

Precursor

THE CONSTITUTIONS

1978

CANADA

BOLIVIA

TAIWAN

CUBA

PERU

HAITI

GUATEMALA

CHILI

HONG KONG

ZAMBIA

MADAGASCAR

JAPAN

MALAWI

PHILIPPINES

U.S.A.

**Discovering
the
M.I.C.
Life**



**around
the
World**

Message from the Superior General

A Montreal daily newspaper, *La Presse*, June 10 Issue, carried the headline "Constitutional Proposals Revealed", underscoring the element of surprise at this premature "revelation". This issue of the *Precursor* intending to unfold to its readers the Constitutions of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, will probably not make the headlines. Yet, close to one thousand "women of different conditions and nationalities" claim to share the inspiration of Delia Tetreault referred to in the very first pages of these Constitutions:

*"In faithful response to the Spirit,
our Institute was born in 1902
of the jubilant thanksgiving
of Delia Tetreault,
of her intense desire
to make Christ
and the Immaculate Virgin
known and loved
from pole to pole"*

On the occasion of the jubilee year of the Institute, the *Precursor* presented a comprehensive view of the works being carried on by the daughters of Delia Tetreault. It also re-transmitted the message of this woman for whom life is a gift of God that is great enough to motivate an entire Congregation to live the Gospel, in a spirit of thanksgiving, amongst peoples of the world to whom the Church will send her. To look at a Congregation from the OUTSIDE through its DOINGS, is one way of getting to know it; so today, the *Precursor* wishes to add a fifth dimension and thereby reveal from the INSIDE, the M.I.C. ENTITY, as it is unfolded page after page in its BOOK OF LIFE.

The Federal Constitution of Canada has not finished spilling ink; the reformulation of the M.I.C. Constitutions in accordance with the exigencies of the Gospel and of the contemporary times, will also have required a long period of research before we can come out with a text causing the wellspring of Delia Tetreault's charism to gush forth:

THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

CONSTITUTIONS: a set of laws which define a project of evangelical life.

SISTERS: women, motivated by thanksgiving for the gifts of God, who accept to live a universal fraternity:

*To be at the heart of the Church
perpetual thanksgiving
in the name of all men, our brothers,
is the motive of our consecrated life
as well as of our apostolate.*

A FEW COMPARISONS

Little child, my friend, I am not a child, but I am completely that the Lord Jesus said to the grown-ups one day: "Unless you become as little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven". And he said to Nicodemus: "Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." To be able to step into the Father's projects and to become a missionary, I must have a childlike heart, the dynamism and boldness of youth, and the vivacity of my thirty years.

If you are a child who likes goldfish happens to your goldfish if you put it in "fresh-water fish", a native of an attractive Jean, Quebec. The Lord led me to a tiny by a vast sea: Taiwan. For me, to become be "somewhat" like a goldfish that has to live in salt water.

If you are a mother or a father, you detachment, the love and displacement it and then to allow your children to be missionary must be able to leave or be at least, from her parents, friends, work, and country, to offer the life of Jesus Christ to me without brothers, sisters, yes, disciple. Anyone who after me cannot be

An overwhelming spiritual experience, thanksgiving is manifested concretely in missionary activity: sharing of the gift of God, revelation of Christ to those who do not know him. It then brings our brothers to a co-birth in divine gratuitousness and allows them to become revealing witnesses of thanksgiving through their joy of being sons of God.

These expressions of the M.I.C. spirituality are not provoking any reactions from the press, yet they constitute a revolution in our society of consumerism, aiming at a scandalous profit-making. The spirit of the M.I.C. Constitutions is a NO to profits at all costs, a YES to gratuity. It is a protest against inequalities, an acceptance to share even in the blessings of our faith. It is a NO to a world presurized by a heartless economy, a YES to the joy of one who has received everything gratuitously from God.

MISSIONARIES: sent by the Church to bear witness to the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ through an exacting incarnation wherein receptiveness is the law. The revolutionary spirit of the M.I.C. Constitutions is already experienced in fifteen countries by women from fourteen different nations who have welcomed the charism of Delia Tetreault and made it their life project.

OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION: that is officially claiming affinity with Mary, in a mission accomplished by her of whom much has been said before silence enwrapped her person, perhaps for fear of discovering that God has a feminine connotation. The Almighty is sufficiently free and gratuitous to dare the Immaculate Conception: the Woman who gives her name to God, the Word made Flesh.

Our Constitutions state what the ENTITY and MISSION of an M.I.C. are: to recapture her original integrity by acknowledging God's gift kept intact in the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and to announce the Good News that the Son of Mary is the Son of God inviting us to live out this perfect plan of the Father, "the superabundance of redemption" in HIM and in Mary.

**Monique Prefontaine, M.I.C.
Superior General**



"My adaptation period in Taiwan"



*"I came to Taiwan because I believe
in Life and in Christ's Love."*

Olivette Côte, M.I.C.

*Following His example,
we shall accept
the real and constant effort
demanded by our missionary incarnation
in all places.*

M.I.C. Constitutions, No. 6

THE JOURNEY HAS BARELY BEGUN

It is now more than two years since I arrived in Taiwan: this corner of the earth where the Lord has led me to carry out the mission to which he invites me to collaborate with him each day.

Two years is rather short in the "eternal now of God". Two years means several events of adaptation in a foreign land so different from mine at all levels. Two years of adaptation is rather long when I look at it coming and how short it is when I realize it is already a thing of the past. Whether it appears long or short, two years in the Orient is very little and I dare say that after this time, "the journey has barely begun", for it will take several years before I can feel at home in my country of adoption and feel at ease in my mission.

ADAPTATION, A FIRST STEP

Adaptation is but the first step of a slow "kenosis": a transformation or conversion that every missionary must live, like every Christian for that matter, in order to abandon one by one all the beautiful plans he mapped out and little by little step into the designs and projects of the Father... Thus, the Kingdom is built... In his volume, "L'Esprit sur le monde", my great friend, Fr. Yves Raguin, S.J., has very well expressed what kenosis consists of. Since every human being is unique in the world, living his own experiences in a way also unique and personal, I do not want to deal lengthily with the theory of kenosis. Rather, I come today to share my actual experience which will, no doubt, interest you who are engaged in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ. With you, children, building a world of friendship; with you, teenagers and grown-ups near or far who through your solidarity in the faith in Jesus, accompany me in a thousand and one ways in my journey.

Whoever you are, whatever your age and profession, I'd like to reach you; this is why at the very outset, I offer you a few comparisons that may help you grasp the main point of my message; after this, I will relate my experience more precisely.

A FEW COMPARISONS

Little child, my friend, you trust your parents and life so completely that the Lord Jesus said to the grown-ups one day: "Unless you become as little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven". And he said to Nicodemus: "Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." To be able to step into the Father's projects and to become a missionary, I must have a childlike heart, the dynamism and boldness of youth, and the vivacity of my thirty years.

If you are a child who likes goldfish, you know what happens to your goldfish if you put it in salt water. I am a "fresh-water fish", a native of an attractive city of Lac St. Jean, Quebec. The Lord led me to a tiny island surrounded by a vast sea: Taiwan. For me, to become a missionary is to be "somewhat" like a goldfish that has to get accustomed to live in salt water . . .

If you are a mother or a father, you know the joy and detachment, the love and displacement it costs to give birth and then to allow your children to leave one by one. A missionary must be able to leave or be separated physically, at least, from her parents, friends, work, and country, to offer the life of Jesus Christ to others. "If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:25-27).

If you are a surgeon doing heart or kidney transplant, you can certainly guess the physical, psychological and sociological reactions of the missionary who has to have a new heart grafted by the Lord in an entirely new world.

If you are a farmer, you know that the "grain of wheat" you throw into the ground has to die to bear much fruit . . . Jesus is asking his friends to bear the seed of his word and to produce fruit abundantly . . . Therefore, I am sure that you can easily understand what has to be lived by someone whom Christ sends to share the Good News with his Chinese, Malagasy, Canadian or African brothers, etc. . .

TO BECOME A MISSIONARY IS TO BE

To become a missionary is to be alternately a trusting child, a loving mother and father, a daring youngster, a goldfish, a transplanted heart, and a grain of wheat thrown into the ground.

Now, do you want to know how I lived all this in the reality of daily life? At the very beginning, I was fascinated

by the beauty of the country which I liken to an earthly paradise filled with verdure, flowers, fruits, variety of vegetables, and magnificent mountains . . . I felt strongly attracted to this young and dynamic nation where the majority of the people are below twenty. These two aspects were for me stimulants that made the heart transplant easy in this enchanting isle.

A STRANGER

Yet, in spite of the marvels surrounding me, there were days when I felt like a perfect stranger. Yes, I was often homesick during my first year. A stranger, because I could not communicate with the people with whom I was living and working. A stranger, because for several months I could practically not go out without being accompanied. I cannot yet read the thousands of Chinese characters that would help my orientation, neither can I ask information from the people I meet. I must therefore accept to become a little child and practically let myself be led everywhere by the hand. At certain times, this is psychologically very painful when you are at an age yearning to live an independent and full life. Happily, I soon learned where to find the mail box nearest the residence and in which opening I could put my letters to keep in touch with everybody, relatives, companions and friends from all parts of the world.

During those two years, I also had to become a little child as I began learning Mandarin at Taipei Language Institute. Every forenoon, for two hours, I kept repeating after my instructors, words of the same sound in four different tones which at the beginning, are senseless to a Westerner. Most of the afternoons were spent in memorizing what I learned in the morning class and practising to write the characters. Learning Mandarin is very interesting, but for me, it was rather demanding as I had to shut myself up within the four walls of my room.

SHADOWS . . .

After some months of sustained efforts, came moments of wanting to give up, of nausea; gloomy hours wherein I asked myself whether I would be re-born in this country some day . . . If I would ever know this language a little, at least to be able to express myself and to be understood.

Then for a moment, I regretted having followed this missionary call, asking myself at times whether this was not mere illusion . . . I dreamed about this apostolic work of yesteryear which brought me so much joy in spite of difficulties . . . This is the moment when you have to take a rest to allow the body and the mind to assimilate a little of what you are living. What I did was to stop for a month . . .

The acclimatization to the country and to a new diet brought along minor inconveniences: nothing serious but a bit annoying! I discovered too, that entering into a new culture requires a longer time and is more important for the mission than adjustment to the food and climate. This stage of my integration in Taiwan has barely started . . . and it will progress gradually along with my insertion in my future apostolic work.

Integration in a new fraternal team that is constantly changing and made up of different nationalities, is an important phase. In any group, a newcomer is always some kind of intruder and at the same time new blood that brings in a new lease in the life and dynamism of the group. There again, time and patience are needed to get acquainted, to grow familiar with, and to appreciate one another. It is indeed, in this M.I.C. milieu where I was welcomed that I take roots day after day, in the Taiwanese soil. On this ground I will continue to grow, thanks to the mutual support I find in my community and the solidarity I get from the different parts of the world.

What I have written so far may seem rather dismal to you . . . I do admit, and it is normal, for I have first shown you the death aspect of this kenosis, leading to a true rebirth, to the resurrection and fullness of life. It is throughout the journey that the two aspects of this reality are lived at the same time.

... AND LIGHTS

Through this experience of adaptation with the cross, I met great joys: joy of being born again at all levels of my being; joy of discovering and learning; joy of feeling more and more at home in Taiwan. Joy of beginning to understand what the people around me are saying; joy of being able little by little to use the Mandarin I learned; joy of recognizing here and there the characters I studied; finally, the joy of making a few outings alone.

Joy of creating new ties of friendship and fraternity; joy of experiencing what I am in the plan of the Father and joy of being accompanied by the Lord each day in my life's journey. Joy of growing in a new fraternity team and in another culture. Joy of rediscovering myself more profoundly and knowing I am maturing. Joy of seeing the great marvels the Lord is doing around me and in me. Joy of knowing that I am in communion with you all, in solidarity with the universal Church and with all men, our brothers. Joy of being where the Lord has led me. Joy of receiving His light and strength each day to enter into his project of love for the whole of mankind. In short, joy of receiving my daily mission: envoy in the name of Jesus Christ.

As you see, if my adaptation has cost me tears, these, like the rain are beneficial. They are a path of love purifying and cleansing the eyes and the heart and making me discover the true joy brought by Jesus Christ.

TO CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

Before closing, I wish to tell you again that to live happily despite everything, I had to pray much to Jesus and Mary: to abandon myself to this love, acknowledge the Lord and believe in Him to the end especially in the most difficult moments. It was also good to know that I am supported by those whom I love and in solidarity with the Christians. I have been accompanied by my M.I.C. Sisters and by the precious help the Lord has gratuitously put on my path. How often this friend of mine has said to me that one has to die to so many things in order to love in truth and that in me, a new life would somehow gush forth someday . . . that after the rain and the storm, the sun shines more radiantly . . . This is to tell you that the mission and Christian life are always lived in solidarity. "No man is an island".

It is because I believe in Life, in the Love which Jesus came to give us and which he puts in me for the others, that I have accepted with overflowing thanksgiving, to share with you my experiences of adaptation. I am pleased to remind you that I wish to remain a bridge between you and the Church of Taiwan. I still need you to pursue my journey . . .

In the joy of being sent,

Olivette Côte, M.I.C.



Gathered in the name of Christ. From right to left, Sisters Olivette Côte, Celia Chua, Marthe Lai and Mary Hsu.

JAPAN

I would like to speak also about St. Mary's Home. I reside, Sr. Agnet Uchimura, the director. It is the only possible means to give the children entrusted to us the taste for the peace and joy of the Resurrection. My life at the Home after school hours and during the night is simply a presence. Our small fraternity, made of Japanese and foreigners, is welcoming and to bear witness to the joy of the Gospel. It unites us in this place where the smallest of the Kingdom of God is received. It also means to be an oasis of prayer where we can find the humanity in the persons who are entrusted to us.

Woe to me if I do not preach Jesus Christ...

... That Your Heart May Not Weaken ...
... the Lord Jesus Christ ...
... came from the Kingdom of God ...
... predecessor, used to explain to the mothers ...
... she was giving to the little ones. It is here ...
... found the taste for God and has asked ...
... with her husband and her two children ...
... Yamagi, having received Baptism last Easter, and the ...
... children last Christmas, never stop thanking for this coming ...
... of God into their lives.

Finally, we did not restrict the Christian message to the school. There have been voluntary services for years, where the mothers of our pupils generously engaged them in sewing for the children in the orphanage, in making dresses for handicapped children, in making dresses and instructional materials for the school.

**The entire world
is our field of apostolate.
Sent by the Church,
we have, since our origin
but one and only goal:
To reveal Jesus Christ and his Gospel
to those who do not know him.**

M.I.C. Constitutions (General Objective), No. 3

Four years in Japan is too short a story to speak of a missionary experience: two years of laborious language apprenticeship, followed by a year of immersion while yet stammering in a new school system. Frankly, I am only in my first year of apostolate.

But time flies and the needs are great. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel," wrote Saint Paul who was smitten by Christ. I feel somewhat like him, impelled not only by the task, but more especially by the mandate passed on to our Congregation by the Church: "TO REVEAL JESUS CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL TO THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW HIM." We, in Japan, strive to realize this fundamental objective day after day. Before us lies a vast field of non-Christians waiting for the Revelation ... woe to us, indeed, if we do not evangelize.



by Louise Nicole, M.I.C.

THE SCHOOL, PLACE OF EVANGELIZATION

Like most missionaries in Japan, I work in a school: Saint Francis Xavier School of Koriyama. We are six MICs working in this milieu: Therese Renaud is school directress; Theresia Takahashi teaches religion and Japanese in the secondary; Theresia Fujimatsu teaches religion in the elementary; Michele Paquette teaches English in the elementary; Agathe Bolduc takes charge of the Music Department and I am in charge of the Kindergarten where I also teach catechism in English.

The school is really a place of evangelization. Apart from teaching religion we try to create an atmosphere that is conducive to Christ's revelation of himself and to the youth's living the evangelical values. Our teachers have at heart to give the school its Christian hallmark. So, they willingly give importance to prayer, to the teaching of religion and to liturgical celebrations. They joyfully cooperate in the preparations for Christmas, for the feasts of the Blessed Virgin and St. Francis Xavier. They devote one hour each month to the study of the Bible or of some religious themes. Likewise, once a year they set aside a day to reflect on Christian education. And yet, they are not Christians: among the sixty teachers and employees only six are Christians. The others are willing to be evangelized, it seems, but what is preventing them from adhering openly to Jesus Christ as members of his Church?



Celebrating the Children's Festival: Sr. Louisa Nicole and her little friends.

FROM THE SCHOOL TO THE FAMILY

When a missionary of Japan speaks of his apostolate, he can not but feel humble and poor. Nothing is spectacular in Japan; there are crowds of people, but we reach only a handful. Here is an actual experience.

At the suggestion of Sr. Therese Renaud, five MIC Sisters with hopefilled hearts, and aware of their mission as evangelizers met with Father Michel Garipey, O.P., the pastor, one Tuesday in April, to study the feasibility of offering courses to the parents of our pupils, and to plan for our apostolate.

What a blessing! There have never been so many workers for the Vineyard. Fr. Garipey, Sr. Takahashi and Sr. Agathe offer themselves to give courses to the adults while Sr. Fujimatsu and myself choose to work in the formation of young Christians in our school and in the public schools. Our objective is to give catechetical lessons on Sundays in view of forming teams of young Christian mothers for the deepening of the faith. Since the wrappings are very important in Japan, we carefully looked for the best means of presenting our projects. Finally, letters to our 800 families were sent out and each day we awaited with "outstretched necks", as the Japanese say, the return of the pupils to count the enrollees. Ah, yes, we could count them on our fingers, each day. All in all, twenty.

It is a failure, you might say . . . No! "Many are called but few are chosen", so the Gospel says. The prayer of a missionary in Japan is somewhat like Abraham's, interceding for Sodom: "Lord, perhaps there will only be 45 just men . . . only 10 . . . only one . . ." But even for one, I will proclaim your Name.

Finally, we did not restrict the Christian message to teaching. There have been volunteer services for years, whereby the mothers of our pupils generously engage themselves in sewing for the children in the orphanage, in hospital services for handicapped children, in making drapes and instructional materials for the school and kindergarten. These hours of manual work are good opportunities for exchanging information. Sr. Lucille Prevost and Sr. Agathe make it their duty to be present. Last year, the Parents' Association of the School, in a gesture of sharing, agreed to donate a part of the proceeds of the charity bazaar to a needy country. Is it not through this openness to others that evangelization of attitudes is taking place little by little?

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

Our apostolate is not limited to the school; the Sisters are also eager to be present in the parish. As for me, I opted to be with the youth. Last year, we started the Sunday School which gathers some twenty Christian children. Besides catechizing, we organize common recreational activities, and with them prepare the important liturgical feasts. Christmas is an occasion for socializing with the non-Christian children who respond in great numbers to the invitation. I am also involved in "Cecilia Kai", a choral group of young Christians who add to the Sunday Mass, the charm of their rhythmic hymns accompanied on the guitar. Through its repertoire of religious songs, this young and dynamic group proclaims that Jesus Christ is very much alive.

All I would like to speak also about St. Mary's Home where I reside. Sr. Agnes Uchimura, the directress, uses every possible means to give the children entrusted to our care, the taste for the peace and joy of the Resurrected Christ. My life at the Home after school hours and on holidays is simply a presence. Our small fraternity wishes to be welcoming and to bear witness to the joy of Love which unites us in this place where the smallest of the Kingdom are received. It also means to be an oasis of prayer where one encounters God, God in humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, God in the Japanese people. For He is really there at work, through His Spirit who preceded us and it is because of this conviction that we can carry on.

So That Your Faith May Not Weaken . . .

So that our faith may not weaken, the Lord has granted us the joy of gleanings from our apostolate. The first came from the Kindergarten. Sr. Gisele Lambert, my predecessor, used to explain to the mothers the catechism she was giving to the little ones. It is here that one of them found the taste for God and has asked to be catechized with her husband and her two children. Mr. and Mrs. Yamagi, having received Baptism last Easter, and their two children last Christmas, never stop thanking for this coming of God into their life.

A second fruit is Kesayo: a twenty-nine year old leader of the Scouts and Brownies and teacher at our orphanage. Having lived with the Sisters, she felt she lacked a dimension in her life. Baptized last Easter, she is now happy to be able to work more thoroughly in forming the hearts of her youngsters.

Mitsuko is working in a bank. The warm friendship of the youths of Cecilia Kai have brought her in contact with the Christian world. Notwithstanding her parents' opposition, she asked to enter the Church of Jesus Christ last Easter.

The last fruit is still in its maturing stage. Mrs. Komada, who teaches in our secondary school, has been obsessed for a long time with the desire to become a Christian. She prayed the Lord to give the same desire to her husband. At last, Mr. and Mrs. Komada are enthusiastically taking the pre-catechetical lessons of Sr. Takahashi. The Lord has answered the prayer of Mrs. Komada. She and her husband have faith and they will surely be admitted into the Church with their two children next Easter.

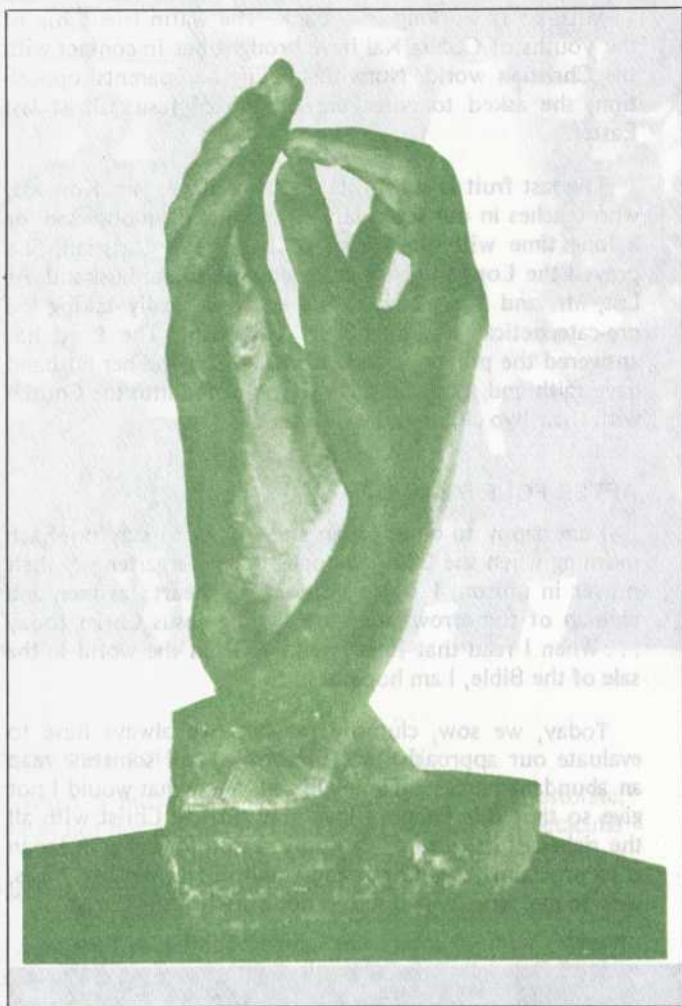
AFTER FOUR YEARS

I am happy to be in Japan and I want to stay on. Each morning when the 284 little ones in Kindergarten say their prayer in unison, I feel a hope in my heart: as men and women of tomorrow, they are singing Jesus Christ today . . . When I read that Japan ranks sixth in the world in the sale of the Bible, I am hopeful . . .

Today, we sow, clumsily maybe, (we always have to evaluate our approach) and tomorrow, will someone reap an abundant harvest? Time will tell. Yes, what would I not give so that this People I love may turn to Christ with all the riches of its culture? Our only reason for being in Japan is to proclaim Jesus Christ and transmit His Message. "Yes, woe to me, woe to us if we do not preach Jesus Christ . . ."

Baptism of Mr. and Mrs. Yamagi.





Intercession, praise, thanksgiving . . . spiritual axis of the M.I.C. life.

INTRODUCTION

This excerpt from Chapter I of our Constitutions echoes the words of our Foundress: "... that the spirit of our vocation must be a spirit of gratitude. Above all, our thanksgiving to God must be unceasing. On entering our little Society and frequently thereafter, we must offer our life as a hymn of perpetual thanksgiving, in our name and in that of all men" (1). Drawn from the very source of the New Testament, more particularly from the letters of Saint Paul, this spirit of gratitude is one of thanksgiving. It becomes the touchstone of the spirituality of the MICs.

The short commentary which follows, exposes this spiritual project in three points. They correspond to the three aspects of the proposition contained in these phrases of our book of life: "At the heart of the Church", "To be perpetual thanksgiving", "In the name of all men, our brothers" (2).

OTTAWA

I like to speak also about St. Mary's. I reside at St. Mary's, the director of the children entrusted to the care of the Resurrection. My life at the Home after school hours and on weekends is simply a presence. Our small fraternity wishes to be welcoming and to bear witness to the joy of love which unites us in this place where the smallest of the Kingdom are received. It also means to be an oasis of prayer where one encounters God, God in humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, God in the Japanese people. For He is really there at work, through His Spirit who precedes us and it is because of this conviction that we can carry on.

So That Your Faith May Not Weaken . . .

So that our faith may not weaken, the Lord has given us the joy of glowing fruits from our apostolate. The fruit came from the Kindergarten of St. Agnes. I am very proud of my predecessor, used to the little ones.

***To be at the heart of the Church
perpetual thanksgiving
in the name of all men, our brothers.***

M.I.C. Constitutions-Spirituality, No. 9 Yamski, having last Christmas, never stop thinking for this coming of God into their life.

A second fruit is Karlov, a young man, the very old leader of the Scouts and St. Agnes. Having lived with the Scouts, she felt she lacked a dimension in her life. Baptized last Easter, she is now happy to be able to work more thoroughly in forming the hearts of the young. She looks for human education and for testimony to good work among the young. Agatha and her friends, St. Lucie, Provost and her friends, are very happy to be able to work more thoroughly in forming the hearts of the young. She looks for human education and for testimony to good work among the young.

by Micheline Laque, M.I.C.

I. "AT THE HEART OF THE CHURCH": THE EUCHARISTIC CHRIST

What does "heart of the Church" mean? It is necessary to answer this question if we want to grasp the justifiability of the other two points connected with it. The visible aspect of the Church is established by this assembly of men and women called by God to acknowledge to the whole world the Good News of Salvation in Jesus Christ. "At the heart of this Church" is a living and vivifying presence: the Eucharistic Christ. Throughout the world, Christians receive the Body and Blood of Christ and become "a single body because all share in this one loaf" (1 Cor.10:16-17). Through the power of the Spirit, a "mysterious" link unites all Christians among themselves. Mystery of faith! A marvelous reciprocity exists: "it is the Church that makes the Eucharist but it is also the Eucharist that makes the Church" and, "Christ in his Eucharist is truly the heart of the Church" (3).

Now Eucharist means "thanksgiving"; it is even the act of thanksgiving *par excellence*! As a true "memorial" of the Supper of Jesus, the Eucharist does not only recall the memory of the Passover of the Lord, but through the sacramental gesture it makes present the Death-Resurrection of Christ, the salvation event for all humanity.

Accepted in faith, the recognition of this work of salvation gives to the thanksgiving act the character of a real "confession of faith": joyful proclamation of the wonders of God in man's life. From this contemplation of the mysteries of faith, "praise" gushes forth for this great love and gratuity.

The M.I.C. Sister wants to graft her life on "the heart of this Church" so that it be transformed into "a perpetual thanksgiving".

II. "TO BE PERPETUAL THANKSGIVING"

1. Thanksgiving and memory of the heart:

"To be perpetual thanksgiving" means to constantly set before her eyes the benefits of divine love for all men, to keep all these things in her heart as Mary did. Awareness of the salvation events, of the gracious action of God in life pertains to the memory which united to the heart, "This inexhaustible fund of knowledge and love", enables man to find his true identity: "redeemed in Christ Jesus", "child of God", "adopted son of the Father", "co-heir of Heaven". Because too many Christians do not realize these titles of glory, they do not bear witness in their lives to the riches of their being.

According to Cardinal Suenens, "lack of faith among Christians in what they are by God's grace", would be the major obstacle to evangelization (4). This diagnosis shows the congruous aspect of this "memory of the heart"

which is essentially "the ever actual presence of the gifts and spiritual calls that the Father unceasingly sends us ever since he snatched us from the darkness of nothingness in order to draw us to his admirable light" (5).

By listening to her deepest self, the M.I.C. Sister develops this aptitude of welcoming in her very depths the divine action whose impact on her whole life she can not fully measure. She wants to celebrate with her whole being this gift of "knowledge" by a life that would be perpetual "acknowledgement" of her joy of being a Christian.

2. Thanksgiving and confession of faith:

"To be perpetual thanksgiving" means to make her life a joyful response to the wonders of God's love. Her whole being becomes a "living proclamation" of her faith in the revealed mysteries.

The MIC life offers itself as a "confession of faith" through the link it establishes between the motives of giving thanks and her actual experiences, or at least, through this constant endeavor, to render her being "coherent": to live what she believes! Thanksgiving, like confession, is, so to speak, "grace in action". The Good News of Salvation finds an echo in her life, meaningful gestures bear witness to her faith in God-Love. Time entirely unfolds itself under the sign of gratitude for God's work in her life: life and death, joy and suffering, time and the beyond — all become clear in the light of the great Christian mysteries.

Thanksgiving is daily life lived in the "spirit of eternity": "Heaven will be thanksgiving" (Y. Congar). Here below, the M.I.C. Sister anticipates this heavenly vocation.

3. Thanksgiving and praise:

"To be perpetual thanksgiving" means to give glory to God, to praise him for what he is, in his Love, in his Gratitude, in his Infinity. "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ" (Eph. 1:3-4). This hymn which should be read in its entirety, aptly synthesizes the motives of giving thanks and praise. The climax lies in the accomplishment of "his own good purpose to make us praise the glory of his grace . . ." (1:5-6; cf. 1:7-11).

In response to this benevolent plan, the M.I.C. Sister wishes to make her life "a living offering, pure and pleasing to God" through constant seeking of the divine will. For this is the worship that is pleasing to God since this offering reaches out to Him in His loving Being (Rm. 12:1-2).

"And for all things give thanks" (1 Thes. 5:11) becomes a leitmotif for her life. In spite of certain rough moments in life, the exhortation of Saint Paul is fully justified. "Even when they are great, recurring and overwhelming, our tribulations can be seen in the light of thanksgiving because they find their meaning in the Cross" (6). In Christ, suffering is not in vain, it contributes to the advancement of the Kingdom of God in the heart of men.

III. "IN THE NAME OF ALL MEN, OUR BROTHERS":

Intercession

The M.I.C. Sister wishes to share with her brothers the happiness brought by the knowledge of God's plan. Her prayer takes on the universal dimension of Salvation, her thanksgiving is expressed through fervent "intercession": May God's Kingdom come!

"To be a perpetual thanksgiving in the name of all men" invites the M.I.C. Sister to a prayer of "substitution". Men forget to render thanks to God. So the M.I.C. Sister frequently offers prayers of thanksgiving for the benefits received, for the graces granted. The wonderment at the beauty of creation renders her sensitive to the grandeur of the Creator; she gives Him praise for so much majesty. She unites to her praise the offering of those who think not of giving glory to the Artisan of these wonders.

Her "intercession" is made more visible when, following the call of her specific vocation, she goes to other countries

to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. She assists with great joy at the co-birth of ecclesial communities which in turn will give thanks for the splendor of God's loving Plan for mankind.

"Substitution" and "intercession" therefore, are truly realized through the Eucharistic Christ in his sacrifice of praise.

CONCLUSION

Thus, because her heart "keeps memory" and in an act of faith that integrates her whole life, the M.I.C. Sister renders thanks to God. Through Him, with Him, and in Him, she truly becomes "at the heart of the Church, perpetual thanksgiving in the name of all men, our brothers"

NOTES

1. Excerpt from the Draft of the First Constitutions, p. 11. Cf. Letter of Sr. Marie Immaculee, St. Bruno, Nomingue, September 4, 1916. "After the *Pater* and the *Ave Maria*, let the *Magnificat* and the *Te Deum* be our favorite prayers. Even though nothing more than thanking God were done in the house, I feel it would still have its *raison d'être*. Our gratitude towards the benefactors of the society should be as effective as possible."
2. This commentary does not presume to be the mouthpiece of all M.I.C.s. It merely offers a meditation following the reading of this program of life.
3. Henri de LUBAC, *Meditation sur l'Eglise*, Coll. "Foi Vivante", no 60, Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1968, pp. 101 & 117.
4. *Une nouvelle Pentecôte?* Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1974, p. 261.
5. Jean-Calude SAGNE, "La Memoire du coeur", in *La Vie Spirituelle*, Vol. 132, no. 625 (1978), p. 195.
6. Adrienne Von SPEYR, *L'experience de la priere*, Coll. "Le Sycomore", Paris, Lethielleux, 1978, p. 116.



Sr. Yvette Hervieux welcoming friends.

In Mzambazi, we discover...

***We owe it to the people
to whom we are sent
to welcome their aspirations,
values, symbols, and customs;
penetrating these with joy and respect
we discover therein
the secret presence of the Spirit
preparing hearts
to receive the Good News of Salvation.***

M.I.C. Constitutions, No. 6, par. 3

To speak of people, of their aspirations, values, customs in a few lines, is indeed a feat. But because a good M.I.C. friend of ours from Quebec has asked us to do so and because of you, dear readers whom we love, we take this risk.

In order to speak to you of the people we are living with, 24 hours a day, we situate ourselves in the mission of Mzambazi, located at the center of the diocese of Mzuzu, Malawi. It is an enchanting corner of the world where poinsettias are so exquisite that they are a matter of envy for the Christmas cribs of Canada. Around us are 60,000 inhabitants, an ever increasing population due to the mushrooming tobacco plantations. Here, the hard smoker is not interested in decreasing his dosage for he gets it cheap in this tobacco land.

VALUES OF THE AFRICAN SOUL

The Malawian comes from a people who for generations has lived at the heart of nature and in a closely-knit harmony with it. The day begins long before sunrise and ends soon after supper. The sound of a woman grinding corn at four o'clock in the morning is something very ordinary. For the young missionary, freshly arrived from Canada, adaptation, or in a more sophisticated expression, "inculturation", begins right there: accepting to be awakened very early in the morning. After a few months here, we understand why our employees arrive for work, walking heavily, having already worked three or four hours in the garden. They've done nearly a half-day's work when the day begins for us! This and many other situations call for more and more understanding.

Harmony and communion with nature do not distract man from other higher harmonies. They teach him the sense of dependence, of confidence, and especially of intensely living the present moment. Every missionary like every Westerner must learn to "take time". The greetings and opening of a conversation are slow and pursued in a certain fashion. When a visitor comes to a village the host invites him to come into the house or offers him a chair outside. Then, each villager comes to squat and greet the guest. Afterwards, they inquire about each other's state of health and exchange bits of local news. Of course, if we are the hostesses, we must try to observe the same courtesy. They are not in a hurry. If we are not able to grant their requests, they will leave in the same mood they were in when they came. But they are tenacious and they will come back a little later...

There is always a tomorrow. We learn to live the process of adaptation in a relaxed and somewhat listless way to the rhythm of nature. It is a real human value and an asset not to be squandered. We also see in this a providential preparation to the calls of the Lord, to trusting abandonment to Providence. All that happens comes from God. A child is a gift from God and so is a good harvest. An African's daily activities become pure offering: prayer, good deeds and monotonous everyday duties, these fruits of effort and labor are integrated in the unique act of obedience and love that saved the world: Christ's passage on the Cross, from this world to his Father.

One of the African values is the sense of the dignity of the person. The man who is apparently the poorest is

rich with this nobility which perhaps does not give him the means of livelihood, but gives him reasons to live.

Another value is respect for the family institution. However complex the structure of the African family may be, and whatever its present situation of deep transformation the family remains the place of deep-rootedness of the person and his asylum in difficult times. It takes some years before the ties of African kinship can be disentangled especially in cases of polygamy. To respect these values is to put aside at certain times our desire for material efficiency in order to focus our attention on the understanding of and listening to the African.

Examples of solidarity are numerous. Be it a matter of building a school or a house, or of gathering corn, everybody gets to work: men, women, children.

The belief of the African in the Hereafter needs not to be proved. The funeral rites and the ancestral worship are expressions of a lived faith. Whether it be a child or an adult who dies, there is no question of not going to the village for the funeral services.

I remember this last Easter Sunday when I went to an outstation chapel bringing the sacred species to celebrate the Lord's resurrection with the people. When I arrived nobody was there. After a few minutes, a woman came to me and said: "Sister, a young girl died last night and everybody is at the funeral". So I proceeded to the village, a fifteen-minute walk from there. We prayed, sang, wept together over the departure of this young girl for the house of the Father. On returning from the cemetery, the Christians asked me, "Could we receive communion?" "Sure", I replied. It was two o'clock in the afternoon. People from the mission of Mzambazi, ten miles away had come to the place, after the Easter Vigil. Many of them rode back with me in the vehicle, others had to walk again. This was the most beautiful Easter I ever had had in my life: this young girl rising up at the same time as her Risen Lord.

Another human value clearly emerging from the common mentality and traditional wisdom of this country enables us to discover the sense of man. It is the dignity attached and reserved to child-bearing. Today, there are still many women who do not take advantage of the maternity care extended by the clinics in the towns or dispensaries in the bush. As advised by the elders, they continue to perform the rites of traditional child-bearing be it in the sacred woods or in an isolated place, so that the newly-born may come in contact with the earth from the very moment of its birth.

A SERVICE

For service is always appropriate. We expect it, we think

AT THE HEALTH CENTER

Welcoming the expectant mothers at the pre-natal clinics is Sister Francoise Royer, a registered nurse, specialized in obstetrics. She comes from St. Henedine, Dorchester county. Sister and the African mid-wives try to detect complications that might provoke a difficult delivery especially if the mother wants to give birth in her village. On account of the distance, those who foresee complications are urged to come over to the Center till the child is born. The young mothers find more security and benefit from the adequate care given at the maternity clinic. Thus, we rejoice at the birth of 75 to 80 babies each month. Cesarean cases are brought to the government hospital, sixty miles from here. A competent and devoted African doctor performs wonderful work in rather simple conditions. Here, the medical and para-medical team from the nurse-in-charge, the midwives to the nutritionist and laboratory technician neglect nothing to enrich the knowledge of the "mamas". Together, they discuss different topics in a joyful atmosphere. What they all dream of is to have a healthy baby.

Much importance is given to the under-five clinics. These clinics operate every 15 days at the Health Center. Twice a month, the mobile clinic goes to three other distant villages. At least 325 persons are examined and attended to each time. Sr. Carmelle Delisle drives the clinic car.

With the valuable assistance of Fame Pereo and Service Mond-Ami, it is now possible for us to give the needed balanced diet to each undernourished patient.

Each day at the out-patient clinic of the dispensary, about 200 to 250 patients are examined and given treatment. The number has considerably increased since the opening of tobacco farms in our region. For a year and a half, countless workers, women and children have been coming to the Health Center of Mzambazi, not only by ox-cart but by tractor and truck. Unfortunately, accidents frequently happen on these farms. Sr. Francoise and her staff attend to these urgent cases of all sorts. "Luckily, I like sewing", she often tells us.

Curative medicine can not be neglected here any more than the formation of replacements in the medical field. Summing up, the work is rather diversified and interesting for one trying to give herself 100% and whose ideal is to attend to the bodies in order to reach out to the hearts and to lavish on them the tenderness of the Lord.

This then is a glimpse of our work at Mzambazi, the land of poinsettias . . . How fortunate we are! We discover that every person is precious! The symbols, the customs of our friends are sometimes difficult for us to understand but they are the language of our brothers who, like us, are searching for happiness and meaning in their life. To share and to live the Gospel of Salvation with them is a grace!

Carmelle Delisle, M.I.C., Domestic Science

Francoise Royer, M.I.C., Registered Nurse, Mid-wife

Jeanne Vallee, M.I.C., Pastoral Worker



The Mobile Clinic returning from a distant village; Sr. Francoise Royer and Sr. Carmelle Delisle beaming with the joy of the harvest.

Authority... a service...

by Suzanne Labelle, M.I.C.

To speak of the service of authority is a rather delicate subject. It seems all has been said about this controversial topic which concerns everybody! Are we not all either dependent on authority or in authority? Though I am not an authority in this matter, here are a few reflections on this indispensable service at the heart of communities.

Except for God, all authority is exercised as a service under another authority. A sort of bilateral service, let us say. Service of God and service of neighbor; service of those who have authority over us and service of those under our authority.

AUTHORITY IN 1978

In many places, authority does not have a good press. It is discredited, judged, and complained about. It is feared.



a service...

eluded and avoided. It is confronted, defied, mocked. We try to curtail authority, we consider it as a blow to our freedom. Probably, because we take it for what it is not. Unless it is authority that considers itself other than what it should be.

On the other hand things also happen contrariwise. And this is good! We get to see the reasonableness, the usefulness, the necessity of an authority. Then, we want it, we understand it, we congratulate ourselves for it. We respect it, recognize its value, obey it. We give it our support, we collaborate with it. While accepting it, we are conscious of exercising our own freedom. This can be realized each time authority considers itself, and is considered as it should be: a service.

A SERVICE

For service is always appropriate. We expect it, we think we have a right to it, we demand it. We look for it, appreciate it, we are thankful for it. Sometimes also we render it. We render it to someone above or below us. Or rather, God excepted, it is always to an equal that a service is rendered, from one fellow-being to another, each fulfilling a different function.

SERVICE IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Therefore, in religious life as everywhere else, to fulfill the function of authority means to serve. To be present, simply present at the right moment, at the very instant when you are needed, at the very minute that call comes, or just before it comes, even anticipating the expectation of the other: such is service.

To welcome another, to listen, to smile, to sympathize, to be able to wait, to try to understand, to show empathy, to put oneself in the shoes of the other, to make one's problems ours, to look for the right solution to them, to implore lights from above with the other: this is service of docility to the Spirit.

To gather, to question, to enlighten, to support, to animate, to consult, to ask for information, to discern; to make plans, to coordinate, to evaluate; then, to reanimate, to remake plans, to reevaluate, always with the persons or groups concerned: this is service of animation.

To spur on a dynamism already present in each one, in all those who are animated by the same spirit, by the Spirit; to keep that dynamism up, to renew it, to stimulate it, to revive it, to put it to the fore and make it fruitful: these are other facets of the service of animation.

To see to it that everything runs smoothly, to assure ourselves of the necessary means to continue functioning, to take measures for the future in all prudence while being totally confident in Divine Providence: that is service of administration.

To write, to telephone, to telegram, to inform, to translate, to question some, to reply to others: this is service of communication.

TOTAL SELF-GIVING

To cross seas and lands, to have no place to rest one's head because we must go from one place to another to get familiar with the life conditions of the place, its problems, all the aspects of reality, so as to pursue together a common project in view of the Kingdom: this is service of apostolate.

To serve as an intermediary, a delegate, an interpreter at times; a guide, a reference or support, a resource-person; in short, to serve, that is in fact, true service.

To serve as a link in the religious community. A link between persons of the same group, between groups of the same region. A link between regions and provinces of the same Congregation; a link between the Congregation and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. A link between the Churches: the silent Church and the contesting Churches, Churches of the weak and Churches of the powerful, rich Churches and poor Churches. A link of knowledge and of acknowledgement and love: this is service of unity.

To serve directly the members of the group, of the Congregation to which one belongs and through these members, to serve the entire Church: this is ecclesial service.

To serve the poorest, the farthest from Christ by assisting those working among them to proclaim joyfully the Good News is missionary service.

TO SERVE UNTIL THE END

To serve day after day without getting weary and then to say to the Lord: "We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty" (Lk. 17:10). Servants, not "useless" ones according to the old translation but mere servants . . . no more . . . no less.

In order to remain so, as faithfully as possible, and to carry on one's service successfully, one must beg from the Lord the graces of light and love. The following prayer of an unknown author, or any other of similar inspiration addressed to God with the sincere heart of a servant wishing to fulfill the service of authority as best as possible, is a good way of obtaining these graces.

*Help me, Lord
to be towards all,
one who waits unweariedly,
who listens tirelessly,
who receives kindly,
who gives lovingly;
one who is surely to be found
when needed.
Help me to be this sure presence
to whom one can go
when one desires,
to offer this restful friendship,
enriched by and in
your Presence,
to radiate a joyful peace,
to be recollected in you
and open to others.*



"Consecrated life does not run counter to my femininity," Sr. Antoinette Castonguay with a group of students.

The joy of receiving and giving

by Antoinette Castonguay, M.I.C.

**Union-in Christ liberates
and opens the heart
to the dimensions of the Church
and of the world.**

M.I.C. Constitutions, No. 12

A YES TO LOVE . . .

Twenty-five years ago I said "YES" to the mysterious love of Christ who called me despite my littleness. "You have too many defects; they will not keep you in the convent." My brother hurled these words at me when he learned of my desire for the religious missionary life. Indeed, I am a very ordinary person: a simple employee, later

a telephone operator of Bell Canada, who suddenly sets out on a great adventure far beyond her. In the past (perhaps, even today) missionary life was thought to be for heroes, at least for women of great stamina and strongly built . . . not for feather-weights like me, weighing a mere 96 pounds! Yet in simplicity of heart, I offered my all and the Lord has never failed me. He strengthened me, liberated me and is still liberating me from my weaknesses and fears.

I was twenty-eight at my first missionary departure for the Philippines via Vancouver, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, aboard the "Canada Mail". The homeland seems far away when there is no hope of meeting before 15 years. Leaving my relatives, I learn to know the distant kinship of God's large family. The Asians with their delicate Oriental politeness gain way into my heart. I welcome them in wonderment!

RELIGIOUS, GRATIFYING EXPERIENCE IN LIFE

Consecrated life does not run counter to my femininity. No. On the contrary, it shapes and brightens it. My relationship of love with the Lord opens my heart to the other and disposes me to greater dedication and tenderness. Like a mother experiencing death of a part of herself when her son is taken away too soon, so too, I experience this heart-breaking powerlessness when one of my high school students, Leonardo suffers the pangs of agony during the last stage of hydrophobia claiming him totally. Looking at his emaciated corpse, wrapped in a mat, lying on the church floor for the last blessing, before it is brought on horseback to his parents, I keenly feel the naked poverty of Christ. To the very little ones of the Home, I offer affection and security. To many a teenager I share out the bread of knowledge, the discoveries of life and the Word of God. Together with these zealous leaders vibrating to the distress of their exploited nation and those committed Christians giving their time and risking their own lives, I experience to overflowing the joy of life that gives and receives.

TO LOVE AS HE HAS LOVED . . .

The missionary vocation has its exigencies. They can be funny sometimes, like for example, traveling by public transport with piglets snorting under your seat and chickens squawking at your feet because you occupy too much space. Unsettling demands, like walking for hours in the sun or in the mud to bring comfort and solace to the poor, or facing a gun for wanting to defend the truth or to conscientize. "With eyes fixed on Christ," I try to love as He loved with a personal and gratuitous love, excluding no one, not even the small monkey of Kiblawan.

Kiblawan is a mission in Mindanao, a mission at the very end of the road. I know nobody there as I am just arriving. This is my second departure for the Tropics and I feel stripped to the core on that first evening on my "new planet". I look at the people passing by. I cannot communicate with them as I do not yet speak the dialect. But, here comes a small monkey swinging on a branch, extending signs of friendship. I smile at it. I do not feel alone any more! And in the quiet of the evening the words of Saint Paul come welling from within: "Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship, or poverty . . . ? No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!" (Rm. 8:35-37)

The following day, the chieftain of a mountain tribe comes to tell me: "Why did it take you so long to come? Look, my hair is now all white." His sadness overwhelms me and a desire germinates. I am haunted by all of my brothers who have not yet heard the Good News of the love of the Father, of His redeeming and liberating Word. Very soon my dwelling place expands and my heart stretches out to the dimensions of the world. Young Filipino women share the same vision as I do. They, too, want to be evangelizers, to be bearers of hope. This is a common awareness of our responsibility with regard to this vast continent called Asia, the most densely populated continent, with only one Catholic country which is their own. In their inmost being a universal love is born: the missionary elan of Delia Tetreault, the modest girl from Quebec, enters their heart. Our world, more than ever, needs women who are liberated and available bearers of life and love.

FREER THAN THE BIRD . . .

No more solitude and aloneness. I am now obsessed with thoughts of the People of God, all his people-to-be. And freer than a bird, more prolific than a young mother, more enthusiastic than the missionary on her first take-off, I live hour after hour my joy of being a woman, of loving and of being loved, the joy of receiving and of giving!



"Why did it take you so long to come?"

As the

By Gabrielle Ouimet, M.I.C.

M.I.C. Constitutions, No. 27

20



With these zealous leaders vibrating to the distress of their exploited nation and asking their own lives in experience to over-

bud...

DYNAMISM OF THE BAPTISMAL GRACE . . .

The woman presenting herself today at the Formation Center of San Bruno, California, actually returns to the very source of her Christian life and drinks from the waters of her origin, that is, from that baptismal grace where everything was a promise, a bud. But like a seed that has to be thrown into the ground to die in order to bear flowers and fruits she, too, must be deeply forgetful of self to enter a new life. She does not know exactly what awaits her in this community, whose countenance is inevitably human, to which her religious vocation leads her. However, she is seeking Christ, whose grace she recognizes and whose call she hears; this call to forsake everything. She wants to surrender herself, to let herself be overtaken by the Lord whom she will learn to know more and more.

"God calls through his Son, and man responds". Are we not moved by this very simple revelation? But, alas, like seashells, the most simple words, the most lucid phrases end up emptied of their substance.

What is there in the heart of God so that Christ from all eternity calls the woman to follow him in the religious vocation? What is there? . . . An immense Love. A Love through which God gives himself. Through baptism Christ beckoned to her. He invited this woman to acknowledge the manner in which He, the Son of God, has committed himself with regard to her and in what manner she can live this same mystery of death and resurrection.

Christ's gaze is riveted on her. It bears both the call and the response. She heard the "gratuitous and personal call to follow him more closely", and freely, in an upsetting faith-experience she has grasped the creative impact of this call and of this Love.

IT MUST BLOSSOM AND FRUCTIFY . . .

As a bud needs time to blossom into a complete flower . . . so also a time of formation is needed for the one who wants to learn how to discover God through what she is and what she is called to be. In short, through "her" vocation.

There are decisions, options to be taken in her daily life, that certify a lifetime commitment. This commitment is lived in situations similar to those lived by the Blessed Virgin throughout her life: she had to repeat her "yes" in Bethlehem, in Egypt, in Nazareth, at Cana, at Golgotha. In all poverty, Mary commits herself and this liberating attitude is infinitely precious in the eyes of God. Mary never stopped letting herself be drawn by God because she always said YES.

So it is, for the one learning little by little how to live not for herself but for Christ who comes like an unquenchable fire. To Christ who calls, she wants to give "the ever new and free response of the one who commits herself".

"The freedom that accepts . . ." What is this affirmation about? Can we tell a rosebush to bloom or an apple tree to bear fruit? The rose bursts out freely from the bud with its unique beauty that the rosebush alone can provide.

In the religious vocation, the development of the gift of self comes along with that of freedom. The gift of self to God supposes beings capable of willing in absolute freedom as well as capable of loving.

One must be aware of the extraordinary liberating strength contained in this desire of giving oneself to Christ: YES, indeed, if this woman has enough audacity to believe that her life is a very unique adventure in Christ . . . then she will have enough sense of security to take the risk of staking everything on Him.

During the formation period, it is not so much a matter of successfully applying the precepts to be observed as to cast her life into the Christ-mold. To follow Christ is to assume his condition. Paul does not hide the fact that this

condition is a form of slavery. To be afraid of acknowledging it before the youth of today craving for freedom, is to mislead them with regard to the truth of the Gospel. "So though I am not a slave of any man, I have made myself the slave of everyone . . ." (1 Cor. 9:19). Those who love know very well that love enchains.

The woman who wants to give her life to Christ becomes a "prisoner of love". She holds from God the freedom to love Him as He has loved her. Her acceptance, her commitment, her fidelity, are the expression of this full liberty in conformity with the will of God.

THE BUD BLOSSOMS FORTH . . .

As a plant is but a growth, a promise, a bud, so also the religious vocation is but the prolongation of the promises of baptism whereby each one recognizes the inspiration God has given with the initial call. This inspiration is never exhausted by the concrete responses of life. It remains available like "living" waters for the one who wants and knows how to hear the renewed calls of the Father from whom all perfect gifts come, (Ja. 1:17) and towards whom spring all movements of life and love.

Thus, the religious vocation becomes for this woman, an increased and renewed discovery of the call of God in Jesus, a call to the perfection of love. And her response bursts out ever new and free like the blossoming of a flower from its bud.



Bravo! It was a 27 kilometer walk for a good cause . . . hunger in the world. A group of student with Sr. Bien, novice, and Sr. Claudette Bouchard, M.I.C.

MADAGASCAR



A chain of friendship expresses our solidarity in Christ.

Missionary promotion work at the other end of the world

by Marie-Claire Audy, M.I.C.

*Privileged witnesses
of the universality of salvation,
imbued with a hope that never fails,
we shall allow Christ to be in us
a relevant sign
of God's love for all men
and of communion among local Churches.*

M.I.C. Constitutions, No. 5

The M.I.C. Sister while working for the evangelization of people, is by her very vocation, a sign of communion among the local Churches. To awaken the missionary spirit in the brothers among whom she lives, thereby making them aware of the universality of their faith, becomes an apostolic priority. Understanding this priority, the M.I.C. group of

Madagascar proposed at its last Provincial Chapter, a stimulating and demanding objective: TO COMMUNICATE OUR DYNAMISM FOR EVANGELIZATION AND OUR CONCERN FOR NON-CHRISTIANS.

Missionary promotion work has become for us a pastoral activity of foremost importance. To intensify this missionary dynamism in our fraternities so that each sister may feel co-responsible, to promote this involvement in our school, through the teachers, to awaken this missionary consciousness in the local Church authorities, such is the task to which the Spirit invites us.

To reach the goal, to guide and sustain this desire, we had to look for persons willing to launch the invitation. This task was entrusted to me. From then on, I resorted to the publication "Service Mond-Ami" (Organization of Missionary Children in French Canada) which proved to be a

great help in materializing our apostolic dream. Thanks to it and coupled with a bit of imagination, each of our schools could get started, "EN ROUTE" (Theme of Service Mond-Ami for 1975-76). Our first step was to sensitize the directors and teachers. Three large flyers were prepared together with posters showing heads of children from Africa, America, and Asia.

The theme was: The school can become a place where we deepen our faith, express our faith, and commit ourselves in faith. I presented the prospectus to the M.I.C. schools of Tananarive, Antsirabe, Morondava, Mahabo, and Ambohibary.

Each school was given a folder containing the teaching materials of "Service Mond-Ami". In view of the special events along the year, we had included a missionary celebration of the Word for the primary school children and a slide show for those of the secondary, Audiovisual aids: "Comment vivre l'amour" (How to Live a Life of Love), "Rassembleur dans l'amour" (To Gather in Love), and "Vietnam" were adapted and translated into the Malagasy language. This required much time and cooperation from the teachers. It was a pleasant experience and a good preparation for the year 1976-1977.

After the summer vacations, we proposed to those in charge of each school to carry on the venture by themselves. The theme for the year was a kind of invitation: "VIENS . . . ALLONS-Y (come . . . let's go ahead!)", theme of Mond-Ami for 1976-77. The recent teaching aids of "Mond-Ami", so rich with dynamic ideas were also sent to them. Maidenoff's text was suggested as reference in order to reach all the pastoral workers of the Catholic mission in our respective posts. It speaks of the missionary commitment in the family, in the school, in the parish, in the Church.

Solidarity and responsibility are two simple things within our reach if we want them. Is not every Christian a missionary by definition? Is that not everyone's vocation? Amisol, a personage in "Service Mond-Ami", says: "The Church is a big house. There is place for a lot of people."

Our main concern in Ambohibary at the beginning of the first trimester of the school year, was to meet the two priests of the mission and the catechists of the different centers. Forty-two in all. Thanks to our speaker, Mr. Claude Rakotonindrina, catechist supervisor, we were to study together how to concretize the evangelical message and how to express it through actions in solidarity with our brothers in order to build the present-day world. We learned how to initiate the youth to involvement in their milieu: family, school, district; how to interest them in the life of other children all over the world through information and participation in the vision of the Church.

Children are generous, they willingly open their hearts to the missionaries, to friends of all races and colors. They love to share their happiness, their friendship, their talents, their services, their smiles and good humor. They are capable of making a personal response to the call of Christ. They can also be laborers of the Kingdom. It suffices to provide them with information of universal scope. Unfortunately, there is a lack of animators.

At the primary level of Ambohibary, a sizable school, we personally appealed to unity by participation and collaboration in a group activity. We were perfectly pleased with the "RASS-U" project of Amigo (personage of Services Mond-Ami) and (Together in Unity). Four classes participated in the project. Big placards showing the figure of our friend "RASS-U" were colored with the intent of forming a chain of friendship. All along the Lenten season, the child had the opportunity of showing concrete fraternal gestures; of experiencing the joy of sharing. On the eve of Easter vacation, the celebration of unity brought us together to pray and sing to the Lord and to offer our personal efforts of generosity in behalf of the five big continents.

This is, in short, how we strive to be those human intermediaries leading others to total self-giving, how we try to respond to our vocation as missionary animators in the Province of Madagascar. We do not presume having done everything. Far from it. It will always remain for us to respond more effectively to the aspirations of young Christians who want to grow by learning how to be free; to know how to use their freedom properly. LIFE within them calls for LIFE.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Message from the Superior General	2
TAIWAN:	"My Adaptation in Taiwan".	4
JAPAN:	Woe to me if I do not preach Jesus Christ	7
OTTAWA:	To be perpetual Thanksgiving	10
MALAWI:	In Mzambazi, we discover	13
MONTREAL:	Authority . . . a Service	16
PHILIPPINES:	The Joy of receiving and giving	18
SAN BRUNO:	As the Bud	20
MADAGASCAR:	Missionary Promotion	22

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