



Where is the Christ Child?

Several years ago, Father Lawrence Lovasik, S.V.D., related a striking fact stressing the absence of the Christ Child from the Christmas scene in too many places.

A five-year-old refugee tot was being shown around a department store by his fond foster parents. His eyes grew wide with delighted wonder at the glittering display. Soon however, a puzzled expression stole over his face.

Off he ran, up and down the aisles, peering under counters and stands. Finally he blurted out, "But, where is the Christ Child?" There was an embarrassed silence. Then the store official

gave orders for a Crib to be set up. The boy clapped his hands and danced for joy.

This Christmas season may be overflowing with gifts and merrymaking, but unless we truly possess the Christ Child all the rest will leave our hearts empty. While they are fine in moderation, coloured lights, tinsel, presents can never substitute for that peace and joy which the Christ alone can give.

How about jumping off the merry-go-round of endless worldly distractions and giving some precious time, during this season, to searching for the Christ Child and the true meaning of Christmas?

CHRISTMAS IN KATETE

by Marie Marthe Terrien, M.I.C.

In our Katete Mission, preparations for Christmas begin with the first week of Advent. A zealous African pastor often emphasized the need of restoring the Christ Child to the centre of the festivities. To quote him, "Christmas is not a day on which we should expect presents. On the contrary, we ourselves should give the Christ Child spiritual gifts. He became man out of love for us, and died on the Cross to redeem us. Surely, we owe him something in return."

In order to train the children of the parish in this spirit, I invite them to our house once a week during Advent to teach them the true meaning of Christmas. Over 60 Christian as well as non-Christian children, between the ages of four and twelve, respond to my invitation. You should see with what reverence they listen to the word of God. For them, it is a tremendous experience and I am always deeply moved by their attention. The older ones see to it that the tots keep quiet. After the reading of the Nativity gospel I give simple explanations and a short period of

questions and answers follows, to make sure all have understood. Some little practices of self-denial are suggested as gifts to be offered the Christ Child at Christmas, such as helping with the house chores, fetching water, taking care of the younger children... Then we have a period of relaxation, and invent plans for making individual Cribbs. Little hands get busy. All are very clever at molding clay figures of Mary, Joseph, the Christ Child, the angels, the shepherds. Even the legendary ass and ox are not forgotten. Some make little huts.

On Christmas Eve, there is an exhibit. A prize is awarded to the one whose Crib is judged to be the best. Each child present also receives a gift: a sucker, a pencil, a used Christmas card, a toy... Our little ones are easily pleased. Then it is Christmas, the birthday of the Christ Child, which all celebrate with joy and piety because they have made such a wonderful preparation. Christmas in Katete will always be among my fondest and most precious memories.

GREETINGS

With prayerful
gratitude for
your friendship
and generous
collaboration,
M.I.C. Sisters
across the world
wish you
and your loved ones
enduring peace
and happiness.
A MERRY CHRISTMAS
to you all!



Sister Marie Marthe has spent 17 years in Africa.



Little hands get busy. All are very clever at molding clay figures.

May our hearts and hands reach out,
spanning distance, to all the world's needy
every day of the new year



JANUARY

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28 29 30 31

*I'd like to build the world
a home and furnish it with love.*



AUGUST

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*Living the Gospel is the
best way to preach it.*

SEPTEMBER

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

Photo credit: Pawek

JUNE

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OCTOBER

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

AUGUST

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OCTOBER

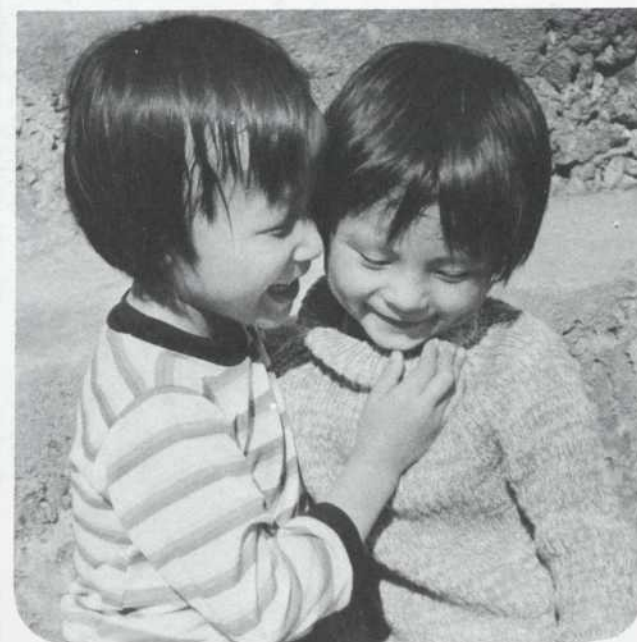
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MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Bits out of mission life

SAPANG PALAY, P.I.

Sapang Palay Revisited

by Beatrice Pelletier, M.I.C.

On December 1, 1963, policemen and demolishers invaded the premises where about 15,000 squatters had held out against repeated warnings to move issued by municipal authorities in Manila. This once, the squatters realized the situation was serious. Sadly, they made up their meagre bundles and boarded the conveyances put at their disposal. The relocation area was situated at some distance from the capital. Notwithstanding its picturesque panorama, it was like a desert to those who had always lived amid the hubbub of a large thriving city.

A few days later, four Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception rode to the site, their car loaded with bags of food and bundles of clothing and medicine provided by Knights of Columbus and Catholic Relief Services. They were immediately surrounded by a crowd of settlers overjoyed to see that their friends, the Sisters, had not abandoned them. "Operation Sapang Palay" had been launched. Today, after more than a decade, it is still going strong.

Our handicraft centre and sewing room provide work for about 120. Orders come chiefly from a company of exporters in cottage industries. The women flock to the centre to learn how to make embroidered baskets, trays, fancy footstools, and other items. They then work at home and are paid so much the completed article.

Fifteen of the first squatters to resettle at Sapang Palay now form an independent company. These fill orders for baby dresses which come from important outside manufacturers. Several industrial sewing machines were donated by the Rockefeller Centre. Ordinary machines were the gifts of friends. The Rimouski students, for instance, sent a substantial gift

to this end. Thus, helpful hands stretched out in friendship across the world, restore the former squatters' dignity as human beings.

These people who come to us, are very poor. Most of them start work in the morning on an empty stomach. As a rule, the women are more persevering than the men. The latter get bored with the calm settlement life and return to the bustle of a big city, leaving their wives to provide for a family of six, eight, or ten children. They hope to get higher wages in urban areas. Those who work in the sewing centre can hardly hope to earn more than seven pesos (\$1.00) a day, even when they have become experts. The big companies refuse to pay more.

Old timers would scarcely recognize the settlement with its church, schools, sewing shop, handicraft centre, medical unit, etc. Help has come from people high up in government circles and from friends and benefactors. A group of M.I.C. Sisters has taken up residence among the population. I have been at work there for the past several years and have loved every moment spent trying to ease the spiritual and temporal burdens of the women and girls more especially.



Sister Beatrice Pelletier with Miss Teresita Yudtuan who is in charge of the workroom, and Mrs. Anita Mallare, secretary.



In the sewing room, Sisters Lilia Frandoza and Lydia Gabournay show a newcomer how to proceed.

MALAWI, AFRICA

COLLABORATION

by Marie Paule Gaudreau, M.I.C.



The pupils merrily carry their bundles of twigs to school in the hope of earning a blouse.

I had just come home from Africa, when I met Laurette, a former schoolmate of mine and a very dear friend. She invited me to her home for a prolonged visit, being all agog to hear about my missionary experience. We spent many pleasant hours together. She was especially impressed by the poverty of our primary school pupils. As she runs a dry goods store, she offered me eight dozen of pretty blouses for my girls. We had much fun wrapping up the parcel and mailing it to Mzimba on time for the opening of school in October.

You may well imagine how happy the Sisters and the girls were upon opening the precious parcel. But as, on principle, nothing is given away without remuneration of some sort, the girls planned that each would pay for a blouse. To this end, they vied with one another in picking up bundles of twigs which they carried to school to provide for the cooking of their *sima*, a staple food out there. They insisted on having their photo taken and sent to their Canadian friend. Every little bit helps, and collaboration can build bridges across the world.

Our Friends in India

by Gisèle Villemure, M.I.C.

Irene Caillard, an Indian Sister, was born in India some thirty years ago. She is at present pursuing studies at l'Institut Catholique in Paris, France. Sister Gisèle interviewed her for our readers.

G: Sister Irene, could you draw a thumbnail sketch of your country?

I: Willingly. India is made up of eighteen states. Pondichery, my native city, is situated in the state of Madras, on the south-western coast. It has a population of 60,000 inhabitants.

G: I am sure our readers would enjoy knowing something about local languages, religions, and customs.

I: Tamil, a regional language, is spoken in Pondichery. The young generation, however, speaks English, the country's official language. Despite the fact that Pondichery was once a French colony, very few people do speak French.

India's climate is quite different from Canada's climate, for example. Foreigners find our hot and humid summers intolerable, even though there is nearly always a cool breeze at night.

Indian menus are heavily spiced, especially in the South. Rice is the staple food seasoned with fish, vegetables or meat. Our favorite dessert, served at almost every meal, consists of delicious milk, rice, and coconut cookies.

What can I say about customs that might prove interesting? Perhaps a few relating to marriage are the most typical. Wedding festivities last for at least three whole days. It all depends on the wealth and social prestige of the family. The parents of the young man choose the bride who must usually belong to the same caste.

On the great day, the bride is made to sit on a gaily decorated dais. Her father-in-law presents her with perfume and a necklace of

flowers; her mother-in-law offers her a sari and appropriate jewels.

On the following day, the young couple go to church to receive the nuptial blessing. An important Indian custom is observed after the wedding rings have been exchanged. It is called "cord around the neck". After this cord has been duly placed around the girl's neck, the wedded pair return to the groom's home where refreshments are served. As a pledge of close union both drink from the same cup.

G: Do arranged marriages usually turn out to be happy?

I: A curious fact which Westerners find it difficult to understand is that fewer divorces occur among these arranged marriages than among the so-called love unions. Indians believe that marriage creates a lasting bond. My own sister was not consulted before being married. The only concession granted was that her betrothed was allowed to see her a few minutes beforehand. Nonetheless, both are very happy.

G: Do any of your traditional values tend to disappear?

I: Modern life has not modified our customs to any great extent.

G: What about the religious question?

I: Indians are an essentially religious people. But the question of evangelization is a particularly acute one today. Christians number only two per cent of the population. Hindus make up 82 per cent, and Muslims 11 per cent. The majority of the Catholic clergy is autochthonous.

G: Are there many religious Congregations of foreign and of Indian origin?

I: There are several Congregations of foreign origin. The Congregation to which I belong is Indian. It was founded in 1844 by a French missionary, for the education of young girls. Formerly, Indian women were taught only the rudiments of reading, writing, cooking, and sewing. On that score, young people today are privileged. Religious Congregations have also evolved. A few years back, it would have been inadmissible for me to be allowed to pursue my studies abroad.

G: Will these studies facilitate your apostolate?

I: I feel sure they will, as I am in charge of catechetics and liturgy in our secondary school and in our formation centre. At present, we have thirty novices in formation.

G: Whenever mention is made of India we hear a lot about hunger and stark poverty. Does assistance from foreign sources improve this state of affairs?

I: I am always unpleasantly surprised when I find that India is represented, on many publicity posters, by emaciated children in the last stages of starvation. In Pondichery, I never saw any starving children. Of course, there are many poor people in India as there are in all other countries. Indeed, statistics show that fifty per cent of the population live below the subsistence level, particularly in the Bangladesh region plagued by frequent droughts.

G: I think that India remains a land of mystery to most Westerners. Every year they flock to it in search of adventure.

I: This may be as you say. I have noticed that tourists are more especially drawn to the large pilgrimage centres such as Benares or Rameswaran. For the young, more especially, India seems to be an inexhaustible fountain of spiritualism.

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