

## **ANGELA MERICI: A WOMAN OF HOPE**

Forty-one years ago, responding to a call I was experiencing through my formation process as a member of UNEC, the Union of Christian Students, together with Gladys and Fermina, two friends from the Christian Base Community, we initiated an experience of community life that would help us deepen our following of Jesus and our option for the poor. On November 5, 1982, we began the Lay Community of St. Angela. It is with joy in my heart that I celebrate and thank God for the coming of Saint Angela into my life.

At this time, through the Ursuline Sisters, Paulina, Karen, Margot, Loreta and Claudia I met Angela Merici. They were religious women concerned for the formation, development and leadership abilities of the most vulnerable population, especially of women and youth in Urrunaga one of the poorest sectors in the district of Jose Leonardo Ortiz. They sought to live their spirituality in a deep solidarity and friendship with the poor, the sick, the youth. They accompanied committed lay persons to find their path in the church and society. This is how I encountered them.

Through them I came to know Angela as a fellow disciple. I came to know her very great love for Jesus, her deep desire to continually deepen the Word given to us in the Gospel and to live a life open to the Spirit of God, attentive to the signs of the times, always, with great confidence that the Spirit was with her. I identified deeply with Angela's search for freedom for herself and for the poor women of her time and for the conviction of women's ability to make decisions and to resolve the various situations presented to them.

I experience Angela as a woman of hope. Her deep faith led her to live her life in the "world" not in a convent but close to those in need. Angela opened new doors accepting challenges in the Church and in Society of how we can be present to those most in need, especially women. Angela was ahead of her times living the invitation of Pope Francis to us today to be to be a Church on the way, on the journey. Angela demonstrated that hope is nourished by responding to the voices of those who call for justice, voices that must be listened to, healed, helped and supported. Getting to

know Angela has brought me great joy and I experience that she is always with me animating me and encouraging me in my searches.

Angela's ability to 'be with the 'other' has given me a more profound way to live and serve Jesus and the Gospel. Angela, lived the words she spoke to the women of her time to be "like an open plaza" where all who come can rest, feel free, accepted, listened to and valued. This aspect of Angela's spirituality is one that I greatly value and has made me realize that the houses where 'Angelinas' live must also be places where all are listened to and welcomed. I have been deeply touched by this aspect of Angela's spirituality and hope that the Community House where I live reflects this spirit.

We are 29 women who belong to the Lay Community of Saint Angela. In our anniversary celebration we renewed our commitment to sustain hope in a time of deep crisis politically and a time of reform of the Church. We deeply believe that Jesus never abandons us and that we are always accompanied by Angela who continually animates and renews our spirit.

Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Angela! WOMAN OF HOPE.

