

## WITNESS

I was born and raised in a faithful - but not radical - muslim family in Iran. We learned how to pray and to fast. I got my first veil with 5. That was funny, I played with it. Then I did not know that later it would become a chain.

When I was 10 – 1979 – the islamic revolution happened. Before that many women did not wear a veil. But over night everything changed. People were sentenced to death, many had to flee. Books which were not to unite with Sharia were burned. Schools and universities closed for months. After they re-opened many teachers had been murdered as well as many others who said something against the regime. Others were whipped in public because they said something against Ramadan or smelled after alcohol.

A special police (vice squad) was founded to watch over the new rules of morality and sentenced severely those who made mistakes.... That was my everyday life then.

With this external situation an internal emptiness came. For many Muslims it became impossible to find a good contact with such a God. And people started to look for a God, who they really could love and adore, who makes it possible to come close to him.

This God we find in Christianity. After my escape to Austria I experienced Jesus Christ and decided to become baptised.

In the beginning it was difficult. The worst thing was that I lost my family. Family is everything for Muslims. The one who loses his family in the oriental regions loses everything. You spend more time in the families than in the western world. Education happens in the families ...

And in times of need family supports you...

After baptism everything was new. I learned to know a loving God, who sent and gave his son for our sake.

Through my faith I found a new home and family: the church, which is more than blood-relationship but overcomes frontiers, races, languages - and it is spread all over the world.

In Orient we grow up into a family where everyone takes his responsibility according to his talents.

I experienced this in my new Christian family. After baptism the parish became my home and I took over duties according to my talents. The church was not only a place where I got something, but where I could participate and act.

That was the welcoming I experienced. I was accepted as a member of the church. I was no more a stranger but a sister who could be trusted – with a start as a helper at the parish flea-market... I got time and place to grow into my new family and to learn. Living together, celebrating, working in a parish gave us neophytes the possibility to learn how to live and love as a Christian. You learn it by doing, not only from books or catechesis.

Welcoming means for me: to be noticed as a fellow human being and then to be received as a member in the church, where you may act, live and celebrate with others.

Thanks for your attention.