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MIC

MISSION NEWS

Laying down my roots



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

Going back to our roots may be quite exciting. These roots can extend far and wide as they did for Sr. Laura and Sr. Jeanne when they planned their return to Manchuria. This had been their first mission forty years ago. There, as young missionaries, they had served with love and enthusiasm. There, they had left old friends. But long years of separation had not dampened these friendships. Together with them they prayed, they laughed, they cried. Their roots are still there in China.

Other roots are still extending and growing as is the case of younger missionaries who happily return to share the life of the people they love in Haiti, in Peru. Some roots are totally new shoots in a country welcoming this newcomer. It is the case of one Sister relating her joy on just being there for the present, while she is learning the language.

Our Christian roots extend into the Kingdom of Heaven, to the very "house of the Father of all men". Sr. Simone explains how her patients serenely leave her, to return to Him whom they loved and served in the missions all over the world.

This is what our issue is all about... going back to our roots.

The Editor

Cover photo

*Little two year-old Michael Pau
at the violin.*

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Forty Years Afterwards



Fr. Jean-Yves Isabel, P.M.E. (2nd left), Srs Laura Therrien, Jeanne Bouchard, (4 & 5th in line) with some employees, in front of a former mission school in Szepingkai, Manchuria.

Last September, two M.I.C.'s, former missionaries in Manchuria during the 30's and 40's, returned to their first mission field to visit old friends whom they had left behind some 40 years ago.

Sr. Laura Therrien and Sr. Jeanne Bouchard left Hong Kong where they have been working for years, in the company of a Father of the Foreign Missions of Quebec, Fr. Jean-Yves Isabel.

When the three of them boarded China Airlines in Hong Kong bound for Peking they had mixed emotions. As they flew over the country they had loved all their lives, they still remembered the many Christians they had prepared for Baptism, and the native Chinese Sisters with whom they had shared their lives.

In Mukden now called Shen Yang, they were surprised to see the large delegation of sisters and friends there to greet them. The next day, they left for Szepeing always in the company of Fr. Jean-Yves who escorted the two elderly sisters all the way. (Sr. Laura called him "a real St Raphael", because he took over the heavy luggage and parcels that our 70 year old Sisters could not carry!)

In Szepeing, the M.I.C.'s had labored for many years. Not surprising then, that all the friends who heard of their coming gathered to meet them. After the customary Chinese banquet where everyone wanted to share news with the other, the Sisters were asked to retire to their hotel. Foreigners are not allowed to stay with friends in their homes.

Shortly after their arrival, two officers of the Religious Affairs Bureau came to greet the Sisters. They were well aware that Sr. Laura had worked 15 years in Manchuria and that Sr. Jeanne had served the people 8 years.

The following days were spent visiting the premises of the former mission compound. Before entering

each establishment, they had to request permission to enter. They visited a school which has been transformed into a children's nursery for the factory workers' youngsters. They strolled through beautiful parks meeting many young mothers with their one and only child permitted by the State.



The newly constructed church in Szepeing

The elderly Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary, a native community founded by Mgr. A. Lapierre, P.M.E., came forward to meet their Sisters. The M.I.C.'s had been in charge of their religious formation until they were forced to leave Manchuria. Then, Mgr. Lapierre had appointed a Superior General, Sr. Li Loasa. She was accompanied by several others who share the same living quarters. All these years, they had supported themselves by household work and sewing. Today, their health is greatly undermined but their faith in God has remained staunch as ever.

Now, these Sisters help in the upkeep of the newly constructed church, dedicated to the Sacred Heart. For the formal blessing by the Bishop last June, the Hong Kong M.I.C.'s had been able to forward gold embroidered vestments at their request.

All these years, these Sisters had managed to find opportunities to answer letters from the Hong Kong M.I.C.'s, namely Sr. Odile Malboeuf, who wrote regularly to them, though they answered rarely.

Each day at 5 p.m., Srs. Laura and Jeanne joined the people assembled in the church to say the Rosary and the evening prayers, followed by a meditation point. According to the custom, men sat on one side and women on the other.

After Masses, the people literally threw themselves at the feet of Fr. Jean-Yves to ask his blessing. They brought with them medals, crucifixes and rosaries to be blessed as well.



Sr. Jeanne with a Rosarian Sister

As a foreigner, Fr. Jean-Yves was asked to celebrate Mass in the sacristy. During the Mass in the main church, people sang continuously except at the Consecration. This was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament all sung in Latin again.

The three visitors found themselves surrounded as soon as they left the Church. Foreign visitors are few and far in that remote area of China. The organist came up to Sr. Laura, thanking her for the music lessons Sister had given her years ago.

Before leaving, their hosts and friends invited them to more banquets. The Sisters refused to accept those restaurants who wanted to segregate the foreigners from the Chinese. They finally found smaller restaurants where they could all share a meal together in an enclosed room.

After all these joys, parting was difficult for both sides. However, now that China has opened its doors, there is always hope for an au revoir. Although the communication had not been totally open because of living circumstances, many hidden messages were passed through tears and smiles.

On their way back, in Canton, Sr. Jeanne met a priest who had served them in the leprosarium where she had worked for years until her expulsion. They also met numerous

friends there, many former orphans and teachers of the Holy Spirit School.

The visit was an answer to many prayers and dreams. It would have been impossible a few years back because of the political situation. It would have been hard without the support of Fr. Jean-Yves, always ready to give them a helping hand. It was through the generosity and understanding of the M.I.C. superiors, happy to allow these Sisters to return to the roots of their early apostolic endeavors.

(Excerpts from a report sent by Sr. Laura Therrien and Sr. Jeanne Bouchard as well as an interview with Sr. Odile Malboeuf.)



Sr. Laura in the home of Chinese friends in Szepeing kai



Sr. Simone Leboeuf in her office at the infirmary.

Going Home

When the missionary sisters become too old to work in the missions they sometimes come back to Canada to spend their last days in prayer and sickness. When a younger missionary is stricken with a terminal cancer and no treatment or personnel is available to relieve her, she too has to come back. She then enters the infirmary where several M.I.C.'s are on duty.

These Sisters often have to accompany them as they prepare for the final journey where they will meet the Father. Sr. Simone Leboeuf, an M.I.C., who has served many years in Haïti, now finds herself at the bedside of her dying Sisters whom she prepares one by one for the longest journey a missionary can undertake. In this article, Sr. Simonne herself relates some of her experiences with these dying missionary Sisters of all ages.

"As a nurse, these last 6 years, I have assisted 56 Sisters of my community during their terminal illness. This means, I have met death face to face. This means also that I can look at it without fear and even go as far as to love it. Nevertheless, I have never really become accustomed to it, because no one can easily accept the death of a dearly beloved person. And those who died here, I loved them dearly. Confrontation with death enriches life. It gives a meaning to life.

Several of these dying companions were dear friends of mine. We were the same age. We shared the same mission experience. We lived the same community life. With some of them, I cried, while listening to their fears and their sufferings. Today, I would like to share with you this deep experience. It might help some of you who fear that journey into the unknown.

But be reassured, there is a special grace for that hour. I have seen some who were really terrified of death. They wanted to live on ! In the end, all of them, without exception, went to

God peacefully, in great serenity and calm. The day before her death, one young missionary sister who had struggled a great deal, hugged me saying : "If only you knew what a beautiful vision I have had !" I felt she was in deep communication with the Lord.

After a visit of the doctor, one Sister asked me : "How much time does he give me ?" I merely answered : "You are so close to the Lord, now you will be happy to know without a doubt that you could have only one more week with us..." We both cried together and after a long moment of reflection she said : "Now, I want to live fully the days that are left of my life. I am looking forward to meeting the Father. I will throw myself into His arms."

A STAGE OF GROWTH

We will all die one day. Nothing is more certain. We are all invited to live out fully the days that are left. Death is not at all destructive. It is really and truly a constructive and positive element of life. It is the key that opens the door to a new life, an eternal life. This is the last stage of growth.

Death may be the fulfillment of a life well lived out. Or it may simply be the end of a certain number of years on this planet. At the end, each one is alone. It is not the number of persons around us as we leave, nor the number of years that really count, it is THE QUALITY OF OUR LIFE ! Only that can give us courage to face that last journey.

One dying person told me : "I have lived more deeply these last three months than the sixty other years of my life !" She had grown in faith, she had made a new commitment in her given situation, admitting that she regretted not having understood sooner the real meaning of life.

We have to learn how to die. That does not mean we will escape from the idea nor deny death. Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross describes the characteristics of each stage that a dying person goes through when she learns of approaching death. There is the denial, the rebellion, the bargaining, the depression and finally resignation and acceptance of the fact. All do not necessarily pass by each one of the stages mentioned here.

But it is certain that if someone has accepted her own death during lifetime, when the moment comes, the passage becomes much easier.

THE ACCOMPANIMENT

To treat death in a constructive manner one must be HONEST about it. It is true that a patient will accept death much more easily when she feels that the doctor, the nurse and those about her are honest about her condition. This way, she avoids many hours of doubting.

For many patients, it is not so much death that they fear, but the fear of suffering. That explains why a prudent ministering of sedatives and tranquilizers are a factor of major emotional adjustment. The patient who under-

stands that her suffering will be monitored and that medication will be offered accordingly to make her suffering bearable will be much more at peace.

Other patients are upset because of the work imposed on others. One must never seem overworked and pressed by time when tending the terminally ill. Take time to listen.

The one caring must be brave. A person unable to face death should not be at the bedside of the dying. She could project her own personal fear. Nor must death become routine matter to the nursing personnel. For each one, it is the one and only time that she will die !

When the nurse feels the imminent death of a patient, she must help the person become rid of guilt feelings. She must remind the patient that she is about to meet a loving and kind Father. Inviting the dying to live out their last hours in the love of the One who loved us first, is vital.

I have learned that we do not need many words with the dying. The person may have no strength left to pray, but she can love. We may even disturb her by our personal prayers. It is far better to be there as a silent presence.

Dear readers, I hope that these few lines will help you to be liberated from your fears of death and dying. Death is a stage of growth. May we all have the courage to face it as a fact, when it is our turn to meet the Lord."

(Translated from a French article written by Sr. Simone Leboeuf, M.I.C.)

Walking Side by Side



Sr. Agnes Bouchard with an aspirant

Sr. Agnes Bouchard of Petite Rivière St. François, Québec, has just returned to Peru where she has been working with native Sisters for the past 10 years. She tells us here about her life with the people she loves.

"Ever since 1972, I have lived in the Prelature of Sicuani, in the diocese of Cuzco, Peru. We are only 11 priests, and 23 religious women serving 249 villages. Only 10 of the Sisters are Peruvians. This lack of Peruvian personnel has always disturbed me. I wondered what could be done to help the situation. But first, let me describe our life style here in the Peruvian Andes.

Where are we? We are in a Prelature that counts 4 provinces. The villages are located on the steep sides of the mountains or sometimes between huge rocks, on the upper heights.

Each one of these villages is hard to reach as roads are practically non-existent. To travel from one place to another, means to walk on foot for some 10 to 15 hours or else ride on horseback.

The socio-economic context reveals that 85% of the inhabitants live by farming a small plot of 0.7 hectare. In the area where I live now, farmers often see their crops destroyed by frost or drought. These crops are quinoa, canihus, two very nutritious cereals, as well as small but bitter potatoes. Nearby, the wealthy land-owners have a very fertile land. The



At Secuani with aspirants

extent of their property is often up from 1000 to 20,000 hectares!

In this rural population, 50% to 60% of the people are illiterate. The few small primary schools built by the parents are attended mostly by boys.

Twenty years ago, the entire population were baptized Catholics. Now religious sects have moved in and the statistics vary. There are very few pastoral animators but there are devoted catechists, mostly of humble, peasant origin.

So, the Bishop decided that it was urgent to train leaders so that they could reach out to their own people. A seminary was opened to prepare candidates for the priesthood and now we can count 16 young seminarians.

There were also young ladies who wished to consecrate their lives to God. Accordingly, a new institute known as Our Lady of Mount Carmel was opened. The members would become diocesan missionaries. They were from the people, they spoke their language, they understood their own customs. They were part of their own culture. Now 4 recruits have

joined the ranks with the others. And I was invited by the local Bishop to be the Directress of formation in this young institute.

My congregation consented to "lend me" for the next five years where I will share their life and aspirations. I gladly accepted because I feel this project gives hope for the Church of the Andes.

I know from experience that the woman of the Andes is a silent person, yet a humble and pious Christian. I have seen many positive values in their lives which could be a rock of foundation for a solid religious life. They have a tremendous capacity for service to others and they are stable in their enterprises.

Now, I walk alongside them as they grow in spiritual life. They may carry out the mission in an altogether different manner from the way my own congregation does, but they can be missionaries just as well. They too will help bring about the Kingdom of God among the people of Espinar, for they understand them, they talk their language, they are one with them."

Agnès Bouchard, M.I.C.



A Chair for Everyone



Yes, fifteen years ago, Sr. Rachel had taken the firm resolution that each and every one of her boarders, as she liked to call them, would have a chair to sit upon. In Haiti, this was really a problem, especially in the Stenio Vincent Asylum which was under the Haitian Ministry of Health. To get funds for any type of furniture—let alone chairs—was no small matter.

These boarders were among the poorest of the poor. Rachel could count 43 blind elderly men and women, 2 lepers, a few paralyzed patients, some epileptics, besides the other handicapped and elderly persons.

Sr. Lucienne Dery and Sr. Rachel were in charge of these boarders, having to care and feed them with a

staff of only 20 helpers. It was no joke! And it still is no joke!

The government pays a meager salary to 9 of the employees. The rest of the funds have to be coming in from benefactors of Canada or the U.S.A. But Divine Providence never let them down. They had to work with their hands, their hearts and their imagination to be able to carry on with the project. Living with these helpless people had developed a keen sense of creativity in the Sisters.

That explains why trees had to be planted, so that chairs and coffins could be provided. It was a repetition of the old children's nursery rhyme: "This is the house that Jack built. This is the tree that Jack used to build the house. And this is the tree that provided a chair for every one."

When we Canadians stop and think about it! A chair for everyone! Not a luxury in Canada, to be sure, but certainly, one in Haiti to own a chair of your own.

As a child, Rachel had worked in her father's tool shop for fun. She had made furniture for her dolls. Her father, a skilled carpenter, had showed her many a trick in wood carving and cutting. Now, she was using these same old tricks to help the poor.

So, she planted many oak trees that reached maturity after 10 years or so. Then she showed two young workers how to level off planks from the trunk of the trees. As soon as these planks began to take shape, everyone tried to help. The hands of the elderly, the handicapped, the sick ones even, began turning out doors, benches and chairs. The wooden chips were utilized in stoves for cooking purposes. Not a single piece was wasted.

Day by day, new articles of furniture were turned out until each and every one of the boarders had his own chair to sit upon or rock himself in. The expressions of joy and contentment told the story to all the onlookers. They knew that there was also enough wood for a coffin! For an elderly Haitian, that meant a lot.

Each day, they would rest and relax in chairs and furniture fabricated by themselves, from trees on their own compound, and they could foresee a resting place in a wooden coffin when they would leave to meet God! What more could one ask of life?

Sr. Rachel now thanks God that her kind father took time to show her some woodwork that helped provide the needs of her dear boarders. That is why she returned so happily to live with her dear ones in Haiti last year after a brief visit in Canada. She has been with them for more than 30 years.



Sr. Rachel Blanchette with patients

Malawi

Changing Schedule

When Suzanne Leclair, M.I.C., left for Africa last summer with her own sister Marie Leclair, M.I.C., she foresaw that adapting to a new culture was not so easy. Now she is there, her first letter shows that she has humor of her own situation.

Monire wose! Hello to everyone! Here I am to give you a little bit of news from Malawi. Up to now, nothing sensational has happened. I am in intensive language studies for the next three months. Now and then I risk a phrase with children or some of our employees.

One night, as I was returning home after Mass, a young man tried to open a conversation with me. I was surprised that he answered me in English... I had tried citumbuka. It was later that it dawned on me that I had used the wrong verb... I had answered him using the verb «I am not studying». No wonder he had answered me in English! So, you can see how I am learning, little by little, word by word.

The temperature is very high here. This morning at 10.30, it was 95° in the shade. The trees are in full bloom, but the grass is drying up fast. The rains will be welcome, although they bring disaster and discomfort in countries like these.



The other day we had to drive all the way to Mzuzu so that I could get my residence permit until I go to Kanyanga, my mission. We had hardly reached home when our front tire went flat. Luckily for us that it did not happen in the dark on our way back through the bush. There is really a Providence watching over us here!

I am adjusting to my new life here. I eat well, I sleep well, and I'm happy. I had to alter some of my daily habits of rising and retiring. Around 5 a.m. the drum starts beating to awaken the students whose classes begin at 7 a.m. Therefore, I must rise early and retire early.

Perhaps it is just as well, for in the evening darkness brings out many unwelcome creatures here. I always make a jump when I meet a colossal spider! Would I ever appreciate having electricity 24 hours a day as you have in Canada. Here, we have it only from 5.45 p.m. until 8.00 p.m. Then the lamps come out. But don't be alarmed, I have managed to survive so far.

I have not forgotten any of you. My heart often jets to Canada to see you all.

Your loving missionary friend,
Suzanne Leclair, M.I.C.

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