

Sister Ana was born in Manila Philippines on December 11, 1931. Her father, Francisco Castañeda, was a Naval officer. Her mother, Emilia Quejada, was a housewife who showered her five children with love. There were three girls and two boys. Ana was the second. She had a happy childhood with all the comforts of the youth of her surroundings. She was a Girl Guide and part of every sport in her school. She completed her primary, secondary, and collegiate studies at Stella Maris College in Manila run by the FMM. It is in this religious environment that she discovered her missionary vocation. *The sisters inspired me by their total self-giving, their internationality, and their guidance through each step of my youth. I felt called to follow Jesus in this community. I left everything and marched into an unknown saying Yes like Mary. In 1952, I became a FMM. I was twenty.*

Ana lived 6 months as a pre-novice in the Philippines. After entering the novitiate, her superiors asked her to continue her formation in the novitiate at Fruit Hill in Providence, RI, USA. She left with two sisters from her group. She was happy to be able to experience internationality at the beginning of her formation. It had inspired her as a student in Stella Maris.

She quickly adapted to her new surroundings. With faith, she completed her formation even

when it was tough. She partook in the manual labours. All these experiences prepared her for her temporary profession on March 19, 1955. She was then sent to further her education. She completed a bachelor's in history at Emmanuel College and a master's in education at Boston College run by the Jesuits.

In 1960, she taught in grade six at Spirito Sancto School for a year in Fall River, Mass, USA. She then received her posting for Africa, first in Monrovia, Liberia and then in Jirapa, Ghana. For seven years, she was a school headmistress, a catechist, a religion, and history teacher. *Africa taught me many things. I came from great wealth with several degrees and tools to succeed. Here in seeing such lack and poverty, I was amazed at such ingenuity, perseverance, and solidarity amid obstacles and the struggles to survive. I found myself humbled by the children's generosity and dynamism even though they lacked the basic needs.*

In 1968, Canada became her new mission. She taught from sea to sea in Rigaud, Edmonton, and Prince George. From 1969 to 1972, she taught English at the Toronto Chinese Centre. She completed intensive training at the Trillium Centre. She then became a special education teacher for children with learning disabilities.

Sister Ana had a special gift of approaching these children incapable of learning due to personal or home difficulties. She knew how to love them, win their trust, give them an education, and enable them to adapt in society. This experience taught her *that children need to be loved to learn and survive after their traumas. Only the healing grace of affirmation has the power to unlock the dormant possibilities hidden in their hearts. From their weakness and vulnerability springs a healing force for others and themselves. This simple experience became a source of life for me.* Sister Ana remembered these 16 years of service to these troubled youths with great pride and love. In 1996, she became the social program coordinator at the Newman Centre of the University of Toronto.

Amid her mission activities, Sister Ana was very grateful to be able to spiritually renew with her vocational roots. She happily partook in the Emmaus and Sorgente programs at the heart of our Institute. Reflecting on these moments of her life, she wrote: *The hand of the Lord has always been there to guide me throughout my days, whether delightful or bleak. God's unconditional love has always preceded me and prepare my way. I have tried to live out Mary's Yes and the My God and my all of Francis. Lord, will I ever fully understand this wisdom? Teach me, guide me on the path that leads to you.*

In 2000, Ana was forced to slow down and was admitted in the infirmary of Montreal for knee surgery. She helped at the reception and with newly arrived immigrants. She returned to Toronto in 2005. There, she led a group of our associates.

In 2013, she celebrated her 60th anniversary of religious life. *Before the immensity of my life, I stand and look at the journey of my missionary vocation. In awe, I can only state: my God, for all that has been and will be, I praise you and I thank you for having created me.*

In 2015, Sister Ana was admitted in the provincial infirmary on Laurier. She was 84 years old. Since then, with the passing years, her health declined. In June 2021, with her companions, she was transferred to the infirmary at Carrefour Providence. There, she received all the medical care from a caring health team.

In the silence of her room, she lived out her last years in peace. She welcomed each dawn with gratefulness for the gift of life. Then came the last day when the Lord welcomed her into his Kingdom.

Go, dear Sister Ana, and enter the Lord's peace.



One of her drawings of the Mother and Child with its crocheted frame that she enjoyed giving as greeting cards.



***Sister Ana Castañeda
(Maria Benilda)***

Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

***born in Manila, Philippines
December 11 1931***

***entered the Institute
in Tagaytay, Philippines
on March 30 1952***

***died in Montreal, QC
on October 27 2023***

***in her 92nd year,
the 71st of her religious life.***

May she rest in the peace of Christ!