

January-February 2007

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### Editorial 2007

On 1<sup>st</sup> January of each new year, we join with the Church in honouring Mary, the Mother of God. Throughout the centuries, Catholics and members of the Orthodox Church have added the most precious gems to her crown of glory: the title of Immaculate Conception, Virgin most pure, Our Lady of the Assumption, etc. But the most beautiful diamond in her crown, her most precious title, the one from which all the others are drawn is, without any doubt, the one bestowed on her by the Council of Ephesus on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 431: Theotokos, Mother of God. By her "yes", the Virgin Mary became the mother of her Saviour: she received the Word of God: the Word took flesh in her.

Her constant fidelity to her vocation makes her the perfect Mother of God but she is also the Mother of humankind and has concern for the life of each one of her children.

As the Only Mother of the Company, she accompanies each Sister on her vocation journey and in her service of the poor people of this world.

Each day of this year 2007, Mary will be with the Company and will shed on us Daughters of Charity, the luminous rays of God's grace:

- A year of grace because Mary will obtain for us the light of the Holy Spirit for the Company which will soon be undertaking a period of reflection during the Domestic Assemblies, with the help of Father Alvarez's guidance which we will find in coming issues of the Echoes.

- A year of grace which will see the beatification of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira, a Brazilian Daughter of Charity: her violent death is an eloquent witness to the message of her simple life. We will also be remembering the exemplary life of Mother Suzanne Guillemin during this centenary year of her birth.

- A year of grace because poor people will continue to evangelise us: they will make us proclaim the wonders that God performs in their lives and in our own. We will pray to Mary that young people may generously respond to the call of Christ, Servant of the poor. With them we will commit ourselves to reducing poverty, exclusion and suffering.

So, everything is starting anew. *“The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us”* as Sister Evelyne reminds us in the meditation presented to us in her letter of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007.

### FATHER GREGORY GUY, SUPERIOR GENERAL

#### **Building loving relationships**

Conference given at the Motherhouse on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007

*We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all dangers, O Ever-Glorious and Blessed Virgin.*

Today the universal Church celebrates the solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. It is in the context of this feast that I would like to share my reflections with you this morning, Sisters.

Surfing the internet these days, I came across a news item that caught my attention. There was a woman who had hung a wreath on her door in protest against the war in Iraq. When asked by the local authorities to explain the meaning of the wreath, the woman simply said that it was the outward manifestation of her inner desire for peace in the world. Other people, living in the same neighbourhood, complained that the wreath was a sign of the devil and that it was not patriotic to have it hanging there. She was fined a large amount of money for every day that it remained in place.

It is a strange world in which we live today, Sisters, one where expressions of peace are seen to be symbols of the devil; when people who take action to promote peace by speaking out against the war, are penalised. It is truly a strange world.

Since the war in Iraq began, violence and death have escalated and have even worsened in the last months of the year 2006. We, as a world, witnessed the utter devastation that took place during Israel's constant bombing of Lebanon, when it seemed that the world powers were helpless to bring this senseless fighting to an end.

We live in a world where tragic death continues to find its victims among the poor, a world in which 25 million died from AIDS during 2006. We live in a world where people put a bad interpretation on words and actions, in order to criticise and find fault and cause division. (Cf. the address given by Benedict XVI at the University of Ratisbonne).

Not too long ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Republic of Cuba. It was incredible. It seems the entire system of government and its ideological beliefs have created a situation in which the Cuban people are deprived of all their rights. It is the truth, and only the truth, which will bring freedom to this country.

This is the world in which we live. This is the world of which we are a part. This is the world which has its influence upon us, a world in which we are challenged to speak. In this world, we are not only called to speak a word that is simple and truthful, but we are called upon also to build a world of loving relationships.

At the beginning of this New Year, we can make our own the words of Teilhard de Chardin:

*“I believe that the universe is in a constant state of evolution. I believe that this evolution is converging on the Universal Christ... The Messiah, who appeared for a moment in our midst, only allowed himself to be seen and touched for a moment before vanishing again, more luminous and ineffable than ever, into the depths of the future. He came. Yet now we must expect him once again and more than ever. The Lord Jesus will only come soon if we ardently expect him.*

De Chardin, the philosopher, gives us his poetic definition of hope. In this world in which we live, we are called on to keep hope alive and maintain the hope that this life is worth living and that it has a future. We are called to keep alive the hope that our mission and service continue to be authentic instruments of salvation in the Church and for the world, and especially for the poor and for those who suffer.

The Mother of God maintains a unique relationship with the one she bore in her own flesh. As the model for the whole human race, Mary teaches us to become more human and to witness to what it means to be human in today's world. Mary invites all of us to participate in the divine work of creation.<sup>1</sup> Mary should not be understood as simply a wonderful example from the past, but as someone here, a living presence among us.

Do we sing the *Magnificat* because one day Mary sang it? Or do we sing with her today the wonders of God's actions in our human lives? Like Mary, we not only magnify the Lord with our lips, but we are called to commit ourselves to serve God's justice with our lives. As a living witness of God's grace and our hope in Christ, Mary can help us build a world of loving relationships. She is the one who, in a spirit of recollection, looks beneath the surface of events and in faith accepts suffering. In

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<sup>1</sup> *Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ*, 21. The Seattle Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, edited by Donald Bolen and Gregory Cameron (Continuum: London, 2006) 226-227.

the gospel incident where Jesus remains behind in the Temple, she is reproached for her lack of understanding but uses this experience to commit herself to following a path of deeper faith.

Hope is only sustained, and life will only have meaning, if, from grass roots level, we continually strive to work on our relationships in a loving way. As Daughters of Charity, your *Inter-Assembly Action Lines 2003-2009* invite you to do this in a number of ways. In order to revitalise your relationships, you are called to go beyond what already exists, to give new impetus to your spiritual life by developing greater attentiveness to the Spirit at work in the lives of people and in world events.

You are also invited to intensify your collaboration with the laity, the Vincentian Family and other groups through concrete and long-term projects.

You are encouraged to create joyful communities where diversity is accepted as enrichment, and where participation, co-responsibility and subsidiarity exist at all levels of community life.<sup>2</sup>

Building relationships in community demands;  
the true living out of humility, simplicity and charity,  
dialogue and sharing, in a spirit of respect and kindness.

So as not to fail in humility, simplicity and charity we should ask ourselves these three questions before talking about another Sister in community:

1. Why is it important for me to talk to somebody else about this Sister?
2. Will what I say about her wound her dignity?
3. Would I like to hear someone speak about me in the same manner?

Building a world of loving relationships means beginning at home and building a local community of loving relationships.

We need to reflect often on what we say to others and what we say about others. Let us always try to speak in a constructive way and so give glory to God.

In terms of your relationships with the poor, you are continually called to develop the art of serving them, an art which is based on love, and to live more closely to them in heart and in life style.

Although some people may fail to understand your life of service I pray that the witness you give may be a challenge for young people who would like to share your life of service, of community and of prayer.

To end with, let us listen together to the words of Saint Louise's Testament. This is my prayer for each one of you at the beginning of this New Year 2007:

*My dear sisters, I continue to ask God for his blessings for you and pray that he will grant you the grace to persevere in your vocation in order to*

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<sup>2</sup> *Action Lines*, p.6-7, Relationships and mission

*serve him in the manner he asks of you. Take good care of the service of the poor. Above all, live together in great union and cordiality, loving one another in imitation of the union and life of Our Lord. Pray earnestly to the Blessed Virgin that she may be your only Mother.*<sup>3</sup>

Father G. Gregory Gay, C.M  
*Superior General*

SISTER EVELYNE FRANCO, SUPERIORESS GENERAL

To all Daughters of Charity

**Letter of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007**

Dear Sisters

Happy and holy New Year to each of you and thank you for all your letters and various messages in your Christmas and New Year greetings. They were accompanied by detailed and, at times very witty descriptions and were often justifiably proud of the services carried out by your local community. As I read your messages, I was touched and able to share in your joy of being given to God in the Company, your love for our most abandoned brothers and sisters, your distress at not being able to do more with them and for them. Something else evident in all the Provinces is your opposition to the injustices in our society and your great desire to be close to persons who are poor in order to live in unity of heart with them, to combat the harshness and artificiality prevailing in our world.

In his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007, Benedict XVI described, in the following way, the task entrusted to every human being: *“to mature in the ability to love and to contribute to the progress of the world, renewing it in justice and in peace.”* Our total gift of self to God, our vocation as Daughters of Charity leads us even farther along this same line: *“the service of Christ in those who are poor is an act of love--both affective and effective love -- which directs their entire life and is the expression par excellence of the ‘state of charity.’”* (C. 24 a) This is exactly what is proposed to us in the motto chosen by Saint Louise: *the Charity of Jesus crucified urges us.*

I would like to call to mind our motto as a context for my greetings for this New Year. As you know, in 2007 we begin the journey that leads us to the General Assembly of 2009. Your Domestic Assemblies will take place in 2007 and part of 2008, followed by your Provincial Assemblies in 2008. Finally, the Company will hold its General Assembly in 2009. It seems to be of the utmost importance that we

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approach these Assemblies with a renewed spirit, even if this is our eighth Domestic Assembly! I really believe that reflecting on our motto can help us prepare for them.

Saint Louise chose a symbol that contained the essential elements of her faith experience: a heart encompassed by flames, with the figure of Jesus crucified, surrounded by the motto:

***“The charity of Jesus Christ crucified urges us”***

From 1643 onwards this seal and this motto were included in the letters of Saint Louise. The Company has continued to use the seal and motto since that time. What do they mean for us today? Are they simply a heritage from the past that we respect, or rather a rich symbol with which we can identify, which sends us forward in service of our destitute brothers and sisters? What does this motto say to us today? How is it expressed in our current documents?

The Charity of Jesus crucified... is the fundamental basis of our vocation; it is an understanding that we are loved by the Lord, called to witness to this same love with our Sisters in community, knowing that we are sent out so that poor persons might have this same experience.

The Charity of Jesus crucified

- *causes them to love God with all their being,*
- *fosters and maintains communion among the Sisters,*
- *urges them to serve those who are poor and to help every person to fulfil their vocation of child of God, without distinction of race, culture, social condition, or religion. (C. 18 c)*

The Charity of Jesus crucified is the source and inspiration of our faith life, our service and our community life. It is a love that is nourished and strengthened in *“the Eucharist, the centre of our life and mission, an indispensable meeting each day with Christ and our brothers and sisters, listening to God’s word, bringing the local community together”* (cf. C. 19 b, c, d).

The Charity of Jesus crucified, *“our passion for Jesus impels us to go to those who are poor with fearlessness, compassion and creativity”* (Action Lines); the Charity of Jesus crucified commits us to looking at reality and accepting it as Jesus did: *“At the school of the Son of God, the Daughters of Charity learn that no type of distress should be foreign to them.”* (C. 11 a)

This Charity impels us to approach our realities with a perspective that is new, loving and full of hope. *“Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave.”* (Deus Caritas Est, n° 18)

This year 2007, the year of Domestic Assemblies, is a new time of grace for the entire Company, an invitation from the Lord to deepen our fidelity to our charism

in new ways, with imagination, inspired by love, with passion and hope sustained by God's fidelity, urged on by the Charity of Jesus crucified.

I hope that these Assemblies will be an opportunity for us to reflect together on ways of being both simple and prophetic, to demonstrate that our heart is full of the love of Christ, that it is caught up in Him, that in fact our life is of Christ and for Christ, always in and through those who are poor. Our prophetic expressions will demonstrate our way of living the mission, in proximity with poor persons, in humble openness that excludes no one, freely giving our all in discreet ways that seek nothing in return. These prophetic ways will speak of God and lead to God, through a simple, poor lifestyle that resists the attractions of comfort and what Benedict XVI referred to as "*the temptation of mediocrity, of middle-class ways and of a consumer mentality*" in his address to the representatives of Institutes of Consecrated Life in Rome in May 2006.

To dare to take on such prophetic gestures, to welcome this new spirit, we need to live in communion with Jesus, in a way that our being and our actions flow from that relationship.

*"In prayer we learn God's Will, we advance in perfection, we gather strength to resist temptations, and we are affirmed in our vocation; lastly, that is where our soul has the happiness of speaking heart to heart with God."* (Saint Vincent, May 31, 1648. Coste IX, page 321).

In the strength of the Spirit, we will be able to confront the difficulties of our times, the discouragements of daily life, the deadly ills of disillusionment and individualism. Impelled by the Spirit, our hearts will be more and more on fire with the love of Jesus crucified.

Allow me to turn back to 2006 for a moment to thank you for the warm welcome that you extended to the General Councillors and to me during our visits to your Provinces. These were opportunities to praise the Lord of Charity for countless witnesses of joy and faith. I would also like to call to mind other events that marked the year 2006: gatherings (Encounter for Newly Appointed Provincial Directors, Inter-Assembly Visitatrices' Encounter), missionary events (the foundation in Tanzania, sending Sisters to the Mission *Ad Gentes*), our solidarity with the sufferings of the Sisters and poor persons in the face of violence that becomes more and more commonplace (in several countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean) and with those who have suffered as a result of natural disasters (in Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam and India).

I also give thanks for the celebrations commemorating the bicentenary of the birth of Saint Catherine and the centenary of Mother Guillemin. In this new year of 2007 we look forward with joy to the beatification of Sister Lindalva Justo de Oliveira in Brazil.

As this New Year begins, I turn to Mary in prayer, asking her to accompany us and to help us prepare our hearts to enter into the Domestic Assemblies with attentiveness to the Spirit. This same Spirit accompanies us on our journey, inviting



us to explore new pathways, always with characteristic humility, simplicity and charity.

In conclusion, I offer the same prayer that our Holy Father included in his message for this year's World Day of Peace: *"May Mary show us, in her Son, the Way of peace, and enlighten our vision, so that we can recognise Christ's face in the face of every human person, the heart of peace!"*

Devotedly and with affection and prayers,

Sister Evelyne Franc  
Daughter of Charity

FATHER J. ALVAREZ, DIRECTOR GENERAL

Outline for the monthly retreat

**God's hands and our hands**

*"A leper came to Jesus....."If you want to, you can cure me." Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him."* (Mk1, 40-41)

God is not absent from our lives even if we often find his silence disconcerting. Sometimes, however, we have such a powerful awareness of his presence that we are moved to cry out, "God's hand is in this!" It might be his right hand, which bestows the grace in a direct way. It might be his left hand, which also bestows grace but does so in a more indirect and unexpected way. Sometimes it is testing us. To give some well-known examples: was it not God's hand that saved Peter from the waters of the abyss and helped him to get safely back into his boat? (cf. Mt 14, 24-33). Was it not the hand of God that brought Saul low on his path of perdition and led him to the faith? (cf. Ac 9, 1-35). Was it not God's hand that pointed Vincent de Paul in the direction of the poor? Was it not the hand of God that inspired John XXIII to open wide the doors and windows of the Church?

**THE HANDS OF GOD**

We can use our imagination as a way of coming closer to God. This is frequently the case in Sacred Scripture which contains very many and varied images. When we speak of God's hands we are speaking particularly of his providential and creative deeds. *"All this was made by my hand,"* (Is 66, 2) said the Lord on the seventh day of creation. And with particular reference to human beings, God is presented as the potter who created man in his own image and likeness: *"Yahweh, God, fashioned man from the dust of the earth."*(Gen 2, 7). Looking at things in another way, human persons can consider it a great blessing to feel they are held in the great hollow of God's hands (cf. Jer 18, 6; Ws 3,1). But before this can happen, the clay has to recognise the potter, that is to say, each one of us must recognise our dependence on him.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons also used an imaginative approach to the Trinity. To his way of thinking, God has two hands: Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are hands that liberate, bestow graces, bless and save. So just as we say that Jesus is the face of God because in Him God is wonderfully manifested, so too, we can say that Jesus is God's hand because through Him, God works most powerfully. In the Gospel, the hands of Jesus help people, they heal, share, pray and bless....all this in the name of God the Father.

## **THE HANDS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CHARITY**

**1. These should be united hands.** Charles Peguy said, *"The Christian is one who gives a hand."* If some people stay outside the circle their hands are no longer those of Jesus. They will be marked in a different way, they will serve other interests and work for other masters. In keeping with the Vincentian spirit we can give this rather unconventional definition, *"Community is the art of giving a hand."* There are various ways of giving a hand, each one good, each one based on the gospel, each one imitating the Good Samaritan. One way is to raise up our fallen brother or sister. When we do this we are able to say in the words of psalm 112, *"He lifts up the lowly from the dust...to set him in the company of princes."* The hand may be outstretched to give direct help to the vulnerable person. *"Those who are strong,"* says St. Paul, *"ought to bear with the scruples of the weak"* (Rm 15, 1). Sometimes it only requires our supportive presence for a person not to feel that they are on their own. *"If anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him."* (Mt 5, 41). So we have to be generous. Hands must know how to receive as well as to give because nobody is so poor that they cannot give something, or so rich that they have no need of other people. The process of giving and receiving is called sharing and this is what takes place in community. *"Treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you,"* is the advice St. Paul gives to those who live in community (Rm 15, 7). None of this can happen, and nobody can hope for renewal in communities, unless first of all, *"every Sister is received as a gift from God"* (At Jacob's Well, p.12).

**2. They should be open and outstretched hands.** They should be sacramental in the sense that our hands have to make present the hands of God. They will do this, to the extent that they give and share generously: that they are not closed through greed, that they do not hold back what our brothers and sisters need, that they do not hold on to what is superfluous and that they do not defend unjust ownership. This is what God said to the people of the Old Testament: *"If there is any poor brother among you....do not harden your heart or close your hand against that poor brother but be open-handed with him....."* (Dt 15, 7-8). Opening our hand is the same as opening our heart to the poor person.

Saint Vincent explained in great detail that the poor person is the sacrament of God. We might add that every Vincentian person should be a sacrament of Christ for those who are poor. Both actions have a reciprocal effect. To achieve this we have to live continually in the presence of God and be united with him in such a way that what we are and what we do will progressively identify us with Christ. In short, we have to become "another Christ." This will be possible if *"the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit"* (Rm 5,5). This is how we will be able to be the friendly, good and loving hand of God, the strong and liberating hand of God.

## HOW WE ARE TO STRETCH OUT OUR HAND

If stretching out our hand is an inherent part of the Gospel and something that is an essential feature of our Vincentian vocation, the style and manner of doing this is no less important. Jesus tells us, *“As I have loved you.”* (Jn 15, 12). We have to give a hand

\***Humbly**, with no trace of vanity, not looking for applause and being unconcerned about the importance of the work being done. *“But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing”* (Mt 6, 3). There must be no showing off. We have to act humbly because we must not humiliate those who are poor. Our way of acting must not be from the top to the bottom but from the bottom to the top, since *“the poor are our masters”* and even more, *“they make us ask forgiveness for the help we offer them,”* as Saint Vincent would say.

\* **Generously**, with no limits to our generosity, no bargaining, with *“full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over”* (Lk 6, 38). We know full well that Jesus gave his all, he gave himself completely and unstintingly. *“Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich but he became poor for your sake”* (2 Cor. 8,9).

## FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

**You might meditate on the biblical image of God’s hands.** (Jr. 18, 1-7: Ws. 3, 1-11).

The hands of God are my refuge, my “temple”, the place where I should lay down my fears, anxieties, difficulties, doubts....After this meditation I will feel liberated because we are truly in the hands of God.

### **Hands that are united**

In the words of the hymn, *“To build this wall, bring me everyone’s hands, coloured people with their brown hands, white people with their white hands...”* do my hands build up or do they destroy? Do they bring people together or do they scatter them, do they caress or do they strike people, are they open or are they closed? How can I give “a helping hand” to my community?

### **Open and outstretched hands.**

What state are my hands in: are they tired, injured, calloused, courageous, full of hope...for service? Who has need of my hands? What do my hands need in order to continue serving the poor?

Father Javier Alvarez, CM  
*Director General*

WE ARE ALL CALLED TO HOLINESS

*“The charity of Jesus Christ crucified impels”  
Mary to become Mother of the Church and  
Servant of the whole human race*

## INTRODUCTION

These last three years have enabled us to penetrate even more deeply into the mystery of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the promulgation of the dogma), the apparitions of 1830 (175<sup>th</sup> anniversary), the life of Catherine Labouré (bicentenary of her birth). On July 27th, 2007, we will commemorate the **60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the canonisation of Sister Catherine Labouré** – a woman of such silent and extraordinary holiness attained through her service of the poor, inspired by the charity of Christ crucified. We can easily imagine her day-to-day life in profound communion with the Virgin Mary. Her retreat notes witness to this and emphasise the place of Mary at the foot of the cross: *“Mary is there at the foot of the cross; she is there in the Cenacle with the Apostles. In silence she awaits the descent of the Spirit. What a lesson! Mary is our example. O Mary, make me love you and it will not be difficult to imitate you”* (1841). On November 27th, 1830, Catherine had already entered into this mystery through the vision of the reverse side of the Medal: *“The letter M surmounted on a cross and underneath, the blessed hearts of Jesus and Mary,”* one crowned with thorns, the other pierced by a sword.

This last part of the vision is of great importance to us because it reveals Mary in such close union with Christ, the Redeemer, both as Mother and “Servant of the Lord.” In showing us Mary at the foot of the cross, Saint John, in his Gospel, reveals this mystery of the close union between mother and Son and the new mission to the very heart of the nascent Church to which he is inviting her.

Since Mary is now Mother of the Church, she is also, according to Saint Vincent, the model of the Daughter of Charity, who, at Mary’s school, is invited to welcome the gift of *“the charity of Jesus crucified”* to continue to love him and serve him in the person of the poor. Could we not paraphrase the motto of the Daughters of Charity, applying it to the Virgin Mary: *“the charity of Jesus crucified impels Mary to become Mother of the Church, Servant of all people?”* Let us open our hearts and our whole being to that love of which Mary is the living image. With the Spirit who dwelt in the heart of Mary, let us re-read some events of her life, in the light of the Cross, and discover how charity impelled her to collaborate day by day with the plan of God’s love for all people, to the point of becoming Mother of the Church and servant of all people.

## SOME IMPORTANT EVENTS IN MARY’S LIFE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF HER SON’S PASSION

At the scene of the **Annunciation**, we can already sense that the mystery of the Annunciation is bound to that of the cross. One explains the other; one is at the root of the other. Mary says to the angel: *“I am the servant of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word.”* This sentence signifies a profound compliance, a desire, a “yes” from the heart. It also reveals a spirit of sacrifice: when Mary agrees to abandon her own plan in order to open herself to God’s plan and is simply a virginal offering, she shows she is available to accept her mission as Mother of God. Mary’s “yes” indicates the direction of her entire life lived in conformity with God and she consents in advance to all the options made by Christ, from Bethlehem to the cross.

The account of the Annunciation is not to be seen as an isolated text. It is not a narrative that is complete in itself but rather, it shows the pattern of Mary’s life as it evolved to the Cross and the Cenacle. In her song of praise, Mary, the humble servant, wonderfully hymns God’s action in her and in the world. It would only be at the foot of the cross that she would come to understand in depth what the “marvels” of God were.

The census meant that Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, about a hundred kilometres away. Joseph found a quiet place on the side of the road, far from family and among strangers. From the time of Jesus’ birth, Mary’s home was already open to passers-by, to the poor as well as to the great. Mary was only beginning the long series of astonishing events. She meditated upon these events in her heart. Without her realising it, had not the Lord prepared her for the universal mission that awaited her – that of welcoming all people, brothers and sisters of her son, as her own children?

After all the activity round the crib, she resumed her ordinary life in **Nazareth**, faithfully carrying out the lowly duties of everyday life. Mary is ever and always the servant. She preserved the ability to never cease thinking of God while immersed in all the humble realities of this earthly life. She knew the simple everyday joys: *“The child advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and man.”* She also shared in the monotony and ordinariness of daily life and the weariness of doing the same tasks everyday. Let us not be too quick to think that life in Nazareth was idyllic. At the time of **the Finding of Jesus in the Temple**, despite her constant state of welcome and openness, Mary found it difficult to accept that the mystery of God was being revealed in a different way than she expected: *“Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s work?”* Exegetes maintain that this passage of the Gospel is a meditation predicting the passion of Christ. Jesus allows his parents to experience the cloud of unknowing, the pain of those who seek the Lord yet do not find him. Here we are presented with the silent mystery of Mary, a humble silence that asks no questions. It is only at the foot of the cross that Mary will reach a deep understanding of what is meant by being *“about my Father’s work.”*

Eighteen years pass by silently. The Gospel says nothing. Jesus went to the bank of the Jordan to meet John and be baptised by him. At home, Mary continues to meditate, asking the Spirit to let her be what God wants her to be. Then, lo and behold, she is invited to a wedding in Cana, a little town near Nazareth. Words cannot describe the profound symbolism of the story of the **Wedding at Cana**. This wedding is a sign of another espousal, the last one, which Christ seals with humanity by his blood on the cross when his “hour” has come. Cana is the beginning of the

signs through which Jesus “*manifests his glory,*” but it is also proclaims the ultimate and definitive “*third day,*” that of Easter. If Cana is the beginning, the Passion will be the ending, and the ending of the Cross is the beginning of the Church. Because of her place in the event, Mary has a key role in the symbolism of the narrative. She is not called Mary; she is called “*the mother of Jesus.*” When Jesus says “My hour has not yet come,” he is saying that it is not a question of what she wants but of what the Father wills. In Saint John’s Gospel, “*hour*” is always the hour of the Passion and Resurrection. Only the Father knows and decides on the “*hour.*” Mary does not respond to Jesus’ question, but she shows the servants what it means to believe: “*Do whatever he tells you.*” Without seeing what will happen, since Jesus had not yet done or said anything, she is open to unconditional availability and she believes.

During the years of Jesus’ public life, Mary, in her heart, will never cease meditating on all the mysterious words she heard since the Annunciation, knowing very well that they were communicating the will of God and that one day, she would understand.

Mary was also going to encounter many cruel sorrows in life: the rejection of Jesus by the people of Nazareth (Lk. 4, 28), the family’s lack of trust in Jesus (Mk. 3, 20), etc. Mary’s soul was pierced by the sword to its very depths because all the harm done to her son hurt her, too. However, she continued her journey of union with Him right up to passion.

### **MARY AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS**

At the foot of the cross, Mary joins Jesus who is still “*about his Father’s work.*” She is united with him in the gift he is making of his life. With her eyes fixed on the dying Jesus, who is now revealing the extent of the Father’s love, Mary enters into the depth of this mystery of love that until now she had not known. She was pierced by the love of Jesus crucified: “*Forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.*” In the same way that we speak about the kenosis of Christ, we can speak of the self-emptying of Mary. Looking on his mother, Jesus can grasp her total acceptance of the gift he is making by letting himself be put to death on the cross. The symbols on the back of the Medal express in a simple way this profound mystery of the union of Jesus and Mary. “*The two hearts say enough,*” repeated Saint Catherine.

The hour when God revealed to the world the final word of his work, Mary, who made a habit of keeping all the words of Jesus in her heart, was ready to learn the most profound secret of God and respond to it. Though crushed to the depths of her being, Mary did not hesitate to open her hands to give her Son what he needed. Her heart opened itself unreservedly to these words: “Woman, here is your Son.” Even at this time, the humble servant of the Lord who had consented to be the mother of the Saviour, consented also to be the humble servant of her Son’s love for his disciples.

### **MARY AT THE BIRTH AND THE HEART OF THE CHURCH**

While suffering might have closed her in on herself, Mary was open to this new relationship with John. It was deeper than a blood relationship and made her become Mother of John and mother of the infant Church. John is her son and all the human race are her children. Her suffering mother’s heart was called to blossom into

a new motherhood that could embrace the whole world.

Mary's life with John very quickly became life with the apostles and disciples. Mary discovered that she could love Jesus in the person of all his brothers and sisters. From this time onward, Mary was present at the heart of the Church. The apostles gathered in the upper room "*devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women and Mary, the mother of Jesus.*" (Acts 1, 14)

The text places Mary last in the list, after "*some women.*" Saint Bernard saw a lesson in this: if Mary was named last, it is because she put herself in the last place, so as to be the servant of all. She was, however, the first to imitate her Son, and since actions speak louder than words, this is the best lesson she could have given the disciples.

Praying with Mary in the Cenacle, the disciples who share her faith become "apostles." With her, they learn to keep all the words of Jesus in their hearts, to welcome the gift of the Spirit and to let themselves be consumed by the fire of Crucified Love. At Pentecost, "*the charity of Jesus crucified impels them*" to witness to God's infinite love for humanity. The Apostles are made responsible for building up the Body of Christ. This building up does not come from the strength of their convictions or their power to attract others. They do not first communicate a message or a doctrine; they convey to others the love of God.

## CONCLUSION

In giving us Mary as the only Mother of the Company, our Founders invite us to turn toward her so as to learn to know her Son better and to read in "*the book of the Cross*" how much we are loved by Jesus, and to always respond better to his love. Mary is the living reminder of the essence of mission: to communicate and to spread and hand on to others the Love of God. With her, the founders let themselves be interiorly enlightened. Living in the love of God, their activities, their service and their whole life revealed the charity of Jesus crucified, the burning love of his heart which ardently desired to inflame the earth and transform it into a burning bush.

May Mary, Adorer of the Father, Servant of his loving plan and Mother of mercy teach us to serve our brothers and sisters who are poor with this infinite charity of Jesus crucified. Then our service will become more and more the work of a God who, for love, became a Servant even unto death, death on the Cross, to free us all.

Sister Anne PRÉVOST  
*Daughter of Charity*

## PRESENT DAY CHALLENGES

### **Introduction**

During 2006, we presented, under the heading “Present day challenges, ” a series of reflections that gave food for thought to those who took part in the International Session for Sisters working with migrants. In 2007, the articles under this heading will provide us with an echo of the two formation sessions for people engaged in the service of the Chapel at rue du Bac.

The first issues of the Echoes will present first of all, the subject for the first session, “Welcome” and the following issues will deal with the theme of the second session, “Discernment in welcome.”

The service of offering welcome is part of the Chapel ministry where the mixture of different nationalities and the differences between the generations are regarded as important issues. In fact, welcome involves, in one way or another, a whole range of pastoral activities. It is true, of course, that a very great variety of people come to pray to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and they move on very quickly. So it is more difficult to deal with this and, in particular, to respond to people’s expectations. The themes of these two sessions aim at helping us to get to know people in their family, social and religious contexts and to create conditions that will promote a meeting with the Lord. It is not possible to envisage every type of encounter we may have as we welcome people but the new situations we find ourselves in as we give this welcome, demand constant adaptation on our part. Moreover, the priests, Sisters and volunteers who are part of the Chapel service team, have to remember that they are welcoming people “in the name of the Church.” This is something demanded of all Christians in their relationships with other people.

Under the heading “Present day challenges” we will be presenting the speakers and the themes they dealt with:

**Father Richard McCullen:** his conferences will help us to enter into the spiritual aspect of welcome and hospitality.

**Professor Henri Joyeux** will clarify for us the notion of the universality of the person, with life styles that will alter our scale of values. In his talk he will be concentrating on the aspect of family life. (He is Professor of oncology and digestive system surgery in the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier, France. Since 7<sup>th</sup> April 2001 he has been President of the “Families in France Movement” not tied to any religious, political, trade union or ideological set of beliefs.

**Father Joseph-Marie Verlinde:** basing his talk on his research and his personal experience, he will explain how we are to confront the rise of syncretism, the fascination with Eastern religions, the religious relativism arising from the proliferation of sects. (Doctor of Philosophy and of nuclear chemistry, Joseph-Marie Verlinde is also an expert on questions dealing with esotericism, the occult and new forms of religion. He is Prior of the monastic fraternity of the Family of St. Joseph and is a professor of natural philosophy and theology in the seminary).

**Father Pierre Descouvemont** will speak to us about the different attitudes we might take towards such a diversity of religions and in his reflections he will raise the question of the ambiguities and misunderstandings about the Christian faith in these times of profound change. (Philosopher, theologian, retreat master and lecturer, he is



the author of twenty or so works some of which have become essential reference books for the transmission of the Catholic faith)

The articles under this heading will conclude with an overview of the last twenty years since the publication of the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.

FATHER RICHARD McCULLEN, CM

## **Hospitality**

When I was in the seminary and we were being taught how to preach and to prepare homilies, one of the rules we were given was not to start back in the Garden of Eden in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. I am now going to break that rule, and go back even beyond the first chapter of Genesis. So let me re-write the first line of the Bible and say *In the beginning there was hospitality*. Plunging ourselves into the mists of eternity we can say, in the light of our present knowledge, that in the beginning there was hospitality - the hospitality of God. Thanks to the light of revelation we now know that when we celebrate the mystery of the Blessed Trinity we are celebrating the fact that the life of God is a shared life. It is a life of hospitality: the Father showing hospitality to the Son, the Father and the Son showing hospitality to the Spirit, and the Spirit showing hospitality to the Father and the Son. And that from all eternity. In the very first lines of our Creed we profess our belief in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

In time God widened the circle of hospitality, for he wished to bring us humans, the work of his hands, to enjoy the hospitality of that Trinity of person which was theirs from all eternity. And so he created the heavens and the earth, and then us humans. To give us access to the hospitality of the Trinity *the Word became flesh and lived among us...* (Jn 1:14). *As many as received them he gave them power to become the sons of God...* (Jn 1:12). That was all made possible when Mary of Nazareth consented to give the hospitality of her womb – and indeed first of her mind and heart - to the God who approached her through the angel Gabriel: “*Let it be done to me according to your word.*” ... (Lk 1:38). “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.*” (Jn 1:14).

The first experience any human being has of hospitality is in the womb of its mother. It was not different for the eternal Word of God who sought the hospitality of the womb of the Virgin Mary. It is she, who perhaps of all our broken and sinful race, could best tell us the meaning of Christian hospitality and how we could offer it to her Son now living in the persons of the baptised, present also in a special way in the person of the poor.

It is our Christian belief that the Word of God continues to ask hospitality from every human born into this world. Indeed we could say that the basis of the whole missionary apostolate in the Church is to proclaim the good news of God’s offer of hospitality in his Church. And at the end of our lives hospitality in the very heart of our most loving God for eternity. Did Our Lord not assure us the night before he died: “*Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*” (Jn 14:23). And in the book of

Revelation: Our Risen Lord is presented to us as saying, *“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me”*. (Rev 3:20).

Have you ever noticed how often our Lord in his parables comes back to what we associate with hospitality - a celebratory meal? If we invite someone to our homes we will immediately think of offering them something to eat or drink. It is a minimal sign of hospitality. Someone once remarked that when one reads the gospel of St. Luke, one could get the impression that our Lord seems to move from one dining table to another. Certainly Jesus often accepted invitations to dine. It is very likely that he himself was, from time to time, a host. We know for certain that on one celebrated occasion he provided a meal for more than 5,000 people. I am sure that on that occasion there were many poor, crippled and handicapped people among his guests. It is very clear that he frequently asked for and accepted hospitality in the home of Martha and Mary.

Yes, it is one of the great truths of our faith, that Christ is seeking the hospitality of our hearts, not just in the Christmas season, but on every day of the year. Perhaps you recall that beautiful alternative reading of the Song of Songs which the Church proposes at Mass a few days before Christmas. The passage is part of a love story and the lover is presented as standing outside the house of the girl he loves. *“There he stands, gazing in at the windows..... my beloved speaks and says to me: ‘Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away’”*. (Song of Songs 2:9-10).

That is an image of the relationship between God and His Church, between God and the individual soul. Often Our Lord is addressing us in the words of the Song of Songs: *“You are like a dove that hides in the crevice of a rock. Let me see your face, let me hear your voice.”* (v.14). Yes indeed, too often we are curled up in ourselves, in the crevices of our own selfish preoccupations, avoiding the gaze of the lovely face of Christ and failing to hear his enchanting voice. *“Remember always to welcome strangers, for by doing this some people have entertained angels.”*-(Heb. 13:2)

When the three persons of the Blessed Trinity come seeking the hospitality of our hearts, they do not come with empty hands. When I was visiting the Vincentian Family in Poland on two occasions I noted a tradition which I imagine exists in other countries too, that when one was going to visit a house, the guest brought along some little gift. In Poland it seemed often to be a bouquet of flowers. When our divine Guest comes he also brings gifts. I sometimes think that it is one of the most undervalued truths of the Catholic Faith: that every baptised person houses the Spirit of God in the depths of his being. When you read the two letters of St. Paul to the Corinthians – among whom there were many poor and uneducated people – you may have noticed how no less than six times St. Paul, (pained by the lapses of his converts into immorality), asks *“Do you not know that your bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit.?”* The Church salutes the Spirit of God on Pentecost Day as *“Dulcis hospes animae,” the soul’s delightful guest.”*

It was the conviction that the Spirit of God lives in the depths of our being, activating the gifts and maturing the fruits he has implanted in our souls, that led the celebrated American Cistercian writer, Thomas Merton, to observe *“There seems to*

*be no way of telling people that they are walking around shining like the sun". Yet this is what our Catholic Faith teaches us! How often during my life must Christ be whispering into my ear the words he said to the Samaritan woman of St. John's gospel: "If you only knew what God is offering. " ( Jn 4:10).*

Now it is a truth of our Faith that the Spirit of God brings gifts – seven of them- wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord. It should be our daily prayer – perhaps in moments after Holy Communion – that we ask the Spirit of God to activate those gifts he has given us as we go about our daily work.

The Spirit of God, as St. Paul reminds the Galatians, also enriches us with fruits. In the fifth chapter of that letter we read: *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* (Gal – 5:22-23). Our daily prayer could be to ask the Holy Spirit to bring our charity, our patience, our gentleness, our self-control to a new degree of maturity each day.

Holiness can be measured according to the degree to which a person is collaborating with the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of the Risen Christ. The story of our lives will be the story of the flowering of those fruits of the Holy Spirit in the activities of our apostolates. As members of an animation team, you are being asked by the Risen Christ to mediate the fruits of the Spirit to others. In the variety of services you offer to pilgrims of every nation and tongue, you are called to be sacraments of God's love, of his peace, of his patience, of his gentleness, of his self-control. *"You belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God".* (1 Cor.3:22).

We have been reflecting on the eternal truth that the life of God is a shared life, that the experience of the Blessed Trinity is an experience of offering hospitality, firstly to each other and then to us his creatures. The second great truth that we have been considering is that the eternal God has sought the hospitality of my poor mind and heart. By baptism I have opened the door of my heart to the Blessed Trinity. *"Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them".*(Jn 14:23). If we deepen our awareness and appreciation of this great mystery of hospitality that we have already begun to live, we will all the more easily offer hospitality to the members of Christ who come to seek it from us. In a second reflection we will focus on some of the practical consequences of a vocation to offer hospitality to all who seek it from us. Let me conclude with the prayer of St. Louise, so devoted to the indwelling of the Spirit of God in her soul.

*"Most Holy Spirit, work this marvel in me, your unworthy subject, through the loving union you shared with the Father and the Son from all eternity... O Holy Spirit, you alone can enlighten us about the greatness of this mystery which, if we might say such a thing, reveals God's impatience... O men, blinded by trifles, and I more so than anyone else! Let us lift our minds- -not above what we are in God's designs, for this would be impossible, - but above our natural inclinations corrupted by sin, so that in all our actions we may honour Our Lord by the witness he wishes us to give to him by performing the actions he performed on earth.. It is his will that Christians, by doing this, may experience in this life that union with God that he has merited for us."* St Louise: *Spiritual Writings* (p.821).

## II. WELCOMING PILGRIMS

In the country parts of my native land there is a very old custom of placing in a window of one's house a lighted candle when darkness falls on Christmas Eve. It is a way of expressing a welcome for the Holy Family, should they be in search of a lodging. That was something that Mary and Joseph failed to find on the first Christmas night in Bethlehem. The custom of placing the lighted candle in a window has now spread to towns and cities in our country. It has been taken up in some other countries as well. In some places it is now regarded as part of the Christmas decorations. It is the fashionable thing to do.

Going along some of the streets of Dublin at Christmas time, and seeing the candle in a number of windows, I have sometimes wondered what would happen if I called and said I was looking for a room for the night. *"Oh, sorry, Father, we didn't know you were coming, and well,.. there's no room ready. I'm sure you'll easily find a bed and breakfast place."* (In Ireland, private houses that display the sign "Bed and Breakfast" provide travellers and tourists with cheap lodging for the night).

I might even wonder what would the reaction be if I presented myself in cheap and poor clothes and asked for a night's lodging? The reply would be more brusque and impatient: *"Sorry: go to one of the city hostels where you may get free lodging.... Good night... Happy Christmas."* Then the door would be closed loudly and firmly. Meantime, the candle in the window would continue to burn.... It would still be a sign of welcome but instead of a bright and warm welcome I would only experience chilling darkness.

Our Lord liked the word *Welcome*. He liked to welcome people, - and not only the prophets and the good people. St. Luke noted: *"And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." -- Luke 15:2.* Yes, he always had a special welcome for vulnerable and poor adults. And at the other end of the scale of people- what a welcome he had for children: *"Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."-- Mk 9:36-37.* Can we ever allow ourselves to forget Our Lord's words recorded in the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Matthew's gospel: *"I was a stranger and you welcomed me"*. Mt 25:35.

The two great commandments of the law- are they not a programme for welcoming? To welcome someone is to make room for the person in the home of your heart. Simon, the Pharisee, who invited our Lord to his house offered him a meal,- but he did not welcome our Lord into the home of his heart. Our Lord knew,- and Simon did, too,- that his welcome was not wholehearted and generous. We, too, can say nice words to people, but if we have not made room for them in our hearts, then our words will sound hollow. Behind the light of the candle, there can be coldness and darkness. So it is when we forgive injuries and pluck resentment from our hearts, - we are re-admitting people to the home of our hearts. So Our Lord's new commandment of charity has much to do with welcoming people,- from the heart.

Over the years, both Saint Vincent and Saint Louise developed, a marvellous capacity for welcoming people, particularly people who in so many ways were least attractive, - the poor, the marginalised, the sick, the mentally disadvantaged. As room in their hearts grew bigger, our two Founders found plenty of space not only for the poor, but also for those who were trying to better the condition of the poor. Both saints continually kept encouraging others to join them in caring for the little ones, those who were asking for a cup of cold water and had nobody to hand it to them. "*We must help one another*", wrote St. Vincent, "*support one another and strive for peace and union for this is the wine that rejoices and strengthens those who travel along the narrow path of Jesus Christ. I recommend this to you with all my heart.*" (SV IV,262).

To welcome anyone into the home of our hearts is to show hospitality. When we show hospitality – we are radiating the love of God which we have received in baptism. The Risen Christ calls us to radiate his hospitality more and more for everyone we meet.

Your ministry here in this very busy centre of devotion to the Mary and to her Son could be compared to the air that envelops the globe of the earth. We know that it is the air that breaks up the blazing white light of the sun and gives us the variety of colours that rejoice our eyes. The charisms and ministries in the Church are like the great variety of colours that we see with our eyes. Many times during my visits here to the Chapel I have gone up to the tribune and looked down on the moving sea of people below. There are young and elderly people, rich and poor; there are dark-skinned and pale-skinned people, serene faces and anxious faces.

Pilgrims come and go, but you, members of the animation team, remain here to radiate the love of the welcoming Christ. The questions pilgrims ask are as numerous as the sands of the seashore. Their needs are legion. Some people are very polite and others rude. Every day you are called to be patient and kind, to be sympathetic and helpful. You have to answer the same question asked by different pilgrims a hundred times a day. You are challenged to rise above your own changing moods and to be at all times what St. Paul calls "the good aroma of Christ." -- 2 Cor 2:15. Recognising the difficulty of reaching this ideal St. Paul immediately asks "*Who could be qualified for work like this?*" And then he gives the answer: "*in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.*" ( 2 Cor 2, 16-17 )

Yes, you have been sent by Christ, for you have received a mission from the community and from the Church to be **sacraments of the hospitality of God**. You represent the kindness of Christ, and the welcome that his Mother would have given to anyone who called at the home in Nazareth. Try at all times to think of this Chapel and the people who walk up the alley way as people who often come with an unasked request on their lips. Like the Greeks who approached Philip on Palm Sunday, their request is: *Sir, we wish to see Jesus.*" (Jn 12:21).

This Chapel of the Apparitions and its environs are **a New Nazareth, made sacred by the presence of Jesus and his Mother**. And you are the **door** to welcome all comers and to make them feel at home in their Mother's house which she shares with her Divine Son.

*“Do not forget to show hospitality”* wrote the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, and St. Peter, in his turn, put forward a very high ideal when he wrote; *“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.”* In one of the modern English translations of St. Peter’s words a paraphrase is used, which runs: *“Be hospitable to each other, without secretly wishing you had not got to be”*.

That certainly is a demanding ideal, especially when you are called to listen to a long story from someone you consider to be rather boring. It is then that St. Paul would remind you; *“In Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.”* ( 2 Cor 2, 16-17)

*“Though his state was divine, Jesus did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave and became as men are, and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death.”*(Ph 2, 7). Following Our Lord’s example, we have to divest ourselves of our customary ways of thinking, feeling and acting. So, not many years ago we took up the challenge of inculturating the charism of our Founders in countries and places where the Spirit had not implanted it in the early days of the Company. We began to pay more attention to people in developing countries. We have seen missionaries become increasingly sensitive and showing more respect for the native cultures of the countries they went to in order to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. We became more aware of the profound “kenosis” (self-emptying) that this sensitivity sometimes demands.

That was yesterday! After just a few more years a fresh “kenosis” will be asked of us and of all those who, while not leaving their homeland, still want to serve poor people today. I am thinking most specifically of the vast wave of immigrants who, in the space of a few years, have poured into the countries of Western Europe.

I take my own country as an example. Since 10 countries from Eastern Europe were admitted, at least 100,000 immigrants have arrived on our shores. These immigrants came in search of a better life. Some of them are highly qualified and are able to find work. But they were often obliged to accept menial jobs in order to earn a living. Far too often, some of them are exploited. If such a huge influx of immigrants is a new experience for our people, the same cannot be said of you here in France: you have had to face this problem for many years.

A new appeal is being made to all of us who are trying to live up to the Christian ideal of hospitality. The challenge of inculturating the Vincentian charism is put to us in new and often difficult circumstances. Do not neglect hospitality! This appeal has new urgency for all of us in the countries of Western Europe.

The candle that is placed in the window on Christmas Eve, is only lit after nightfall. It is just a tiny flame: it cannot do much to dispel the darkness of night but it is pure light and casts no shadows. May our small gestures of hospitality and welcome have, as Saint Vincent used to say, *“Only God in view.”* In short, may our acts of hospitality reflect the Light of Christ to illuminate the world.

*(to be continued)*

Father Richard McCullen , CM

APPOINTMENTS

Designation of Visitatrices and  
Provincial Directors

PROVINCE OF NORTH AFRICA: Sister Josefina REMIREZ was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

PROVINCE OF HAITI: Sister Maria Teresa TAPIA was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Natalia MARTINEZ, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2006.

PROVINCE OF PERU: Sister Marina MELENDEZ MELENDEZ was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2006.

PROVINCE OF SAINT LOUIS: Sister Mary WALTZ was designated Visitatrice, replacing Sister Marie-Thérèse SEDGWICK, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

PROVINCE OF BARCELONA: Sister Maria Cruz ARBELO HUARTE was designated Visitatrice for a further period of three years, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

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PROVINCE OF BOLIVIA: Father David PANIAGUA NOVA was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006

PROVINCE OF PERU: Father Javier GAMERO TORRES was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2006

PROVINCE OF GERMANY: Father Georg WITZEL was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

PROVINCE OF AUSTRALIA: Father Kevin CANTY was reappointed Director of the Daughters of Charity for three years, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

PROVINCE OF CAMEROON: Father Emmanuel TYPAMM was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

PROVINCES OF ARGENTINA AND PARAGUAY: Father Pedro DUARTE ALONSO was appointed Director of the Daughters of Charity, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

REGION OF ALBANIA-KOSOVO: Father Vittorio PACITTI was appointed Sub-Director of the Daughters of Charity, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2007.

## VISIT BY SUPERIORS

Sister Evelyne Franc, Superioress General  
And Sister Blanca Libia Tamayo, General Councillor

Visit to the Province of Venezuela  
January 15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 2007

### **A little bit of history**

**In 1950** four Colombian Sisters arrived in Venezuela at the request of the Archbishop of Caracas, to manage a social services programme for mothers and children. After being named a Vice-Province of the Province of Gijon in 1967, it became a Province in 1971. The Seminary was opened in 1980. Today, the Province has 65 sisters, 29 of whom are Venezuelan.

### **Visit from Sister Evelyne Franc**

**On January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007**, Sister Evelyne and Sister Blanca Libia landed in Venezuela, the “land of Grace” as the Conquistadores called it. At the airport, the Visitatrice, members of the Provincial Council, the Seminary Community and several Sisters from the Caracas house awaited their arrival. At the Provincial House, after welcome wishes and a visit to the chapel to thank God for a safe journey, Sister Yolanda Zambrano, Visitatrice, expressed her gratitude for their visit at this time of uncertainty and fear about what could happen: we have mixed feelings of confidence and fear, hope and doubt at the beginning of the process of a Castro-revolutionary socialism or a socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as President Hugo Chavez calls it. But we also hear: “Do not fear,” ”The Spirit will give you the words to say.”

The following day the visitation began with the Eucharist and a meeting with the members of the Council in a sincere, constructive and encouraging dialogue about the situation in the country.

On January 17<sup>th</sup> the Province celebrated with grateful hearts the Golden Jubilee of Sister Amelia Lopez, one of the original missionaries from the Province of Madrid. After the celebration, the community of Saint Louise School, including the teaching staff, the administrators and the employees, warmly welcomed Sister Evelyne, who then spoke with great simplicity and kindness to the children in the school.

In the conference room, Sister Evelyne met the first group of Sisters of the Province. She invited them to accept the challenges and risks of today, to give themselves entirely to God for the service of poor persons according to the spirit of the Company. Then in an open dialogue she listened to our questions and responded to them in a very encouraging way, giving us much hope and helping to prepare us to have serenity and faith amid the events that will come about with the development of Revolutionary Socialism. We all then gathered for the Eucharist, which was followed by a festive meal in honour of the jubilarian and a lively recreation time with the Seminary Sisters.



In her meeting with the Sister Servants, Sister Evelyne emphasised their mission of spiritual animation of the Sisters, in which they strive to create in the community an atmosphere conducive to living in union with God. She also emphasised among other things, the importance of the Domestic Council and subsidiarity, and thanked each Sister for her generous service.

The following day, Sister Evelyne met the Sisters of the Seminary who shared their experiences of life: the Seminary is a careful blend of inter-congregational formation and specific Vincentian instruction. Sister Evelyne emphasised the importance of meditating on the Word and penetrating deeply into it. Then Sister Evelyne visited the local communities of Maria-Antonia Bolivar and Coromoto. The former, a school, was one of the first foundations in the Province. The latter is a house where there are five elderly Sisters including Sister Maria Vasquez, foundress of the Province of Venezuela. She spoke to her attentive listeners, Sister Evelyne and Sister Blanca Libia, about the beginnings of the Province.

The Pilgrims' Inn is a residence for forty people who were formerly homeless, but have been rescued from the dangers of the streets, solitude and hunger. Here our visitors were entertained with a programme of songs and poetry readings provided by the residents, who offered our guests flowers in gratitude to the Sisters who are helping them to reintegrate into society. Several told personal stories of their "descent" into homelessness as well as the difficulties they encounter in trying to be accepted back into society, a struggle which demands much courage and perseverance.

On January 19<sup>th</sup>, after visiting several individual sisters, Sister Evelyne was given a very brotherly welcome by the Vincentian priests. Afterwards, she toured a Social Work service for mothers and children. The Sisters of that community told her about one of the acute forms of poverty in Venezuelan society, that of girls who become mothers at a very young age. The Sisters described their ministry with these girls to provide them with an integrated education and train them in their role as mothers. This service means the Sisters have to be well balanced, mature, and able to offer much love and understanding of the situations faced by these young girls. Sister Evelyne brought them a message of faith and hope.

On their return to the Provincial House, the Sisters gathered with representatives of the seven branches of the Vincentian family in Venezuela to celebrate the Eucharist together.

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, the last day of the Visitation, Sister Evelyne met a second group of Sisters of the Province. She helped us to understand more deeply several passages from the writings of the Founders as well as the Constitutions, urging us in her final words to us, to be faithful and to strive to grow together in our vocation. During the Eucharist, we gave thanks to God for all that we received from Sister Evelyne and Sister Blanca Libia.

That afternoon a final meeting took place with the members of the Council to ratify some key points. Sister Yolanda expressed her gratitude and said farewell in these words: "*Sister Evelyne, we have neither gold nor silver; we offer you our*

*continual prayers before the Lord, placing in his heart your intentions, those of the Company, and your future visits to other Provinces ...Since you will be departing shortly for the Motherhouse we use the words Saint Vincent addressed to Saint Louise, because you represent her at this time in the Company: 'I pray that His Divine Goodness may accompany you, be your consolation along the way, your shade against the heat of the sun, your shelter in rain and cold, your soft bed in your weariness, your strength in your toil, and finally, that He may bring you back in perfect health and filled with good works.'"*

Sister Bernice Jimenez  
Correspondent for the Echoes

### Testimonies of the Sisters

Province of Sienna

150 Years of History of the Daughters of Charity

*"In our roots, a future of charity"*

2006: a year of grace that made Saint Vincent, his charism and his works known and loved. In Sienna, on September 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, the closing celebrations brought together more than one thousand people, among them Sister Evelyne, Superioress General, Sister Mariarosa, General Councillor, the Sisters of the Province of Sienna and the other Provinces in Italy, Priests of the Mission, and numerous members of the laity, including many young people. The quality of the welcome provided by a group of Sisters and young people allowed everyone to feel part of one big family. By her simple and unobtrusive presence, her clear and direct exhortations, Sister Evelyne encouraged us in our vocation.

After a visit to the infirmary and the Provincial House community, Sister Evelyne participated with everyone in the first presentation: "Louise de Marillac, the vocation of a noble heart," followed by an evening of music organised by the Marian Youth Association. That evening, a prayer vigil in the marvellous "Basilique dei Servi di Maria" brought together many participants. Bishop Italo Castellani, bishop of Lucca, spoke on several occasions.

The next day, after morning prayer, Father Vernaschi, CM, Provincial Director, presented the book *In our Roots, a Future of Charity*, written by several authors for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Province.

Afterwards, Sister Luisa Farri, Visitatrice, gave a power point presentation of the Province. She listed the services confided to the Sisters since the early days that shaped the Province and spoke about the most significant moments of the 150 years of devoted service. *"Truly, we can tell a great story of love, a beautiful story as well, although there was no lack of difficult years, especially during the times of the two great wars. The Daughters of Charity were never discouraged; they learned from Saint Vincent that "the things that are of God come about of themselves." Today the Province, despite the decreasing number of Sisters, maintains its joy in belonging to the Lord and its desire to live its vocation fully and faithfully. Society changes, and*

*with it the face of the poor changes, but what Jesus said is always true: "The poor you will always have with you..." New poverties challenge us, often they fill us with anguish."*

Then, Sister Luisa presented today's ministries: welcoming prisoners in Campomorone, care for terminally ill patients in Quercianella, the new Scandicci Caritas Centre in Florence and the Day Care Centre in Sienna. She spoke of the revision of works, a process that is always aimed at bringing us closer to poor people. *"Transforming ministries, closing and opening houses, passing the administration of establishments on to others, these are not easy things, but new needs demand new responses."* She concluded, *"Let us put the future of our Province in God's hands, for an ongoing creation.... I invite the Sisters to look at the future and to plan our presence in the Church, very conscious of being servants and instruments of a Plan that belongs only to God, for the good of those who are poor."* She confided to the Sisters, work with young people and the responsibility of sharing the charism. *"Involvement in charity is a living school for young people."*

She finished by saying, *"With you, I want to thank the Lord for having made us participants in his Creation for the poor, for being the author of this long history of charity, for sending us into a future of charity with these deep roots."*

At 11:30, Archbishop Antonio Buoncristiani, archbishop of Sienna presided at the Eucharist, assisted by Father Gregory Gay, Superior General, who came between his trips to Ethiopia and Tanzania. In his homily, the Archbishop quoted Saint Vincent several times, recalling the most important points of our vocation. He also expressed his gratitude for these 150 years of witness to charity. He concluded by asking for the Sisters the gifts of trust and hope, rooted in the Christ who directs human history, despite our weaknesses.

In the afternoon Sr. Evelyne spoke about the grandeur and the reality of incarnating and transmitting our charism to the lay people with whom we collaborate. She particularly insisted on fidelity to our origins, collaboration with the Vincentian family, attention to poor persons who are deprived of everything, and, in a special way, to migrants and the young.

In the crowded basilica, she recalled for her attentive listeners the words that Father Slattery, former Superior General, addressed to the Sisters of the Province of Sienna on the occasion of the centenary of the Province. *"Your Province has lost nothing of the original spirit of Saints Vincent and Louise. Your greatest merit is that you have known how to unite the traditions of the Company with the best of modern progress during your century of existence: conservation and renewal in obedience, these characteristics have been and will be the guarantees of the endurance of your Province."* She continued. *"Thank you for your dynamic fidelity... above all your fidelity to the origins with regard to the Vincentian family, as Statute 9c emphasises... Today, the ministry of evangelisation and of charity continues, thanks to the presence and dedicated collaboration of the laity, an expression of ecclesial communion. Collaboration and the sharing of the charism is a sign of the times that has a profound theological meaning. The heart of the Vincentian charism consists in this service of Christ in the person of the poor carried out together. We know that when we speak of sharing, it is not a question of finding a replacement for the declining*

*numbers of Daughters of Charity: lay people share with us – and we with them – the same responsibility for works of charity and of justice in the human and Christian community.”*

Sister Evelyne invites us to share: *“All of us can offer the wealth of our experience and can also learn much from a dialogue that addresses ways for ministry to continually respond to new forms of poverty.”* Speaking of new poverties, Sr. Evelyne stressed, *“The Italian Provinces have already brought about real projects for the defence of human rights, but our most deprived brothers and Sisters require such initiatives to be multiplied. They thirst to be treated in a cordial and personalised way. I am thinking especially of migrants who are becoming more and more numerous in your country.”*

Then she addressed the subject of youth: *“There is still so much more to create.... By their freshness and their enthusiasm, young people are, in a specific way, our greatest resource. It is often they who move our Sisters to be women, not only for others but with others. This being with the world is a central aspect of our charism and strengthens our identity for a common service; let us learn from one another how to respond to the concerns and initiatives of each individual, in dialogue based on common apostolic goals. Let us be able to say together: young people are the future of the Company and of the Vincentian Family. In the Company, vocations are numerous, but they are not evenly distributed among all the Provinces. Collaboration with the Vincentian Family can contribute to witnessing to our vocation as servants of the poor. Getting to know the Sisters and witnessing their joy can help to encourage new vocations.”*

Then Sister Evelyne addressed all the Vincentian Family, encouraging them all to progress together on the path of serving Christ in those who are poor.

Sister Luisa Farri concluded: *“Let us confide to the most holy Virgin this path we undertake, that she may guide us towards a new future of charity – and in this common involvement with the Vincentian family, -- let us continue to live out this history of love with enthusiasm and courage, following this path of holiness that many have already travelled. May we move beyond the goals already attained and be vessels of hope, love, joy and tenderness in order to continue and renew salvation history.”*

Sister Patricia BIN  
Daughter of Charity

### Testimonies Given by the Sisters

Province of Central Africa

Visit by Sister Juana Elizondo,  
September 2<sup>nd</sup> -19<sup>th</sup>, 2006

The Province of Central Africa (Rwanda-Burundi) has been in existence for 5 years; however, the Daughters of Charity have been serving poor persons there since

1971 when these two countries united to form a Region. During that period, despite the great difficulties that the Region experienced, Divine Providence continually sustained the Sisters in their mission, in particular through the involvement of Mother Elizondo. She came to visit us on several occasions, at times even at the risk of her life, and always accompanied by Sister Marie-Anne Latscha, of whom we also have fond memories. In 2002, Sister Juana returned with Sister Wivine Kisu to open our Provincial House.

Even after her mandate as Superioress General expired, our Province continues to remain dear to her heart, and she still shows concern for this Province whose difficult beginnings she witnessed. Recently, at the invitation of our Visitatrice, Sister Sabina Iragui, Sister Elizondo came to our Province for two weeks to help us deepen our understanding of the revised Constitutions. She patiently explained them to us, giving us all the time we needed. She presented them as material that is not only to be read and meditated on, but also something to be lived.

Sister Juana, a Daughter of Charity with wide experience, urged us to meditate well on the Constitutions as a summary of the Gospel. She emphasised the importance of loving the Company and participating actively in its government, each one according to her role. She called attention to the need to organise our life of service and to manage very carefully the goods entrusted to us. *“Do everything,”* she told us, *“so that Jesus will be known, loved and served, especially through and in poor persons. That is our mission. Let us live it in fidelity and truth.”*

Almost everyone in the Province participated in one of the two 5 day sessions, which included times for personal reflection and sharing in groups in order to formulate questions. *“What we have just experienced is only the “taster”; we need to continue to meditate on our Constitutions and assimilate them to make them our own, for they are our way to holiness.”* Thank you Sister Juana; you are always remembered in our Province.

Sisters Christine Ndayisenga and Scholastica Mujawamariya

*Daughters of Charity*

Testimonies given by the Sisters

Province of Chelmno

Sister Barbara Samulowska

(Sister Stanislawina in community)

Died in Guatemala Hospital on 6 December 1950,

85 years of age, 66 years vocation.

Born on 21<sup>st</sup> January 1865 in Woryty, Poland, Barbara was favoured with visits from the Blessed Virgin during the apparitions at Gietrzwałd. These took place from 28<sup>th</sup> June until 16<sup>th</sup> September 1877 when she was 12 years old. At the age of 19, she entered the Daughters of Charity and postulated at the

Provincial House in Chelmino. Following this, she made her Seminary at the Motherhouse in Paris. From that time onward she was known as Sister Stanisława. A Daughter of Charity for 66 years, she served poor people, first in Paris, then in Guatemala for 54 years. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1950, she died a holy death in Guatemala.

At the time of the celebration of the centenary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in Gietrzwałd, the Church solemnly declared their authenticity. The Priests of the Order of Canons Regular of the Lateran who were Guardians of the Sanctuary in Gietrzwałd were convinced of the holiness of Barbara Samulowska. In January 2001, in agreement with Sister Juana Elizondo, Superioress General at the time, they contacted Archbishop Edmund Piszcz of the region of Warmia in order to initiate the process of beatification of the visionary of Gietrzwałd. However, according to ecclesiastical law, the process of beatification is directed by the diocese of the region where the person being considered has died. So it was necessary to obtain the consent of the Archbishop of Guatemala, Cardinal Rodolfo Quezada Toruño, in order to transfer the process to Poland. This permission was granted on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2003.

After obtaining a favourable decision from the Episcopal Conference of Poland and permission from the Congregation of Saints on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2004 in Rome, the process of beatification at diocesan level was opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005 in Gietrzwałd. Father Kazimierz Brzozowski, Guardian of the Sanctuary at Gietrzwałd, was named postulator of the process. Three Daughters of Charity from the Province of Chelmino are part of the Tribunal Commissions: Sister Hanna Cybula, Visitatrice, on the Theological and Historical Commission, Sister Anna Mamona on the Notary Commission and Sister Krystyna Rynarzewska on the Historical Commission. Sister Gertruda Bukowska, a Polish missionary in the Dominican Republic, assists as an interpreter in interviews with witnesses in Guatemala.

The Tribunal has interviewed a significant number of witnesses in Poland, Germany and Guatemala. The Commissions have studied the documentation collected about the Servant of God and have given their opinions. The Ecclesial Tribunal in Guatemala, with the approval of the Archbishop of the region, has assisted in gathering the necessary documents that give an account of the virtues of Barbara Samulowska. All the documentation of the process at diocesan level amounts to approximately 1500 pages. On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006, the feast of the Birthday of Mary, the final diocesan session of the Beatification Tribunal was held. The closing ceremony was carried out by the new Archdiocesan Pastor, Archbishop Wojciech Ziemba.

The next step in the beatification process will be the designation of a Postulator in Rome. The Cardinals and other members of the Congregation will begin to study and verify the documents that have been collected and transmitted to Rome by the Postulator in Poland. The decision to declare the Servant of God blessed will be made by the Holy Father.

In his homily on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006, Archbishop Wojciech Ziemba declared: *“We give thanks today for the Servant of God Sister Barbara Samulowska. Through*

*Mary, her heart was inflamed with love for God, making her life a beautiful testimony.”*

N.B. Although Barbara was called Sister Stanislawa in community, her baptismal name takes precedence, which is why she is referred to as Sister Barbara Samulowska.

## **REMARKS ON SISTER BARBARA SAMULOWSKA**

*“Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is even more beautiful!”*

Here are the circumstances surrounding these words that came from the lips of Sister Barbara Samulowska, who was often too silent for our liking.

“I had just arrived in Postulancy,” explained a certain Daughter of Charity, “and I was so homesick for my dear Mother. A Sister from the Hospital, finding me in tears in the parlour, said, to console me: *‘Don’t cry, miss, soon you will be so happy when you receive the Postulant cap from the hands of your Sister Assistant, who is a saintly woman, and who had the privilege of seeing the Blessed Virgin when she was a child in Poland.’* I was so surprised to hear this that I stopped crying. Not long afterwards, the Sister of Office took me to the office of the Sister Assistant to introduce me. Kneeling before her, I listened to her speaking to me of the beauty of our vocation with words that fell like dew on my suffering heart. In spite of myself, when I looked at her I noticed that there was something about her that seemed other worldly. Full of the spirit of the world, and understanding nothing of the supernatural, my curiosity got the better of me. Suddenly, and imprudently, I blurted out, while pointing to a small statue on her desk: *‘Sister, is it true that the Blessed Virgin appeared to you when you were little, looking like she does here?’*

Her astonishment was plain to see: *‘Who told you that so soon? You have only just arrived!...That is not a question you should ask.’*

But it seemed to me that her smile betrayed her, and rashly I insisted: *‘Sister, please tell me! Was she as beautiful as this statue of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal?’*

Shaking her head in disagreement but still smiling, she replied, *‘Oh, what an imp you are! Prepare yourself to make your Postulancy very well, if you, too, want to merit the grace to see her one day!’* Then, looking at the lovely little statue, she added: *‘Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is even more beautiful!’*

But how did this news of the maternal favour granted by the Queen of Heaven to a humble young Polish girl ever reach as far as Guatemala, if the preceding event is the sole incident that might have betrayed her secret? Our dear Sister Lannes, who was then Directress of the Seminary in the Province, explains: *“From the time she arrived in September 1895, Sister Barbara Samulowska was confided to my care by our Sister Visitatrice, to be introduced to the Spanish language and become accustomed to the work of the Seminary. After observing her closely for several days, I thought: I sense something extraordinary about this Sister, something supernatural: the Divine Master is at work. Then one day I happened to read in the Annals of the Children of Mary, an account of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin in the village of Gietrzwałd in Poland. That’s when I understood everything.”*

Let us then open for ourselves the Annals of the years 1878-1879, which contain the only detailed record we have of the childhood of Sister Barbara, and we will read: *“Just as at La Salette and at Lourdes, the Immaculate Virgin Mary has chosen the land of Poland in order to manifest herself to those who are humble and simple. At the same time, she wanted to console a people who suffered misfortune and return the special love that they continue to show for the magnificent privilege of her Immaculate Conception. It was the village of Gietrzwałd which witnessed the marvellous apparitions that we are going to recount.”*

On June 27<sup>th</sup> 1877, the revered and pious pastor of the region had assembled the children who were preparing for their First Communion by taking a test beforehand. Justine Szafrynska, who was 13 years old and who had limited intelligence and even less ability to memorise, was dreading this exam and had prayed to Mary with all her heart, asking her to help her. Mary heard her prayer: to the great surprise of the pastor, Justine answered all the questions with perfect assurance and better than any of the other children.

Justine was a poor peasant girl, sickly and delicate, of average size for her age; she wore a brown dress made of coarse material, with a red woollen shawl that covered her head and framed the regular features of her pale face which showed an expression of great modesty. Her clear blue eyes, which were normally always cast down, at that moment shone with joyous satisfaction. A few steps away from the church, she reached her mother who had come to meet her, anxiously awaiting the results of her exam.

- ‘ So then, daughter, will you be allowed to make your First Communion?’

- ‘ Yes,’ answered Justine, ‘ I answered all the questions correctly; the Blessed Virgin and Jesus answered my prayers.’

As mother and daughter walked along, continuing their conversation, the Angelus bells rang. According to the custom of their country, they knelt down on the road and recited the Angelus. Suddenly, Justine let out a cry of astonishment and fear:

*“Look! Look! There’s a bright light over the maple tree. It looks like a fire! And what a beautiful lady dressed in white!”*

The pastor, arriving on the scene at that moment, heard the child and called to her to come into the presbytery garden where the maple tree was, so that she could better see the glowing light that had attracted her attention. Justine approached, stretching out her right hand towards the tree and crying out: *“I can see the Blessed Virgin sitting on a throne of gold, adorned with pearls; she is wearing a white dress; her shining blond hair is flowing around her shoulders.”*

The pastor, believing that she could, indeed, see the Blessed Virgin, invited her to recite the Hail Mary; Justine obeyed, and hardly had she finished her prayer when cried out once more:

*“Oh, now everything is even more shining...Now a little child is coming down from Heaven; his clothes are white and shining with gold; they are fastened with a golden clasp.”* Saying this, Justine began to bow down respectfully before the Apparition, and then added: *“Now the Blessed Virgin is going up to Heaven; she is holding the child on her left side...up above, the sky is very clear...there are no*



*clouds...everything is fading away...I only see a bright, glowing light...now I can't see anything else."*

The extraordinary behaviour of the child, the confident way she spoke, the wonderful way her eyes were shining, the impression she gave of being overcome by fear: all this so impressed the good pastor, that he was moved to say: *"Don't be afraid of anything! Tomorrow, at this same time, come back here to say the Rosary."*

The next day, 28<sup>th</sup> June, Justine returned to the maple tree, followed by several of her young companions from catechism class, and together they all knelt down and began to say the Rosary. When the Angelus bells began ringing, Justine saw a shining light in the shape of a wheel, illuminating the maple tree, and the remarkable apparition from the previous day returned to delight her eyes once more. The Blessed Virgin, whose beauty was beyond description, appeared to be between 16 and 18 years old. She had a long face, with delicately rosy cheeks, blue eyes that were remarkable in their gentleness and brilliance, and long shining rays streamed from her fingers. Two angels dressed in white seemed to be holding the throne on which the Queen of Heaven was seated. Two other angels held the Infant Jesus and placed him on the Blessed Virgin's lap. Another celestial messenger carried a globe that the Immaculate Virgin Mary presented to her Divine Child. The angels handed him a sceptre and placed a crown on his head and one on the head of his Mother. Finally, a luminous Cross descended from Heaven and hovered in the air above the group formed by the Blessed Virgin and the Angels. At the end of the Rosary, this marvellous sight disappeared.

This time, Justine was not the only one to contemplate the apparition; another child shared this happiness; Barbara Samulowska, our future Sister, a poor girl from the village of Woryt, a quarter of a mile from Gietrzwałd,. Barbara was only 12 years of age. She had genuine simplicity and unrestrained childlike freedom. Never slowing down to a walk, she only knew how to run and jump like a young deer. With her penetrating dark eyes and her sun-tanned skin, her entire outward appearance revealed a lively and almost wild character that nothing could suppress.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> June, at the same time, the Blessed Virgin appeared once again to the two children, and when asked by Justine: *"Who are you, Madam?"*

-the Apparition replied: *"I am Mary, conceived without sin."*

-The child then asked: *"Madam, what is it you wish?"*

- *"I would like you to say the Rosary."*

The following day, First Communion Day, a great number of people accompanied the young girls, gathering near the maple tree to say the Rosary. As days passed, the crowd quickly grew in number: villagers arrived from all parts, and the prayers became more fervent. The number of pilgrims became so great, soon reaching 2000, that they began to come in procession to the place of the apparitions in order to maintain order and recollection, with the Cross leading the procession, and the people arranged in groups preceded by a banner. The Queen of Heaven had announced to the children that she would appear until the 8<sup>th</sup> September. She had expressed her desire for a small chapel to be built on the site of the apparition and a statue of Our Lady Immaculate to be erected there.

Towards the end of July, the Blessed Virgin's visits became more frequent. She began to appear three times a day, at the time of the Angelus. At that time, two other witnesses began to share the joy of the favours granted to Justine and Barbara. One was Catherine Wieczorek, a young woman of 23, though she looked no more than 18; she was of average height, with a strikingly gentle and modest appearance. Always recollected and silent, though pleasant in manner, she came across as someone familiar with the ways of the world but whose heart was centred elsewhere. The other witness, Elisabeth Byliewska, was a poor widow, completely lacking in this world's goods. Her pale, thin face reflected simple and true piety. Both of them contemplated these marvellous manifestations that had had a profound effect on the country of Poland for more than two months.

The Blessed Virgin, frequently questioned by the four visionaries, recommended prayer and confidence, and particularly asked people to say the Rosary. Each day, she would raise her hands in blessing over the multitude crowded together at her feet and assembled in ardent faith. On 8<sup>th</sup> September, 50,000 people from various provinces hastened to Gietrzwałd. The Immaculate Virgin Mary had indicated that she wanted to bless a spring that had been discovered three years earlier on the land attached to the presbytery. On 16<sup>th</sup> September of that same year, during the octave of the feast of Our Lady's Birthday, the little Chapel that had been hastily built in response to the request of the Blessed Virgin was blessed, and the statue of the Immaculate Conception was placed in it. This time, Mary also appeared near the maple tree, blessing the assembly and announcing that she would come back the following year.

These marvellous events have a supernatural connection with those that have occurred in various countries, principally in France: at La Salette and Lourdes. They should fill us with gratitude towards our Immaculate Mother and remind us of the need to pray, in union with her motherly mediation, so that Jesus may once more reign in all hearts. The account of these apparitions has been transmitted to us by individuals who are completely trustworthy. We offer them to you with the aim of increasing your filial devotion to Mary, but always respecting the decisions to be made by the Holy See, and without wishing to influence the judgment which it alone has the right to make. This is the complete account as recorded in the Annals.

What became of the child in later life, after many encounters with the Blessed Virgin, and how did she hear God's call and enter the family of Saint Vincent? Only the Angels can reveal these secrets. After a fervent Postulancy in Chelmno, she came to the Seminary on 19<sup>th</sup> January 1884, not yet having reached the age of 19. Placed in Paris, rue de la Mare, under the guidance of Sister Mauche, this young Sister made up her mind that her generous service of the Good Lord would know no limits, and so she offered herself for the Missions. Ten years later, her request was granted: Sister Stanislas was missioned to Guatemala. One of her young companions, Sister Marie-Therese Recamier, wrote the following in a letter to her family dated the summer of 1895:

*"I have many spiritual commissions for you. I ask you to earnestly recommend to the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes our house in Belleville and all its members, in particular Sister Stanislas. You were not here long enough to*

*remember her, but I am sure I have spoken about her to you, as I had already become very fond of her during my Postulancy. She is a very nice young Polish Sister, who worked in the nursery school. And imagine, she is leaving us this evening and will set out on Thursday for Guatemala. You can understand that six weeks of journeying without rest and without religious support will be difficult, as will be her adjustment to a country that is so different from our own. In the end, though, the main thing is to do God's will."*

This was certainly the only goal of this Sister who left France for the rest of her life. The account given by Sister Lannes assures us of this:

*"Several times, during the 7 years that I lived with her, I tried to learn some details about her past, but her secret was well kept. I sensed that her soul lived only for God and that all her actions were inspired by her intense love for the Blessed Virgin. She had a very positive influence on the Sisters of the Seminary, as well as on all those who approached her. In order to receive some advice, I tried to develop a closer relationship with her. 'In my prayers' she confided to me simply, 'I speak to the Good Lord without difficulty. During the day, I make the Way of the Cross in my heart, in order to not lose the sense of His presence and His sufferings. I frequently renew my spiritual Communion and this gives me strength and inspiration.'"*

When she was made Directress of the Seminary, Sister Barbara used all her care and love to encourage devotion to the Blessed Virgin in all hearts. Her gentle persuasion gave her words a special power to transform souls: all the Sisters wanted to benefit from her instructions. Whenever she spoke about our Mother in Heaven and her goodness and beauty, Sister Barbara's face seemed to reflect these same qualities. "Love Her," she would repeat, "have confidence in Her. She will watch over your whole life."

Later, when she needed a change of climate for health reasons, Sister Samulowska was given the mission of overseeing the Hospital in La Antigua. Poets called this place "the sleeping village" because of the silence that pervaded it after it was partially destroyed. La Antigua was linked to the present capital by a 36 kilometre road of incomparable beauty, and its horizons reflected the beauty of the One who had created them. Fresh, pure air, an exceptional climate, rich soil, all these features confirmed Guatemala's reputation for being an eternal springtime. However, these States along the Pacific coast also had the unfortunate privilege of suffering periodic upheavals, brought about by the violence of cosmic underground forces in the New World.

During the half century that Sister Samulowska lived in Guatemala, she knew at firsthand the horror of these earthquakes which, in a matter of hours, could destroy the wonders of art that this advanced civilization had amassed. These earthquakes meant that on three different occasions the state capital had to be moved..

In the 16th century, the Spanish conqueror Don Pedro de Alvarado chose the valley of Almolongua as the setting for his palace. An extinct volcano dominated the landscape. The crater had formed into a deep lake, with a view that took in the unique panorama of two oceans. Don Pedro died after being wounded in battle, leaving his

wife Dona Beatrix overwhelmed by grief and uttering horrible blasphemies. Should we see the horrendous floods that soon afterwards destroyed the capital as a chastisement from Heaven? Was this history or legend? What is certain is that the natural dikes of the crater lake broke down and the waters overflowed, sending torrents of water rushing down with unstoppable force that carried away trees, rocks and earth and flooded the city. Dona Beatrix and her court ladies met their death in the Oratory where they had sought refuge, begging God's forgiveness. After this disaster, the capital was rebuilt in the valley of Panchoy, at the foot of two volcanoes "Agua" and "Fuego" (Water and Fire), two giants that seem to keep watch over the city. A severe earthquake on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1773 destroyed this flourishing capital. La Antigua rose up again, not without pride, in the ruins left behind by the catastrophe: cathedral, churches, convents, cloisters, underground chapels testifying, despite their damage scars, to their magnificent architecture.

The Hospital for which Sister Samulowska became responsible was not numbered among the archaeological wonders of La Antigua. It was an establishment marked by extreme poverty; however, these circumstances could not discourage a soul that preferred to practise the virtue made honourable by the Son of God. Countless times she urged her companions, by her admirable example even more than by her words, to have *"nothing superfluous, nothing personal, nothing without permission!"* The only situation that caused her deep suffering was when she was not able to meet the needs of the poor people as she wished, when she saw they lacked basic needs, and at times she would be found in the chapel in tears, begging God to provide the bread that she did not have. The Director of the Hospital quickly realised the rare prudence, the excellent training and the complete dedication of the new Superior that made her a precious collaborator. *"We have won first prize!"* he exclaimed, rejoicing over the order that was maintained here and the way the goods were managed. *"Let's hope they leave her with us!"*

This wish of the Director was only partially granted, for Sister Samulowska was called to the Hospital in Quezaltenango, where Sister Thonluc needed assistance because of her advancing age. Here, however, the staff, patients and benefactors formed a real coalition against Sister Samulowska, mistakenly believing that her arrival meant the departure of the dearly loved Sister who had founded the work and had always directed it. Calumnies, suspicions, lies, threats; nothing was spared her. Neither her patience, nor her gentleness nor her humility were able to calm them, so much so that the Superiors of the Province, learning of her difficulties, decided to recall her to La Antigua. There was great rejoicing on her return, but her health had her interior struggles had affected her health. In her weakened condition she contracted life-threatening typhoid fever. After her convalescence she was put in charge of the General Hospital in Guatemala. This was a new stage on the path of sorrow that the Divine Master wanted her to tread, since it happened shortly before the terrible earthquake of 1917. A pilgrimage that dates from the time of this catastrophe is still connected with the name Sister Samulowska. Here is the reason why. In the hospital morgue, a poor mother kneeling beside the body of her dead son lifted her eyes towards a miraculous life-sized Crucifix, formerly venerated under the name of "Jesus of Mercy", which had long since been forgotten. *"My God, is it possible that I have lost my two sons?"* she implored. *"One by death, and the other sentenced to a long time in prison..."* How happy she was when she returned home

and found there her son who had been in prison and for some unknown reason had regained his freedom!

When this event became known, visitors began to come in such large numbers to seek favours from the Crucified One that the decision was made to build inside the Hospital a Chapel worthy of Him. This “jewel” was completed in 1917, and 1<sup>st</sup> January 1918 was chosen as the date for dedicating the Chapel. Government authorisation was sought in order to organise a procession in the city, so that the “Jesus of Mercy” could journey through the city streets before coming to his resting place in the chapel. Because of sectarianism, permission was refused. The people saw as divine punishment the horrific seismic tremor that destroyed half the city on Christmas night.

*“In order to imagine how terrible it was to wake up to this,” declared a Sister of the Province, “you would have had to have experienced a similar event, for neither describing such a disaster, nor seeing the ruins it caused can give any idea of the anguish and terror that seized the soul when, on the one hand, everything around us shook, creaked and snapped in pieces from the force of the furious hurricane raging around us, and at the same time we felt ourselves being lifted up by the movements of the earth and heard an ominous din like an uncontrollable torrent rolling under our feet and seeming to want to engulf us...”*

During this night of anguish, Sister Samulowska came and went, preoccupied with finding shelter for the hundreds of patients in the Hospital. Only one patient refused to leave and died under the rubble. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January, another tremor that lasted even longer, succeeded in bringing down the buildings that had previously survived: the Hospital was no more than a pile of rocks. Sister Samulowska had shelters quickly constructed, for the rainy season was approaching and it was essential to have available more substantial accommodation than tents. Not forgetting the “Lord of Mercy” she had a wooden chapel built and Mass was celebrated there every day. Countless graces were obtained, and after this period of disasters, donations came in such quantities that the miraculous Crucifix took up residence in a new Basilica which became a place of pilgrimage.

While still in charge of the Hospital reconstruction work, Sister Samulowska was named Assistant of the Province in 1919. In this wider sphere of activity, with her courage strengthened and stimulated, she encouraged all those who had the happiness of approaching her. Her dear companions were always the first to benefit. She inspired in them a deep attachment to the Company and to our respected Superiors, as well as total fidelity to our Holy Rules that she herself observed with scrupulous exactitude. When she noticed any negligence in the practice of the Holy Vows, she was distressed: *“God cannot bless a person who scorns his Holy Will”* she would say. Then she would firmly set the Sister on the right path again.

Her continual serenity and sweet smile inspired confidence. Always ready to excuse and to mitigate faults, she formed the Sisters in virtue and demanded of each one their best. For the service of those who are poor, one must always sacrifice, and be ready to leave the refectory, recreation or the chapel in order to meet people’s needs: *“A sick person needs you, go quickly!”* If ever by negligence or lack of foresight a Sister arrived late for a Community exercise, Sister Barbara would show

her the time in silence; then when the companion asked pardon she would say: *“You know how much a lack of punctuality displeases me...Oh! no, it doesn’t offend me, a poor creature but...Our Lord. Go to the chapel and ask his forgiveness.”*

A close-knit family life makes it easier to forget about fatigue and the difficulties of one’s office. In order to win all hearts and lead them to the Divine Master, our Sister Assistant, with complete supernatural selflessness, adapted herself to the tastes, customs and habits of the country. After she had spent 50 years living in Guatemala, only those who knew her very well were aware that she had been born on the other side of the world. How many struggles and hidden victories took place in transforming a rigid and haughty character into a person who was always cordial as well as humble.

To live as Daughters of Charity was what she demanded of each of her Sisters who sought her advice; for this was what she herself practised.

- *“Every Friday, you will inform me in private of the faults you have noticed in me,”* she said to a companion.

- *“Excuse me, Sister Assistant, I cannot do that, for I never see anything blameworthy in you. May I just say that there is no limit to your humility.”*

- *“You will do it nonetheless”,* replied Sister Samulowska, in a tone of voice that called for obedience.

Her demeanour in the chapel deepened the faith of those who saw her. The purity of her soul was reflected in her gaze; she detested the smallest faults and carefully struggled against anything inspired by the spirit of the world. Her forbearance for difficult characters and her goodness made her approachable to all, for everyone sensed it. She had motherly concern for Sisters who were being missioned. One such Sister, suffering from a succession of changes, received this note: *“Here you are, the little toy ball of dear Jesus. See there now, let yourself be hurt, for the Good Master knows what you need.”*

A young Sister who was sick and confided in her that she feared she would be sent home, was completely consoled by her encouragement which soon had its effect: *“Have confidence in the Blessed Virgin: She wants you here and will protect you. True vocations are lasting. Let us make together a novena to our Mother in Heaven; she will cure you. This is a trial that Our Lord permits in the early years of vocation, since it often happens. It will serve to strengthen you in your love of your holy vocation and make you very fervent.”*

Another Sister recounted the following event: *“I made my Postulancy at the General Hospital along with my younger sister. When our father’s birthday arrived, I approached our Sister Assistant and timidly asked her to say a Hail Mary for his intentions, since for the first time his daughters would not be able to celebrate with him. With a warm smile she agreed to my request. In the afternoon, she called me to say: “Tomorrow, you can kiss your father. I contacted him and he will be coming to see you.”* She then gave me two small packages. *“You can give him these mementos.”* Our birthday wishes so moved my father that he exclaimed: *“How admirable your Community is since it has people with hearts like that of your Sister Assistant.”*

Her goodness extended to all, exerting an extraordinary influence on the doctors and students in the large Hospital. One of these students, on hearing of the illness of Sister Samulowska, came to visit her and began to speak of the past: "Do you remember, Sister Assistant, what happened when I was a student? It was the annual festival, all my colleagues had left and I remained alone in the courtyard. You passed by and asked me what I was doing there. I said: *"I'm studying..."* *"Hmmm! Hmmm! Studying..."* you repeated, looking very doubtful. A few minutes later, you returned with an envelope containing the money which I needed, so that I could go to the celebration. You had guessed the unspoken reason for my zeal for my studies! Time passes, but things like that are unforgettable."

Other even more striking events, shot through with various emotions, marked these long years of unceasing labour.

In 1920, even before all the ruins that had accumulated from the earthquakes had been removed, civil war broke out in the capital. Not a single victim was turned away from any of our five houses, but for a week the situation in Hospital was critical, as it was filled with the wounded and there was not enough water.

However, a general effort on everyone's part led to a rapid improvement. The following year, after an official visit to the French Establishments in Guatemala, General Mangin made this point as follows: "The hospitals and orphanages are managed by the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul, who do admirable work. From the 8 Sisters who arrived in 1875, they are now 300, but this is still not enough. They are in constant contact with the people and the relationship they have with them is always one of goodwill. They care for a constant stream of sick people and they are responsible for the care of successive generations of children, a work they continue to carry out in an admirable way. Their unflinching devotion is often heroic and they never look for any recompense from this world. What better recommendation could I give them? When I visited the Guatemala Hospital, I noticed how well maintained this model establishment is; it would be admired in every country in Europe. The Director told me that the Central American doctors get their knowledge from French tutors and they praise our teachers; several of the students were trained in Paris by these same instructors."

Although Sister Samulowska's name does not appear in this account, it is easy to understand that, given the series of disasters the hospital suffered, some of this praise is due her.

When the decree came from the Holy See regarding the regular change of Superiors, Sister Samulowska moved from the General Hospital to the Hospice. With the large number of children living in this home, she was as much in her element as she was in caring for the sick, for her spirit of faith helped her to seek and find her beloved Master in both situations. With the little ones in the nursery, she showed great tenderness: *"Love, and take good care of these infants who are Jesus for you,"* she advised her companions. *"Above all, plant in their hearts knowledge and love of God, for even if they go astray in life, they will turn back and will be eternally God's own: this depends on you."*

She returned to the Hospital and the last ten years of her life were just a series of trials, accepted with a heart that meekly submitted to the Divine will. Changes in the government and in the Administration transformed the house into a real battlefield. As well as the new demands that were being made on the hospital, she had to face suspicion, injustices and threats. The Nursing School, founded by the unforgettable Sister Galloti, and the fruit of the Sisters' efforts and sacrifices, was laicised in 1940. Our Sister Assistant was divested of all authority and she understood the need to send her companions for further studies to avoid their being replaced by nurses: some took correspondence courses, others registered in the National School of Nursing, and three went to the United States for advanced studies.

*"I am a nobody now,"* Sister Samulowska said simply. Her humble and strong spirit was untroubled by the situation.

The Most Holy Virgin, of whom she constantly spoke, and who was her help in times of difficulty, would be a tremendous support during her long and very painful illness. Her secret wish, to die quickly without needing special care, was not God's wish: He judged her worthy to suffer yet more. Her last year on earth – the Holy Year – was a true martyrdom: untreatable and progressive facial cancer called for every ounce of patience she could muster. When the pain became too intense, she moaned: *"Jesus! my dear Jesus!"* and shed silent tears.

Finally, on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1950, while our Sister Directress was saying the words "Remember O Most Gracious Virgin Mary" with all the Sisters gathered round to say the rosary of the Immaculate Conception, the soul of Sister Samulowska departed this life to contemplate in Heaven, the Blessed Virgin who had deigned to manifest her glorious privilege to her here below.

PHOTO



**SISTER BARBARA SAMULOWSKA**  
**1865-1950**



Prayer to obtain graces  
through the intercession of the Servant of God, Sister Barbara SAMULOWSKA

All-powerful and merciful God, we give you thanks for the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Barbara Samulowska, in Gietrzwałd, and for the witness of her life as a Daughter of Charity.

Lord, author of all that is good, we humbly ask you to grant us, through the intercession of your Servant, the graces of which we are in particular need, in order to love and serve you in our brothers and sisters.

God, Source of all holiness, we also ask for the grace of the beatification of Sister Barbara Samulowska so that her life, totally given to God in community for the service of those who are poor, will call forth from many Christians the same strong evangelical charity.

#### NEWSBRIEFS

#### **The Company is granted consultative status on the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.**

**On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007**, the Company of the Daughters of Charity was accorded consultative status on the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. **The Company is recognised as a non-governmental organisation** that fights the causes of injustice, advocates for the integral promotion of the human person and promotes the restoration of peace.

According to the UN Charter, the Economic and Social Council is the principle agency that coordinates the economic and social activities of the United Nations and its specialised organisations and institutions. This Council examines international economic and social issues of a global nature. It develops practical recommendations relating to these issues for the Member States and the United Nations system as a whole. The Council also has the responsibility to formulate recommendations on international questions in the economic, social, cultural, educational and public health domains as well as other related areas that promote effective respect for human rights and fundamental freedom for all. An important part of its mission is to consult non-governmental organisations that have an interest in the issues it considers. It recognises that these organisations – which now officially includes the Company – must be able to present their particular perspectives and that they often have experience and expertise which can contribute to the work of the UN.

Sister Margaret John Kelly gave us great help in developing and presenting the application process. Sister Germaine Price is the Company's representative on the UN Economic and Social Council.

## NEWSBRIEFS

### **The First Sisters in the Province of Central Africa Celebrate 25 years Vocation**

In 1981, the first three postulants in Burundi and Rwanda began their Seminary in Bujumbura. On June 14<sup>th</sup> 2006, these first Sisters celebrated 25 years of vocation. Despite the difficulties and dangers that have prevailed in their countries, the Sisters have continually confirmed that, with perseverance, the venture of love is possible. *"Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away."* (Song of Songs, 8:7). Today, they continue to witness to the simple and profound happiness that comes from serving Christ in persons who are poor, and to the joy of belonging to an international Company that strives to paint rainbows everywhere on earth wherever there are clouds. These 25 years, rich in generosity and genuine community living, are also full of promise and hope for the future.

(Province of Central Africa)

### **A light in the darkness**

On the evening of September 30<sup>th</sup> 2006, Naples began its celebration of a "night of light" during which 8 churches remained open all night to provide a time for prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, singing, gospel dramatisations, etc., for all who wished to participate. The Archbishop of Naples wanted to celebrate this "missionary night" with the young people so that they could proclaim to everyone that among the many lights that there are in life, there is one light that will never be extinguished: Jesus Christ.

After a day of preparation, the bishop sent on mission young people, members of religious congregations and priests. We, the Daughters of Charity, went to Saint Catherine's parish in Chiaia. More than a hundred people gathered in the church to pray with us. This special time together was a faith experience for all of us and there was genuine sharing on our experiences of life.

In the cathedral, the bishop spent many hours hearing confessions and being a witness to hope. Thanks to his initiative, about 2000 people had a very special faith experience, a time of prayer and sharing that night. (Province of Naples).

## SOURCES AND UPDATES

### Introduction

An institution that forgets its own past will have difficulty finding and defining its special role with regard to the social, cultural and religious context of humanity

This reminder of our origins encourages us today to organise the handing on of the spiritual legacy of Saint Vincent de Paul and Saint Louise de Marillac, a

transmission which is considered part of tradition, a record of evangelisation and something that will help us in our ministries.

Discovering the cultural patrimony of the Company during the year 2006 was something that amazed our 1514 visitors: Daughters of Charity, Priests of the Mission and those whom we fondly call “Vincentians” from every country. This patrimony takes the form of signed writings, manuscripts and printed matter, as well as administrative documents going back to the Foundation, and artistic items such as paintings and statuary.

In the discussions and evaluations that took place after these visits, the question of transmitting our spiritual and cultural treasures to the Sisters on a worldwide scale, led to several important observations being made. Not all Sisters have the joy of being able to come to the Motherhouse. The necessary translations of texts do not exist in all languages; some recently-formed Provinces do not always have these texts available to them. For these reasons, we thought that the Echoes would be an appropriate means, among others, of fulfilling this desire for a better understanding of our patrimony.

In agreement with the Commission for the Echoes, the Sisters in the Archives service offer the following theme: **“Our holy Founders and their concern for life.”**

During the year 2007, in the section entitled “History of the Company”, each issue will include, for your reading and meditation, a text from our Founders. The text will be reproduced in its original form with references and some accompanying explanations. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise will speak to us through their writings that give meaning to day to day life “totally given to God.” Thanks to the Sisters who translate this material, each Sister will thus be able to “drink from the sources” and like Mary “ponder them in her heart.”

Sister Claire HERRMANN  
Daughter of Charity

## SOURCES AND UPDATES

### The Office of Cook

Louise de Marillac, a woman with great foresight and organisational skills, quickly recognised the need to have a Rule for the different services provided by the newly formed Company.

While the greater part of her Spiritual Writings provide us with much of her correspondence between 1627 and 1660, this work concludes with the section entitled “Thoughts”, where much space is devoted to the Rules. Here the dating is not always very precise. The subject we are discussing refers back to the period 1633 and 1647. In articles A 91b and A9 Louise gives more detailed Rules and this is the case with the office of cook.

This office has often been considered a very lowly and humble form of service. However, Saint Louise said that it *“is one of the most important offices for the regulation of the house.”* She would also say in regard to the same subject: *“to serve the Sisters or the Poor is to serve Our Lord.”*

In order to carry out this service well, the Sister who is cook must have certain essential professional qualities.

She must have **foresight**: *“In the evening, she shall be careful to have some water and wood with which to start her cooking early in the morning.”* She must also exercise this foresight throughout the day, *“she shall work carefully all morning long, finding out well in advance what she is to prepare for the meal.”*

Likewise, *“At five o’clock, she shall start to prepare supper. If there are any infirm individuals or ladies in retreat, then she shall start at four-thirty.”*

The foresight of the cook will be shown by her exactitude and care to have the food ready on time. She should not be hurrying at the last minute. This means she must be ready on time so that the Sisters are not kept waiting, especially those who are sick or those visiting. *“She shall be careful to have everything ready for dinner at eleven-thirty, and for supper at exactly six o’clock.”*

*“If one day she finds that the herbs have not been cleaned the night before, she shall ask a sister to help her. On other days as well, she shall ask for help rather than have dinner ready any later than exactly eleven-thirty.”*

*“She shall be sure to prepare enough so that each one receives an equal portion.”*

If foresight is a necessary characteristic, **know-how** is even more so. Louise was speaking from experience. She received formation in household tasks when she was placed in a boarding house. She devoted even more attention to this service when she became a wife and mother.

For Louise, know-how consisted of being able to make any necessary adjustments to the meals served and especially to the manner of presenting them. She skimmed the soup and used herbs.

*“She shall see to it that the meat is neither overcooked nor undercooked. She shall season fricasseed meat well without its being too spicy, too salty, or too vinegary since all this is bad for the health. On the other hand, it should not be so unseasoned that the sisters cannot eat it.”*

She should take **special care** in the preparation of dishes for **those who are ill** and whose appetites need to be stimulated.

*“When the sisters are really ill, it is then that she must redouble her care in making good bouillons. She must remember that it is the care with which she prepares them rather than the quantity of meat used, which makes the bouillons pleasing to the patients... In preparing the soup, she shall be sure always to save some bouillon to give to the sick sisters in the evening.”*

*“When she becomes aware that any sister finds the food disagreeable or distasteful, she shall charitably give her something better and something which she judges suitable for her infirmities.”*

Louise required **great cleanliness** on the part of the Sister in charge of the kitchen. This is in keeping with the quality of her service and charity towards those whom she serves.

*“She shall keep herself clean and shall work in a clean manner so that nothing distasteful is found in the soup and portions.”*

*“She shall do her utmost to prepare the food tastefully so that her effort will compensate for the delicate morsels eaten in other Communities.”*

The Sister Cook must also take care to **be fair and just**. *“This sister stands in need of great charity and prudence so that she does not give more to one than to another. She must have in mind only her obligations which should lead her to love and to treat all the sisters alike when providing for their needs.”*

At all times, the cook must remain **calm and level-headed**, avoid being hurried and encourage peace and quiet. Since the kitchen can be a source of complaints and fault-finding, *“she shall accept corrections and reprimands with humility and with the desire to profit from them.”*

*“Although she is most diligent in carrying out her duties, she is strongly urged not to become saddened or upset by the complaints that a few of the sisters might make about her. Whether these malcontents accuse her of having prepared too much or too little, of having prepared the food badly, or of having prepared better for herself than for the others, she shall make good use of such complaints. She shall endure them patiently and console herself by thinking of the countless times that complaints were made about Our Lord as He was serving His neighbour.”*

As well as having the special qualities necessary for her office, the Sister who is cook must also take care to be **faithful to participate in Community prayer** even though the needs of her service sometimes require her to make special arrangements.

*“At four-thirty she shall go to the chapel as the others do, and shall make her meditation in peace. After the Angelus has rung, she shall leave the chapel and go immediately to start the fire and to put on the pot which she shall not leave until it is at a full boil. Her fire being started, she shall complete, in the kitchen, the prayers which are said at this time, checking on the fire from time to time.”*

*“After her pot has come to a boil, she shall go to Mass, unless there is a sick person who needs soup, in which case she shall prepare some and then leave, with permission.”*

This is also the case for prayers in the evening:

*“At five o’clock, she shall start to prepare supper...She shall go to the chapel at five-thirty to listen to the reading, and there she shall have a quarter of an hour’s meditation. She shall finish her meditation in the kitchen for she must be ready to serve the sisters when they arrive at the refectory...”*

Union with God helps her to cultivate a sense of charity, cordiality and justice.

*“This sister has to show great charity and prudence so that she does not give more to one than to another. She must only have in mind her obligations which should lead her to love and to treat all the sisters alike when providing for their needs.”*

There is a final point in this rule which is of fundamental importance for it expresses an attitude that should be characteristic of every Daughter of Charity.

*“...whether she gives or refuses, she should always do so gently and with gracious words.”*

Saint Louise often stressed the need for gentleness and recommended that the Sisters practise it, since gentleness is closely linked to charity and humility.

Lastly, these recommendations addressed to Sisters who have the office of cook, can be applied to all forms of service given by a Daughter of Charity.

Through this rule written for Sister cooks, we can also discover some of Louise’s outstanding qualities. She was a woman who was sensible, organised, attentive, kind and sensitive. She shows us that material tasks can have a supernatural value if we carry them out for the love of God and other people.

After these reflections on the rule for the Cook, it would be a good idea to reread the text in its entirety in the Thoughts of Louise de Marillac included in her *Spiritual Writings* - English edition A 91 b on pages 764-765 and A 92 on pages 807-808.

Sister Aline Grodziski  
*Archives service*

SPECIAL CENTENARY CELEBRATION OF MOTHER GUILLEMIN

Mother Suzanne Guillemin

Daughter of God – Daughter of the Church  
Superioress General of the Company  
1906 – 1968

*“This is the conversion we are striving for here: to discover that the Council will not take place without us. It constitutes a stage in the life of the Church to which we belong; an action of God in His Church, passing through the whole body of the Church, from the Head to the members. If our mentality, our life, certain practices among Christians, were not renewed and transformed by the Council, this would be a sign that it was not a success. It is the whole Church that is in a state of Council.”*  
(Msgr. Lochet)

These few lines, used by Mother Guillemin to place the Company in a “state of Council” set us on the course along which she guided the Company during her Generalate. In this commentary we will show the richness of her personality, with the intention of making these riches available to the entire Company.

*“In this body of the Church that we are speaking about here, the Little Company takes its humble place as Daughters of Charity, Servants of the Sick Poor. It is called, with all other members of the Church, to be totally engaged in the work of the Council; to participate, in whatever concerns it, in this great revision of the life of the Church, in this magisterial apostolic reflection.*

*The grace of a new Pentecost is about to come down on the world, and **upon us**, with all its light and all its strength. The Holy Spirit will not fail the Church assembled in Council, but may we not, perhaps, fail the Holy Spirit?*

*The word of the Gospel is still valid: ‘He who can understand, let him do so.’ We shall only hear and only understand the voice of the Holy Spirit, under certain conditions, and with interior dispositions which are not new, but have undergone renewal.*

*In order to discover these dispositions, it is enough for us to direct our thoughts towards the eminently evangelical spirit of our origins, the spirit which moved our Holy Founders to abandon themselves to the action of God, and made of them the admirable servants of the Church that they were: it is in humble and simple hearts, souls burning with charity, that the grace of the Council will be received and bear fruit in the Church.”* (Echoes, Oct. 1962)

This rather lengthy preamble is necessary if we are to understand to what extent Mother Guillemin placed God’s word before us. She spoke little about her interior life, but she radiated God’s presence and lived in familiar intimacy with Him.

On the occasion of the centenary of her birth, many Sisters talked about Mother Guillemin, even Sisters who did not know her well. During this year 2007, by looking at some outstanding aspects of her life, we will examine how she lived in relationship with God and the Church, in service to the Company and the Church, and

how, to use her own expression, “to live the present moment as a Daughter of Charity”. Here is the plan we will be following:

**Introduction:** Suzanne Guillemin and her family

**I - Suzanne Guillemin, Daughter of Charity**

- The early years of her vocation
- Sister Servant at Saint Bernard de la Chapelle
- Sister Servant at Tourcoing and Visitatrice

**II – Service to the Company**

- La Centrale des Oeuvres (Services Coordination Centre)
- *Ad intra*: practical and administrative organisation
- *Ad extra*: civil and ecclesial relationships
- Participation

**III – Leadership of the Company**

- Administrative organisation
- Understanding of Provinces
- Formation
- Teaching: how to live the present moment as a Daughter of Charity

**IV – Service to the Church**

- Vatican Council: her integral role in the work of the Council

**V – Post-Conciliar Service to the Church**

- *Aggiornamento* of the Company
- The Council’s message to religious, to committed lay people, to popular Missions.

**VI - Appendix**

**INTRODUCTION: SUZANNE GUILLEMIN AND HER FAMILY**

Suzanne Guillemin was born one hundred years ago on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1906 in Rethel, a small town in the Ardennes region of France. Her father was recognised as a man of great importance in the town. Elected mayor of Rethel after World War I, he oversaw the work of reconstruction in this small town that had been almost completely destroyed in the war.

When Sister made her vows for the first time, Madame Guillemin shared some reflections on Suzanne’s childhood: “She was always a very charming, gentle and studious child – this, however, did not prevent arguments between herself and her brother Pierre, who was two years older...”

Between the ages of 8 and 11, during World War I, she lived in Paris with her mother and brother. “*We did what all children did in Paris,*” she said, “*I roller-skated and rode my scooter along the pavements of the Champs Elysées.*”



Suzanne was an outstanding student, very talented in art and design. *“She had very good taste,”* said her brother Jean, *“and a highly developed appreciation of ‘beauty’. For her, this appreciation of beauty was a special way of honouring God and his creation. Unsightly or extravagant things repelled her, especially in the case of buildings consecrated to God.”*

Later, others perceived in Suzanne a strong character and assertive personality. By the age of 17, she possessed exceptional self-discipline, was constantly striving for perfection and was unusually pious: for example, she went to daily Mass, even during the holidays.

## **1 – SUZANNE GUILLEMIN, DAUGHTER OF CHARITY**

### **The early years of her vocation**

In 1927, she entered the Daughters of Charity. She received the habit in 1928 and was sent to her first mission at Saint Bernard de la Chapelle in the 18th arrondissement (district) of Paris, where for ten years she was known as Sister Catherine.

Her Sister Servant, who was deeply spiritual and animated by a great love for poor people, influenced Sister Catherine’s growth in holiness and her “sensitivity to the poorest of the poor.” She was put in charge of the health centre. Every day she cared for large numbers of patients, such as nursing mothers who had varicose ulcers and came for treatment. Afternoons were dedicated to visiting sick and poor persons.

Thursdays were different: catechism, youth groups, and frequent trips to the Bois de Boulogne Park with an enthusiastic group of 70 to 80 children who were truly the “street urchins of Paris,” pushing and shoving, each one trying to outdo the other, creating a “terrible” din in the metro.

In 1932, her Sister Servant was changed. Sister Camman accompanied Sister Catherine in her preparation for holy vows. In 1934, the flourishing Association of the Children of Mary was confided to her care, in addition to her other occupations.

She created with the members of the youth club, a production of great educational value, **The Passion of the Saviour**. She made sure that the performances were of high artistic and literary quality. This Passion performance was repeated twice annually in the years following, on Passion Sunday and Palm Sunday. In later years, she found time to compose an equally successful Pastoral that was performed at Christmastime in 1947 and 1948.

### **Sister Servant at Saint Bernard de la Chapelle**

In 1938, Sister Catherine was named Sister Servant of her local community. Life went on. She remained there ten years, and over time her natural and supernatural gifts were able to blossom. Continually pressing forward, there was no limit to the help she gave her companions both physically and morally. She was interested in their human, cultural and spiritual formation. She did the same for the young women with

whom she worked. These have repeatedly testified to her spirit of openness, balance, human and spiritual maturity, and sure judgment; all of which helped each one to be a balanced individual

It is impossible to remain silent about two events in which Sister Guillemin reacted with courage and self-discipline. During the 1939-1945 war, the Sisters' house was a Civil Defence post. Apart from times of alert, and once the precautionary arrangements were made, the Sisters were not called on to meet any urgent need. Two tragic occurrences, however, troubled this apparent calm.

In 1940, refugees from Belgium and Northern France streamed towards Paris. Sister Guillemin welcomed many poor people into the house, with all the understanding and zeal that one would expect from a true Sister of Saint Vincent de Paul: providing shelter, provisions, care, and above all, cordial and unfailing charity.

The other event, in April 1944, had a profound impact on all aspects of community life. The region was bombarded mercilessly for an entire night. The pastor of the parish had nothing but admiration for the Sister Servant's courage and composure during this catastrophe, and the way she summoned help: the evacuation of the elderly and young girls in residence to neighbouring shelters; she took in poor people whose homes had been destroyed, the wounded were cared for, and emergency first aid given to those most seriously injured, while waiting for the ambulances to arrive. All this was organised with promptness, level headedness, and clear judgment amid the initial confusion and widespread panic.

Her charity was untiring. Provisions began to be in short supply in Paris. No one dared to harvest the vegetables in the fields targeted by V2s, <sup>1</sup>even when they had permission to do so. Large quantities of supplies were collected to be transported to Paris by any means available. She dedicated herself completely to the service of charity.

### **Sister Servant at Tourcoing and Visitatrice**

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1948, she arrived in Tourcoing as Sister Servant of the local community and Visitatrice of the Houses in the North of France. In a letter, she described her local community: *"In Tourcoing, I have 13 Sisters, two quite advanced in age, three who have not yet made vows, and the rest are of various ages. Visits to poor people in 6 parishes, an orphanage, trade school, and an old, unattractive, gloomy but scrupulously clean house. Good spirit, real service of the poor. No assistant at present and no plans for one in the future, although I am in desperate need of one. It is impossible to carry out these two responsibilities at the same time."*

This is Sister Guillemin at work. She became actively involved in modernising the house and redesigning the chapel, drawing up the plans herself. She set about looking for a holiday home for the children in the orphanage, as she was concerned about their happiness and healthy development.

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<sup>1</sup> Long -range missiles carrying explosives, used during World War II

At the same time, she had to oversee the running of the large Home for Children in Tourcoing and take on the role of Visitatrice for the north region of France, which comprised 48 establishments, including 10 hospitals and hospices, 23 charitable works offering a variety of services. Ten other charitable works were specially set up in major coalmining regions.

Sister Guillemin carried out her office of “Overseer” in a sympathetic way, responding immediately to every request with deep faith, regardless of the time or the difficulty involved.

Confidence in Providence brought her Heavenly assistance. She recognised the difficulty in finding homes for children younger than 6 or 7 years old. As always, she waited for some providential sign. It was not long in coming: in one month, four baby girls between the ages of 11 and 18 months arrived under tragic circumstances and it seemed impossible to refuse them admittance. This increased the number of babies to twenty. All over the city, people spoke about the orphanage and the energy of the Superior. One day, the Municipal Councillor responsible for checking conditions in establishments like this paid a visit to the Home. He was surprised to find that there was no bathroom plumbing...When the visitor left, Sister Guillemin said simply: *“That was probably two hours wasted...oh well!”*

The result of that visit was soon evident! Thanks to it, the complete renovation of the orphanage could begin.

To continue the work, Sister Guillemin took the initiative of having administrative technical advisors, including manufacturers and benefactors of the work, so that they could reflect together on current problems: *“Outsiders often have a different perspective on things,”* she would say.

### **The area of northern France**

Her mission was to be the link between the Major Superiors at that time and the local communities, the works and especially, the Sisters. Sister Guillemin was deeply convinced of the need to be aware of community issues on the one hand and social issues on the other. As a result she paid regular visits so that she could have an in-depth understanding of the houses, and above all the Sisters, whom she wanted to get to know personally. She devoted much attention and special care to the young Sister Servants. She was closely involved in retreats for the Sisters in Tourcoing and with the detailed organisation of this work. When the retreatants had gone she helped with the tidying up.

The day she left Tourcoing, under a sky heavy with dark clouds, she remarked to the Sister accompanying her: *“the darkest clouds are always fringed in gold”*.

(To be continued)

Sister Claire HERRMANN,  
*Archives Service*

## Some maxims of Louise de Marillac

Page 355, № 71

Daughters of Charity, reflect on the name you bear! It is a constant reminder of the special obligation you have to strive to practise this great virtue.

Page 357, № 81

Perfection is not to be found in the vexatious study of what is passing through our mind, but rather in the courage to serve God and poor people in a state of interior recollection, amid our daily occupations and in submission to God's good pleasure. This is true charity.

Page 360 № 93

Whenever you have occasion to suffer, to practise gentleness or patience, have a generous heart that finds nothing difficult for the holy love of God.

Extract from "Louise de Marillac, widow of M. Le Gras – her life, virtues and spirit".  
Volume 2 presented by Father Fiat- 1886