



My First Missionary Experience

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I had the honor of going to St. Kitts for missionary experiences during my Postulancy. My missionary experience was to be in our small preschool in the small village of Molineux. At the start I had to face many difficulties: such as language! I came with the assumption that I speak English and so do the People in St. Kitts: I could hardly make out what they were saying, speaking “English” all the time! Other bumps in the road were the living environment, and community life. That was not an easy journey, but let me say it at the start, it was a very rewarding journey.

The first and biggest difficulty seemed to be the language. Even though the primary language in St. Kitts is English, it is hard to understand the local dialect of English, which is a mixture of St. Kitts’ Creole with a mixture of British English. I observed and learned the terms in which the teachers used to talk to the student. As an assistant in the “small” class of the three year old children, I watched the teacher and memorized the wording she used with the children. Some of the terms were: to turn off the water is “to turn off the pipe”; don’t break the bottle is “don’t mash up the bottle.” Trash is referred to as “rubbish or garbage.” If I didn’t use the local term, the children would look at me puzzled, which happened more often than not. Upon leaving St. Kitts, I still was not comfortable speaking that language.

The second difficulty for me was the living environment. According to the locals, I came during the hottest month of the year. The heat and humidity of the tropical region is very different from the summer heat of Chicago or Texas. By the time I got used to feeling wet all the time, it wasn’t that bad at all. I enjoyed the nice walks in the evening and appreciated the abundance of flowers and fruit trees around me. I savored many fresh tropical fruits right off the trees. That was the best part.

The island itself is gorgeous, with much history and



beauty. The house I lived in had the mountains close to the back of the house and the sea was in front of the house. Sometimes the electricity went out or the water would shut off and you have no idea as to when it would come back on. St. Kitts does not have the communication set-up yet in which the electric company will inform you as to how long and when the electricity or water will be back on. People just continue with daily life and are creative in mastering the situation; we learned to save gallons of water and always have flash lights or candles ready when needed.

These little bumps seemed to make life difficult at first, but really it wasn’t such a big deal, not so bad at all. Being in St. Kitts, talking to the locals, being part of their events, and learning about their culture made my missionary work enjoyable, meaningful, and yes, fun at times. The people, Kittitians, are very warm and amicable in relating, also to the stranger and foreigner. They truly opened their arms to welcome me. I felt like I had a real place there. Aside from Sr. Edel Deong, I had a second mother and many aunties and

uncles there making sure I was well fed and all my needs were met. I didn't feel like an outsider or just a visitor, I was part of the larger family functioning around church and school.

While living in the village Molineux of St. Kitts, I have grown in my religious life. The biggest change for me occurred in my prayer life. I have learned to be more aware of my own relationship with God and those around me. This is true due to my experiences in St. Kitts. Working in the preschool made me change how I viewed the world. The students' views are very simple, yet endearing. As I interacted with these children, I had to change my wording when I wanted to explain things to them and I was touched by the simple prayers they pray before each snack time and meal. I especially had to pray more, ask for God's guidance and the gift of gentleness and intuition, since I lacked experience working with preschool children. I needed help. My interaction with them made me recognize that talking to God on a daily basis in simple terms addressing direct needs and hopes and plans is a good way to establish my relationship with God, learning to trust and to respond with gratitude.

My time in St. Kitts reinforced my wish to become a missionary sister. I realize that missionary work is not easy. From the initial taste I got in St. Kitts I learned that there are many challenges, such as living space and shortage of necessities or what I had learned to be necessities for living and working. At the same time, it taught me that missionary work is not just a job, it's about getting to know the local people, learning to understand them, and embracing their culture as one way of being on the way to God. Working in the preschool has also helped me to understand myself in working with people and that I would like to work with children in my future ministry.

