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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

A happy and blessed New Year to each and every one of our readers. May 1985 be a year where all may realize that Christ is the only way to the Father. Let us pray that this Gospel message will reach all men, from the rising to the setting of the sun, as World Mission Sunday reminded us.

The past year was one of utmost importance to Canada. It was the year of the Papal visit that none of us will ever forget. This visit surpassed all our expectations as we joined in prayer with the Christian communities in either one of the Canadian cities, to celebrate our Faith together.

The person of John Paul breathed life and hope in each of his messages. He called forth goodness. And there was graciousness to his goodness. This made his messages all the more audible to us.

He reminded us of the importance of respecting cultures, as he gave us practical lessons on how to respect the cultural background of each ethnic group he met.

In this issue, we have narratives of missionaries who are fully aware of their obligation of inculturation: in Bolivia, in the Philippines. We also have a condensed biography of a true witness of Faith and Hope, a messenger of peace, like Pope John Paul II. Our Chinese Sister, Lucia Ho, left us to meet the One she had followed so closely, accepting Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

These living examples can help us all to celebrate our Faith in the spirit of thanksgiving that Delia Tetreault, our Foundress, wanted to spread all over the world.

The Editor.

Cover photo: Tagakaolos women

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*Sr. Monique Prefontaine, sup. gen., greeting Sr. Lucia Ho on her arrival in Canada.
Sr. Therese Giroux, her companion on the journey.*

A light in the dark

Sr. Therese LeBlanc, M.I.C.

In late summer of 1984, a light went out in the life of the M.I.C.'s when they discovered that Sr. Marie Lucia Ho had peacefully gone back to the Father. This Chinese Sister was one of the most humble and gentle women I have ever met.

For the many years, when she was behind the "bamboo curtain" in China, all we M.I.C.'s prayed for her day and night. Her real name was Ho Suet Fan. It was only at baptism that she received the name Lucia, bearer of light. And light indeed she was!

Lucia was born in a wealthy Chinese family of Canton in 1906. She was the thirteenth of fourteen children. Her mother was the third wife; the three families lived peacefully in a huge compound. Lucia loved to tell us what a happy childhood she had, what an understanding mother was hers.

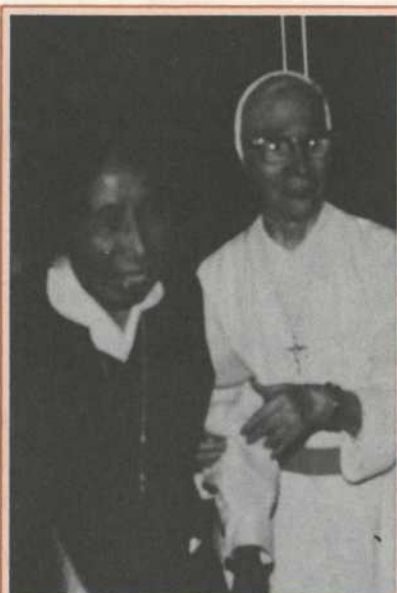
When her father died, he had the usual Buddhist funeral rites according to the village tradition. He was buried in his seven long robes and his photo was added to those of the others on the ancestral tablet in the home. Each month the family would gather before these ancestors to pay their homages.

Lucia began her first formal education with private tutors and later on she attended a Protestant school. Quite providentially, a friend brought her to the school of the M.I.C.'s, the Holy Spirit School in Canton.

Here, Lucia met the Sisters she grew to love so much. Her first teacher and guide was Sr. Gratia Blanchet, now aged 90; she taught her English and religion lessons. Lucia was tremendously interested in religious education. She had never heard of God. She was fascinated by the teachings of the Gospel, and she kept questioning her teachers to know more and more.

Soon, she enrolled in the catechumen class where she prepared for admission in the Church.

At Easter, 1924, Lucia was admitted into the Christian community by baptism, a grace she cherished all her life. Among the nine girls of her class, was Helena Fong. A friendship soon developed as the two girls discovered they had identical



Sr. Gratia Blanchet welcoming Sr. Lucia in Canada.

ideals: to become M.I.C. Sisters! Little did they realize how long they would have to wait. Their redemptive experience in the footsteps of Christ was just beginning.

Meanwhile, Lucia completed her studies and soon obtained a degree in education from Canton University. She first taught in a public school, but soon she gave it up to join the teaching staff of the Holy Spirit School.

History tells us how unsteady were the times in China. After the Sino-Japanese War came the Communist Revolution. These internal struggles often obliged the Missionary Sisters to flee Canton and close the school temporarily.

These unsettled conditions were the liberating factors for Lucia. She was free to pursue her dream of higher educational studies in the U.S.A.

In 1938, she left for Emmanuel College in Boston where after four years of study she obtained another degree. All these years, Lucia never laid aside her dream to join the missionaries. Each year she would petition the authorities for admission in the novitiate. Finally, after many years of waiting, God granted her the grace she so desired. She became the first of many Chinese M.I.C.'s.

Her life as a novice was peaceful. It was peace before the storm. God was slowly preparing her for the ordeals she would have to bear in later life. She had aspired for community life, she lived it fully in the Marian spirit of thanksgiving that Delia Tetrault wanted of all her Sisters. The dynamics of her personal redemptive experience were at work in her life.



Two friends meet again: Sr. Helena Foung and Sr. Lucia.

As a member of a missionary institute, she accepted to be sent off to Canton to serve her own people. It was there that she made her final commitment to God in 1948.

One year later, in 1949, the Communist Army entered Canton. The new government seized the school, the orphanage and the other works of the M.I.C.'s. Some Canadian Sisters were forced to leave, while five of them were imprisoned. (Eventually they were expelled.) Sr. Lucia had the opportunity to leave; she opted to stay on and help her own people. This was 1951.

Sr. Lucia was now alone. Her nearest community was Hong Kong. God was her only support. Communications with the Sisters were few and far between. She managed to continue her good works in the Church while living a simple life style with the older orphans. She was a light in the darkness to all those around her. Her life of prayer and sacrifice, day by day, went on and on, with bleak hope for the future as the revolution escalated.

In 1959, the Government began to tighten the screw on the Christians and open persecution soon followed. Sr. Lucia was not spared.

She was arrested, interrogated and finally found guilty, with the charge of "revolutionary". Then because of her new social status, she was almost totally separated from her religious family. She was subject to the State for all kinds of chores.

Her tremendous inner resources of faith and hope in the One she had promised to follow sustained her in all her sufferings.



Sr. Lucia with Sr. Mary O. Lam in Hong Kong.

The morning and evening prayer of the M.I.C.'s was forever in her heart and on her lips. "Lord, I come to do your will". "Lord I commend my spirit into your hands."

The storm escalated as the Cultural Revolution gained momentum. The Red Guards were ransacking homes and destroying all that reminded them of bourgeois life and foreign powers.

Sr. Lucia again was an obvious target as she fell within that category by both her faith and belonging to the M.I.C.'s

In spite of her untold sufferings, Sr. Lucia always tried to make life easier for the others. She even managed to prepare a few for baptism. She nursed the physically handicapped, she showed to all what Christian love is all about. Her hope in Him radiated around her. She was a light in the darkness.

Her gnarled fingers did not allow her to write any longer. Her crippling arthritis kept her more abed. But she was for all a grace of God.

This was how the Hong Kong M.I.C.'s discovered her after many years of broken communication. Sr. Mary Olga Lam bravely volunteered to search for her, as soon as the doors of China opened up a bit in 1980. She brought her the first Communion in years... which Sr. Lucia accepted in tears, insisting that she was not worthy, that she was a sinner!

After endless negotiations between Peking, Hong Kong and Canada, the Chinese authorities allowed her to go. Sr. Mary Olga returned to fetch her with a faithful friend of the community, Mrs. Joseph Wong.

The old Sister that emerged from the Hong Kong — Canton railway train was far from the gentle young woman that I had known years ago. The gentleness was there; it was clear by the bright smile that she gave to each one of us there to greet her. Her worn-out features betrayed a person who had suffered intensely.

The Magnificat, the song of praise sung by Mary, was repeated by her and all the Hong Kong M.I.C.'s as they entered Good Hope chapel. Tears were running profusely on every one's cheeks...tears of joy and thanksgiving to God to have Sr. Lucia back with them.

Sr. Lucia was now a free woman. She was free to express her faith, her hope in Him who had never betrayed her. Her redemptive experience had been a long and mysterious one of nearly 30 years. He alone knew the cost and the outcome.



Srs. Simone Leboeuf and Monique Landry, her devoted M.I.C. nurses.

She had discovered the price of discipleship while remaining deeply Chinese. Sr. Lucia always loved her people; she always spoke with love about them, showing no bitterness whatsoever. Through all the events and encounters, her loving heart lived fully, both as the instrument and the recipient of Redemption. Events and people had brought grace into her life, as she did in theirs.

Sr. Lucia's saga was not over yet. She was welcomed to Canada by loving Sisters. Among them was her old teacher and friend Sr. Gratia Blanchet, now retired in Pont Viau. There were other M.I.C.'s of Canton waiting for her at the airport. Her old childhood friend, now Sr. Helena Fong, M.I.C. was there as well. The two of them had many memories to share and a new life to discover amid the love of others around them.

Sr. Lucia's fragile health deteriorated fast. The last of her four years in Canada was spent in the infirmary of the community where everyone went to chat with her. In spite of the love and concern of all those around her, in spite of the best nursing care, Sr. Lucia was yearning to go back to her Lord.

She passed away peacefully at Pont Viau on August 29, 1984. Around her were the old Sisters who had known her in Canton, faithfully reciting the Rosary in her native Cantonese. What more is there to add?

This gentle woman who had yearned to serve Him in religious life had now reached her goal. She had remained faithful through joy and suffering. She had lived the life of a martyr, ignoring her own saintliness, unaware that she had been a light to all those around her.

Tangis: On the Eighth Day

by Pierre Fisette, P.M.É.

*You may wonder where
is Tangis? You may also
wonder why missionaries
want to return there?*

Tangis is certainly not on any map, not even on the map of Davao Province in the Philippines. It is a small territory, about 1300 meters in altitude in that mountainous area. There is no central barrio; there are some isolated thatched huts perched on high poles here and there.

It is surely not an accessible place for tourists. For missionaries, such as two P.M.E. Fathers, Pierre Fisette and Gilles Belanger, with one M.I.C., Sister Elizabeth Relacion and the catechetical team, it was a place of promise. Of course, it meant six days of travel on foot over the mountains, across rivers and through all sorts of deep, tall grass.

It meant following the guides and porters, loaded with food supplies of rice, dried and salted fish and a few vegetables.

It meant being harassed day and night by mosquitoes, leeches and other insects. Not a package deal for any tourist agency yet!

Outside influence has barely touched the lives of the inhabitants. There are no roads leading anywhere. No schools for children, practically no radios, and everyone still follows tribal and ancestral customs.

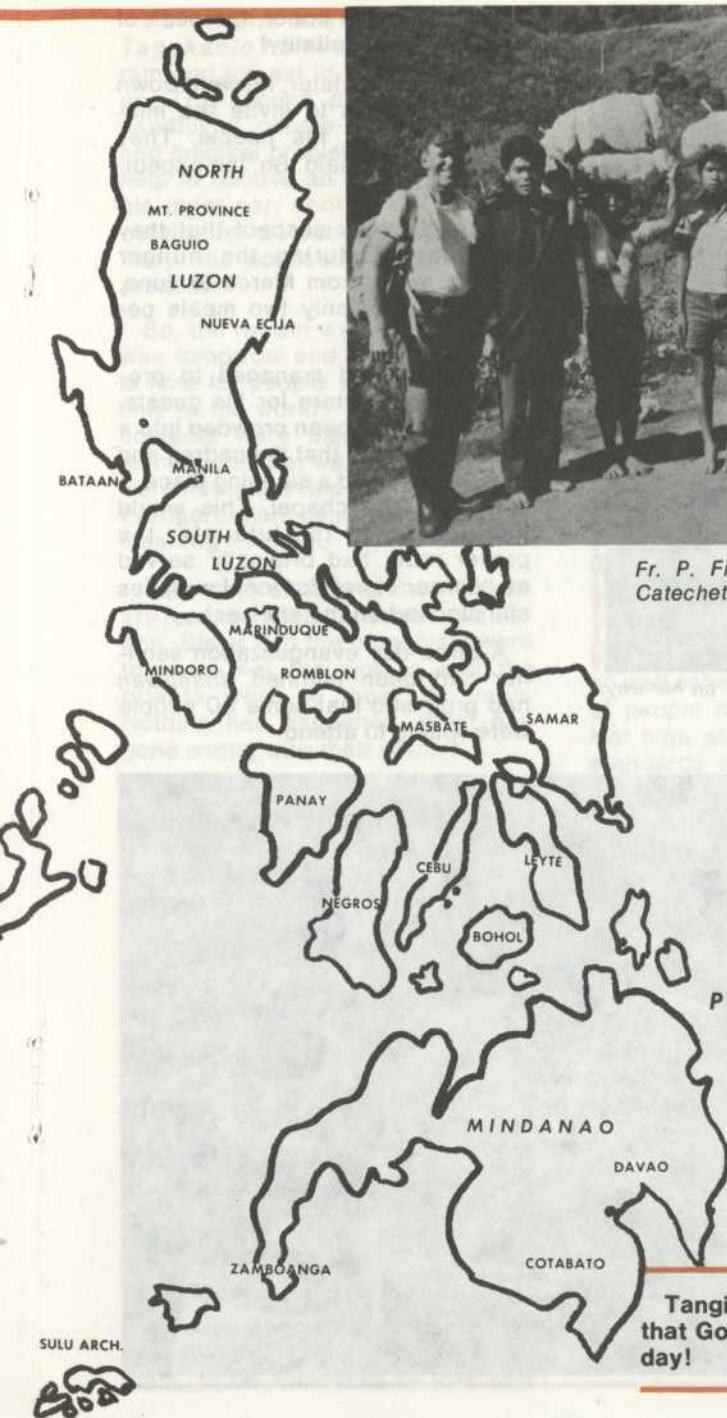
Time is not a value for these people, neither is distance. For them, "a thousand days are as one". Time is determined by counting knots tied to jungle creepers. Age is counted by seasons. "This son was born during the planting season", "that one during the time of hunger".

These natives were discovered by the P.M.E. Fathers a few years ago while they were on a pastoral round among the *Bilaans*, another mountain tribe. In this deep jungle, the priest had come across the *Tagakaolos*. He had promised them that he would return.

Meanwhile, a young man of the tribe, *Inallawan*, had been sent to a Primary School among the neighboring *Bilaans*. This is where he met the P.M.E. Fathers who invited him to attend classes in the Catholic Mission Primary School at *Caburan*.

Inallawan accepted, but the "fast life" of the lowland barrio together with the isolation from his own people were too much for him. One night, *Inallawan* ran away, back to his mountain home.

So one day, later on, when the missionary arrived in *Tangis*, *Inallawan* recognized his old friend. He greeted him cordially. He even killed



Fr. P. Fisette, P.M.É., with the Catechetical team and porters.

Tangis seems part of that world that God created after the seventh day!



Sr. Elizabeth Relacion, M.I.C. on her way...

a chicken in his honor, the peak of *Tagakaolos* hospitality!

Some months later, he went down to the lowlands to invite the missionary to meet his people. They were ready, he said. So, the expedition set off.

Little did they suspect that they would arrive during the hunger season, when from March to June, everyone eats only two meals per day!

Inallawan had managed to prepare living quarters for his guests. One family had been crowded into a smaller room so that the padres and others could find a sleeping place, a space for the chapel. This would have delighted the futurists...the prayer room had originally served as "corner store" for local supplies still stocked on the shelves!

A three-day evangelization seminar had been planned. *Inallawan* had promised that some 50 people were willing to attend.



But there are no clocks in *Tagakaolo* homes. Furthermore, rain and fog set in. No one showed up. The second and third day, a handful of people came. They all had medical problems. One needed help to remove an insect lodged in his inner ear, another one needed nursing for a near-gangrenous leg. They had no desire to listen to a preacher!

So, the refrain went on and on. It was tomorrow and tomorrow. What is time for people who have all the time in the world? Some individual contacts were made by the missionaries, but that was all. The people were not interested in any prepared evangelization seminar. It had no meaning for them.

After days of waiting, the missionary team decided to have an evaluation. Sister and the catechists were to have met the women and the priests were to meet the men. Nothing had happened. What had gone wrong with their plans?

After praying together, both feet stuck in the mud, they began raising questions such as: Are we ready to evangelize these people? Are we familiar enough with their native customs, their culture, their small universe? Have we really listened to these people? Do we respect them enough? Have we touched the spot in their lives where the Spirit of God is blowing in their midst?

All questions. No answers. Yet the people had invited them, offered them hospitality and showed some signs of friendliness on their own home base.

The outcome? The missionary team decided to continue being available to the people, to smile to them, to be witnesses of love and

charity, among themselves and with their hosts.

Suddenly, on the eighth day, something began to happen. Fifteen persons showed up, many of them sick and suffering. It was the first time in their lives that someone had invited them! It seemed late to the missionaries, it was early for them!

**The grace of God
is not controlled
by any time machine!**

The session began...but their ears were not tuned to long conferences, neither were their limbs. They roamed all over the room, showed interest only when pictures were displayed, nodded approval now and then.

The mission seemed to have failed. It had been so well planned, so well scheduled! The total number of people contacted was 49 only. Not high statistics! Yet by Gospel standards it was a success. The poor, the rejected, the destitute had come.

The tribe had heard enough now. They decided they would like to hear more. They appointed *Inallawan* as community leader to preside each week at a Bible service on the Word of God.

They begged the missionaries to send someone to teach them how to read and write. This was their top priority for the moment.

After the eighth day, the team took the road downhill. They left behind them warm and hospitable natives, part of God's people among whom the Spirit was at work in their lives.

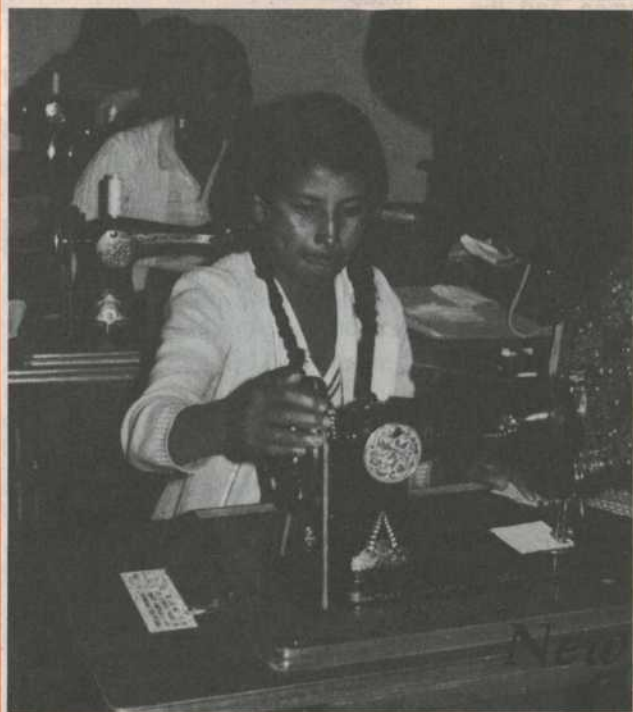
"We shall return", the missionaries promised!

*(Abridged from the original French
version by the Editor)*

Bolivia



New



New hope

out of bondage



Sr. Louise Laberge, M.I.C., originally from St. Louis de Gonzague, Valleyfield, returned to her mission field last Fall. Before leaving, Louise came to have a chat with us in our office. Her mission experience was rich, with 5 years in Japan and 12 in Bolivia.

Q: *Sr. Louise, you are about to leave Canada for La Paz, Bolivia. Could you explain to us what area of the city you will live in?*

I am returning to live and work with a team of M.I.C.'s living in one of the poorest districts of La Paz, Santa Rita Zone. Many of these people are migrants from rural areas. They have come from the countryside to settle in the city for social and economic reasons. Some of these are Aymara Indians originally from the bleak mountain plateau running through the Andes.

Q: *Would you tell us what projects you have in mind to help these women?*

Our team expects to organize a Co-operative to work in solidarity with the Bolivian women, so often the victims of exploitation, both socially and sexually. Our project includes lessons in reading and writing, as well as sewing garments that can be sold for their own profit.

Q: *You mentioned that they came for social and economic reasons. Could you explain this further?*

One of the main reasons why these women come to the big cities is for the educational benefit of their children. In the little country school, instruction is very basic and unstable. They wish to offer these children a better chance in life.

Q: *In what ways are women of this class exploited?*

The uneducated women of this class of society ignore their basic human rights. They are unaware of their own human dignity for they are often used for the mere pleasure of man. They become unwed mothers very young in life. They have to bear the burden of bringing up several children with no help or recognition of the father. The mother is both mother and breadwinner for the children.

Q: *Sr. Louise, how did you manage to become involved in this type of work?*

As parish social worker, I could enter the homes. I soon discovered the sad plight of these women, so we M.I.C.'s decided to do something to help them out of their bondage. First, we thought of showing these women how to read and write so that they could find out for themselves what were their basic human rights. To encourage them to come, we had to offer practical lessons as well. We decided on basic home hygiene, cutting and sewing of clothes, knitting. As we could not do all this ourselves we needed outside help.

Q: *Who was this outside help?*

Some young University students heard of our plans and came to offer their services. They would teach them to read and write on a voluntary basis. However in order to help the women value and appreciate their courses, we asked them a very modest fee. This would also help us to finance the project. In each group, we had about 10 to 12 persons.

Q: *It sounds rather depressing to hear of such exploitation in our day and age. What helps the women to survive in these inhuman conditions?*

It may well sound depressing, but these people have learned how to cope with life. They may well take it for granted that the man can beat them, but this does not destroy them. Their human relationships are very genuine and warm, factors not always noticeable in our consumer society.

These people also know how to celebrate life, to celebrate human realities such as births, weddings, even deaths. This is done in song, dance and music. They are extremely courageous and have much to teach us in facing the hardships of life.

Q: *How do you feel now that you are leaving this consumer society to go to share this life, to live in utter poverty with these women?*

I feel very happy to return. These brave native women have taught me to liberate myself, to become the real person I am. They have taught me how to deal with the unexpected, to live without the frills of modern life, without the needs that our society is constantly creating for us.

I love these people, they are God's people. These women are my sisters, they need my help and cooperation. I will work in solidarity with them so that they will feel my moral support, so that they can have hope. Through my love, they will perceive the love of the Father for them. Together, we will share life, work and the Word of God. This will bring us all to **NEW LIFE and HOPE.**

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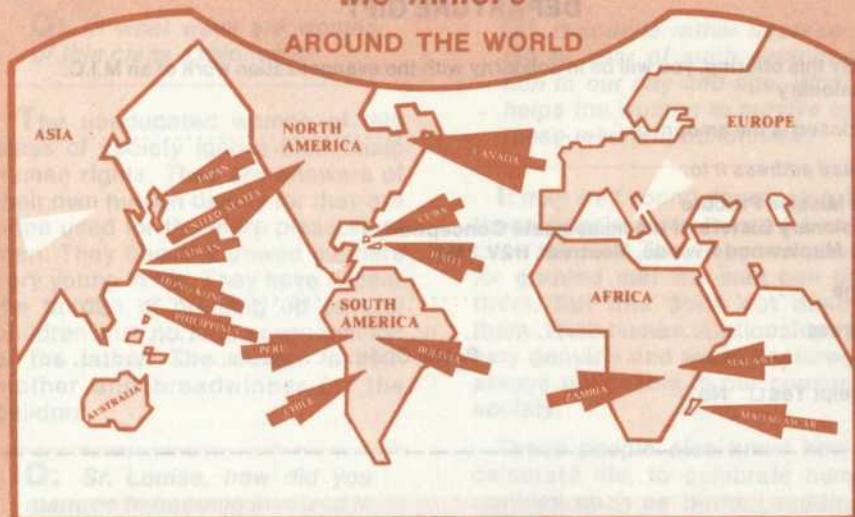
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