

Remembrances of Sister Anna Marie Noth from the ULAF (Latin American) Region

I know that it is not possible to write in a note what the heart has treasured for 40 years. I only wish to share a deep gratitude to God for giving me the privilege of knowing and sharing part of my life with Madre Ana María. She was the means through which God called me to consecrate my life as a religious in the School Sisters of St. Francis congregation.

Madre Ana gave me an example of how to face risks by living in a completely different environment, in a culture that is not our own, always starting something new. She trained the health promoters and the delegates of God's word as part of a large team, trying to speak a language that was not her own and that was difficult for her.

She exemplified how to be a woman of faith and how to trust in God's action and providence in daily life. She placed every initiative in the hands of the Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, Brother Peter, and St. Jude Thaddeus, and trusted in their intercession while we waited for an answer. With God's help, she always overcame obstacles.

She taught us the value of community life and love for the entire congregation. She was always connected to our history and events, and she spoke to us with pride of who the School Sisters of St. Francis are in the world. From her own experience, she instilled in us Franciscan spirituality because she loved life in all its manifestations.

Her love for the poor brought her to Guatemala, to our villages, where she gave the best years of her life to the service of the neediest. With unconditional love, she put at the service of others her gifts as a nurse, spiritual guide, formator, and founder of projects. These projects continue to respond to the needs of the times in healthcare, education, and the care of children.

She has left us an unforgettable legacy of fidelity, dedication, joy, firm faith, unconditional love, sacrifice, and perseverance amid all the challenges that life presents day after day.

Her spirit will live forever in my heart because of the words of encouragement that I always received in each encounter we had. It will continue to be a force that drives me at the beginning of each day.

I am sure that Madre Ana rests now in peace and enjoys the fruits of all that she sowed throughout her life. See you soon, Madre Ana.

- *Sister Argelina Marroquin*

Mother Ana Maria Noth arrived in Guatemala to work in the Pastoral Center of Santo Tomás de Castilla, Puerto Barrios Izabal, at the invitation of Monsignor Gerardo Flores. When her assignment ended, she stayed on in Guatemala to start a wonderful experience, again at the invitation of Monsignor Flores.

With joy and responsibility, she agreed to collaborate with Monsignor Flores, and fulfill the duties he entrusted to her. On January 15, 1975, she arrived at Los Amates without a house in which to live, so she rented a room behind a store on 15th Street and called it Casa Maria. Young women began to arrive, and she already had names on her list: Magdalena, Matilde, and Lucia. Ten days later I arrived, accompanied by my mother, and I gave her a letter from Josefa Sandres. On February 3 Josefa arrived, accompanied by her mother. Madre Ana received her with extraordinary joy.

We were sad when we were told to vacate the room. We had nowhere to go, and Mother Ana paid for our food. Father Honorio, the parish priest of Quiriguá, looked for a place for us but without success. Mother Ana was overjoyed when a group of archaeologists who were in town told her that they would leave us their house while they were going on vacation, so that same day we moved in with our few belongings.

When she saw that so many young women were coming, she started to look for a place to build. A non-Catholic couple helped her. She was incredibly happy when the couple told her that the property in front of the house where we came to live could be ours. They contacted Don Chando, the owner, and his response was positive. Construction began with many setbacks. Father Honorio looked for the masons to build the house, and we had to act quickly because when the archaeologists returned, we would need to vacate their house. When we moved to our house, we did not have windows, light, or water, but at least we had a place to live. We were happy at the beginning of our religious formation.

In 1976, we lived through the earthquake. Many families were left with nothing. With the blessing of Monsignor Flores, Mother Ana helped a community to build their homes. The project was named after her, and she received help from priests to build a model home on the grounds of Los Amates. This house still exists on our property in Los Amates.

Because of the sisters' presence, young people continued to arrive for religious formation. We built spaces for the formation of catechists and the different pastoral works of the parish; it was a work that flourished quickly.

The Mother General at the time accepted me to enter the novitiate. Mother Ana agreed that the reception could take place in Sailá, the place where my family lived. Monsignor Flores celebrated the Mass, and we had a nice party. Invitees included catechists,

midwives, and health promoters, with many distinguished and well-known people known to Mother Ana. It was an immense joy for everyone.

In 1981, the persecution of the church began. On July 1, Father Tullio Maruzzo and Luis Obdulio Arroyo, good friends of all the sisters, were murdered. Some sisters had to go into exile to Honduras and Mexico; only four of us remained in Guatemala City.

With much joy and fear the sisters from exile returned to Guatemala City in 1982. The parish priest of Zone 19, looked for a place for the sisters. Mother Ana was sad when I was imprisoned and deported; she rejoiced again when I was released. Her biggest concern at the time was that we did not have a house of our own, and we were scattered. She gathered us all to visit the Holy Brother Pedro de Betancourt in Antigua Guatemala, to ask him for a miracle and to have a house for all of us and for formation. The response was quick, and her heart was filled with joy when a family told her that there was a house in Zone 2, on Simeon Cañas Avenue. We received the joyful news from Mother Ana that we had found a house. This house was another of her projects and dreams realized, after Los Amates. She did not stay there because she wanted to continue helping the poor and those affected by the violence that occurred in our country. She looked for a place in Santa Apolonia Chimaltenango to care for children orphaned by the armed conflict. This is how she started another project in Santa Apolonia, Hogares Santa María de Guadalupe.

Her desire to continue helping the poor remained, and Monsignor Ramazzini supported her by giving her a part of the land of the diocesan center of the Diocese of San Marcos. There she built the alternative medicine clinic which she called the Rieti Project.

Mother Ana, you were and are a woman of great faith, hope and charity. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary accompanied you in the difficult moments in this life. May you be accompanied to the heavenly home by St. Francis and St. Claire; our foundresses, Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, and Sister Clara; all the angels and saints of the Heavenly Court; our martyred friends Blessed Tulio, and Obdulio; and other martyrs of the Church.

Thank you, Mother, for your life and mission in our beloved Guatemala, for the honor and glory of God and our congregation. I write these lines with love and gratitude.

- *Sister Albertina de Paz*

Madre Ana: woman of prayer, wise, supportive. She knew how to listen, and whoever approached her received an answer.

Madre Ana: welcoming woman, simple, friendly, hospitable.

I remember that two months after my experience in 1981, she interviewed me. She asked, “Are you still steadfast in the search?” I said yes. “Do you know what this entails?” I said yes, I was firm. She told me about what the three loves meant to follow Jesus: Love of the birth of Jesus, love of the Crucified, and love of the Eucharist.

I knew what this meant. Always as in the heart of God, all are welcome, good and bad. In the heart of Madre Ana there was also space for each one. She approached the unknown always with trust in God. She evangelized with her life, her dedication.

She has left our side, but today she will live closer to us. In the spiritual life, there are no borders.

Madre Ana, please pray for me from heaven. Amen

- *Sister Bersabe Crisostomo*

I am one of the older sisters who began formation with Madre Ana. For me, it was truly an unforgettable experience.

We lived in 15th Street Los Amates, Izabal, where I saw her tears and sorrows, worries, and joys at the beginning of the formation in our house named Casa Maria. She was a woman of deep prayer and meditation, with a lot of confidence in the Lord Jesus. You can say she was a woman of a lot of faith.

She always had a beautiful, infectious smile that encouraged people to move forward. She knew our family members by name. She loved and valued every person who visited her, and she was very hospitable. She accompanied us in every way she could and enjoyed her time with us. She followed all the milestones during our formation process as School Sisters of St. Francis, as well as our academic studies.

Days before my reception, she asked me when my dad celebrated his birthday. I told her it was November 6. She suggested that I choose that date for the Mass of my reception, and so I did. She told me “Your dad will be closer to you.” My dad had died a few months after I enter the convent.

When we opened the mission of the Economica, she was incredibly happy, after that, every February 6 she would visit us to remind us that it was another year in the mission. She usually visited with Madre Marietta. It was a nice visit and we shared coffee and cake. It was always a genuinely enjoyable time.

When I graduated, I was given a big surprise: She invited my mom without me knowing! To protect us from the civil war that Guatemala was experiencing, she took us into exile and went with us to Honduras and Mexico for a few months. With profound respect, she asked us if we wanted to go home with our family or go to Honduras. We moved to a place where the Diocese of Chiapas welcomed us, and we made ourselves at home with the Mexican people. Madre Ana motivated us a lot to accompany the people in their walk and thus we experienced formation amongst the town's people.

These are just a few small memories. We have so many beautiful things we can say about her. I respect the great love she had for God and for the congregation, and the ways she made that love present with her life's testimony.

Thank you, Madre Ana. You are not dead; you are closer to us, each of your sisters in Guatemala. Here, your memory will live forever. Madre, happy return to the Father's house. Through your dedication, you have earned that Kingdom promised by the Father: *"I will come for you."*

Rest in peace, Madre Ana, we love you!

- Sister Josefa Sandres

Most of my religious life was lived with Madre Ana. She was my companion at all stages of my formation. We shared many years together in our work, the last experience being at the Rieti mission in San Marcos.

I had the joy and privilege of knowing Madre Ana very closely. I can say with sincerity that she was an integral, spiritual sister, a visionary, dreamer, enthusiastic, very generous, and welcoming woman. In addition, she had a lot of love for each of the sisters in the community. A remarkably simple Franciscan spirit was the hallmark of her life.

Many religious from other Franciscan congregations in San Marcos sought her out for spiritual direction. Apart from the great affection she had for all persons, she was also a lover of creation. She loved planting flowers and kept her garden incredibly beautiful. She also kept a special place in her heart for her dogs.

Madre Ana was a sister who inspired a lot of confidence in all the people she worked with as a team. I saw and felt that again when I arrived at the mission when she was the director in Rieti. In her last years in the mission, she decided to only be a presence in the project since her health and advanced age no longer permitted her to continue with the activities. Her decision was respected and valued by everyone on her team.

Madre Ana used to visit the different offices and talked with each of the workers. Many times, she would come into my office to share new dreams for Rieti. I always put

aside what I was doing to listen to her, and before leaving, she would say thank you, for listening to me and also for your advice. It was striking to me to see her with her rosary while walking slowly in the forest with her dogs. She prayed while we were all in our work areas, and she also always prayed the holy rosary while we waited for the Eucharist to begin.

Madre Ana also had a great love and respect for the community. She was happy when we had community outings. She always said if we have some money, we should have our outing. Other times she would say if there is any money, we can go to eat somewhere outside.

Madre Ana for me was an exemplary woman, mother, sister, friend, and confidante. With her, I learned to value people regardless of their living conditions. She taught me to appreciate and respect diverse cultures and to know how to listen to others. Madre Ana trusted me so much. Many times she would say, with a smile on her face, “This is only for you, Flory Leiva.”

I will always carry everything I learned from Madre Ana in my heart. God has her in his glory, and I am sure that from heaven, she will be interceding for all of us.

- *Sister Flory Leiva*

I have the privilege of living and working on the last project founded by Madre Ana, Rieti, a place that she dreamed, loved, and had the courage to leave with pain but also with wisdom.

The joy of living and working with Madre Ana compels me to continue making her dream come true: To love to serve others without any discrimination. To find God in creation by making faith alive from a contemplative experience. To put our hearts into what we dream, and what we fight for, by surrendering everything to God’s hands.

Madre Ana taught me to live as a Franciscan: Her spirit of prayer, her smallness, her joy, her strength, her love of creation, her acceptance of God’s will, and the way she welcomed all who approached her. Her love, dedication, and welcome to the poor and sick have been engraved in the hearts of many people.

There is a lot to say, and I can summarize it all in the word “Madre.” She knew how to be a true mother for her daughter, the ULAF Region, especially to the sisters in Guatemala. All the experiences and memories will live in the hearts of your daughters. Your love and presence accompany us from heaven.

I can feel her presence in Rieti, where she was so happy. I am left with her smile, her affection, her joy, and all those values that gave so much life to the mission.

Madre Ana, continue to accompany us from heaven. Intercede for us so that we can be those humble and joyful sisters you taught us to be.

- *Sister Inés Albizures*

“To Paradise the angels take you. May the martyrs receive you on your arrival and introduce you to the holy city of Jerusalem.”

Dear Madre Ana, I know that the Lord has already rewarded all that you did on earth, although with sadness and tears knowing your departure of this world. I know that from heaven, you will protect me anywhere. For me, you will be a guardian, a companion on my path who will guide me in my consecrated life. Your footprints have been marked in my heart and in my life.

That is why I am incredibly grateful to God for the opportunity to have lived together and gotten to know you. You taught me to be a humble person and responsible in my tasks. I had the joy of being with you at the beginning of the Rieti project. I saw your enthusiasm, looking for funds to realize your dream in San Marcos.

For me, Madre Ana, you were a mother who welcomed me into your heart, and guided me in my formation process. You also supported me in difficult and joyful moments, there was never distinction. You valued me as I was. You always encouraged me and congratulated me for the simple things I did. You corrected me with humility, with love, and tenderness.

I also admire your courage and your trust in God in all the things you did. You were a woman of prayer and a risk taker in all your endeavors. Thank you very much, Madre Ana for everything. May the Lord receive your soul.

- *Sister Petronila Baran*

To all the School Sisters of St. Francis and family, my deepest condolences and a big hug.

“Madre Ana” is what we call Sister Anna Marie in Guatemala. She was a woman of faith and with much love. We all fit in her heart, and she was able to give love on so many levels. She was my formator in the various stages of formation from novitiate to juniorate and perpetual vows.

Madre Ana was my sister, friend, and mother all at the same time. She was always my spiritual guide, so her departure hurts deeply. I also feel happy to know that God already has her enjoying his eternal presence. She is gone, but in my heart, she will remain forever because there is not another woman like her.

Madre Ana, my heart is sad because I will not be able to count on you now, but I know that from heaven you will continue to accompany my life, especially with the service that I give now to the ULAF Region. Your wise advice that always came from your heart will be deeply missed.

You taught me to listen with my heart before reason because we are all humans and we need each other. This marked my heart and I hope I never forget it. I need to be a worthy daughter and follower of St. Francis from the unique teachings of inner simplicity to be able to serve with love.

Madre Ana was a woman of listening from the heart, a woman of faith, brave and a fighter, a woman of dreams with a broad vision. She was not afraid of anything; that is why the projects she established were carried out. Now we have her legacy and we have to strive to move forward with a deep faith like she had.

Anna Marie touched many hearts in the laity and especially in us, her sisters of Guatemala. With her departure I feel we are left without her protection, but I know that it is quite the opposite because we now have an intercessor for us in heaven at the feet of our Father.

I also cannot forget the great love she had for animals, with a special attention to dogs that were always her guardians.

I am forever grateful for everything, Madre Ana.

- *Sister Rusbi Marisol Aldana de León*

On Wednesday, September 7, I received the news that Madre Ana was in an extremely delicate state of health, with a poor prognosis. I received this sad news through Sister Inés Albizures, from Madre Ana's congregation. I promised to offer my special prayers for Madre Ana. The following day, I learned the sad news of her passing.

I had a special affection, profound respect, and admiration for Madre Ana, only corresponding to the great affection and consideration that she always had to me. In Madre Ana, I could appreciate and feel the affection of a mother, or an older sister. She was a truly kind, very human, simple, fraternal religious, always close, with an authentically Franciscan simplicity and fraternity. An exemplary nun, with a very deep spirituality.

Someone who lived close to her told me that it was striking to see her when she was praying. She concentrated to the depths of her being to rise to the top of the heavens. "The times I found her in prayer," this person told me, "I was deeply impressed." It is this profound way of praying, I believe, that made Madre Ana a special religious woman, a woman who radiated God. A woman, a religious who brought that prayer, that faith into the practicality of daily life. That intense contact with God nourished her to be such a special religious, a religious with a living and a lived faith. Undoubtedly, this was the reason for her human and Christian maturity.

Madre Ana was also a visionary religious, as she showed when she implemented, with great tenacity, the project of the Franciscan Oasis Rieti. In Madre Ana, I could also see a religious dedicated to the service of her neighbor, especially the poorest, with a Franciscan spirituality to an extremely high degree. To me, Madre Ana was a saint, a very worthy disciple of St. Francis of Assisi and, therefore, of Jesus of Nazareth.

My very sincere and fraternal condolences to the family of Madre Ana and her congregation of School Sisters of St. Francis. I offer you my very sincere prayers and all my affection. The respect, admiration, and affection that I have had for Madre Ana, is not interrupted by death. May the much-loved Madre Ana rest in peace. I am sure that she, from a special place that God had reserved for her in heaven, intercedes for all those who loved her so much and who will continue to love her for as long as God lends us life. Peace and all good, and a fraternal embrace.

- *Father Toribio Pineda García*