

Echoes July-August 2006

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10th Study Document on the Revised Constitutions

CHAPTER VI: GOVERNMENT

AT LOCAL LEVEL

(C. 81-83; St. 63-67)

I. INTRODUCTION

Government at "local level" is the aspect of government that affects Sisters most directly. They do, of course, have dealings with those who govern at Provincial level, but these contacts are not on such a regular basis. This is confirmed in article 34 of the Constitutions which states, "*The local community is the primary place of belonging for the Daughters of Charity.*" We would go further and say that it is the first and the most important place. In fact, the image that many Daughters of Charity have of the Company, is linked to the experiences they have had in the different local communities they have belonged to. From this simple statement we can see how much we need to pay attention to this concrete place which is so important for the life and work of a Daughter of Charity.

In studying this level of local government we can refer back to the general principles of government stated in articles 60-63 which we commented on in the first part of the eighth document. It would be useful to reread these before you begin to study this present document. You will find there the principal changes that have been introduced, as well as

some observations on the most important statements with regard to these three essential points: the local community, the Sister Servant and the Local Community Plan.

II. MAIN POINTS OF THE DOCUMENT

1. THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

The Second Vatican Council Constitution *Lumen gentium* states that it is the entire universal Church that is represented and which acts in each Christian Assembly. If we look at a polyhedron we will realise that the whole geometrical figure can rest on any one of its bases and this can help us to understand something of the relationship between the universal Church and a specific community.

This explanation can help us to understand that the spirit and aims of the Company are alive and embodied in each local community. It is here that “*each Daughter of Charity, united with her Sisters, lives out her vocation.*” (C.81) and comes to have a deeper sense of belonging to the Company in general (cf. C.34). I would even go so far as to say that the local community embodies and represents in reality, not just the Company but the entire universal Church. This is how we can interpret the words at the beginning of article 81 of the Constitutions, “*the local community, a living cell of the Church.*”

The principles of participation and co-responsibility mean that all the Sisters, and not just the Sister Servant, are responsible for building up the community. It might be said that she has most responsibility for this but she is not alone in the task because the Constitutions state very plainly that the Sister Servant “*together with her Sisters, is responsible for the accomplishment of their common mission.*” (C.82a). How are these principles applied in this chapter on local government? The Sisters take part in the Visitatrice’s consultations with the Province prior to the appointment of new Sister Servants (cf. C.82b; St 65b) as well as the consultation that takes place with the local community before the Sister Servant of that community is appointed for a further three years (cf. C. 82c). They also take part in the consultations with the Sister Servant for the appointment of the local Assistant and Treasurer (cf. St. 66, a,b). They participate by right in the Domestic Council, in the drawing up and implementing of the Community Plan, as well as in all matters concerning the day to day life of the community and the mission (cf. C.82 f; St. 63, 66c, 67).

2. THE SISTER SERVANT

In June 1642 the Founders decided to give the name “Sister Servant” to the Sister in charge of each local community and this choice of name was accepted and is still in use today. It expresses the Gospel understanding of authority: “*If I, then, being Master and Lord, have washed your feet, so you too, must wash one another’s feet.*” (Jn. 13, 14). “*This is not to happen among you. No; anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant and anyone who wants to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (Mt 20. 26-28). The Constitutions recognise that the Sister Servant “*has certain powers in her own right*” (C. 82d) but these powers which are clearly set out in the Constitutions, are given to her so that she can effectively serve the community. The phrase, “*she is attentive to the needs of her Sisters*” (St. 64b) is another way of stating this idea of authority as service.

If we read carefully the articles on this level of government we will see that the office of Sister Servant is most important for the local community and consequently for the Company as a whole, so much so that in an article for the Echo, Father Quintano says, “*the most important office that a Daughter of Charity can be asked to take on is that of being Sister Servant.*” Some passages from the writings of the Founders confirm this: “*one of the greatest benefits that can accrue to the Company is to have a good Superioress and good officers*”; “*all that is good and all that is bad in a community depends on the Superioress*”; “*the Company is like a ship at sea, which should bring us to port, and Superiors are like the pilots who should guide it.*”¹ This last image helps us to develop the idea contained in Statute 64b concerning the Assembly and the Superiors General: these are responsible for animating the Company and keeping it faithful to its spirit and its mission in the Church. They have certain means of doing this at their disposal: the exercise of government, documents, elections and appointments, circulars, visitations, Council meetings, guides for the different offices, formation sessions, times for planning and evaluation.... The same holds true for Provincial government with regard to the Province. But for everything we have just said to reach local communities and affect the lives of the members, the key person is the Sister Servant. If she does not fulfil her role, everything we have just said is reduced to unassimilated documents, guidelines that are merely theoretical and plans that are not implemented.²

a) Principal changes in the revised Constitutions with regard to the appointment of a Sister Servant.

In the 1983 Constitutions, the appointment was made by the Visitatrice, subject to two conditions: she had to submit the Sister’s name to the Superioress General and the appointment had to be confirmed by the Superior General (C.3.45). In the present Constitutions, however, the Visitatrice makes the appointment and informs the Superioress General about it. (C. 82c). The reason for this change in roles is partly due to subsidiarity which has introduced the relevant changes at every level of government, and also, it is due in some measure to the increasingly important role that women are playing in the Church. In our times it is difficult to understand how the Superior General would need to confirm the appointment of Sister Servants in the Company.

After a Sister Servant has been in office for three years, the Visitatrice needs the “*consent of the Superioress General*” (C.82c) before reappointing her as Sister Servant. This small alteration in wording, “consent” in place of “informing” might be meant to tell us that ideally Sisters should not be Sister Servants for too long a time. For this reason, it is usually the case that the Superioress General is simply informed of the appointment. In exceptional cases, after a third three year term of office, the “consent” of the Superioress General is required. Nowadays, the situation of the Company in many Provinces means that what used to be exceptional can now become commonplace, but any extension to the Sister Servant’s mandate must always be based on necessity.

In this same article of the Constitutions there is a striking emphasis on the need to consult the community at the end of the Sister Servant’s second term of office. Of course, if it is not previously indicated, it is because the Sister Servant might come from another community and the Sisters might not know her well enough. In the case of a Sister Servant

¹ Coste X, p. 261-262, Conference of 22nd May 1657

² Cf. F. Quintano, “*The Sister Servant, what and how does she animate?*” *Echoes of the Company* (2000) p. 407

being chosen from within the local community, according to article 82, the Visitatrice must first consult the community.

The Constitutions also provide for the possibility of a mandate lasting less than three years. There can be special reasons for this. In this case, it is the Visitatrice with her Council who will study these reasons and give their approval (cf. C.82), and not the General Council as indicated in article 3.45 of the 1983 Constitutions. This is another consequence of applying the principle of subsidiarity.

There is a further change with regard to the Sister's age in vocation. For a Sister to be a Sister Servant she must be at least 10 years vocation (St. 64a) and not 7, as stated in additional clause 10 of the General Assembly of 1985. Perhaps this change was made because many sociologists and educators today say that people now mature more slowly, but it may also be because the office of Sister Servant is more difficult now than it used to be.

b) Role of the Sister Servant

The first paragraph of article 82 sums up the mission of the Sister Servant: she *“animates and leads the local community and maintains its unity. She strengthens its bonds with the Company and with the Church”* (C.82a). Basing his remarks on this article of the Constitution which has since been only slightly altered, Father Lloret sums up the role of Sister Servant in these three verbs: *to guide, to unite, to animate.*³ We ourselves think that the most important and necessary one of these verbs is “to animate” because to animate means to inspire courage in the community so that it may accomplish the aims for which it was founded. Taking this, her main mission, as our starting point, we can look at the different duties of the Sister Servant in more detail:

***To animate the spiritual life.** This service, which is very much a part of the Sister Servant's role, is clearly expressed in article 36: *“The Sister Servant creates with her Sisters a joyful atmosphere of faith, prayer, cordiality and apostolic zeal.”* (C.36a). If we begin this chapter on government by speaking of her mission with regard to the spiritual life, this is in no way contradictory because if the Sister in charge does not succeed in animating the spiritual life she will have failed to grasp the true meaning of government. Saint Vincent reminds us of the importance of the spiritual life : *“The interior life is necessary. We must tend to this, and to fail in this matter would be to fail altogether.”*⁴

How can the Sister Servant animate the spiritual life of her Sisters? By improving the quality of religious practices and making them more authentic so that they may both stimulate and express the spiritual life. Consequently, the Sister Servants should really be mindful of Mother Guillemin's recommendation: *“When a custom becomes something that is merely routine, it is essential that we find a way to revive and reinvigorate it.”*⁵ Another important way of animating the spiritual life can be through the communication and the dialogue that the Sister Servant has with each Sister, particularly at the time that they ask to renew their vows. Article 36b and Statute 21 give very precise and interesting guidelines for these communications to have the results we hope for.

³ Cf. M. Lloret CM, *The Sister Servant, why and how?* Echoes of the Company, March 1989

⁴ Coste XII, p.131, Conference of 21st February 1659

⁵ Mother Guillemin, *Instruction to the Sister Servants*, 1996, p. 196

*** Animating the mission**

This role is discussed in Statute 63 and Article 82a. Animating the mission means much more than simply being in charge of social services works. It often happens that the Sister Servant has a very heavy responsibility because as well as being the animator of the community she is also in charge of the work of the house. However, the Sister Servant must always remember that her main function is to motivate the Sisters of her community so that they understand and live out the mission in accordance with the spirit of the Company and with a Vincentian vision of poor people and of service. In this way they will avoid the risk of falling into professionalism. One of the best means of animating Sisters for the mission is apostolic reflection (Cf. C.36a; St.11a). Another means, and one that is directly connected with the mission, is the local Community Plan, something that we will be discussing in more detail later on (cf. C.83; St.67).

*** Animating community life (cf. C.35a; 63)**

The Sister Servant must start by accepting the sociological and psychological make up of her community: differences in age, outlook, temperament....and never forget that the Community is something that must always be seen through the eyes of faith.

Viewing it in this way, she sees that God has called and assembled the Sisters who make up her community. We do not choose the persons who will be journeying with us, it is God who chooses them for us. So it is with them that we have to build up community for the mission. Today, more than ever before, the task of animating community life requires a special mystique to motivate and sustain it.

To animate community life the Sister Servant should use the means indicated in the Constitutions for achieving this. Here are some of them: fostering the Sisters' co-responsibility and participation in the building up of community, dialogue which allows the community to share experiences and practise discernment about events in order to make decisions; creating an atmosphere of trust, freedom and joy; sisterly correction and spiritual charity; passing on information... (cf. C.32a-36).

C) Things that will help the Sister Servant in her work of governing

The principle of co-responsibility mentioned in the first paragraph of article 82 of the Constitutions calls on the Sisters to collaborate in the decisions taken by those in authority. We know that the Sister Servant will always have ultimate responsibility for community decisions. However, the Sisters in that community share responsibility with her, provided, of course, that they have taken part in the discernment process prior to the decision being taken. This principle of co-responsibility requires the Sister Servant to have a mindset that is in tune with today's sensibility that shows great regard for the individual, for freedom, participation, equality and dialogue. The General Assembly certainly took these values into account and they are embodied in the Constitutions. This principle of co-responsibility affects all the Sisters in the Community and forms the basis of the different structures of government such as the office of

*** The Assistant or Assistants of the community**

This is not the assistant of the Sister Servant but of the local community, (*according to the needs of the local community*) states St. 66a). For this reason it is the Visitatrice who appoints her. In the present Constitutions no mention is made of the duration of this office of Assistant or Assistants, as was the case in the 1983 Constitutions (*“she is appointed for three years and may be reappointed for a further three years.”*). The present Constitutions use the open-ended expression, *“the Assistant is appointed for a specific period of time by the Visitatrice with her Council”* (cf. St.66a). This formula allows the Visitatrice to adapt the appointment of the Assistant in accordance with the real needs of each community. This change must surely have come about because of experience. We should note that it is up to the Sister Servant to ask the Visitatrice for an Assistant for the community. But it is obvious that preparation has to take place before this request is made, (the need or the advantage of having an Assistant, names put forward): Statute 66a says that the Sister Servant *“will have consulted the community.”*

The office of Assistant to the local community highlights the importance of the office of Sister Servant. It exists to avoid any lack of governance in the community. It also ensures that there will always be a Daughter of Charity whose mission it is to animate, lead and unite the group of Sisters who have been brought together by the charism of Saint Vincent. (C.82a). In normal circumstances it is the Sister Servant who does this but if she is absent the Assistant takes on this role. At such times, as her name indicates, her main duty is to replace the Sister Servant when she is absent from the community or unable to exercise her office. Generally speaking, the specific role of the Assistant *“is determined in collaboration with the Sister Servant”* (St.66a). Obviously, the two people involved here are the Sister Servant and the Assistant.

*** The local Treasurer**

We have to consider the local Treasurer in relation to the Sister Servant because, in fact, she helps the Sister Servant in her mission to govern. Article 82e of the Constitutions states very clearly that the Sister Servant is responsible for the temporal goods of the local community. Since the local Treasurer is the Sister Servant’s helper, it is the Sister Servant who appoints her after consulting the community. For the same reason, the Treasurer will carry out her duties *“under the direction of the Sister Servant”* (St 66b).

We can see the progression from the Constitutions of 1963 to those of 2004 with regard to the appropriateness of having a local Treasurer: the phrase *“in certain communities”* now reads, *“in the local communities, insofar as this is possible”*. This last recommendation is more in keeping with the Code of Canon Law which strongly advocates this genuine and effective exercise of co-responsibility.⁶ The Assembly members were aware of the difficulty in appointing a Treasurer in every local community so they used the rather open phrases: *“insofar as it is possible”* *“for a specific period of time.”*

***The Domestic Council**

We can think of this as an appropriate structure for ensuring sisterly governance because it guarantees the co-operation and co-responsibility that the Constitutions are constantly urging us to practise. Saint Vincent spoke of it even in his own times and he saw how necessary it was to establish the practice even though this idea was not, in fact,

⁶ Cf. Code of Canon Law, № 636

implemented in the days of the Founders or even later.⁷ The Constitutions of 1983 spoke of the Domestic Council as an optional structure: “*The Sister Servant may be assisted by a Domestic Council*” (St. 56 of the 1983 Constitutions). But what was optional in these Constitutions became obligatory after amendment 15 of the 1985 General Assembly. The most recent Assembly was of the same mind: “*The Sister Servant is assisted by a Domestic Council composed of the whole local community. In houses where it seems necessary, however, she may have a smaller Domestic Council.*(C 82f). “*In the case of a smaller Domestic Council, the members are appointed by the Sister Servant, after consultation with the local community. The appointment is transmitted to the Visitatrice.*” (St. 66c).

This regulation about the Domestic Council is meant to help the Sister Servant in governing the community. The Code of Canon Law clearly states that all Superiors should be assisted by their Council.⁸ We cannot categorically say that Domestic Councils are not necessary since we already have the community meetings mentioned in Statute 63. It is a question of having two different and complementary structures operating at the same time. In fact, the Domestic Council deals with matters concerning the smooth running of the community and which can affect the Sisters’ lives: financial affairs, organisation, the horarium, special activities etc., all these of course within the limits of local government. The other community meetings mentioned in Statute 63 are concerned with drawing up or revising the Community Plan, formation and apostolic reflection.

How is the Domestic Council to be organised? It has to have its own special structure. Specifically, it should meet at regular intervals at agreed times, with the dates known in advance (for example, they will meet every term). The Sister Servant should draw up a list of points to be dealt with: there should be constructive dialogue on each of these points; a secretary should take notes on what was said and on the conclusions reached; there should be a file for the minutes of Council meetings that people can consult. The moderator will always be the Sister Servant or, in her absence, the Assistant. In conclusion, let us not forget that the Domestic Council is not a decision making body but a consultative one.

The Constitutions make provision for a smaller Domestic Council. Normally this will be the exception rather than the rule. When should a small Domestic Council be set up? When there are a lot of Sisters in the community or when it is very difficult for the community to be run smoothly. In such circumstances the Sister Servant should plan ways of informing the Community about matters that will have been dealt with.

All these levels of participation indicated in the Constitutions are specific ways of applying the principles of subsidiarity and participation which the Constitutions emphasise so strongly. So it would be a real contradiction to talk about these principles and then not use the means of applying them indicated in the Constitutions. If we want to reach the goal we have to take the means to attain it. We have seen that not all of these ways of participating are obligatory. Well, I think that even if this is so, it would be good to use them because there is no doubt at all that this would be a sure way of exercising participation, co-responsibility and subsidiarity.

3. THE LOCAL COMMUNITY PLAN

⁷ Coste XIII, p.611-615, Council of 5th July 1646

⁸ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, № 627 &1

This is another excellent way of exercising, within the local community, a sense of co-responsibility, participation, belonging and subsidiarity. We can think of the local Community Plan, as an application of the Provincial Plan, given the specific circumstances, needs and concerns of the local community. Some Statutes need to be spelled out in more detail, for example, № 1,2,3,4,6,7...and this can be done in the local Community Plan.

The Constitutions say enough about this means of dynamising community life and we need to keep this in mind (cf. C. 35a; 83; St. 67). Let us think back to some points already mentioned in the appropriate place. First of all, the Plan should be well inculturated. It therefore needs to take into account the mission of the local Church and that of the Province (cf. C.83). Statute 67 gives us the procedure to be followed in drawing it up: the Plan is “*prepared in prayer*”, that is to say, the Community Plan is an ideal occasion for community discernment, and prayer is necessary, too, when adjustments are made. It is in this same atmosphere of prayer that each Sister prepares to participate, and is careful to do this in union with the Holy Spirit. “*Worked out together*”: the way that the Community Plan is drawn up should give sufficient opportunities for all the Sisters to express themselves more or less directly. We know that everyone cannot participate to the same degree. This is inevitable. What needs to be avoided at all costs is that a Sister feels excluded because if this were to be the case, it would no longer be a “Community” Plan. It is absolutely essential to think out a good working method so that the whole Community participates satisfactorily in the process.

“*The Plan ...is submitted for approval to the Visitatrice with her Council.*” Having the approval of the Visitatrice with her Council, means that the Community Plan is in line with the Provincial Plan and is therefore in conformity with the Constitutions and Statutes.

The second paragraph of St. 67 indicates what is to be included in the Plan. It should cover “*all the concrete aspects of community living*”, that is to say, the spiritual life, community living and our life of service. All these aspects of life should be planned and orientated in accordance with what we said earlier. It goes without saying that the Plan should be reviewed from time to time. Finally, we might add a reflection which came from the 1997 General Assembly’s thinking on Community Plans: they should be “*creative, realistic, demanding and able to be evaluated.*” In this way, and only in this way, will the local Community Plan be an instrument that will revitalise as well as being a sisterly structure of government.

SOME QUESTIONS TO HELP US IN OUR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND IN COMMUNITY SHARING (SHARING AT COMMUNITY OR PROVINCIAL LEVEL)

1. Compare the revised Constitutions with those of 1983. Note the changes that have been introduced into the articles mentioned in this study document.
2. The Constitutions have a lot to say about Sister Servants. Which of the points made do you consider most important?
3. With regard to the Domestic Council: if there isn’t one established yet in your community, what advantages and drawbacks can you see in having one? What reservations would you have?
4. Do you think it would be useful to have a local Treasurer in your community?

5. With regard to article 83 of the Constitutions and Statute 67, what convictions do you have about the local Community Plan, what concerns do you have?

IV. SUPPLEMENTARY READING MATERIAL FOR DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS 10TH STUDY DOCUMENT.

* *Directives for the Sister Servant*

* Father M. Lloret, *The Sister Servant, why and how?* “Echoes of the Company”, March 1989

* Father F. Quintano, *The Assembly and the Community Plan*, “Echoes of the Company”, 1996

Father Javier Alvarez, *Director General*
Father Fernando Quintano, CM

FATHER J.ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Guidelines for the Monthly Retreat

“You are the ones who have stood faithfully by me in my trials”
(Luke 22:28)

The culture in which we are immersed is strongly marked by the two characteristic laws of technology: speed and efficiency. In any human activity, the energy circuit works like this: a certain cause produces a certain effect; action produces a reaction; efforts yield results. Results are rewarding and encourage further effort. It is difficult for young people to understand that their efforts do not always produce immediate results, but often only in the medium or long-term. And these days, we adults are not very patient either.

However, patience is essential today. It is true that our times call for justice, peace, idealism. But we also need a good dose of stamina, reflection, and love. To attain that first quality, stamina, we need to exercise the second quality, patience, because it is patience that provides water and nourishment for the human, Gospel, and Vincentian values to grow in us and in the environment around us. Certainly patience by itself does not guarantee that things will go better in the future, but at least it opens up the possibility, continues the search, and sets in motion values such as perseverance, fidelity, discernment, trust, strength, reflection, and love.

WE NEED PATIENCE

We need patience in order to understand and accept the fact that great efforts often produce few results, or at least to accept the possible disproportion between effort and result. This happens often, as with the fishermen who let down their nets and stayed on watch all night but in the morning found the nets completely empty. (cf. Luke, 5:5)

It is said that patience is the art of waiting. Others say that it is the art of knowing. We can combine both concepts: it is the art of knowing how to wait. Patience breeds perseverance. Usually in life there are no great leaps forward: not in biology, psychology, our spiritual life, or in our service. The grain of wheat is sown this afternoon; and we wouldn't think about going early next morning to see if the seed has sprouted. It needs to rest for days and nights. After several weeks, a tiny miniature plant shyly appears. Then, during the following months, the plant shoots up and is transformed into a beautiful stem. Patience means that there are no great leaps forward, only small steps.

THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF PATIENCE

Sacred Scripture's testimony to this attribute of God forms the background to these two dimensions of patience: the Lord rebuilds ruins (cf. Am 9:11), heals infidelities (cf. Hosea 14:5), remakes misshapen vessels (cf. Jer.18), brings together the dispersed (cf. Is. 43:5), gives life to dry bones (cf. Ez. 37), grants more time to repay and even forgives debts (cf. Mt 13:24-30; 18:23-25). *"But you, our God, are good and true, slow to anger, and governing all with mercy."* (Wis. 15:1) In the parable that Luke presents to us, the caretaker came to the defence of the fig tree that had been sterile for a long time: *"Leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it."* (Luke 13:8)

The first dimension of patience is for you to be patient with yourself. You examine yourself and easily conclude that you are in the same state as you were years ago. You had hoped to make progress, and haven't achieved your goal. What should you do? Remember that God is a specialist in giving us time. Edith Stein liked to say: *"Be patient with yourself; God is."* Patience is an indispensable tool in the process of personal growth, an angel of light who shows us the next step on the long journey to becoming ourselves. *"I will dig round it and water it again..."* Active patience leads us to overcome discouragement, to begin anew, to love ourselves in the right way.

Patience also has a direct bearing on community life. Each individual develops at a different rate, they are different in character, situations in community can become complex and one often has to wait for a solution because agreement is never achieved automatically. To sum up—community life demands patience. And going hand in hand with this virtue, which we talk so much about in our daily lives, are the virtues which St. Vincent so highly recommended for community living: respect, forbearance, and pardon.

PATIENCE IN THE SERVICE OF THOSE WHO ARE POOR

The virtue of patience has to extend to our service also. When St. Vincent speaks of the poor he makes us understand how necessary this virtue is: *"They are your lords and masters, terribly sensitive and demanding..."* Any service or work

today is influenced by the pace of persons involved (at times this pace is maddeningly slow); at other times service is shared with persons or institutions whose motivation is different from ours...Can service be good if there is impatience, aggressiveness, or brusqueness?. Will anything be gained by putting more pressure on people than need be? What is the meaning of Jesus' recommendation about "not quenching the smouldering wick"? Obviously patience can never mean refraining from action if this adds to the sufferings of those who are poor.

Daughters of Charity are meant to serve, be helpful, and denounce situations. Patience tells us that at times this road is a long one. So the explanation might be found in this principle noted by Joaquín García Roca: "*patience with the process and impatience for the goal*". Václav Havel offers us a reflection along the same lines: "*I have often wanted to speed up history in the same way that a child tries to make a plant grow faster: by pulling on it. I think that the art of waiting must be learned in the same way as the art of creating. One must patiently plant the seeds, water the earth and give the plants the time that they need to grow. You can't be cleverer than the plants. But you can also "water" history, every day, and with patience; not only humbly, but also with love.*"

But patience goes even further. Patient persons know how to look at the reality and situation of poor people in the way that God looks at everything. They see our human condition in the way that Jesus sees it, as so many contemplatives look on the world's wounded ones and try to take bold action on their behalf. According to the dictionary, patient people are those who can do gruelling and tedious work. And, I would have to add, those who have the courage to imagine the reality that could be, because in some way they have already seen it. Job is a prime example of this patience, which has nothing to do with passive acceptance of the insults and evils he endured. On the contrary, his patience is wedded to tenacity, stamina, perseverance in suffering and the search for truth.

FOR PERSONAL PRAYER AND SHARING

- Meditatively read chapters 1 and 2 of Job, up to verse 10 and/or Mt. 18: 12-35.
- How do I understand the virtue of patience?
- In which aspect of my life do I think that I need to grow in this virtue of patience?

Father Javier Alvarez, C.M.
Director General

VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Visitatrices' Encounter

Paris, May 8 – 28, 2006

On May 8th, 2006, 77 Visitatrices and one Regional gathered in the conference room of the Motherhouse, 140 rue du Bac in Paris. They had been invited by Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General to an international gathering to prepare the General Assembly of 2009.

After a spiritual retreat from May 8th to 16th, 2006, given by Father Javier Alvarez, Director General, Sister Evelyne presented the objectives of the Encounter, and Sister Margaret Barrett, Assistant General, outlined the process.

During the Encounter, the Visitatrices studied the following themes:

1. **The Company today.** This described the efforts of the Company to respond to realities with regard to AIDS, recent natural disasters, violence that affects the daily lives of so many of our contemporaries, overcoming poverty through projects that promote real changes in living conditions. These presentations gave the Sisters an experience of the solidarity that exists among the Provinces throughout the world.
2. **The spirituality of the Daughter of Charity, servant, witness and prophet.** This reflection gave us much food for thought and raised the challenge of showing greater consistency in our lives.
3. **The Mission of the Visitatrice.** Sharing in small groups and plenary sessions allowed the participants to explore four particular areas: The role of spiritual animator, creative charity, the juridical context of government, and formation. They also dipped into the world of the Archives, another sign of our belonging.
4. **A look into the future.** The last two days of work allowed for preparation of the General Assembly of 2009 and raised challenges to be taken up in the future.

The Encounter ended with a sharing on the new implantations, the service to immigrants, the possibilities of the web site, the ability to unite our voices and combine our spiritual, human and material resources for persons who are poor...so many signs witnessing that our passion for Jesus Christ and for those who are poor is very much alive.

In this issue of the Echoes we will be presenting:

- A synthesis of Father Robert Maloney CM's conference on the "Dream Project"
- A synthesis of the conference on "IPS" (International Project Services) by Sister Felicia Mazzola, DC, Director of IPS.

VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Paris, May 8-28, 2006

The DREAM Project

Notes taken during the presentation by Fr. R. Maloney, C.M.

DREAM is an acronym for a programme to combat AIDS and malnutrition in the world: "*Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition.*"

When Ana Maria first arrived to participate in DREAM she weighed a skeletal 64 pounds. When he discovered that she was HIV positive, her husband left her and her neighbours shunned her. As she struggled to take care of her six children she realised that she was dying. Today she and her children are well. In fact, Ana Maria is full of fighting talk and enthusiasm as she promotes the struggle against AIDS, fuelled by her awareness that she would be dead if she had not received treatment.

The grim reality of AIDS in the world

Today, with early diagnosis, proper care and well-monitored drug therapy, a person who is HIV-positive can live a relatively normal life; in the USA and Western Europe most do. But in poorer countries, most die, since few receive high-quality treatment. Worldwide, AIDS killed 3 million people in 2005, and the total number of people living with HIV reached its highest level in history, an estimated 40 million people. In 2005, 5 million new cases emerged; about 700,000 of these were among children under the age of 15. While the number of deaths from AIDS in the USA and Western Europe has diminished dramatically because of drug therapy, it remains the leading cause of death worldwide for people between the ages of 15 and 50.

Sub-Saharan Africa has been hit the hardest. There, 25.8 million people have HIV/AIDS, almost one million more than in 2003. In fact, two thirds of all those in the world with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa, as do 77% of all women with HIV. The World Health Organisation estimates that 95% of those with the virus do not know they have it. South Africa has the highest number of people (5 million) of any country in the world with HIV/AIDS.

One of the most striking demographic impacts of HIV/AIDS is its effect on life expectancy. By 2010, life expectancy in several highly-affected countries could drop to below 40 years.

The creation of DREAM

Since 2002, Project DREAM has been applying in Africa, with extraordinary success, the state-of-the-art standards of treatment now used in developed countries.

The Community of Sant'Egidio, many of whose members are health-care professionals, designed DREAM and began a pilot project in Mozambique in March 2002. This lay community, founded in 1968 in Rome and recognised canonically by the Catholic Church, has a special bond with Mozambique. The relationship began in the early 1980s when Sant'Egidio sent humanitarian aid to Mozambique during the country's long, devastating civil war; it reached a high point when the community mediated the peace agreement signed in Rome on Oct. 4th, 1992 after 27 months of negotiations. Then came DREAM.

DREAM provides treatment to children and adults who are HIV-positive, but its special focus is to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS from a pregnant woman to her newborn child and to maintain the on-going health of the mother. The method used is highly active anti-retroviral therapy (HAART), which is sometimes called the "triple therapy" because of the three drugs administered. DREAM's success rate is very high: 96% of children born to HIV-infected mothers taking part in the project are born HIV-free. The ongoing results are carefully monitored daily through a computer hookup between Mozambique and Rome, so that DREAM, in addition to being a treatment programme, does ongoing research aimed at improving patient care.

Accurate diagnosis plays a crucial role in DREAM. For that reason, a molecular biology laboratory is essential for analysing the patients' situation, monitoring their therapy and counteracting any toxic effects that it might have.

DREAM has been creative in inventing means for keeping the adherence rate of participants high. These means include home visits, a day hospital, a mother/child healthcare centre, and a daycare programme to which pregnant women bring their children, thus guaranteeing their presence twice a day for medication administration.

Since hunger and malnutrition weaken the defence system, DREAM also monitors patients' nutritional state, devotes time to health education, promotes a balanced diet, and, with the help of the World Food Programme and other NGOs, provides for food distribution to mothers and their families.

DREAM works in partnership with the host nations, though its funding does not pass through local governments, and it promotes the training of indigenous personnel, so that eventually they can take over the running of the programme. In each country an agreement is signed with the Ministry of Health to assure the government's cooperation with DREAM and support for it.

The partners

On June 9th, 2005, the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Daughters of Charity entered into a collaborative agreement. The advantages of this cooperation are significant. The Community of Sant'Egidio provides the DREAM model for AIDS treatment, as well as formation and evaluation in the use of that model. The Daughters of Charity provide personnel, experience in health care, native contacts within Africa, and, perhaps most important, the assurance that the resources of the programme will directly reach the poorest of the poor. The joint participation of the two communities guarantees that costs are kept low while quality is kept high. The programme is totally free of cost for those receiving treatment.

Sister Evelyne Franc appointed two Sisters to represent her in the project's reflection and evaluation meetings. The Daughters of Charity and Sant'Egidio have already been collaborating in DREAM in Mozambique for several years. On May 1st, 2006 DREAM began in Nigeria. We hope to open in the near future other centres in Africa, for example in Mbandaka in the Congo. We "dream" of establishing DREAM in Asia too. Father Maloney, C.M. serves as coordinator for the joint programmes in which the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Daughters of Charity, and sometimes other groups collaborate. The Sisters of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul from Untermarchtal, for example, are in dialogue with Sant'Egidio about collaboration in Tanzania.

Over the last few months, the Daughters of Charity and the Community of Sant'Egidio have entered into a new collaborative relationship with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which is now providing anti-retroviral therapy in nine countries under a grant from the United States' government.

Formation

The Community of Sant'Egidio has already sponsored twelve month-long formation programmes for nearly 1,000 participants from 20 countries: doctors, nurses, team coordinators, lab personnel, social workers, computer technicians and home visitors. Teachers aim to communicate to participants not only the most up-to-date scientific knowledge about AIDS, but also the principles underlying the DREAM model.

Fall-out from AIDS

The most tragic effects of AIDS include not only the high number of women who are HIV-positive, but also so many orphaned children obliged to withdraw from school in order to care for younger siblings, and consequently there is a loss of competent human resources for the next generation.

Financing

Funding the initial and the ongoing costs of Project DREAM is a huge challenge. Even though the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Daughters of Charity, and many CRS volunteers donate their services, startup costs in each country come to about a million dollars because of the need to train personnel, build a laboratory, buy equipment and medication, and obtain computer hardware and software. Once the programme is established, ongoing costs are considerably lower. But laboratory work, staff training, provision of food, and the purchase of drugs remain indispensable expense items. Fortunately, DREAM has been able to obtain approved drugs at a reduced price. The annual cost per patient for drug therapy is \$300, a sum that is nearly the total annual income of many Africans.

The Seton Institute, which was founded in 1985 and has its headquarters in Daly City, California, has close historical connections with the Daughters of Charity and assists them in fund-raising. It seeks support for DREAM from private and public sources. A recently established office of the Daughters of Charity, called International

Project Services, will also be assisting us in the search for funds. DREAM has already received significant financial assistance from the World Bank and two Italian banks. Because therapy for those who are already HIV-positive is lifelong, the ongoing search for both public and private funds is essential.

It is not easy for faith-based groups like ours to receive aid from governments in Europe and the United States. Most European governments send their financial assistance to the Global Fund in Switzerland that provides financing for international health programmes. However, the policy of the Global Fund is to channel its funds directly to other governments in greatest need. As a result, NGOs and faith-based groups like ours must apply directly to the African governments themselves to receive aid. Unfortunately, a great deal of corruption exists. Other forms of government aid, like the funds that CRS receive, are available only in certain countries that are often chosen for political reasons. So we must continually appeal for funds from foundations and private groups.

Conclusion

Joãozinho has become a symbol of DREAM. He was the 1000th baby born to HIV-positive women receiving treatment, and he now has the chance to lead a healthy life. Moreover, his mother is alive and healthy. Treatment helped her so much that, as her medication was phased down, her immune system became almost normal. As the success of treatment at the DREAM Centre in Matola, Mozambique has become well-known, husbands are now coming in increasing numbers for testing. So it is very probable that Joãozinho will lose neither mother nor father and will avoid joining the ranks of the millions of orphans in sub-Saharan Africa.

Father Robert Maloney, C.M.
Sister Catherine Mulligan, D.C.

VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Visitatrices' Encounter
Paris, May 8-28, 2006

IPS (International Project Services)

Notes taken during the presentation given by Sister Felicia Mazzola, D.C.

The same fire of love for Jesus Christ crucified that animated our first Sisters is still burning as brightly today, enflaming the hearts of Daughters of Charity, urging us to hasten to the relief of every type of human misery.

IPS (International Project Services) was begun in 2004. After a brief presentation of its development and objectives, I will explain to you how it functions, the progress made by IPS until the present, the kinds of projects funded in the last year, how to request funding, and finally, information that is useful for all Provinces.

I – ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

About 4 years ago, the International Finance Commission began to study projects from Provinces that had been invited to present their small needs. The maximum amount of money allowed for each Province was \$25,000 because that was how much money was available for the projects. Each year the number of projects increased. Sister Evelyne Franc, who was then Treasurer General, discussed with the Commission the possibility of setting up a Daughters of Charity Office that would seek money from outside the Community to help meet the growing needs for funding ministries in the Provinces. It was in May, 2004, that Sister Evelyne with her Council made the decision to establish “International Project Services” and asked me to be the Director.

The purpose of IPS is:

- to obtain outside resources needed by Provinces in impoverished countries to help support their works;
- to accept unsolicited donations in any amount.

It is in keeping with the Vincentian tradition of bringing the needs of the deprived to those who can help them. This is accomplished by writing grant proposals and sending them to Foundations and by approaching corporations and individuals who have means and are eager to donate monetarily for a particular project or to give unrestricted donations that can be used for any project. IPS accepts not only money, but also donations of medicines, equipment, and even personnel. In a couple of instances we've had occasion to refer volunteers to Provinces.

II – HOW IPS FUNCTIONS

Before IPS began accepting projects from Provinces, certain criteria and processes were developed. Approved by Sister Evelyne and her Council, these are guidelines which the Provinces must follow. They are found in the Programme Description and Application Form; let us review some of them.

1. First, IPS does not usually ask Provinces for funds because Provinces that have surplus money send it to the General Curia for the needs of the Curia or for Interprovincial Aid (in accord with C 90 and S. 72.) There are times, however, when a Province has an exceptionally good year financially, so the Council may want to send extra money to the General Curia and designate it for IPS.

2. IPS assists Provinces in impoverished countries, Provinces that are unable to financially support themselves and their works. These are Provinces that ordinarily receive help from the General Curia. While every country has people who are poor, developed countries do have greater opportunities for finding financial assistance. (Of course, it is understood that the current criteria might change in the future depending on the way IPS develops.)

3. IPS is an optional service for Provinces to use. Provinces are also free to seek funds on their own if they wish. IPS serves as the link between Provinces and Foundations in seeking funds, and in some situations, IPS can even be the link for Provinces that seek funds from Foundations independently of IPS. Provinces of Slovakia, Central America, and the Middle East sent projects to US foundations and were awarded grants, but because most Foundations in the United States will not send money directly to another country, IPS acted as the liaison by receiving the money, then sending it to Sr. Rita Ferri, our Treasurer General, who in turn forwarded it to the Province.

4. When the cost of a project exceeds the authorised expenditure limit for the Province, the Province must have the approval of the Superioress General with her Council before submitting the project application to IPS. This is a new guideline that was implemented in October 2005 (in line with C 91 c.)

5. Individual Sisters, local communities or works, process projects through their Provincial Council. The Visitatrice with her Council approves the completed Project Application Form and sends it to IPS.

6. IPS is not able to seek money for emergency relief, like for the Tsunami disaster, because there has to be sufficient time allowed to process the application and obtain assistance. Sometimes the process can take as long as a year.

7. There must be a strong probability that IPS can obtain funds for a project. Both the kind of project and total cost of the project greatly affect its chances of getting funding.

8. The project should address the needs of the Daughter of Charity Province and/or the people it serves. IPS does not fund, for example, a conference sponsored by a diocese, or build parish churches or other buildings not owned by the Daughters of Charity.

9. The current guideline of IPS asks that projects be submitted preferably in English. However, I now have some Sisters who can translate French, Spanish and Portuguese into English, so a Province can submit projects in any of those four languages.

10. The final step in the process concerns accountability at three levels:

- a) Accountability of the Province to IPS. When a project is completed, the Province sends a *Grant Evaluation Report* to IPS, describing how the money was used, how the people were helped, etc.

- b) Accountability of IPS to the Foundation or funder. Using the information that comes from the Province on the *Grant Evaluation Report*, IPS gives a written account of the project results to the Foundation or the one providing the funding.
- c) Twice a year, IPS meets with the Superioress General and the Treasurer General to give an update on the status of IPS including:
 - all the projects received from the various Provinces,
 - projects funded,
 - projects that are in process,
 - how much money was granted,
 - other aspects of IPS.

Not long ago I was speaking with the Sister who is the Director of the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters. She asked if the Daughters of Charity have special training for managing projects, because she saw that the Daughters are excellent managers of projects.

III – CURRENT SITUATION

IPS was established in May, 2004 and accepted its first project in September 2004.

From September, 2004 to the end of April, 2006, 130 projects were received from 35 Provinces. With the combined contributions from Foundations, designated and undesignated, private and personal donations, 75 projects were successfully funded for a total amount of \$1,478,832.94. Several of the unfunded projects have been sent to Foundations; we are waiting to hear if they will be funded. We continue to try to find funding for all the other projects.

The sources of the funds awarded can be grouped into three categories: 58% was awarded by Foundations, 18% came from individual donors, and 24% was Interprovincial aid. Approximately one year ago, some Interprovincial aid money was made available by the General Council for small projects and small grant-matching funds, used only when necessary and when it will possibly encourage a Foundation to give matching funds.

Until this past February, the IPS office was located at the Evansville Provincial House, where I was assisted part-time by Provincial lay secretarial staff. Now, Sister Francine Brown and a lay secretary work with me full-time. Our IPS office has been relocated to the Detroit, Michigan area. As IPS will be assisting in the search for funds for Project DREAM, we plan to hire a grant writer whose primary focus will be Project DREAM.

IV –PROJECTS FUNDED

Most often, the projects that receive funding are those that touch the heart of the members of the Foundations and donors. These can be specifically grouped into

two categories: projects that provide for basic needs and those that enable people to be self-sufficient.

1. Projects that provide for basic needs

- Food for malnourished children, especially in Africa and Latin America.
- Clothing for children to enable them to go to school.
- Materials such as mattresses, sheets, towels, fabric to make clothes.
- Ambulances to transport sick people to clinics.
- Decent housing for families living in a village with no sewage or clean water. (IPS funding has allowed 10 new homes to be built; 10 additional houses are pending, as well as the construction of a well.)

2. Projects that enable people to be self-sufficient

- Projects for women's development which enable them to make a living to support themselves and their children.
- Projects involving education of children.
- Donations of supplies such as small farm implements to till the soil, equipment used to teach carpentry, masonry, sewing, small repairs, etc.
- Donations of chickens, sheep, cows, feed for the animals, and wire fencing. (Many of the people who receive the first chickens, sheep, pigs, etc. share the offspring of these with their neighbours, thus enabling more people to become self-sufficient.)

Foundations respond better when other support can be cited, such as from persons served by the project, the local community, the Province, or other Foundations. Even small contributions of money and/or services make a difference.

Some projects are difficult to fund, especially those for large construction and building renovations. It is better if such projects are divided into phases which can be sent to different Foundations. (For Community buildings, it is an advantage to have some financial contribution on the part of the Province or the Company.)

V – HOW TO REQUEST ASSISTANCE FROM IPS

When completing the project application form, it is essential that you do the following:

1. Answer completely all the questions on the form:

- conditions in the country and the area where the project is located;
- statistics about the people being served by the project;
- history of the Daughter of Charity presence;
- budget plan.

(Having complete, detailed, precise information is a great help and limits delays in the application process.)

2. Send good, close-up pictures that demonstrate the need. (If possible, include one or two Daughters of Charity in the photo.)

3. *Send the Application Form by e-mail with the photos as an attachment to the e-mail. (If this is not possible, send them via regular mail.)*

Maintaining e-mail communication between the Province and IPS is important and necessary, and I am grateful when you acknowledge receipt of my messages and any attachments.

Each Foundation has its own specific guidelines and application forms which require different information.

The usual process that IPS follows in relation to Foundations is:

- I first must send a description of the project to the Foundation and ask if I may apply for funds,
- wait for the application, complete it and send it to the Foundation,
- wait for the Foundation Board to meet to review the application,
- then wait longer to get the money if the response is positive.

To satisfy the Foundations' requirements, there are times when I need to ask for more information. You have been so patient with this LONG process and I count on your continued help and prayerful support in this endeavor. (Foundations will not give money for projects already completed; in other words, they will not reimburse money already spent on a project.)

VI HOW YOU CAN HELP IPS

All of us have the same call to be Daughters of Charity, servants of those who are poor. All of us together are the Company, and no matter where or how even one Daughter of Charity ministers – there is found the Company, serving the poorest of those who are poor. IPS is for all Daughters of Charity, those in countries that have very limited resources, and those in developed countries that have greater resources. St. Vincent said to his Daughters, *“We should assist the poor in every way and do it both by ourselves and by enlisting the help of others – to do this is to preach the Gospel by word and work.*

IPS needs all of us to help to reach out to more Foundations. If you know of a good Foundation or someone who works with a Foundation that I might contact, please tell me. Or, you could make the initial contact yourself. Sometimes, a Foundation actively seeks a place to give money. Recently, a Foundation contacted me asking where and how they might help the Daughters of Charity in Brazil and worldwide. IPS needs your help to reach out to corporations and individuals as well. You may know people of means who would feel privileged to give money for the works of the Daughters of Charity. Don't hesitate to approach them, spread the news about IPS and distribute brochures, direct potential donors to the IPS web site and to IPS. The purpose of IPS is to obtain outside funds, as Saint Vincent did when he asked wealthy people for help.

Even small contributions are helpful. IPS received money from a primary school class that raised \$135 to buy bricks for a school in Mozambique; a teen-age choir in Chicago performed a concert for the benefit of IPS and sent \$1,000; another

school raised \$1,500 to contribute to a project. These events did not yield a great amount of money but combined with other contributions, they can make a difference in someone's life. More importantly, these are ways of raising awareness of other people's needs and spreading our charism of service to persons who are poor.

In conclusion, IPS, which started in early 2004, is already well-developed, and in the words of Saint Vincent: *"there is reason to believe that it is not yet what it will be when God has perfected it as He wants it."*

N. B.

There is an IPS web site – the address is www.daughtersips.org. It is in English, but will be translated into French and Spanish in the near future. You will find there some general information about IPS, several projects funded, and others that need to be funded. You can also find the newly revised IPS Application Form, Project Description and the Grant Evaluation Report.

Sister Felicia Mazzola,
Daughter of Charity
Director of IPS

Photo 3

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

Introduction

If the arrival and the presence of migrants is a sensitive subject for a large section of public opinion, this new chapter entitled **"Migrant People, a gift for the Church and for society"** seems to bring out clearly that we are not talking here about migration itself, but rather about people, those who migrate. One of the challenges to take up from this is to know how to welcome people who enter a country, to accompany them and take care of them. Another is to discover the gift that migrant people can be for the countries receiving them.

Two people in the field, a chaplain to the African communities and a member of the Jesuit Refugee Service⁹ (JRS) share their experiences. They draw our attention to the positive impact that worldwide migrations has on the host countries.

Following this, several Daughters of Charity give testimonies to various forms of ministry with migrant people.

⁹ International non-governmental organization (NGO) present in over 50 countries and all continents, JRS was founded by Superior General Pedro Arrupe, SJ, on November 14, 1980.

Before we discover from the different presentations these opportunities that can come from migration, let us open our hearts to the words of Jacques Vermeulen, *“We can only be true believers if we agree to take up the inner task that follows on from questions that arise from outside ourselves. We need to remember: our ancestors in the faith were migrants, and the journey towards what we don’t yet know is part of who we are.”*¹⁰

¹⁰ Conclusion of an article by Father Jacques Vermeulen of the diocese of Malines-Bruxelles and professor at the Catholic University of Lille, France, entitled “Nous sommes tous des migrants. Quelques réflexions à partir du témoignage biblique” appearing in “Les Cahiers de Paraboles”, January 2004 on “Migrations, chances et défis.”

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

**“Migrants,
a gift to the Church and to society,”
*from a migrant’s point of view***

Based on notes from the presentation by M. Katuvadioko

Introduction

As a chaplain appointed to ministry with African communities, I am glad to have the opportunity to speak on this theme, “Migrants, a gift to the Church and to society.” I would like to reflect with you on the following two words: “gift” and “migrant” from the perspective of society, Church, and pastoral work.

Before going any further, it is good to remind ourselves that humans are first of all relational beings. The need to be “with,” to communicate, love, be loved and have one’s dignity recognised, is distinctively human. Humans are not created to live in isolation, but as social beings.

Solidarity is a factor that unites persons in a network of relationships. Today, this network is becoming planetary in nature due to the effect of globalisation. Developments in forms of social communication lead to the emergence of an international conscience, creating the necessity for dialogue and new forms of mutual support. Moreover, for us as Christians, solidarity does not stay just on the natural level; it is founded on the love of Christ for all people and on the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of unity. We understand what this gift means in the light of this mystery of love.

I. TWO TERMS TO DEFINE: “GIFT” AND “MIGRANT”

1. Gift

For the world

The *Petit Larousse* dictionary defines gift as: “*the action of giving something that one possesses*” and what is given is a good deed, a favour. In a juridical sense, a gift is also “*an act by which a person transmits something irrevocably and without recompense to another person who accepts it.*”

We frequently use the term “gift” in conversation. Nearly every day we receive appeals to give to humanitarian missions such as the fight against AIDS, support for orphans, natural disasters, etc. In giving, we are aware that we have done a good deed; we have promoted life. A gift has an existential element: it contributes to bringing about life.

For the Christian

In Christian dynamics, a gift is first of all a grace. It is God who is the first giver. God communicates his love that is freely given to us. The basic Christian attitude, then, is to recognise the favour that God has granted us and to accept it with gratitude.

It is in the Incarnation that God's gift to humanity is most fully manifested: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only son."* (Jn. 3:16) In his conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus says: *"If you only knew the gift of God!"* (Jn. 4: 10) We speak also of the gifts of the Spirit, dispositions stirred up by God in the human person in order to communicate the power and energy of divine life (*wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, the fear of the Lord*). The book of Isaiah (11:2-3, 42:1-4) prophesied the coming, among the descendants of David, of a servant of God on whom these gifts would rest in abundance. The first Christian communities immediately recognised this in Christ, the servant of God, who, by his resurrection, was revealed as the bearer and the giver of God's power. In the Pentecost event, the Church recognised the continuation of this manifestation of the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

The Migrant

For the world

According to the dictionary, a migrant is *"someone who carries out the action of migration."* Migration is *"the movement of populations from one country to another, in order to establish themselves there,"* for economic or political reasons. Migrants are often forced to leave in order to save their lives.

These men, women and children who are displaced individually or as families are living among us. They are a topic of discussion every day. Migrants are not just a distinctive feature of our developed countries (Europe or the United States). They are much more numerous in countries in the Third World. In the last thirty years, mobility in the world has increased: from 77 million migrants in 1965, to over 111 million in 1990 and up to 150 million today.¹¹ Even if host countries in the western hemisphere are those most sought after, more than 60% of migrants do not leave the southern hemisphere, and three quarters of them move into other third-world countries. In Europe, for example, of its 380 million inhabitants, there are 20 million foreigners, of whom 5 million are from European communities. Certainly, the phenomenon of migration has become widespread because of globalisation, whereas beforehand it was limited to a few host countries where there was often a history of colonisation. Today, migration has become a way of life, related to the issues of ever-widening economic, social, political, cultural gaps, etc. Unfortunately, because of the closing of borders, a large number of migrants make their journey clandestinely, 2.8% of the worldwide population emigrates and several hundred thousand do so illegally.

¹¹ « *Quand l'étranger frappe à nos portes* », Documents Episcopat, n° 7/8, 2004, File A2

Today, the profile of migration has changed: due to the rise of *feminism and an urban middle class*; it also includes *unaccompanied minors, people with particular skills*, etc. The whole question of migration is a complex issue. Most often, departures are linked to issues of survival, with economics and politics frequently interwoven. Certain situations are more dramatic: such as when hundreds of thousands are forced to migrate in their own countries (Bosnians hunted by Serbs, Serbs fleeing Kosovo, Kasaiens fleeing from Katanga into the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sudanese fleeing Darfour, etc.)

For the believer

For the believer, there is a biblical foundation to welcoming strangers. The Book of Leviticus includes in the same category, the foreigner and the poor person, the widow and the orphan: *“if a stranger lives with you in your land, do not molest him. You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself – for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.”* (Lev. 19:33)

As he remembers his own exile, the Jewish person has the duty to consider the foreigner as a brother. This respect for the foreigner is also founded on the understanding of ownership during the sabbatical year: *“The land belongs to me, and to me you are only strangers and guests.”* (Lev. 25:23) This land is only given to us as a heritage. (cf. Gen. 23:4.)

In the New Testament, Peter refers to the Christians as foreigners or strangers: *“I urge you, my dear people, while you are visitors and pilgrims...”* (1Pt. 2:11) for their true home is in heaven. (cf. Eph. 2:19) This is the basis for Fr. Yvon Quéménéur’s question: *“How can the Christian, himself a foreigner on this earth, not respect or love the immigrant, his brother?...And since we like to include ourselves as followers of the Hebrew Scriptures, can we not take in to account the argument of Leviticus: “The stranger who lives with you in your land, you must count as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself – for you were once strangers yourselves in Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.”* (Lev. 19:33)?

II. THE MIGRANT, A GIFT FOR THE CHURCH AND FOR SOCIETY

The Jubilee year of 2000, calling to mind *misery and poverty, the different forms of modern slavery, the debt of poor countries, all the “have-nots”*... has urged the people of today to show a greater sense of solidarity. The Jubilee reminds us that we have to be attentive to the people of our times and be committed to solidarity.

Coming from the Congo, a country with so much potential for wealth, and where expressing the Christian faith is a great treasure, I felt myself challenged by the call made by John Paul II. The three years leading up to the Jubilee year of 2000 helped me to live more united to Christ and to my brothers and sisters. I had a better understanding that life is a gift to be welcomed and a task to accomplish: to be more attentive to all those living in unstable or precarious situations. I became more aware of all the “have-nots” and of the importance of working for better relationships among people.

A “gift” for society

The displacement of large populations on a global scale has certain effects on the composition of nations. Today, each country is careful to remain master of its own territory. Migration is sometimes perceived as a factor of destabilisation, and migrants are regarded as persons who take jobs away from citizens or who profit from social services. Governments are torn between a concern for preserving their country's cohesiveness and the need to accept migrants.

At the same time, in many of these countries with declining birth rates, immigration can be an opportunity to revive population growth. Migrants can also become an icon, representing the "right to live" where one can best flourish and be fulfilled, and they can at times offer skills that are sought after in the global market.

A "gift" for the Church

We are aware that French society has become multicultural and multifaith. This requires a great change in mentality which includes learning to welcome differences and accept diversity. This new reality is felt, too, in the Church whose mission it is to live brotherhood and sisterhood in the name of Jesus Christ.

The term "ecclesia" means "assembly". To create an assembly means to live out communion while respecting diversity. To create Church, then, means to accept each person, each group as part of the Church, capable of giving and receiving. If we think of the Church as a Community, we risk thinking of those who come into it as guests to be welcomed, but not as members of a part of the whole Church. However, it is together that we create Church, that is, a Church made up of people who are welcomed and those who do the welcoming.

To be gift for the Church and society, the migrant must be recognised as a full member and a participant in this reciprocal task. Migrants expect the Church to sustain and accompany them so that all can work together. Each member is called to share their own richness. In living out solidarity in a reciprocal way, this richness becomes more evident and we can speak of "catholicity." As a Christian from Africa, I feel that I have a role in the Church in France and bring gifts that can contribute to unity. One of the essential steps for migrants is to not remain on the periphery but to offer their talents for the development of the Church community in order to build up, with others, a Gospel notion of brotherhood and sisterhood.

A "gift" at the level of the Church's pastoral plan

According to the thinking of Vatican Council II, the migrant is a "gift to be welcomed." The Catholic Church defines itself as a "*sacrament of world unity*" where no one is a foreigner. Through many forms of service, Christians participate in welcoming and defending the rights of the most abandoned. The Church recognises the role of Christian migrants within their parish communities, confides responsibilities to them, offers them formation, etc. All Christians, native to the country or not, receive together the same mission. Rooted in various traditions, the Christian faith, celebrated according to various cultures, manifests in this way the catholicity of the Church. This dimension calls for reciprocal understanding among Christians and an openness to the situation of migrants.

The pastoral process of welcoming the migrant as gift can be developed by listening to the Gospel:

- *“He placed a little child in the midst of them”* (Mk. 9:36): Since the child represents both human fragility and the joy of reaching out to others, Jesus calls Christians to welcome migrants in the same way.

- *“How is it that each of you hears us in your own native language?”* (Acts 2:8): When Peter realised that Cornelius, a pagan, had received the Spirit, it changed his outlook and that of the whole community, too, *“I realised then that God was giving them the same gift as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; and who was I to stand in God’s way?”* (see also Acts. 10:1-11, 17, Peter and Cornelius) We all share the same faith and the same hope.

- *“You, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom; we will hand over this duty to them...”* (Acts 6:3): Migrants are called to share their gifts and put them at the service of the Church. (cf. 1 Cor. 12)

- *“All are baptised in Christ: you have all clothed yourselves in Christ, and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ”* (Gal. 3: 27-28). The foundational purpose of the Christian mission is to bring together the dispersed children of God (Jn. 11: 52) and to work for the unity of humankind.

Conclusion

“If you knew the gift of God!” (Jn. 4:10) Life is about welcome and gift. As one who has been welcomed, as well as being, in my own right, a member of the great family of the baptised, I strive to contribute what I can to create Church. Called to share my talents for the good of all, I want to become more and more attentive to those who are wounded by life and to build up, with them, a new humanity.

Gabriel Katuvadioko
Official chaplain for African Communities

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

**“Migrants,
a gift for the Church and for society,”**
as perceived by a member of an NGO in the service of refugees

Based on notes taken during the conference of Father Eddy Jadot, SJ

Seeing that the focus of this theme is “Migrants, a gift for the Church and for society”, I took this to be as an invitation to try and be a witness for those persons that I meet in JRS (*Jesuit Refugee Service*): asylum seekers, refugees, those who are

undocumented. I will try to share what the life experiences of these people has taught me, in order to show how they can be gift for countries that have immigrants.

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an NGO (non-governmental organisation) with the mandate “to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees”. However, JRS’s solidarity with persecuted persons needing protection is not limited by the restriction of defining a *refugee* solely according to the criteria upheld by the Geneva Convention of 1951. We are also involved with “people who are displaced within their own country and those forced to emigrate” for a variety of reasons, according to the wide range of situations referred to in the Church’s social teaching and contained in the document issued by the Holy See: “*Refugees: A challenge to solidarity.*” (1992). The Superior General of the Jesuits, P. H. Kolvenbach, addressing the social ministry coordinators in May 2004, confirmed that this is the appropriate approach for JRS. He declared: “A question that arises everywhere...is that of *persons on the move, the problem of human mobility, the phenomenon of migration.*”

MIGRANTS: A “GIFT” FOR OUR CHURCHES AND SOCIETIES?

In the current context, simply to affirm that migrants are a gift can prove counterproductive these days, leading more to xenophobia than to friendship, even if one is making reference to scientific studies, or human values, and fervent, generous efforts at appreciating our foreign brothers and sisters. Of course, it is easy to cite the women and men in the world of politics, universities, athletics, the arts, and other areas, those born of immigrant parents, who improve the reputation of our countries on the international scene. The usefulness of migrants is recognised, as indeed is the need to have them, in order to maintain certain economic and social sectors as the populations of the rich countries age, and decline in number. However, the self-interest or utilitarian values of people who think like this, do not, of course reflect our outlook when we present migrants as “a gift” – gift from God, gift of themselves – to our societies and our Churches.

The statement made by Fr. Lluís Magriña, International Director of JRS, on the occasion of the *World Day for Refugees* on June 20th, 2005, applies to all categories of migrants, and it clearly emphasized an essential point: “Persons who are forced to migrate *need to be listened to*. It is important that the priorities decided on by organisations that assist refugees, must come from the beneficiaries themselves, and not from any other authority. *We learn from those whom we serve*. Without them, our programmes have no value. Well-informed people with sufficient resources, persons who have been forcibly displaced, are in the best position to make decisions concerning their lives in exile and the long-term solutions for their future.” They can also tell us when, and under what conditions, they see themselves as *a gift to the society to which they immigrate*, and they help us, in turn, to come to believe the same without hypocrisy and to express it to them in words that show no disrespect for them or for the often painful journeys they have had to make.

The approach taken by Lluís Magriña means that our reflections, our plans of action, our evaluations must, above all else, have reference to the life experience of the migrants and what they have to tell us.. That being the case, within the limits of the European context and my own field of solidarity, two *stories* of persons I have

encountered in detention centres can help our reflection, and promote the “*inner task we have to take on in response to questions that come from outside ourselves,*” as author Jacques Vermeulen suggests.

LISTENING TO THE PEOPLE WE SERVE

Sivaswamy : Rejected everywhere

“*Why am I in prison? I am not a criminal!*” These were Sivaswamy’s first words to me when I met him at a detention centre near Brussels airport. For several years he was part of a crowd of five to six hundred thousand Tamils internally displaced in Sri Lanka (*IDPs: Internally Displaced Persons*). Owner of a small business with several employees, he had to flee his city of Jaffna. He moved from one hiding place to another in one of the *High Security Zones (HSZ)* controlled by the army and the Singhalese police, in order to escape once again the torture sessions in the military prisons. He had never carried weapons, but he supported the LTTE (*Liberation Tamil Tigers, Eelam*), while the rest of his family supported the EPDP (*Eelam People’s Democratic Party*), the rival party to the Tamils. He had seen one of his brothers-in-law killed by the LTTE. His wife and children had been abducted and had not been seen for a long time. Under surveillance by several Tamil factions, and in a constantly precarious situation due to the military repression, he was utterly exhausted. Even though he had close ties with his country, he felt increasingly threatened by these belligerent forces. One day, he decided to escape this cruel, 25 year long civil war.

Sivaswamy reached Colombo, where he hid while managing to organise and pay for his journey out of the country, leaving most of his little wealth behind. His plan was to escape by two flights: going first to one of the capital cities of black Africa, then to his final destination in Western Europe. He wanted to live in peace, be protected, and carry out his profession. “*But why did you choose Belgium?*” I asked him. He replied: “*I didn’t want to be here. Actually, I wanted to rejoin my Tamil family and friends from my country who are in England. At the flight stopover in Brussels, I asked to be transferred to a flight to London; I was refused so I had to apply for refugee status here.*” Sivaswamy was not granted refugee status, but he remained in Belgium for 4 years and 4 months making no attempt to hide his presence. A petition to the State Consulate and a request for legalisation of his residency here remained unanswered. He lived by doing odd jobs, frequently sleeping in the street. One day, he was stopped by the authorities in a store and then arrested by the police. I met him in the detention centre. After several weeks, there was a new development: he was freed, the Belgium authorities not daring to send him back to his country because of the risk of further imprisonment and torture.

So once again he has no papers, and his precarious situation continues...

Sivaswamy has good grounds for requesting asylum, even if fleeing a military conflict is not, in the strict sense, one of the criteria of the Geneva Convention. He gave honest answers in the course of interviews during his asylum-seeking process, explaining his real need for protection, his desire to rejoin his Tamil relatives in London, his hope of managing his business there without being a burden on the social services of the State. Unfortunately, however, the Administration refused to grant him refugee status, interpreting his words as a fraudulent request for asylum. Sivaswamy

shared with me his disappointment: *“Why say I am lying, just because I said I hoped to find my family again and I also said I needed protection?”*

He cited other cases: the young Cameroonian woman named Esther who wanted to escape the excision practices carried out in the villages of her ethnic group; Magomed, a Chechen man tortured in Grozny by the occupation army from Moscow: in the detention centre, after being separated from his wife and their five children, he was waiting to be sent back to one of the new member states of the European Union, and from there, no doubt, be forced back into Russia; Dieudonné, a young man from Togo, who was a minor at the time of his arrival: he had completed three years of studies, and just after turning 18, had been placed in detention in the middle of the academic year with the intention of repatriating him. Esther, Mogamed, Dieudonné, and so many others: no one believes their stories either.

“Why are they always so suspicious?”, Sivaswamy asked, in the end, frustrated at not being able to offer the valuable gift of contributing with his person and his talents to a society in which he would like to live, where he had hoped to find much-needed protection, no doubt along with his many other legitimate and acceptable reasons. The culture of doubt which had pursued him during this process had wounded him, made his efforts toward a new beginning more arduous, and made it more difficult for him to be perceived as a person capable of making a valuable gift to a society to which he had immigrated, the gift of presence, relationships and actions.

Listening to this young Sri Lankan, it became more and more clear that, like every gift, the gift of the immigrant would only be realised in its fullness if it was both freely given and cordially received, in reciprocal respect for the other person and other countries.

Julian, Rena and their five children: the great distress caused by being gypsies, in their homeland or in our country

As gypsies who were ill-treated in their own country, and hoping to find protection in Belgium, Julian and his wife Rena arrived in Belgium in 1998, with their five children, from the eldest Julian Jr. (age 20), to the youngest Besar (9 months old). Two negative judgments put an end to their process of asylum-seeking.

Living in a small village in the capital, the family gradually became integrated, participating in the neighbourhood activities and being well-accepted by their neighbours. Both parents and Julian Jr. were able to find odd jobs allowing them to make a living; they never required public assistance or had to beg.

Integration was made easier by fact that their 3 school-age children; Estera (age 16), Joan (age 14) and Natalia (age 10) were accepted into different schools, were successful in their studies, and expressed themselves well in French. Their request for legalisation was not granted in spite of their petition. Although they never complied with the order to leave the region, they were not subject to immigration controls, and led a normal life, keeping the laws and happy to be able to give something to the

country that was sheltering them. Unfortunately, the police came to their home early one morning and arrested them. After being kept at the local police station for 36 hours, they were sent to the airport. They were then transferred to this holding centre after refusing to let themselves be repatriated to their country of origin. During their 3 months at the centre, the family continued to suffer increased stress because the school-age children were losing a year of their studies. Despite recommendations by the lawyer and private organisations, the assessment made by the school principal and teachers, and the public support of their neighbors, the Administration failed to shoulder its responsibility and uphold the children's right to be educated.

One morning, they made a decision: Julian Jr., Estera, Joan, Natalia and Besar, their parents Julian and Rena, set out to return to their own country...and to what new distress?

After six years in Belgium, Julian and his loved ones experienced this expulsion as an injustice committed against their children, given the fact that the youngsters had already spent half their lives in Brussels. Their desire to be more integrated in the life of the country and to be of use to it, the positive perception that they had of their own presence in Belgium, suddenly vanished in the face of the inhumanity of the officials and administrators, leaving in its place, bitterness and discouragement.

During the four years that I paid weekly visits to the detention centre, I developed a real respect for many of these detainees. I frequently observed that despite their harsh experiences, the violations of their basic human rights (in particular the denial of schooling for their children), acts of marginalisation, rejection as well as xenophobic reactions, none of these diminished their sense of personal dignity, their capacity to be patient and hopeful. Many times I witnessed gestures of solidarity among the detained migrants of different nationalities. My visitor colleagues from other organisations and I often reflected on this: what a source of renewal and enrichment for our societies, for our Christian communities would the definitive presence of such individuals and families be! But this was very different from the attitude we noticed in areas where migrants had been living, sometimes for several years. The attitude and actions of the authorities and the general public meant there was a stigma attached to being an immigrant; people were suspicious of them and could hardly conceal their xenophobic feelings etc. More recently, in the context of the war against terrorism, reinforced security measures have created unfortunate bitterness and foreigners feel more and more that they are the main targets.

Henri Goldman, Coordinator of the Migration Observatory in the *Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight Against Racism* (Brussels), observed that *"there are two ways of looking at the migration experience, according to whether one shares the point of view of the migrant or of the host society, whether one favours the right of persons to live in dignity or the right of States to regulate their borders and their resources. These two perspectives, equally legitimate, are in regular conflict with each other. How can they be reconciled? Certainly, all hospitality has its limits. However, no limit can curb the pressing need that forces thousands of people to leave*

their native land regardless of the cost. This need explains the measures people are prepared to take, either lawfully or unlawfully"¹²

In fact, if one considers political policies and the recent course of events in Europe and in the world in general, can one imagine that these two perspectives can ever be reconciled at the present time? Would not such a present or future reconciliation require a serious examination of strategies capable of re-establishing priorities? Is it not time to redefine the choices that the Christian Churches in particular make, so that they may recognise their responsibility in this matter? Although mutual aid to migrants remains necessary, Christian communities cannot rest satisfied with that. How can migrants themselves have more of a voice; how can we listen to them when making decisions that affect them? How can we be, together with them, the voice of the voiceless masses?

A CULTURE OF WELCOME

The "culture of suspicion" often hides the diversity of human and cultural richness that comes with the presence and the constructive activities of migrants. The deep desire of Christian Churches to systematically establish a "culture of welcome" must continue to firmly oppose a tendency towards doubt and suspicion. This is the recommendation of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 2003, frequently cited in *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*. It states: "It is important that the [Christian] community should not think that its duty towards migrants can be limited to simply offering gestures of fraternal aid or even to upholding the piecemeal laws that favour their dignified insertion in society and which respect the legitimate identity of the foreigner. Christians must become promoters of an authentic "culture of welcome" (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa* 101 and 103), which knows how to appreciate the authentic human values of the other person, and to overcome the many difficulties which accompany living together with persons different from ourselves. (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa* 85 and 112)"¹³

Rooted in the religious tradition of the people of God, we know that in both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, God has more than once taken on the features of a foreigner, that God favours the presence of migrants among his people, requiring that all have an appropriate regard for them. In God's plan, migrants have always had their place among those who receive them, sometimes being entrusted with a mission – a mission sometimes as important as that of being among the ancestors of the Messiah. Just as in the time of the Prophets and in the time of the One sent by the Father along the roads of Palestine, migrant people today remain a gift for Christian Churches and societies. Insofar as they have immigrated with total freedom and experienced a sense of welcome, they can become active partners with those who welcome them, Christians or women and men of good will in the struggle in solidarity with "a faith that exercises justice", on behalf of the lowly, the forgotten ones, the foreigners.

¹² Henri Goldman : « *Le mariage blanc de Sonia* », in « Politique. Revue de débats », special edition: « Réfugiés, étrangers en Belgique : vers un horizon solidaire », published by CIRE – Coordination et initiatives pour et avec les réfugiés et les étrangers – January 2005, pages 96-97.

¹³ Cf. « *La Documentation Catholique* », N° 2318 (July 18, 2004), n° 39, pp. 669-670.

I will end with a reflection by Father Jean-Noël Gindre, which allows us to benefit from his experience of solidarity with foreigners during the course of four decades: for 14 years in Algeria beginning in 1963, then in four industrial villages in Isere, and finally in Saint-Denis with students, 80% of whom were foreign. Jean-Noël Gindre wrote¹⁴ :

“Yahweh is the Other, the Beyond-human, which means He is the partner who invites all to enter into a Covenant, that is, a living and evolving relationship with Him. The authors of the Bible like to represent God as having the characteristics of a foreigner, the one, for example, who visited Abraham at Mamre, who became closely involved in his life and mingled with his descendants. It is also under the appearance of a stranger that the resurrected Christ entered into relationship with the disciples in Emmaus, and because they accepted that relationship with him, the two disciples could recognise his living presence in the gesture of the breaking of bread. In the Acts of the Apostles, it is once again a foreigner, the Centurion Cornelius, through whom the Spirit speaks to Peter to help him discover that the Christian identity is not limited by the boundaries of Judaism.

“As descendants of Abraham, the disciples in Emmaus and of Peter, we believe that our experience of a relationship of brotherhood and sisterhood with the strangers we meet is the best news that we can receive and proclaim. If the God of Jesus Christ is truly for us the One Father of all humans, then relationship is the principal element of our faith, the sole transcendence that we can recognise. Friendship is a matter of choice and can be negotiated. Our relationship as brothers and sisters is not debatable, even with regard to the stranger. This relationship is recognised in the prayer Our Father. It is both a promise and an invitation to look beyond ourselves. But we also know that this faith has little value without works and actions to make it credible.

I am quite convinced that, in today's world, a theology of mission can no longer be concentrated solely on the idea of teaching truths, however worthy these may be, nor of exporting humanitarian aid, necessary though this is. Perhaps the great achievement of Christians of the 20th and 21st century is to have recognised that **dialogue** is an essential dimension of faith.

Father Eddy Jadot, SJ

Member of the Jesuit Refugee Service

¹⁴ In *Vie Chrétienne*, n° 499, September 2004, pp. 4-9: Jean-Noël Gindre SJ, « Notre relation à l'étranger ».

Today's Challenges

Province of France North

Living among migrants

Located in Montreuil, a suburb of Paris, our local community has been living in a housing project of 500 apartments among very poor people. The neighbourhood is noted for its numerous young people and its ethnic differences with a predominance of Africans. However other immigrants come from Eastern Europe and Asia. 22.6% are foreigners, 4.6% come from the European Union. Montreuil, nicknamed “Bamako 2”, is the “capital of Mali” in France. In this housing project we try to live our vocation as Daughters of Charity by placing ourselves at the service of our brothers and sisters so that they may be recognised and become agents in their own development. Our daily relationships involve being in proximity, in the neighborhood, in the projects, the city and the Church. Individual relationships are necessary, but we are also convinced of the importance of collective activities that can have long-term effects.

In 1996 a priest in the parish asked me to accompany one of the catechumens, **Colette**, a young woman from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I soon discovered that she was here illegally... Since then the condition of immigrants in France has worsened. Immigrants have become the “undocumented”. After the promulgation of certain laws, a group “Support for the Undocumented” was created in the neighbourhood to welcome people who do not have the necessary documentation, to support them, and accompany them in their process of legalisation, to act with them to have their rights recognised, and also to sensitise public opinion. After community discernment, I became involved in this support group. Here I meet members of several associations, trades union organisations and political parties.

Later I met **Chekne**, a Malian, who came to France with plans to bring his family over. A new government decree in 1997 allowed him to ask for legal status. He was classed as a single person since his wife had stayed back home, so his application was refused. Many others were in the same situation. In despair, they tried to find refuge in a church to make the public aware of their situation. They were driven out by the police. Chekne was then taken to court and sentenced to a year in prison and banned from French territory for five years. While he was in prison, his friends couldn't visit him because they, too, were “undocumented.” One of the members of the support group asked to visit. The group became involved... and he was freed after seven months. When he was released from prison, he told us, *“The other prisoners didn't want to believe I was there because I had no official papers. They were in there for robbery or murder!”* That was the hardest thing for him. When he got out of prison, wanting to help his family back home, he again found work illegally. The police placed him under restriction orders: he could not move

from one district to another, but he would not be sent back to his own country. He stayed in hiding for more than 20 months.

This group "Support for the Undocumented" provides legal assistance. It is supported by the GISTI (information and support for immigrants group), the CIMADE (ecumenical service for mutual aid) and at times by the Secours Catholique (Catholic Social Services). They handle petitions for legalisation. For other immigrants, we try to make appointments with the police to explain each case. Our perseverance has brought results. The laws are applied in different ways, depending on the police departments... Our department has the highest number of undocumented persons, and so it is more difficult to obtain legal status.

In our parish, we have the custom of greeting each other at the beginning of each Eucharistic celebration. One Sunday, I noticed an African man who seemed a bit lost. I greeted him. He was Congolese and his name was **Jerome**. That same Sunday a prayer of intercession was offered for a group of undocumented immigrants and their families who had been welcomed into the basilica of Saint Denis because they were homeless. Our Bishop de Beranger supported this. His statement was read in every church of the diocese. At the end of Mass, I went up to Jerome. He asked me to explain the Bishop's statement. Then I understood that he was having problems. Being alone, he came for his midday meal with the Community. He had arrived clandestinely in France two months ago, and had not found a place in the hostel. He was staying temporarily with a Congolese woman in the neighbourhood; she was a single parent with two children. I invited him to the support group and helped him fill out the application forms for political asylum. He received the minimum aid to live on, but he was not given a work permit. Unable to survive on the money he received from the state, he illegally found a job with a Yugoslavian painter/carpenter. He worked there for three months and received half the minimum wage. One month he was not paid at all, but he had no means of claiming his wages because he was working illegally. After a year and a half, he was refused political asylum. In fact, an accord was signed between our two countries; Congolese nationals can no longer claim to be political refugees even if it is dangerous for some of them to remain in their country. So our efforts were in vain. Jerome went underground to find work, forced to accept any kind of working conditions, unable to claim what is rightfully his when the employer is dishonest, going about afraid of being arrested by the police...all these conditions contributing to a very stressful life. Yet he had to survive.

Suzy from Cameroon was able to be legalised thanks to our support group. In the group she met Christian who was an agnostic, and they decided to get married. Suzy wanted a church wedding, Christian was willing, but to be true to himself he recited the Our Father in his own words. For the church ceremony he asked me to read this text: "*I want someone who is in the programme with me and who has faith, to read my text.*" Here is what I read:

Our Father: You, the Father of all who struggle to make the light of love, solidarity and justice shine. You, the one I want to be the Father of all those close to me, my friends, my family.

Hallowed be your name by all those who work day and night to free their brothers and sisters from ignorance, illness, exploitation and persecution. By all those

who give of their time to change working conditions in the neighbourhood, the factory, the office, the school.

Your kingdom come, and may it come for all!

Your will be done.

Give us this day our daily bread, this bread that is in short supply and is in the hands a small minority. Insufficient for the great majority of people in our world, the bread of work for all, the bread of real formation, and that very special bread that we call “papers”. The bread of true life, also.

Forgive us, Lord, for all the cries that we do not hear, all the smiles that we do not see, all the injustices against which we do nothing.

Lead us not into temptation to fold our arms, to close the door in order to protect the little happiness we have. Let us not be tempted to believe that power can be gained through violence, racism and intolerance.

But deliver us from evil which, in the depth of our being, prompts us to live our life by keeping it for ourselves, when You invite us to give it away. Give us the enthusiasm to make the world more beautiful!

Annouze is a 38-year-old woman from Haiti. She arrived here a few months ago with a tourist visa. She could not stay in her own country that is so poor. Also, an aunt of hers practises voodoo and made her life impossible. She came to be with Joseph, a school friend who has worked in a restaurant in France for over 20 years. She wanted to marry him and have a family. She often went to church to pray, but Joseph didn't understand that. After a very difficult year financially she illegally found work in the restaurant. One day she told me: *“I still don't have a husband and a child. So since I earn a little money, I would like to support a child from a poor country. I want to share and help a child to live. Can you give me the address of some organisation?”*

Andrews from Sri Lanka was with his wife and their two children. He was undocumented but he has the possibility of getting papers. However where could he find the 420 Euros required by the prefecture when he did not have the right to work? In our local community we decided together to lend him the money.

This commitment to working with undocumented immigrants sometimes places me in difficult situations. One political party used the undocumented for its election propaganda. The group reacted to this and we notified the migrants. In the neighbourhood we meet neighbours and their children on a daily basis. Immigrants who are not French citizens tend to live together among themselves, and we want to help them integrate with the rest of the people in the housing estates.

In collaboration with others, the neighbourhood organised a group to help the children with their homework. It was an opportunity also to meet the parents and to encourage them to attend school meetings. **Mr Traore** lives on our floor. He has no problem about coming to our apartment to ask for advice or other help. For the last few years he has participated in the tenants' association and encourages his friends in the projects to become involved, to participate in meetings and demonstrations, and to come to meals in the neighborhood where each one brings a speciality of their own country. All this helps them to get along better with one another.

Several years ago a few French neighbours started a Celebration Committee. The municipality supports them as they organise friendly gatherings and outings for families, to help them to discover more about their adopted country, and plan entertainment evenings that include items presenting different cultures. This has helped lower barriers and has introduced the residents to other cultures. The “*Week against racism and in promotion of friendship among peoples*” has met with growing success. Over time, active and responsible participation among groups has promoted a better understanding and sharing of cultural richness. Our local community participates in all these aspects of the life of the neighborhood. We welcome into our home, often on the spur of the moment, all who are having difficulties, and invite them to share a meal with us. We find all their problems disturbing. We can’t remain indifferent to so much suffering and injustice. We have to act with others. Isn’t the first right of the migrant the right to live in his or her own country? Shouldn’t the richest nations take responsibility for fighting against poverty and inequality in the countries of the southern hemisphere? The responses required need to be on a global scale. That is why we are involved in the Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development. This NGO has two main missions: education to promote development in France and the support of development projects at grassroots level through partnerships. We also reflected on the guidelines given by the Ministry to Migrants. In one of the latest documents “*When the stranger knocks at my door*”, the bishops of France challenged the entire nation: “The quality of the welcome we offer our neighbour shows how humane we are.”

Thanks to the closeness we share, we are impelled to wonder how to promote relationships between believers and non-believers. On Christmas night, Lotfi, a man from Algeria, gave out pamphlets about the situation of undocumented persons. A woman came up to him and spoke to him in racist terms. He told me afterwards: “*I let her talk, but I said to myself: she goes to church, but she must not read the same book as you do.*” Yes, the God of Christians and of the Muslims invites us to live as brothers and sisters.

Allowing each one to be recognised for their gifts and to have a place in the neighbourhood as well as the Church, is the way we respond daily to the call of Saint Vincent. Each year we have the joy of celebrating together in the parish the “festival of the nations”. Each one expresses their faith, uniqueness and dynamism.

Sister Bernadette Anouchian
Daughter of Charity

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

Testimony from the Province of North Africa

Ministry with Caritas Tunisia

Since 1997, I have been working with a Caritas Tunisia team involved in ministry to migrants and refugees. Our team is international and interdenominational.

It is made up of a Congolese pastor from the Methodist Church and his wife, a Korean pastor from the Reformed Church, a Syrian Sister of Saint Joseph of the Apparition, and a Spanish Daughter of Charity. So we are all “migrants” even if our reasons for migrating are different. For the last few years, we have organised ourselves and shared out different responsibilities among our team. Once a month, we meet together to update one another on our different experiences and to examine how to move forward together.

Tunisia is regarded as a transit land. In fact, all the migrants who come to our reception office, from sub-Saharan regions or North Africa, have just one thought in mind, to set out for Europe, “El Dorado”, or the promised land! Tunisia, then, is just a stage in the journey. However, for many of them, this stage is often longer and harder than they anticipated. Those who have the good fortune to reach Tunisia discover the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of obtaining a visa for any European country. In addition, they wait for an opportunity to enter clandestinely. But before any of that, they must find a place to stay, food to eat and health care if they become ill. However, in Tunisia there is no work available for foreigners, even less so if they do not have a residence permit. And in order to have such a permit, they need a work contract. So it is a vicious circle. After waiting for several months or several years, the luckiest ones manage to cross the Mediterranean.

When migrant persons arrive at the office of Caritas, we try first of all to listen to them. Only rarely do we give them financial assistance. We meet them several times and try to get to know as much about their situation as possible, something always very difficult to do. Fortunately, since our team is made up of people from different continents, we have a wider outlook and are better able to know if a given situation really requires assistance from us or not.

There are many different reasons why people migrate from their countries. There are:

- Those from very poor backgrounds and who are fleeing from poverty; for them the journey is long and hard because they lack resources.

- Those who come from a better social background. In their case it is their families who have paid for their travel and they expect them to succeed. For this reason, if they fail, they refuse to return home.

- Students who arrive with so-called scholarships from their country. Since this money never arrives, they must interrupt their studies through lack of resources. No longer able to register for school, they lose their right to renew their student visas and become illegal immigrants

The people of sub-Saharan Africa mostly fall into these three categories.

- Finally, there are those who flee their country because of war. We refer them to the office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The majority of these people, though, are not true refugees, and use the situation in their countries as a way of seeking a better lifestyle. Often this group of people come from Algeria and are accompanied by their families.

In the last two years the number of migrants has decreased. Since it is extremely difficult to get into Europe, the migrants are obliged to remain in the

country. The government does not like having them in its territory, and takes measures to curb their presence here.

It is always very difficult to have a good understanding of their situation and their real needs. We frequently encourage the migrants to return to their own country, and if they agree, we help to pay for their return travel when necessary. We know the many dangers that lie in wait for young women and girls, and so we feel a certain joy when they return to their countries of origin. However, we are very sad whenever they seek to cross the Mediterranean by any means possible, despite our advice to the contrary.

Another difficulty for our Caritas Tunisia office is the fact that we live in a completely Muslim country but we are neither native nor Muslim. Caritas is an organisation sponsored by the Catholic Church, with no official recognition by the government authorities, even though our presence is tolerated. We must act with great discretion and prudence. The police regularly come to visit us to gather information about what we are doing and to check that we are not proselytising.

We receive aid from various European organisations and donations from different churches in Tunisia. The country does not give us any assistance. The only other help comes from a few doctors who provide a free medical consultation if someone becomes ill.

Our office welcomes all those who come here, no matter who they are, without distinction of race or religion. In our interviews, we never ask questions relating to religion. We want to be “all to all” without giving preference to one group or another. This manner of treating each migrant person equally is known everywhere. At present, we do not provide a specific pastoral ministry to migrants. Those who wish to practise their religion get in touch with their own places of worship.

The local people are not happy to welcome migrants, especially those who are Christian. The question of migration is a very complex international issue. But even if we cannot solve this problem on a worldwide scale, we can, at our local level, give good care to those who are suffering.

Sister Purificacion SANTAMARIA
Daughter of Charity

PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

Testimony from the Province of Bogota

A social services centre for migrant people

Introduction

“The passion for Jesus Christ impels us to go toward the poor with boldness, compassion, creativity.” (Lines of Action)

Among the many types of poverty that exist in Colombia, one seen these days is the movement of displaced individuals and families to moderate-sized towns or large cities, because of armed conflict between groups who operate outside the law. Generally, it is the entire family that emigrates, after one or several family members have been assassinated. They arrive with nothing. They must leave everything—land, animals, clothes, cooking utensils, shelter—that is to say, they are in total poverty. The loss of their homes isn't only the loss of material property, but of all the elements which make up their individuality--traditions, culture, values, family ties and friendships.

After the Provincial Assembly of 2002, we gathered information about the circumstances of these displaced people. The Sisters then reflected on this information at regional meetings, and the Province decided to organise specific actions they could take in to respond, in a more effective way, to the needs of at least a part of the population. The population of Colombia is currently 44 million people, and the number of those who are displaced is approaching 4 million.

Social Services Centre in Mosquera

Located in the municipality of Mosquera, 50 minutes away from Bogota, this centre provides various social services for displaced families. With advice from the University of St. Thomas in Bogota, the Centre provides training in farming techniques, management of organic crops, and profitable ways of rearing poultry.

The displaced families live in small rented quarters. Some are overcrowded, with substandard utility services and hygienic conditions that are not conducive to the well-being of the persons living there. When we learn of the presence of a displaced family, we begin by visiting them and assisting them with their legalisation process. After this, we offer them a small strip of land to cultivate, so that they can earn enough to meet their basic needs. Our centre also offers various activities and formation sessions. The Centre's rule of life is based on the values of honesty, solidarity, and mutual respect.

The families we serve in the Centre participate in communal agricultural work and animal rearing programmes. In time, we see the people coming to life again, their faces shining with hope and a renewed will to live. The families receive a small salary in accordance with the number of hours work they contribute. At the end of each project, an evaluation is made with the families and new objectives are set. Gospel reflection is also part of our service of accompaniment of the families as they grieve over what has happened to them. We help them maintain their faith in a loving God and try to transform their feelings of hate into a desire to forgive. Our Centre helps the families to move on from a position of dependence to a real sense of personal empowerment, to find their dignity again, and to develop a spirit of solidarity with other families experiencing the same trials. We notice that their sense of family is strengthened and mutual respect increases. Even with support from the diocese, the major difficulty for the Centre is a lack of economic resources, since we receive very little assistance from the State. Despite this difficulty, the families' witness of courage motivates us to persevere in this mission. Here is one such testimony among many others.

Vicenta's Family

Vicenta is 39 years old, married to Manuel and the mother of three children: Roberto, Rosa, and Elvira. Vicenta recounts the following:

“One day early in 2003, at 5 a.m., an armed paramilitary group arrived in our village and divided into smaller groups of 8 to 10, in order to enter all our homes at the same time. I was with my husband, my three children and my grandson. They took us hostage, but my husband was able to escape. They took Roberto aside, and the rest of us four were led to the highway with others from the village. They left us standing there, guarded by several armed men. An hour later, a man arrived with my son's watch and he said to the officer in charge: *“I'm bringing you that boy's watch. We had to kill him because he swore that he wasn't going with us to kill innocent people.”* When I heard this story, I began to cry, but the others who were held hostage with me said to me: *“Courage!. Don't say a word. Accept it for the sake of your daughters and grandson.”* I imagined finding my son dead, and I asked God to give me the strength to bear all this suffering. The armed men led us along the road, insulting us and prodding us with their guns to make us walk faster. Suddenly, I saw Roberto, alive in the middle of some armed men. A few metres further on, they made us lie down on the ground and told us that they weren't going to kill us if we told the truth. They asked us who lived in each house and if we had seen any other armed group. I answered angrily *“I saw another armed group go by, but I don't know who they are.”* During this time, they burned Roberto's face with some kind of toxic liquid. Then they took us to a nearby house and locked us in. After they left, we managed to break down the door. As I came out, I saw Robert lying on the ground a little further away. Just at that moment, my husband came out from hiding, having witnessed the entire scene. I fainted when I saw that my son was dead. When I recovered my strength, we fled into the forest to hide—our children, my husband, and myself. We walked for seven hours, following the road that would take us to Bogotá where some of our family living there offered us shelter. The neighbours gave us clothes, shoes, and food when they learned of our situation. Then the Sisters came to visit us and told us about the social services centre in Mosquera and invited us to go there. We immediately accepted their offer. We are grateful to them for all their support, above all for having welcomed us as if we were their own family. We lost everything—our son, house, land. Thanks to the Centre's comforting support, we have found the strength to survive this terrible ordeal, and we are infinitely grateful.”

The witness of Vicenta and so many other displaced families has taught me a great deal and been a form of evangelisation for me. I give thanks to God for the ministry carried out by the Centre, a ministry that helps me to put my own personal problems into perspective, and to overcome them.

Sister Ursulina Quintero
Daughter of Charity

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCES

Nominations

PROVINCE OF BELGIUM: Sister Christiane VERCAUTEREN was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, February 8th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF SOUTH INDIA: Sister Rosa KIDANGEN was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Mary KUNNAPPALLY, February 15th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF NORTH INDIA: Sister Grace MOOLAN was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, February 22nd, 2006.

PROVINCE OF BOGOTA : Sister Nubia QUINTERO QUINTERO was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Hilda APONTE, March 6th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF MEXICO: Sister Maria Graciela RUBIO MONCADA was designated Visitatrice, March 6th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF ROME : Sister Amelia CICCONOFRI was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Béatrice PRIORI, March 22nd, 2006.

PROVINCE OF PUERTO RICO : Sister Teresa DIAZ BIRD was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Juanita FLORES, April 5th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF FRENCH-SPEAKING SWITZERLAND: Sister Madeleine SAILLARD was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Pia HUMBEL, 5th April 2006

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Sister Anna SOEPRAPTIWI was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 27th April 2006

PROVINCE OF SAN SEBASTIAN: Sister Carmen PEREZ was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 1st August 2006

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PROVINCE OF NIGERIA: Father Eamon RAFTERY was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, March 8th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF ECUADOR: Father Edmundo BURBANO PORTILLA was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, March 13th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF NEW YORK: Father Gerard LUTTENBERGER was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, March 13th, 2006

PROVINCE OF CHINA: Father Jan Van AERT was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, March 13th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF NORTH INDIA: Father Thomas KOTTIRI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, March 24th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF INDONESIA: Father Franciscus HARDJODIRONO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, March 28th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF SEVILLE: Father Manuel FREIRE QUINTERO was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, April 28th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF CHELMNO-POZNAN: Father Pawel SLIWINSKI was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, April 28th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF VIETNAM: Father Joseph PHAN THAI HOA was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, April 28th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF CRACOW: Father Marcin STASIOWSKI was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, May 2nd 2006.

PROVINCE OF BELGIUM: Father Daniel MARTELLO was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, July 1st 2006. Father Théo JEURIS was reappointed Sub-Director for three years, July 1st 2006.

PROVINCE OF MADAGASCAR: Father Kazimierz BUKOWIEC was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, July 19th, 2006.

PROVINCE OF MADRID SAINT VINCENT: Father Enrique SANZ PORRAS was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, July 19th, 2006.

SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Central Africa

Visit by Father Gregory Gay, Superior General

On March 14th, 2006, Father Gregory Gay, Superior General, arrived in the Province of Central Africa. He came with the Visitatrice, Sr. Sabina Iragui, to Mukungu, to the first local community which was established in 1973 in the southwest of Rwanda. There the Sisters provide different services at the clinic, nutrition centre and the centre for the promotion of poor persons. The pastor and parish community joyfully welcomed Fr. Gregory for the Eucharistic celebration. During his visit to the clinic, he greeted each patient and gave them a word of encouragement. Then he met the members of the Vincentian family and invited them to continue moving forward: *“The poor are the beloved of God and agents in their own promotion. The Lord asks us to serve them with love.”* Finally, he shared with the Sisters, listening to their experiences, their joys and their difficulties and giving his ideas on mission and on his service as Superior General.

The time came to leave for Rwisabi, Burundi, where we met the Sisters of Ruza, near the border with Tanzania. During Mass in the parish church, Fr. Gregory

invited us to grow more and more in sisterly love: *“I invite you to forgive, to work to root out the violence that destroys human life and family life.”*

Then Fr. Gregory travelled to Butare, in the south of Rwanda, to meet two communities, one that forms postulants, serves in the orphanage and ministers to people with AIDS; and the other, which is the Seminary community. There, Fr. Gregory encouraged the young Sisters to live fully their time of formation and the other Sisters to take responsibility for their own formation and to collaborate with the laity in order to serve those who are poor in the spirit of St. Vincent.

Returning to the north of the country, Fr. Gregory arrived in Nemba where the Daughters of Charity came in 1972 to serve the sick in the hospital. The bishop of the diocese came to greet the Superior General. After meeting the parish community, Fr. Gregory met members of the Vincentian family. The next day in Kigali, many Sisters of the Province gathered for the celebration of Eucharist. There Fr. Gregory said, *“As Vincentian priests, we are called to be ‘fathers’ of the poor, and as Daughters of Charity, you are ‘mothers’ at the service of those who suffer.”* Sr. Sabina warmly thanked him because *“it’s the first time a Superior General has visited us.”* She gave an account of the Province which has been in existence for the last five years although the Company has been in the country for 35 years. The Province comprises 9 local communities: 2 in Burundi and 7 in Rwanda; 58 Sisters, of which 37 are native and 21 are missionaries; 4 postulants and 5 pre-postulants. With the help of powerpoint, Sr. Maria Carmen presented the history of the Province since its foundation in Burundi in 1971 and in Rwanda in 1973. Naturally, Mother Chiron was remembered as were the first missionaries, and we contemplated together the marvels accomplished by God in the past and today. Fr. Gregory told us that he was touched by the joy and faith of our people despite their suffering. He advised us to maintain a balance between prayer and community life for quality service. After some advice for the Sister Servants, he asked all the Sisters to always be filled with a spirit of faith, good will and understanding.

A group of Sisters

THE POOR SPEAK TO US

Quasi-Province

“For me, my mother is the Gospel!”

Having been brought up in an orphanage, Mathilde never knew her parents. From a very young age, she had to work in a factory and learned to get along on her own. Her only desire was to start a family and to experience the family affection she herself had never known.

One day, Jacques, a young man who worked in the same factory told her that he loved her, and she believed him. They were married. But, she very soon realised that Jacques was an alcoholic. Every night he would come home drunk and beat his wife. Mathilde soon understood that her family life would be one long ordeal of suffering. Under the influence of alcohol, Jacques continued to beat her, even when

she became pregnant. When Mathilde gave birth to a little boy whom she named Michel, Jacques went through a phase of terrible jealousy. Not only did he not care for his child, but his violence against Mathilde became worse. And as well as this, Jacques had affairs with other women.

For more than two years, Mathilde became more and more unhappy and no longer believed that she could ever find the happiness she longed for. It was in the depths of her misery that Mathilde was to find God. Having decided to return to the Church, which she had left since she went to work at the factory, she met a religious in whom she confided her trials and suffering. With this Sister, Mathilde began to pray to Jesus on Calvary and to Mary at the foot of the cross. In realising that Jesus and Mary had suffered so much more than she had, Mathilde suddenly felt close to them. From that day on, she never stopped praying and began to follow an amazing spiritual path. Already more concerned for others than for herself, she became more attentive and compassionate towards all those who suffer in the tragic situations they have to endure.

At home, she tried to let nothing show, speaking positively to Michel about his father. But Michel could see that his father beat his mother. This domestic violence affected Michel and made him a disturbed child. At twelve years old, he began to get into trouble. However, when he returned home, whatever he might have done, his mother was always welcoming and affectionate, making an effort to explain things to him without ever scolding him. Michel, however, became more and more difficult. For Mathilde, only one thing counted: to love her son, to help him to become a man, and to serve him with infinite generosity. She continued to pray to God with confidence. Michel's psychological state deteriorated from year to year. Five years later, Michel fell gravely ill, and his mother continued to surround him with marvellously compassionate care. His illness lasted several months. As the days passed, Michel realised that his life would soon be over. He watched his mother, and in this daily closeness, he gradually discovered how generous she was, how self-effacing and caring for the well-being of others. Shortly before his death, Michel told her: *"Mom, I think I'm going to die. I want to ask your forgiveness for all that I did wrong. I also want to say that, if your God is as good as you are, then I believe in God. I think that I came to God through you. Now I can die in peace and be with your God. Thank you."*

Thank you, Mathilde, for the witness of your life, for this gift of yourself that shows me the infinite generosity of the maternal face of God, which is constantly turned towards others.

Sister H el ene-Marie
Daughter of Charity

NEWSBRIEFS

A Jewish Baby Saved in Salonika!

For more than 40 years, the Yad Vashem Museum of Jerusalem has been, for the State of Israel, the central memorial to the Holocaust of the Jewish people. It is situated on the Hill of Remembrance in Jerusalem. To get there, you have to take the Road of the Righteous where a tree was planted in memory of the "Righteous of the Nations," a title ascribed to non-Jews who, during World War II, risked their own lives to help Jews in peril.

In Israel, January 27th is the day dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Nazis. On that day I found myself on the Road of the Righteous that leads to the House of Remembrance, near Yad Vashem. Among the many trees, there are two that are particularly dear to me.

These two trees recall an event that occurred in Salonika, Greece, during World War II. One tree is dedicated to my parents, the other to a Daughter of Charity, Sr. Giuseppa. In 1940 my Italian parents lived in Greece. It was at that time that Mussolini declared war and the Italian army invaded Greece. Now at that time, the Germans occupied Salonika. They began to harass the Jews and require them to wear the distinctive yellow star. At the elementary school, my classmates and I looked at the yellow star on their smocks with envy; we didn't know the terrifying meaning of that decoration. Our house was next to that of the Daughters of Charity, where my mother had studied and with whom she remained in contact. In 1943, Sr. Giuseppa, who was deathly pale, came to our house with a several month old baby in her arms. She said to my mother, "It's a Jewish child; we found her in our chapel. Help us; we can hardly say she was born in a convent." A quick understanding glance passed between my parents and then my father said, "We'll say she's ours." So for three years in Salonika, I, an only child, had a "younger Jewish sister," Rena.

After the war we separated from Rena who stayed with the Sisters. My family was expelled from Greece, and we returned to Florence. It was only there that I learned that 60,000 Jews had been exterminated. Only several hundred had been saved, among them, the real parents of my "little Jewish sister." Her mother, Edda, having miraculously survived a concentration camp, was sent to Paris by the Red Cross. Edda went to the Motherhouse at rue du Bac to inquire about her little daughter, Rena, whom she had left during the war at the Daughters of Charity house where Sr. Giuseppa was placed. Sr. Giuseppa got in contact with Edda and returned her daughter to her. While I was in Florence, I learned that my "temporary little sister" and her parents had reached Israel, safe and sound. Then, I heard nothing more of her for years.

Forty years later, after a programme on Greek television, I received a letter from Greece: "*Dear Sir, I am the Jewish baby from Salonika*" My heart gave a bound. We met each other like sister and brother and it was she, "my little sister" who wanted to plant near Yad Vashem, the tree dedicated to my parents. We agreed and we also planted beside it, another tree dedicated to Sister Giuseppa, whose deep love made possible the start of our story and helps it to continue'

Vittorio CITTERIC
From the Avvenire Newspaper

The Lord's Hospital

I went to the Lord's hospital for a medical
and I learned I was sick.

When Jesus took my blood pressure, he said it was low on tenderness.

When he took my temperature, the thermometer showed 40° of egoism.

He did an electrocardiogram, and the diagnosis was that I needed a graft of love
because my veins were blocked by my want of openheartedness.

In the orthopaedic department, I had difficulty walking towards others,
because my vanity tripped me up and my muscles were too tense.

He also discovered I was shortsighted and couldn't see beyond appearances.

Finally, Jesus diagnosed my severe hearing loss, a blockage caused by too great a
flow of harsh words.

After this consultation, the Lord wrote the following prescription for me:

I am to take:

On rising: a tea of "Thank you, Lord for this new day".

When beginning work: a teaspoonful of "Hello, my brothers and sisters".

Every hour: a tablet of "Patience" with half a glass of "Humility".

On returning home: an infusion of "Tenderness".

At bedtime: two capsules of "Peaceful conscience" after asking forgiveness.

Thank you, Lord, for this free consultation
and the comfort that comes from your mercy.

From now on, I promise to follow your treatment plan every day,
and to continue it to the hour of my death.

Your eternal patient

*Based on a text by Luiz Gentile Filho
Excerpt from the Belgian Provincial news publication*