

*E*choes of the Company



General Assembly 2015

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General Assembly 2015

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Letter of July 1, 2015

Dear Sisters,

“Bless the Lord, my soul; and all my being, bless His holy name!” (Psalm 103 [102]:1)

This opening verse from Psalm 103 beautifully expresses the joy in my heart flowing from the outpouring of your promises of prayers and your good wishes. I am overwhelmed by your thoughtfulness and I only wish that it were possible for me to personally thank each one of you for your messages. You can be sure that I am reaping the benefits of your intercessory prayers. Please know that I am in turn asking our Lord to bless you daily!

It is also with this psalm verse that I offer my simple expression of gratitude for the graces which we have all received as part of the 2015 General Assembly. We were filled with the assurance of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of our Blessed Mother as we sought to promote our fidelity to our charism and the apostolic vitality of the Little Company (C. 84a). As you will see as you read the attached letter, Pope Francis also sent us his assurance of prayers for our intentions and his encouragement that we continue to deepen our commitment to those who are most poor. I believe that each member of the Assembly was touched by the sense of unity and boldness evidenced through the interventions and the daily experiences of prayer, sharing, and ongoing discernment. I am deeply grateful for the enthusiastic and joy-filled participation of each Sister!

You have been able to read in our *Assembly News*, as well as review on our *International Daughter of Charity Website*, and perhaps hear firsthand from your Visitatrix and Delegate(s) that our days between May 5th and June 12th were full, and the fruits of our work were tangible and manifold. We, the members of the General Council, are currently continuing the task of preparing the *Inter-Assemblies Document*. In anticipation of our work, the Members of the General Assembly approved its basic content, and the Editing Commission carefully framed its main points. We ask for your continued prayers that we as a Council will be able to clearly and concisely formulate for you the intuitions and desired lines of actions expressed at this 9th General Assembly.

Please allow me now to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to Sister Evelyne Franc for her untiring service to each of us, both while she served as our Treasurer General as well as during these past twelve years of her mandate as our Superioress General. Sister Evelyne continues to be a treasured presence among us and a tremendous support to me personally as I humbly assume the responsibilities that have been entrusted to me. I am confident that you join me in praying that our Lord will continue to bless her abundantly as His plans for her future unfold.

Likewise, I share my gratitude for our six General Councillors who have also finished their mandate with this General Assembly: Sister Rosa Maria Miro, Sister Marlene Terezinha Rosa, Sister Christa Bauer, Sister Rosa Maria Napolitano, Sister Madeline Hara, and Sister Zofia Daniscakova. I thank and praise God for their generous service as members of the General Council, and I assure them of our prayers as they return to their Provinces of origin.

My thanks are extended as well to those who are continuing this service on the Council with me: Sister Françoise Petit, Sister Neghesti Michael, and Sister Iliana Suarez Perez. Likewise, I wish to thank those who have generously agreed to leave their Provinces and boldly minister with us as General Councillors: Sister Raimunda Corina Sousa Bastos, Sister Hanna Cybula, Sister Maria Teresa Mueda, Sister Carmen Perez Gonzalez, and Sister Marie Raw. Please be assured that we will do our best to serve the Little Company well, taking all that is brought before us one-step-at-a-time and allowing our Lord and His Blessed Mother

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to guide us... *THANK YOU* for your prayers!

As we begin working as a General Council, we have already had the experience of discerning important decisions regarding others whom we need to assist us. Sister Ana Maria Olmeda, as you may be aware, has served for twelve years as Secretary General. The qualities evidenced daily in all aspects of her ministry among us are exceptional. We are very appreciative of the loyal and competent way Sister Ana Maria has served the Company, and we extend our deepest gratitude to her. However, our Constitutions do not allow us to ask her to continue serving as the Secretary General beyond twelve years. Therefore, we have appointed Sister Marie Odile Herbet, who currently serves in our General Secretariat, to replace Sister Ana Maria. We are confident that she too will be a blessing to us. We are grateful for Sister Marie Odile's availability to assume this new responsibility. Sister Ana Maria and Sister Marie Odile will work together during the upcoming months to ensure a smooth transition.

Sister Pia Humbel will have completed six years of service as our Treasurer General in November. We are deeply appreciative of the depth of her commitment and her fidelity to good administrative practices as she competently advised us regarding our Community's temporal affairs, assuring that we carry out our mission of service to Christ in persons who are poor. Respecting Sister Pia's request that she not be reappointed for a second six-year term, we have appointed Sister Teresa Sanno, the current Provincial Treasurer from the Province of France-North, to be our Treasurer General. We are very grateful for Sister Teresa's availability. We believe that she will guide us in being good stewards of those resources that assist us in our service. In the months which follow, Sister Pia and Sister Teresa will work together in order to transition their responsibilities.

Sisters, please allow me in simplicity to take this opportunity to further call upon your generosity as I open to you the possibility of our receiving Sisters from your Province to serve as members of the Mother House Community. The Visitatrixes and Delegates who participated in our General Assembly witnessed first-hand the generous response that 150 of our Sisters from 35 Provinces are offering us through their presence here at 140 rue du Bac. Truly our internationality and our commitment

to serving are visibly reflected through these Sisters who live and minister among us. Humbly, I invite our Visitatrixes and their Provincial Councils to seriously consider sending us Sisters who would be able to continue this type of assistance. For practical purposes, I would ask that the Sisters be at least ten years of vocation and that they would be able to remain serving with us for six years rather than for four years as in the past. I would also highly recommend that those who might be considered for this mission, but who do not speak French, undertake initial studies in the language PRIOR to their arrival in Paris. Please be assured that we will offer continuing opportunities for deepening their knowledge of the French language while the Sisters are here with us, but our past experiences have confirmed that it is best if a Sister has a basic ability to communicate *in French* before she arrives at the Mother House for an extended stay of service. Thank you very much for your consideration of this request.

As we did faithfully during our Assembly, let us continue holding in prayer those whom we serve who are currently experiencing hardships and sufferings due to the de-humanizing situations present in our world. We remember in a particular way those who are forced to migrate from their homelands and those who are the victims of modern forms of slavery or persecution. Let us strive to be united with them continually, daring to respond to their needs in concrete ways that will ease their burdens and allow each of them to experience God's personal love.

As we seek to ever more faithfully, joyfully and boldly live our vocation as Daughters of Charity, let us also continue praying for one another. Through the intercession of our Blessed Mother as well as that of our Holy Founders and our Communion of Saints and Blesseds in heaven, may our Lord embrace us with His unconditional love, enabling us to discover Him and serve Him in persons who are poor.

Affectionately united with you in prayer,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

Letter of August 15, 2015

Dear Sisters,

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon beneath her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (Entrance Antiphon for the Solemnity of the Assumption; Revelations 12:1).

With this antiphon leading us into the sacredness of this Feast Day, let us whole-heartedly rejoice in the Lord as we celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. In this same spirit of joy, I would like to begin this letter by thanking you for the very touching messages that you have been sending me in anticipation of August 15th. My heart is filled with gratitude for your special greetings and your promises of prayers. I have also very much appreciated hearing the news of your Provinces. You have truly brought them to life for me. *Thank you!*

I am confident that contemplating this event in Mary’s life will inspire us and that this solemnity will be a holy day filled with many graces. May it be an opportunity for each of us to renew and deepen our personal relationship with Mary, leading us to request that she – *the first Christian* – become an integral part of our responses to the calls of the Company, of the Church, of the Vincentian Family, and especially of persons who are poor in the months ahead.

As you are well aware, Pope Francis has invited us to celebrate a *Year of Consecrated Life*. We, as Daughters of Charity, honor Mary as the “consecrated Virgin par excellence, present in the life of the Company from the beginning” (C. 15a). Let us ask ourselves, do we consciously invite her to walk with us as we strive to live the specific “aims” Pope Francis proposed for this year? Is Mary a part of our reflection and prayer as we look to the past with gratitude, live the present with passion, and embrace the future with hope?

You also know that Pope Francis has announced the *Holy Year of Mercy*, which will officially commence on December 8, 2015. We recognize that Mary is “the Mother of God, Mother of Mercy...” (C. 15b). Preparing for this special year, will we allow Mary to accompany us in this call to mercy? We pray that our relationship with her may awaken us to new life and lead us to receive both blessing and pardon from God. Will we seek Mary’s assistance to welcome this mercy from the Lord, and then, as carriers of God’s balm of mercy, bring the goodness and tenderness of our Lord to all whom we encounter?

On Pentecost, we entered into the *Year of Vincentian Collaboration*. Father Gregory invited us to give flesh to the conviction that “Together in Christ, we Vincentians make a Difference”. By celebrating, connecting and learning, and serving, we are encouraged to respond locally, regionally, and internationally in order to more fully live out our shared value of collaboration. Undoubtedly, we recognize Mary as an exemplary collaborator – one “... who heeds and welcomes the Word of God, ... who prays, ... who offers ...” (C. 23) and who “... gives the example of that maternal love by which all should be animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission of the Church on behalf of the rebirth of mankind...” (C. 26). Do we consciously invoke the presence of our Blessed Mother as we seek to establish a greater union among us as members of the Vincentian Family in order to respond boldly to the needs of those who are most poor?

We believe that Mary will always be found close to her Son and to those whom her Son loves deeply: namely, those who are the most poor, those who are marginalized, and those who are victims of modern forms of slavery, particularly women and children. Choosing to be close to them, we will also be close to Jesus and to His Mother. Through your letters and personal visits, we who serve you as members of the General Council have been blessed with the assurance that you are faithfully responding to the concrete calls of our Lord to serve those who are the most abandoned. You have told us of your services to refugees who, oppressed by violence in their native countries, have been forced to leave their families and abandon their homes and their land. Your attentive presence to the Burundian refugees seeking shelter in Rwanda, to the thousands of men, women, and children landing on European shores after treacherous journeys, as well as to the Central and South American

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unaccompanied minors and women with small children continuing to arrive at the hospitality centers in the United States touches our hearts and clearly reflects the boldness of charity being lived out in tangible ways. At the same time, we rejoice with you who have had the joy-filled experiences of ministering to young people in Taizé and among the Vincentian Marian Youth at their General Assembly in Salamanca. We thank God for the hope He provides for the future of the Little Company as we observe the smiles on the faces of our Seminary Sisters in the photo sent to us from the Interprovincial Seminary of the Provinces of La Milagrosa Bogota-Venezuela, Cali, del Caribe, and Ecuador, and as we read of the numerous young women and Sisters in the various stages of discernment and initial formation in the Provinces of North India, South India, and Vietnam. We are conscious that the examples mentioned are simply a glimpse of the extensive and audacious service being offered daily in each of your Provinces. We thank all of you for the gift that you are to persons living in poverty – and we promise to be united with you in support and prayer.

As we receive news of the meetings that you have had with your Visitatrix and General Assembly Delegate(s) regarding the 2015 General Assembly, we also wish to assure you that the General Council's work on the *Inter-Assemblies Document* earnestly continues. Our on-going discernment regarding the best way to present the content has been a source of grace for us. We count on your prayers asking that the Holy Spirit continue to help us to accomplish our task well. We will send you the document as soon as it is completed!

Please allow me to conclude by sharing that I am confident that Mary is accompanying us and interceding for us. May we strive each day to celebrate her Assumption – honoring Mary as our Mother and our Model, *our life, our sweetness and our hope* – so often brought out as we sing the *Salve Regina* together. May we treasure the joy and hope which Mary, assumed into heaven, radiates to our Company, to the Church, and to the world. Let us seek to follow her example as one who consecrated her entire being to God. As Mary continues to lead us to Jesus, may we be blessed with the graces needed to respond fully to all that is being asked of us with open, passionate, and grateful hearts.

Affectionately and with my prayers,

Sister Kathleen APPLER
Daughter of Charity

The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum

Presentation given to the members of the Assembly
May 22, 2015

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Notes taken during the presentation (oral style)

Presentations Introduction

I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak with you about “The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum.” These are two inseparable realities, and one engenders the other. Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas est* (DCE) asserted, “*The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacraments (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being*” (DCE, n. 25).

Benedict XVI’s insistence in reminding the entire Church of the ecclesial dimension of the service of charity helps us to understand it as an important means of evangelization and the source of a new missionary momentum. In the final analysis, this is the Church’s call: not to look at itself but to make the light of Christ shine on its face. Yet on Christ’s face shines the blinding light of the infinite love of God. The Church is exactly like the moon. The moon does not have its own light. It is opaque, dark and lightless.

It only shines when it reflects the light of the sun. Such is the case of the Church. Unfaithful and separated from Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice, the Church has no light and is dark and opaque. It becomes the light of the nations when the light of Christ shines on the countenance of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1).

The Lord’s mission to the Apostles, such as it is found at the end of Saint Mark’s Gospel, is very eloquent and connects us directly to our topic: “*Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature... These signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will drive out demons, they will speak new languages. They will pick up serpents with their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not harm them. They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover*” (Mk 16:15-18).

For a long time, the mission of the Church has been seen as dependent on this commandment of Jesus. However, Jesus’ words can never be separated from the action of the Holy Spirit; otherwise, they will become dead words. Without the action of the Holy Spirit, even the commandment, “*Go...make disciples*” is not life-giving. As a result, the foundation of the mission is not found in the words of Jesus alone, but in the very innermost life of God, in the Trinity.

In addition, as we can observe, Jesus does not reduce the mandate that He entrusts to His messengers to a single dimension consisting of proclaiming the Gospel but rather makes them His evangelizers with an all-encompassing range of action. It is thus evident that the first evangelizers were aware of being sent not just to announce truths or a doctrine but also to communicate the Word of Life and carry out acts of compassion, love and merciful charity.

I will develop this topic in three parts.

In the first, I will reflect on the fact that God’s merciful love is the origin and perfect source of evangelization, with all its closely related activities. Evangelization is born from God Himself, for God is love: “*Deus Caritas est*”.

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In the second part, I will examine the relationship between evangelization as such and works of charity, that is, holistic promotion of the human person.

In the third part, I will try to explore how, in our current circumstances, every new act closely related to evangelization also expresses God's charity or merciful love. Before entering into the heart of the topic, I would like to mention the brilliance of Pope Francis' simple actions and words, which are gestures of charity and evangelization. They also reveal God's true face, which we are called to make known and reveal through our priestly and pastoral ministry. By his very natural actions, Pope Francis reveals God's tenderness, God's love and mercy, God's paternity and God's proximity. After all, isn't evangelizing the boldness of communicating this tenderness of God to a world that no longer knows what love is?

THE LIFE OF THE TRINITY: SOURCE AND GOAL OF THE MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION

As we said in the introduction, missionary momentum has long been based on Jesus' command to the Apostles: *"Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel..."* (Mk 16:15).

The Second Vatican Council, however, represented a turning point in how mission was understood. For the first time, an Ecumenical Council spoke about mission. This had begun with Vatican I (December 8, 1869 - July 18, 1879), but it wasn't brought to completion. In the Decree *Ad Gentes* on the missionary activity of the Church, the perspective changed and asserted that the foundation of mission is not crystallized solely in Jesus' command, but in the Trinity.

If the missionary mandate is not clearly considered a part of the Trinity, we risk reducing it to multiple activities of a social nature, many works for economic development and progress, and training people to provide humanitarian assistance, but this would be very far from the mission Jesus Christ entrusted to His disciples. Being missionary, in fact, does not mean giving things or providing material wealth, but communicating the foundation of God's Trinitarian life. The Christian's goal is to enter into the life of the Trinity, and Christ, through His Incarnation and public

life, revealed God's innermost life.

The Council Fathers thus asked themselves the following question: what is the true source from which flow the energies that send us forth on the roads of this world to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others?

With the Second Vatican Council, the Church thus sought to pinpoint the real origin and to dig more deeply into the source from which flows the energy behind its missionary commitment to universal evangelization that it has carried out courageously for 2000 years despite all the difficulties it has encountered and that it encounters still today. We find the answer to its theological questioning in the words of the Decree *Ad Gentes* on the missionary activity of the Church: *"This plan, however, flows from the 'fount-like love' or charity of God the Father who, being the 'principle without principle' from whom the Son is begotten and Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son, freely creating us on account of His surpassing and merciful kindness and graciously calling us moreover to share with Him His life and His glory, has generously poured out, and does not cease to pour out still, His divine goodness. Thus He who created all things may at last be 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28), bringing about at one and the same time His own glory and our happiness"* (n. 2).

We should give special attention to this text: the Council could have emphasized, as the starting point of evangelization, Christ's commandment given to His Apostles before His ascension into Heaven (cf. Mt 28:19-20; Mk 16:15-20), about which the Decree speaks explicitly. In contrast, here, as it begins to develop the question of mission, the Council leads us to its deepest source, that is, precisely to the origin from which our commitment and missionary momentum spring. We must thus start from the Father's love that, as Saint Thomas defined it, is an eternal spring from which salvation flows. Therefore, we cannot think about evangelization without thinking about God's love as the original source. We see that this relationship between merciful love and evangelization is closely related to the nature of the two expressions, intrinsic and explicit (n. 5, n. 7 and n. 9). When Saint Paul wrote, *"The love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died"* (2 Cor 5:14), isn't that what he wanted to express? Love sends us forth on the roads of the world to evangelize and proclaim Jesus.

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Allow me to return for a moment to the Word of God. Could we read this famous passage of John, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son*” (Jn 3:16), from this perspective? Jesus is given by the Father; in other words, he is sent and offered out of love. And Jesus, in turn, sends His own “as” He Himself had been sent by the Father, which is to say with the same authority and, above all, the same love (cf. Jn 20:18, 20-21). “*When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit’*” (Jn 20:20-22).

Now, we might wonder, how does the evangelizing action of the Church express this love of God for humanity? We could say that everything that the Church does to fulfill Christ’s mandate is love and mercy. However, I would like to emphasize some aspects that speak volumes.

a. The Father God revealed by Jesus

The first aspect is the following: evangelization first of all brings the gift of the “truth” about God. We know that human beings have always sought to “seek and to know God.” The history of religions demonstrates this. But how many faces of God have sprung from this! They are sometimes even contradictory and often a cause of dissention and fratricide conflicts.

Finally, in “*the fullness of time*”, God sent His Son Jesus (cf. Gal 4:4). He is the one who revealed the true face of the Father. Jesus said everything about God, thus saving humanity from continuing to walk blindly toward the Transcendent and being mistaken still in the future, even in good faith, as had happened in the past. In the priestly prayer of the Last Supper, Jesus, referring to His own whom He was going to send to evangelize, addresses the Father in these terms: “*Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them*” (Jn 17:25-26; cf. Jn 17:6; 1:18; 10:38; 12:28; 14:7-11).

The Church is thus involved today in evangelization in order to reveal the true face of God, who was made manifest in Jesus Christ as the God of Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8). Because evangelizing activity offers the truth about God, it is a true and authentic form of mercy, both in terms of the initial evangelization in mission *Ad Gentes* and in the New Evangelization where faith has been dulled and Christian life weakened. Could there be a charity that is more generous and regenerative for humanity and a greater and more authentic merciful love than this: to offer the truth about God?

The God whom Jesus commanded us to reveal is thus a Father full of love and tenderness, who understands men and women, accompanies them in their everyday lives, forgives their sins, invites them to convert from the depths of their heart and to commit themselves in a consistent way to a life of love, perfection and holiness, and waits for them in order to share His glory and His life with them for all Eternity.

At this point, I would like to recall the unforgettable words that Paul VI pronounced in Manila in 1970: “*I am sent by him, by Christ himself, to [evangelize]... The more distant the goal, the more difficult my mission, the more pressing is the love that urges me to it.*” This great pontiff wanted to publically affirm that his commitment to evangelize, as well as the Church’s commitment, were directly connected to charity and, much more, they flowed from charity. The more we overflow with love, the greater involvement there is in the work of evangelization. Whoever does not love God with all his heart, all his soul and all his strength and does not give himself totally to God cannot be missionary. Anyone who has not had the experience of encountering and personally and intimately loving God cannot evangelize.

This implies a pressing need to personally and intimately experience the Love that teems in the heart of the Trinity. Knowledge and love of God demand that we allow God to grab hold of us so that He might lead us to the radical change of our life. If the proclamation of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit remains only an abstract and theoretical discourse, we can only make a statement that is, granted, intellectually well structured, but groundless. We do not pass on a lived experience that has transformed and illuminated our life. It is easy to speak about the Trinity; having successfully studied theology is sufficient, but what

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is essential is to show it through our lives impregnated with the Trinity's Presence. The great pastoral and missionary challenge is passing on a real personal experience intimately lived and deeply imbued with God. Saint John teaches us this: *"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life — for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us — what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ"* (1 Jn 1:1-3).

Pope Francis asserts as well that the reasons for a renewed missionary impulse are based on the personal encounter with Jesus' love.

"The primary reason for evangelizing is the love of Jesus which we have received, the experience of salvation which urges us to ever greater love of him. What kind of love would not feel the need to speak of the beloved, to point him out, to make him known? If we do not feel an intense desire to share this love, we need to pray insistently that he will once more touch our hearts. We need to implore his grace daily, asking him to open [and rekindle] our cold hearts and shake up our lukewarm and superficial existence... How good it is to stand before a crucifix, or on our knees before the Blessed Sacrament, and simply to be in his presence! How much good it does us when he once more touches our lives and impels us to share his new life! What then happens is that 'we speak of what we have seen and heard' (1 Jn 1:3). The best incentive for sharing the Gospel comes from contemplating it with love, lingering over its pages and reading it with the heart. If we approach it in this way, its beauty will amaze and constantly excite us. But if this is to come about, we need to recover a contemplative spirit which can help us to realize ever anew that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others" (Evangelii Gaudium, n. 264). We hear echoes of *Redemptoris Missio* (n. 91 §2-3) here.

b. Welcome into the family of the Father

We have come to the second aspect where we observe that evangelization comes from charity. Evangelization, in fact, has as its goal not only announcing the truth about God (and, let's add, about the human person as well) but works to form or renew communities of believers of one heart and one soul (cf. Acts 4:32), in other words, forming particular churches, church-families of God, in communion with the universal Church. Now, the family only survives, flourishes and gives vibrant witness if it is rooted in love, founded on love (cf. Eph 3:17) and supported by love. Jesus, God's love incarnate, is the rock on which every marriage, family and ecclesial community is built.

The truth of love between a man and a woman, which really only becomes clear in the light of the love of Christ crucified, thus shows to what an extent *"marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love"* (*Deus caritas est* n. 11).

Welcoming a new member into the community (mission *ad gentes*) or restoring strength to a member who has become arid, weak and lost (new evangelization) is certainly a sublime act of charity and a great gesture of mercy because this is a matter of a noble and genuine manifestation of love. I almost hear the voice of the Good Shepherd saying, *"I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd"* (Jn 10:15-16).

I find it inappropriate and even seriously erroneous to think that it is better "not to disturb" people and leave each person to their own religious belief. Some people today consider that we should let each person follow his or her faith and religion. Muslims should be left to be good Muslims, Buddhists good Buddhists, and animists remain good animists. This is not the way of thinking of Jesus, who made salvation dependent on acceptance of the true faith: *"Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved"* (Mk 16:16).

From this perspective, evangelization is an act of authentic love. It is as much a true act of mercy as an indispensable duty. This is why Paul could not remain silent after his historic encounter with Jesus on the

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road to Damascus, just like Jeremiah burned with an inner fire after his encounter with Yahweh. Jesus' dazzling face threw Saint Paul from his horse, and His powerful voice set a sort of consuming fire in his heart, imprisoned in his bones. He grew weary holding it back, but he couldn't not announce the Gospel and speak about Jesus (cf. Jer 20:9): "*Woe to me if I do not preach [the Gospel]*" (1 Cor 9:16), he wrote to the Corinthians. When we have had the grace of truly encountering Jesus and His love has literally dazzled us and knocked us to the ground, it is difficult for us to remain silent and not bear witness. Our enthusiastic attitude will be like that of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin: "*So they called them back and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John, however, said to them in reply, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges. It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard'*" (Acts 4:18-20).

c. Offer the gifts of life to all

Here's still another aspect: when a person "converts" and truly adheres to Christ and is baptized in His name, this person enters into a family where there are abundant means for life. I mean that a Christian acquires many rights but also duties: the right to receive and be sustained by the Word of God and the sacraments and the right to fraternal communion in the Church. These are gifts that the Redeemer came to offer to all those who follow Him. They are indispensable tools for the spiritual life, without which it is impossible to live as Christians. There are duties, as I was saying, particularly that of charity, of love, but also and especially the duty to fight against sin, which puts us in opposition with God.

Indeed, through the work of evangelization, isn't the offering that comes from these gifts an exceptional form of charity and mercy? More especially, the offering of the bread of life to those who approach the Eucharist, isn't this the most sublime expression of love? Those who receive the Eucharist are thrust, as it were, into a burning furnace. They themselves become a consuming fire to set others aflame with the love of Jesus. And the sacrament of penance, which each person can receive with the sure hope of receiving forgiveness of sins, isn't it the most re-creative and renewing merciful Love? Anyone who receives God's forgiveness finds the joy of forgiving his or her enemies in turn,

as Jesus did from the cross. Evangelization supports individuals and enables them to receive these gifts. This is why, from this perspective as well, charity, missionary momentum and evangelization are in total harmony.

LOVE IN ACTIVITIES ON BEHALF OF THE HUMAN PERSON

There is a second aspect to explore because, as we all know, human promotion is an integral part of evangelization, as article 35 of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, on the Church in the modern world, reminds us. In other words, we cannot speak about evangelization without speaking about its connection with efforts for human promotion.

The Decree *Ad gentes* had already aligned the Church to this perspective when, in chapter II, speaking of exercising missionary activity, it offered a significant introduction. I am referring to article 12 of the decree, entitled "Presence of charity". The concept that I would like to emphasize here is the following: before explaining the activities through which mission develops, which is to say preaching the Gospel, Christian initiation, formation of the community, etc., all the way to the establishment of particular churches, the Council states that a place must first be given to "charity". Here are the words of the Decree, whose tone and strength impress us: "*The presence of the Christian faithful in these human groups should be inspired by that charity with which God has loved us, and with which He wills that we should love one another (cf. 1 Jn 4:11). Christian charity truly extends to all, without distinction of race, creed, or social condition: it looks for neither gain nor gratitude. For as God loved us with an unselfish love, so also the faithful should in their charity care for the human person himself, loving him with the same affection with which God sought out man. Just as Christ, then, went about all the towns and villages, curing every kind of disease and infirmity as a sign that the kingdom of God had come (cf. Mt 9:35ff; Acts 10:38), so also the Church, through her children, is one with men of every condition, but especially with the poor and the afflicted. For them, she gladly spends and is spent (cf. 2 Cor 12:15), sharing in their joys and sorrows, knowing of their longings and problems, suffering with them in death's anxieties. To those in quest of peace, she wishes to answer in fraternal dialogue, bearing them the peace and the light of the Gospel. Let Christians labor and collaborate with others in rightly*

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regulating the affairs of social and economic life. [...] Furthermore, let them take part in the strivings of those peoples who, waging war on famine, ignorance, and disease, are struggling to better their way of life and to secure peace in the world. In this activity, the faithful should be eager to offer prudent aid to projects sponsored by public and private organizations, by governments, by various Christian communities, and even by non-Christian religions” (n. 12).

a. A right understanding of human promotion

Allow me to turn my attention for a moment to this concept of human promotion as connected to evangelization because I find that charity and mercy are especially innate in human promotion. How sad if this is not the case! Christianity has its project for human promotion because Christian humanism is not just horizontal but open to the God revealed by Christ and intends to promote the entire human person, endowed with body, soul and mind.

It is thus a matter of carrying out two types of promotion. The first consists of the effort to eliminate or overcome all situations that keep the person in inhumane or sub-human conditions. On this level, human promotion is equivalent to liberation, in the strict sense of the word. Paul VI had already asserted, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, that evangelical liberation “cannot be contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the divine Absolute; it is therefore attached to a view of man which it can never sacrifice to the needs of any strategy, practice or short-term efficiency” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 33).

The second promotional effort consists of all the activities to develop everything that helps the person to truly live as one. This project is based on the Gospel principles of justice and charity, is applied to different situations and takes form in the various cultural, social and historical contexts. We can observe how this is put into practice in the many Christian works that, over the course of the centuries, have developed in the context of activities of evangelization. However, at points in history, evangelization has sometimes been separated from

activities of love toward the human person.

b. Relationship between evangelization and promotion

I have already said that human promotion is an essential component of evangelization. I would like to further explain myself. As we examine more deeply the relationship between evangelization and promotion, a very strong connection appears between these two realities, a connection of an anthropological, theological and evangelical nature. Here, I am again following Paul VI’s thinking expressed in his Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* because this document provided solid foundations to understand the relationship between evangelization and every activity in favor of human growth.

It is thus a matter of a relationship, first of an anthropological order “because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions” (*EN*, n. 31). The proclamation of the Gospel cannot do without the human person ‘contextualized’ in his social-cultural reality with his real problems.

In addition, the relationship between evangelization and promotion is also of a theological order “since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored” (n. 31). Finally, there are aspects of an eminently evangelical order, “which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of man?” (n. 31). “To believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love means realizing that He thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity. To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which ennobles each human being. Our redemption has a social dimension because ‘God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men’. To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds: ‘The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, even the most complex and inscrutable.’ Evangelization is meant to cooperate with this liberating

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work of the Spirit. The very mystery of the Trinity reminds us that we have been created in the image of that divine communion, and so we cannot achieve fulfilment or salvation purely by our own efforts. From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others” (Evangelii Gaudium, n. 178).

In summary, we can say that it is evident that evangelization and charity go hand in hand because an evangelization plan that does not include human promotion is disembodied, but it is also true that a project for human promotion that would attempt to function outside of an environment of evangelization is certainly less fruitful and less fulfilling for the whole person because it does not touch the entire person, in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. Doesn't Benedict XVI say that Paul VI, through his Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, shed light on the great theme of the development of peoples with the splendor of truth and the gentle light of Christ's charity? Paul VI taught that “*life in Christ is the first and principal factor of development and he entrusted us with the task of travelling the path of development with all our heart and all our intelligence, that is to say with the ardor of charity and the wisdom of truth*” (*Caritas in Veritate*, n. 8).

NEW APPROACHES AND PROSPECTS

It is certain that evangelization today is confronted with challenges that are ever new and always greater, and its relationship with charity takes on nuances and aspects that are always changing and, let us admit as well, attractive and exciting. What I have said up to this point is true and important but must be supplemented with other reflections on aspects that we have gradually learned to deal with during recent decades.

I am not only alluding to the fact that, at this time, we readily speak of “new evangelization”, especially in our countries with a long-standing Christian tradition. Even if we mustn't confuse mission *ad gentes* and New Evangelization, these two realities do not create a problem for

our argument because evangelizing for the first time or evangelizing anew in places where Christian life has weakened and faith has dried up is always the same action that must be performed with an attitude of charity and mercy. The great Pope John Paul II was a master in this domain. We just have to think of his abundant magisterium, of which I will limit myself to citing the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, chapter V and especially article 33, in which he distinguishes three types of situations.

The first situation is that of the mission *ad gentes*. It concerns peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts or geographical areas in which Christ and His Gospel are not known. Christian communities are thus either entirely absent or a tiny minority.

The second situation concerns strong, vibrant Christian communities that bear witness to their faith and the Gospel and become aware of their missionary duty. Here, Christian faith and life must be maintained, strengthened and further solidified.

Finally, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith and no longer consider themselves members of the Church. They have grown apart from Christ and His Gospel. In this case a new evangelization is needed.

Allow me to add one thought about this situation: if we speak about a “new evangelization”, why not speak about a “new human promotion”? This terminology is not in use, it is true, but the meaning behind it is. What was John Paul II trying to explain when he spoke of the necessity of evangelizing “*new worlds and new social phenomena*,” or why did he indicate the need to take into consideration “*cultural centers or modern Areopagus*” (RM, n. 37-38)? Entering into contact through evangelization with these domains of life today and not neglecting them, isn't that a gesture of deep respect, esteem and especially love for persons who live in these cultural centers or modern Areopagus? There is a great challenge today: the evangelization of mass media.

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I certainly am not forgetting the tremendous problem raised today by the many experiences humanity is going through at this moment in a more and more globalized context. They demand understanding and attention and are not outside the mission of the Church. Evangelization, for example, cannot ignore interreligious dialogue, needed more than ever, but also increasingly difficult and complex. It cannot ignore the issues raised by huge waves of migration, by the need to welcome Christians and non-Christians, any more than it can ignore the issues provoked by the contact and confrontation among cultures, races, habits and customs. Nor can we be inattentive to everything connected to the preservation of nature, to new ideologies and Western cultural revolutions affecting Christian anthropology and universal ethical values. We cannot fail to be concerned with paganism and, even worse, the moral depravity and perversion of the West and its scheme to pollute the whole of humanity with its ideology of *gender* and denial of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person. These problems are not new, but they always have novel aspects because they are constantly evolving. The Church attempts to intervene in order to support evangelizers, better equipping and preparing them to act in an opportune and fruitful manner and not retreat before the missionary task out of fear of difficulties, objections and persecution. In this final part of my presentation, I will reflect briefly some more on some of these realities.

a. Dialogue in truth

It was John Paul II who explicitly declared that *“Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission ad gentes; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions”* (RM, n. 55). The same pontiff repeated his teaching on inter-religious dialogue in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. Establishing a dialogue on religious content is a step that should not be evaded. We might ask: why should evangelization be expressed in our time through inter-religious dialogue? The question could also be asked in a more insistent way: why is inter-religious dialogue considered a priority in evangelization in our time? There is certainly a practical reason because dialogue facilitates mutual knowledge, agreement on major themes of life and peaceful coexistence. But there is a deeper motivation: fraternal charity

demands dialogue among persons, and I would say especially inter-religious dialogue, on a global level. How can I consider and look at my brothers and sister as persons with whom I should avoid speaking about such important themes as God, faith, religion, family, marriage, respect for life and moral values, good and evil? The Lord’s words, *“... that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father”* (Mt 5:16) - even if they have their particular meaning in the context of Matthew’s text - can be an inspiration for us: how can others see, understand and question themselves if we do not explain ourselves?

However, inter-religious dialogue should have specific characteristics, on which pontifical magisterium insists: it must be enlightened, sincere, open and respectful of all; it should not be naive or empty of content. It should be conducted *“without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness”* (cf. RM, n.56).

I cannot remain silent about an aspect to which the magisterium is always attentive but that is often skimmed over. I prefer to say it not with my own words but those of *Novo Millennio Ineunte* where it speaks about dialogue and mission: *“We should not fear that it will be considered an offence to the identity of others what is rather the joyful proclamation of a gift meant for all, and to be offered to all with the greatest respect for the freedom of each one: the gift of the revelation of the God who is Love, the God who ‘so loved the world that he gave his only Son’ (Jn 3:16)”* (n. 56).

I would like to add yet another reflection of which I am more and more convinced: when Saint Peter and Saint John answered before the Sanhedrin, which had forbidden them to speak any more of Jesus and said, *“It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard”* (Acts 4:20), did they commit an act of insolence or speak words against charity? I am convinced the answer is no, and that, in reality, they performed an act of authentic charity because they obliged those individuals to pose a crucial question for their lives. This was a gesture of pure evangelization, of true love, of authentic mercy. If they hadn’t loved these persons who made up the Sanhedrin, Peter and John would have remained silent. Speaking their faith and proclaiming the one who is the way, the truth and the life is an immense act of charity and a generous and precious gift made to humanity.

b. Evangelization as intercultural communion in charity

Here, I would like to particularly bring the following to the fore: because Christianity works with a view to evangelization, it is necessarily in contact with other cultures. It thus becomes imperative for this contact to be explicit, desired and not evaded. It is a question of promoting mutual knowledge and frank discussion that is nonetheless always carried out in respect, truth and discernment because everything that a culture has made its own is not necessarily positive.

We know that Christianity is already inculturated because it is expressed through groups deriving from the Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman cultures from which it was born and then developed. Evangelization would certainly have difficulty offering the content of the faith isolated from a culture. To make it easier to understand the content of evangelization, which is of divine origin and thus able to enrich and renew all cultures, eventually it will be necessary to promote reciprocal contact on a cultural level; otherwise, it will be impossible to understand each other.

Obviously, this process of inculturation is only at its beginnings and, for some cultures, it has not even started. However, it is absolutely unavoidable. Yet the inculturation of the evangelical and Biblical message should not be presented as a quest or a demand to legitimize an Africanization of Christianity in place of its Westernization. Inculturation does not mean canonizing culture nor settling into a culture at the risk of making it an absolute value. Inculturation is an eruption and an epiphany of the Lord in a culture; this eruption of God causes instability and uprooting in order to move forward according to a new reference that creates a new culture bearing the Good News for humanity and human dignity.

When the Gospel enters into a life, it destabilizes it, turns it upside down and transforms it from top to bottom. The Gospel gives a new direction and new moral and ethical references. It radically turns the human heart toward God and toward the neighbor in order to love and serve them totally and without ulterior motives. When Jesus enters a life, he destabilizes it, throws it, and radically transforms it by the dazzling light of His face, just as happened to Saint Paul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6).

Just as through the Incarnation the Word of God became like man in all things except sin (Heb 4:15), the Gospel takes on all human values but refuses to take shape in structures of sin. This is to say that the more individual and collective sin abound in a human and ecclesial community, the less space there is for inculturation. To put it another way, the more a Christian community shines with holiness and Gospel values, the greater its chances for successfully inculturating the Christian message. Inculturation of the faith is thus a challenge of holiness. It is a means of verifying the degree of holiness, the extent to which the Gospel and faith in Jesus Christ has made its way into a Christian community. Inculturation is thus not religious folklore. It is not achieved so much through the use of African or Asian languages, instruments, music and dance or ancestral rituals and symbols in liturgy and the sacraments. It is not a mere African or Asian veneer on the Christian Mysteries. Inculturation is God who descends and enters into humans' lives, moral behaviors, customs and cultures in order to free them from sin, make them sacred and bring them into His life and holiness. "Preserve," Saint Ambrose tells us, "what thou hast received. God the Father hath sealed thee, Christ the Lord hath confirmed thee, and hath given the [mark] of the Spirit in thy heart, as thou hast learned from the apostolic lesson."¹

c. Human mobility and charitable hospitality

I also bring up the subject of ongoing and practically uncontrollable migration toward the Western and traditionally Christian world. Migration is an understandable yet overwhelming phenomenon that concerns everyone from many perspectives, and the Church collaborates with governments in order to seek viable solutions. There is certainly an aspect of a humanitarian nature, which is primary and must be confronted courageously, getting beyond issues of national self-interest. We know what international bodies and nations do in this regard. We also know that the Church, through the intermediary of the Conferences of Bishops of involved countries, boldly declares itself in favor of hospitality, obviously when dealing with civilians.

1. Saint Ambrose, *Treatise on the Mysteries*, trans. Tom Thompson. Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (2009), p. 63.

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Here, I would like to draw attention to an aspect that directly concerns evangelization. Non-Christian migrants are unquestionably the most numerous, and many of them do not always find adequate religious support in their host country. As far as we can see, they probably expect from the Church, especially where it is in the majority, hospitality and assistance for the practical needs of their everyday lives. Maybe they are asking for nothing more. But we, to whom evangelization is entrusted, can we be satisfied with mere material assistance without offering them the treasures of Christian revelation?

It is essential that the Church also encourage contact or social gatherings on a religious level, such that these migrants are helped to maintain the transcendent dimension of their lives. What a shame if they were to return to their countries less religious, especially in coming from a Christian foreign land! On this topic, it is worthwhile to recall what Pope Benedict XVI emphasized during a conference in Subiaco, shortly before being elevated to the office of Pope: “*Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner unknown before now to humanity, excludes God from the public conscience, either by denying him altogether, or by judging that his existence is not demonstrable, uncertain and, therefore, belonging to the realm of subjective choices, something, in any case, irrelevant to public life.*”² We believe that this exclusion of God from the public conscience, which unfortunately is not only a European legacy, is a grave disadvantage, nor only for us, but also for the religious practice of disciples of other religions who immigrate to Western countries.

The phenomenon of human mobility is not going away anytime soon, which is why projections indicate, in the relatively short-term, that all nations will become, much more than now, not only multi-racial and multi-cultural but also multi-religious. Aren't we running the risk of seeing Christian culture and Christianity disappear in the West one day, in favor of Islam given a Godless, totally pagan, hedonistic and amoral society? So, here is the question: Jesus' firmly explicit mandate, “*Go into the whole world,*” doesn't it also apply to these non-Christian groups who are spreading everywhere like an oil stain? And who

2. J. Ratzinger, speech given April 1, 2005; reprinted in *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Tracey Rowland, Oxford University Press (2008).

should take on the important commitment of becoming involved in intercultural encounter, religious dialogue and evangelization? In 1998, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples had already clearly identified this set of important questions regarding churches of long-standing Christian tradition, declaring, “*The missionary responsibility here falls, in various ways, to the Bishops, to the parish priests, and to their co-workers and the whole Christian community.*”³

And what can we say about the need to welcome and be especially attentive, materially and spiritually, to Christian migrants? Our involvement on their behalf should be distinguished by a greater attention and flow from ecclesial communion. We all belong to the mystical Body where love reigns, the love that Christ came to reveal to us by loving us to the very end.

Before this problem of human mobility, which is currently being born out, a broad set of often-changing issues develops. I have particularly stressed two aspects that closely affect us: the value of hospitality at any price and the necessity of including these persons within evangelization. In any case, this is certainly the highest expression of the witness of Christian love. For what concerns the issue of human mobility, evangelization and merciful love always work together. They are closely connected to each other.

d. Respect and protection of creation

Finally, I would like to quickly allude to the topic of ecology in connection with evangelization. Development, understood in its moral character, cannot make an abstraction of “*respect for the beings which constitute the natural world, which the ancient Greeks... called the 'cosmos'*” (SRS, n. 34). John Paul II was an enlightened teacher on this subject as well, above all although not exclusively, with the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei socialis*. As a summary of his thought, I refer to article 34 of the encyclical, which demands three considerations: first of all, one must take into account the nature of each being and the connection among them; second, natural resources are limited, and some are not

3. Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Cooperatio Missionalis [Missionary Cooperation]*, October 1, 1998, n. 19d.

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renewable; finally, a certain type of industrial development unleashes pollution's extremely dangerous consequences. We all know that the direct or indirect result of industrialization is, ever more frequently, the pollution of the environment, with serious consequences for the health of the population.

This is why I brought up this ecological dimension of the Church's mission: evangelization cannot neglect the issue of environmental protection because saving nature is saving humanity and therefore constitutes a veritable act of love. Evangelization and charity work together, here as well, on the level of ecology.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to explain what makes up the real relationship between charity (mercy) and evangelization. I realized that they are not two distinct realities, but rather two aspects of the same reality. We cannot speak about evangelization without love, charity, mercy, and we cannot imagine a greater love or charity than one that takes concrete form and is shown through evangelization. I hope that I have succeeded in explaining this idea and communicating this concept.

I conclude realizing that everything I said finds its deepest explanation in the 'loving heart' of Jesus. Jesus is the evangelizer *par excellence*; it would be better to say He is the only evangelizer since we are only His co-workers, as Saint Paul said (cf. 1 Cor 3:9). But all the gestures that He carried out in evangelizing are indisputably gestures of love and mercy. Jesus taught, revealed the Father, welcomed persons, touched lepers, forgave and restored hope. His pieced heart is the true icon of the merciful love that we are all called to announce and offer to others.

His Eminence Cardinal Robert SARAH
*Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship
and the Discipline of the Sacraments*

Rooted in Christ, We Become Fruitful in Mission

Presentation given to the members of the Assembly
Paris, May 20, 2015

Notes taken during the presentation (oral style)

INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters, I am humbled indeed that you invited such an ordinary sister like me to address you on such an important topic. Your theme is a testimony to your search for sinking your roots deeply into the heart of God in order to liberate the power of your divine intimacy for compassionate commitment to God's people, especially the poor and marginalized. I am very much attracted to this theme although I have no great ideology, theory or teaching to share with you. But I speak out of my deep conviction that consecrated life will always be relevant, meaningful and prophetic in the present and in the future if we dare to live it with a passion for Jesus Christ and active compassion for all God's people. I did some googling to find out something about your identity and mission! What I found fills me with great hope and enthusiasm! You are impelled by the charity and compassion of Jesus, whom you follow in close discipleship. You are motivated by the love of Christ and sustained by deep prayer. You are women of community, with a shared vision and mission. You are servants of the poor. Your Constitutions tell us that you as Daughters of Charity know that "God awaits you in those who suffer" (cf. C. 7b). In this context how very relevant is the theme of our deliberations today:



One of the signs of the times today is an amazingly genuine search for spirituality, a deep hunger for interiority and meaning in life. Mere traditional acts of piety and external liturgical practices alone cannot satisfy this hunger. Karl Rahner is quoted as saying that the 21st century Christian is either a mystic or not a Christian at all. This implies that the individual must find her own inner peace and identity which can only come from her rootedness in God. Many are looking for spiritual *gurus* to guide them to God. We are challenged to **be** more than what we do! Will our people find in us true spiritual guides who “have seen the Lord” and, therefore, are able to lead others to God?

The Bible gives us a wonderful picture of the manner of God’s meeting with human beings and inviting them to greater belongingness and intimacy. God comes to us gently, caringly, asking some fundamental questions: to Adam, God asked: “*Where are you?*” (Genesis 3:9); to Cain, God asked: “*Where is your brother?*” to Hagar, God asked: “*Hagar, Maid of Sarai, where are you coming from and where are you going?*” (Gen 16, 8); to Elijah: “*Why are you here?*” (1 Kings 19:9). Jesus of Nazareth asked Andrew and John: “*What do you seek?*” (John 1:38).

Dear Sisters, if we listen to the gentle voice of the Spirit within and among us, we will hear these same questions: “Where are you, my friend?” “Where is your sister?” “Where are you coming from and where are you going?” “Why are you here?” “What are you really looking for?” Like Andrew and John, we also evade the question and ask: “Rabbi, where do you stay? Where is your dwelling place?” Jesus replies to us: “**Come and see.**” This gathering is a graced time to come back home to our call and discern where we are at this time, where God wants us to go, and how we can move forward together in the mission entrusted to us. This is a time to stop and listen again to the loving invitation of God to live our baptismal covenant more fully so that we may become women who live divine intimacy, women who are empowered by a dynamic interiority that is made visible in our total commitment to Jesus and his mission.

I- ROOTEDNESS IN CHRIST: A CALL TO INTIMACY AND INTERIORITY

What does it mean to be rooted in Christ? For us as women religious, this rootedness is another name for passion for Jesus! In the first part of Ephesians 3:14-19, Paul prays for what God will do in us. “... *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*” In the second part of his prayer, Paul prays for our response to God’s grace. He prays for rootedness in Christ: “*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*”

As we respond to this invitation, we become more deeply rooted and responsive to Christ’s love. Being rooted and grounded really comes down to always having our affections and our connections above (Colossians 3:1-4)! Imagine the “Spirit power” that would transform our world if only all of us, as consecrated women and men, would indeed be rooted and grounded in Christ! We know that we are rooted in Christ when we live the radical spirituality of inclusion and compassion of Jesus and keep his vision alive in our way of life and mission today!

We give ourselves to moments of prayer so that we ourselves may be transfigured, that we may become new persons who are enabled to see the world as God sees the world, to become the healing presence of God in our world, to become persons of justice, of love, and of compassion for others. Prayer gives us roots in God, transforms us more and more into mature Christians and makes our true God-image more visible. Mature prayer empties my heart of self and fills it with God and with God’s dreams. In fact, mature prayer leads to a new and unexpected experience of “real presence”, where God and I become one, enabling me to radiate the divine. God becomes incarnate in me and I am enabled to be Christ to those whom I serve.

As close disciples of Jesus, we know that Jesus has made his home in us, his roots are firm in our hearts and we are invited to be rooted and

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grounded in love, in God (Ephesians 3:17). If I am not rooted, I will find that I will just wither away (Matthew 13:5-6). As the beloved of God, I have to grow strong in Christ (1 Peter 2:1-2); I have to be rooted and built up in Christ through being taught the truth (Colossians 2:7). This process of becoming rooted is not an overnight experience, but a lifelong pursuit of holiness. Consecrated life is all about the process of being rooted, grounded, and settled in Christ, becoming one with him as he was one with his *Abba*, so that with Christ we live God's dreams for the world, with the heart of a mystic and a prophet. Our call as consecrated women is to be women of holiness, who bear Christ to our world.

Speaking about the need for a vibrant spirituality in religious life, Joan Chittister says: *"It is the function of religious life to give a lived demonstration of union with God, of seeing the world as God sees the world, of coming to growth, both through failure and through success. In the final analysis it may be the finest gift we have to give. But those who do not pray cannot teach it and without it the world is poor indeed. Without it, the poor will not be sustained and the rich will not be converted. Without it, we ourselves will be the weaker witnesses."* Divine intimacy and deep interiority make us faith-filled risk takers.

A life of prayer and contemplation is the energy and the powerhouse of consecrated life. We often consider contemplation the privilege of a few who are called to the life we call "contemplative", something which remains outside the scope of our own life as apostolic religious. When we think of the contemplative side of Jesus' life, we associate it only with the nights he went up the mountain to pray, or with the moments when he raised his eyes to his Father and spoke with him in intimate terms. Divine intimacy is our birthright too! We are born from above, as Jesus reminded Nicodemus (Jn 3:7), so that we, too, can image and share the divine life. Jesus' way of being a contemplative and a mystic consisted above all in the power to see life as God saw it. As we learn to live and move in the Spirit, the Spirit begins to unfold the mystery of the divine within us. *"The spirit explores the depths of everything, even the depths of God"* (1 Cor 2:10). Our rootedness happens with the presence and action of the Spirit in our life.

We learn the secret of interiority from Jesus who came to unite us to the Father in the most intimate way. The Gospels tell us that, as the news about Jesus spread, crowds came to hear him and be healed of their illnesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:15-16). In the Gospel of Mark (1:32-35) we read: *"And in the evening, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door... And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."* Solitude is an essential ingredient of interiority and intimacy, rootedness and fruitfulness. One can enter into the depths of solitude and divine intimacy through deep prayer and through an inner movement towards authenticity that comes from a self-emptying or kenosis. Having experienced deep rootedness in God, I move out of myself and give myself to others in compassionate service in selfless love (cf. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds*, p. 64).

The great demands made on Jesus to be the teacher, the healer, the leader and the provider of food for the hungry did not diminish his thirst for intimacy with his *Abba* or take him away from his contemplative moments alone with his beloved *Abba*. Jesus was indeed the most perfect mystic in his intimate relationship with his *Abba* with his profound heart-knowledge of his beloved *Abba* and the way he was drawn to *Abba* to the point of becoming ONE with him: *"The Father and I are one."* This is what gave him his identity and purpose in life. It is in his intimate moments with his Father that Jesus found his answers, found his energy to reach out to all in compassionate love. He prayed the whole night before he chose his apostles. For Jesus, **being** with his *Abba*, this mystical union with God, was absolutely essential for **doing** his salvific mission. This is the "everyday mysticism" that we are called to live as his close disciples so that we become deeply rooted in Jesus and we are empowered to do the work of Jesus.

As disciples of Jesus in an apostolic congregation, you and I are called to be contemplatives in action. What is the intensity of my search for divine intimacy and transformation into Christ? How is my rootedness in Jesus bearing fruit in an insatiable thirst for becoming like my Beloved? It is said that we become what we contemplate. Both Eastern and Western spiritual masters teach that *we become what we meditate!*

Rooted in Christ, We Become Fruitful in Mission

There is a story told about Buddha. Buddha was very overweight, perhaps as a result of his hours and days of sitting still under the tree of enlightenment! One day a trim and handsome young soldier came along, looked at Buddha, and said: "You look like a pig!" The Buddha replied: "Well, you look like a God!" "Why would you say that?" asked the rather surprised soldier. "Well," replied the Buddha, "we see what is inside us. I think about God all day and when I look out, that is what I see. You, obviously, must think about other things..." If we contemplate Jesus, our life, our way, our love, we will indeed become more like him. How much do I resemble Jesus? Jesus could say, "*He who has seen me, has seen the Father.*" In community do we see Jesus in one another? Can others see the real Jesus in me?

We live in a socio-cultural and technological milieu that is saturated with so many means of communication. Even children are becoming experts in "multitasking" as they seem to manage to eat a meal, be on their cell phone, watch TV and respond to those around them... all at the same time! As a result, one does not learn to be fully present to any one thing or person at one time. Yes, in this *media deluge* we have become a people "scattered" from within. Everything around our globalized world invites us to live from the outside. All are in a hurry! All is noise! We live almost always on the surface of life. We have no time! Genuine interiority, which is the most precious ingredient of being fully human, has become a rare gift. We do not know how to care for and promote the interior life in our personal life and in our communities. Interior silence has become a foreign concept to many of us.

Let each one here ask herself: What is my lived experience of the precious gift of interiority and fruitful solitude? When we are deprived of an inner experience of God, we may just manage to survive by saying our prayers with our lips, without listening to the quiet presence of God in the depth of our heart. When we are very busy with our apostolic work and other responsibilities, what is it that we usually let go, convincing ourselves that "God understands!" Are we forgetting the very reason for our being religious? Recently, a spiritual writer stated that the only problem in religious communities is just a matter of determining whether or not we are Christian. Are we impelled by faith or mere pragmatism? Have we become "non-believers" in ways that we do not even realize?

Questions for reflection and sharing:

Who was Jesus for you when you first joined this congregation, and what did he ask of you at that time? Who is Jesus for you today, and what does he ask of you at this time?

How do you cultivate interiority and divine intimacy in your life?

II - WITNESSING TO DIVINE INTIMACY AND ROOTEDNESS IN JESUS

Our people expect us to be women of God, women who reflect God's goodness and compassion. Are we coming across to our people as such? Is our passion for Christ and our fire for mission dying out? This is a matter of serious soul-searching for every religious today. It is clear that the real issue confronting religious life today is, above all, a spiritual lethargy and lack of faith. We cannot be women on fire for the mission of Jesus unless we live a life of necessary asceticism and contemplative intimacy with God, always with our feet firmly rooted in the realities that surround us. Asceticism has become an outdated expression even among us religious. Nevertheless, we cannot think of true interiority without rootedness in Christ, without the Paschal journey. The secret of passion for Christ and the consequent fruitfulness in our life is to be found in the mystery of the "*grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies so that it might bring abundant fruit*" (Jn 12:24).

When we have a profound and irresistible attraction toward God and experience God's unconditional and constant love in our personal life, we will be filled with a passion for Jesus and for His mission that will impel us to move out of our comfort zones and be prophetic risk-takers in the service of God's people. I thank God for the prophetic ministries that you are already engaged in among the neediest of our world.

Let me share with you one of my many experiences while living with the poorest of the poor outcasts, the "Musahars", in Bihar, India. In the early 80s, some of us felt the call to live a more incarnational approach to consecrated life, and so we decided to move out of our comfortable convent homes and live among the most marginalized people of our society. Three of us made our home in their tiny, miserable huts with

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no door or windows to close and no facilities whatsoever. We had to find our own ways of living our religious community life of prayer and ministry in this new reality. We used to get up around 3:30 in the morning to take care of ourselves, bathe in the open under the cover of darkness, and then, by around 4:30, we would sit in our little hut with our eyes closed in meditation for about an hour. As people woke up, they would come to our hut and peep into the room to see what we were doing, and the whole group would gather outside our hut, discussing various concerns as usual. One day, I got up from my prayer and told them that we were speaking with our God and God was speaking with us, and so we would be grateful if they could be silent around our hut for this sacred time. From then on, the oldest man in the village, Bengali, took on the responsibility of going around in the morning telling everyone around our hut to keep quiet because the *didis* (Sisters) were talking with their God. Poor as they were, they had no problem understanding this need, and so they gladly responded to his request. In fact, gradually it became a practice for many, especially the women, to come to us during our meditation and ask us quietly to tell our God about their special needs such as safe delivery, healing of their children, etc.

One of the great insights that I received during those many years of living among the poorest of the poor was that we cannot really give ourselves in compassionate love to our people in need until we ourselves have been open to the transforming power of Jesus and have developed an intimacy with God. This union with God makes us true witnesses regardless of where we are and in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. No one and nothing can ever stop us from being witnesses to Jesus and his way of life by living like him!

What are the deeper implications of our rootedness in God? Do our brothers and sisters, especially the poor and needy, see in us the virtues and qualities we profess to possess? How are the poor impacted by our life of commitment and holiness? We need a spirituality born of a contemplative relationship with God, a spirituality that leads us to prophetic involvement with God's people and God's wounded world. A test of the quality of my prayer life is to see how my spirituality is moving me out of my securities to get involved in God's wounded world. Contemplation and prophetic living impel us to move to where Christ is in agony: to the slums, to the cities, to the social outcasts, to the hungry,

to the trafficked and abused women and children, to the AIDS victims, to the victims of war and violence, to the influential circles of politicians and social reformers, to religious leaders of all kinds... to everyone in need. In explaining to her sisters the deep significance of the words, "I thirst," Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, "I fear for you, dear sisters, that you will go to the poor [to your classrooms, to health centers and so on] without having first experienced Jesus in your hearts. Unless and until you have experienced the thirst of Jesus for you and for your love, you will not be able to quench that thirst through your ministry to the poor [or through any of your ministries.]"

When we speak about the option for the poor, we are already into the realm of spiritual poverty. *"Spiritual poverty and a commitment to alleviating real poverty are profoundly related and cannot be separated. Out of spiritual poverty — a condition of the disciples who dedicate their lives to service of the kingdom and a search for God's will — is the attitude of detachment, or freedom from the material goods of the world, for the true disciples realize that where one's treasure resides is also where the heart abides (Mt 6:21). Spiritual poverty calls us 'to be poor,' Romero said, 'and become involved in the poverty of our people as if they were our own family.' Voluntary poverty is a way of life. Spiritual poverty and voluntary poverty are united in the expression 'preferential option for the poor.' The preferential option says that 'the poor are first'" (Gustavo Gutiérrez O.P., Close to God, Close to the Poor, 2010). I am challenged to live a spirituality of sufficiency.*

Take a few moments to think about one of your Sisters in whom you have experienced a true interiority and spiritual energy that she radiated/radiates, an inner power that was/is made visible in her life and in her way of reaching out.

The Prayer and Action of a Disciple is a Single Response of Compassionate Love.

In Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life, Henri Nouwen writes: "Prayer and action... can never be seen as contradictory or mutually exclusive. Prayer without action grows into powerless pietism, and action without prayer degenerates into questionable manipulation. If prayer leads us into a deeper unity with the compassionate Christ, it

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will always give rise to concrete acts of service. And if concrete acts of service do indeed lead us to a deeper solidarity with the poor, the hungry, the sick, the dying, and the oppressed, they will always give rise to prayer. In prayer we meet Christ, and in him all human suffering. In service we meet people, and in them the suffering Christ" (pp. 116-7).

Pope Francis has repeatedly called the faithful to a renewed commitment to prayer that leads to action for justice and peace. He says: *"In our Christian life too, prayer and action are always profoundly united. Prayer that does not lead to concrete action toward a brother [sister] who is poor, sick, in need of help, the brother [sister] in difficulty, is a sterile and incomplete prayer* (Pope Francis to Pilgrims, July 21, 2013). We fail very deeply if we fail to integrate prayer and action. Prayer can hardly be true prayer if we are not more strongly motivated through it to serve others in love, sharing the love that we find in communion with God. On the other hand, a life of action without the deep undergirding of prayer leads many servants of Christ to burnout and meaninglessness.

As women called and sent to be a prophetic presence of Jesus in our world, we learn once again to renounce our own securities, comforts and compromises with the powerful and rich and stand on the side of those on the margins. Our message for the seekers of our world will be accepted when they can see in us the marks of God-realized persons who are at home with stillness and solitude, physical discipline in prayer, compassion and prophetic reaching out to those most in need. I wonder if our emphasis on professionalism and success in ministries as well as our desire for comfort and securities have replaced the inner flame of our consecrated life and put out the prophetic spark in our hearts!

According to Thomas Merton in *Action is the Stream - Prayer is the Spring*, to evangelize in our globalized world is a matter of deep spirituality and witness of life and not just the preaching or teaching of doctrines and Church laws. Gandhi is reported to have said to a group of Christian missionaries: *"You talk too much. Look at the rose. It too has a gospel to spread. It does it silently, but effectively, and people come to it with joy. Imitate the rose."*

Religious are not meant to be builders and maintainers of institutions, but are to be pioneers of new approaches, the responders to new needs,

and the developers of alternative ways to meet needs. Your history bears witness to the fact that, as Daughters of Charity, pioneering in the mission of Jesus and option for the poor is in your blood! Pioneers are always breaking new ground, crossing borders, going where no one dares to go. You are not meant to be "settlers" who are happy just continuing the good deeds of the past, protecting the heritage, and rejoicing in the blessings of the day. No, by birth, we religious are pioneers, and we will have to be so or else we will become irrelevant and eventually disappear! Each one of us needs to examine herself to see if she is a "settler", safeguarding her personal space and wants without the necessary prophetic fire and vision. This is a time to ask yourselves, as women of divine intimacy, do our personal lifestyle and choices reflect the dream we had of religious life when we first responded to our call? What has changed and why? Where is Jesus in all these changes?

We cannot and we may not become invisible. Our only reason for being religious by profession is to be totally oriented to the God of Jesus and to do the work of Jesus by being the Good News to the poor. Let each one of us ask herself: How visible and credible is my apostolic witness? If people cannot identify us by our way of living and our Christ-like commitment to the poor and needy, then we are living a lie! Being genuine witnesses of Christ is not a matter of numerical strength of membership or institutional achievements.

In his article on prophetic religious life, Anthony Gittins raises some pertinent issues: *"Imaginative people ask of themselves and each other; 'Why not?' and 'What if I examine whether or how, my daily life actually impacts God's poor and promotes God's justice? Why don't I think and act differently by simply asking people how I can better help? What if I were to change one single component of my daily schedule? Why do I not take a calculated risk for the sake of the mission I serve? Why take vows "for life", but for whose life? Whose life actually benefits from my vows?' Unless they are generative, they are sterile or simply self-serving. So how has my life really helped my sisters and brothers, and how might it still do so before it's too late? Unless a theology of detachment from things is also a theology of attachment to people, it is barren and a betrayal of the incarnational, embodied, earthy ministry of Jesus we follow"* (in *Transformation of Religious Life* by Anthony Gittins, CSSp, pp. 15-22).

Conclusion

Each one of us stands in need of the great gift of personal conversion. Do I see the need for conversion in my way of living and in the way I live community and in the way I carry out my ministries? What we need today is not more words or ideas about prayer but rather the divine energy that comes from our own ongoing conversion. Unless interior conversion takes place, no “border crossing” or new beginnings will occur. Our postmodern world needs women disciples who, like Jesus, are “border-crossers” with hearts as wide as the world. In Isaiah 54:2, we read: “*Enlarge the space of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.*” The new step that you may be called to take to move into your future could very well be outside the path of your historical experience and into the very essence of who you are as Daughters of Charity. Listen! See! God is making something new! Enlarge your tent. Go beyond the familiar boundaries of your spirituality and allow the Spirit to transform you into a passionate mystic and a prophet for our times. Go beyond the comfortable, secure the boundaries of your ministries, and include the excluded in your tent. Make justice, peace and integrity of creation a way of living, a way of being and doing God’s mission as the Spirit makes all things new. Become interiorly free! Stretch your heart. Let Jesus shine out in you!

We are left with many questions at this time, are we not? What is the vision that we must make our own, the risks that we must willingly embrace and the fundamental changes that we must initiate so that Jesus Christ can be made known and loved among poor children and young people in desperate need of hearing his Good News? Gustavo Gutiérrez said there seem to be two kinds of people in the world. There are those who go into situations, check and analyze the facts, and then – but only then – decide whether there is anything to hope for. And then, Gustavo says, there are Christians: Christians approach life quite differently. Instead of getting into a situation and then judging whether there is anything to hope for, Christians are bearers of hope: they bring hope with them into any situation they encounter. Consequently, whenever a true Christian comes on the scene, hope is there as well, inevitably and always. Christians, in a certain sense, are the hope of the world, incarnate, enfleshed, embodied. That is the challenge for us.

The future of religious life depends on who we choose to **be**, where, among whom and how we choose to **live** and what we choose to **do**. In Luke’s story about the disciples on the road to Emmaus, as the Risen Lord disappeared from their sight, the disciples said to each other: “*Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?*” (Lk 24:32) After their encounter with Jesus, they became his powerful witnesses. Religious life today needs saints and prophets capable of being witnesses. Can we say with Mary Magdalene, “‘I have seen the Lord’, and I am no longer the same? Now, no one can stop me from being on fire for his mission!” May we be genuine prophets in whom the Word of God, the passion for Jesus and his mission, burns as a fire within until we are transformed into that creative fire of God, birthing a new heaven and a new earth.

I would like to conclude with the very powerful words of Dorothy Day: “*The greatest challenge of the day is how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us. When we begin to take the lowest place, to wash the feet of others, to love our brothers and sisters with that burning love, that passion, which led to the cross, then we can truly say, ‘Now I have begun’*” (From *Loaves and Fishes* by Dorothy Day).

Questions for reflection and sharing:

What is your desired future for your congregation/membership with regards to your spirituality, community and mission? Mention two specific points under each of these areas.

Give three concrete suggestions for strengthening the spiritual and prophetic dimensions of your consecrated life.

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MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES ON THE PERIPHERIES

Province of Naples

Going out to meet our migrant brothers and sisters

May 26, 2015

T

Testimonies

“I’ve seen those poor men treated like animals; that caused God to be moved with compassion” (CCD X, p. 103). These words of Vincent made their way into the hearts and experience of a small community of three Daughters of Charity who arrived in Cerignola in 2004, called by the bishop for the service of evangelization and charity in this area. **Cerignola** is a city in the region of Apulia with about 57,000 residents. The city’s economy is mostly tied to the processing of agricultural products.

Ever since the Sisters arrived, they have also looked to the peripheries, toward a village called Tre Titoli, located 13 kilometers from the city. Here, there are groups of migrants from various African nations, including Senegal, Tunisia, Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. They settled here over the years in make-shift dwellings and precarious, dilapidated lodgings, drawn by the possibility of working in the surrounding countryside.

Sanitary conditions are especially hazardous, and the risk of disease is very high. They live in crumbling structures without heat, water or toilets; in some cases, they have no doors nor windows. They have been met with indifference and sometimes rejection. They came to seek work, but they found a real exploitation of the workforce.

In this context, the Daughters of Charity have allowed the Gospel and the charism of the Founders to challenge them; they let themselves be touched by the sorrowful cry of these brothers and sisters who need to be recognized as persons. They began to fight with them and for them against inequalities caused by poverty, fear, diversity, prejudice, neglect and solitude.

Thus began an experience of service and presence for these people who are our brothers and sisters. In collaboration with the diocese, a **Drop-in Center** was opened to respond to the basic needs of the migrants, with a lunch room, showers, food and clothing distribution and a counseling center.

The driving force behind this action has been a strong commitment to prayer as we asked God for the insight needed to be witnesses of His love, to help our brothers and sisters feel His fatherly presence. The first step was attentiveness to their lived experience, their stories and their needs. This was a sign of closeness and a truly loving perspective that restored their dignity as men and women.

It has been very challenging to raise awareness and involve people as we strongly felt our responsibility to rouse and form consciences that had been dulled and were hostile to accepting diversity. The small community could almost feel God’s action, which has raised awareness among various groups of volunteers, parish groups, associations, church and secular entities. Little by little, the city has expanded its vision and its heart.

The gradual evolution of the service is evident, thanks to time dedicated to formation “on the ground” for the lay persons who collaborate with us. It is always based on experience and prayer because we all feel that we are simple instruments in God’s hands.

The presence and witness of the Daughters of Charity intends to serve as a **leaven** in parish communities and a **stimulus** for **institutions** to guarantee basic inalienable human rights. Patiently weaving together a network and exchanges, without exclusion or prejudices, we brought together all the “persons of good will” both from the social services domain and the Church. This has made possible programs

In the service of the migrants

for assistance, solidarity and the **promotion of rights**, such as the possibility of having water tanks installed in various places in the countryside, putting up some camping tents to offer shelter to those who were sleeping in inhumane conditions and providing basic health care for all immigrants, even those without residency permits.

The **network of services** works synergistically to deal with various issues, with each group offering its skills: free lawyers for those without any financial means, emergency services, experts in the area of trafficking of women, ALS (Local Health Administration) and Legambiente (a non-profit for environmental protection). This has produced various initiatives and projects, such as Italian classes, agriculture courses, a legal aid office and an intercultural counseling office (helping residents become more informed about and involved in society).

The Daughters of Charity meet on a regular basis with the lay persons who collaborate in this service to evaluate and plan the work based on emerging needs.

We have promoted opportunities for sharing among those of different groups and backgrounds where they get to know each other, bringing youth from the city and young immigrants together for communal gatherings in the countryside where the immigrants live. **Diocesan Youth Day** events took place in the village of **Tre Titoli**. Those who initially came motivated by curiosity allowed their hearts to be touched for the first time.

“It is not enough for me to love God if my neighbor doesn't love him” (CCD XII, p. 215). These words of Vincent continue to deeply move us and sustain our missionary momentum. The close relationship of trust among our brothers and sisters made it possible to create a prayer space in one of their houses where, together with volunteers and our brother and sister immigrants, we come together each week for a time of prayer and catechesis led by a priest. Thus was born a true community of believers known as “Our Lady of Tre Titoli”, Star of evangelization, who accompanies so many brothers and sisters on their journey. They are suffering but have great faith in the Lord.

This is the precious time when we discover that we are one big family in the Lord, and faces marked by poverty show signs of peace, trust and surrender to God despite their suffering.

In this time when Italy is going through a difficult period of recession, we are aware that we are truly living a **time of grace** because we experience in a concrete way God's Providence at work, a Providence which never fails. In fact, this ministry helps each Sister renew her way of praying, question herself about her lifestyle and not withdraw into her comfort zone but live out flexibility and necessary uncertainty in order to go out to meet the one who has **“no stately bearing, nor appearance that would attract us.”**

The primary goal is not to establish an efficient service that would be able to resolve all the problems of the immigrants, but above all to be credible witnesses of God's love.

Looking toward the future, Vincent's words echo in our hearts: **more... go beyond... always more...**

Let us ask the Lord that our hearts may become ever more available in order to continue to shine forth and raise up His love in all the brothers and sisters to whom we reach out. We want to be able to always be a presence of sharing and relationships that becomes a **transparent gaze** through which each brother and sister may come to rediscover his or her human dignity.

May it please the Lord to expand our presence in the Cerignola region in order to enhance our ministry for our brothers and sisters. We have been asked to:

Organize volunteer experiences or summer work camps for youth and other groups, helping all of them in a concrete way to delve more deeply into and live the charism of Vincent de Paul.

Petition civil authorities so that immigrants might enjoy the rights due every human person: a house, a job....

In the service of the migrants

Share experiences and engage in times of reflection and comparison of experiences and activities with those in similar situations in order to continually strengthen the network of resources.

Encouraging and motivating us, the following words of Saint Vincent to our first Sisters resound in our hearts:

“If God is pleased, Sisters, to grant this grace to your Company, that, through you, poor persons will be served, children instructed, and this house enabled to subsist as it has hitherto done and to admit and form the young women who present themselves with the intention of serving God, and who, in their turn, will render Him the same services as you do, won't that be a great happiness for you?” (CCD IX, p. 388)

Province of Naples

MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES ON THE PERIPHERIES

Province of North India

Serving Tribal People

May 26, 2015

Introduction

With more than 1 billion inhabitants, India has the largest tribal population in the world (more than 84 million). Of all the states of India, Orissa has the largest number of tribes, and these tribes mainly inhabit the Eastern Ghats hill range, which runs in the north-south direction. They belong to three linguistic divisions, namely Khonds, Santals and Sauras. The Kondhs, or the Kui as they call themselves, are the largest tribal population in Orissa. We also serve the tribal people through our five houses in the North Eastern states. They belong to the tribes of Marams, Maos, Mizos and Karbis.

Seventy-five years ago the four Daughters of Charity from Madrid, Spain, arrived bringing with them a small branch of the Company of the Daughters of Charity to implant it in the Indian soil. That little branch they planted has grown into a tree that not very huge but a robust tree. The Province currently has 41 local communities and 222 Sisters. Eighty-two Sisters are at the service of tribal people, serving in 14 local communities.

Service in promotion of the tribal people has been very much a priority in the life of our Province since its very foundation. Our Founding Sisters launched themselves



Testimonies

In the service of the tribal populations

into the fields of education and health care, social welfare programs, promotion of women and children and pastoral care of the new Christian communities.

Education through schools and hostels

Given the situation of the tribal people, it is quite understandable that parents or village people did not care to educate their daughters. They often could not understand its value and found it a waste of time and expense to educate the children in schools. They wanted the children to care for their younger children or assist them in farming, by which they could earn their food. When the schools were organized in these deep interior villages, Sisters rang the school bell in the morning and went to the homes in the village to convince the parents to send their daughters to the school. It was more tedious than teaching itself. Gradually these village children were kept in a hostel to provide them with food, clothing and coaching to facilitate their education. Some of them were over age for the classes, but through regular coaching and supervision, some of them were able to go to higher classes. Little by little, some of them completed Class VII (upper primary/middle school) and entered into small jobs as teachers, clerks, and in other areas. Slowly a gradual change took place in the mindset of the people, and they began to value education a little more. Raikia and Surada were the main centers of education with a hostel and an orphanage for both girls and boys. The boys were cared for by our Vincentian brothers and we cared for the girls.

In the 1960s and 70s, awareness of education spread farther into the interior villages, and they began to send their daughters to schools and hostels for education and Christian formation. Other schools and hostels were opened, thanks to which many more students completed their matriculation, after which they continued their higher education or trainings, thus equipping themselves for jobs and better future prospects in life. It was remarkable how the living standards changed in the villages once the children completed their matriculation. Hope sprang into the lives of the people. There were a chosen few who entered into administrative courses with the Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service, after which a few of them obtained jobs in government posts in Orissa. This opened the eyes of many more boys

to get higher education and follow the path of their elders. Christians began to be employed by the government and private agencies. Practically all people in many tribal villages became educated, and at present many of them are in good positions and economically self-reliant. This can also be pinpointed as one of the reasons for the 2008 Khondomal riots that the Hindus carried out against the Christians since Christians were no longer available to them as a workforce.

The hostels, besides promoting education and Christian formation, helped the Christian tribal girls to learn housekeeping, cleanliness and caring for others. This led the way for vocations and for the girls to grow into good Christian mothers in their families.

Health Centers

The tribal families were used to superstitious practices and witchcraft for the healing of their illnesses. They were convinced that diseases were caused by the anger of the gods, so they followed the advice of faith healers and spent a lot of money for animal sacrifices and other things. Patients in very serious conditions were brought to the dispensary for medical care. Once there, they also grew in their Christian faith through prayer and the Word of God. Sometimes these patients were brought on cots carried through the mountains and forest areas. There were occasions when they died on the way. Patients from closer villages and those who could afford it were brought in bullock carts. In the early years, our Spanish Sisters did not have sufficient medicines. During the Spanish civil war and its aftermath, money was scarce. At times Sisters even used holy water and small rice balls as medicines. Through their presence and prayer, however, they brought healing and comfort to the people.

Gradually, we were able to organize health care services in a better way with proper medicines and quality nursing care. There used to be around 150-200 patients daily and mobile clinics to the villages in the afternoon. They were also taught about preventive health care.

Today we have four Health Centers with essential facilities for medical tests and in-patient quarters. With the help of the ambulance, we have the possibility to transport serious patients to better hospitals.

In the service of the tribal populations

We entered into the North Eastern state of Manipur in 2002. There our Sisters encountered many difficulties in the field of health care. People suffered from epidemics of cholera, typhoid, etc. Day in and day out, Sisters were in the village to attend to the calls of the sick. Some, unable to receive assistance on account of the distance and late arrival, died. It was then with the help of district authorities that Sisters were able to provide vaccinations and preventive care. Today the villagers in the surrounding area are healthier.

Care of motherless babies through crèches:

Due to lack of proper facilities for childbirth, many mothers died. Our pioneer Sisters opened the crèches at three centers with facilities for caring for the motherless babies. They were 50 to 60 in each crèche, who could stay until the age of 5. At times, due to various reasons, no relatives were ready to accept the child. The Sisters continued to care for their educational and other needs by placing them in the hostel and school. There are a number of children who had a lot of difficulties, and so they grew up in our orphanage and were helped to settle down in a job, marriage and so on. In the North East, there are a number of divorce cases, after which children are left abandoned by both of the parents, causing a big vacuum in their lives. We care for these children, providing them with free education and accommodations in the hostel. We gradually settle them in, if their relatives fail to do so. As far as possible, we encourage family members or their relatives to take up this challenge, and we support them by bearing their educational expenses. The sponsorship program in all our hostels and schools has played an important role in promoting education among the tribal children.

Catechetical and social awareness program

Once the inhabitants of a village accepted the faith, the Sisters would go to that village along with a priest to strengthen their faith and social values and teach them preventive health care. These journeys were hazardous and very long, without any other means of transportation than walking. Living in the village and sharing their food and lifestyle was very challenging since the houses did not have proper doors, and they feared being attacked by wild animals. During the day, they taught catechism and prepared children and adults for the reception

of the Sacraments. In the evenings, as people came back from the fields, they taught the new Christians about faith and morals. Though challenging, it was deeply inspired by the missionary spirit. These visits and involvement with the people at the grassroots level brought in a lot of change in their lives.

Things have changed today. With the help of the ambulances, the Sisters are able to return to the community at the end of the day.

Today, there are new challenges to meet.

1. Offer English-language education

English-language education is considered to be the best to help the villagers to enter into the main stream and different walks of life; however, providing our children with English-medium education is very expensive, and the tribal people cannot meet that expense. For our part, we don't find enough resources for infrastructure and payment of salaries.

2. Find doctors

Government regulations require a doctor in every health care center. We don't have them, and training them is not easy within our present situation.

Province of North India

Province of Krakow

**“Assistance on Wheels”
for homeless persons**

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Introduction

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At the request of the Priests of the Mission, on September 15, 2011, three Daughters of Charity arrived in **Odessa** to establish an interprovincial local community and become involved in the **DePaul-Ukraine project**, serving homeless persons in that city. The Sisters' home is close to the local community of the Priests of the Mission in the Fontanka neighborhood, on the outskirts of Odessa. They travel daily into central Odessa to serve the poorest of the poor.

Odessa is a port city in the south of Ukraine on the Black Sea, with a population of one million. It is a city of contrasts and contradictions, of great wealth and vast suffering. It is a city where people often go to seek their fortune and often also find disappointment and exploitation, which sometimes leads to the depths of despair and depression. It is a city that conceals more than 3000 homeless persons, not counting children, in its hidden nooks and crannies. Odessa is a city of numerous nationalities and religions. Orthodox Christians under the Patriarchate of Moscow are in the majority and are not favorable to the Catholic Church. Roman and Greek Catholics, Jews, Lutherans and many other Protestant communities make up a small minority perceived as sects in this area. In this part of Ukraine, intact families are

rare. Most people are involved in non-committed relationships and put themselves at risk for disease; sometimes, they end up homeless.

The DePaul-Ukraine project in Odessa has been in existence for five years. It cares for homeless persons to restore their lost dignity, get them back on their feet and help them believe life has meaning. The project's goal is to assist homeless persons who remain in the streets for many reasons as well as individuals who do not have a home because of the failure of the government system that does not care for those who are fragile, unable to deal with difficulties and cannot earn the minimum needed for basic needs.

Those whom we serve are first of all persons who grew up in children's homes and, once they left them, were not able to obtain basic social security coverage from the government or other support to get a good start in life. They felt hopeless, were not able to adjust to adulthood and ended up in an unhealthy environment, with the risk of falling into crime. Other individuals were born and raised in the streets. The government did not provide them the opportunity to grow up in a dignified way in society because it did not care for their parents living in environments affected by alcoholism, drugs and other dangers. Still others got in trouble with the law and, after leaving prison, were not accepted by their families. A frequent reason for homelessness in this region is the inability to establish good, stable family relationships. God and Christian values have been wiped out of the mentality of the residents of Odessa. Real families have been replaced by domestic partnerships, which painfully affect children, wound them and make them unhappy. These children feel useless and as if they do not belong. Yet another frequent reason people find themselves homeless comes from temporarily leaving their families to seek work. Odessa is a place where the mafia has a strong presence and is responsible for many abuses. Often, attempts to earn a living to support one's family result in personal documents being stolen, depression and a reluctance to return home empty-handed. These individuals try to find other ways out of their situation. Because of conditions of life on the streets, they quickly catch various illnesses, and returning home becomes more and more difficult.

In the service of the homeless persons

The DePaul association is responsible for this project. There is also the “**Assistance on Wheels**” program.

With the cooperation of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, employees and volunteers from different religious backgrounds (most are Lutherans or other Protestants), the program provides hot meals each day. The association bought a large bus. So services would operate well, it was divided into three parts. In the first part, near the driver, hot meals are distributed: thick, hearty soup with bread. Volunteers usually serve the food. We have several thermos containers that each hold 20 to 30 liters (5-8 gallons) of hot soup. Each hungry person can eat his or her fill. The second part of the bus, which is larger, is a nicely set-up as a restaurant for eating the meal. Tables, chairs and a counter were installed so that the poor persons would feel comfortable. The third part of the bus is a medical station. Until recently, two Daughters of Charity, Sister Marta and Sister Katarzyna, provided nursing services. In order to improve conditions for patients and the medical service offered by the Sisters, another bus was bought this year. This bus was named “VINCI-MED”. It is bigger and well suited for this service. Because it is difficult to be admitted to hospital, the Sisters provide wide-ranging medical assistance: pharmacological and medical treatment for various diseases. They dress wounds, clean them and care for traumatic injuries, such as dog bites and burns in summer and in winter when homeless persons warm themselves beside underground hot water pipes. They clean head wounds (cuts and lacerations) after beatings and tend to skin diseases. We are delighted at each opportunity to offer appropriate assistance and, in serious cases, the possibility for hospitalization.

The “Assistance on Wheels” program provides assistance in two strategic areas of Odessa. The Vinci-Med goes out to the places where sick persons are since some cannot travel because of the severity of their illness. Very frequently, homeless persons cram into places where bottles and paper are recycled.

As part of our program, the **Day Center** was begun two years ago. Sister Anna, a social worker, disinfects their bodies, cuts their hair and distributes clothes and shoes. This place is very important because, as they change on the outside, persons living in poverty rediscover

their dignity and identity. The Sisters, along with the persons living in poverty, feel the joy of a new start, as the hope of the possibility to find work and to build a brighter future is born.

In collaboration with the Priests of the Mission, the Sisters are also involved in the work assisting persons suffering from drug addiction in the Rehabilitation Center for men established by the *Comunità in Dialogo* Association. In February 2015, a center for women was opened. The Sisters are involved in some shared activities, such as preparing liturgies, among others. This is a very important part of the service of persons living in poverty, which goes ‘beyond’ and searches new possibilities to serve the whole person.

The Sisters’ services also include helping the parish in four separate communities. This ministry involves liturgy, presence and catechesis.

For the success of this ministry, very charitable and accepting community life is indispensable, as well as a deep spiritual life, without which it would be impossible to persevere and offer God to others. We cannot share charity and goodness without drawing from His presence. Deep faith, rooted in the God who is love, is necessary. We must regularly spend quality time near the Source. In this particular ministry, balancing action, prayer and rest is very important in order to restore strength of body and soul.

In order for our ministry with homeless persons to be effective, we need a place that belongs to us as an organization, which we could adapt for a Vincentian service for homeless persons, a simple shelter with a whole set of services: restaurant, health center, showers, etc.

We need benefactors because, otherwise, our work has no future. We need volunteers ready to provide assistance and to give of themselves.

Over these years, our ministry has evolved, and we are moving forward. The initial forms of assistance with a hot meal and medical service have revealed other needs to us. Therefore, we have rented a premises for the Day Center. Homeless persons can receive special assistance concerning their documents as well as psychological support through dialogue and formation gatherings, with separate groups for men and

In the service of the homeless persons

women. A vehicle for better medical assistance has been purchased.

The Sisters also respond to the need for formation for the employees and volunteers through monthly retreats, in cooperation with the Priests of the Mission. Regardless of denomination, everyone is a disciple following the merciful Christ along the Vincentian path. Thanks to this shared path, we learn to look at the person who is poor in the same way, to see Christ in the poor person and to serve Him to the best of our ability.

Province of Krakow

**MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES
ON THE PERIPHERIES**

Province of Great Britain

**“OUT THERE”
Supporting Families of Prisoners**

*“The least esteemed by [others] are perhaps the best loved by God” (St. Louise de Marillac, *Spiritual Writings*, M. 69, p. 803).*

We established “Out There” in 2006 to offer support to families of prisoners who live in Manchester in the north of the Province of Great Britain. Our service is used by Jewish, Muslim and Christian families as well as by families of no faith. We serve all age groups, from babies to people of 90 years of age. We respect the dignity of each person and offer a supportive, compassionate and caring service. Spiritual support is offered to families who request this, and total confidentiality is observed at all times.

For families who find themselves with a member of their family in prison for the first time, this is a traumatic experience. We offer information on the prison system, emotional support, liaison with the local prisons and practical intervention. We do this through home visits to families and by telephone support. We attend the local Prison Visitors’ Center, where we meet new families arriving for their first visit and accompany them through the visits process. Meetings with a senior member of the prison staff take place, which give the families a voice, so they can make changes to improve their visits and highlight their concerns about the family



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In the service of the families of prisoners

member in prison. We organize family days where parents and children can have fun together and support each other, share experience and information. On regular adult days, opportunities for stress-releasing activities are offered by a trained therapist, and the women offer support to each other. One-to-one counselling is offered by a volunteer trained counsellor. “Out There” staff and volunteers offer lifts by car to families or individuals who have special needs so that they can visit their loved one in prison.

When a family turns to us at first, we listen to understand their problems. They are in shock and need to tell their story. They are offered a home visit so that they can talk privately in a space where they feel comfortable. They need information about the prison system and its rules and regulations. We assess the material needs of each family and have an emergency fund so we can respond immediately to acute poverty. We work with several small charities and trusts to lessen the practical needs of families, and we contact local and government organizations when necessary. We educate the wider community about the needs of prisoners’ families through talks and conferences.

“Out There” was established by the Daughters of Charity and is a subsidiary of “Daughters of Charity Services”, our Provincial umbrella service which provides support and safeguarding of our Vincentian values. “Out There’s” current Director is a lay person who has overall responsibility for the strategy and development of the organization. A part-time member of staff has responsibility for the office and is an important first contact with families who telephone in for support. A senior support worker and another colleague are responsible for working directly with families. Local volunteers offer a valuable service to the families in a variety of ways. Cooperation, sharing of information, interaction and support between staff members is crucial to the smooth running of the organization. We do not charge the families; therefore, we do not generate an income. In our society, families of prisoners are not seen as a priority, and they do not attract either public sympathy or funding. Fundraising is therefore very difficult and time consuming.

We know we have had a major impact on the families who have turned to us for help. Since 2006 we have given ongoing support to 1210 families. They have been offered a listening ear at a time of great

emotional, psychological and financial upheaval in their lives. By linking families with professional organizations, we have helped them deal with debt, housing issues and benefits. Through our ministry, we have lessened the social stigma and isolation experienced by families who have a loved one in prison and the impact this has on their day-to-day lives, especially for the children. Our acceptance and professional friendship also helps to lessen their shame at having a member of their family in prison.

Among the families of prisoners, there is a special group: the families who have someone in prison because he has committed a sexual offence. These offenders are like the ‘lepers’ of today’s society, considered ‘unclean’ and ‘untouchable’. The families who continue to support these prisoners are treated in the same way. They lose friends, family and sometimes the respect of the local community; they may also lose their home. In their own words, they are ‘contaminated’ by the offence. At their request we set up a support group where wives, mothers, and siblings are able to share freely with each other the pain, anger, hurt and confusion, and the struggle to forgive and to learn to trust the offender again. This is a unique group in Great Britain and takes us to the peripheries of this particular type of poverty. Each meeting starts with quiet reflection and prayer, and then they share their joys and their moments of hope. Some family members share the impact the special group has on them:

“My son committed a sex offense in 2010. In this group, I feel I can say anything, open up 100%. Say things I cannot say to my friends and neighbors.” S.

“This is my first day in the group and I will come again, as it is just so wonderful to be among people who understand what you are talking about. It is a great relief.” C.

“I have been coming to this group since it first began; it is my husband who committed the offense. It has been helpful, supportive, informative and a safe place to talk and share.” J.

In the service of the families of prisoners

“My brother is in prison. I have found coming to this group you are with people who know what you are going through and what you will be going through, and it just helped me.” S.

“I have been coming since 2009, when my son committed a sex offense. I found the group helpful because I have not felt like the only one affected by this.” M.

“This group is a great life line. I don’t think I would have got through it without meeting all these people who are in the same position.” B.

For us, as Daughters of Charity, these suffering families teach us many things.

“This is a courageous group of women, who have taught me so much. Their unconditional love of the person in prison is an inspiration and reminds me of the unfailing love God has for his people. They have struggled to forgive and live out that forgiveness daily in the face of rejection and incomprehension from friends and family. They live the message of Jesus to take up their cross daily and follow Him. I have been humbled and enriched by the experience of walking with them” (Sister Moira).

How do we see the future?

We always need *more volunteers* to enhance our work and to help us reach more families. *Further funding* is essential to sustain this service to some of the poorest members of our society. Above all, *ongoing sharing of our Vincentian vision and values* is essential to the development and sustainability of “Out There”: Supporting Families of Prisoners. Let us close by calling on the wisdom of St Vincent who said: *“We should groan under the burden of the poor and suffer with those who suffer; otherwise we’re not disciples of Jesus Christ” (CCD XII, Conf. 209, p. 233).*

Province of Great Britain

MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES ON THE PERIPHERIES

Province of Saint Louise - USA

Alongside abused children and youth

Introduction

Our Assembly process has called us to renew our attitudes and ways of serving for a new missionary momentum. In our Assembly Work Document 2, “The Boldness of Charity for a New Missionary Momentum”, we were reminded that *“an authentic relationship with those who are poor allows them to feel loved by God”* (page 4). Constitution 24e challenges us to help our *“brothers and sisters to become conscious of their own dignity and agents of their own promotion.”*

This is precisely the mission of **Marygrove**: we open our doors to abused children and youth whom no one else has been able to help, and we teach them how to open doors for themselves. We give them the time they need to heal and to realize the wonderful people they are inside.

History and Ministry

For almost 170 years, Marygrove has been serving some of the community’s most vulnerable children, who have been removed from their home due to abuse and neglect. Marygrove was established by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in the city of St. Louis, Missouri, in 1849.

In the 1960s, the ministry moved to a less populated area to provide a more restorative, healthier environment for the



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In the service of the children and the mistreated young people

girls they served. Overlooking the Missouri River, this location provides a natural, beautiful setting for the young people in residential treatment to recover from abuse, neglect and other early childhood traumas, and to establish a way of thinking and behaving to help them build positive and healthy lives.

By 1983, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd were preparing to close the facility because of the constraints of resources and the growing needs of the young women served (who had increasingly complex psychiatric issues), which the Sisters were no longer able to meet. At that time the archdiocese approached the Daughters of Charity. The President of the Board of Catholic Charities (Caritas) knew the Daughter of Charity's charism well and decided to entrust it to them.

In 1984, Marygrove expanded its services and began to serve boys as well as girls. Sister Helen Negri has been serving as the Chief Executive Officer since 1984. The ministry has grown into one that provides hope and healing to hundreds of children, teens and families each year, in particular, young people with profound and complex psychiatric issues who have been unable to get the help they need at other agencies. Marygrove has also been expanding its programs to address the emerging needs of the community. For example, our crisis program, which had been housed in two small rooms, with 7 beds in each room, is moving into a larger building, the former convent of the Good Shepherd Sisters, which will allow a 20-bed program.

Today, Marygrove is a comprehensive continuum of residential and community-based programs including therapeutic residential treatment (which has become one of the largest programs in the state), therapeutic foster care, transitional and independent living, crisis care and special education.

As it has grown over the years, it remains focused on delivering corporal and spiritual care according to the charism of the Daughters of Charity. Every child, each of whom is both emotionally and materially impoverished, receives the skills, support and resources to overcome these life-challenging psychiatric issues.

The children at Marygrove have access to education through the on-

campus school or other local schools, receive healthcare through the on-campus clinic, and are able to attend Mass on Sundays. They also participate in recreational activities and have access to a pool, several sports fields and a playground. They are treated with dignity and respect.

The Daughters of Charity demonstrate their commitment and faith by providing the leadership and nurturing the culture of Marygrove, and the Sisters who serve directly with the children, in collaboration with the other staff, ensure that each resident receives the friendship, encouragement and love of self and others as God has intended for them.

Lessons Learned

There are several ingredients to ensure a successful operation. At Marygrove, we take care of children who are seriously disturbed due to years of abuse and neglect, and so it is essential that they have a safe and nurturing environment. The plan for each child is to progress to a less restrictive environment. For the youth in the programs, the goal for them is to advance towards independence. It is crucial, therefore, to have a professional staff of caregivers who understand the balance of compassionate caregiving, discipline and a healthy routine, and who share the commitment of giving Christ-like care to very vulnerable children and youth.

Marygrove has a very low turnover of staff. In fact, several employees have been with us for 20 or more years. There are currently five Daughters of Charity from various local communities in the city serving in administrative, medical, therapy and mission integration roles at Marygrove. Having a leadership team focused on strategic planning is important, as well as an engaged board of directors and many devoted partners in the community.

We know that St. Louise struggled for many years to provide adequate care for the foundling children of her time. In writing to St. Vincent in 1647 about this service, she noted that "*Providence had revealed the care it wished to take of the poor little children*" (L. 196) as she recounts the donations that had come in to provide care for the children.

Similarly today, meeting the financial needs of the ministry of Marygrove

In the service of the children and the mistreated young people

requires ongoing effort. Most of the children at Marygrove have been removed from their home due to abuse and neglect, and are placed by state and local family services entities that provide limited financial support. A professional fundraising/development staff seeks the additional funds from grants and from generous donors in order to operate Marygrove.

Impact and future

Marygrove has continued to expand programs to address the needs of the community, even while other organizations with a similar mission have ceased or reduced operations. In the years ahead, Marygrove will continue its ministry of enriching the lives of the most troubled children and working to prevent child abuse and neglect. Currently, through its various programs, it serves over 1,300 babies, children, teens, young adults and families in need each year. We expect that during 2015, those numbers will increase significantly.

The opening of the Martha E. Jones Center, formerly the Sisters of the Good Shepherd convent, was made possible through a generous bequest of an individual who was deeply committed to the children of Marygrove and had great confidence in the faith-based work of the Daughters of Charity.

This center will further Marygrove's ability to help youth who are homeless as well as families in crisis, and will potentially be a short term residential facility for children immigrating alone from Mexico and Central America. Federal funding in place already allows Marygrove to provide shelter to teens who are homeless from any place within the United States.

For young people in need in the local regions and from other countries, Marygrove is here to offer hope and healing in the example of Jesus through the ministry of the Daughters of Charity and many dedicated collaborators.

Province of Saint Louise - USA

**The missionary testimonies that did not appear in this issue
will be published in the next *Echoes*.**

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Echoes of the Company

The attitude of Mary of Nazareth
shows us
that being comes before doing,
and to leave the doing to God
in order to be truly as he wants us.
It is He who works so many marvels in us.
Mary is receptive, but not passive.
Because, on the physical level,
she receives the power of the Holy Spirit
and then gives flesh and blood
to the Son of God who forms within her.
Thus, on the spiritual level,
she accepts the grace and
corresponds to it with faith.

Pope Francis
Angelus, December 8, 2014

