

MY BISHOP'S BIRTHDAY GIFT

On my birthday one Sunday morning, my husband and I were getting ready for church when the phone rang. I answered, and the bishop said, "I know today is your birthday, but could you meet with me in my office in 30 minutes? I would like to talk with you."

Curious, I hurried to church.

In his office, the bishop said to me, "Sister Cruz, I have a birthday present for you. The Lord is calling you to serve as Young Women president. Will you accept this calling?" I felt overwhelmed, but I accepted the calling. I was sustained and set apart that day.

When I returned home after church, I sat on my bed. The weight of responsibility hit me. I cried and felt inadequate for the work. What a responsibility to guide those young women! I was baptized when I was 22 and had never attended Young Women activities before. How could I be Young Women president?

I did the only thing I knew to do—I knelt and asked Heavenly Father for guidance in this new calling. At that moment I had an experience I will never forget. As I visualized each young woman, I understood that each was a daughter of Heavenly Father.

Each needed a president who loved her and could help her understand that God loved her. In my mind I saw the names of all the less-active young women (whom I had never met), and I understood that they were also daughters of Heavenly Father and needed my attention. I felt each one's potential.

The following months were not easy. I worked hard to get to know each young woman and to understand her needs. Together with the active young women, our presidency helped those who had been less active return to activity. I saw the hand of the Lord at work in many ways.

When I was released from my calling, I worried that perhaps I could have done more. Upon arriving home, I knelt and asked Heavenly Father if my service had been acceptable. I received a sweet feeling that He was pleased.

I thought back on that birthday when I could have turned down the calling because of all my other responsibilities. But I am the one who would have lost most by not accepting the calling. I would have lost the opportunity to learn humility, gain understanding, develop patience, and become an instrument in the Lord's hands. But mostly I would have failed the Lord in the confidence He placed in me, and I would have failed to learn that the opportunity to serve is a gift. ■

Mariana Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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