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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

When Delia Tetreault was searching for God's will in her life, she spent over ten years working with the destitute, the homeless, here in Montreal.

Later, when she had set her foundation of Missionary Sisters on firm ground, she kept reminding the Sisters that their preferential love should be for the poor. Her letters are filled with advice on how to be kind to them. All her missions were founded with one idea in mind: to help the poor. The Constitutions of the M.I.C. Sisters tell them that they are sent by the Church to bring the Good News of Salvation to the poor.

We know that in Asia, in Africa, in Central and South America, millions of children roam about in the streets having no permanent shelter. Those of us who have worked in the large urban centres of the Third World such as Manila, Calcutta, Lima, Sao Paulo, etc. are well aware of the fact that many people have no place to sleep at night.

In this issue, Huguette tells us about the plight of Bolivian children who had no safe school building to study. Aida and Jeannette were appalled by what they saw and heard in New Delhi. Nicole is building up hope in young people ready to dedicate themselves for others. The statistics on the refugees stagger one's imagination.

In what way can I bring hope to these brothers and sisters of mine? I don't have the answer.

The Editor

Cover photo

Sr. Marie Therese Beaudette and Sr. Nicole Beaulieu (Hong Kong)

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Is There Still Hope?

This is a very good question to ask ourselves as we are plunged into the year of «Shelter for the Homeless».

We know vaguely that some people are dedicating a part of their lives to give hope to refugees still lingering in detention camps. Most of us wish we could do more to heighten this hope of finding a shelter, a home in one of our countries.

In Asia, as in other countries, a certain number of missionaries, both religious and lay people, are giving a

practical helping hand in some of the camps in Hong Kong, in the Philippines, in Thailand or other countries.

Let us now focus on the Hong Kong refugee situation. There is still a large number of boat people arriving at that port from Vietnam. Following 5 years of steady decline, the number seems to be rising once more.



In 1979 nearly 69,000 boat people landed in Hong Kong in all sorts of frail embarkations. In 1984, only 2,230 were registered. Today, 8,500 of them are housed in Hong Kong's five camps.

Departures for resettlement abroad continue to outstrip arrivals. Some 2,738 left the British Crown Colony during the first 7 months of 1986, leaving behind them the 8,500 still waiting for a solution. The rate of departure this year is higher. This is the result of special efforts made by a number of countries in response to the appeals of the H.K. and United Kingdom authorities.

The U.S.A., Canada and Australia continue to account for more than 2/3 of those leaving. The United Kingdom announced that it would accept 500 new refugees from H.K. Holland and Finland have selected 70 refugees. Belgium will welcome 30 only. Sweden gave the green light to 98 of them.

Hong Kong itself has done its share in absorbing many of the ethnic Chinese refugees who have been in the camp for as long as 4 years. Between 1975 and 1978, 14,500 have been admitted. These had come in, on special flights, from Vietnam and were allowed to stay because of family links already in the Colony.

Hong Kong has two types of refugee camps. The «open camp» where the refugees are free to leave during the day and work wherever they can secure a job. Tens of thousands have availed themselves of this opportunity, unique to Hong Kong. But this policy attracted many refugees to the territory, so much so, that eventually the authorities adopted the controversial policy of «closed camps».

It was in July, 1982, that the «open camp» policy was suspended and all new arrivals were to be confined in these «closed camps». These are situated on outlying islands within sight of the H.K. skyline. They are managed by the Correctional Services Department. In Chi Ma Wan, a group of southern Vietnam refugees are confined. In Hei Ling Chau, the northern group find shelter. (The two groups had to be separated after violent riots between the two factions in one of the camps, wherein some inmates were killed and many injured). In Bowring Camp, however, both groups are accommodated as peace is maintained there.

So far, the great majority of refugees who are resettled are selected from the «open camps». The number from the «closed camps» is very low yet, for unknown reasons.

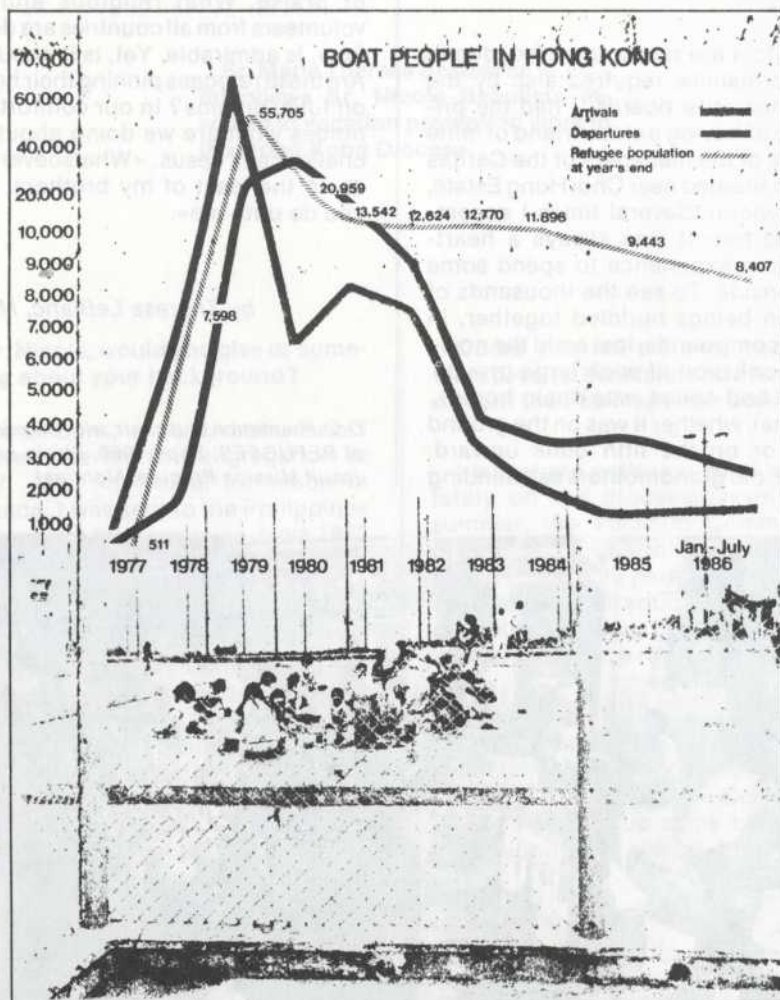
Boat people arriving in Hong Kong today are almost sure to face long detention periods in a prison-like atmosphere. But these newcomers were given a choice when they landed. They could be given a fresh supply of food, water and fuel. Their boats could be repaired if necessary, and they could sail on to another haven. In 1985, 1,782 of them chose the alternative of sailing onward. Little is known of their fate after that. Do they reach the Philippines? Are they picked up by ships? Nobody knows for sure.

Hong Kong is known to be one of the most densely crowded urban territories on earth. Refugees have packed it to the bursting point. Hong Kong's population of 5.4 million includes 630,000 legal and illegal immigrants who have entered the territory from China in the last 10 years alone. Since the fall of Saigon in 1975, Hong Kong has accepted 14,500 Vietnamese refugees as permanent immigrants.

Now, in addition to the ones arriving directly from Vietnam, Hong Kong also faces the arrivals of the «ex-China» cases. If we look back, we can find that 260,000 Chinese of Vietnam asked for asylum in China. Many of these are dissatisfied, so they seek asylum now in Macao or Hong Kong. However, these Vietnamese refugees are carefully screened before admission. In many cases, they are returned

to their country of first asylum, China.

As I mentioned above, in Hong Kong, most religious communities have some of their members to help in one of the transit centres. For example, the Salesian congregations had Vietnamese priests and sisters in their ranks. These serve the Catholic camp population in Church services of all kinds.



Other religious groups, such as the M.I.C.'s give time for English or French lessons to adults and children. It is not easy to have access to the camps. Many formalities are required before admission to give help. Sr. Lucie Gagné, M.I.C., managed to be admitted in the «closed camps» which she visits each week. Several other younger Sisters, among them some Filipinas, go regularly to the other camps.

Visitors are rarely admitted, due to the formalities required also by the administrative boards. I had the privilege of having a close friend of mine as one of the managers of the Caritas Camp situated near Choi Hung Estate, in Kowloon. Several times I accompanied her. It was always a heart-breaking experience to spend some time inside. To see the thousands of human beings huddled together, in huge compounds, lost amid the noise and confusion of such large groups. Their bed-space was their home... and that, whether it was on the ground level or on the fifth bunk upward. There, old grandmothers sat, minding

the babies; there, younger women were engaged in cottage industries, making flowers or garments etc. The noise of the hundreds of radios did not seem to disturb them.

What United Nations has done to supply them with food and shelter is a worthy cause. What the Hong Kong Government has done and is still doing for these people is also worthy of praise. What religious and lay volunteers from all countries are doing now, is admirable. Yet, is it enough? Are these refugees pinning their hopes on futile dreams? In our comfortable homes what are we doing about the challenge of Jesus: «Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do unto me».

by Therese LeBlanc, M.I.C.

Documentation and chart, with permission of REFUGEES, Sept. 1986. Photo credit: Jesuit Mission Procure, Montreal.



God Tugs at Their Sleeves

**Sr. Marie Therese Beaudette M.I.C.,
interviews Sr. Nicole Beaulieu, in-
volved in vocation promotion work in
the Hong Kong Diocese.**

Sr. Nicole, would you give us something about your background?

I was born in St. Urbain, P.Q. I entered the M.I.C. congregation in 1967. After my initial formation in Canada, I was sent to the Philippines to complete this formation, from 1972 to 1974. Then I came to Hong Kong, my assigned mission. I taught in Tak Oi Secondary School here for several years. Then I took a few years off for Chinese language studies. Now I feel at ease in Cantonese and I can read it fairly well. Presently, I am in charge of our own M.I.C. vocation program. I also participate actively in similar programs on the diocesan level.

Are the young people that you meet, attracted to the kind of life that we live?

Yes, there are some. Those who attend our meetings and follow our programs are really committed and daring.

Could you tell me how you help them develop their faith and eventually discern their call from the Lord?

I will share with you what we did lately on the diocesan level. Last summer, the Vocation Commission organized a «Faith and Vocation Camp». Some 25 participants signed up. They were all young, interested in religious life and the priesthood. Some even showed eagerness to enter right away.

During their three days of prayer, reflection and sharing, they formed a deep bond of unity. So, in October, 22 of the same group came back for a follow-up in our school, here in Tak Oi.

This time it was for a sharing with others on what the Lord had done in their lives since they had met at the former camp.

One admitted going to Mass daily, even cutting out an English lesson so as to be present at the Eucharist. Another admitted that he had started reading the Bible a few minutes each day. He wanted to be challenged by God's Word. Another member began singing the Magnificat, bringing all of them to the awareness that we can be happy both in joy and in sorrow. All of them expressed the wish to know more about the Lord.

I am impressed by what you are telling us about their openness and their spirit of thanksgiving. How do you feel, Nicole, after this experience?

I feel like someone who has given birth to a new life. I feel God's presence in their lives, for God is really tugging at their sleeves. I want to make them aware of the fact. I want them to discover the God of love that I have discovered in my own life.

(Sr. Marie-Therese Beaudette, M.I.C. of Vegreville, Alberta, and Sr. Nicole Beaulieu, M.I.C. of St. Urbain, P.Q.)



A group of Catholic youth of Hong Kong at the retreat (Sr. Nicole, top row, second from left)

When a Heart Sings



by Suzanne Morneau, M.I.C.

It was at Sophia University in Tokyo, where I was teaching French Literature that it happened. Five of these young ladies were interested in getting on with French conversation. They would come to me outside of class hours to chat.

I would pick up any topic for conversation; some were cultural, others were political or religious. They counted on me to bring up the topic for them. Sometimes we talked on Buddhism, on Christianity, or the Bible. They had shown no special interest on topics regarding women or feminism. One day I had the bright idea to begin telling them about Mother Teresa... and then, Delia Tetreault.

I had passed out a copy of the book, «When a Heart Sings» written by our own Sister Mireille Bourdeau. The poetic form brought out beautifully the various aspects of the life of Delia. It was difficult for them to read it in English or French. They decided, there and then, that a certain group would begin translating it into Japanese.

For the next five years, this translation work kept them in close touch with the thought of this Christian woman who became a religious, a missionary, a foundress of a large mission community. And Delia left footprints in their lives. One young lady wrote: «Even today, each time I

read over 'When a Heart Sings' a deep emotion rises in my heart. The long years I took to translate it have been unique and very precious to me. It made me reflect. I too, wanted to go to the missions in the poor countries as I was then thinking of my vocation. I could understand her hesitation to leave her family. This book has been the turning point in my life.»

Let me tell you first of all that the very title «When a Heart Sings» had appealed to them somehow. Only two of these girls were Catholics, others were Buddhists. To these girls it was all so mysterious.

They couldn't understand why a young, beautiful, intelligent and resourceful person would ever think of giving up marriage (so important to the Japanese woman). How could she decide to leave her family, her village, to go and take care of unknown poor for ten years of her life? How could she ever have accepted the idea of going to bury herself inside a convent, hidden by habit and veil, in order to found a new community? And how could she face such a life until death?

Delia's radicalism charmed them, even seduced them. Deep within them, they had been searching for meaning of the future as Japanese women of today's society. They soon perceived in Delia, that «sister of all humanity» who had been haunted early in life by the happiness of all God's children on earth, no matter what was their culture. The woman of God had given herself unconditionally to Him. This woman mystified them. They questioned her motives, her spirit of thanksgiving. She had said: «God has given us everything; He so loved the world that he gave us His only Son». This radicalism took their breath away.

Delia at one point in her life, as a young lady, had wondered whether religious life would be bearable. She feared to lack love within it. They had noticed how she loved Nature. This was meaningful to a Japanese. She had been preoccupied about flowers thrown too early in the garbage bag. She reminded her Sisters that cats should be cared for, since they had only their «cat-lives» to live. They loved the part about «the joyful messenger». She wanted only «joyful rowers» in her boat, she had once said. She knew how to choose picturesque sites for the houses. She beamed when she could pick up the choicest apples in the orchard to give to her novices. All this greatly impressed our Japanese readers.

As they went through the book, chapter by chapter, they saw a woman passionate for life, full of passion for the Absolute, deeply in love with Jesus, who had loved her first.



A young Japanese student

They observed that the greatest preoccupation of Delia throughout her life had been to decode the message she had received in her dream as a child. Then they began to understand why she could have «a singing heart» in spite of all the difficulties arising as the dream began to be fulfilled.

Delia carried out a real revolutionary project for the missionary Church in Canada by her two foundations. Only prayer and solitude could prepare her for the numerous meetings she had with Church dignitaries. Yes, they could see that Delia had been tested by suffering, misunderstandings and even defeats. All this, while in frail health and sickness.

But it was when they were deepening their study of the inner drama of Delia, tied down to her sick bed by paralysis, going down deeper and deeper into her solitude, her silence, her fulfillment of God's will, that they grasped how difficult the test had been for her. Yet, Delia never betrayed herself. The «singing heart» of Delia accompanied her to the very last. It left a trace in the hearts of these young Japanese ladies. The trace is still there as they look back on the life that led them closer to the One, Delia had loved so much. Some day their hearts may sing also when they have discovered Him fully... and may the daughters of Delia, be the ones to lead them to Him.

(Report sent by Suzanne Morneau, M.I.C. now in Koriyama, Japan.)

N.B. The book, «When a Heart Sings», published in 1976, is available at the Delia Tetreault Centre, 314 Chemin Ste. Catherine, Outremont, P.Q. H2V 2B4.

Bolivia

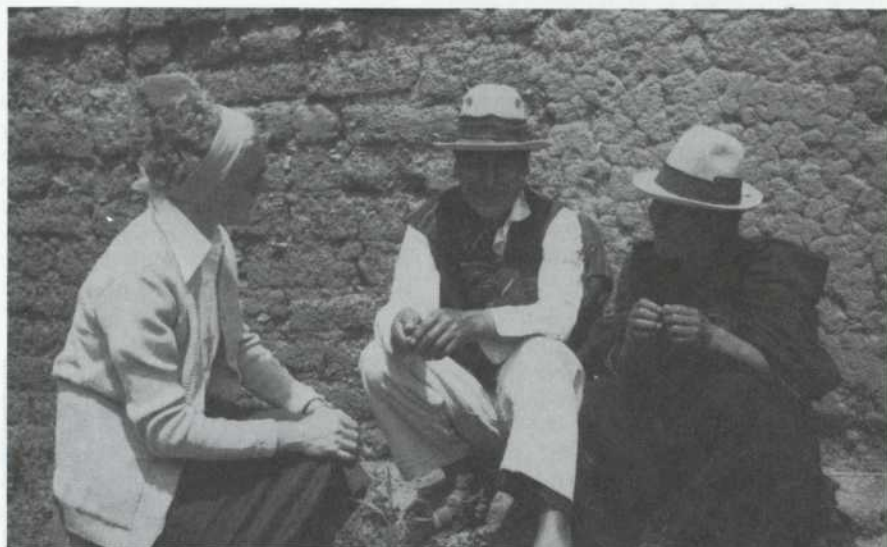
Day by Day

by Huguette Crete, M.I.C.



I am working with the peasants of the Andes, more specifically the Bolivian Andes. In this simple sharing with you on my missionary life, I hope you will be able to discover for yourself the values and the positive aspects of life that these simple folk are living out today.

The little village of Huancarani is divided by a river that runs between the mountains. This village has four sections, all buried in the hills. The church building, our M.I.C. house, a small clinic constitute one sector. Srs. Suzanne Labelle, Pierrette Quevillon and myself share the same lodging with a lay missionary, Angele Germain.



Around us all the homes are made of adobe bricks, that is, bricks made from local mud and dried in the sun. The roofing of each house is either straw or tin sheeting. When people can afford it, they prefer the tin for it is safer in heavy winds and in rain.

The majority of the people live by agriculture. In this place we are hardly aware that there is an industrial era, let alone a computer age. You might easily believe that you are still living in the time of Jesus in Galilee. Shepherds here still tend their flocks of sheep and women still fetch water at the village well.

In Huancarani, far from any urban centre of Bolivia, there is one single school building. In it, some 300 children of kindergarten, primary and secondary school age level get their education, Bolivian style. The building is a potential danger for the children. The floors are giving in, the roof is leaking and the walls are ready to collapse. There is no electricity nor drinking water. These are unheard of luxuries for these people and children.

Noticing that the building was not safe, the parents and educators wanted to do something about this distressing situation. They decided they needed a new school building. They formed committees and drew up lists, asking this or that person to give so many days of work on the construction. As for me, I volunteered to do the secretarial work, joining the workers at the riverside for work whenever I could.

Everybody chipped in. Young children carried stones and sand. Each man in the village gave 20 days of work without pay. For the cement floor and the roof, they asked help from their Education Department. They sent them two men who were more expert with this type of work.

Although it was decided to finish the construction during the year, it was not yet completed when I left. The people work at their own rhythm. they are happy and satisfied with what they have and can do. But they are sticking on with their project, and

hopefully, next school year, the children will have a decent school where their lives will not be endangered by decaying rooftops, nor collapsing floors.

I am a catechist in the school and each week I help the religious education teachers prepare their lessons. They offered me the position of principal. I declined the offer, explaining to them, that this was their school, that one of their own people must be in charge. They understood and selected a well prepared educator to assume that responsibility.

These people have integrated the meaning of justice and peace. They feel it is their duty to do something positive to help their own children. These in turn will benefit of the solidarity of the whole village of Huancarani.

Soon, I shall be returning to my assigned mission with them. I shall strive to build a better world with them day by day, I ask you to keep me in your prayers as I live out my mission among them, the mission of bringing the Good News of the Kingdom to these just and peaceful people of Huancarani.

(Huguette Crete, M.I.C. is now in Canada carrying out mission animation among her fellow Canadians. She expects to return to her poor mission shortly.)



A Passage to India

Sr. Jeannette Légaré, of Taiwan and Sr. Aida Sabandal of Hong Kong were delegated to attend the Second Forum on Justice and Peace held in New Delhi, India. This meeting was organized by the Office for Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops (FABC).



A group of the participants in New Delhi with Sr. Jeannette (standing) and Sr. Aida (kneeling extreme right).



Jeannette and Aida with an Indian family of New Delhi.

This meeting kindled a spark in the hearts of the two M.I.C.'s. They came back with a burning enthusiasm for a deeper understanding of the mission of religious women in the struggle for peace and justice in Asia.

The participants of 17 congregations from all over Asia realized that there was an urgency for religious to become involved in the grassroots with the people and to search with them for their rights. Religious from all communities, particularly those with an international character, can have far reaching effects in the promotion of justice and peace among their own.

Sr. Aida was impressed by India as a people. «It is true there is widespread poverty, but the Indians have found freedom in spite of their poverty. They bear it with dignity, as Ghandi had urged them to do.

They told me that there were 44 million children in child-labor of some sort. One out of every ten Indian is bound by the caste system. To me this is a form of slavery. But then if I compare what is going on in large urban areas where workers are bound by working conditions that are hardly human, I see another form of slavery.

I feel that religious women of Asia must do something to bring workers to the awareness of their rights. We must support them in their struggle for justice.

This is what I learned in my passage to India, says Aida»

(Contributed by Sr. Marie-Thérèse Beaudette, M.I.C.)

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