

My Mission in Ottawa



Annette
John, fmm
Ottawa

We are pilgrims on a journey and yet we always feel at home wherever we are sent even with all the challenges the move might entail. Sr. Liliane, my Provincial, asked me to pitch my tent at Notre Dame de Guadeloupe, Kaladar Avenue, Ottawa, in July 2018. I asked the Lord “Where are you leading me”? To find a job at my age is not an easy task, but our God is a God of surprise. I was approached by Fr. Joseph Gavin, SJ, requesting me to be part of the Jesuit team of chaplains at Saint Paul University. Our sister Agnieszka Pal had already informed the Jesuits about me and of my arrival. So, he came to our house to conduct an interview and to assess my CV. He hired me immediately and blessed us with a gift of a meaningful Eucharistic celebration. Thus, this is the second year that I am serving as one of the chaplains at the university. Fr. Joseph died recently of cancer. We miss him at the university, and I am sure that he is a powerful mediator on our behalf before the Lord.

My ministry at the university is very simple. It is all about respect, relationship, and trust by being an expression of God’s tender love to both the students and the members of the staff. We often hold interactive sharing with one another in a non-judgmental attitude irrespective of ethnicity or sexual orientation. A few do not even hesitate to reveal themselves as LGBT as they feel quite comfortable with me in sharing their little secrets. Once, when we were having our lunch together, one blurted out “My wife prepared this lunch for me.” This was a woman who was speaking to me. She is a great lady, full of practical wisdom and who always stood for justice and authenticity. Another lesbian student told me that she does not strictly follow any religion, but she gave up meat during lent and is always ready to do acts of service. Some even struggle with depression. All of them are in fact a wonderful, vibrant, enthusiastic bunch and they come to the oasis (Pastoral care area) to sing, to dance, to share, to drum and to strum.





The students and the members of the staff have sometimes tough choices to make in life. I ask the Lord to show me 'what is the most loving thing to do in a given situation'. Sometimes the students even share their assignments with me. When they defend their thesis, I attend to support them and to encourage them. Once I was asked by a professor to be a member of the panel on discernment. Together with the students and staff, we collaborate in the preparation of certain projects like making posters to support the mental health organization, preparing for the celebration of the 5th anniversary of Laudato Si, signing petitions and planning other spiritual innovations. I feel loved and accepted as they call me affectionately, 'Sister Love'. They believe in the power of prayer and we share simple Biblical thoughts with them which they themselves prepare. They are deeply spiritual in their own unique way. I also participate in the ecumenical services, and Native Indian services of drumming and in the sharing circle. Sometimes I give English lessons to the French speaking students and one of the students used to come to our house for the class. She could not continue due to the current pandemic. At the moment the students are having their courses online.

Besides being a chaplain, my apostolate also consists of other simple ministries like accompaniment of persons through telephone and internet, visiting those who are lonely, distribution of communion to the home bound, welcoming individuals and groups at home for visits and prayers by sharing and being with them in their joys and struggles through compassionate and generative listening. Two of our friends, Lisa Guzzo and Gaetana, help me by giving me a ride to go to my various apostolates. I accompany also Secular Franciscans and our Associates. I prepare spiritual leaflets for the province and this year the theme is on 'Interculturality'. It is a challenge and a grace to prepare a different leaflet for every month. I pray that they may help us in our ongoing formation and in our journey with the Lord and with each other.

I have the joy of living with my two young sisters, Arlene and Agnieszka. I am much older than them and the adjustment is on both sides. I am grateful to the Lord for their love and youthfulness. We support one another in our journey of faith and in our intercultural living together. I am sure this indeed is a witness of the Lord's love to the people who encounter us.

