fr. Franciszek Blachnicki. Feeling alone as a teenager, this movement provided me with the opportunity to build relationships and to experience God not only as Tradition, but as One who is truly ALIVE and who does care about people.

I took a first course in Finance, but since my desire is to work with people and not with money, I continued studying and pursued Mathematics for teachers. By this time my grandparents had died, so I had to support myself, which I did by selling bread and rolls at a baker's shop. After finishing my studies, I worked in an outsourcing company as a junior accountant. Just when I thought I had almost everything that would make me feel secure in life, it was also when I felt an emptiness within and a deep desire to find the real meaning of my life. That then was the moment for me to open the space of my heart to Jesus Christ and His Love.

Feeling called to become a religious, I started looking for a congregation. All I knew then was I wanted to be in the service of young people. When I chanced upon the website of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, I told myself: "No, this is too strange for me. Some wear the religious habit, while others don't. And they carry a foreign name - Sacre Cœur." But there was something that urged me to read more about them. As I got to know this congregation more, I began to recognize its language in my heart.

I entered the Society of the Sacred Heart in 2007. Although my two families did not say anything at that time, I could see that my decision was difficult for them. But as years went by, they have come to accept my choice.

I lived my first year as a candidate in the community at Poznań, and I worked as a teacher of mathematics at a nearby city. That was followed by two years of novitiate - a beautiful time that was full of prayer, studies, and apostolic service. Through meditation and contemplation, and the Ignatian spiritual exercises, I experienced God



Lidia (1st from right) with other RSCJs

slowly and gently teaching me what Love really means. I also began to study theology and I engaged in different apostolic activities: participating in the Light-Life movement in our parish, being a volunteer at the retreats for people with disabilities, helping the Missionaries of Love in giving retreats to the homeless, and joining the young people in the Youth Days organized by the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Sallette. In all these activities and through all these people, I could see God; and it was a real joy and honor for me to accompany them.

I made my first vows in 2010. As an RSCJ, I worked in the middle school as a teacher of mathematics. I enjoyed doing this because being with young people is my passion. But just two months after I began this ministry, I suffered from a stroke that left me unable to speak, and with half of my face and my right hand paralyzed. That was a truly difficult moment for me because I did not know what the future would bring. But it was also at that time that I experienced the enormous love of God and the care of others. With God's healing grace, the disease cut back very fast, and after a few months I was able to return to school.

I continue to teach mathematics in that same school, where I try to share with young people in different ways the love of God that I had personally experienced. During the summer holidays, I help in giving retreats at our Retreat House, or I accompany young people as they search for the Love of God's Heart. This year, for example, I helped in the activities related to the World Youth Day.

My experiences in life and my practice of the spiritual exercises have helped me to enter deeply into the reality of forgiveness. Even when I wrote my thesis, I focused on "forgiveness as the way towards personal transformation." Through my relationships, especially in the family, I continue to touch the profound mystery of forgiveness. Indeed, all these years, I have experienced the gentle, tender, and forgiving love of God's heart.



Lidia (standing, 1st from right) with RSCJ in community

Now as I desire to commit myself more fully to God, I hope that I will be able to open my heart more and more to this unconditional Love. I pray that I will have the chance to share this Love with the people I will be graced to meet throughout my life.