

September-October Echoes, 2006

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MOTHER E. FRANC, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

## **Letter of 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

To all Daughters of Charity

Dear Sisters

In this month of the Rosary, when we gather together with Mary to confide to her the intentions of the Church and the Company, and to pray for the Missions, I have the joy of sending you some *family news* as a way of strengthening our unity with each other.

Recently I received word that the cause for the beatification of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira was favourably received by the Commission of Theologians on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Since our Sister was martyred, there is no need for a miracle for beatification. All that remains now before the process is complete, is the meeting

of the Cardinals and the decree from the Holy Father. There is every indication that the beatification will take place in Brazil next year during the visit of Pope Benedict XVI. This is a great joy for our Sisters in Brazil and for the entire Company and a beautiful example of passion and radicality in the service of persons who are poor.

We will have other opportunities to speak about Sister Lindalva, who, while serving poor persons in Salvador, in Bahia State in Brazil, was martyred on Good Friday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1993. In the meantime, I refer you to two articles already dedicated to her in the Echoes of the Company in July-August 1993 and May 2001.

The other *family news* concerns Sister Suzanne Guillemain the centenary of whose birth we will be celebrating on Monday, October 16<sup>th</sup>. We know the great mark that Mother Guillemain left on the Company and how relevant her teachings are for us today. I would invite each Province to celebrate the Eucharist in thanksgiving for her life, on October 16<sup>th</sup> or one of the following days.

May I cite several beautifully expressed passages taken from the last circular letter of Mother Guillemain written on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1968 which she spoke about the serving poor people in a special way, something that Sister Lindalva put into practice during her life and also by the way that she died.

*“Service is simply putting love into action”*

*“We know that suffering and poverty in a person’s life are unquestionable indications of the Hand of God in that life.”*

*“Our reason for existence should be to embody charity.”*

*“It remains for us to humanise technology and make of it the instrument of the tenderness of Christ.”*

*“Each of our activities is truly ‘in their service’ because it is the Company, whole and entire, that is consecrated to them, and everything in the Company is considered in that light.”*

I would like to end the *family news* by calling to mind the current situations of which we are all aware, from increasing political and religious fanaticism, to the prospects of asylum-seekers and refugees throughout the world. Neither can we forget the scale of worldwide violence that has become a part of everyday life, and the fragile calm currently reigning in the Middle East. All of these events cast a shadow over international, national, regional and local relations. That is why, in fidelity to Saint Vincent and Saint Louise and in recalling Mother Guillemain and Sister Lindalva, I want to assure the prayer and support of the entire Company for all the Sisters who are particularly confronted by these situations, suffering with the poor persons they serve. All of us, wherever the Lord has placed us, regardless of our age or our role, witness together to *“God’s love for the world, especially for persons who are poor”* (C. 17 b) whether individually, through our presence, or by our direct service, and always through our prayer.

From now until Christmas I will have the joy of going to Poland with Father Javier and Sister Zofia for a gathering of the Councils of the five Provinces of the Slavonic languages and the Region of Albania, then to Lebanon and Syria with Sister Marie-Bernard, to the United States with Sister Margaret to the Provinces of Albany New York and Saint Louis and finally to Rome with Sister Mariarosa for the twentieth anniversary of the Interprovincial Seminary. I confide all these visits and those of the other General Councillors to your prayers.

May our Lord, through the intercession of Mary, watch over the Company!

With the assurance of my prayer and my devoted affection,

Sister Evelyne Franc,  
Daughter of Charity

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

## **11<sup>th</sup> Study document on the revised Constitutions**

### **CHAPTER VI: GOVERNMENT**

#### **THE ASSEMBLIES (C.84-87; St.68-71)**

##### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The final part of the chapter on government in the Constitutions and Statutes is devoted to Assemblies. This is only to be expected because the General Assembly is the most important governing body in the Company and, as we shall see, it enjoys supreme authority (cf. C.86c). Even though the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies are not legislative but consultative (cf. C.86c), they are, for the Sisters, a means of collaborating with local and provincial government in decisions that have to be made, in drawing up the Norms, the action lines and priorities, as well as other guidelines for the local or provincial community.

Six months after the death of Saint Louise and one month before his own death, Saint Vincent convoked in Paris, on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1660, what might be regarded as the first “Assembly” of the Company, in order to designate the “Officers”, the Sisters we would call today Councillors. Viewed from the perspective of our present-day concept of Assemblies, this was certainly a rather special one. However, it would seem that the Company looked on it as the nucleus which has developed and now includes, in our current Constitutions and Statutes, our present-day understanding of what constitutes a General Assembly. That is why the quotation at the beginning of the last part of the chapter was introduced.

In this document will be noting the changes made in the Constitutions of 2004 with regard to those of 1983. There will be a paragraph devoted to general points about Assemblies, and we will look at the three types of Assemblies that exist in the Company: the Domestic, Provincial and General Assemblies.

## **II. MAIN POINTS OF THE DOCUMENT**

### **1. The Assemblies**

Article 84 of the Constitutions points out the objective of these three types of Assembly in the Company: *“to evaluate and promote fidelity to its specific charism and its apostolic vitality.”* To achieve this goal, the Superioress General chooses a theme for each Assembly, after consultation with the Visitatrices. Preparations for the Assemblies and the way that these are conducted, are carried out in accordance with the Directories approved by the Superioress General with her Council (cf. St.71b) Each Province can draw up its own Directories for the Domestic and Provincial Assemblies. Usually, the Superioress General with her Council suggests a model for these two Directories, offering guidance for the task of compiling them. The Quasi-Province, consisting of the Motherhouse in Paris and Maria Immacolata in Rome, follow their own special Statutes (cf. C.84a,b).

The Provincial Assembly prepares the way for the General Assembly, just as the Domestic Assembly prepares the way for the Provincial Assembly (cf. C. 86a; 85a). Also, when the Superior General has convoked the General Assembly (cf. C.87a), the Visitatrice convokes the Provincial Assembly and then the Sister Servant convokes the Domestic Assembly (cf.C.86a; 85b) Normally, the Superioress General with her Council draws up a schedule to plan for the periods of time judged necessary for preparing and holding these Assemblies so that they will all follow on from one another at the predicted times and the material for the preparatory commission for the General Assembly will arrive in time.

The General Assemblies of 1985, 1991 and 1997 each drew up a Final Document (*“At the Crossroads”*, *“At Jacob’s well”*, and *“A New Fire”*). Each of these dynamised the whole Company in line with the Assembly theme. The 2003 General Assembly was concerned with the revision of the Constitutions and Statutes and so did not produce a Final Document but left it to the Superioress General with her Council to draw up for the whole Company the *“Action Lines”* to revitalise five most important points about our life, until the General Assembly of 2009.

The Assemblies take place every six years (cf. C.87b). This is the length of time that the Company has judged it appropriate for determining tenure of office at general government level, for reflecting on the profound and rapid changes of our times and for reviewing the way that we are living out our charism and our mission to serve those who are poor.

In the Company, every Sister is responsible for being faithful to the charism and for the vitality of our apostolic mission. It is during the Assemblies that they can exercise this co-responsibility. At such times they reach out beyond the small circle of their local community and their own service, to come into contact with the concerns of the Company as a whole, to feel themselves active members of this body

and in solidarity with others, to reinforce their feeling of belonging to the Company, and to appreciate its international character.

The Assemblies are an instrument at the service of the transforming action of the Holy Spirit. This requires the Sisters to become open to conversion, prayer, dialogue and openness, participation and freedom of expression. We have to look on Assemblies as God walking among us, as a time of grace that brings hope, which reanimates and oxygenates the Company. If this were not so, the Assemblies would be reduced to a series of actions and formalities that have to be observed every six years and this would not justify the time or the resources spent on them.

Statute 68 explains an important detail concerning the three types of Assemblies, in matters relating to elections and to voting – Canon Law 119 will be followed (unless Proper Law dictates otherwise). That is to say, an absolute majority will be needed. (cf. Glossary of the Constitutions p. 202)

## **2. The Domestic Assembly**

Few changes have been made regarding the Domestic Assembly. The most important one concerns the Seminary Sisters' participation in this Assembly (cf. C.85c; 42b), something not found in the Constitutions of 1983. Of course, this participation is limited to having the right to speak. Since they are only beginning their vocational journey in the Company they are not able to contribute to decision making in an objective way. They may participate in the Domestic Assembly either in the Seminary community or in the local community where they are placed for their period of apostolic work, as the Directress or the Visitatrice decides (cf. C. 85c).

The Company sees the Domestic Assembly as very important so all the Sisters of the local community, even those who are absent, must be convoked. If a Sister cannot take part in the Domestic Assembly of her own local community she should go to the Assembly of the nearest community, if possible (cf. C.85c).

Matters dealt with at the Domestic Assembly may be concerned with Provincial or General Government and the circumstances of the local community. Postulates and propositions may be drawn up on these three levels and presented to the Provincial Assembly or to the Visitatrice with her Council (cf. C.85d).

## **3. The Provincial Assembly**

Articles 86a and b stress the fact that the ordinary Provincial Assembly is a preparation for the General Assembly. Both are held every six years. The Provincial Assembly must end within the time period determined by the Superioress with her Council (cf. C. 86c). In this way the Province has time to send away the material that will be used to prepare for the General Assembly. In the Provinces there is always the possibility of holding an extraordinary Provincial Assembly if the Visitatrice deems this necessary and with the consent of the Superioress General with her Council. This, of course, would only happen in exceptional and very important circumstances. Indeed, extraordinary Provincial Assemblies are very rare.

Article 86b shows a change from the content of article 3.49 of the 1983 Constitutions. It is now the Visitatrice and not the Director who presides over the Provincial Assembly. Here we have another example of the principle of subsidiarity being applied and of legislation being drawn up in conformity to practice. Article 86d is mindful of the Company's situation and includes among the ex officio members, the Vice-Visitatrice and the Regional Superior. The phrase "Sisters responsible for Formation" is not very precise but this vague wording is used because the Provinces have different ways of organising formation and also because of the quite considerable number of Sisters responsible for each stage. The text of the Constitutions does not indicate the number or the Sisters responsible for formation who may attend the Provincial Assembly as ex officio members.

Article 86d speaks of Sisters "who enjoy active voice" and those "who enjoy passive voice": the meaning of both terms is clearly explained in the Glossary (p.207). The Visitatrice with her Council can choose a method for electing delegates to the Provincial Assembly and she submits this to the Superioress General with her Council for approval. Whatever form of election is decided upon, it is important to find a balance among the Sister delegates as regards age and the different types of service given. The number of elected members should be at least equal to the number of ex officio members (cf. C.86d). It may even exceed the latter. Some Provinces invite Sisters to attend in a listening capacity. The intention here is good provided this does not lead to the service of the poor being neglected.

Article 86e lists the matters to be dealt with at the Provincial Assembly; election of delegates and substitutes who will be present at the General Assembly in accordance with the new ratio established by Statute 70; proposal of names for the office of General Councillor. The Provincial Assembly also studies the theme suggested for the General Assembly, it formulates the Postulates and Propositions it wants to send to the General Assembly, to the Superioress General or to the Visitatrice. The Provincial Assembly is, of course, the best place and the best time for studying the affairs of the Province Statute 61b speaks of one of these matters: preparing the Provincial Norms. Article 86e ends by reminding us that the Provincial Assembly is "*consultative and informative but not legislative.*" This means, among other things, that the Provincial Assembly cannot impose its decisions on Provincial government. But it is good for those in authority at Provincial level to adopt the guidelines and the propositions voted for by the Assembly, if there is no over-riding reason for not doing so. This is a basic principle of government.

#### **4. The General Assembly**

Before we look at the most important aspects of the General Assembly, as well as the slight changes that appear in the Constitutions of 2004, we can see in broad outline the history of General Assemblies in the Company.<sup>1</sup>

##### **The beginnings**

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the facts given here are taken from an article by Fr. Michel Lloret, "*Assemblies in the Company,*" *Echoes of the Company* (March 1991).

The question of Assemblies began to be discussed in the Company in the time of Father Bonnet (1711-1736). Every six years the Visitatrices would gather in the Main House in Paris to discuss with the Superior General, with the Superioress General and with her Council, the needs of the Company. And of course they took part in the election of the Superioress. We should not forget that at this time there were only 14 Provinces in the Company, in France and in Poland. We do not have a single written account of any of these Assemblies; there was just a very brief allusion to one of them in a circular from Mother Deleau on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1792, in which she mentions the law passed on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1792 suppressing all religious Congregations in France.

The term “General Assembly” officially appears in the Constitutions of 1954. But at that time the Assemblies had no other function than to elect the Superioress General and her Council. So, for example, the General Assembly of Pentecost 1956 in which 46 Visitatrices took part, re-elected Mother Lepicard for a further six year mandate: this was the sole reason for that Assembly.

At Pentecost 1962, things at the next General Assembly began to change (54 Visitatrices). Mother Guillemain was elected. At this time preparations were in hand for the opening of the Second Vatican Council, a period marked by a strong desire for renewal. So that the Company could walk in the footsteps of the Church, Mother Guillemain undertook an enormous task of revision in the Community. Sisters all over the world were consulted about the values of vocation, about formation and about updating the Book of Customs. All this seemed like a preparation for viewing General Assemblies in a different way.

### **The extraordinary Assembly of 1968-1969**

The renewal that the Church asked all religious Congregations to undertake had to be carried out in accordance with the Conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* and the documents *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (6<sup>th</sup> August 1966) and *Renovationis Causam* (6<sup>th</sup> January 1969). The Superiors General, Father Slattery and Mother Guillemain, convoked that Assembly in order to draw up the new Constitutions. The Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes gave the General Assembly the power to legislate. That is why, for the first time, Domestic and Provincial Assemblies were held, and these sent delegates to the General Assembly where they were able, for the first time, to present postulates. From that time onward it might be said that the Assemblies were going to have the same structures as they have today.

The Assembly of 1968-1969 was called “extraordinary” because of the huge amount of work that was done: the whole book of the 1954 Constitutions had to be reformulated and adapted to meet the guidelines presented by the Church. For this reason there were two sessions, one in 1968 and the other in 1969.

### **The Assemblies of 1974 and 1979-1980**

There was a change of direction now and their task was to look at how the Sisters lived. The 1985 Assembly, convoked by Father McCullen and Mother Roge, had also to complete certain points on juridical matters (Additional clauses). The



simultaneous publication of the Constitutions and Statutes, and the Code of Canon Law, had prevented these points from being clarified.

The 1991 Assembly, convoked by Father McCullen and Mother Duzan was devoted to “*the Daughter of Charity in and for the world today*”. This Assembly compiled and added three additional clauses to the Constitutions and three to the Statutes. These were approved by Rome on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1991.

### **The General Assembly of 1997**

For the sixth time, the Company, in accordance with its Constitutions and Statutes, had a new General Assembly, this one convoked and presided over by Father Maloney and Mother Elizondo. Like the Assemblies before it, this one was worthy of the name; the whole Company was represented by its ex officio members, and the Sister delegates (representatives). It enjoyed supreme authority to elect the Superioress General and the Councillors, and to legislate, if necessary, by Statutes or Decrees; it also had the power to modify articles of the Constitutions if two thirds of the members agreed and if these were then approved by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

This 1997 Assembly amounted to a “revision of life”, taking as its starting point the theme, “*inculturation of the Charism in a world of change*” and concentrating on community life and life style. Among the propositions was one that called for a revision of the Constitutions in the light of inculturation and this was approved.

### **The General Assembly of 2003**

With the slogan “*Revise in order to revitalise*”, Father Maloney and Mother Elizondo invited the whole Company to revise the 1983 Constitutions. The fruits of the Assembly that followed were amazing: the Constitutions were revised in accordance with Church guidelines, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the charism of the Founders and the signs of the times. They were approved on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2004.

This brief historical outline can help us have a better understanding of the articles of the Constitutions that have direct reference to the General Assembly. The commentary which we are making here in no way replaces a personal reading of the relevant Constitutions. Throughout this section on the General Assembly, we have to keep in mind the following points:

### **The aim and circumstances of a General Assembly**

We find the aim stated in article 84a. This objective covers all Assemblies and we are applying it here to General Assemblies. The Assembly has to reflect on the recent past in order to “evaluate” the period of time that has elapsed since the last General Assembly. For the Company, it is a “revision of life” based on the document issued by that last Assembly. But after looking back over the past, we have also to look to the future. “*To promote fidelity to its specific charism and its apostolic vitality*” (C.84a), in the context of a General Assembly, could be taken as meaning practising discernment with regard to those aspects of the life and vocation of the Daughters of Charity that need to be emphasised, and that these should be revitalised

keeping in mind the calls made by the Church, the needs of those who are poor, the different cultural contexts in which the Sisters live, and the needs of the Company. All this, of course, has to be based on the Gospel and the spirit of our Founders. As you will see, the discernment that an Assembly has to exercise is no easy task.

With regard to the circumstances (who is it that convokes? How often? Where?..) there is no change: it is still the Superior General with the consent of the Superioress General with her Council, who convokes both the ordinary and the extraordinary General Assembly (cf. C.87a). In order to convoke an extraordinary General Assembly the consent of the Superioress General with her Council is needed and all the Visitatrices, also, have to be consulted (cf.C.87f).

### **Members of the General Assembly.**

The 1983 Constitutions and Statutes presented a list of ex officio members who would participate in the Assembly; the 2004 version added, "*The Vice-Visitatrices or their replacements, the Regional Superiors or their replacements, one Sister Servant from the Quasi-Province elected by the Sister Servants of the Quasi-Province, or her replacement*"(C.87c). According to the 11<sup>th</sup> additional clause to the 1997 Assembly's rulings, Regional Superiors could attend a General Assembly with a right to speak. Today they enjoy full membership in their own right, exactly like the Visitatrices. The same is true for Vice-Visitatrices (at the moment there are none in the Company). For the Quasi-Province, which has a new structure and its own special Statutes recognised by the Constitutions and Statutes of 2004 (cf.St.47), a Sister Servant was included in the list of ex officio members of the Assembly. With regard to Sister delegates to the General Assembly, the phrase "*one Sister Servant from the Quasi-Province elected by the Sister Servants of the Quasi-Province, or her replacement*" was added. These two recent additions to the text seem logical when one considers that the Quasi-Province is different from any other Province in the Company; a Sister Servant takes part as an ex officio member since the Sister who takes the place of the Visitatrice (a General Councillor), participates in the Assembly as an ex officio member; another is delegated as happens in any other Province (cf. St.70).

Once the number of ex officio members and the number of delegates is known, the Constitutions add that "*The number of delegates must be at least equal to the number of ex officio members.*" This is not something new but it also states "*When the number of delegates is less than that of the ex officio members, the Superioress General with her Council determines a method to complete the required number*" (C.87c) and this is certainly a new element. It is another way of emphasising the same idea, democratic representation at the Assembly. When all is said and done, "*The General Assembly represents immediately the entire Company*" (C. 87a) and this is proved to be the case.

### **Election of the Superioress General, the Assistant and the General Councillors**

As in the 1983 Constitutions it is still the Superior General who supervises the voting and announces the name of the Superioress General (cf. C.87d). There is a slight change with regard to the election of the Assistant and the Councillors. It is no

longer the Superior General who supervises the voting and announces the name of those elected, but the Superioress General (cf. C.87d). This is a step towards greater clarification of the role of Superior General and that of the Superioress General.

#### **SOME QUESTIONS TO FACILITATE PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNITY SHARING (AT LOCAL OR PROVINCIAL LEVEL)**

\*Compare the revised Constitutions with those of 1983. Note the changes that have been introduced into the articles studied in this document.

\*Pick out the points that struck you most about the theme of Assemblies, in the text of the Constitutions or in the explanatory document.

\*Make the connection between the principles of “participation and co-responsibility” at each of the three levels of Assembly.

#### **IV. ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL FOR DEEPENING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS 11<sup>th</sup> STUDY DOCUMENT**

\*Father Michel Lloret, *“Assemblies in the Company”*, Echoes of the Company, March 1991.

\*Sister Juana Elizondo, *“The Assemblies. A personal and communal commitment”*, Echoes of the Company, June 1995.

\*Sister Juana Elizondo, *“The Sister Servant and the Assemblies”*, Echoes of the Company, September-October 1995

\*Father Fernando Quintano, *“Attitudes we should bring to the Assemblies”*, Echoes of the Company (September-October 1995).

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

#### **FATHER JAVIER ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL**

Guidelines for the monthly retreat

**Rid your hearts of all hateful feelings**  
 (cf. Mark 7)

*“There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile...For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”* (Mk. 7:15, 21-23). The human heart needs to be filled with feelings and emotions. We would not be able to survive in a vacuum. The question is to see whether all the feelings within us are good and positive ones. Do I discover some negative feelings that are destructive? What should I do about these? How can I

detect them? How can I change them for positive ones? This month I invite you to focus your retreat day on a very important topic, one that Jesus presents to us in Chapter 7 of Mark's gospel, and which includes the passage quoted at the beginning of this reflection.

When a feeling or emotion becomes very strong we call it a "passion." Passions can be positive or negative depending on the nature of the emotion. When a soul feels passion it may be dominated by it and become passive in the face of such a powerful force. If the passion is positive it inspires enthusiasm and helps the person to make progress. On the other hand, the main effect of negative passions is sadness. This is how the philosopher Espinoza expressed it: *"Negative passions separate us from other people and instead of creating human ties, friendship and happiness, they cause us to be turned in on ourselves, filling us with sadness and causing rivalry with others and shame for ourselves."*

## **SOME POSSIBLE NEGATIVE FEELINGS OR PASSIONS**

### **Pride and vanity**

Saint Vincent dedicated an entire conference to speaking about these sentiments. (cf. IX, 528, ff.) Recognising one's qualities, gifts and personal value is positive and has nothing to do with pride. Pride, however, (and what stems from it) places a person in another perspective, in a realm of selfishness. Pride is always "diabolical" in the original meaning and etymology of this word, meaning to separate and divide. Those who are proud end up distancing themselves from others and rejecting those around them. This also leads to division. Narcissism or vanity is the enemy of empathy and sensitivity. Pride causes one to look at things not as they are in and of themselves, but rather in relationship to self. It is not unusual, then, that when pride dwells in people, they will tend to manipulate those around them... In the Gospels, pride and its opposite, humility, are perfectly portrayed in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. (cf. Lk. 18: 9-14)

### **Rivalry and jealousy (cf. Coste, IX, 548 – 560)**

These feelings harden the heart because they don't take others into account, only the frustrations that others can provoke. The basis of jealousy is a failure to accept one's own shortcomings: instead of realising one's personal poverty, and using this as a motive to relate well with others, a person is trapped in a situation that always brings sadness. Why does another person have gifts that I don't have, particularly a gift that I would like to have? Jealousy then takes root, it is the secret cause of many things that happen. It is a shadow. Why does a person not rejoice in seeing the good in another? Because that person is functioning from the "ego" and has an outlook that is not accustomed to recognising good and what flows from it: joy, splendour, participation, etc.

In the Bible story of Cain and Abel we have a perfect example of this passion (cf. Gen. 4:1-16) The gospels also describe this unfortunate condition in various texts, for example, the passage about the Prodigal Son (cf. Lk. 15:11-32) and in the parable

of the workers in the vineyard. (cf. Mt. 20:1-16) The words of Jesus in this last text are very clear: “*Are you envious because I am generous?*”

## **JESUS FREES US FROM EVIL SENTIMENTS**

When we analyse negative feelings, we see that they all have, as a common denominator, selfishness, ego-centrism or excessive self-centredness. Negative passions rule over and destroy a person; while positive ones multiply and at the same time give a great sense of freedom, because one’s centre is no longer self but God. At the same time though, “*who can deliver me from these chains that bind?*” asked Paul when he was imprisoned. The answer is Jesus and his Gospel. In the measure that we can assimilate Gospel values, to that same extent the negative feelings that have a hold on us will be reduced. It is all about evangelising the heart, which is as important and effective as evangelising the head. None of us should ever think we do not need this evangelisation. When a value, a gospel passage or a Vincentian virtue (for example, charity) becomes interiorised through personal prayer, we develop new reference points that give us new perspectives: others no longer appear as rivals but rather as our sisters and brothers, situations are no longer just a series of difficulties, but rather opportunities to discover God’s will... The same thing happens when we steep ourselves (through prayer) in the person of Jesus Christ. What has happened? The centre is no longer the individual but God and the Kingdom.

How do we recognise the person who is born “again” as Jesus said, through contact with the Gospel? (cf. Jn. 3:3) Such a person has the following characteristics:

### **Respect for everyone**

A respectful person knows, and knows from experience, that each human being is an image of God, “a temple of the Holy Spirit”. He or she understands that each person is a sacred reality just as God is, indescribable, unfathomable, unique and immeasurable and never to be repeated. According to Saint Vincent, “respect” is a Christian virtue that consists of feeling respect and esteem for all people. (cf. Coste IX, 1063 - 1064) Respect causes one to recognise the values, merits and qualities in others, to be grateful for their services, to respect their opinions and to be welcoming to all. “*We want to receive each Sister as a GIFT from God*”, declared the document from the 1991 General Assembly, *At Jacob’s Well*, p. 10.

### **Profound humility**

Humble people recognise their personal value and qualities, as well as the more negative aspects of their personality. Humility is truth, said Saint Therese. The humble person knows that everything comes from the Lord who has given us life. We have no reason to take the credit, but rather to be always giving thanks to God. Humble people are naturally grateful to those around them and grateful to God. They realise that in fact they can attribute nothing to their own doing. We cannot say “*Jesus is Lord*” without the grace of the Holy Spirit. (cf. I Cor. 12:3) Not only have we received everything from God, we also are continually dependent on God’s help.

## **An attitude of ongoing joy**

Why is interior joy one of the characteristics of those who live by the Gospel? It is because anyone who encounters the author of life cannot help but be filled with energy and joy. We see this in numerous Biblical passages. I will cite several of them: Lk. 1:46-55; Lk. 15:11-32; Lk. 19:1-10...

Joy is one of the most characteristic sentiments of Sacred Scripture. We can quote Saint Paul's recommendation: "*Rejoice always.*" (I Thes. 5:16). And at the end of his life, while in prison, he wrote, as the precious legacy he wanted to leave for us, the words closest to his heart: "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" (Phil. 4:4-7)

## **FOR PERSONAL PRAYER**

- \*Scriptural Meditation: Mt. 7:1 – 23 and/or I Cor. 13:1 – 13
- \*Read and meditate on the Conference of Saint Vincent on *Secret Pride* (March 15, 1654, Coste IX, 528-535).

Father Javier ALVAREZ  
*Director General*

## VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Paris, May 8<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup>, 2006

## **The Daughters of Charity's response to natural disasters**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Last year, several Provinces of the Daughters of Charity were greatly affected by a series of natural disasters: the tsunami in South Asia, hurricane Katrina in Louisiana (USA), hurricane Stan in Central America, which especially devastated Guatemala and Salvador, and a tropical storm that followed soon after, ravaging Honduras.

The immense suffering of so many poor people was brought home to each of the Visitatrices in the Provinces involved. Overnight, people lost everything: families, friends, homes, jobs... At the same time, the Visitatrices recall the countless emergency services provided by our Sisters in collaboration with humanitarian associations and local participants, whose aim was to be as close as possible to the people in distress in order to respond to their needs. The priorities were to rescue survivors, provide food and set up tents for shelter. The three Visitatrices are grateful

for the huge network of international solidarity the Company showed them by their prayers and sharing of resources.

## VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Provinces of India South, Indonesia and Thailand

### **The Tsunami**

#### **A tragedy that shook the world**

On December 26, 2004, a powerful earthquake that began on the western coast of North Sumatra in Indonesia resulted in forty-foot tall waves hitting the Asian countries in places where the Daughters of Charity live and work, namely: South India, Indonesia and Thailand.

#### **Pain and suffering, the lot of those who survived**

The tsunami deeply traumatised thousands of its victims who, in an instant, lost everything: family, properties, documents, places of work, security, and peace of mind. In the midst of this tragedy, the survivors needed to learn how to find enough courage to start living all over again.

#### **The Sisters commitment**

The Province of South India decided to assist those who were most seriously affected by the tsunami along the coastal areas. The Sisters concentrated their relief and rehabilitation work among poor, uneducated fishermen in order to help them rediscover the way to live a normal life as soon as possible.

The Province of Indonesia chose six villages in a poor region where many Hansenite (lepers) families live.

The Province of Thailand helped the Burmese migrants, who were among those who had received least attention. They also chose to give aid to villages where Thai Buddhists, Muslims and Moken gypsies lived. These villages were situated some distance away from the tourist areas affected by the tsunami and had not received any assistance from international relief services.

#### **Collaboration with others beyond borders**

Initially, the Sisters were involved in emergency relief services. Afterwards, the three Provinces sent Sisters to begin more long-term assistance with local agencies, developing rehabilitation projects for the poorest of the tsunami victims: educational assistance, reconstruction of houses, etc.

The Sisters in the Province of South India collaborated with the Parish Council in giving aid to about 30 groups of people with several families in each group. A fishing boat, complete with engine and fishing net, was given to groups of three families to allow them to meet their basic needs. They also helped in the rebuilding of houses for some people who had been living in temporary houses constructed for them shortly after the tragedy.

After sending Sisters from different local communities to take turns in working for a year in the affected areas, the Province of Indonesia decided to stay longer in the villages of Hansenite (leper) families, working in collaboration with different religious congregations, local volunteers and lay volunteers- Christians and non-Christians, to open a small clinic and to attend to the people's basic emergency needs. Together, they planned and implemented a project to construct houses for the Hansenite villagers who lost everything during the tragedy. One of the people collaborating with the Sisters said: *"I felt blessed by God for this chance to work with you. I learned how to collaborate and especially how to respect and understand people of a different culture from my own."*

The Sisters from the Province of Thailand worked in coordination with several NGOs and social services. As members of a humanitarian team, they organised financial assistance for those affected by the tsunami. One Sister, together with a team of volunteers for the Burmese victims, organised some financial help for the Burmese families. The Sister who worked with the Thai Buddhists and Muslims and the Moken Gypsies went into the villages to search for people who were not attended to by the NGOs. Construction materials were provided for several villagers whose houses had been destroyed and the villagers themselves helped one another to build the houses. A Thai Buddhist said one day: *"Sister, your presence means so much to us. You gave us courage and support. We have our houses now and we will try to stand on our feet and help ourselves. Please continue to visit us."*

Here are some testimonies from Sisters who working in these areas after the tragedy:

- *"I am happy that the values of solidarity, mobility, and availability became realities for me as I responded to the needs of the victims; and, my relationship with people of other faiths was a faith experience that influenced my spiritual journey as a Daughter of Charity".*
- *"To have experienced and to have worked with the people in their struggle for survival, especially those who suddenly lost everything, reassures us that our charism is very much alive*
- *"My presence among the Burmese victims deepened my compassion for the migrants. I felt moved to continue nurturing moments of prayer in silence and my relationships with my Sisters and the migrants."*

Apart from the tragedy of it all, the tsunami has also created an intense experience of compassion and solidarity throughout the world and has drawn forth the best in thousands of persons of every race and creed.



Sister Josefina ESTREMER, Sister Rose KIDENGEAN, Sister Anna SOEPRAPTIWI  
*Visitatrices of Thailand, South India, Indonesia*

### VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Province of Saint Louis (USA)

#### **Hurricane Katrina**

29<sup>th</sup> August 2005

Some days before the catastrophe of 29<sup>th</sup> August 2005, the American people were warned that a hurricane was threatening Louisiana, one of the States in the Province of Saint Louis. On 29<sup>th</sup> August 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck with full force south of Louisiana and then headed for Mississippi, a State in the Province of Evansville. Many cities in these two States sustained severe damage from this storm. The State of Louisiana is situated in the south of the United States: it is bordered on the west by Texas, on the north by Arkansas, on the east by Mississippi and on the south by the gulf of Mexico. The State capital is Baton Rouge. Katrina is one of the most powerful hurricanes to have hit the United States: it devastated Louisiana, and the entire population of New Orleans had to be evacuated from the city.

I am focusing on the situation in New Orleans. The Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg opened their first mission in New Orleans in 1830. After this branch of our family joined the Company of the Daughters of Charity in 1850, the Daughters of Charity have continued to serve those who are poor in this city, working in education, parish ministry, health care, social services....Consequently they know several generations of people living in New Orleans. Today there are 38 Sisters still living there. Before Hurricane Katrina the population of New Orleans was 500,000. The African American population was 67%. Many of them live below the poverty line.

On 28<sup>th</sup> August, the meteorological office foresaw the partial or total destruction of houses and the severe damage that would render the city uninhabitable for several weeks. The mayor gave orders for the city to be evacuated. The Sisters left with many of the people. But about 100, 000 people remained cut off because they had no means of transport. Tens of thousands then took refuge in the Superdome Sports Arena to wait for the water level to come down. But the waters rose even higher in that area and the refugees had to be evacuated as a matter of extreme urgency. On that day the whole world saw on the media, the face of the poor in the United States. 23,000 hectares of land were ruined, nearly 300,000 houses destroyed and 70, 000 businesses permanently closed.

Next day the 4-metre high levees gave way and 80% of the town was flooded. In view of this catastrophe the Provincial Council decided to set aside our houses in Dallas, Waco, Austin and Texas for our elderly Sisters and to transport the most disabled of them to Saint Louis.

More than 52 Sisters of the Province who come from the affected region, have family members who have lost everything: their houses and possessions. The

Province immediately sent money to Catholic charitable organisations for urgent help to be given to our Sisters' families.

Our active Sisters are staying in Baton Rouge (80 miles from New Orleans so that they can return to that city as soon as possible. Meanwhile they are working with the emergency services and Catholic organisations working to rehouse people. Others are teaching in the schools where the number of pupils has now doubled. When I returned to Baton Rouge a fortnight later, I was amazed by the devotion and creativity these Sisters showed in order to respond to the people's many needs.

Like thousands of other dwellings, our houses in New Orleans were covered in 4 to 9 feet of muddy water. Everything was covered in mould. 4 houses were beyond repair, two of them were completely crushed by fallen trees that crashed down from a height of 12 feet. Debris was floating on the water and the whole place looked like a building site. 17 of our 22 cars are a total wreck. Both floors of one of the houses for elderly Sisters were completely flooded. 35 churches and 26 schools were closed.

Our Lady of Wisdom Health Care Centre was not flooded but was taken over by the firemen. Sister Marie-Jean, who works there, joined the firemen to visit people and try to restore health care services.

Like a good shepherd, the Archbishop joined volunteers in visiting the people of the town. He decided that his Church would set aside a considerable sum of money each month for urgent aid and food supplies.

Sister Juanita, principal of Saint Stephen's School, decided to reopen the school which had been occupied by the National Guard from Puerto Rico, to prevent looting. Since the people could no longer afford to pay the school fees, Sister Juanita warned the staff that she would not be able to pay them their full salary. In spite of these difficulties, the school opened at the end of October and there will soon be an extra 300 children enrolled.

The clinic was so badly damaged that the public health service was resumed in a building outside the city. We have been able to share out the donations received, among the schools, clinics and social services that our Sisters are working in. The people continue to suffer but they are trying to face up to the situation. A million people have been left homeless. They are camping out in school canteens, church halls or in tents. The whole country has been mobilised to bring aid and volunteers from every State have come to help the victims.

Only one of our houses in New Orleans was more or less spared any damage. As soon as it was possible, 28 Sisters returned there and others moved into rented apartments or even into the attic of a Poor Clare Monastery, in order to help people put in claims for federal assistance. Thousands of people are trying to overcome their losses. Everyone, rich and poor alike, need food and shelter. In spite of their agonising distress, the people strive to comfort and support one another.

In Arkansas, one Sister is serving more than 50,000 evacuees. A Sister in Texas is providing a similar service. After such a tragedy it will take a long time for life to return to normal. It will take years to make good the 200 billion dollars worth

of damage. We thank Providence and the whole Company for their support and their prayers.

Sister Marie-Therese Sedgwick  
*Visitatrice of the Province of Saint Louis*

### VISITATRICES' ENCOUNTER

Province of Central America

Hurricane Stan  
3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> October, 2005

After Hurricane Katrina passed through the United States, Hurricane Stan struck the southeast of Mexico and Central America. The latter comprises the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. These lands are subject to various natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, atmospheric depressions and tropical storms. The Provincial House of the Province of Central America is located in Guatemala, a country of 12 million inhabitants, 40 % of whom are indigenous people who are completely destitute

**Guatemala** was the hardest hit. At the beginning of the month of October 2005, hurricane Stan ravaged the Guatemalan coastland, causing severe flooding and mudslides. The consequences were disastrous: one third of the country completely destroyed, over 1500 deaths, 1000 people disappeared under the mudslides from 5 to 11 metres deep, 10,000 homes destroyed by landslides, thousands of kilometres of roadways severely damaged, over thirty bridges destroyed beyond use. Rivers overflowed, flooding houses and cultivated fields. Communication in villages was cut off from the rest of the country. Over 3 million persons were victims of this disaster.

The capital of the country was unable to communicate with the villages in the high plateau regions and along the southern coast, especially Port San Jose where the Daughters of Charity serve. As with all tragedies, poor people suffered the most. The southern region, hardest hit, was difficult to access. The most urgent problem was neither food nor drinking water, but rather the ability to access these disaster areas in order to reach the survivors and give them medical assistance.

The Sisters in the Provincial House have been preparing meals each day to be sent to Port San Jose, along with blankets, clothing, medicines, etc. for the families who lost everything in the disaster. Many businesses have collected articles that have been sent to the Red Cross, Caritas and the bishop's office in Guatemala, all of whom ensure that the goods reach the areas affected in the south of the country.

**El Salvador** has also suffered greatly. The southeast of the country was completely flooded. 70,000 persons had to be evacuated. The roadways collapsed, especially those in the region of Tepecoyo where one of our local communities is

located. Numerous rescue patrols and volunteer crews were mobilised by the government. Thanks to so many generous benefactors, among them the Order of Malta, and the mobilisation of the Salvadorian people, the Sisters are able to assist the poorest people, providing them with food and material goods such as mattresses, clothing, etc.

In **Honduras**, the tropical storms Gamma and Beta brought severe rainstorms, forcing over 1800 persons to be evacuated. There again, flooding and landslides caused panic among a people already traumatised by earthquakes in 2001. It left dozens of villages in the south and the west completely cut off from the rest of the country. The government mobilised the entire population to bring food into the most devastated regions.

After the hurricane was over and the emergency response phase passed, the situation of the victims has posed new challenges for us:

- To avoid disappointing the poor people who continue to hope against hope in the Providence of God.
- How can we reach the most abandoned persons, those who received the least attention from the government?

Didn't Saint Vincent say to us: *"You have a vocation which obliges you to help, without any discrimination, all sorts of persons: men, women, children, and, in general, every poor person who needs you."* (C. 10)

Today the Sisters continue to visit the widows, orphans and victimised families who have sought refuge with relatives or friends. The Sisters support them day after day, to give them back the courage and strength they need to begin their lives once more.

*"Through faith they see Christ in those who are poor, and they see those who are poor in Christ. They serve Him in His suffering members 'with compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect, and devotion.'" (C. 10 b)*

*"In loyal collaboration, the Sisters work jointly with others in a spirit of sharing, living the values that the Company professes." (S. 9 a)*

Despite the horror of this huge natural disaster, we thank God that we are able to be present in the midst of these people and to serve the most abandoned. We are grateful to the entire Company for the solidarity and the spiritual, moral and financial support of all the Provinces. It is together that we put into practice the passage of the gospel of Matthew 25: 36: *"Come, you that are blessed by my Father...for I was hungry and you gave me food...I was naked and you gave me clothing..."* In the name of the poor people in the Province of Central America, we thank you.

Sister Rosa Elvira GOMEZ  
*Visitatrice of the Province of Central America*

## PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

### **Towards a new humanitarian order: the transnational movement of persons**

Notes taken during the conference given by Mark R. Sternberg

Mark R. von Sternberg is a senior attorney with the Catholic Charities Community services of the archdiocese of New York where he concentrates on litigation before the immigration courts and the Immigration Appeals Board. Since January 1999 he has held the post of assistant faculty member at Pace University School of Law where he teaches general immigration law and legislation relating to refugees. Since August 2000, he has also held the post of adjunct faculty member of St. John's School of Law where he contributes, with other lecturers, to giving seminars on immigration. In 1973 Mark von Sternberg was awarded a Doctorate in Law by the Vanderbilt University Law Faculty, and in 1984 an LLM degree (in International Law) from the New York University School of Law. He gives lectures in Law Schools and to professional associations, on matters concerning immigration. He has written extensively, particularly on legislation concerning refugees, international humanitarian law, and human rights. He is the author of a recently published treatise on the definition of refugees as applied in the United States and Canada. In 2002 he received the American Immigration Lawyers' Association Pro Bono Award.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This presentation will focus on political and legal barriers affecting the transnational movement of persons and the response of international law to those barriers. Some aspects of **International Protection Law** will be studied alongside the **Law relating to the status of refugees** as set out in the *Convention relating to the status of refugees, 1951*, and the *Protocol relating to the status of refugees, 1967*. (*The Convention relating to the status of refugees* was signed in Geneva, on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1951, at the end of World War II). The United Nations decided to grant status, recognition and international protection to refugees. *The Convention relating to the status of refugees*, commonly referred to by the shortened title, "*The Geneva Convention*", defined the conditions under which a State must accord refugee status to those who request it, as well as the rights and duties of such persons. It was in Geneva, in 1946, that the International Organisation for Refugees was established, and this was the forerunner of the High Commission for Refugees, founded in 1951. We must not confuse the *Convention relating to the status of refugees* (1951) with the *Geneva Conventions* (1949) which codify the rights and duties of combatants and civilians in times of war). *The 1951 Convention* is still the most complete systematic organisation of rules concerning the rights of refugees. However, this Convention only applied to those who were refugees prior to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1951. Thanks to the *Protocol relating to the status of refugees*, signed in **1967**, this restriction is no longer in force and the *Geneva Convention of 1951* is applied to contemporary refugees, too.

## **POLITICAL AND LEGAL RESTRICTIONS ON MIGRATION**

Sovereign States can impose explicit limitations on the rights of migrants. In reviewing these it is imperative to maintain a distinction between voluntary migration and involuntary migration. International policy focuses more on forced migration than on voluntary migration. Countries have sweeping powers over immigration.

### **1. Voluntary migration**

*International Protection Law* offers little support to people who emigrate voluntarily. The policy for admitting migrants on a permanent basis varies widely from country to country. In the international labour market, some policies favour the admission of skilled workers to the detriment of those who lack qualifications.

### **2. The power that States have to regulate immigration, and the concerns that arise from globalisation**

When it comes to immigration matters, countries are not subject to the same limitations as they are with regard to the rights of their citizens. They have almost limitless power to regulate the flow of migrants. Globalisation, as we know it today, favours the free circulation of people and goods across frontiers. This would seem to undermine national and State frontiers. This development makes States anxious to protect themselves and it is the reason why countries impose severe restrictions on the transnational movement of people across their borders.

Globalisation is also responsible for a growing network of traffickers who handle the transportation of migrants. This practice is very widespread and it raises many questions with regard to human rights, including the inhumane conditions in which people are often transported.

### **3. “Plenary “ powers, in practice: aliens refused admission or deported**

There are different reasons why a State might regard non-citizens as people who do not fulfil the conditions necessary for entering the country, or persons who may be deported. Governments base their arguments on *public order*, including the threat of terrorism or other concerns about internal security, or people entering their territory looking for employment without the necessary authorisation. The reasons for admitting people or refusing them admission are largely at the country’s discretion and *international customary law* has little to say on the matter.

We need to distinguish between non-citizens who are seeking permission to live in a country and those whom the State is trying to deport. Usually the former enjoy more protection than the latter. It can even happen that people who have been granted permanent resident status, are deported and have to leave their families in the host country. As long as an application for citizenship has not been granted there is always the risk of deportation.

## **RESTRICTIONS ON THE SOVEREIGN STATE’S POWER OVER MIGRATION, AND THE NORM OF “NON-REFOULEMENT.”**

There are some limits to a country's right to restrict immigration, most notably the International Norm of "Non-refoulement" (the right not to be sent back to a country).

### **1. Article 33 of *The Convention relating to the status of refugees* and article 3 of *the Convention against torture***

The powers enjoyed by the State conflict with the legislation contained in article 33 of *the Convention relating to the status of refugees*, which states that a refugee cannot be sent back to the borders of a country where his or her life or liberty may be threatened for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or being of a particular political persuasion. Similarly, *International Customary Law* and article 3 of the *Convention against torture* forbid the sending back of people to a country where there is reason to believe they could be subjected to torture. Countries should not send aliens back to places where there is civil war. "Non-refoulement" is obligatory in *International Customary Legislation* but different countries interpret it in different ways.

### **2. The scope of non-refoulement and obstacles to "rejection at the frontier"**

Non-refoulement is one of the strictest laws that *International Customary Law* has in favour of those who flee their country of origin through fear of persecution or torture. Even though *International Customary Law* does not give foreigners the right to settle in a country or to ask for asylum, it still imposes limits on the Sovereign's absolute power. Countries cannot send away foreigners without first questioning them about their reasons for fleeing their own country, and judging whether these fears are justified.

### **3. Expedited removal and interdiction at sea**

While waiting for a preliminary inquiry, asylum seekers are held in detention centres. If, in the course of their first interview, people's arguments are judged to be wrong or groundless, such foreigners can be summarily returned to their port of embarkation. If their reasons are recognised as credible, foreigners are then kept in detention until their application for asylum is heard. This is particularly the case in the present climate of terrorism.

There is yet another difficulty in that some asylum seekers arrive with false documents. This, according to article 31 of the *Convention concerning the status of refugees*, justifies the imposition of a penalty.

Other problems have also arisen with the massive influx of asylum seekers who arrive by sea. Some of them are forcibly repatriated to their native land. A new law requires countries to ascertain the conditions under which requests for asylum are heard.

### **4) Sharing the burden and "Safe Third Country Agreements"**

How can countries share the burden of welcoming and absorbing immigrants in the face of such a massive influx?

The *Schengen Agreement* (1985) between the governments of certain European countries, and the *Dublin Convention* (1990) require asylum seekers to make their request for refugee status, in the first European Community country they come to. But before any decision is taken, assurances must be given that there is a “safe third country” willing to welcome them, and this makes the procedure more difficult. These *Agreements* have their shortcomings and cause new worries. In spite of this, a comparable system has been set up between the United States and Canada.

### **5) The limits of *international protection***

The main benefit arising from the *Convention relative to the status of refugees* is the right not to be returned to the country where there is persecution or torture. *International Customary Law* guarantees, therefore, the person’s right to request asylum but it offers no guarantee that such a request will be granted. And even if refugee status is recognised it does not confer the right to citizenship or the status of permanent resident. The result is that countless refugees throughout the world are living in refugee camps without any “lasting solution” to their critical situation.

## **THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECT OF NON-REFOULEMENT**

This section examines the definition of “refugee” in the context and within the limitations of *International Protection* inherent in this definition. It also examines the efforts to close some gaps arising from these limitations.

### **1) Limitations of the definition of “refugee” in the *Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees***

The *Geneva Convention* definition of “refugee” requires as a precondition for any aid being given, that there be grave danger from one of the five areas established by the *Convention*: race, religion, nationality, belonging to a particular social group or holding particular political opinions. This does not include fugitives from justice, people fleeing from generalised violence, natural disasters, or danger that is purely of a private and personal nature.

### **2) *The Convention relating to the status of refugees and other forms of International Protection***

New models of *International Protection* present a broader concept of the term “refugee” and are an improvement on the *Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees* (1951). So, the *Convention of the Organisation of African Unity* adds to the definition of refugee: “any person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, or events that seriously disturb public order in either a part of or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his native country.” The *Cartagena Declaration* also broadens the definition of refugee given in the *Convention relating to the status of refugees* by taking into account threats from



generalised violence or mass violations of human rights. These two new models take group protection into account.

The General Assembly of the United Nations has expanded the mandate of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to include new categories of people who deserve international protection. It established the norm of *Temporary refugee* which makes for greater flexibility with regard to international protection.

*The Convention against torture* and the *International treaty on civil and political rights* reinforce the obligation of States to protect the most basic human rights.

### **3) Efforts to create the remedy of non-returnability, based on incontestable violation of human rights**

When a non-citizen expresses a fear that does not meet the criteria set out in the definition of refugee given above, some European countries have established the remedy of “non-expulsion” which is discretionary leave for the person to remain, on humanitarian grounds.

United States case law has attempted to provide a remedy of “non-return” based on the violation of human rights and of the Rules of engagement in wars being waged in the person’s country of origin.

The new dispositions of the *Statute of temporary protection* codify the general norm of *Temporary asylum*. However, *this statute* leaves much to be desired because it does not carry with it the same level of protection as that offered by the general norm of *Temporary asylum*.

### **4) The influence of *Protection of Human Rights* on the way that the definition of refugee has evolved**

*The Law relating to the status of refugees* is moving in the direction of the model of *Absolute Protection of Human Rights*. The definition of refugee now takes into account another aspect of refugee protection, - membership of a particular social group. Every group of people under threat should be able to ask for protection even if the authorities are unwilling to help them. It is recognised that violations of human rights in the country of origin can determine the seriousness of the danger and the need for protection.

Models of protection are emerging even when the persons involved do not have refugee status. This is particularly the case in the new Directives issued by the United Nations concerning people who are displaced in their own country.

### **THE IDEAL OF CHARITY AND A “NEW HUMANITARIAN ORDER”: *International protection for those displaced because of natural or man-made disasters***

One of the limitations of the *right to international protection* was that it did not include the right to emigrate after a natural or economic catastrophe. Since the

tsunami disaster it has been argued that leaving one's place of residence after a natural or economic calamity should also give the person access to international protection.

### **1) *The right to humanitarian aid and the ideal of charity***

*The right to humanitarian aid* is a recognised feature of the *Law governing warfare* and the *Geneva Conventions* signed in 1949. (Historically, these (1949) *Geneva Conventions* are a development of the brief, earlier Convention of 1864, which marked the official introduction of *International humanitarian law*, initiated by Henry Dunan).

Adopted by governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations, the principle of *the right to humanitarian aid* is defined as a “new international humanitarian order.” Providing relief in times of distress is a humanitarian act as long as it respects the rules of neutrality and impartiality of the International Committee of the Red Cross; it reflects an ethical norm arising from an ideal of charity which is to be found in all the major religions.

### **2) *The law of war and the right to humanitarian aid***

The primary objective of the *Law of war* is to guarantee that human rights will be respected during hostilities. *The law on humanitarian aid* requires countries to observe, during the hostilities, the “basic humanitarian principles” with regard to non-combatants in the conflict. These *Geneva Conventions* (1949) contain regulations about the way humanitarian aid should be delivered during times of international conflict and civil wars.

In 1977, two additional protocols to the *Geneva Conventions* were signed and these related to the protection of victims: the first was concerned with international conflicts and the second related to times of civil war when aid convoys needed to reach people whose survival was threatened.

### **3) *Humanitarian aid and natural catastrophes***

Resolution 46/182 of the United Nations General Assembly allows *humanitarian aid* to be given for natural disasters and other urgent situations. Countries should facilitate the work of governmental and non-governmental agencies by putting humanitarian aid at the service of neighbouring countries. The International Committee of the Red Cross is the “*guardian of international humanitarian law*”. Its code of conduct is a collection of guidelines to be followed in providing disaster relief. *Humanitarian aid* is a “basic humanitarian principle that should be available to all citizens in every country.” The members of the International Community recognise their obligation to give humanitarian aid “wherever it is necessary.” That is why those who deliver this humanitarian aid must have access to the people who need it. A country that refuses permission for aid to be brought to displaced persons is guilty of an abuse of power.

According to *the basic Principles of the right to receive humanitarian aid*, Governments are obliged to protect the rights of people who are displaced in their own country: the right to food, drinking water, clothing, housing, medical aid and

sanitation as well as protection against cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. And since countries are under the obligation to protect these rights, the United Nations services can take all necessary measures, including constraint, in situations where people are suffering great hardship. These measures may be adopted even when authorisation to increase humanitarian aid has been unjustifiably refused. These *Basic Principles* represent a significant advance on previous models of *international protection*.

#### **4) The implications of developments regarding the *right to humanitarian aid* and on the *Law relating to refugees***

Does this *right to humanitarian aid* have any impact on the status of refugees who flee their country because this humanitarian aid was not offered to them or because the State diverted the humanitarian aid to other purposes?

Groups of people fleeing from conditions caused by natural disasters, should be able to demonstrate that they are refugees within the meaning of *the 1951 Convention*. The question is not whether the affected group has been the object of some discriminatory policy, but whether the group has had its rights violated. Appropriate refugee analysis consists in examining whether the human rights of individuals or groups have been respected by the State. The deprivation of human rights can be classified as “persecution” as understood by the *Convention*. In such cases are there sufficient grounds for granting them refugee status? International institutions have clearly classified displaced people in their own country among those in need of special protection.

#### **Conclusion**

We can see, then, the way that the *law relating to the status of refugees* has developed and given a broader interpretation, in order to respond to new situations. International law, therefore, obliges countries to guarantee the protection of all people in distress.

However, there are still considerable gaps in the *Law relating to the status of refugees (Geneva Convention 1951)*; for example, the question of victims of natural disasters displaced in their own country has not yet been resolved. What will happen when these displaced persons move en masse to an international frontier? Will they be protected as refugees? Even if these persons have not been targeted by a “persecutor”, will we be able to recognise their need for international protection in situations of natural disasters over which they had no control?

Mark R. von Sternberg  
*Attorney for the Catholic Charities Services of the archdiocese of New York*

## **The experience of Limsry Pin, a Cambodian migrant**

Limsry Pin, official Cambodian chaplain and a French citizen of Cambodian origin, is married and has six children. He arrived in France in July 1982 with refugee status and he now presents to us his perspective on his experiences: camps in Thailand, his encounter with Christianity and baptism, and finally, his role within the Church in France.

Notes taken during his testimony

### **Exodus towards an unknown land**

In January 1979, the Khmers Rouges regime came to an end and another regime began: that of the Popular Republic of Kampuchea (RPK) established by Vietnam. A certain number of administrative agents, survivors of the massacres of the Khmers Rouge, agreed to work with this government. Refusing to accept this solution, I began producing and selling alcohol distilled from palm sugar in order to feed my family.

Early in 1981, the situation became increasingly critical. Intellectuals, some of whom worked for the government, as well as people who did not favour the regime, began to leave the country and seek refuge in the camps in Thailand. I also decided to leave, along with my family. After a 36 hour train journey, we arrived in Battambang, a Cambodian village near the border of Thailand. During the journey, we suffered the death of our little 14 month old daughter. We started to ask ourselves: was the death of our daughter a sign of the danger that lay ahead for us? Should we not protect the lives of our other two children? Should we continue the journey or return to our country?

A month later, after living in dangerous circumstances, all four of us arrived at a refugee camp in Thailand. During our stay, my wife participated in catechetical formation classes offered by the Christians there.

A year later, we had the opportunity to depart for France. On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1982, we arrived at Roissy with some other refugees. Then, after moving from one reception centre to another, we finally arrived in Bourges, France.

### **Encounter with Christianity**

One day, at the end of a French language course, my wife asked the teacher what she needed to do in order to continue her catechetical formation. A Sister from the parish and a young woman came to see us. At their request, I agreed to be their interpreter during the catechetical sessions. However, it was very difficult for me to translate words that did not exist in my language, such as God, Gospel, Trinity, etc. At times, I had difficulty understanding what the catechist was saying: *God, deliver us from evil, God, creator of the heavens and the earth...* I talked a great deal to the catechist in order to understand the Gospels better. I began to read them and to ask

many questions...A few months later, we had a visit from a former missionary in Cambodia. What a joy it was for me to hear explained in my own language the words and phrases of the Gospel!

In the autumn of 1982, we reached the end of the time limit for us to live in our reception centre. At that time, in order to obtain accommodation, three pay slips were required. In addition, I needed money to feed my family. Without work, without money, without housing...I asked myself a thousand questions: Why did I come here? What can I do? And I thought again about my country and my family I had left behind and whom I missed very much. Two months later, a fellow Cambodian found a job for me in a factory. This was a great relief!

### **With Cambodian Christians**

In 1983, I attended meetings with some Cambodian Christians. These gatherings were organised by BPAC (Office of Apostolic Promotion among Cambodians) under the auspices of Bishop Yves Ramousse, Vicar Apostolic of Phnom Penh. At these meetings I began to get a taste of Christianity. Two ideas that touched me most were 'solidarity' and 'freely given'. A year later, at the parish of Saint Paul in Bourges, my wife, my children and I were baptised during the Easter Vigil.

After that, I became involved in the association of Cambodians in Cher as its vice-president. Along with others, I volunteered to help Cambodians who had recently arrived in France. However, some of the people who were paid for working with the reception of these refugees accused me of being a traitor to the Khmer nation because I had become a Christian. Fortunately, the association in which I did voluntary work supported me.

In 1987, I arrived in Paris and joined a branch of the Cambodian Church in the 19th arrondissement (region) of Paris. There, along with others, I translated into Khmer some catechetical books, psalm books and a bilingual missal for Cambodians throughout the world.

In 1990, together with the Christian Cambodians of the Ile de France, we organised a Mass followed by a meal, to be held once a month and at for the major Cambodian feast days. This initiative continues to the present time.

### **Chaplain to Cambodian Christians**

Little by little, Cambodia is becoming more open, and former missionaries are beginning to return to the country. In agreement with the Church in Cambodia and in France, we created the national Cambodian Chaplaincy office which has the following two objectives:

1. To promote the insertion of Cambodian Christians into the local church and French society, at the same time helping them to preserve their roots and their specific values.
2. To teach young people their language of origin in order to facilitate better communication with the adults who have difficulty mastering French.

The Chaplaincy office ensures that Cambodian Christians discover religious points of reference while maintaining their own culture and their religious outlook that is influenced by Buddhism. It also helps them to adapt to the culture of their host country and the local Christian communities.

### **Connections with the Cambodian Christian Community**

There are a large number (approximately 70,000) of Cambodian refugees in France, many of whom have obtained French citizenship. However, the number of Christians among them is less than 3,000, the majority of these being introduced to Christianity in the camps in Thailand. One of the reasons that Buddhist parents choose Christian baptism for their children is their desire to help them integrate better into their new social setting, where most people are Catholic. A Cambodian proverb says: *“When you enter a river, follow its twists and turns; when you enter a country, follow its customs.”*

Cambodian Christians who have little contact with the Cambodian Christian community find it very difficult to integrate into the life of their parish. *“Many Cambodian Christians are too isolated and their connections with the parish are practically non-existent,”* affirms Bishop Lesouef, Prefect Apostolic of Kompong Cham (Cambodia). So new Cambodian Christians should be accompanied by the Cambodian Community, not only in their faith but also in their Buddhist culture and religion. Rather than being just a change of convictions and the practice of new moral values, conversion is a new way of relating to others. Links with other Cambodian Christians is a source of consolation: *“Being very isolated, they are happy to meet a Christian Khmer friend from time to time.”*

### **Evangelisation of newly baptised Cambodians**

In our pastoral ministry, dealing with Christians and non-Christians who want to learn about or increase their understanding of the Christian religion, we quickly find ourselves facing a highly complex issue. It requires dialogue, but dialogue is difficult due to the fact that the participants do not speak the same language and do not have the same cultural background. Under these conditions, the same word can have significantly different meanings. A given word might not exist from one language to another.

Here is an example that illustrates the need for pastoral ministry to the Khmer peoples.

The mindset of the Khmer peoples is permeated with a culture that includes animism, Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism. The Khmer are very familiar with the idea of supernatural and mythical beings. Animism provides them with a multitude of divinities. Hinduism connects them to a mythology of gods and deities evolving in forms that closely resemble human beings. Theravada Buddhism does not deny the existence of God but is indifferent to it: God or divine beings are considered inferior to Buddha, who, by his enlightenment, has passed into another world. Faced with these different religious outlooks, how should a Christian notion of God be approached, and what word should be chosen to designate God?

In the latest edition of the ecumenical Bible, our Christian language drew from the language style of the Brahminic religion. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion, we have to create new words to bridge the gap between Christian and Buddhist concepts. The question is asked: is it also necessary to familiarise Christian Cambodians with the new Christian Khmer vocabulary in order for them to give witness among their compatriots? Bishop Ramousse said: *“In the Church, catechumens are a sign for their ethnic community, even if it is often at the price of scandal because they are accused of being traitors to their nation and race. They demonstrate that a Khmer can become Christian without denying his or her culture. Scandal is diminished by the commitment they can witness to their compatriots.”*

The issue of language must be addressed if Christians are to persevere. In order to speak about God, it is necessary to discern everything in their culture that has a divine aspect. It is a long and difficult method but it has the advantage of allowing the catechumen to reflect deeply.

It is important to understand the Khmer mentality, religion and culture in order to accompany catechumens. Otherwise, there can be no link established between faith and life, and faith becomes limited to knowledge, an accumulation of facts that are not applied to life.

### **Connections with the Church of Cambodia**

As with all migrants, Khmers living in France often think of their homeland and their families from whom they have long been separated. As refugees in France, they do not have the right to return to their country. However, they are ingenious in finding ways of seeing their families and friends again. When they return there, they help in the construction of schools, pagodas, etc. Those who are Christians go to church, making contact with the priests they met in France... Church has developed since 1993 and is “Khmer influenced” in its language and liturgy: *“When I returned to Cambodia and attended Mass, I was a bit disoriented. I even had difficulty in saying the Our Father without some help, as it was not the same prayer that I knew.”*

### **Inculturation**

When Bishop E. Destombes, Vicar Apostolic in Phnom Penh, returned from the Synod of Asian Churches held in Rome in 1998, he wrote the following in the Bulletin for Chaplains: *“Three words sum up the main contents of this synod: inculturation, inter-religious dialogue and the place of the Church in society.”* With regard to inculturation, he added: *“The Church is striving to adapt itself to the Khmer culture...But it is up to the Khmer Christians to see that the Cambodian Church has a Khmer identity.”*

So, for example, during the Church Synod in 1999, 120 Catholic Cambodians exchanged ideas on the theme of inculturation, with particular reference to the subject of All Souls Day. Some of them said they celebrate All Souls Day on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Others celebrate, as their Buddhist friends and neighbors do, traditionally for a 15 day period. With a deepened understanding of the Gospel about the wedding feast at Cana where it is said that Jesus miraculously changed water into wine, showing the disciples that he made no changes to local customs, but adapted his teachings to them, the discussions in small groups allowed them to put into perspective the connection

between the Cambodian feast of *Pchum Ben* and All Souls Day for the Catholic Church. Each year, from the first to the fifteenth day of the waning moon in the month of Photrabet (from September 19<sup>th</sup> to October 3<sup>rd</sup> this year) the Khmers have the custom of celebrating *Pchum Ben*. Everyone participates in this celebration out of respect for their grandparents and parents. Catholics, too, express gratitude to their grandparents and parents, whether these are living or dead. The commemoration of those who have died is an opportunity for them to demonstrate their faith in Jesus Christ risen from the dead. When they pray for the dead, they ask these to intercede with Jesus Christ for them.

*“Cambodian Buddhists believe that their ancestors, parents and grandparents who have sinned and have gone to hell come back to earth on the days of Pchum Ben to receive food from their children via the Buddhist monks (bonzes) who act as intermediaries. Cambodian Catholics do not believe that dead people can receive and eat food, but they celebrate their own “Pchum Ben” in accordance with the customs and the culture of Cambodia. We bring food to the church to celebrate the unconditional love of God and the forgiveness of all in the great family of God. Cambodian Catholics can celebrate Pchum Ben each year as the Buddhists do, but they must understand that its meaning has changed.”*

### **Collaboration of Cambodian Christians in France in the translation of Catholic works into Khmer**

Father Bruno Cosme, a French priest who is the Director of Spirituality for the major seminary in Cambodia, made this request in a letter to the Khmer Christian community in France in 1999: *“I am looking for one or more persons who are Khmer, Catholic and French-speaking, who might assist me by translating Church texts, lives of the saints, meditations, articles of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Conciliar documents, etc. for the use of seminarians and the Christian community. This will allow each seminarian to have documents in Khmer. Other than the Bible, there are no other documents existing in Khmer...”*

After this request, about ten Christian Khmers decided to offer their assistance to the Church in Cambodia to provide these translations. We have created two commissions for translation and proof-reading, for *“this type of work cannot be the fruit of the work of an individual; translation is an art!”* The translations must respect the civilisation and the culture of the particular country. People’s outlook varies from one civilisation to another, especially in the matter of religion.

This work of translation is not just meant to aid the Church in Cambodia. It allows the translators and the editors to express their faith in an accurate way and according to the Khmer culture. Cambodians baptised in France experience the difficulties that migrants always have in integrating into parish life. They are warmly welcomed during the time of the catechumenate, they become “stars” on the day of their baptism, but afterwards they often fall into a certain state of anonymity, which poses problems for their perseverance in the faith.

Given the development of the Church in Cambodia, this work of translation is a responsibility as well as an opportunity to nourish and strengthen our Catholic faith that we practise here in France.



## **The life of Cambodian Christian communities**

In Paris, Marseilles and Lyons, the Khmer Christians gather each month to celebrate the Eucharist and afterwards share a meal.

A quarterly bilingual bulletin helps to create links among the various Cambodian Christian communities as well as Khmer Catholics who are isolated from others and it is a way of sharing news of each other within the Cambodian Church

Since 1996, a national pastoral council with representatives from the various communities meets once a year to exchange ideas about the situation and various other matters and to study more deeply the theme chosen for that year. So, in 1999, we reflected on the Christian understanding of Jubilee for the year 2000, and the following observation: *“For Asians, the Gregorian calendar is not the point of reference; the relationship to cyclical time in the traditional Buddhist perspective is quite different from our linear perspective; this is an important discovery.”*

Each summer, the national chaplaincy office organises a vacation week for Cambodians throughout France: Christians and non-Christians, children, young people and adults: a time of relaxation, of contact with nature, of meetings between different generations, of discovering France, and of formation.

Limsry Pin

### VISIT BY SUPERIORS

Mother Evelyne Franc,  
and Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councilor

### **Visit to the three Provinces of the West Indies** Puerto Rico - Santo Domingo - Cuba

30th June –July 8th, 2006

**Puerto Rico, Cuba and Santo Domingo** are part of the West Indies, a group of islands situated in the Caribbean Sea, which has South America to its south, Central America to its southwest and the United States to its northwest. These islands form an arc-shaped archipelago that is 3500 km long, extending from Cuba, south of Florida to the tiny Dutch island of Aruba, off the coast of Venezuela. There are two main parts:

\* The Greater Antilles, including Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and Jamaica. These alone represent 9/10 of the surface area and total population of the West Indies.

\* The Lesser Antilles, made up of a chain of small islands formed by volcanoes or limestone including Puerto Rico.

On **July 1st, 2006** Sister Evelyne Franc and Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo arrived in Puerto Rico. After this first stop, they headed for Santo Domingo and then Cuba.

**In each of these Provinces**, Sister Evelyne met in turn with each Provincial Council and then with the Sister Servants. After listening to their experiences, their joys and sorrows, Sister Evelyne spoke to them about the basis of authority, the manner of carrying it out and means that can assist them in their service. She made constant reference to the Constitutions and the Founders. She quoted, among others, Mother Guillemin and her words reminding us that the mission of Sister Servants consists first of all in uniting the local Community to God. This requires that the Sister Servant be clothed in the spirit of Christ as Servant, following the example of Mary as Servant.

During the meetings with the Sisters, Sister Evelyne shared the personality traits and the life of faith shared by the two Daughters of Charity whom we celebrate this year: Saint Catherine Labouré and Sister Suzanne Guillemin. These two Sisters invite us to become more and more women who are “experts in communion” for our wounded world. Sister Evelyne also helped us to reflect on our personal responsibility to grow in fidelity to our vocation as servants of those who are poor in order to become “an open letter of Christ” for those who are poor. (cf. 2 Cor. 3:2) Based on our day to day choices, the Province will renew its fervour and enthusiasm. After listing several challenges we have to face in our world today, she encouraged us to respond in very committed ways. She strongly urged us to live to the utmost our specific spirit, to deepen our understanding of our revised Constitutions, to involve ourselves in ministry with young people and to transmit to younger generations our passion for the service of poor persons and to be open to the international dimension of the Company.

**In Puerto Rico** Sister Evelyne and Sister Blanca Libia visited the Hospital of Perpetual Help and the Saint Louise Residence for elderly and ill Sisters. Sister Evelyne assured them how much they participate actively in the life of the Company through their prayers and sacrifices.

**In Santo Domingo**, Sister Evelyne met the young people in difficult situations who are in a residence called “Rebirth.” A 14 year old adolescent gave a testimony of her experience: *“Before coming to this residence, I behaved badly towards my mother and always argued with her. Here, I became aware of my behaviour and learned little by little the value of respect for others. Now, I appreciate my mother and our relationship has changed. This residence helped me to become a better person.”* Afterwards, Sister Evelyne visited the “Saint Louise” Community, a centre for gatherings and retreats. Later, she met some children suffering from AIDS at the “Rose” Home. Two employees there expressed how happy they are to be working with these children, seeing their work as a service they carry out with enthusiasm as they collaborate with the Sisters in order to be *“the fathers and mothers of those who have lost theirs.”* Finally, Sister Evelyne visited the first mission of the Daughters of Charity in the Dominican Republic, the “Duarte Home” for poor children and the “Marguerite Naseau” mission located in a very poor neighbourhood.

In **Cuba**, Sister Evelyne, with great joy, presided over the sending on mission of a young Sister from the Seminary. She later visited “The Golden Age Home” for people with disabilities and “The Corner” where persons with Hansen’s disease (leprosy) are welcomed. Sister Evelyne admired the service the Sisters provide for these suffering people who have been abandoned by the current political regime.

Before her departure for Paris with Sister Blanca Libia, Sister Evelyne thanked the three Provinces for their very warm welcome. We give thanks to God for visiting us in the presence of our Superioress General.

A group of Sisters

### VISIT BY SUPERIORS

Mother Evelyne Franc, Superioress General  
and Sister Julma Neo, General Councillor

### **Visit to the Province of Thailand**

July 22<sup>nd</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> , 2006

**On July 22nd** 2006, Mother Evelyne Franc arrived with Sister Julma Neo in the Province of Thailand to visit the three Asian countries that make up the Province: Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. The joyful welcome of the Sisters at the Provincial House ushered in the series of activities that began with a Eucharistic celebration, followed by a Council meeting to give Sr. Evelyne an overview of the Province. They later met with Muslim and Thai parents and their children who are being helped by the Sisters’ Social Development Centre. The interfaith milieu where the Sisters live and work was immediately evident.

#### **In Cambodia**

Sister Evelyne, Sister Julma and Sister Josefina Estremera (Visitatrice) were welcomed to Phnom Penh by the Sisters from the different local communities of this capital city, along with the Sisters from Battambang, a prefecture of the Church in the poorest region of the country. Cambodia is a country still struggling to develop after years of violence under a communist regime. Sister Evelyn witnessed striking evidence of poverty among the poor people served by the Sisters: the patients in the temporary shelter, the factory women whose housing conditions are truly wretched. The visitors also had a chance to go to Takeo where the Sisters administer the only Eye Hospital in the country. The clinic trains Cambodian doctors and nurses in the treatment of eye problems, with the help of foreign doctors. After training, they are deployed to serve the people in the villages. The Sisters will soon start a nutrition programme in the Pediatric Unit of its State Provincial Hospital.

#### **In Laos**

The visit to Laos was an experience of a Church that is truly a minority Church. An early Eucharistic celebration at the Parish Church in Vientiane, a visit to Bishop Kamsee and meeting the elderly, the young people and women served by the Sisters, gave the visitors some insight into the life of a small Christian community trying to maintain its vitality in a communist ruled country. In Laos, Church activities are allowed only in the church compound.

### **In Thailand**

The visit to the **South** of Thailand was another experience of the service of poor persons in the two houses of the Community: In Ronphibun the Sisters manage a vocational school for both Muslim and Buddhist youngsters, take care of rehabilitated elderly Hansenites at a leprosarium and persons with disabilities, in a community-based programme. In Phattalung the Sisters administer a school for the children and take care of the elderly in the community. The unique welcome of the children and teachers which delighted Mother Evelyne was followed by a warm dialogue with the Sisters who were touched by Mother's focus on being rather than on work and her challenging observation: "*The service to the children and the lepers must be a joy that has nothing to do with achievements, rather it must be one experienced by a simple, humble, loving heart and one that lasts all through life*".

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, they went on to Maesot, in the **north of the country** along the border of Thailand-Burma. In this very poor area, the Sisters are doing a wonderful work with the Burmese migrants and refugees and the hill tribe people (Burmese Karen). Mother spoke to some Cadmium-infected persons, visited a slum area where Muslim street children live, and the Daycare Centre for both the Thai and the Burmese children. The visit to the Burmese refugee camp and the hospital developed for the refugees by a female Burmese physician was very moving. It reflected the heroic efforts of the Burmese to help their compatriots in spite of very limited resources. To date, there are still thousands of refugees in these camps.

On their return to Bangkok, they were welcomed by all the Sisters of the Province holding lighted candles that together they offered to Our Lady. The visitors had very fruitful meetings with all the Sisters, the Sister Servants and formators and, lastly with the young Sisters. Afterwards, they visited St. Clare Hospice where one of the Sisters works with terminally ill persons with AIDS. A delightful evening recreation that had everyone laughing crowned the day.

On the last day of the visit, the Vincentian family gathered together for Eucharist and a community meal. A final meeting with the Council and a traditional Thai send-off and good luck rite ended the visit on a very joyful and hopeful note.

Sister Violeta Cecilio  
Daughter of Charity

### VISITS BY SUPERIORS

Mother Evelyne Franc

## **Visit to the Sisters taking part in the Interprovincial Vincentian Studies Institute at Salamanca**

August 3<sup>rd</sup> 7<sup>th</sup>, 2006

This year the session of the Vincentian Studies Institute in Salamanca was marked by the visit of Sister Evelyne Franc. In August 2004 the coordination team had invited her to participate for several days in a Vincentian session, and this year she was able to accept.

On August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2006, Sister Evelyne, Sister Rosa Maria Miro, General Councillor, and Sister Maria del Carmen Zaballos, Visitatrice of Madrid Saint Vincent Province, came to Salamanca. The 150 Sisters taking part in the session gathered in the main house to welcome the visitors. This brought to mind the joy of the first Sisters when they saw Saint Louise come to join them when Saint Vincent was giving a conference. Father Sanz, Provincial Director, Father Otero, Visitor, and Father Sanchez Mallo, Director of CEME were also present.

For five days, we enjoyed the presence and the simplicity of Sister Evelyne and Sister Rosa Maria. Their approach to people reminded us of the attitude of Jesus who said he had not come to be served, but rather to serve.

### **Visit to the city of Salamanca**

It would have been unthinkable to miss the opportunity of showing Sister Evelyne the region of Salamanca, located southwest of Castile and Leon. As you enter the city of Salamanca, full of historical monuments and places of learning, you immediately come into contact with its culture and learning. The saying: "Whoever wants to become cultured should go to Salamanca" is certainly true. Sister Maria del Carmen had planned a tour at the end of the day when the sun's rays cast a golden glow on the stones of the monuments of Villamayor. The visitors admired the plaza, the cathedral, the house of seashells, the church of Saint Stephen, and the University. Together they praised the Lord for the beauty of Salamanca's monuments. These architectural treasures sing of the glory of God and the dignity of humankind.

The walk through the city, the cool air from the Tormes, contact with nature and art, as well as information given by some of the Sisters from Salamanca, gave Sister Evelyne an overall idea of the importance of this beautiful city in the history of Spain and the world. The guide who accompanied them remarked on Sister Evelyne's interest in all that she saw.

### **Visit to Ciudad Rodrigo**

To the west of Salamanca rises the magnificent Ciudad Rodrigo. On the evening of August 5<sup>th</sup> the visitors set out to discover this Spanish city, formerly the Roman city of Mirobriga. This year, in the cathedral of this salt mine diocese, there was an exhibition depicting "The ages of Man" entitled Kyrios 2006. These treasures

of the Church of Castile and Leon help us to reflect on several aspects of the Christian message; the five themes of this year are: "According to Scripture," "The Incarnation, the childhood and the hidden life of Jesus," "The public ministry of Jesus," "The Pascal Mystery," and "Eschatology".

At Ciudad Rodrigo, the Visitatrices of the Spanish Provinces and some of the Provincial Councillors were waiting for Sister Evelyne for a late afternoon gathering. The guide was ready and the municipal Council was also on hand for the arrival of the visitors. All admired the artwork display that richly expressed the Christian message. The Director of the exhibition announced this event in the press: "*Sister Evelyne Franc is the 4662<sup>nd</sup> visitor on August 5<sup>th</sup>, and the 132,131<sup>th</sup> visitor since the opening last June.*" Her visit will therefore remain inscribed in the annals of the Church in Castile and Leon.

Afterwards, the visitors went to the local community in Ciudad Rodrigo to meet the Sisters. Previously there had been two houses here: one where the Sisters served in the hospital for incurables, and another where the Sisters were involved in school ministry and a home for young people, named "Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal." For more than one hundred years the Sisters witnessed to the love of God for those who are poor. Currently the two communities have regrouped into a new work to serve the aged in the Residence (the former Hospital) as well as doing pastoral work in the rural area. They work in collaboration with the members of the AIC and AMM (Miraculous Medal Association.)

### **At the Vincentian Studies House**

On August 6 Sister Evelyne gave a conference on the theme "*Formation Today.*" More than 300 sisters attended (150 participants from the Session, the Sisters of the Provinces of Gijon and Madrid Saint Vincent, the Interprovincial Seminary, missionary Sisters from Avila and Sisters from the area.)

Sister Evelyne began her presentation very simply with the gospel of the day on the Transfiguration and quoted Peter's words on Tabor: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" With an excellent command of the Spanish language, she developed the following points:

- The importance of formation, according to the Founders
- The need for ongoing formation, according to the Constitutions
- Formation: a life-long task
- Revitalising our vocation by striving even harder.
- 

The conference was followed by a very lively discussion on the theme of the local community: place of formation, sharing, community revisions, and obstacles to formation. Then two Sisters gave an audiovisual presentation: "*The Daughters of Charity in Spain: from 1790 to 2008*". The morning activities concluded with the celebration of Eucharist.

The afternoon agenda included a roundtable and sharing on the following experiences:

- Mission among migrants in a reception centre
- Personal experience of illness
- Service among homeless persons
- Pastoral ministry with particular attention to families of sick children
- Mission among the Muslims in Morocco.

The sharing that followed brought out the concern of many Sisters regarding the subject of migrants arriving in Spain.

### **Visit to Alba de Tormes**

In the evening on August 7<sup>th</sup>, after the conference by our General Councillor on *“The spiritual and apostolic dynamism of our vocation,”* Sister Evelyne, Sister Rosa Maria and the three Visitatrices of the Provinces of Madrid Saint Vincent, Gijon and San Sebastian, went on a pilgrimage to Alba de Tormes, the burial place of Saint Teresa of Avila. An arrangement had been made in advance that allowed them to enter the Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady and pray before the tomb of Saint Teresa.

Afterwards, they visited the church of Saint John, a treasure of art and faith, the most significant example of a style of architecture coming from the fusion of Romanesque and Moorish styles. Inside the church is a very impressive work of art showing the twelve apostles with Christ, a polychromatic work on granite rock, dating from 1200. It is a real jewel of Romanesque sculpture.

Finally, the day ended with a visit to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Residence and the Community of retired Sisters. For them this visit was like a life-giving spring of water in the midst of the monotony of daily life and a breath of fresh air that revitalised their fidelity. However, it was soon time for the visitors to leave. The Sisters warmly thanked Sister Evelyne and promised her their prayers: *“We will always pray for you and we will walk along the path of faith that you have left for us.”*

On the morning of August 8<sup>th</sup>, after the Eucharist, the Sisters at the session also expressed their gratitude to Sister Evelyne for accepting the invitation to come. Her presence and her message encourage us to continue enthusiastically and confidently on our journey in the footsteps of Christ. Sister Evelyne went back to Valladolid where the Sisters of the area were waiting for her at the Laboure Residence, during a gathering to reflect on the theme of Formation. The Provincial Council, Sister Juana Elizondo and the Sisters of the Province of San Sebastian joyfully welcomed her.

In the late afternoon, Sister Evelyne and Sister Rosa Maria left for Paris. We thank them again for these days spent together.

Sister Marie Angeles Infante  
*Daughter of Charity*

## SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Krakow

### Interprovincial Encounter of the Visitatrices and Formators from the Slavonic Countries

**From 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> August 2006**, the Visitatrices, the Formation Councillors and the formators from the three Provinces of Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the region of Albania, met in the Provincial House of Krakow at the initiative of Sister Sophie Daniščakova, General Councillor for the Slavonic countries. This gathering was followed by another for the Sister Servants of the Province of Krakow, on August 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>. Sister Marlène Rosa, General Councillor for Portuguese-speaking Provinces, was invited to share her experience as a formator.

The theme of the first gathering was a recommendation from Saint Louise de Marillac : « *What the Lord asks of you is great union and great patience with your Sisters, in humility, simplicity and charity* ».

This gathering gave us the opportunity to share our experiences of formation with its joys and difficulties. We have to take into account the reality of young people today (family difficulties, etc.). The Sisters emphasised the need for human formation, for spiritual formation to develop a spirit of faith, for apostolic formation with the courage to witness in a secularised world, and for convictions that unify one's total gift of self to God.

Sister Marlene helped us to reflect on the following points:

- The situation of young people and their families, in order to take these into account in the different steps of their formation.
- Our own reactions to the reality of young people today.
- The periods of difficulty in consecrated life to be lived as calls from God to re-centre our lives on Him.

**August 21<sup>st</sup> 22<sup>nd</sup>**, Sister Marlène responded to questions from the Sister Servants and focused on the problems concerning co-responsibility, subsidiarity and communication with the Sisters, as described in the Constitutions.

To close these two gatherings, the Sisters made a pilgrimage:

- In the footsteps of Pope John Paul II: to the Sanctuary of the Mercy of God in Łagiewniki (Krakow) and to the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska.
- To the concentration camp of Auschwitz- Birkenau.

These two gatherings were very rewarding, as they allowed us to get to know each other better and to realise that diversity is not an obstacle to unity but rather a means of reinforcing the bonds between us and of admiring the infinite creativity of the action of the Lord in the heart of the Sisters.



Finally, from August 22<sup>nd</sup> -27<sup>th</sup>, Sister Sofia and Sister Marlène met the Sister Servants of the Province of Chelmino to study in greater depth several questions more particularly relevant to them.

Sister Anna BRZEK  
*Echoes Correspondent*

## SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Curitiba

### **Fourth Interprovincial Meeting of Sisters**

#### **living in small insertions among the working people**

The fourth interprovincial meeting of communities with insertions among the working people, took place in Curitiba the last week of February in 2006. This included 91 representatives from the six Provinces of Brazil. The Province of Curitiba provided the accommodations and planned the meeting. It was a sharing of the daily realities of our insertions and reflection on the challenges that arise: "How to take up the cause of those who are poor and how to change unjust structures."

The Province of Curitiba is one of the places where the Company began in Brazil. Throughout the celebration, we took as symbols the blue bag of the Daughters of Charity and the flame of a candle. We let the words of Saint Vincent resound: "*Go, my Daughters and serve the poor, the poorest of the poor everywhere.*" Let us give thanks to God for the loving plan of Vincent and Louise, as well as for those of our Sisters who have created these small insertions among the working poor. Impelled by our particular spirit, in order to collaborate with others and to dare to make the necessary changes to improve the lives of the poor, we ask God's help to follow the path with discernment and to look toward the future.

In an atmosphere similar to that of the Apostles gathered in the Cenacle, we dealt with the following themes:

- The reality of our insertions and that of poor persons
- Today's challenges, as presented by a lay theologian
- The identity of the Daughter of Charity with the working poor, presented by Father Barbosa, Provincial Director of Rio de Janeiro.
- Associations that work for social integration, presented by Father Groh

This shared reflection centered us on the fundamental aspects of our mission: spirituality of service, Vincentian charism, essential mobility in order to "pitch one's tent" among the poorest of the poor, "*comings and goings,*" as St. Louise said. The presence of Sister Marlene Rosa, General Councilor, was very much appreciated. Recalling the guidance given by Sister Evelyne Franc in her Circular Letter of

February 2, 2006: “*We must be an eloquent sign of the presence of God’s Kingdom in today’s world... sentinels who discover and proclaim the new life that is already present in history.*” she reminded us that we are going toward the future with the entire Company. We also greatly appreciate the messages of encouragement that we received during the gathering from Father Gregory Gay, Superior General and the Visitatrices.

At the sending forth celebration, each Province received a small “bundle” of pine illumined by a candle, a sign of endurance and light for the journey. (Because of its great durability, the bundle of pine is used by poor people to light the fire in winter.)

The next inter-provincial meeting is scheduled for July 2008 in Recife, where we will continue to reflect on our commitment to persons who are poor.

Sister Barbara VALENGA, *Echoes Correspondent*

### SISTERS’ TESTIMONIES

Province of Barcelona

Active Retirement!

In Reus, where the Company was established in 1792, the Vincentian charism is very much alive today.

Some years ago a priest, Monsignor Frederic, aided by Sister Ana Maria Cabia, Daughter of Charity, laid the foundation stone in a charitable work to assist young children. What began as a small place that served as kitchen and dining room has become a social centre which, due to its exceptional organisation, has become a model for others. The people of Reus have always been sensitive in the face of poverty and so, presented with an organised social initiative, have been very collaborative and generous.

Over the years, the work has continued to evolve with regard to infrastructure, quality of service, and the number of clients. The first to be served were gypsies; this group of people has given way to the multicultural influx that has recently come to Reus: South Americans, Eastern Europeans, and North Africans. There are many families who have settled legally in the city. Some are able to find work; others live precariously, relying on the solidarity of the townspeople.

Today, Monsignor Frederic Social Centre is a model of well-organized service, carried out by a group of retired Daughters of Charity and a committed and efficient group of volunteers. The projects developed in the Centre point to responsible management of human and material resources. The centre opens at 5:30 p.m. to welcome some 190 children between the ages of 3 and 14 years. All the children have an individual identity card, which gives them admission to the activities

planned for their particular age group. The pre-school children are picked up by their parents at 7:00p.m. Those who are older are met at 8:00 p.m.

The activities offered by the Center are:

- Welcome and play activities for children from 3 to 5 years of age.
- Tutoring for primary and secondary students.
- Computer classes for small groups.
- A film show once a week.
- A substantial and well-balanced lunch served from Monday to Friday.
- Sewing classes for those mothers who want to participate.

Attendance is guaranteed thanks to the rules which are set out in a contract between the families and the Centre, and these are implemented in collaboration with the city schools which the children attend.

The rules require participants to:

- Attend the Centre each day, bringing their identity card.
- Not miss school without good reason
- Behave well during activities.
- Show respect for the people in charge of the various activities.
- Take care of the Centre's furniture and equipment.

If the children do not attend the Centre regularly, without good reason, the family does not receive the bag of food which is distributed each Friday to all participating families.

On the subject of rules, the possibility of non-compliance and sanctions might be seen as cold and anachronistic...However, it is the key to the success of this social service Centre. The families are happy, the collaborating organisations know that their contributions are well-administered, and public institutions can rely on an agency which supports their civic education programmes.

The volunteers team has an age range from 16 to 85 years. Some bring their wisdom and teaching experience; others are responsible for the good order of the dining room; while others peel potatoes and clean vegetables for the meals. At the present time, the possibility is being studied of offering activities for children between the age of 14-16 years. Each day, from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. the Centre is a hymn to Charity, an example of what "active retirement" can offer by way of service.

Sister Rosa Mendoza  
*Correspondent for the Echoes*

### SISTERS' TESTIMONIES

Province of Krakow

**Process for the primary school of Szczodrowo  
to be given the name "Sister Marta Wiecka" school**

## **WHO IS SISTER MARTA WIECKA?**

Born on January 12th, 1874, in Nowy Wiec, in the region of Pomorze, Marta Wiecka was baptised six days later in the church of Szczodrowo, two kilometres from the house where she was born. Her region was annexed to Prussia because, at this time, Poland was erased from the world map as a political entity. This was the difficult time of Kulturkampf (fight for culture) that was particularly violent as Prussia fought against the Church and the Polish identity. (The Polish population, supported by the Church, resisted the government in order to defend its national identity and the Catholic faith). As a child, Marta attended the local school of Nowy Wiec and the church in Szczodrowo, participating in Marian celebrations during the months of May and October.

Marta's family was staunchly Catholic and patriotic. Given the political ideology of the time, schools were forbidden to teach the Polish language, Polish history, and the Catholic faith. However, Marta learned all this from her family.

To prepare for her First Communion, Marta didn't hesitate to walk 12 km to go to the parish church in Skarszewy. On October 3rd, 1866, she made her first Communion and continued to go there for Sunday Mass because at the church in Szczodrowo, Mass was only celebrated once a month.

At the age of 18, she entered the Company of the Daughters of Charity in Krakow. For 12 years, she devotedly served the sick in the general hospitals of Lvov, Podhajce and Bochnia. During her last years, in Sniatyn, she served to the point of giving her life in an act of heroic love. Despite the risk, she replaced another employee in the work of disinfecting the bedroom of someone suffering from typhus. She contracted the disease and died in Sniatyn (currently in the Ukraine) on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1904.

## **PHOTO**

At the request of the people of that region and as a result of the cult that developed around her, the process of beatification was opened on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1997, in the diocese of Lvov. The process of investigation regarding the Servant of God was completed on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1998 in Lvov.

Afterwards, the findings of the inquiry were transmitted to Rome. On April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, in Rome, published a decree approving the validity of the process of beatification at diocesan level. The decree on the heroic virtue of Sister Martha was promulgated on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004 by Pope John Paul II.

We hope that the process of beatification of Sister Martha will conclude soon in Rome and that she will be counted among those declared Blessed

## **THE BIRTHPLACE OF SISTER MARTA TODAY**

Marta's birthplace is situated in a very picturesque agricultural region of the country. The fields are cultivated to the very edge of the land; the roads, like those of the past, are surrounded by woods and grasslands; the houses have well-kept flower gardens and storks' nests, all signs of the innocence of nature. Today, her family no longer live in this house, but everyone remembers Marta. The Dworaczek family are living there at present. On the property there was a statue of Saint John Nepomucen, to whom Marta had a great devotion, but the statue was destroyed during the Second World War. When the process of beatification of Sister Marta opened, the authors of the Photo Gallery "Homelands," with the agreement of the Company and the local Church leaders, took the initiative of placing a new statue in Marta's former home.

#### **PREPARATION FOR THE CEREMONY ON SEPTEMBER 20TH, 2006, WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL AT SZCZORDOWO**

The principal of the primary school at Szczordowo, Mrs. Potrac, was looking, with the teachers and the parents, for a patron for their school. Together, they chose Sister Marta Wiecka and decided to give her name to the primary school at Szczodrowo. The principal said: "*She is one of us.*" Sister Marta Wiecka is a good example for the students. After obtaining the consent of the municipality and the Company of the Daughters of Charity in Krakow, the principal invited the bishop of Pelplin, taking advantage of his visit to the parish of Szczordowo.

The ceremony for the official naming of the school was arranged for September 20th, 2006. The principal and the teachers prepared the children by teaching them about the life of Marta, and prepared them on a spiritual level thanks to an exhibition with five large displays and numerous photos. The first presented the decree of the heroic virtues of Sister Marta; the second, information about her family; the third, Sister Martha's apostolic activity as a Daughter of Charity; the fourth, Sister Marta's relations as a Daughter of Charity with her family; the fifth, Sister Marta's tomb in Siatyn, a venerated place visited by Catholics, Orthodox, Greek Catholics and even believers of other religions. Sister Irene Chorała gave a brief talk on the Company and the Miraculous Medal.

#### **TWO SUCCESSIVE CEREMONIES**

##### **The request made to the bishop to give the school at Szczodrowo the name of Sister Marta Wiecka**

On September 20th, 2006, Bishop Bernard Jan Szlaga arrived in Szczodrowo, accompanied by several priests. A large group of Daughters of Charity from Krakow, Chelmno, etc, came for the ceremony, as well as members of Marta's family, among them a priest and a religious sister.

After a word of welcome, the principal presented to the bishop the official request to give Sister Marta's name to their school, invoking the need for role models in the training of new generations. The bishop agreed to this request. He called Sister Marta "the salt of the earth," and her death "a white martyrdom" because she gave her life for another person. She can teach us how to live by loving others. The bishop's remarks were followed by a concert during which Mrs. Natalia Tachtajewa performed

three compositions by Bach that were very well received. Then a photograph was taken and an entry made in the annals of the school.

The ceremony for the official naming is fixed for May 30th, 2007, the day when the 103rd anniversary of Sister Marta's death will be celebrated.

Following the ceremony at the school, the guests went to Nowy Wiec for the solemn blessing of the statue of Saint John Nepomucen.

### **Blessing of the statue of Saint John Nepomucen**

The crowd went in procession with the bishop on the road from Szczordowo to Nowy Wiec for the solemn blessing of the statue of Saint John Nepomucen. Arriving in front of the statue, the procession joined another crowd already assembled near the house where Sister Marta was born. Bishop Szlaga arrived, and the pastor asked the bishop to bless the statue, requesting that Saint John Nepomucen become the patron of the region.

Then, the deputy mayor of Skarszewy thanked the bishop and all those who contributed in any way to this work. Sister Jozefa warmly thanked those who had the idea to erect the statue of Saint John Nepomucen again in front of Sister Marta's birthplace.

Sister Adolfina DZIERZAK  
*Daughter of Charity*

### THE POOR SPEAK TO US

Province of Belgium

### **6 years, a long time or not?**

I think that six years is a long time to spend in a country that isn't your own, when you have no rights, no medical or social assistance, no work permit, no possibility of studying, no way of imagining the future. What's more, you have to live from day to day, feed your family, send your children to school and maintain your professional status. All my efforts were directed towards integrating my family into society. I was a blood donor at the Red Cross and I tried to take up my studies again before I learned that I wasn't legally permitted to do so. I joined in the activities organised by the associations of the town where I lived. In my native country, the Ukraine, I was a physician and a surgeon and my wife a nurse. I didn't leave my country for economic reasons since I had what I needed. I left because I couldn't see any future there as a result of the political problems. I didn't go to Belgium to take advantage of a system, but to finally be able to find a country where I could become a good citizen. The Belgian people ask foreigners to integrate into their society, and I did everything possible to do just that. But too often people told me that no one made me come and do it. How was I to find hope?

It's thanks to the Famenne (Luxembourg) Welcome programme and the Abbey of Saint Remy, as well as to the generosity of people I met, that my family was able to survive; otherwise, I would have become a beggar with my children who were born in Belgium. I would like to thank the Belgians who didn't abandon my family, who showed great generosity and not just financially. Many supported us during that long period, were warm-hearted towards us and gave us hope to live. The good that I found in Belgium was due to them. A very special thanks goes to those who helped us to learn French and introduced us to Belgian culture.

Thanks to the wonderful assistance given by the Famenne Welcome team, I was able to complete the numerous stages I needed to go through before I could emigrate to Canada where I would be able to exercise my profession. In September I was given permission to go to Canada. God is witness to our willingness to integrate ourselves in Belgium, despite the administrative obstacles. That's why I was sad not to be able to fulfil my desire to become a Belgian citizen. I still have fond memories of all the good times spent with my Belgian friends in that beautiful country.

Vladimir

*From the newsletter of the Friends of Famenne- Welcome  
(Rochefort)*

## SOURCES AND UPDATES

### **Our Lady of the Mission**

*The statue of Our Lady, which is venerated in Saint Joseph's Chapel in the Motherhouse, is dedicated to "Our Lady of the Mission."*

#### **ORIGINS**

The stone statue is 1.2 metres high, and it is similar in style to that of Marian statues in the Louvre dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

Because of its beauty, the statue was paid the unusual honour of being placed above the famous gateway in the wall that Philippe-Auguste built around Paris, in rue Saint-Denis. This statue of the Blessed Virgin saw the kings and queens of France pass beneath Our Lady's feet as they made their solemn entrance into the capital or were carried to their final resting place in the royal Abbey of Saint-Denis.

In **1671**, the historic gate was destroyed in order to expand the city, and the statue was placed in a neighbouring house at the corner of Artists' alley (114 rue Saint Denis).

Around **1680**, this house was demolished, and the statue was abandoned in a marsh.

In **1681**, in keeping with the wishes and the persistence of Mathurine Guérin, the statue was taken from this marsh and honourably placed in the centre

of the courtyard of our first Motherhouse in Saint Laurent parish, in the district of Saint Lazare.

The name of the statue was given to us by Mathurine Guérin. We can read in her instructions, compiled by Marie Moreau in 1706: “*She was named Our Lady of Victory because it is on that day that she came to the house.*” **That day was the 18<sup>th</sup> August**, because it is on that day, since the fourteenth century, that the commemoration of Our Lady of Victory has been celebrated at Notre Dame, Paris.

In fact, in 1304 at Notre Dame, Paris, the King of France, Philippe le Bel, established a feast to be celebrated annually on August 18<sup>th</sup>, under the title of “Our Lady of Victory” in thanksgiving to the Blessed Virgin for his victories and for her special protection. The beautiful statue of mother and child, therefore, entered the history of the Company under the title “Our Lady of Victory.”

### **FROM OUR LADY OF VICTORY TO OUR LADY OF THE MISSION**

Historic events necessitated several moves for the Motherhouse and, therefore, several moves for the statue.

After being hidden in a house in the suburbs during the course of the Revolution, in **1801** it was moved to the Motherhouse at rue du Vieux Colombier. It was enthroned in the middle of the courtyard as a watchful guardian.

In **1815** there was yet another move to **140 rue du Bac**. At first, the statue was placed “*on a little altar in the annual retreat room above the chapel.*” It is upon this very altar, that in 1840, Mary appeared to a Daughter of Charity, Justine Bisqueyburu, to confide to her the green scapular, a devotion which brought about cures and conversions.

In **1851** the retreat room, which had become too small for the retreatants, was transformed into a linen room where the Sisters worked for the Priests of the Mission. These Sisters were also given responsibility for looking after the altar, illuminating the statue of the Blessed Virgin and decorating it with flowers.

The Saint Lazare linen room quickly became known as the “Mission Office.” The Sisters working in this office came to call the statue “Our Lady of the Mission.”

### **MIRACULOUS INTERVENTIONS THROUGH OUR LADY OF THE MISSION**

Since its earliest days, Louise de Marillac placed the Company under the protection of the Virgin Mary and chose her to be its only Mother. This founding action had unimaginable repercussions. The history of the Company bears witness to that.



The day after its installation in the house at Saint Laurent, the statue of Our Lady of Victory revealed itself as an effective sign of protection. There would be similar occurrences in each new house.

### **Saint Laurent – the first Motherhouse**

In **1681**, when some scaffolding collapsed, taking along with it two workers who were thought to be dead, *“Sister Mathurine fell to her knees before the image (statue) of the Blessed Virgin begging her to have pity on these two men and to obtain for them from her dear Son the graces they needed. As she was saying her prayer, the workers got up, safe and sound, as if nothing had happened.”*

In **1785**, Mandrin, a notorious criminal, was condemned to death. Before dying, he insisted upon seeing the Superioress General and said to her: *“Sister, I did not want to die without warning you that in your house there is a very low window with no bars on it and through which anyone can easily get into your house. My friends and I went there more than fifteen times, and we would have been able to get in **except for a lady who was in the middle of the courtyard**. She always pushed us away with her arms, and it was impossible for us to get past her. I think, however, that it would be well for you to put some bars on that window. That, Sister, is what I wanted to tell you before I die.”*

### **Rue du Vieux Colombier – the second Motherhouse**

*“One evening, the Sister Portress forgot to close the front door. The neighbours, saw that the door remained open with a sentry keeping guard, and said to one another that the Sisters were probably waiting for some people they were expecting.. For this reason they must have asked for a sentry just for the night, because at daybreak, the sentry had disappeared. When the Sister found the door open and learned from the neighbours how the house had been under guard, the police commissioner was notified. He said that he had not sent anyone to keep watch. **The Sisters then concluded that the Blessed Virgin had sent an Angel to protect the Community.**”*

### **Rue du Bac – the third Motherhouse**

After delivering some valuable liturgical vestments that were given to the Sisters for the chapel, two men decided to steal them during the night. In the very act of carrying out their wicked plan they were struck by a providential paralysis and found themselves unable to move.

In the morning, they regained their powers of movement and of speech and were able to tell the Superioress: *“We were just about to carry out (our plan) but the moment we put our hand on the furniture, **that lady there** (trembling and pointing to the Blessed Virgin) **approached us and bound us so strongly that we unable to move or speak or even look at each other all night long. The moment you spoke to us, however, we felt a sense of release. Oh, Mother, do not send us off to the galleys. We have been rightly punished for the rest of our life.**”*

Many other miraculous events could be recounted, but the most important ones are personal and remain hidden deep in people's hearts.

## FINAL MOVES

The statue of Our Lady of the Mission remained in the "Mission Office" until 1930. At that time, after building renovations, it was placed in the tribune of the chapel... one hundred years after the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to Catherine Labouré.

During renovations made in 1980, the statue was moved one last time and placed in the sanctuary of St. Joseph's chapel, where it is venerated today.

*Our Lady of the Mission  
Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal  
Mary is always there at the heart of the Company.  
The statues of Mary are put before us in faith  
as tangible signs of her benevolent presence and ongoing protection.  
Let us not forget her!*

Sisters of the Archive Services  
*Motherhouse*

Say that I was a drum major...

When I go to meet my Maker,  
tell whoever gives my eulogy not to talk for too long.  
If they wonder what I would like to hear,  
tell them not to mention I won the Nobel Peace Prize —  
that isn't important.  
Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards—  
that's not important.  
Tell them not to mention my studies.

I'd like somebody to mention that day  
that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving others.  
I'd like somebody to say that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love people.  
I want you to say that day that I tried to be right on the war question.  
I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry.  
And I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life  
to clothe those who were naked.  
I want you to say on that day that I did try in my life to visit those who were in prison.  
I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

Yes, if you want to, say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for  
justice.

Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness.  
and all the other superficial things will not matter.

I won't have any money to leave behind.

I won't have life's fine and luxurious things to leave behind.

But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

And that's all I want to say.

If I can help somebody as I pass along,  
if I can cheer somebody with a word or song,  
if I can show somebody he's travelling wrong,  
then my living will not be in vain.

If I can do my duty as a Christian ought,  
if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought,  
if I can spread the message as the master taught,  
then my living will not be in vain.

**Martin Luther King**

Based on excerpts from one of his last sermons, delivered two months before his assassination