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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

The Year of Youth themes - participation, development and peace - provide a smooth transition into the International Year of Peace themes: peace and development, peace and disarmament, preparation for life in peace.

In this issue some of our M.I.C.'s wish to share with us their hope and frustrations as they work for this peace on earth in various countries.

One of them explains the difficulties of the refugees adapting to their new status in life while they wait to be admitted in other countries. A Filipina M.I.C. sees her work as a peace agent among her own people who have immigrated to Canada. A young Vietnamese refugee cries out his pain in poetic form, reminding the world that he too is a person, a person searching with others for peace and freedom.

The Church in its mission to work for peace and justice often reminds us that we are all peace agents, that all of us are responsible to bring about justice where injustice reigns. Pope John Paul II gave us food for reflection in his message on World Day of Peace: "Peace is a value with no frontiers: upon North-South, East-West, let there be but **one peace.**"

The Editor

Cover photo: Vietnamese refugee girl today.
(Photo credit: H. Turcotte, M.I.C.)

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There's a new world somewhere...

*From an article contributed by
Françoise Royer, M.I.C.*



The boat people seeking refuge: (Photo credit: Jesuit Mission Procure)

"Palawan Refugee Camp has been a school of love for me during these last three years," claims Sr. Françoise Royer, a Canadian M.I.C., who has been sharing the life of Vietnamese refugees on an island of the southern Philippines.



Sr. Françoise Royer, M.I.C.,
midwife, nurse and teacher at the camp.

In Canada, all of us have read many stories about these "Boat People" who sought refuge in the free world. Many parishes have adopted families, and helped them adapt to Canadian living. Some families I know, have gone so far as to adopt several younger refugees. Their story is now familiar to all of us. Yet, Sr. Françoise wrote, wanting to share some of her feelings for reflection with us.

"I have been living here for more than 34 months now. I share the life, the frustrations, the hopes of these people whom I love and respect. Their situation in life is far more complex than you would ever imagine.

There are 3 main factors to this experience, as I am living it. I know

now that no one should ever attempt to speak on the subject of refugees unless he himself has had a similar experience at one moment in life.

The second point is that these refugees need to feel the friendship of others. They need to feel their trust, their belief in a cause for which they willingly gave up family, home and country.

In the third instance, I have discovered that the need for hope lies deeper than the need for food and shelter. Even the most vulnerable refugees are willing to cross overwhelming odds when they know that hope lies at the end. No sacrifice is too great for them when it comes to save their dignity as human beings.

Refugees find themselves locked in between two worlds. They live suspended between a memory and a hope. They are homesick. They cannot forget country and culture. They have lost their past. They cling to memories of places and people left behind them.

They envision an uncertain future. Their ultimate aim is to be resettled, to move away from the restraints of camp life. They find themselves at crossroads, uncertain which way to take. This makes them very uncomfortable. They get easily bored, disgusted with camp activities after years of waiting.

Some of them manage to organize their time and offer their services as teachers, translators, interpreters etc. But all of them are worried about family members left behind. They still mourn companions lost at sea.

As refugees, they realize they have lost the citizenship of a given country and lie now at the mercy of a host country. They know they are directly under the control of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and this is a source of humiliation to them.

The younger ones are in a state of great emotional insecurity. They were mere children in 1975 at the time of the fall of Saigon. Ever since then, they have been victims of political propaganda. They have a need for basic education in human values. They must learn from experience the meaning of love, justice, sincerity and mutual trust. Many must overcome their xenophobia.

Now that I am well accepted by them, I occasionally get invited to share a meal with families. Over a cup of tea, over a plate of rice, they open up their hearts. They always

People getting ration of rice.

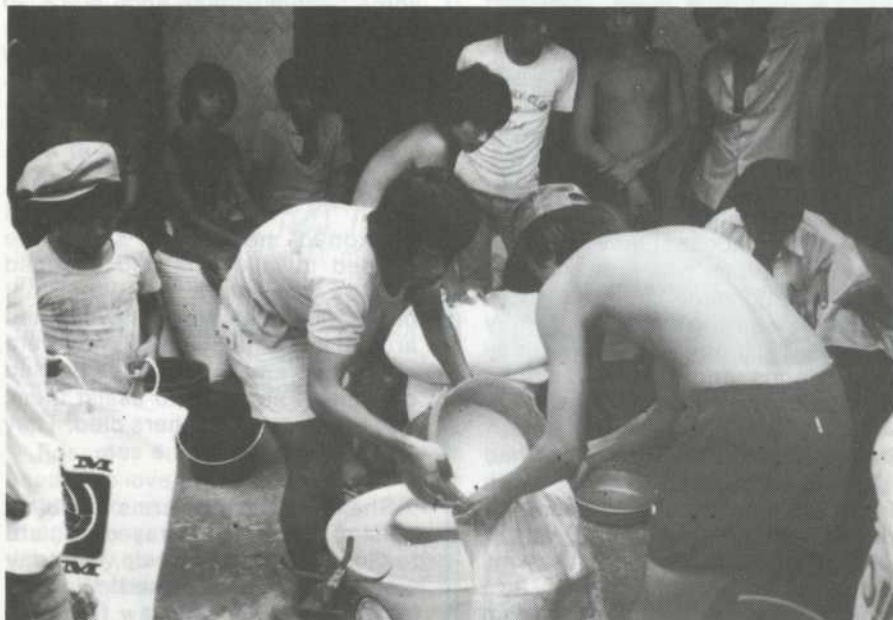




Photo credit: Jesuit Mission Procure

hesitate a moment before taking the first bite. This is the hour - the time - when they best remember their loved ones "back there", some of them lingering in prisons or in re-education camps.

It was during such a meal that Quoc Cong Tran related to me his sad story. Together with his family, he was sent to live in a special economic zone. On arrival there, they saw at once that they could not survive, the land was not fertile. So they risked coming back to the city illegally. But how can a family manage to hide? Somehow, they did. Friends and relatives helped them at their own risk.

One day Quoc Cong Tran had enough. He decided to escape with 3 of his children. They spent 34 days at sea. Of the original group of 47, 37 of them died on the way. Among them were his 2 sons. As I looked into the sad eyes of this

father and his surviving daughter, I began earnestly questioning myself what kind of government could ever force people to take such steps, to risk their lives in such a way? "What is existence in your own country if there is no meaning to this existence?" he concluded.

During one of my French classes, Soun Thy, a 17 year old girl beckoned me to her side. She needed to talk. She had escaped with 22 others in a small boat that broke down at sea. They drifted around for some 50 days. They were out of food and water. Ships passed by without stopping to assist them. Her brother and 7 others died. They threw his body into the sea.

She grabbed my arms sobbing. "Sister Françoise, I prayed so hard to God and Mary for help. One day we were saved: it rained! We collected water and ate raw fish until

we landed. I'm here now, safe, but my sister is still in Vietnam. She was sent to prison for one year after trying to escape." It was then that I noticed how her hair had thinned out through sheer worry.

On October 24, United Nations Day, a young friend of mine, an unmarried mother gave birth to a son. How ironical that this baby boy should be born here in a refugee camp on this very day. The baby's father is somewhere in America. His grandparents are in Vietnam. His other relatives are scattered all over the world.

When the young mother returned to her house with the baby, she was full of joy. But day by day, she began worrying whether her son would one day curse her for bringing him into this world? I watched her whispering words of tender love to her baby. She made the sign of the cross on his forehead as she talked to him gently about life. I was amazed to see her jot down daily events in her diary. She was keeping that for him. Believe me, it is some experience to be a midwife in a refugee camp, here in Palawan.

Is it necessary for me to tell you that this refugee camp has been a school of love for me? The first year, I was tempted to give priority to work and efficiency. Now, I have learned that love is what matters most. It is my presence of love among them that comforts them, that reassures them. I keep reminding them that the world has not forgotten them. Somebody out there cares.

For me, following the Gospel means to love these refugees. To be willing to spend all my time with them. To serve them in a manner that they can accept. I want to be a sign of solidarity with them, a sign of hope.



Refugees are voiceless. They need my voice. I am forever challenged by Paul's words when he wrote to the Corinthians: 'If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts of the body suffer with it.'

(1 Cor. 21-26)

(The names are fictitious)

One Peace



I, refugee person,
Didn't choose this lifestyle,
Far from my roots.
I am a fisherman, infant, soldier, mother,
teacher, student,
I am a person.
I came from Vietnam.
I had no alternative but to escape.
It may seem I came with nothing
But that is not true.
I came with one thing only... a burning desire
To see my people and homeland saved.
Saved from war and slavery.
Saved from destruction,
Saved from abuse,
Saved from itself.
You laugh at me, mock my high ideals,
But you don't understand.
I am only one voice in millions
Who have the same yearning.
I may not be educated, rich or powerful
But I do know one thing:

Unity and Peace and Freedom
Belong to all people,
and are the only way to save the world from destruction,
I'm tired of struggling, tired of pain,
Tired of seeing my world slowly go into ruins.
If only we could have the eyes
To see others' situations
The ears to hear others' pleas
The heart to share others' burdens
The hands to reach out in brotherhood
The voice to speak for those who can't speak.
With a little more effort, a little more concern
A little more love and support
Our world would be a place of Unity
If we really wanted it to be.
Afterthought: My words came from a heart
That has known disunity,
Oppression, war, hatred.
I am willing to sacrifice all for our world.
Will you help me?

(Composed by a Vietnam student with the help of his English Teacher. He has been living in the Palawan Camp for more than 3 years.)



Among my own people

*Condensed from a report given by
Sr. Estela del Bando, M.I.C.*

Can you be a missionary in Canada? You certainly can, says Sr. Estela del Bando, a Filipina M.I.C. involved in pastoral work among the Filipino community of St. Kevin's Parish in Central Montreal.

Estela explains in her own poetic language: "As days unfold into weeks, and weeks into months, activities roll on, taking different shades of color. Some days are bright (interesting), others are gray (emotion laden), others yet are dark, (discouraging) but most of them are white, (full of hope)."

"During Lent last year, I helped the Filipino group prepare a Passion Play. In spite of the numerous setbacks expected in a any large group, in spite of the cold Canadian winter night, some 200 spectators attended the play. It was a success. Many admitted that some of the scenes touched them to tears. The cast discovered that their production had helped them create a bond among themselves, almost a spiritual bond. They had enjoyed themselves. As for me, I was thanking God and singing praises in my heart."

She describes some of her work. "Each week, I have a number of visits to carry out. It may be visiting



Sr. Estela del Bando, M.I.C.,
with the Filipino choir.

the family of first communicants or others about to receive the sacraments. This family visitation is a very special ministry to me as I can be the witness of extremely moving episodes.

I have watched couples who have shared their lives together. When one of them loses his life partner, he becomes totally disoriented. I have listened to young couples experiencing pain where joy and happiness should be theirs. The reasons for the collapse were both big and small. Big when God slipped out of their lives, their homes. Small, when they had taken each other for granted. When relationships broke down because of in-laws or other reasons.

But I have also witnessed beautiful reconciliations... I have seen persons willing to compromise, to forgive, to start anew.

My visits also include those at funeral wakes, where I try to bring the

comfort to Christian prayer and acceptance of God's will. My visits lead me to hospital beds, near the sick and dying to whom I try to bring some joy before they leave us. Sometimes, I may succeed in bringing about reconciliation at the last days between family members. In each case, I hear over and over again God's Words made flesh, such as the time when I heard a dying father wishing to see his prodigal son so as to offer him his forgiveness.

Daily I can testify to the fact that I witness the happiness and loneliness of real life. I see life, death and resurrection in each one of them, in each one of us, the paschal mystery assumed in everybody's life.

I forgot to mention that I also help to organize "Evangelization Seminars" for Filipino groups. These sessions help Christians deepen their faith as they search together in the Bible the messages and challenges that Jesus proposed to all men of good faith in the Beatitudes.

Sr. Estela on a home visit.





Participants of the Evangelization Seminar.

In these seminars, a group of us Filipina M.I.C.'s, team up to present the topics for reflection and prayer. Sr. Felicidad Dacayanan, Sr. Angie Yap, Sr. Edita Telan and myself often form the team. One time, we had the joy of including Sr. Angelita Olimba and Sr. Milagros Gomez who were here in Canada attending a long session.

I could not end this article without talking about our Filipino choir. The renown of the choir has zoomed these last months as request after request comes in for various occasions. We had the privilege to sing at the funeral Mass of some P.M.E. Missionaries who had worked in the Philippines. The last one was that of Fr. L.C. Sabourin who had passed away in Davao.

I feel saddened by the fact that many of our Filipino family values and others are becoming deteriorated as the second generation is raised in a land foreign to their fami-

lies. Many of the young people, even children do not have the faith of their fathers, nor the respect for the Church that we find in the Philippines, our country.

But, I am happy to work in this pastoral team with another nun and two priests. Our parish priest, Fr. Brady has always shown full support and concern for all our projects. On the team, I keep reminding myself of a principle to which I adhere closely: 'It is not what the team can give me, but what I can share with the team that counts.' This had helped me work harmoniously and peacefully with the others despite our cultural differences, our family backgrounds and our religious training.

Yes, I do find myself fully missionary here in Canada **among my own people**, the Filipinos, sharing my faith with them in a cultural manner that we understand.

This chair for me?

Ambohibary, Madagascar

Dear Anna,

We had beautiful and long Holy Week ceremonies. The Easter Vigil started at 11.45 p.m. We arrived back home at 7.00 a.m.! Will you believe me now when I tell you that the longer the ceremony is, the better the people like it!

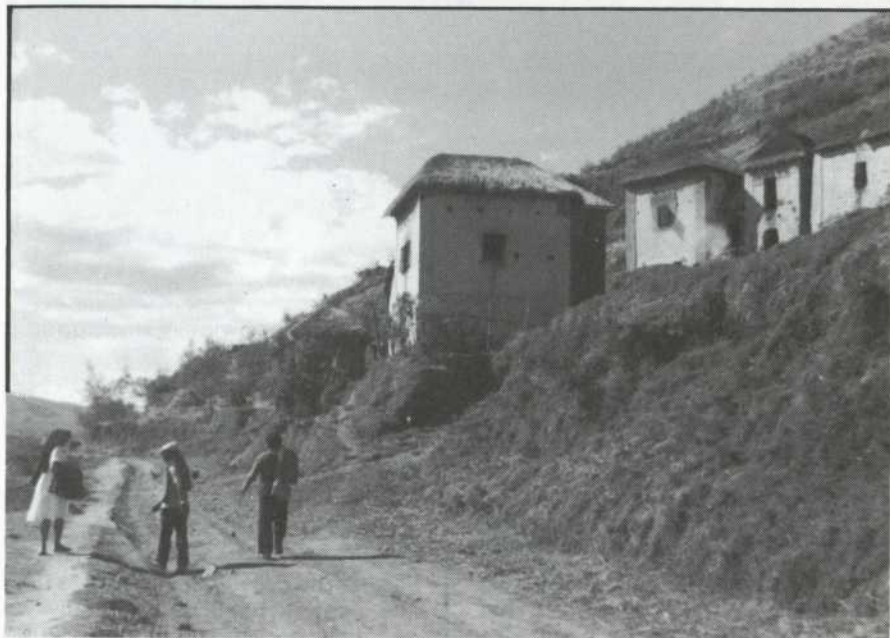
According to an old tradition, on Easter Monday, the parish priest invited the Sisters out for a picnic. I stayed home with one of the Malagasy Sisters. But the following Monday, my turn came about. Father was going to visit one of far mission posts, so he invited me with another Sister and a catechist. Because of "my age" ... they offered me the best seat in the jeep, near the chauffeur. This reaffirms to me that I am really getting on in years, although my birth certificate states that I have just entered the 70's!

After driving over terrible roads, the driver halted and told us that the next 4 kilometers were going to be "rough roads"! "Yesterday as we passed through the bushes we got caught in the mud... we were held there for several hours. Claude, can you remember exactly which ruts we took, so that we can avoid them today? I must aim straight today!"

Claude could not remember. Not too reassuring. I began to pray St. Joseph, who must have heard me, for the driver did manage to take the right ruts this time! Finally we reached our destination at 2000 meters altitude. No sunshine. A heavy wind. Biting cold. A very small church building in the middle of a meadow. A tiny house of 2 rooms, the residence of missionaries who passed by on their way to the bush missions.



Sr. Rose Blanche Noel, M.I.C.



I looked all around for other habitations. None were in sight. But strange to say, more than 200 people were already assembled at the church to greet us. They had walked 2 or 3 hours to attend Mass, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and attend a catechism lesson. They were all bare feet... on a cold cement floor...yet fully attentive to God's Word.

After the Mass we shared a meal in the priest's residence. A plateful of rice, some fruit laid out on the bare table. Everybody sat on wooden benches. I was given the one chair! All this because of my respectable age of 70! They do respect the "elderly", you must notice... I, who had the illusion that my age did not show.

During the marriage ceremony in the afternoon, I was ushered in front, on the lone chair that had accompanied me all the way. You

can well imagine how mortified I was, when I saw the celebrant having to stand up all through that Mass. But these people were so honored to have a religious woman present. It was a first in their Church history, and it was me!

On the way home, didn't it start to rain? Well, we managed to get through, by driving at the speed of 10 miles per hour and by invoking St. Joseph who seemed to sympathize with us. To save gas, once we were out of danger, the driver turned off the ignition and we rolled gleefully down the hills, and around the hairpin curves! But St. Joseph was always with us and saw to our safety. We reached home at sunset, glad to be alive. I noticed that I had been sitting down all day. Long live the elderly!

**Your friend of Madagascar,
Sr. Rose Blanche Noel, M.I.C.**

Did you know that...

● The Legion of Mary is very much alive in Asia, especially among the Filipino groups scattered in the diaspora. In Hong Kong, with its 26,000 Filipinos, there are 5 Filipino Legion groups. In Taiwan, they form 4 Praesidia. The Philippines has 15,000 Praesidia with some 200,000 active members. Korea also has 7000 Praesidia with 80,000 active members. Hong Kong has 250 Praesidia with some 2,500 active Chinese members. Indonesia is reaching the 1000 groups. Japan has 120 Praesidia.

● Last October, the J.M.J. Children's Fund of Canada, Inc. presented \$400.00 to Sr. Marie-Marthe Terrien, M.I.C., a missionary from the archdiocese of Ottawa. This amount covers the expenses of the education of 4 teenagers in a secondary school managed by the M.I.C.'s in Mzuzu, Malawi (Africa). The donation was offered in the name of the Association by Mrs. J. Coderre, the president of the Board of Directors for J.M.J.

● Nepal, an independent kingdom north of India, has a population of more than 1 million. Hinduism is the state religion. There are some 1000 Catholics with their 28 priests, 26 religious women and 6 brothers. Although religious freedom is guaranteed, it is unlawful "to change religion". The Church activities are limited to education and social help. The kingdom has diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Some of the English Canadian Jesuits are missionaries today in Nepal.

(Sources of Information: The Queen, Dec. 1985, Canadian Jesuit Missions, June, 1985, and a report sent by the J.M.J. Children's Fund of Canada, Ottawa.)

Schedule of Masses for our Subscribers

March 1986

Kaseye (Malawi)
Joliette (Canada) 2
Rosal (Philippines)
Tokyo (Japan)
Colon (Cuba)
Trou-du-Nord (Haiti)
Longueuil (Canada)

April 1986

Cap-Haitien (Haiti)
Pont-Viau (Canada) 8
San Juan ICA (Philippines)
Ambohibary (Madagascar)
Cikungu (Zambia)
Lima, Prov. House (Peru)
Louis Colin (Montreal)

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