

MIC

VOL. 51, Nº 1 | JANUARY • FEBRUARY • MARCH 2024

MISSION NEWS



To sow seeds of joy and hope! — Since 1923

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At the Heart of
benevolence

PUBLICATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

MISSIONARY PRAYER INTENTIONS

JANUARY 2024

For the gift of diversity in the Church: Let us pray for the Spirit to help us recognize the various charisms within the Christian community and discover the richness of the different ritual traditions within the Catholic Church.

FEBRUARY 2024

For the terminally ill: Let us pray for the terminally ill and their families, that they may receive high-quality medical care and support.

MARCH 2024

For new martyrs: Let us pray for those who risk their lives for the Gospel, in different parts of the world, that they may enrich the Church with their courage and their missionary impulse.

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**

VOL. 51, N° 1 | JANUARY • FEBRUARY • MARCH 2024

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A Call to Benevolence



By Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

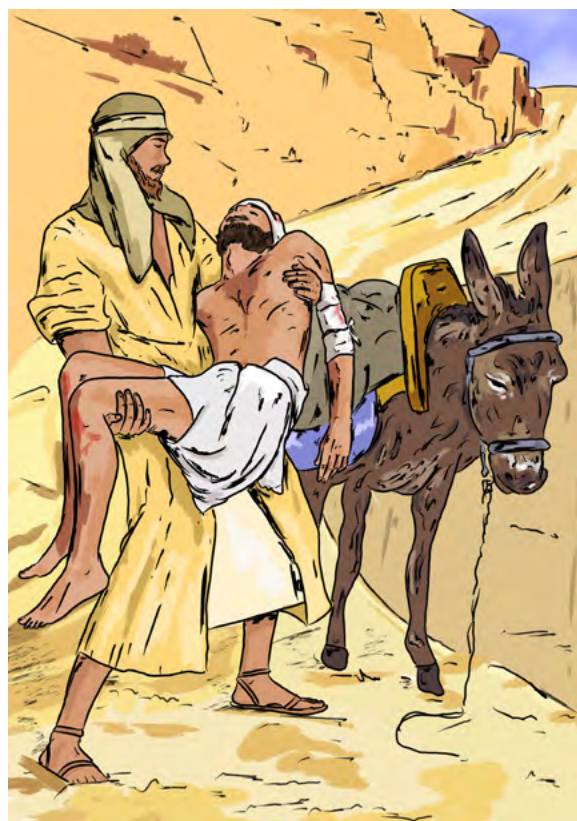
Within the Catholic Church, the month of October was an important time of reflection and discernment as the representatives of God's people gathered in synod. Men and women, seated at the same table, listened to each other. Indeed, the synod is a time of intense sharing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to respond to the demands of our modern times.

We live in a world in crisis, in search of answers, where wars break out, forcing victims to flee to find refuge in other countries. Natural disasters leave millions homeless. As they become aware of these tragic events, Christians of all nationalities are invited to question themselves. It is a call to step outside ourselves, a call to benevolence.

But what exactly is benevolence?

A few examples may speak louder than a simple definition. Opening the Old Testament, we find an illustration when Abraham's servant begins to pray to Yahweh in these words (Gn, 24:12): *Lord, God of my master Abraham, grant me success today, and show your kindness to my master Abraham.*

In St. Paul's letter to the Galatians (5:22-23), we discover that benevolence is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It can inspire us to behave in a welcoming way towards the people we meet, even though they are strangers. The example of the Good Samaritan helps us to understand its full meaning: he stops by the wounded man, carries him to the inn and even gives money to the innkeeper for his care.



Benevolence is thus defined as an individual's disposition to aim for the good and happiness of others. As Pope Francis says: The love of God is realized in the love of your neighbor.

Everyday benevolence

In everyday life, we all have countless opportunities to be kind: a teacher to his students; a nurse to her patients; parents to their children. We can all give a minute's attention to a stranger walking down the street, or give up our seat on the metro to someone who needs it more than we do. These small gestures are acts of kindness that spring from the overflow of the heart, from a profound charity where we welcome others without discrimination.

As you read the articles in this issue, you'll discover various aspects of benevolence, an invitation to delve into it.

Enjoy your reading!

Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, m.i.c.

THE SOURCE OF M.I.C. HISTORY

Taiwan: 1954 to the Present Day

{ From the DVD *M.I.C. in Taiwan*, 2019, by Huguette Chapdelaine, M.I.C. }

Taiwan's origins date back to prehistoric times, when melting glaciers pushed a small mountain range away from the Chinese mainland, creating an island.

In the 16th century, Portuguese sailors discovered the island and named it Formosa, meaning *beautiful island*. A century later, the Dutch colonized part of the island and christianized some of the aboriginal tribes. In 1683, they were driven out by Zheng Cheng Kung (or Koxinga, the name given to this Chinese privateer by the Europeans), a supporter of the Ming dynasty which reigned from 1368 to 1644. In 1646, the Qing dynasty took control of the island, a stranglehold that lasted until 1911. In 1895, China was defeated by Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War. That same year, China signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, ceding Taiwan to the victor. This led to the Japanese occupation of the population, which lasted for 50 years, until 1945.

Following World War II and Japan's surrender, Taiwan was handed over to the UN. Between 1945 and 1949, General Chiang Kai-shek arrived on the island with two million Chinese: soldiers, teachers, students and civilians, all with the ambition of retaking the continent from the Communists. Slowly, the Republic of Taiwan progressed. For Mao's China, this overpopulated, overdeveloped and highly educated little corner



Huguette Chapdelaine, M.I.C., on mission in Taiwan. – Photo: M.I.C. Archives

of the world became a renegade province that had to return to the fold!

Democratization took hold in the 1970s. Twenty years later, it was articulated around an independence movement that gathered momentum until 2000. For the first time in Taiwan's history, a government was democratically elected.

Religious History

If you ask Taiwanese what their religion is, they'll tell you they're Buddhists. Ninety percent of the population practices the traditional Chinese religion, which

integrates Buddhist elements with a Taoist foundation and Confucian philosophy. In the 20th century, a small population of Catholics lived in the south of the island. Only a very small number were to be found in and around Taipei.

The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception: from Mainland China to Taiwan

In mainland China, during the years following the seizure of power by Mao Zedong's communist government, Catholic institutions were confiscated and missionaries expelled. In 1953, all the foreign Sisters left the country. Sr. Marie-Lucia Ho, a Chinese member of our community, remained in the country. Following a brief sojourn in Hong Kong or Canada, at the wish of Bishop Antonio Riberi, the former Mandarin-speaking missionaries came to Taiwan. At that time, we saw the freedom and opportunity to evangelize.

THE MISSION EXPERIENCED A ROLLERCOASTER RIDE OF SUCCESSES, HOPES AND DIFFICULTIES FOR THE COMMUNITY.

Guanshi

In 1954, at the invitation of the Jesuit Fathers, three Sisters arrived in Taiwan to settle in Guanshi. When they arrived, there were no Catholics in the town of 35,000 inhabitants. Although they already knew the official language, they had to deal with the local dialects. They were welcomed into a small, airy two-storey dwelling, with no water and a cardboard ceiling that sheltered birds. They opened a kindergarten, celebrated children's birthdays, showed religious films in Hakka, the language of the people, taught English and music theory, played music and gave private lessons. In short, they seized every opportunity they had to connect with the people.



Theresa Wang, M.I.C., teaching at the Catholic Hospital Tien Center, Taipei. – Photo: M.I.C. Archives

The year they arrived, Taiwan suffered an earthquake. Fear, typhoons and damage inherent in these natural disasters became their new normal.

Shih Kuang

In 1955, the M.I.C. were authorized to found a religious house. They made pastoral visits and cared for the sick, and a dispensary was soon up and running. A question then arose: could foreigners buy ancestral land? The mission experienced a rollercoaster ride of successes, hopes and difficulties for the community.

Taipei

In 1956, the Sisters were invited to Taipei. Three of them settled in a small apartment near the market. Mme Simone Viau-Simard, a wealthy and generous nurse, gave them a sum of money to cover their installation costs. Thus a residence was built adjacent to the dispensary. Two years later, in 1958, Sr. Marie-Berthe Fleurent received her medical diploma, enabling her to practice throughout China. The Sisters dedicated themselves wherever they could be of service.

The mission expanded: first, in 1958, to Suao, and, three years later, to Taipei, where a residence independent of the dispensary was built. In 1964, it moved

to Hsinchu. The following year, a novitiate was opened first in Guanshi, then in Shih Guan. Finally, in 1966, the mission moved to Nan Ao.

Time for Renewal

Over the past 10 years, we have witnessed a profound socio-economic evolution in Taiwan. Living conditions have changed at an unprecedented pace. However, the missionary of yesterday, today and tomorrow remains the messenger of the Gospel. The integration of the Sisters is now less institutionalized, and all the more so as the state has taken charge of social needs.

Today, each of them is involved in a number of fields: pastoral work in the Church, in the city and in the mountains; participation in the movements of the Association of Religious Sisters; collaboration and follow-up for Christian Life Communities; relief work with illegal workers from South Asia; service to the intellectually disabled; social work in counseling; leading retreats; teaching at university; mission with aboriginal populations...



The M.I.C. community today. – Photo: M.I.C.

Proof that the expansion movement continues: in 1989, a group of AsMIC (made up of 42 associates) was formed.

The mission is now under the able leadership of Asian Sisters, 10 of whom are from Taiwan. Vision, risk and hope stem from the same spirit of thanksgiving, the testament of our venerable foundress, Mother Delia. 🌸

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Venerable Delia Tétreault

By Agathe Durand, M.I.C.

Before declaring a person a saint, the Catholic Church carries out a thorough investigation to demonstrate the subject's Christian virtues, which are often proven to have been extraordinary and even heroic. Such a process can take dozens, even hundreds of years. Given the scope of activity of the universal Church, one might think that this is a special field reserved for a few specialists. However, the real starting point is the person's entourage, those who witnessed his or her journey and influence, who express their amazement at his or her faith in God and the dedication of his or her life to the service of others.

Extraordinary Life

The Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception is engaged in such an endeavor because of its foundress, Delia Tétreault, born in Mariville in 1865. From an early age, this woman of faith was seized by the inspiration to make God known and loved throughout the world. She felt fulfilled by His gracious gift. At this time, Christian countries were acting on the need to share the benefits of the faith, even far away, and to introduce it to children in particular. For Delia, the best way to show her gratitude became clear, and she was ready to commit herself and others to it: to give to God children who would learn to know and love Him. An irresistible missionary call was born in her heart. She was going to devote her life to it, first enlisting the help of



people touched by a similar vocation, then establishing foundations, works and projects in Canada and in the farthest reaches of the world.

Just imagine the vitality, spiritual resources, audacity and solid virtues it took to set up, often in the unknown and in great poverty, projects for education, assistance and care in remote environments, such as leprosy clinics in China. In America, Delia has single-handedly created communities of men and women with a missionary vocation. Dreaming of *ad extra* missions, but too frail in health, Delia overcame obstacles thanks to her charisma, but above all succeeded in spreading throughout the Church and the world what Pope Francis calls *the Joy of the Gospel*. Even though she was paralyzed for the last eight years of her life, she never ceased to stimulate



Archbishop Lépine signing the souvenir book at the tomb of the Foundress. – Photo: B. Thibeau

the missionary cause, notably through her magazine *Le Précurseur*, published in both official languages and known to many families in Quebec and abroad.

Exceptional Value

From the moment of her death in 1941, testimonials of admiration poured in from all quarters, underlining the courageous audacity of her many initiatives and achievements, but above all the exceptional value of her person, her faith and her boundless charity. Her community saw itself as the bearer of a considerable heritage, not in material goods, but in human and Christian treasures. In all fairness, it was her duty to make known her foundress and the lasting impact of her works. The Sisters took the first steps toward Delia's canonization.

It continued over time. In December 1997, Pope John Paul II officially recognized the heroic virtues of Delia Tétreault in the eyes of the universal Church, designating her *venerable* for the piety of all.

Recognized Venerability

In Pont-Viau, on Sunday October 8, 2023, the mother house of her Missionary Institute celebrated the 25th anniversary of this declaration of *venerability*. Archbishop Christian Lépine of Montreal recalled how, in 1902, the foundress had received support and encouragement from her predecessor at the time, Mgr. Paul Bruchési, to open the way to the *foreign missions*, in the language of the time. The current Superior General of the *Société des Missions-Étrangères*, Mr. Ergete Tesfaye, and his vicar, Mr. Bertrand Roy, participated in the celebration. They unhesitatingly recognize Delia Tétreault as the spiritual mother of generations of missionary disciples, whether priests, religious or laypersons.

If Christian fervor seeks the intercession of the venerable Delia Tétreault, the day will come when the long-awaited miracle will make her recognized and proclaimed blessed, then saint, as we do not hesitate to venerate her now. 🙏





Maurice with his parents and his sister. – Photo: Demers Family

Family Spirit

By Maurice Demers

My father, Léo-Gilles, passed away on September 29 at the age of 86 years and 8 months at his home in Saint-Gilles, Lotbinière. He led a beautiful, loving life. This text is a tribute to the man, but also to the generation he represented, a look at what was Quebec society.

Léo-Gilles enjoyed a happy childhood with his brothers and sisters, the number of which evoking a distant past: Monique, Jeannine, Liliane, Jean-Maurice, Léo-Paul, Jacqueline, Raymonde, Huguette, Louis-Nazaire, Yolande, Jean-Paul, Brigitte and Pierre. A large, close-knit family where brothers and sisters, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren gathered together every New Year's Day. The town hall was then filled up with around 150 people. It's fair to say that my father was known for his great

family spirit, a quality he passed on to his descendants, an inheritance he himself had received from his family. Right up to his last days, his brothers and sisters came to sing for him at home, or gathered around his hospital bed.

A mischievous prankster, Léo-Gilles was a generous, unifying and supportive man, who lent a helping hand to many people over the years.

All his life, my father was very close to his childhood friends. When he moved to Montreal in the early 1960s, he helped some of them settle in the metropolis and find better jobs. Following his marriage to Lorraine Vaillancourt in August 1962, it was in this same city that he had his first two children: Christian, in 1964, and

Annie six years later. While he experienced great joys, he also experienced great sorrows, notably the death of his wife in 1974. But, thanks mainly to the support of his sister Jacqueline, he bounced back from this loss, showing great resilience and continuing to offer the best to his son and daughter.

A child of Maurice Duplessis' rural Quebec, my father worked in a variety of trades. At the age of 10, he was selling fish in Saint-Gilles and the surrounding parishes. In those days, school was not compulsory, and you had to help out your parents and family. As a teenager, he hauled ice blocks up and down the river. Later, in his twenties and early thirties, he worked as a butcher in Montreal.

AT THE AGE OF 10, HE WAS SELLING FISH IN SAINT-GILLES AND THE SURROUNDING PARISHES.

When he returned to Saint-Gilles in 1975, his passion for horses turned into a livelihood. He became a horse dealer. He bought the house of his grandfather, Nazaire, located in the heart of the village, opposite the church, and set up his stable to trade horses. Countless people passed through there. Over the years, he dealt with thousands of persons. It was also at that time that he met Élianne Lévesque, the new teacher at Étienne-Chartier elementary school, who became his second wife in July 1976, and with whom he lovingly raised Annie and Christian. Léo-Gilles developed a close bond with Élianne, whom he particularly enjoyed teasing, as he did his mother-in-law, Gilberte, who lived on the second floor of the house for many years. His third child, Maurice, was born in 1977.



Mr. Demers' funeral.
Photo: Demers Family

Léo-Gilles adored us. I remember *riding* on his back in the living room, bouncing in his arms with my feet on his in the kitchen, racing against him to the garage and, of course, getting to ride horses and riding in his truck. His grandchildren have similar memories. Hundreds of people also remember his teasing, as Léo-Gilles retained his mischievous spirit and sense of humor throughout his life.

And this spirit remained with him through thick and thin, particularly when his son Christian, then aged 21, died in a car accident in 1985. The shock was extremely hard to take. But, as usual, Léo-Gilles bounced back and continued to be an admirable father. His children were very lucky. This man left an indelible mark on so many people, inspiring them with his generosity, kindness, *joie de vivre*, hospitality and benevolence towards his own family and towards others. It's no surprise that January 1st was his favourite day, and that he loved to welcome people into his home and receive them heartfully.

Thanks to life for introducing us to this extraordinary man. Thanks to our elders for passing on to us such a wonderful family spirit. 🌿

Benevolence: Inspiring Wisdom

Everyday benevolence means adopting a loving, respectful and caring attitude towards others. This can manifest itself in different ways, such as:

Active listening:
being attentive
to the concerns,
emotions and
needs of others,
without judgment
or interruption.



Sister Perpetue accompanies Sister Liliame.

Being respectful:
treating people with
courtesy, politeness and
consideration, recognizing
their dignity and value as
human beings.

Being empathetic:
trying to understand
the feelings and
experiences of others
by putting ourselves
in their shoes and
showing compassion.

Everyday benevolence helps create a harmonious environment. By being kind to our fellow human beings, we foster a climate of trust, respect and mutual understanding, which contributes to more pleasant and fulfilling interactions.



Sister Fenecia Dapitanon with the children.

Offering help: being ready to provide support to people in need, through concrete gestures or simply by being there for them.

Cultivating gratitude: recognizing and appreciating everyone's qualities, actions and contributions, regularly expressing our gratitude.



Sister Charity Zimba takes care of animals.

Let's listen to the Spirit of God who watches over each and every one of us. When the time comes, this Spirit of justice, righteousness and wisdom will tell us how to show kindness to those who cross our paths.



At the School of Divine Pedagogy

For it is God who works in you to will and act in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Phil 2:13)



By Emmanuel Bélanger

At the beginning of last year, during the days of preparation at my college, a speaker came to talk to us about the pedagogy of the heart. This could be summed up as being benevolent towards learners, and putting this benevolence at the very heart of our practice. We were invited to root our pedagogy and our relationship with our students in our hearts, the place of will and desire.

The difficulty lies not so much in the ideas and theories to be favored, as in their practical application in everyday life.

There are many who say that the reality in schools is increasingly difficult. Young people live in a society that has completely lost its historical, moral and religious bearings. The ideology of progress in which they have been immersed since birth has persuaded them that the new takes precedence over the old. What's more, they are marked by the crisis of adolescence, when they seek to free themselves from the norms and constraints that have guided them up until now.

This twofold observation often leads a large proportion of learners to hate school, even though they loved it so much when they were younger. As the French writer and former teacher Daniel Pennac put it: *Teaching is an intrinsically violent act. School and the act of learning are frightening.* Secondary school

students are subconsciously apprehensive about moving into the sphere of knowledge and education. It is as if they sense that discovering new knowledge will require them to abandon some of their certainties and ways of being. That's why they often see teachers as old-fashioned and odd characters.

Faced with this reality, teachers often fall into two types of traps. The first, especially when they're just starting out, is to seek a friendly bond with learners and, in so doing, overlook their whims and blunders for fear of offending them. At the other extreme, teachers become desensitized to the point of cynicism. Gossip and jeremiads are heard in teachers' lounges, where they lament and criticize this lost generation, in an effort to deal with the pressure.

For me, as a teacher, as a man and above all as a Christian, the question is: how can we love the unlovable?

The answer is simple: it's impossible. And yet we can do all things in Him who strengthens us (cf. Phil 4:13).

From a strictly human point of view, it's absolutely impossible to want what's best for others¹ when they're against us. As teachers, it's hard to fool ourselves about our capacity to love. Learners make a point of confronting us with this harsh reality. At this age, testing the limits of the teacher and authority is often a game, a challenge.



Photo: Canva

In this case, it's pride that suffers, the gnarled sore spot of the ego. Too often, when this happened, I made it a personal issue, as if it was my deep human dignity that was affected, whereas it was the root of sin in me, that mortal root that doesn't want to die.


So I tried to defend myself, to take justice into my own hands. And then benevolence disappeared.

The unlovable brings us face to face with our deepest reality, with our heart that aches for not knowing how to love. Is it inevitable? *No! For it is God who works in us to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.* And, Pope Francis tells us, *in the light of faith, we know [...] that God looks at man and woman in another way. He created us not as objects, but as people who are loved and capable of loving*².

Through His Son, Jesus Christ, God shows us the way, and through His Providence, He is already acting in us, with the help of His grace, so that we can choose good and do good. To be benevolent is to be converted day by day and to follow Christ. A caring teacher does not abandon his or her duty as educator, he or she carries on for the love of Christ, recognizing and defending the dignity of every human person.

WE OFTEN FORGET THAT CHRIST IN THE GOSPEL IS THE TEACHER *PAR EXCELLENCE.*

In Jesus, we have the perfect example of benevolence, and He calls us to serve our neighbor as if it were Himself. In fact, seeing Christ in my pupils enables me to wish them the greatest good, and this is precisely what God makes possible in me, as Saint John says (13:35): *By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

Finally, benevolence in my profession boils down to loving our learners, knowing how to guide them with charity when necessary, being patient and living in the logic of giving. We often forget that Christ in the Gospel is the teacher *par excellence*. 

¹ Etymologically, benevolence is "the feeling by which we wish someone well". It means having a good disposition towards him.

² Words spoken at the general audience on August 20, 2020.

The header features a light blue and green watercolor background with various words like 'DIVERSITY', 'mental health', 'CYBERCRIME', 'productivity', 'inclusiveness', 'artificial intelligence', 'cloud computing', 'social justice', 'fair housing', and 'anti-harassment' scattered across it. There are also illustrations of pine branches and small yellow and orange dots.

Word of the Day: *Benevolence*

Concept: Thérèse Lortie, M.I.C.

By Sylvie Bessette

Have you noticed how often certain words and expressions are used nowadays in conversations, newspaper articles and periodicals: cybercrime, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, productivity, diversity. These terms, and there are many more, have been coined to describe new technical and scientific discoveries. At the same time, these new names signal the emergence of phenomena in our rapidly changing social reality.

Other words are so prevalent in official discourse that they have become part of our everyday vocabulary. They designate behaviors that are increasingly highlighted in our collective reflections: inclusiveness, anti-harassment, better mental health, welcoming immigrants, social justice, fair housing, etc. Our society is gradually opening up to the problems we face living in this world together, problems that, just a few years ago, would have been passed over in silence, considered unimportant, or even taboo.

It's against this backdrop of a better way of living together that the word benevolence comes to the fore. It particularly appeals to me. Its Latin etymology, *benevolentia*, means *a favorable disposition towards others*. To wish someone well, isn't that an attitude of neighborly love? Psychologist Rose-Marie Charest

defines benevolence as follows: "It refers to an attitude of openness, curiosity and generosity towards others. Benevolence is opposed to indifference, egocentricity and contempt¹."

How can we integrate this broadly defined concept without losing sight of ourselves? As the saying goes, charity begins at home. So being benevolent doesn't mean forgetting yourself in a boundless and unmitigated devotion. Rather, benevolence flourishes in a welcoming heart, in non-judgment and love, as defined by Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians (13:4): *Love is patient, love is kind*.

Christ gave us this new commandment before leaving (Jn 13:34): *Love one another as I have loved you*. How can we put this at the heart of our lives? Everyone in their own field, everyone in their own circle, can find ways to open up to others and embrace their differences. Benevolence goes much further than tolerance. Why is that? Because, despite appearances, tolerance carries with it a certain closeness to others. We tolerate certain behaviors, even if we don't accept them. We tolerate certain abuses out of indifference. But if we are benevolent, we will try to understand before judging, we will try to help vulnerable people, we will try to open our hearts.

The lives of many religious men and women and saints contain countless examples of these generous hearts. Inspiration can always be found in their human and spiritual journey.

For example, the venerable Rosalie Cadron-Jetté, foundress of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy, kindly welcomed unmarried pregnant girls, at a time when such people were judged very harshly not only by society but also by their loved ones. In those days, they were known as *fallen girls*. Rosalie Cadron-Jetté welcomed them without judgment which enabled her to lavish love and security on those who would otherwise have found themselves on the streets.

This is the embodiment of the kindness that has enabled young women to regain control of their lives with dignity. A prime example of kindness in action.

As for the venerable Delia Tétreault, foundress of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, she left her mark on the history of Montreal's Chinese community through her involvement with its immigrants: foundation of a hospital for the Chinese, evangelization, all manifestations of her profound benevolence.

Then, as now, there are many opportunities to open up to others, to try to help them, while respecting their experience, which often eludes us. They need an attentive ear, a hand extended with kindness to help them to get through difficult situations or find solutions. Building a more humane world...is that not the result of benevolence in action in different places and circumstances? 🌸

¹ Chantal Tellier, "La bienveillance: un outil pour favoriser l'inclusion?", VÉRO Magazine, Autumn 2023, p. 78.



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When the Heart is Set, ***THE FEET FOLLOW***

This title came to me while reading the reports of the *Missionary Associates of the Immaculate Conception*. Was it inspired by the Togolese proverb, translated as *Wherever the heart is, the feet don't hesitate to follow*? For me, this expression speaks of disciples of Jesus, speaks of AsMIC.

By Louisa Nicole, M.I.C.

A CALL

The story begins in 1979. Two women, Nicole Guénette and Andrée Bellerive, expressed a great desire: to affiliate with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, in order to live with them, in a secular way, the spirituality of Missionary and Marian Thanksgiving that is specific to them. Jocelyne Dallaire, who also had such a project in mind, had preceded them by submitting a request to this effect to the Institute's general council in 1974. In 1980, with the help of a few Sisters from our community, these three pioneers set out on a long journey to establish the foundations of a lay affiliation with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Three years later, 40 years ago this year, at a meeting attended by two M.I.C. provincial councils in Quebec and the General Assistant, the official title was adopted: Associates of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. This was followed by official approval of the association's statutes. Born in 1980, the association began to take off, with new members joining. And in 1986, the first English-speaking AsMIC nucleus was formed in Montreal.



The AsMIC at Cap-de-la-Madeleine. – Photo: M.I.C.

WHEN THE HEART IS SET...

But who exactly are these Missionary Associates of the Immaculate Conception? As you can see, the name has changed. I like this new connotation of autonomy, of taking charge. Lay people are, in their own right, Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, with the charter that characterizes them.

If I was to paint a picture of these men and women, it would be rich in color. The groups are varied. There are professionals and non-professionals, single and married people, fathers and mothers.

Their desire: to take charge of their Christian life, to deepen it and to live it according to the spirituality of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, a spirituality of gratitude and commitment in the manner of Mary. At least six times a year, these people meet to support one another, draw inspiration from the Gospel and encyclicals, share their experiences as disciples of Jesus, and nourish their hearts with the writings of Delia Tétreault, the Institute's foundress.



New group in Montreal. – Photo: M.I.C.

... THE FEET FOLLOW

What sets these people apart? The joy of thanksgiving that comes from the conviction of being personally loved by God. With their hearts captured by His love, these enthusiastic disciples of Jesus follow in His footsteps in their own environment. You'll find them just about everywhere, in all sectors of pastoral and voluntary work. Some have made temporary commitments in Haiti with the Sisters of our community, or visited other parts of the world where M.I.C. are at work. Over the years, the Associates have supported and financed many projects in less-privileged mission countries. Nothing can stop them. They have organized benefit concerts and dinners, bingos, bazaars, garage sales and handicrafts with the nuns. Thanks to their dedication and benevolence, many of our brothers and sisters around the world have seen their lives improve.

WHAT NEXT?

These men and women I've told you about are now in their seventies, eighties or even older. But these AsMICs have not given up on what was once their ideal and the fabric of their lives. Depending on their age and abilities, they are still active and still get together. Attracted by the testimony of their existence, younger members have even joined them. Some, held back

by illness, remain AsMICs at heart, whose mission it is to pray. There's a feeling of belonging, a spirit of togetherness, a sense of community.

As our hair turns white, we tend to reflect on the past, but we also ask ourselves in the present: what will I leave to posterity? Rejoice, dear AsMIC, your family has grown! You have offspring! There are now over 600 of you in 8 countries where M.I.C. are at work. Yes, the little seed sown over 40 years ago has grown into a big tree.

A NEW BRANCH...

Right here in Quebec, thanks to the initiative of Sister Adrienne Guay, M.I.C., from the same roots and sap, a new branch has sprouted to embellish this tree. On Sunday, October 22, 2023, World Mission Sunday, five young immigrants to Quebec from various nations made a commitment in our Pont-Viau chapel as Missionary Associates of the Immaculate Conception, while two others renewed their commitment. Isn't that wonderful? Let's give thanks to God for life, forever flowing and circulating!

Your heart is set and your feet continue to walk the paths of the Gospel. 🌿



Sowing Joy and Hope with the Help of Animals

Living in a school with animals is not common practice in Hong Kong. However, it's what we've been doing since 2013, and more and more people are getting to know the animals at Good Hope School.

By Pauline Yuen, M.I.C.

It all began in 2012 when a sad case of animal abuse occurred near our school. A stray cat was brutally tortured and eventually killed by several teenagers. The photograph moved me. As we teach our students to love life and God's creation, we thought we could do something. So we offered shelter in the school to a few small abandoned animals. Among them are stray cats, inseparable who came to us on their own or were born at Good Hope, two adopted red-legged turtles and a few sea fish. All these animals are allowed to be themselves and are kept away from students, where they can live in peace.

Studies have shown that having pets at work boosts employee morale and improves the general atmosphere. This has proved to be true for our colleagues in the office where we house the school's animals: they share common interests and often show affection to their little housemates. What's more, it's clear that these teachers are *ambassadors who help young animal lovers develop appreciation and compassion for living beings through interaction and close observation*¹. That's how I slowly developed a program to educate our students about animal kindness, such as *responsible ownership, adopting, not selling* a little living creature.



Students get to know animals. – Photo: Pauline Yuen, M.I.C.

As I've already mentioned, our cats are kept in an office where my colleagues lavish love and care on them. As a result, many felines are very affectionate towards people and like to stay close to them. Those who are shy and fearful are housed in another room. We insist that these animals, although they are our partners in education, are not tools. We respect their will. Four of them have been chosen to be *ambassadors*. In addition to receiving them into the classroom for general studies classes, students are allowed to go to the cats and interact with them. It's a delight



The responsible for this new project. – Photo: Pauline Yuen, M.I.C.

to see how happy and loving the children are when they pet them. To make them more open, responsible and joyful, we invite students with learning difficulties to care for and play with the felines. Very often, they arrive tense, but after playing with these little balls of fur, they leave smiling and relaxed. So this visit can be a great motivator and encouragement for them.

THIS DAILY CONTACT MAKES ME MORE AND MORE GRATEFUL FOR THE GIFTS OF CREATION.

Surprisingly, we noticed that one or two cats liked to stay close to us when we were reading documents. This gave me the idea to use them to promote reading. They quite easily became our library cats with the *Reading with Doxa and Kyla* program. The result? The girls are very interested in this program and are more willing to borrow more books to take part in these reading sessions.

Learning with animals has a significantly positive impact on the students: they are more sensitive to their well-being, they pray for those who are homeless in stormy weather and include kindness towards them in their program of good deeds. What's more, this close contact brings out their artistic talents: they draw beautiful pictures of animals in their projects and gifts. For them, these friends, with or without fur, have become good companions in their school life.

For me, this daily contact makes me more and more grateful for the gifts of creation. Animals, as God's beloved creatures, also reflect His infinite goodness. In my experience, they are sensitive beings who can feel

and suffer. They know what love is and, in their own way, they return it and the affection they receive. The inseparable know how to take care of their young and even protect them at all costs. All these experiences have helped us to see that we too can learn a lot from animals, and that God has put them on our path to remind us of the meaning of love, love of God, love of our neighbors and love of all creatures.

As Pope Francis says in his encyclical *Laudato si'*: *Everything is related and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth*². This encyclical has helped us to see the place of all created beings in God's plan of redemption for us. I think our project can help our students realize that, as God's children, we must care for all creatures and respect life. 🐾

¹ To learn more about the benefits of this cohabitation, you are invited to consult petsintheclassroom.org/benefits-of-classroom-animals.

² From Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* 92.

AN UNEXPECTED PATH



Sister Jacintha with her students in Hong Kong. – Photo: M.I.C.

By Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

This story originates in Tanzania, a large East African country, famous for Kilimanjaro and the magnificent Serengeti National Park, home to elephants, lions, leopards and rhinos. Zambia and Malawi are not far to the southwest. The official languages are Swahili and English. But in addition to all these wonders, this country is home to another: a little girl destined to go off the beaten track. Her name is Jacintha.

A First Step

The third of a large Catholic family, Jacintha admires the nuns in her parish who teach and visit the sick. These missionaries come from Canada and belong to the congregation of Our Lady of the Angels. In her heart, she says to herself: *One day, I'll be like these women and I'll teach thousands of children...*

After her studies, her desire to dedicate herself to the Lord continues to grow in her heart. She gets her hands on a directory from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of East Africa (AMECEA), which lists the services and offices of the dioceses of several countries. There she discovers the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. It is love at first sight. She writes to the published address, and Sr. Jeannine Forcier, M.I.C., replies with several information leaflets about the community. Jacintha is dazzled, but, having never been abroad before, she asks herself a legitimate question: how could this be done? She talks to her bishop, Mgr. Christopher Mwoleka. He encourages her to pursue her dream, helps her obtain her passport and buys her plane tickets to Zambia to meet the nuns.

A Path Strewn with Surprises

From the moment she arrives, Jacintha feels at home, very much at ease with her new companions. However, she faces the challenge of learning several languages, including English, Chichewa and French. She continues her religious training, postulancy, novitiate and scholasticate, before heading to Quebec for a year of intense formation in the land of the community's foundress, Delia Tétreault. She then returns home to take her final vows. She completes her studies and obtains a degree in English Literature from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Nairobi campus.

Meanwhile, back in Hong Kong, the school year is just around the corner, and the English teacher we've hired falls seriously ill. What to do about it? The provincial superior sends an urgent request to the superior general. She has just received confirmation of Sr. Jacintha's diploma. Without hesitation, she writes to her, asking her to go to this Chinese city to teach at the Good Hope school run by the M.I.C. Sr. Jacintha is shocked: she had never thought of such a mission. Following a process of discernment and after taking advice from her spiritual director, she accepts.

On the Road to the Unknown

In Hong Kong, Jacintha's eyes are not big enough to see everything: the tall buildings, the people moving by the hundreds in the streets, not to mention the difficulty of distinguishing one Chinese person from another. Her first day of teaching is proving to be a great challenge both for her and for the students, who, for the first time, are in the presence of a black African Sister. In the staff room, she struggles with the same problem: no one dares speak to her, until one day a colleague finally invites her to spend some time together. Little by little, Jacintha courageously makes her way into the hearts of her students. Her language and catechism courses are appreciated. Over the course of her 22 years of teaching, she earns, of course, the trust of teachers and students alike. In



Sister Jacintha with her M.I.C. community. – Photo: M.I.C.

the early days, however, this was not self-evident. After five years, when she returns home, Jacintha is convinced that her work there is finished. After much thought and prayer, however, she realizes that Hong Kong was her mission and that the Lord was waiting for her there. Resolutely and courageously, she sets off again. Great joys await her, as young Chinese women who adhere to Catholicism ask her to become their godmother. What a wonderful sign of trust and friendship! Today, as she looks back over her career, she realizes just how much the Lord's benevolent grace has supported and accompanied her in this missionary challenge.

A Beneficial Stopover

Before returning to her country of origin, Sister Jacintha asked for a brief stay in Canada to reconnect with the land of her foundress. What a joy it was to see former companions from Africa and to meet Sisters she didn't know! Exchanges on both sides strengthened the joy and missionary spirit in their hearts. She also receives surprise visits. A work colleague, a teacher at Good Hope but now based in Toronto, learned of her visit to Quebec. Without hesitation, she introduced her husband and two children. A former student from Vancouver, now in Montreal, also comes to meet her. A wonderful reunion that speaks volumes about her welcoming presence in Hong Kong.

For her, the time has come to return to the magnificent continent of Africa. In her heart, Jacintha has a great desire: to open an M.I.C. mission in her native Tanzania. With her, we pray that her dream will come true, while remaining in tune with the Spirit, who sometimes has great surprises in store for us... 🌀

With You, O Lord



MONICA LAM, M.I.C.
1940-2023
Shanghai, China

Rereading her family history, Monica recognized the action of Divine Providence and became aware of God's predilection for her. The arrival of the Communists in Shanghai led her to emigrate to Hong Kong. As a student at a Catholic school, she discovered God. Baptized at the age of 14, she deepened this Gift of God and discreetly felt the mysterious call to become a nun. At a Children of Mary retreat, she met a group of M.I.C. Her call became clearer, and on August 15, 1964, she became the first local postulant at the Hong Kong novitiate. Monica proved to be a passionate and visionary educator and superior, attentive to the culture of the values of unity, love and family spirit. In January 2023, she was diagnosed with lung cancer, which took her life on July 24, 2023.



SUZANNE TREMBLAY, M.I.C.
Sister Sainte-Émilie
1933-2023
Les Éboulements, Quebec

Suzanne was born in beautiful Les Éboulements in 1933. Her schooling began at the age of five with the Little Franciscans of Mary; as the M.I.C. visited her school, she sensed a missionary call. As a young adult, she helped her widowed mother with six children by taking a job in Pont-Viau. In an outing, she discovered our Novitiate, which she entered on August 8, 1956. She confided: *Being used to supporting myself and being self-sufficient, it was a difficult adjustment.* In 1962, she went on to missionize with passion and love in the Philippines, an endearing country. Returning to Quebec in 2001, she made our sick Sisters benefit from her comforting presence. Then, peacefully, on August 8, 2023, she entered into heavenly Beauty.



GERMAINE ROY, M.I.C.
Sister Sainte-Aurélie
1922-2023
Nicolet, Quebec

Welcomed to the novitiate on February 1, 1947, Sister Germaine would prove herself over the years to be an exceptional woman who took on, with discernment, autonomy and a sense of duty, the many obediences entrusted to her and supported by prior studies. She excelled in the field of health care in Haiti, at the Deschappelles Hospital and at the *Clinique-hôpital du Limbé*. In Vancouver, she gave a remarkable boost to Mount Saint Joseph Hospital. Her competence earned her a Fellowship from the American College of Hospital Administration. Moreover, the Archbishop of Vancouver delegated her to represent the Catholic Church in an ecumenical project. At the dawn of her 101st birthday on September 14, 2023, it is mission accomplished for Sister Germaine and eternal thanksgiving.



VÉRONIQUE CHARTRAND, M.I.C.
Sister Véronique-de-la-Passion
1927-2023
Lyster/Mégantic, Quebec

Sister Véronique entered the novitiate on August 8, 1951, with a wealth of experience as the eldest of 15 children and 3 years of teaching experience. Her almost daily choices, between providing a helping presence at home and continuing her studies until she obtained a teaching diploma, were the fruit of constant discernment. Her keen sense of responsibility and faith in Providence, observed during her training, were the effective foundations of her commitments in Haiti and Quebec. In addition, she studied accounting for community services. After a life of giving, illness plunged Véronique into a life of seclusion, which she lived in peaceful silence until she was called to enter eternal rest on October 15, 2023.



My roommate

Make me a window, an open door to a world of light and love, joy and peace. To be a door to you, I have to be empty of everything that isn't you. What would be the point of a door or window opening onto a wall?

To open a door or a window, you have to break through the walls. Break through the walls of the prison that locks me in. Break the glass that gives me the illusion of contact but prevents the wind of your Spirit from penetrating my life. The windows through which I see the world, but which prevent me from reaching out to it.

May my gaze, my smile be a balm on the wounds, a refreshing breath on the burn of unfulfilled desire for happiness. And for that, take all the space. Be the true occupant of my dwelling, my roommate for life and eternity.

Monique Bigras, M.I.C.

Photo: Thérèse Lortie, M.I.C.

