

From top gun to top nun

Faith detour takes new Claretian from FBI aspirant to 'God's agent'

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MIAMI | Growing up, Sister Ivette Habach aspired to become an FBI special agent and earned a degree in criminal justice in 2011. But the 28-year-old recently took a big step on her journey — from top gun to top nun.

Sister Ivette professed her first vows as a Claretian Missionary at St. John Vianney College Seminary Dec. 8 during a quietly joyful Mass celebrated in Spanish. She entered the order in 2012 and will make her final vows in five years. The date also marked the 50th anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council, the start of the Jubilee Year of Mercy and the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the congregation's patron saint.

"In this year that today opens, the Year of Mercy, to me it's like an invitation to welcome that mercy into my life and be also like a channel of mercy for others," said Sister Ivette in an interview. Her profession "means to have found the pearl of great value and to reorient my life, all my dreams, everything toward him. It also means to have Jesus as the center of my life and to love and serve others with all my heart."

The celebrant of the Mass was Father Jose Luis Menendez, pastor of Corpus Christi Parish in Miami, where Claretians have worked for decades. Attendees included members of the Claretian lay group, members of the St. Timothy Parish young adult group which Sister Ivette has led for three years, Corpus Christi friends, Daughters of Charity, Teresian Sisters, and seminarians, faculty and staff of St. John Vianney, where she has studied.

Following the Scripture readings, Sister Ivette, wearing a knee-length gray habit, stood before the altar adorned with white lilies and roses. Claretian Sister Elisabeth Rodriguez asked the novice if she wanted to voluntarily accept her vows.

"I commit myself to follow in the footsteps of Christ, my all, in the spirit of poverty of the Beatitudes; I commit myself to imitate Christ who made himself obedient unto death on the cross and to live the gift of virginity that leads me to a total dedication of service to God and others," she replied.

Then the local Claretian superior, Sister Ondina Cortes, placed a



Claretian Sister Ondina Cortes puts the veil on newly professed Sister Ivette Habach.

veil and crucifix on Sister Ivette and presented her with the congregation's constitution.

Sister Ivette is of Cuban and Syrian heritage, but grew up in Venezuela. After her profession, she spoke of her determination to marry, have children and become an FBI agent. But as she graduated from Florida International University, she began to discern and later was inspired by a passionate, joyful Claretian nun she heard speaking at a retreat.

"I was not paying attention to deep in my heart what (God) wanted me to do, to be available to everybody, to bring joy and to serve everybody," she said. "If you are in married life you have to be devoted to your kids, your husband; your attention is divided. And when you are in religious life (God) is our everything, and then from him everything flows."

She said she was drawn to the missionary charism and family-like community of the Claretians, founded in 1855 in Cuba. In Florida there are 12 sisters and one novice in convents in Miami, West Palm Beach and Mayo. They work in parish ministry and education.

"They are very open to people and to bring the good news of the Gospel. And I really think that's what we all need, someone who shares that hope and the joy of the

Gospel," Sister Ivette said.

She added with a smile that members of the youth group she has led at San Lazaro Parish in Hialeah "say that I went from being a top gun to a top nun. God can be very creative sometimes."

The enthusiastic Claretian credits the support and witness of her family and sisters for giving her the courage to give her life to God "full time." She said she eventually hopes to work for human rights.

"I really have a passion for justice, to fight for justice and bring love. I don't know exactly how, but I know that God will open a way," she said. "I used to pursue my personal agenda of wanting to become an FBI special agent. Now I have become God's agent, working for his agenda of love, justice, peace and service."

Her brother, Sadik Habach, travelled from Atlanta with his family. "I'm very confident that she will inspire even more people and move people closer to Our Lord" with her joy and kindness, he said.

"She's unique, vivacious, assertive, loving, sharing," said Doris Strong, Sister Ivette's classmate in a Barry University master's degree program. "She has everything you can think of, a good Christian and somebody really in the path of Our Lord. She has it within her no doubt



Claretian novice Ivette Habach poses before her first profession of vows with her parents, Eloina Marticorena and Sadik Habach.



Claretian Sister Ondina Cortes, right, questions Ivette Habach before her profession of vows. (PHOTOS BY ROBERTO AGUIRRE | FC)

— top notch."

Sister Ondina, who teaches at St. Thomas University in Miami Gardens, accompanied Sister Ivette over the last three years. "It was very joyful for us to see her so happy and how she came to her journey. It's a witness to young people."

While many see religious life as centering on restrictions after decades of decline in vocations, Sister Ondina said that it actually frees one from attachments and opens many possibilities. "It empowers you to love beyond all limits." ■