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Sanctuary of Hope: Lived Experiences of Selected Missionary Sisters Sheltering Vulnerable Citizens

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Abstract

This study examined the experiences of missionary sisters caring for vulnerable individuals in San Pablo City, Laguna, focusing on their coping mechanisms and the challenges they face, particularly their physiological and psychological struggles. Using a phenomenological approach, the research identified key themes of caregiving, spirituality, and community support. The findings emphasized the sisters' commitment to holistic care, the role of faith in overcoming difficulties, and the need for self-care and emotional balance. The study recommended strategies to enhance their well-being and called for increased support from local governments and NGOs to sustain their vital work.

Keywords: Missionary Sisters, Vulnerable Citizens, Challenges, Coping Strategies, Resilience, Spiritual Practices, Caregiving

Duties

1. Introduction

Women, especially from religious backgrounds, have long been underrepresented in many fields. Missionary sisters, driven by faith and compassion, dedicate their lives to helping vulnerable individuals, reflecting their spiritual commitment to both God and humanity. Their role in missionary work gained recognition in the late 1700s, with British missionaries acknowledging their significant contributions, as noted by Grimshaw *et al.* (2021) [3].

This study focused on exploring the experiences of missionary sisters in Laguna, Philippines, specifically those who provided care to vulnerable individuals. It aimed to understand the challenges they faced and how they coped with the physical and psychological demands of their work.

The findings from this study sought to shed light on the significance of the missionary sisters' well-being in providing effective care. It also aimed to suggest ways to improve their physical and emotional capacity to better serve the communities they support.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

The study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of missionary sisters caring for vulnerable individuals in Laguna, Philippines, particularly in healthcare. This method provided in-depth insights into their interactions and the challenges they faced, allowing the researchers to analyze and interpret their findings to draw meaningful conclusions and generate new perspectives.

B. Research Locale

The study was conducted in San Pablo, Laguna, focusing on respondents from this area to examine the experiences of missionary sisters providing care for vulnerable individuals. This choice of location allowed for a more focused analysis of the context and provided relevant insights aligned with the study's objectives.



Fig 1: Map of Laguna Province, Philippines

C. Population and Sampling

The study focused on women aged 21 and older, selecting five missionary sisters in San Pablo City, Laguna, through purposeful sampling for in-depth data. Purposeful sampling ensured participants had rich insights, while snowball sampling expanded the pool to include hard-to-reach individuals. These methods facilitated a thorough exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Table 1: Eligibility Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Service Time Frame	6 months - 1 year & above	1 month to 5 months
Participants	Active missionary sisters	Nuns in convent or monastery
Age	21 years old and above	20 years old below
Language	English/Filipino	Other languages
Place	Laguna, Philippines	Other provinces
Setting	Communities/organization	Convent/monastery
Phenomena	Psychological and physiological	Other challenges not related to
	challenges faced by missionary sisters	the study objective
Population	Five (5) participants	Six (6) and above participants

D. Research Participants

The researchers focused on missionary sisters with direct experience in outreach, counseling, and assisting individuals in need, excluding nuns focused on prayer and convent work. They specifically studied those serving in San Pablo, Laguna, Philippines, to understand the varied contexts of their work.

E. Research Instrumentation

The study used semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires to gather insights from missionary sisters in Laguna, Philippines. The questions were validated by experts, piloted with a small sample, and refined based on participant feedback to ensure validity and reliability.

F. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers gathered data through semi-structured interviews, face-to-face sessions, and demographic profiling, supplemented by overt participant observation. The data were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to identify key themes, with triangulation of

supplementary data to enhance credibility and reliability.

G. Ethical Consideration

The researchers followed ethical guidelines, ensuring data privacy and participant confidentiality per the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were fully aware of the study's purpose, risks, and benefits. They could withdraw at any time, with their autonomy respected throughout the process.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the study's results, linking them to its objectives and existing literature. Using a systematic approach, participants' responses were analyzed through coding and IPA, highlighting key themes and patterns that reinforce the study's credibility and depth. The results and discussion are divided into three parts: the Annotated Exemplars, the Main Themes and the Sub-themes, and the Proposed Program Plan.

Table 2: Annotated Exemplars on the Sisters' Personal Motivation

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 1	"I am inspired to share my love for others. To others. Kapag inlove ka, kaya mong gawin lahat.	Her eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, and her smile radiates warmth, reflecting the deep empathy and happiness she derives from her mission.
Participant 2	"The heart is for charity, for helping out those who need it. When I was in college, I was also a member of a socio civil organization who does outreach programs so, kumbaga sanay talaga ako na mag outreach."	Participant 2's response conveyed a deep sense of pride and commitment to her mission of helping others.
Participant 4	"Para maglingkod. Serbisyo. Kaya 'yon 'yung ginagawa ko hanggang ngayon na maglingkod. Kahit na walang kapalit."	Participant four responded with a heartfelt sincerity that was unmistakable in her facial expressions.

During the interviews, participants expressed a strong emotional connection to their mission of service. Participant 1's joyful demeanor and enthusiastic tone reflected her passion for helping others, while Participant 2's confident smile and steady voice revealed her unwavering commitment to charity. Participant 4's warm smile and steady tone highlighted her sincere devotion.

Table 3: Annotated Exemplars on the Physiological Difficulties during their Apostolic Responsibilities

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 1	"When it comes to physical, talagang do'n papasok 'yung pagod. As a missionary (sister), kalimitan, nagkakasakit ka, especially kapag hindi ka talaga sanay 'dun sa missionary work."	Participant 1's expressions and emotions highlighted the physical challenges she faces as a missionary sister.
Participant 3	"Ayon lang 'yung pagkakasakit. Siyempre pag ika'y nagsakit sa kumbento hindi mo magagawa 'yung apostolate mo"	Participant 3 reflected on her past struggles, her brow furrowing and gaze drifting, indicating a moment of contemplation.
Participant 5	"Kase ako noong during my Formation period, noon ako ay masakitin talaga. Ako'y very weak kaya 'pag ako'y nilagnat talagang mataas. Muntik pa nga akong palabasin dahil sa sakit 'yun 'yung struggle ko."	Participant 5 expressed a quiet sadness as she shared her experiences with illness while helping others.

During the interview, the Missionary Sisters' facial expressions and emotions revealed the contrast between the joy of their work and its physical toll. Participant 1's warm expression turned serious as she spoke of fatigue and illness, while Participant 3's distant gaze and heavy tone showed the emotional strain of physical limitations. Participant 5, though

composed, subtly conveyed exhaustion and sadness when discussing her health struggles. These emotional shifts highlighted the impact of physical challenges on their wellbeing, yet their commitment to their mission remained strong, illustrating the personal sacrifices they made.

Table 4: Annotated Exemplars on the Psychological Influence of their Apostolic Responsibilities

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 1	"Nakakaano siya mentally na isipin mo na ano ba talaga yung nangyayari within sa isip nila, tsaka sa pain na nararamdaman nila inside?"	Participant 1 displayed a furrowed brow and a distant gaze, suggesting deep engagement with the emotional demands of her work.
Participant 5	"Syempre yung patience. Talagang tatyagain mo sila kahit makulit, kahit iba-iba sila ng mood, kahit paulit-ulit."	Participant 5 conveyed determination and emotional resilience, emphasizing the importance of patience and compassion in navigating challenges with a calm, steady demeanor.

Participant 1, with a furrowed brow and distant gaze, expressed the emotional strain of her role, reflecting on the inner struggles of those she cares for. Participant 5, with a

calm and focused expression, emphasized the need for patience in her work, showing emotional resilience and strength in maintaining compassion despite challenges.

Table 5: Annotated Exemplars on their Positive Perception and Management on Challenges

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 2	"I was grateful for that experience. It was a memorable and grateful experience."	Participant 2 warmly expressed heartfelt gratitude for a memorable experience, emphasizing its lasting emotional impact and the deep fulfillment it brought to her life.
Participant 5	"Sinisikap ko maging positive. Sa tulong ng biyaya ng diyos talagang ako'y nakapag- tagumpayan ko basta siguro andun na yung biyaya ng diyos sa akin na gawin kong positive yung mga ganoong situwasyon"	Participant 5 spoke with an optimistic tone, accompanied by a shift in expression as she explained how she perceived challenges in her missions.

rticipant 2 spoke with a warm smile and soft gaze as she shared a meaningful experience, expressing gratitude and emotional fulfillment. Her tone conveyed how the experience had a lasting impact, highlighting the positive rewards she gained. Similarly, Participant 5 spoke with quiet

determination, reflecting on overcoming challenges through faith. Her calm demeanor and steady gaze illustrated how resilience and belief played key roles in maintaining a positive outlook.

Table 6: Annotated Exemplars on their Spiritual and Physiological Coping Strategies

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 1	"Pray. Pray in a way na it really benefits peace of mind and I can continue my whole day ba."	Participant 1's face softened with calm, and her eyes grew distant, reflecting the inner peace prayer brings as she explained how it helps her get through the day.
Participant 3	"Yun lang naman ang aking ano, relax lang. Wala, 'yun lang talaga."	Participant 3 spoke about her relaxation approach with a relaxed and satisfied expression.
Participant 4	"Nahingi ako ng tulong kay Lord na bigyan Niya 'ko ng lakas para makayanan ko 'yung mga pagsubok na ibinigay Niya sa akin."	During the interview, Participant 4 displayed faith and hope, relying heavily on spiritual strength and resilience.
Participant 5	"Prayer kase iyon ang the best na makakapagpagaan ng kalooban; doon ka talaga makakasurvive thru prayer talaga kase yung pakikipag- usap mo kay lord, talagang magkakaroon ka ng kaliwanagan."	Participant 5 spoke about prayer with a serene, almost enlightened expression.

The participants' expressions revealed how prayer and spirituality helped them cope with caregiving challenges. Participant 1's serene face showed how prayer brought peace and strength, while Participant 3's relaxed demeanor and

"Relax lang" reflected a simple approach to stress relief. Participant 4's focused gaze emphasized her reliance on prayer for strength, and Participant 5's calm expression conveyed comfort and clarity through prayer.

Table 7: Annotated Exemplars on Assisting on Building Resilience and Coping in Vulnerable Citizen and Managing Individual Well-Being

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 1	"Ako naman ang magbigay nung compassion and empathy. Simply, yung hug, diba? 'Yung maramdaman nila na meron silang kasama. May taong yumayakap sa kanila o kaya naman, may nakikinig sa kanila."	Participant 1 highlighted how offering a comforting presence and listening attentively brings peace to those in her care, with her tone reflecting warmth and genuine concern.
Participant 2	"Balance life pa rin naman. Kumbaga yung personal time, siesta 'yan 'yung personal time ko Sabi nga namin apostolate of presence because you are there, I'm also handling ministry of listening actually, so isa iyon sa mga advocacies ko, mental health awareness then I also do safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, in regular friendships, katabi mo lang okay na, yung ganon?"	Participant 2 spoke with a steady voice, mentioning her "apostolate of presence," while a subtle nod reflected her quiet confidence in her caregiving approach during the interview.
Participant 5	"Syempre yung pagi-ingat ko sa sarili halimbawa mayroon na akong mga nararamdaman- noong ako'y chineck up mataas daw ang aking sugar, ginagawa ko nagleless ako kung ano 'yung mga bawal."	Participant 5's facial expressions and tones revealed the delicate balance between personal well-being and the dedication required for caregiving, underscoring the inner strength and emotional intelligence needed to offer both care and self-care in such a demanding role.

Participants' expressions revealed the emotional depth of caregiving and the need for balance between self-care and others' needs. Participant 1 emphasized compassion, Participant 2 highlighted mental health balance, and

Participant 5 focused on self-care to sustain caregiving. Schempp (2022) [5] notes that self-awareness, community support, and joy in service help prevent burnout and maintain resilience.

Table 8: Annotated Exemplars on the Importance of Social Support Groups in Apostolic Responsibilities

PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	RESEARCH OBSERVATION
Participant 1	"Meron kaming community life na kasama namin magdasal, may makikinig sa'yo, and may mag a-advise sa'yo kapag nandun ka na sa part ng hindi mo na talaga kaya, na dumadaan ka dun sa crisis. Parang sila 'yung charger ko. Doon ako, nakiki-charge para maging full.	Participant 1's expression relaxed with gratitude as she spoke about her shared community life.
Participant 3	Syempre bahagi rin yung mga tao, sila sa iyo para makatulong ka rin sa kanila."	Participant 3, discussing support from both her caregiving environment and beyond, displayed a calm and understanding demeanor.
Participant 5	"Isa 'yun din sa mga syempre nagpapatatag sa akin; maramdaman na you are belonged, you are accepted. Kumbaga sa pamamagitan ng suporta nila sa akin, nararamdaman ko na l'm a member of the community.	Participant 5's expression reflected a strong feeling of belonging and acceptance.

The participants' expressions highlighted the vital role of community support in emotional well-being and caregiving. Participant 1 described her community as a "charger" that replenished her, while Participant 3 emphasized the balance of giving and receiving support. Participant 5 expressed pride

in the sense of belonging her community provided. These insights align with Mahfoud *et al.* (2023) ^[4], who noted that social support strengthens emotional resilience, especially through shared spiritual practices.

Table 9: Organizing Subthemes — Sisters' Personal Motivation

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES
Passion and Heart to Serve	Participant 1	"I am inspired to share my love for others. To others. Kapag inlove ka, kaya mong gawin lahat."
	Participant 2	"The heart is for charity, for helping out those who need it."
	Participant 4	"Para maglingkod. Serbisyo. Kaya 'yon 'yung ginagawa ko hanggang ngayon na maglingkod. Kahit na walang kapalit."
Community Engagement Background	Participant 2	"When I was in college, I was also a member of a socio civil organization who does outreach programs so, kumbaga sanay talaga ako na mag outreach, mag talk, makisalamuha."

"Sister's Motivation" emphasizes the missionary sisters' deep commitment to serving others with compassion, driven by their faith and religious calling. Their dedication to helping vulnerable individuals through outreach, counseling, and assistance reflects a passion for service, not personal gain. By actively engaging in community programs, they embodied love, humility, and sacrifice, connecting faith with action to uplift those in need.

Table 10: Organizing Subthemes Physiological Difficulties in Apostolic Responsibilities

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES
Sickness	Participant 1	"As a missionary (sister), kalimitan, nagkakasakit ka, especially kapag hindi ka talaga sanay 'dun sa missionary work."
	Participant 3	"Ayon lang 'yung pagkakasakit."
	Participant 5	"Noon ako ay masakitin talaga. Ako'y very weak kaya 'pag ako'y nilagnat talagang mataas.
Fatigue	Participant 1	"Talagang do'n papasok 'yung pagod."

The theme "Physiological Difficulties in Apostolic Responsibilities" highlights the physical strain on missionary sisters, including exhaustion and illness affecting their service. Despite harsh conditions, their commitment

remained strong. Studies by Dinh (2021) [2] and Arnold (2023) [1] stress the need for better support to safeguard their health while continuing their mission.

Table 11: Organizing Subthemes Psychological Influence in Apostolic Responsibilities

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES
Compassion	Participant 1	"Nakakaano siya mentally na isipin mo na ano ba talaga 'yung nangyayari within sa isip nila, tsaka sa pain na nararamdaman nila inside?"
	Participant 2	"Ako'y naaawa kasi yung mga may sakit naghahanap rin sila ng pagmamahal doon sa mga naga-alaaga sa kanila: 'yung atensyon, 'yung pag-unawa."
Emotional Enrichment	Participant 2	"Emotional enrichment, hindi burden. It's a good experience for me."
Stress	Participant 1	"To 1 week, nasa ospital ako. Ang sabi ng doktor, kaya raw ako nagka-fever tsaka 'yung allergy, it's because of stress na ang tanong eh kung meron daw akong pinag-a-adjust-an na environment."
Impatience	Participant 5	"Syempre yung patience. Talagang tatyagain mo sila kahit makulit, kahit iba-iba sila ng mood, kahit paulit-ulit."

The theme "Psychological Influence in Apostolic Responsibilities" focused on the mental challenges faced by missionary sisters, including stress and emotional strain.

Their faith and compassion helped them find resilience, highlighting the importance of balance and self-awareness in their roles.

Table 12: Organizing Subthemes — Positive Perception and Management on Challenges

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES
Meaningful Experience	Participant 2	"I was grateful for that experience. Tt was a memorable and grateful experience."
Positive Thinking	Participant 5	"Sinisikap ko maging positive. Sa tulong ng biyaya ng diyos talagang ako'y nakapagtagumpayan ko basta siguro andun na yung biyaya ng diyos sa akin na gawin kong positive yung mga ganoong situwasyon"

The theme "Positive Perception and Management of Challenges" explored how missionary sisters viewed obstacles as opportunities for growth Their resilience and

positive mindset helped them navigate difficulties, like Typhoon Ondoy's aftermath, and grow personally and professionally.

Table 13: Organizing Subthemes — Spiritual and Physiological Coping Strategies

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	
Prayers	Participant 1	"Pray in a way na it really benefits peace of mind and I can continue my whole day ba."	
	Participant 4	"Nahingi ako ng tulong kay Lord na bigyan Niya 'ko ng lakas para makayanan ko 'yung mga pagsubok na ibinigay Niya sa akin."	
	Participant 5	"Prayer kase iyon ang the best na makakapagpagaan ng kalooban; doon ka talaga makakasurvive thru prayer talaga kase yung pakikipag- usap mo kay lord, talagang magkakaroon ka ng kaliwanagan."	
Relaxation/Unwinding	Participant 3	"Yun lang naman ang aking ano, relax lang. Wala, 'yun lang talaga "	

The theme "Spiritual and Physiological Coping Strategies" highlighted how missionary sisters relied on faith, prayer, and self-care to overcome challenges. Prayer provided strength during exhaustion and emotional strain, while rest helped

maintain their well- being. These strategies enabled them to sustain their commitment and continue serving with compassion.

Table 14: Organizing Subthemes — Assisting on Building Resilience and Coping in Vulnerable Individuals

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES
Physical and Emotional Comfort	Participant 1	"Ako naman ang magbigay nung compassion and empathy. Simply, 'yung hug, diba? 'Yung maramdaman nila na meron silang kasama. May taong yumayakap sa kanila o kaya naman, may nakikinig sa kanila."
	Participant 2	"Sabi nga namin apostolate of presence because you are there."
Active Listening	Participant 1	"I'm also handling ministry of listening actually, so isa iyon sa mga advocacies ko, mental health awareness then I also do safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, in regular friendships, katabi mo lang okay na, yung ganon?"

The theme "Building Resilience and Coping in Vulnerable Individuals" highlighted how missionary sisters supported vulnerable people through compassion, active listening, and emotional care. Their presence offered comfort, helping individuals feel heard and valued while empowering them to face future challenges with strength and hope.

Table 14.1: Organizing Subthemes — Managing Individual Well-being

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES	
Self-Care	Participant 5	"Syempre yung pagi-ingat ko sa sarili halimbawa mayroon na akong mga nararamdaman noong ako'y chineck up mataas daw ang aking sugar, ginagawa ko nagleless ako kung ano	
Service-Life Balance	Participant 2	'yung mga bawal." "Balance life pa rin naman. Kumbaga yung personal time, siesta 'yan 'yung personal time ko."	

The theme "Managing Individual Well-Being" emphasized the coping strategies used by missionary sisters to maintain their physical, emotional, and mental health. Practices like prayer, rest, and regular health check-ups helped them stay resilient and effective in their roles. By balancing service with personal time and reflection, the sisters ensured sustainability in their work, preventing burnout and maintaining their ability to care for others.

Table 15: Organizing Subthemes — Importance of Social Support Groups in Apostolic Responsibilities

SUBTHEMES	PARTICIPANTS	RESPONSES		
Sense of Support and Belongingness Within Community	Participant 1	"Meron kaming community life na kasama namin magdasal, may makikinig sa'yo, and may mag a-advise sa'yo kapag nandun ka na sa part ng hindi mo na talaga kaya, na dumadaan ka dun sa crisis. Parang sila 'yung charger ko. Doon ako, nakiki-charge para maging full."		
	Participant 5	"You are belonged, you are accepted. I'm a member of the		
Mutual Support from External Community	Participant 3	community." "Syempre bahagi rin yung mga tao, sila sa iyo para makatulong ka rin sa kanila."		

The theme "Importance of Social Support Groups in Apostolic Responsibilities" highlighted how missionary sisters relied on community support for emotional well-being

and resilience. Both internal and external support helped them stay committed to their mission and overcome challenges.

Table 16: Proposed Program Plan BAYANI: Building Abilities and Yielding Assistance through Nurturing and Integration

Training Sessions	Objective	Resource Needed	Projected Budget	Timeline	Success Indicator
Regular Check-Ins and Mental Health Screenings	Offer mental health screenings that can identify early signs of stress, anxiety, and depression.	Mental Health Professional Local Government Organization	P 1,000 per person	Every after Mission	Implementing this program will positively impact and enhance the mental well-being of the missionary sisters, providing them with essential support and promoting their overall psychological health.
Psychologi cal Counseling Session	Offer therapy sessions, either individually or in group settings that can help address challenges related to stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue.	Mental Health Clinics	₱ 2,500 per person	Every After Mission	This counseling session is designed to foster the psychological well-being of the missionary sisters, resulting in improved mental health and emotional resilience.

Mental Health Professiona Is Collaborati on Program	Partnering with psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers to offer comprehensive mental health care, including assessments, diagnoses, and treatments as needed.	Mental Health Professional	₱ 2,500 per Mental Health Professional / Volunteerism	Every 3 Months	Developing a collaborative program with mental health professionals is expected to enhance the mental health and well-being of the missionary sisters, providing them with comprehensive support and fostering a healthier, more resilient community.
Physical Health and Wellness Programs	Offers fitness activities, nutrition counseling, and health check-ups that can improve overall health.	Nutritionist Fitness Instructor	P 1,500 both Nutritionist and Fitness Instructor	Every 3 Months	The implementation of this program aims to support and promote an active, healthy ifestyle among the missionary sisters, fostering their physical vitality and overall well-being.
Vocational Training and Empowerm ent	teaching vocational skills to those in their shelters not only benefits the residents but also empowers the sisters in their mission to bring sustainable change.	• TESDA	₱5,000 overall budget	Annual	Executing this training program will strengthen the vocational skills of the missionary sisters and those in their shelter empowering them with valuable abilities that enhance their personal and professional growth.
"Grace & Grit" Emergency Response Training	Focused on emergency response within faith missions, this program would offer training for situations like natural disasters, food shortages, or sudden influxes of people needing shelter. Sisters could learn practical emergency management techniques, as well as spiritual practices for maintaining peace and offering comfort in crisis.	National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council Philippine Red Cross	P5,000 overall budget	Annual	By implementing this program, the missionary sisters will enhance their readiness and preparedness for emergency situations, equipping them with the essential skills and confidence needed to respond effectively in times of crisis.

BAYANI supports the holistic well-being of Missionary Sisters through programs focused on self- care, mindfulness, and professional development, helping them build resilience and balance to serve effectively

4. Discussion

The study's themes are summarized in a figure graph, showcasing the experiences of five Missionary Sisters from San Pablo, Laguna, highlighting their mission work, challenges, and impact.

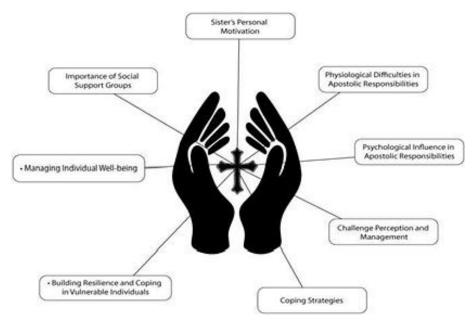


Fig 2: Key Emerging Themes

The diagram highlights the Missionary Sisters' balance of faith, challenges, resilience, and service. Despite physical and emotional tolls, their commitment, supported by community and self-care, reflects the transformative power of compassion.

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