

# MIC MISSION NEWS

VOL. 51, Nº 2 | APRIL • MAY • JUNE 2024



*To sow seeds of joy and hope! — Since 1923*

*100 Years  
of an Undaunted Mission*

A photograph of a church interior. In the foreground, two young girls in school uniforms are kneeling and working on a large, colorful floral arrangement. A woman is kneeling next to them, guiding them. In the background, other children and women are visible, some standing and some kneeling, in a church setting with wooden pews and walls.

At the Heart of...  
**BEAUTY**

PUBLICATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

## MISSIONARY PRAYER INTENTIONS

### APRIL 2024

**FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN.** Let us pray that the dignity and worth of women be recognized in every culture, and for an end to the discrimination they face in various parts of the world.

### MAY 2024

#### **FOR THE FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS MEN AND WOMEN AND SEMINARIANS.**

Let us pray that religious men and women and seminarians grow in their own vocational journey through human, pastoral, spiritual and community formation, that leads them to be credible witnesses of the Gospel.

### JUNE 2024

**FOR THOSE FLEEING THEIR HOME  
COUNTRIES.** Let us pray that migrants fleeing from war or hunger, forced to undertake journeys fraught with danger and violence, may find shelter and new opportunities in their host countries.

#### **Masses for readers' intentions offered in the following countries:**

January: **Canada** • February: **Cuba**  
March: **Philippines** • April: **Haiti**  
May: **Canada** • June: **Bolivia**  
July: **Malawi** and **Zambia**  
August: **Hong Kong** and **Taiwan**  
September: **Madagascar**  
October: **Peru** • November: **Japan**  
December: **Canada**

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**Offices**  
Missionary Press M.I.C.  
120 Place Juge-Desnoyers  
Laval (QC) Canada H7G 1A4

**Phone:** (450) 663-6460  
**eMail:** [leprecurseur@pressemic.org](mailto:leprecurseur@pressemic.org)

**Web Sites:**  
[www.pressemic.org](http://www.pressemic.org)  
[www.soeurs-mic.qc.ca](http://www.soeurs-mic.qc.ca)

**Publication Director**  
Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

**Assistant Director**  
Marie-Nadia Noël, M.I.C.

**Editor**  
Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

**Editorial Team**  
Emmanuel Bélanger  
Sylvie Bessette  
Maurice Demers  
Éric Desautels  
Nicole Rochon  
Léonie Therrien, M.I.C.

**English Traduction**  
Renée Charlebois

**Proofreading**  
Suzanne Labelle, M.I.C.

**Circulation**  
Yolaine Lavoie, M.I.C.

**Accounting**  
Nicole Beaulieu, M.I.C.

**Layout and Design**  
Caron Communications  
graphiques

**Cover**  
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arranging lesson in Japan  
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# Stopping to Contemplate



By Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

When I saw Martin Beaupré's painting *Il n'y a pas de séparation entre nous et l'univers*, I was captivated by its beauty and depth. It transports us to the heart of infinity, where we discover a Presence.

Indeed, lost in space, I contemplate You, Creator God, You who are at the heart of the beauty that surrounds me. Before this immensity, my heart is aflame, and in a burst of gratitude I cry out, *My God, You are great, You are beautiful!* At the moment of creation, *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.* (Gen 1:31)

This spring issue of MIC Mission News takes us on several journeys that converge at the heart of divine magnificence. After stops in Japan and South America, we'll be returning home, where nature, joy and silence speak to us of beauty. Each person sees it differently, it's a marvelous phenomenon. Beauty depends on what's in each person's heart; it's a matter of perception.

In our fast-paced world, it is difficult to stop and enjoy the silence and interiority that are so beneficial. Our Sister Kyoko Takahashi, originally from Japan, grew up in a Buddhist culture. When I interviewed her, I was able to trace the origins of her missionary vocation. I'm sure you'll enjoy reading these pages. As for Sister Murielle Dubé, she recounts an international meeting in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where young people committed themselves to the mission under the



Martin Beaupré, 48x48, *There is no separation between us and the universe.*

– Photo: Galerie Beauchamp. All rights reserved.

aegis of Delia Tétreault. In Quebec, Sister Agathe Durand explains the ins and outs of an ambitious project to help immigrants in Granby. One morning, Mégane Abel, a young bookseller, welcomes a *little soul* with a passion for literature and discovers that she is capable of spontaneous generosity.

With Sylvie Bessette, let's be ecological optimists and sing *Hymne à la beauté du monde*. Finally, Emmanuel Bélanger calls on us to discover the profound meaning of beauty through history, while Rachel Duplessis and Sister Monique Bigras invite us to deep meditations on beauty, apostolic commitment and God.

Dear readers, take the time to savor these articles, which approach beauty from a variety of angles. Stop for a few moments to interiorize the present at the heart of our world and discover the hidden face of its splendor.

Enjoy your reading!

*Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.*



AT THE SOURCE OF M.I.C. HISTORY

# A Brief History of Japan

(Excerpts from the DVD *M.I.C. au Japon*, 2010, by Céline Bourbeau, M.I.C.)

**T**he Japanese archipelago lies at the easternmost tip of the Asian continent. Although it has long been influenced by Chinese civilization, it occupies a very distinct place among the countries of Asia.

In their relations, as in their works of art, the Japanese people have always sought to create a climate of harmony.

Even the 17-article Constitution of 604 contains some astonishing guidelines: it is hoped that harmony will be encouraged, and that honesty will be the first principle of righteous behavior. The Japanese people are heirs to universal values that are precious building blocks for evangelization.

## Naze

The town of Naze, on an island south of Japan, welcomed the first M.I.C. Sisters. In 1923, the Canadian Franciscans had opened a superior school for girls. In 1926, Father Calixte Gélinas visited Canada, commissioned to recruit Sisters for this and other future works. On December 4 of that year, three young M.I.C. went to teach music and English, and to supervise the boarding school. Difficult tasks when you don't speak the language. In addition to studying the language, the

Sisters were responsible for the upkeep of the sacristy linen at all the mission stations, preparing the liturgy and making the communion wafers.

## THE JAPANESE PEOPLE ARE HEIRS TO UNIVERSAL VALUES THAT ARE PRECIOUS BUILDING BLOCKS FOR EVANGELIZATION.

Three new recruits arrived in October 1927. The following year, they welcomed the perpetual profession of two companions. In September 1929, however, they suddenly faced an ordeal: Sr Marie-du-Perpétuel-Secours, who suffered from tuberculosis, had to return to Canada, where she died two years later. That same year, Sr de l'Enfant-Jésus was appointed to the new mission of Kagoshima, where three companions from Canada joined her in opening a kindergarten.

But life was far from easy at Naze: two other Sisters fell ill with tuberculosis and were put on complete rest.





Sr Lucienne Renaud at the orphanage, 1958. – Photo: M.I.C. Archives

## Kagoshima

The historic city where Francis Xavier landed in 1549 to evangelize Japan, Kagoshima, had around 200 Catholics for a population of 130,000. Although the M.I.C.s achieved a few conversions, the beginnings were difficult: the prefectural authorities refused to open a kindergarten and a hospital would have cost \$25,000. Delia Tétreault, our founder, could not approve such a project due to lack of personnel and financial resources. In 1933, the Naze and Kagoshima stations had to be closed.

## Koriyama and Aizu-Wakamatsu

At the invitation of Father Émile-Alphonse Langlais, provincial of the Dominicans, two missions were opened: Koriyama, in 1930, and Aizu-Wakamatsu, in 1933. Christians were happy to welcome the Sisters, but the population was suspicious of foreigners. They

started studying the language and giving private English lessons.

Some 65 kilometers from Koriyama lies Aizu-Wakamatsu, a feudal town with a historic castle. Two Sisters were called from Koriyama to go there. In September 1934, the kindergarten opened its doors to 16 children. At Christmas, the community celebrated seven adult baptisms, including that of their English teacher.

## The War

In 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, living conditions became difficult: Wakamatsu's M.I.C. were declared prisoners in their convent, with two policemen on duty. Surveillance was tight. The Sisters' house in Koriyama was requisitioned. The last eight M.I.C. were then part of a prisoner exchange. The door to Japan temporarily closed.



Srs Agnès Lavallée, Germaine Noiseux, Marie-Jeanne L'Heureux in Naze, 1932. – Photo: M.I.C. Archives

## After the War

Although the war ended in the West in May 1945, hostilities continued in the Pacific. On August 6, an atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, killing tens of thousands. Three days later, on August 9, an even more powerful bomb fell on Nagasaki. A disastrous war: Tokyo in ruins, the country devastated.

However, as early as Christmas 1945, Bishop Michel Urakawa of Sendai asked for apostolic work to be resumed. On October 1, 1946, a group of nine Sisters embarked on the *Marine Falcon*, a warship repatriating some 500 Japanese and many missionaries. In Koriyama and Aizu-Wakamatsu, the Sisters saw to the organization of works: reopening kindergartens, catechism classes, English lessons and care of the sick.

Then, in 1948, a mission was opened in Tokyo. The local notables asked for a nursery school. The convent became a hive of activity.

In 1949, in Aizu-Wakamatsu, a seed was planted: a two-classroom school was named Xaverio. Some 70 children climbed the stairs to reach the third floor.

In 1950, a dispensary was set up, receiving around 30 patients a day. The following year saw the official opening of the orphanage, as the number of children grew steadily.

**SOME 70 CHILDREN  
CLIMBED THE STAIRS TO  
REACH THE THIRD FLOOR.**

August 5, 1953 was a day of great joy for the Japanese mission: Sr Catharina Sachiko Hongo, the first Japanese M.I.C., was professed in Pont-Viau. The novitiate opened with four postulants.



By 1965, the Wakamatsu school had 616 pupils and the Koriyama school 752. Although there was not a triumphant apostolic harvest, hope sprouted from the Christian seed.

Over thirty years later, in 1997, the AsMIC movement was born in Japan. Two Sisters went on mission to the Philippines in 1977, and two more to Haiti.

In June 2008, a Peruvian sister, Ana Alvarado, and two Japanese Sisters opened a new mission in Gyoda for the Diocesan Migrant Pastoral Center. In 2019, Marie-Juna Laguerre, from Haiti, joined the MIC community in Japan to participate in the mission of the local Church.

Japan's door remains open to whatever God has in store. 🌸



The M.I.C. Community in Japan today. – Photo: M.I.C.



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# A Meditation on Beauty

*In everything which gives us the pure and authentic feeling of beauty there really is the presence of God. There is as it were an incarnation of God in the world and it is indicated by beauty.*

SIMONE WEIL, Gravity and Grace



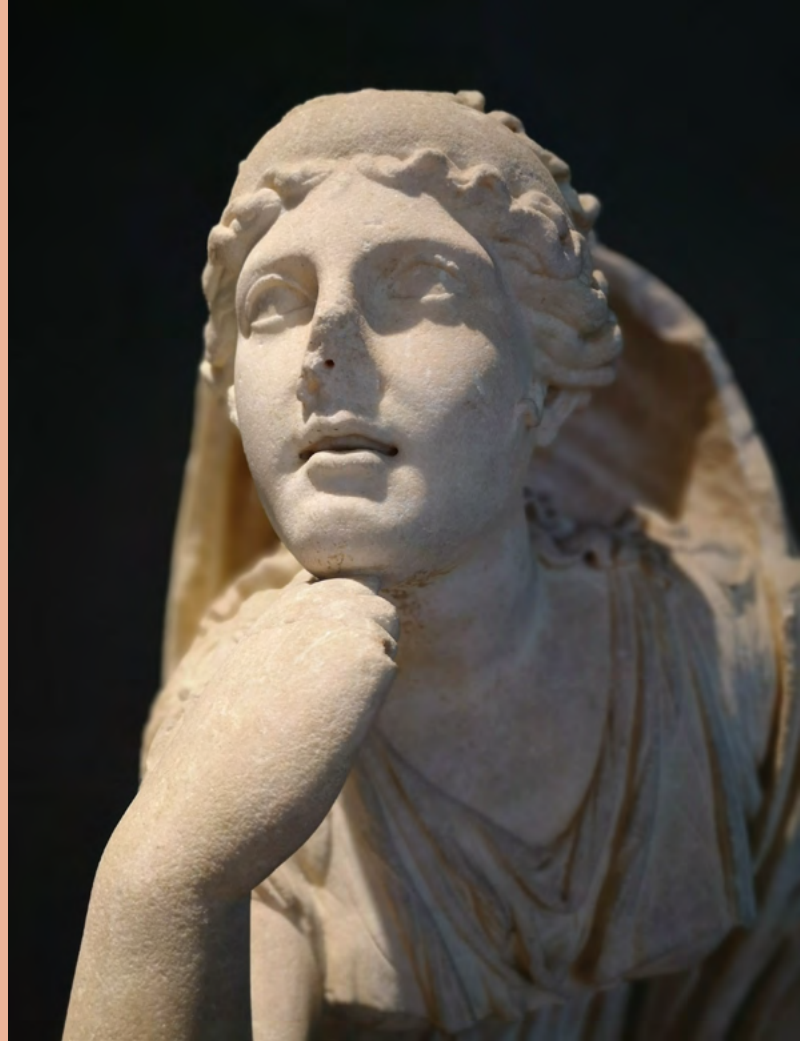
By Emmanuel Bélanger

In this little meditation on the theme of beauty, I'll be following in the footsteps of writers, thinkers and popes who have attempted the impossible: to say something that truly does it justice.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had already understood that the idea of universe or world — the Greek *cosmos* and the Roman *mundus* respectively — referred to a harmonious whole, to celestial beauty and purity. The world was such when civilization, at its best, enabled everyone to live a good and beautiful life together. This was reflected not only in the harmony of civic life, but also in the glory and beauty of the nine arts or, should I say, the nine Muses.

In the face of beauty, man recognizes, often subconsciously, something beyond himself, something he cannot appropriate. We've all experienced this feeling of transcendence, ecstasy and wonder. The phenomenon is so intense that psychologists refer to it as "Stendhal syndrome".

It is such an admiration of beauty, such a powerful experience, that the person feels emotionally overwhelmed by the sublime. The French writer Stendhal, in his account of a trip to Italy, recounts what he experienced during a stop at Florence's Santa



The Muse Clio, Palazzo Massimo. – Photo: Emmanuel Bélanger

*... it is through this beauty, fully lived and actualized in Christ, that the world rediscovers its original vocation as a child of God.*

Croce Basilica: I had reached that level of emotion where celestial sensations given by the arts and passionate feelings come together. Coming out of Santa Croce, I had a strong heartbeat; it was as if my life had dried up, I walked fearing I would fall<sup>1</sup>.

Beauty speaks to the heart, the heart which the biblical authors understand as the very center of being, the place not only of emotional life, but also of intelligence and will, of responsibilities and choices. In the Old and New Testaments, the heart is the link where man meets God, an event that takes on its full meaning in the human heart of the Son of God, Jesus Christ<sup>2</sup>.



The Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky rightly had one of the characters in his novel *The Idiot* say that *beauty will save the world*, for it is through this beauty, fully lived and actualized in Christ, that the world rediscovers its original vocation as a child of God. The Creator is reconciled with his creation through the mediation of the Incarnation of the Son, true man and true God.

*... the path of beauty leads us to grasp the Whole in the fragment, the infinite in the finite, God in the history of humanity...*

This is exactly the meaning of the quotation at the beginning of this text. Through beauty, Christ continues to become incarnate, illuminating the world with his radiant, salvific Presence. This is the way of beauty (*via pulchritudinis*) that recent popes have spoken so much about.

On November 21, 2009, in his meeting with artists at the Sistine Chapel, jewel of the Italian Renaissance and sacred site of conclaves, Pope Benedict XVI said that *the path of beauty leads us to grasp the Whole in the fragment, the infinite in the finite, God in the history of humanity, and that beauty can become a path towards the transcendent, towards the ultimate Mystery, towards God*<sup>3</sup>.



Pope John Paul II

The Christian life is beautiful, because it is a unique reflection of God's work in space and time. In my opinion, there is no better representation of the beauty of the soul and union with the God of love than the benevolent smile of Mother Teresa or the mischievous, frank gaze of Pope John Paul II. This beauty, like an aura of holiness, is a ray of divine light capable of piercing the darkness of death and the night of evil, which all too often seem to have the last word.

I therefore invite you to live this spring and Easter season as a call to be attentive to the beauty of the Creation that surrounds us, whether by contemplating trees and plants, by disconnecting from the virtual world to put down roots in reality, or simply by allowing a beautiful gesture to emerge from the depths of your heart, enabling your fellow man to set off, joyful and confident, on the path of beauty.

True beauty can be exuberant, not for lack of depth, but because it brings to the surface the overflow of grace that erupts from the depths of the soul, where it meets the abyss-like depths of God<sup>4</sup>. 🌿



<sup>1</sup> Translation of STENDHAL, *Rome, Naples and Florence*, Paris, Gallimard, "Folio classique", 1987.

<sup>2</sup> See *Vocabulaire de théologie biblique*, Publisher by Cerf Under the direction of Xavier Léon-Dufour, S.J.

<sup>3</sup> I invite readers to read and reflect on this magnificent speech: [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20091121\\_artisti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/november/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091121_artisti.html).

<sup>4</sup> Beautiful image by Meister Eckhart, German theologian and mystic born around 1260. The bottomless abyss (*Grund ohne Grund*), the place of union between the soul and God.

# The Beauty of the World

By Sylvie Bessette

In June 1972, Quebec poet Huguette Gaulin committed the irreparable act of setting herself on fire, proclaiming: *You have destroyed the beauty of the world! You have destroyed the beauty of the world!* This environmentalist cry, before its time, shook lyricist Luc Plamondon to the core. In collaboration with composer Christian Saint-Roch, he wrote the superb song *Hymne à la beauté du monde*, which was popularized by Diane Dufresne in 1979. Here is a translation of the magnificent lyrics:

*Let's not kill the beauty of the world  
Let's not kill the beauty of the world*

*Let's not kill the beauty of the world  
Every flower, every tree we kill  
Comes back to kill us in turn*

*Let's not kill the beauty of the world  
Let's not kill the birdsong  
Let's not kill the blue of the day*

*Let's not kill the beauty of the world  
Let's not kill the beauty of the world*

*Let's not kill the beauty of the world  
The earth's last chance  
It's being played out now*

*Don't kill the beauty of the world  
Let's make the Earth a great garden  
For those who come after us  
After us*

Over the past 50 years, and no doubt thanks to visionaries like Huguette Gaulin, ecological science has taken on an ever-increasing role in public discourse, government policy and individual behavior. We are increasingly aware of the perils of anarchic management of natural and human resources.

As an eternal optimist, I'm encouraged by the ecological preservation efforts of humanity as a whole. A project like the Great Green Wall for Sahara and the Sahel inspires me greatly. This African Union plan consists of reforesting a strip of almost 8,000 km that will cross Africa from east to west to combat desertification. Thousands of trees are being planted from Dakar to Djibouti, over a width of 15 kilometers. These species, which are able to withstand

desert conditions, attract a wide variety of fauna and promote a high level of biodiversity. As for the human populations involved in this project, they will benefit from new sources of income and better living conditions.

This is just one example of the fruits of collaboration between states and citizens. I'm sure you're familiar with other collective or individual ecological initiatives in agriculture and other fields, such as recycling organic waste and turning it into compost or improving wastewater management. Through our actions, we can all do our bit to love our Earth and enhance its beauty. Nature itself dazzles us with all she has to offer. There's no better way to capture these marvels than by taking a look at the work of ornithologists, naturalists and





Palm plantation in the desert.

landscape photographers. These artists open our eyes to the extraordinary richness of our environment.

*Hymne à la beauté du monde* not only speaks of the present, but also reflects on the future: Let's make the Earth a great garden / For those who will come after us. The fight to protect the environment and respect our planet brings together all generations in the hope of leaving the world less vulnerable to destructive behavior. The English Industrial Revolution harnessed human labor and brought about a great economic leap forward, but craftsmen and public health were left behind in its wake. Since then, industrialized countries have polluted on a massive scale, whether through ignorance or negligence. They are now trying to rectify the situation.

## A less bleak future

Advances in human knowledge now point to a less bleak future for nature and human environments. The numerous efforts of legislative authorities to limit the use of polluting materials such as natural gas and coal indicate that the process is well underway. I am moved by the beauty of these reflections and efforts. I believe that humanity is on the way to a better understanding of the message God conveys to men and women in Genesis (Gen 1:28-30):

*And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every beast that moveth upon the earth. And God said: Behold, I give you every herb bearing seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree that has fruit in it and bears seed: it shall be your food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that moves upon the earth, having in itself the breath of life, I give every green herb for food. And it was so.*

*Hymne à la beauté du monde  
not only speaks of the  
present, but also reflects on  
the future: Let's make the  
Earth a great garden,  
For those who will come after us.*

This is a precious divine gift to mankind. To dominate and subdue does not mean to crush and damage, but rather to use wisely, respecting the balance and beauty of the world. This is the grace I wish for us. 🌿

*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;  
What is essential is invisible to the eye.*

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

# BEAUTY, Seeing with the Heart

Everyone is looking for it in one way or another. It is often seen as an ideal to be attained. For some, it is a source of self-confidence, inspiration or joy. For others, however, it can give rise to anguish and painful comparisons. What is it all about? Beauty, of course, which has always shaped our lives and influenced our actions and thoughts.

By Rachel Duplessis

## But What is Beauty?

As Oscar Wilde said: *Beauty is in the eye of the beholder*. Beauty has no precise rules, since it depends on the observer's perspective. We can approach it from different angles: aesthetic, inner, natural and even spiritual.



Source: <https://www.meubles-boisetdeco.fr/produit/tableau-carre-peinture-beaute-with-blue-scarf-100x100cm/>

## Aesthetic Beauty

Aesthetic beauty, or outward beauty, is one of the most obvious. It's the visual appeal of a person, object or landscape, with features, shapes and colors that catch our eye. In a world where cultural diversity is omnipresent, it's important to respect differences in dress and physical appearance in order to promote inclusion. Let's not forget that all art is self-expression and should be considered a masterpiece.

## Inner Beauty

Inner beauty refers to the qualities and values we perceive in others. Kindness, benevolence and empathy are examples of characteristics that transcend physical appearance and contribute to a person's attractiveness. It goes without saying that these inner qualities take precedence over appearance, as we read in the First Letter of St. Peter (1 Peter 3:3-4): *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight*. According to exegetes, who are specialists in the interpretation of religious texts, in this passage Peter emphasizes the need for modesty and simplicity of appearance.





Acropolis of Log Drivers, Charlevoix, Quebec – Photo: Rachel Duplessis

They stress the importance of not placing too much value on expensive clothes or ornaments, but rather focusing on lasting inner qualities.

## Natural Beauty

Then there's the beauty of nature, which radiates all around us. It is both physical and spiritual. Impressive landscapes, such as mountain ranges, oceans and meadows, remind us of the existence of a God greater than ourselves. We can also admire natural phenomena such as snow, rain and sunsets. Nature's wonders help us appreciate life and anchor us in the present moment.

## Spiritual Beauty

Finally, spiritual beauty concerns the experience of a relationship with oneself, with others or with the Divine. Although subtle, it is striking. It can be

cultivated through meditation, prayer and the practice of gratitude. It's what gives meaning to life and our existence.

## An Exceptional Rose

*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.* You're no doubt familiar with this famous excerpt from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's philosophical tale, *The Little Prince*. The love he had for his rose and how he cared for it made it more important and oh so much more beautiful than any other rose on his path!

The author tells us that the importance we attach to something, be it a person, an object or even a place, makes it precious in our eyes. So the perception of beauty no longer depends on the qualities or appearance of what we're looking at, but on the value we place upon it. The way we perceive beauty is therefore the result of a fully engaged consciousness.



The Little Prince, animated film by Mark Osborne, 2015.

Do you have an exceptional rose somewhere?

Ultimately, the four manifestations of beauty — aesthetic, inner, natural and spiritual — merge to form a whole, Beauty, which inspires us with happiness and joy. Be yourself and take the time to appreciate your uniqueness. Remember, there's only one of you! 🌸

# At the Heart of Beauty



customers is a young soul ready to swallow words like the earth swallows the waterfall.

## The Little Soul

I remember my first encounter with such a soul. She had come alone, with her parents' permission, I suppose. She wanted to buy as many books as she could with the money she had in her pocket. It was the beginning of the day, and customers were just starting to arrive. The little soul had discreetly begun her tour of the bookshop, exploring every nook and cranny. I eventually offered to help, and she handed me her list. I was familiar with many of the titles, and had even read a few. Her varied taste was similar to mine. I enjoyed browsing our shelves, grabbing a title from the list on the left, a favourite on the bottom, a suggestion on the top. Unfortunately, the little soul had to choose between several books. She seemed to mourn certain decisions, but she recovered quickly.

By Mégane Abel

## A Fascinating Job

In the four years I've spent working in a bookshop, I've always walked a fine line between passion and obsession for books. I must say that my appetite for the stories at the heart of all these pages is unquenchable, constantly rekindled by the dozens of new releases every month.

The most wonderful thing is to be able to live one's passion and share it without embarrassment. Although my main task is to sell books, I don't do it to enrich the bookshop, but rather to enrich the customer's imagination. And sometimes, one of those

---

*She wanted to buy as many books  
as she could with the money  
she had in her pocket.*

---

## A Spontaneous Act

The little soul had followed me like a shadow to the checkout. For someone still so young, I found her very independent and at ease in this adult environment. She had shared her latest readings with me, taking my opinions into account before making her selection. But



perhaps it was I who lacked the maturity of someone my own age. After adding up the total, I noticed that the little soul didn't have enough money to pay for everything. Even then, she remained impressively calm, betrayed only by a slight flush to her cheekbones. She was barely three dollars short.

I realize now that I'm rarely generous, by which I mean that I rarely give without any ulterior motive or regret. I mention this because the rest of this story will reveal this unfamiliar side of me.

More than an hour had passed since the little soul had entered the bookshop and I could see that she didn't want to give up any of the books. The outcome of this visit was rather disappointing. So I decided, out of pure understanding of her love of literature, to pay the missing three dollars myself. This uncharacteristic act was spontaneous.

I had cash on me that day, another very rare thing. It was then that the visitor revealed her youthful soul to me: her eyes sparkled and she stammered apologies in an attempt to refuse or thank me. I collected the money, put the wonderful books in a bag and wished the little soul a good day.

## The Story is Just Beginning

What a surprise it was when, in the afternoon, a few minutes before the end of my shift, the beaming face of the morning's little soul reappeared! She was accompanied by her grandparents, who immediately approached me. After all, I was the one who had shelled out the few dollars to help pay for their little soul's purchases. I was much more embarrassed to receive so many thanks than my little customer had been at the cash register.

I chatted for a few minutes with the grandparents, who were very nice people and passionate about reading too. They had even bought a few titles that the little soul hadn't been able to afford that morning.

To this day, the little soul visits the bookshop regularly. She sometimes asks me for certain titles, but she's beginning to find her way around the sections quite easily. She often comes with friends or family.



Photos: D. Abel

## The Beauty of Books

There's a lot to explain my passion for books, which sometimes borders on obsession. Not only is every book a treasure, it's a treasure that can be shared without hesitation. It shimmers with a thousand and one facets, like a jewel. The books come in all colors, sizes and shapes. The stories, as vast as the imagination, can touch anyone.

For me, books open doors onto universes where I can forget the world I live in. They are also the ties that bind me to people who, as the little soul in this story, like to escape this world. Literature has no age. Books that carry this literature are at the heart of what I call beauty. ∞

# A Legacy to Build On

*More than a century ago, Delia Tétreault, a woman from Mariville, had a crazy dream: to share her life and her gifts with those who didn't have her good fortune, and especially her faith in God.*



**By Agathe Durand, M.I.C.**

One day, she left her village, believing that her dream would come true in Montreal, in the underprivileged neighborhoods. She took care of the poor, the sick and the illiterate, even going so far as to learn the language of the immigrant children she welcomed into her catechism classes.

During this time, the dream became a call. Initially an inner call, it was confirmed by contact with other people, who were also invited to go beyond their boundaries in pursuit of a mission. And so a missionary family was born.

The Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, founded in 1902, has grown through generations of people called to give the gift of their lives, like an ardent thanksgiving. *God has given us everything!* exclaimed Delia. The joy of the Gospel could become the heart of a universal mission.

From one country to another, from culture to culture, missionaries have moved in response to Jesus' call: *Go into all the world!* Today, the procession of the baptized and the emissaries, the missionary disciples, is made up of people of all origins, showing clearly that the Christian people, and particularly the Church, is the fruit of an ecumenical work.



The three participants receive the blessing of the celebrant, Réal Lévesque, P.M.É. – Photo: M-P. Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

Some fifteen years ago, in Quebec, the generation of old missionaries had a crazy dream of their own. Aware of the richness of the lives of retired missionaries and other members from diverse backgrounds, they longed for a return to their roots: to open a new mission in the native region of the founder, Delia Tétreault. They searched, prayed, consulted and visited the diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe. The call became clearer, leading these beautiful people to Granby, where dozens of M.I.C.s have served the population, especially through education.

Different times, different needs. It turns out that helping immigrants is a very important mission for the local church. This movement had already begun





From left to right: Srs France Royer-Martel, Kyoko Takahashi, Lise Tremblay at the tomb of Mother Delia. – Photo: M-P. Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

France Royer-Martel (formerly from South America), Kyoko Takahashi (from Japan) and Lise Tremblay (missionary in Haiti). They are looking forward to meeting the people they will serve. They will be delighted to meet up again with lay associates (AsMIC), already committed to the universal mission. Alumni from the 1960s to 2015 may well recognize their teachers, and they will be very welcomed to join us as we build a beautiful legacy together!

In her fraternal message, Sister Cecilia Mzumara, Superior General, wrote: *This bold gesture is sure to ignite the desire for the missions in the younger generations of the Institute.* That's our wish too!

with *Solidarité ethnique régionale de la Yamaska (SERY)*, founded in 1992.

The Laval Motherhouse could finally see the unthinkable take shape! On Sunday, January 28, during the Eucharist, the community celebrated the dispatch of three new missionaries to Granby. They are Sisters

Sister Sylvia Dupuis, Provincial Superior, affirmed, for her part, her certainty that *Mother Delia of Marieville and the Diocese of Saint-Hyacinthe will accompany us on this project. It's a way for us to live out our provincial mission statement: Missionary disciples with Mary, living the joy of knowing Jesus Christ and sharing him in our different living environments.* ☺

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Young people gather from various South American countries. – Photo: M.I.C.

# Fiery Hearts and Moving Feet

By Murielle Dubé, M.I.C., Cochabamba, Bolivia

## Delia's Dream

*One evening [...] I believe I heard (from the voice of Our Lord) that I should later found a congregation of missionary women and work towards the foundation of a similar society of men, a seminary for the foreign missions modeled on the one in Paris. This was in 1883! Around 1919, Delia decided to meet with the bishops of the Province of Quebec to tell them about the project. Some believed in it; others doubted it. At one point, Bishop Paul Bruchési said to her: If you want a seminary for the foreign missions, find me a priest. She*

*found him over a shared cup of coffee. It was Father Louis-Adelmar Lapierre, who would become PMÉ and vicar apostolic of the Manchurian mission. The Société des Missions-Étrangères was founded in 1921 on the initiative of the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Quebec. Without fanfare, a woman of the Church with a heart as big as the world, Delia Tétreault, collaborated on this project. She saw far, she saw big. Her Yes, a hymn of thanksgiving for the gift of faith, still resounds in a long Magnificat!*





Missionary animation by young people. – Photo: M.I.C. /P.M.E.

## Cochabamba, Bolivia, October 2023

We're living through a historic event. For the first time, in Cochabamba, Bolivia, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and priests from the Société des Missions-Étrangères du Québec are present at an international meeting of young people for mission. We are a small group of 19 people from 11 countries: Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Kenya, Philippines, Bolivia, Peru and Canada. Young and not-so-young alike, we are all here for three weeks of integration, immersion and discernment based on the mission, always current, but constantly reinventing itself, taking into account the needs, the reality, the aptitudes of each missionary, and above all the call: *Come! Go!* So I will try to tell you about this experience of deep communion and solidarity in which Wilma Jaldín and I had the grace to participate, because our fraternity — Petronila Chira, Nancy Paz and the two of us — had said yes to the project.

## Integration: Let's Talk About Reciprocity

The Christian community of Quechua migrants welcomes us and invites us to reciprocity: everyone has something to share and receive. This is the Eucharist and the *apthapi*, a meal shared in joy and celebration, in giving, welcoming and mutual recognition.

The testimony of Mgr Iván Vargas, auxiliary bishop of Cochabamba, who lives in Quillacolba, takes place in

the midst of this back-and-forth. Recalling his formative years as a seminarian, he recalls the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception who accompanied him. He is here today, in all simplicity, *because you, my Sisters from Canada, were here yesterday with your faith, your confidence, your missionary daring!*

We are having the same experience as we visit the Higher Institute of Theological Studies at Bolivia's Catholic University. *My Sisters, what*

*you have sown continues to grow! What can I say to you, Lord, but thank you eternally!*

Interculturality, between us and the groups we meet, makes us realize the value of some very important little words that transform everyday life: listening, welcoming, flexibility, respect, dialogue, service. War is wreaking havoc in many countries, and some governments take pleasure in stirring up tensions between rival groups. But here we are, people of different ages and cultures, all called to be witnesses to the great and beautiful family of Jesus, children of the same Father, brothers and sisters, complementary and partners in the service of the same great and beautiful mission. How exciting!

## Immersion: Burning Hearts, Moving Feet

Three weeks is a short time, but we are experiencing some incredible things. Leaving our comfort zones, we are called to be surprised by a hyper-creative God, who never ceases to deploy new forces of mercy, tenderness, justice, equity and dignity.

Here are a few testimonials from participants:

*I didn't know what to do. I was trembling with fear, but the smile of this little girl totally dependent on the care she received will always be with me. (Jorge, from Costa Rica, serving at Puntiti Therapeutic Community.)*



Young people fraternizing. – Photo: M.I.C. /P.M.E.



The joy of international meeting. – Photo: M.I.C. /P.M.E.

*The visit to Morochata, what an unforgettable moment! The hospitality and simplicity of rural life, and the joy of mission to the rhythm of pastoral agents who unite song with service, all this inspires me!* (Eveline, from Kenya, about a weekend immersion in Morochata.)

*I found myself in the middle of a people's market, selling yogurt and bearing witness to the tenderness of a God who became one of us and shared in all our human reality.* (Pedro Emilio, from Venezuela, a Foreign Missions priest serving at the public market.)

*Gathered by the Church of Cochabamba in the city's main square for the vocational and missionary feria, we had an incredible experience. Lay people, nuns, priests, members of various organizations, all together to celebrate the joy of faith and mission in communion with God's people.* (Cynderella, from Kenya.)

## Discernment: Speak, Lord, Your Servants are Listening

It is all this and much more from our history of yesterday, today and tomorrow that we bring, gather and contemplate in prayer. Three days of silence to listen to what the Lord is saying in the depths of our being, and to respond joyfully to his call. Each of us, at the end of this intense time of prayer, has something new to add to our diaries. Our God is always calling us. There is no age limit to hearing his voice and following in his footsteps alongside Mary of the Magnificat.

## A Second Cup of Coffee for the Next Appointment

The M.I.C. and SMÉ experience in Cochabamba has been rewarding. The multidisciplinary team, with its shared leadership, is an example to follow. Cochabamba is a theological

place where the world's emergencies intersect, and where opportunities for missionary insertion and training can be lived out in complementarity and partnership. A pied-à-terre is available. A pilot project can take root.

*Let us listen to the cry of the peripheries and dare to go out to meet life with Mary of the Magnificat.*

(Orientation majeure, M.I.C. 2022-2027.)

*To run the risk of encounter in the service of the Gospel.*

(SMÉ Centenary Theme, 1921-2021.)

Something wants to be born. Fiery hearts, moving feet! Let's enter the synodal process of the universal Church. Make way for enthusiasm, creativity and faith. A new cup of coffee awaits us! ☕



# Kyoko's Big Heart

*What a joy it was to welcome our Sister Kyoko to the Motherhouse last summer! We thoroughly enjoyed this rare visit from Japan.*

*I took the opportunity to ask her a few questions about her place of origin and her desire to become a Missionary Sister of the Immaculate Conception. Simply curious at first, I was totally fascinated by Kyoko. Here is a summary of her story...*

**By Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, m.i.c.**

## Family Life

Kyoko was born in Sapporo, Japan's fifth largest city by population and third largest by area. The birth of an eldest daughter, to be followed by four sons, took her parents by surprise, especially her grandfather, as they had hoped to have a son who would one day take over the family lumber and bicycle business.

Kyoko was raised in a Buddhist family. Every morning, she watched her mother pray before the small altar dedicated to Buddha, offering the family's morning rice to him. Kyoko grew up in that environment. It wasn't until she reached school age that she opened up to the Catholic religion. Her primary schooling was



Kyoko. – Photo: M-P. Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

with Franciscan nuns from Germany. She enjoyed studying, but felt particularly drawn to catechism classes. At 17, she asked to be baptized. Her parents did not object, as Catholics had a good reputation. Deep down, Kyoko already felt the call to religious life, but found the boarding school community too strict. She was looking for something different.

## Adolescence

Kyoko had to move to Tokyo to continue her studies. For the first time in her life, she left her native region, traveling by train and boat. In Tokyo, she couldn't find a place to stay. One of her friends invited her to the home of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, where she lived. Sister Rita Blais welcomed her in all simplicity. Kyoko was charmed by her jovial openness and warmth. Immediately, her ideal was taking shape: to become a mother with a big heart, like Sister Rita. After having spent time with the M.I.C., she saw in this large international family the answer to her hopes. Indeed, the young woman was nurturing in her heart a deep desire to live in a family where there is love for one another. She had always wanted to love and be loved. She understood



Little one from kindergarten. – Photo: M.I.C.

the importance of a close-knit family where children are cherished. The truth is, she wanted to know the big sister she wished she had.

**SHE WAS DELIGHTED  
AND GRATEFUL TO DISCOVER  
THAT SHE HAD SISTERS  
ALL OVER THE WORLD.**

## Kyoko, Nun

At the age of 23, Kyoko decided to become a nun, but her parents did not approve. Her grandmother came to Tokyo to convince her granddaughter to give up the idea, but, seeing the atmosphere of simplicity among the nuns, she remained silent and finally gave her assent. Kyoko's spiritual director encouraged her, saying he saw the beginnings of a religious vocation in her. She then returned to Sapporo, where her mother

wanted her to stay with her brothers, but Kyoko persisted in her ideal of becoming a nun.

After many trials and tribulations, Kyoko entered the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. She did her postulancy and novitiate in Tokyo. One day, the superior told her that she would have to complete her formation in the Philippines. Not knowing what a missionary community was really like, Kyoko was surprised and didn't want to go. However, after careful consideration, she accepted to go to Manila.

**AT THE CONVENT,  
HER DESIRE TO BE  
PART OF A BIG FAMILY  
WAS FULFILLED.**

## An Open Heart

In the Philippines, Kyoko's eyes were opened to another reality. The beauty of nature and, above all, the kindness of the people amazed her. She was delighted and grateful to discover that she had Sisters all over the world. Her mother's heart was filled.

Later, she would become a member of the formation team at the MIC International Scholasticate in Canada, the home of Delia Tétreault, founder of the congregation. What a surprise! There were 11 Sisters of 8 different nationalities! Kyoko had always wanted an older sister. At the convent, her desire to be part of a big family was fulfilled.

Back in Tokyo, Kyoko worked in education at all levels, but had a particular fondness for kindergarten. She marveled at the candor of the little ones, their openness to God's love. She admired mothers who devoted their lives to the happiness of their offspring. Isn't this the foundation of world peace? She established a beautiful relationship with the parents and children of the kindergarten. Her new family was a joy to her heart.

I enjoyed writing about Kyoko. I hope to see her again soon. 🌿



# With You, O Lord



**CHIEKO UCHIMURA, M.I.C.**  
1942-2023  
Niigata, Japan

CHIEKO often experienced the passage through the *Narrow gate* of which Jesus spoke in Mt 7:1. The eldest of a family of 3 children, she appreciated their move to Yokohama, Tokyo. It was there that she discovered the Catholic Church and the religious life that attracted her. She was baptized at the age of 14 and, despite fierce opposition from her non-Christian mother, she entered the novitiate on February 2, 1967. She would go on to be an effective and much-appreciated leader at the Orphanage Ste-Marie in Koriyama, as principal of the Kindergarten in Tokyo and as provincial Superior from 2002-2009. Her serenity always concealed the crosses in her path. In 2006, the *narrow gate* of cancer led her slowly towards the *Great Gate*, which God opened for her on October 17, 2023.



**YOLANDE RENAUD, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Pierre-Marie*  
1929-2023  
Loretteville, Quebec

Strengthened by the family values that shaped her, Sister Yolande was always faithful to her deep-rooted faith. As a young girl, she became interested in the missions through the magazine *Le Précurseur* and was moved by her mother's desire to offer a nun to Christ. On February 1, 1955, she entered the novitiate, happy to fulfill God's will, despite the sacrifice she was making by leaving her family. In 1963, she undertook studies to become a nurse and midwife, then left in 1967 for Haiti, where her new fellow citizens would benefit for 28 years from her skills and qualities of listening, wisdom and sensitivity. On her return to Quebec, she made a significant contribution to our health services, before benefiting from them herself until her reunion with her family in the Father's House on November 8, 2023.



**JEANNINE BOILY, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Saint-Pamphile*  
1929-2023  
La Malbaie, Quebec

An authentic spiritual energy fueled Sister Jeannine's apostolic and fraternal experience throughout her long life. She entered the novitiate on August 8, 1949. In 1963, she realized her missionary dream at our college in Guatemala. The difficulties of adaptation — climate, altitude, language — exalted her total gift to the Lord. In 1980, our Guatemalan mission closed its doors: terrorism was the order of the day. Peru received Sr. Jeannine in 1984. She competently took on various ecclesial services in parishes without a resident priest. In 2006, she returned to Quebec. Despite failing eyesight, she continued her mission in our health services, of which she became a beneficiary in 2011 until November 28, 2023, the day she was called to enter the Beatific Vision.



**LUCILLE GAGNON, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Marie-Isabelle*  
1928-2023  
Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec

On January 25 1928, the Gagnon household in Rivière-du-Loup was filled with joy with the arrival of twin girls, Lucille and Lucienne. Lucille joined our novitiate on August 8, 1951. Having been introduced by her mother to a variety of activities such as knitting, spinning and weaving of wool and linen, sewing and cooking, it was with serenity that she took on the challenges of her missionary work, most notably in Haiti for 40 years. Working as a cook for over 20 years, she trained many young girls in this art. A woman of faith, having confidence in Mary and gifted with apostolic fervour, she led prayer and faith-sharing groups. Her return to Quebec in 2004 did not diminish her joy. On December 27, 2023, she was welcomed to the Eternal Banquet.



# Harmony

Too often, You've been portrayed as a distant, boring figure. Yet You are the Lord of dance, joy and song. Is it not You who placed music in our hearts? Is it not You who imagined the cheerful notes, the playful trills of birdsong?

Everything in the universe is harmony, concert of joy and thanksgiving. Let my little note join the melody of time and space. In its own way, it tells of Your

greatness, of the thousand and one wonders with which You have sprinkled my life throughout its days and nights. My own suffering adds beauty to this symphony. All in minor key, it cries out to You and tells You that without You I could not make it through.

Living God, God of my joy, praise be to You!

Monique Bigras, M.I.C.

