

Spanish cloistered nuns see surge in vocations

A 43 year-old prioresses has revolutionized an old Poor Clares convent in Spain, turning it onto a magnet for dozens of young professional women.



Sister Veronica joined the Poor Clares Convent of the Ascension founded in 1604 in Lerma (Spain) at a time when it was going through a vocations crisis. It was January 22, 1984, and Marijose Berzosa - Sr. Veronica's name prior to entering the convent - decided, at age 18, to leave behind a career in medicine, friends, nightlife and basketball.

"Nobody understood me. There were bets that it would not last, but they did not feel the force of the hurricane that drew me in," says Sr. Veronica. "I was a classic teenager looking for a way out ... and I made a decision in just 15 days."

Sr. Veronica joined the convent which had not seen a new vocation in nearly 23 years.

Sr. Pureza de Maria Lubian, 70, now abbess of the convent in Burgos, was her formation director and remembers her Sr. Veronica as "a lovely girl."

"Very noble and very good," recalls Sr. Puerza de Maria. Sr. Vernoica "was 18 and had a future. She left everything. She followed the call of God. She had a rich personality. She was always a leader. And, spiritually, she had a great vocation."

Sr. Puerza de Maria also notes that though Sr. Veronica faced many "struggles and difficulties," she persevered and submitted to God's plan for her life.

The Spanish daily El Pais, one of the newspapers most sympathetic to the current Socialist government's campaign against the Catholic Church in Spain, could not resist publishing an extensive report on Sr. Veronica. According to the newspaper, she "has become the biggest phenomenon in the Church since Teresa of Calcutta," as "she has made the old convent of Lerma into an attractive

recruiting banner for female vocations, with 135 professional women with a median age of 35 and 100 more on a waiting list.” The paper adds that Sr. Vernoica has also “opened a house in the town of La Aguilera, 24 miles from Lerma, at a huge monastery donated by her Franciscan brothers.”

"It is an unexpected boom in vocations when the Jesuits have just 20 novices in all of Spain, the Franciscans, five, and the Vincentians, two. And it's happening at a time when nuns are being imported from India, Kenya or Paraguay to prevent the closure of convents inhabited by elderly nuns, and when most of our priests are above the age of 60," the report indicated.

On weekends the convent welcomes hundreds of pilgrims: families, young members of ecclesial movements and church groups arrive in buses to attend the prayers, theatrical plays and talks on fully living the Christian life.

According to El Pais, the majority of the young sisters who have been attracted to the cloister "have been in relationships and had careers." The women are strong in their knowledge of theology, and are "urban and educated."



In addition, "None are immigrants. There are five sisters from the same family, eleven pairs of blood sisters and a few twins. Most are from the middle class. And they have college degrees. This community offers a complete roster of lawyers, economists, physicists and chemists, roadway engineers, industrial workers, agricultural workers and aeronautics engineers, architects, doctors, pharmacists, biologists and physical therapists, librarians, philologists, teachers and photographers."

One of the sisters in the community interviewed by El Pais defines the cloister as "an house open to those who knock on our door. We want to share our faith, to make known what is happening to us. And if they see Jesus in us, go ahead. Spain is so pagan that we need to share our faith, not live it alone. It is time to act."

The growth of the cloister since the arrival of Sister Veronica has been explosive: in 1994, when she was appointed mistress of novices at the age of 28, nearly 30 sisters entered. In 2002 there were 72, in 2004, there were 92. In 2005, the number rose to 105. Late last September there were 134.

Originally in a 16th century convent built to accommodate 32, the sisters are being leased the monastery of La Aguliera by the Franciscan Friars of Lerma. It is located adjacent to the sanctuary and the tomb of St. Peter Regalado.

The monastery is quickly being renovated to provide a modern, functional and well-lit space, with energy obtained through solar panels.

The new monastery has 100 cells, each with bed, table and kneeler, while a parlor with a capacity of 400, a hospice, bathrooms for visitors, and a new chapel are currently being constructed.

Recently, Father Raniero Cantalamessa, Preacher of the Papal Household, preached to 140 Poor Clares in Lerma. The visit by the Italian Capuchin was broadcast by the RAI network (Italian Radio and Television) in prime time in Italy.

To see the video, [click HERE](#)

Catholic News Agency