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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

Summer is already upon us. Already we feel the call of the lakes, the seashore, the mountains. The exciting Winter Olympics are over and some of the sports fans are packing for the Korean Summer Games. People will be going there from the four corners of the world. Strangers will greet strangers, will shake hands with them, will smile at them as brothers meeting brothers. Cultural and language barriers will fall. The world, after all, is one global village.

Missioners accept to work in this global village. Today, alongside them are many lay missioners, partners in mission. These lay men and women have responded to the call of Christ and to the need of our sister-Churches. They go to share their faith with people of these four corners of the world.

In this issue, we will introduce you to two marvelous families who dared and are still daring to face challenges and risks in cultures unknown to them. They go as witnesses of faith and hope. The Houde family, now in Madagascar, the McNamara's who served in Malawi, will tell you some of their life experiences. They all claim they will never be the same!

You will see for yourself how Delia Tetreault was prophetic in setting up centres to help our immigrant brothers in Canada. A veteran missionary Sister relates here an exciting true story about one of the numerous adventures the MIC's had in Manchuria during the War. Another one explains how modern video tapes help missioners in their apostolate among the mountain people of the Andes.

So, the mission goes on, spurred by the love, hope and faith of those who have met Him and whose love they want to share. The Lord may be calling you to share that faith and love. What are you waiting for?

The Editor

*Cover photo: Sr. Monique Bigras in Bolivia
preparing video cassettes.*

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Partners in Mission



*Monique and Michel Houde,
our lay partners in mission*

Michel and Monique Houde left Canada during the summer of 1987 for Madagascar to serve in the mission. Karine and Genevieve, the youngest of their five children went with them; the older ones stayed home to complete their university studies.

Monique is not only a mother but a grandmother as well. She has taught music for many years and has been organist and parish animator in several churches of Drummondville ever since 1960. Michel, her husband, has also been parish liturgical animator since 1975. For a long time, he was involved in social work; recently he was general director of a house for delinquents.



The Champagne family at home in Drummondville

This Houde family has taken up the mission challenge seriously. The Third World was their choice. That is why they left for Madagascar to work with the missionaries and give a hand to the local Church there. Their present assignment in Antsirabe brings them to the Catholic Bookshop where they have taken up the managing work from the MIC's.

In one of his first letters Michel wrote: «The project seems very interesting to us. We can see that the MIC's have accomplished a colossal task here in Madagascar. I have not seen all of their work, but I can tell that the dynamism flows from that of Delia Tetreault. We visited several of their missions and were warmly welcomed by them everywhere. We have started taking a course in the Malagasy language which is far from easy.

We are very grateful to have been chosen for this mission experience.»

Monique says in her letters: «Do we ever feel small for such a mission! We left with a lot of naivete but we feel that our previous pastoral experience at home will help us here. We left fully supported by our Church. We came over here to share but we are aware that we are receiving much more than we had anticipated. All in all, what we want, is to be able to continue being what we have been in Canada, that is Christians, fully involved in Church activities.»

(Their dream became reality through the help and financial support of the MIC congregation and other sources.)

Some MIC Sisters went to Drummondville to interview a neighboring family who is supporting them with all their hearts. They are Jocelyn and Gilles Champagne. They see the Houde couple, Monique and Michel, as friends whom God has chosen and led on this dynamic path of life in the missions. They see them as persons living out fully something great from the Gospel teachings. They see them as a sharing couple.

That is why the Champagne family in their turn want to do something special too. So do all of their children, even the youngest one Isabel, has agreed to save and send them their little savings for the next three years.

The Champagnes dare challenge others. At Christmas, they asked their friends whether they had to buy such expensive gifts? To those flying off to Florida for the winter, they inquired if they could not shorten their holidays by one week and share the profit with the Houde family? Writing out a cheque is quite easy to support Church activities, but sharing is something else. «How about it today?» they ask their friends. This is their challenge as they see the Houdes willing to give a few years of their lives, bringing the Good News to their brothers and sisters in situations less fortunate than is ours in Canada.

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Mission in the Andes

Sr. Monique Bigras, MIC, along with two professors from the Institute of Rural Education in Cochabamba, Bolivia, use video tapes to educate and train native Quechua women and also for Bible courses, catechetics, and for lessons in agriculture and hygiene.



Colette Belley, MIC, with participants of the rural Institute

Each viewing is preceded by a lesson, and is followed by a question period just to clear up any difficulties in understanding that may arise. Animated cartoons are used for catechetical lessons offered to children, and for fighting the world of violence, drugs and sex, particularly the American movie idol, Rambo, who they believe destroys and dehumanizes entire local cultures.

Sr. Monique collects all the Bolivian programs she can and passes them on for circulation, and also prepares recording tapes in Quechua, the local Indian dialect, spoken in Bolivia and Peru, and adapts them to the picture. She also takes films of local events for example the Fourth Congress of Rural Catechists, and on a documentary, shows the work being done at the Rural Institute to encourage people to join.

At the moment, they are able to service 6 colleges, 2 orphanages, 2 organizations for rural catechists, 14 parishes as well as the Rural Institute of Cochabamba.

A group of Canadian religious women also work in Yauri, a Prelature of Sicuani in Peru, in the Cuzco Region where you find the ruins of Machu Picchu. The population of 300,000 is 85% rural, and 15% of these campesinos are descendants of the Incas. These missionaries have been using video tapes for catechetical lessons.

The missionaries use video tapes for many programs - catechetical lessons (to arouse the interest of the Christian communities), for the promotion of women, and for rural development. One technician from the Canadian Embassy used video tapes to complement his lecture on the cultivation of vegetables. Other programs on health and crafts were offered in Quechua.

The Peruvian leaders were able to present to their people and workers the catechetical program of Sr. Monique Bigras, as well as the Papal Encyclical «Laborem Exercens», and adapt it to life in Peru.

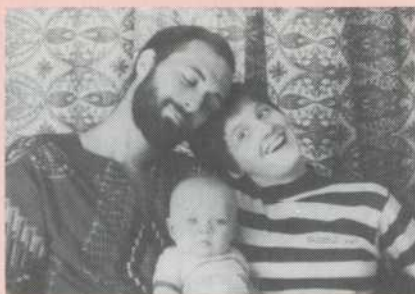
The pastoral agents of Yauri have reached their objective. These video programs have been an important factor in creating a Christian community responsible for its own local Church.

Adapted from an article by H. Turcotte, MIC

By Joyce Sokalski



Participants of the Rural Institute in Cochabamba



*The McNamara's with their first baby
in their mission years*

Margie and Terry McNamara went to live in Malawi, Central Africa, from 1970 to 1973. Last summer when they heard that Sr. Therese Deziel, MIC, was about to return to her mission they came to Montreal to visit the MIC Sisters with their beautiful family of 8 children! Sr. Elizabeth Gagne tells us more about this missionary couple.

"When Terry and Margie McNamara decided to leave for Africa they had been married barely one year. Nobody could understand why they were going so far away. Margie admits that for her she was curious to learn about a new culture. For Terry, it was a humanitarian drive urging him to give a helping hand to the underprivileged.

«For the young couple it was a challenge. For their parents, it was a real concern: Margie was already pregnant. Nothing could hold them back.

«The Marianist Brothers of Nkata Bay welcomed them with open arms. Terry would take up the math classes in their secondary school while Margie would handle the English and Bible classes. Eventually, more and more responsibilities piled up on their shoulders. Margie was given the school paper, the drama club and the teachers' meetings. Terry had to see to the maintenance of the mission school.

We'll never b



The McNamara family leaving Montreal

«In 1972, the Canadian Brothers had to leave the country quite suddenly. Overnight, Terry found himself the school principal. The workload increased and they were often forced to use makeshift methods in their teaching as well as in their homelife.

«It was really the life of pioneers. They had to improvise everything. For the housekeeper, it meant a constant headache wondering what she would serve for the next meal. The nearest grocery store was 40 miles away. There was very little food available where they lived.

«Colin, their first baby was soon followed by Bridget, the following year. They were the only white family in the district. The native people had seen many white missionaries, priests, Brothers and Sisters. This was a new

be the same!



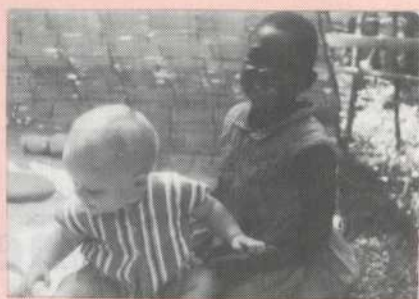
g Montreal for the U.S.A. back home

phenomena: a white family, living side by side with them.

«In spite of the language barrier, the McNamara family felt close to the people. Margie admits now that this barrier made her suffer a lot. At the clinic, this white mother and her baby were the only ones among the black ones. They managed to communicate by smiles.

«After a stint of 3 years in Malawi, they decided to return to the USA. Margie's health was failing and they had to take decisions regarding the education of their new family. It was not easy for them to leave. Many ties had been formed and the cultural shock of returning to their own society was severe.

«For the past three years, they had lived a simple and frugal life style, limiting their needs to the barest



Baby Colin with his playmate, Suzgawaka in Malawi

essentials. It hurt them to see the affluence of their own North American society. It made them wince. In Malawi, a piece of plastic, a bit of twine had been so important. Now, they were plunged back into this consumer society. The African society had taught them other values of life.

«It is now more than 15 years ago that they had this mission experience. It has transformed their lives. «We notice,» says Margie, «that we have absorbed many values of the Africans. Our life style is simple; our way of bringing up our children with lots of human warmth is very important to both Terry and myself. The ties to our Church is something else too.» «Africa taught me patience and tolerance,» admits Terry. «We lived very close to the missionaries. I discovered their human values with their assets and limitations. Together, Margie and I live out our lives very intensively. If we have any witness to offer, it is mostly in our heart though it does pass through our attitudes in daily life.»

After bidding goodbye to Sr. Therese Deziel and all the MIC's at Pont-Viau, they returned to North Carolina in their large van carrying their family of eight children, from 16 to one year old. This wonderful family continues its mission with courage and lots of love. They hope to return to Malawi some day. They will never be the same since that mission experience!

The Day the Key Worked

Many of us recently saw the current popular film of Bertolucci, «The Last Emperor.» The events of Pu Yi's life in Manchuria occurred while the MIC Sisters were living there. Of course, they never met. But like him, they lived under Japanese rule. When he became a prisoner, they were under the Russians and later the Communist regime.

Among the many war stories that Sr. Berthe Crevier likes to tell us, one of my favorite ones is that true story about a mysterious and miraculous key that saved their lives.

Let me start from the beginning. Sr. Berthe is now 84 years old. She entered the congregation in 1928. A few years later she was assigned to Manchuria as her first mission. This was in 1931, and Manchuria was then under Japanese rule. Sr. Berthe adapted well to her new environment and learnt Mandarin so as to work in the mission clinic with three other MIC's.

She tells us that the first nine years were peaceful but the last nine years were filled with danger and privations. They lived under 5 different governments, were



Sr. Berthe Crevier today

heavily rationed, were even suspected of being enemies to the state. They spent some months in prison until the Japanese surrendered to the Russians, on August 15, 1945, in their city of Pai Tchong Tze, in northern Manchuria. Following their liberation, they were faced with new dangers.

All the Canadian Fathers, the PME's, had been interned. A German priest from another mission volunteered to come to give spiritual and material help to the Sisters. (He himself had been a war prisoner of the Canadians during World War I!) When the Russians arrived, he found he was in danger. He declared that he had a Canadian passport so that he could remain in the mission to watch over the four young Canadian Missionary Sisters. I will now let Berthe take over the exciting narrative:

«That Sunday morning, we saw a group of Russian soldiers arriving in our yard. Fr. Hilt went ahead to intercept them. They threatened to shoot him. Finally through sign language we made them understand that we were Canadians. Then, in our naiveté, we invited them to share our meager meal; they accepted on condition that we sampled everything before they ate it.

They were unsure of us. During the meal, they showed us photos of their mothers, their wives and children. Some of them even had icons of Our Lady deep down in their pockets for protection. They seemed satisfied when the left.

Although their military discipline was commendable, their set of morals was another question. All the women in the area were terrorized; they molested young girls and women, left and right. We thought we were safe.

One night, as we were reciting the Rosary on our verandah, we noticed three Russian soldiers ap-

proaching our convent. We had to admit them into our house. Sr. Florine had the presence of mind to stand in front of the petroleum lamp so as to prevent them from putting it out. We could guess what they wanted.

One of the soldiers started waving a small handkerchief with the words: «I love you!» One of them even left the room to throw himself on a bed. Fr. Hilt followed him and ordered all of them to leave immediately. He was exposing his life, he knew it, but he also understood military rule. He pointed out that they were breaking the law. To us, he turned and said: «Make an act of contrition, Sisters. I am going to give you general absolution. We are all in imminent danger.»

They left, but not for long. Meanwhile Fr. Hilt had fainted and we were reviving him, when they returned to fetch him. As they left the house, Sr. Sidonia rushed to lock our front door.

Two MIC's preparing to visit the sick in Pai Tchong Tze



Photo: MIC Archives



The Sisters of Pai Tchong Tze. (Left to right) Sr. Blanche Menard, Sr. Berthe Crevier, Sr. Florine Morin. (Seated) Sr. Sidonia Roussel (r.i.p.)

That was no barrier for them. They broke the lock and came in. One of them had a loaded gun in my back. When he saw that I refused to move, he gave up and went out.

Immediately, Sr. Blanche grabbed a bunch of keys and we all rushed into our dormitory. Sister thrust in the first key and held in there firmly in the lock, while outside, the soldiers were trying their best to outdo us once more. We were frantic. We kept asking Our Blessed Mother and Delia Tetreault to watch over us. We knew that only heavenly protection could save us.

Suddenly, a strident whistle pierced the air! Immediately, they dropped everything and fled for dear life! We couldn't understand then what had happened. We fell on our shaky knees to thank God. We were saved once more!

It was only later that we understood. Fr. Hilt, on being released ran back to the convent. Seeing our predicament, he offered his

life so that we could be spared. The Russian soldier refused to shoot the priest. So, Fr. Hilt shouted: "Do something! Quick! Save the Sisters!" The soldier whistled in their conventional way to warn of impending danger. Our attackers heard it. They needed no second warning!

Now, believe it or not, when we left the room and tried the key into the lock once more, it did not work at all; it did not fit the lock! Yet, it had saved our lives. We could hardly speak coherently to thank Fr. Hilt, to thank our Our Lady and our Mother Delia.»

The story goes that a few months later the Sisters were escorted to the main post of Sze Pingkai where all the other MIC's and PME's were interned. They returned to Canada in 1950 and were later assigned to Taiwan, Hong Kong and the Philippines, new fields of apostolate. Fr. Hilt died a few months after this episode, this good German Samaritan who had risked his life for the Sisters' sake.

Our Brothers, the Immigrants

In Quebec City, ever since 1921, the MIC Sisters have been giving a helping hand to immigrants. These Sisters were sent on this mission by Mother Mary of the Holy Spirit herself. Her aim was to help the Chinese immigrants of the area to integrate in our Canadian society.

From the very beginning, with the aid of a few lay volunteers, they offered courses free of charge in English, French and accounting. One Sister was recalled from China to help with the project, since she could communicate with them in their native language, Cantonese.



Sr. Gertrude Laforest (left) and Sr. Helena Fung, (backright) with their immigrant students at the Language centre in Quebec City.

Delia Tetreault herself knew the needs of giving immigrants a helping hand. She had taught children of Italian immigrants before her foundation in 1902. The insertion of her Sisters in this type of work was really prophetic. Today, the MIC Sisters of Canada have work with the immigrants as one of their priorities together with mission animation.

*Sr. Helena Fung, MIC, of Hong Kong,
with pupil*



For some 35 years, the Sisters offered free language lessons to those newcomers settling in Canada.

By 1960, the Ministry of Education, recognizing the value of these courses given at the Centre, offered a salary grant to the MIC teachers. Later, the school was affiliated to the Catholic School Commission of Quebec.

Since 1969, the classes have been open to all nationalities. Today, they count 73 ethnic groups among their students and participants. Ten MIC's are presently teaching in that Centre.

Parallel to the Centre, courses are still offered to Chinese children and others. Two Sisters and several Chinese teachers are in charge of evening classes and Saturday courses. This is to help the Chinese youngsters not to forget their native language, Cantonese.

In a summary, Sr. Irma de Ladurantaye tells us: «This concise write-up does not claim to have said everything about the inspiring history of the MIC Centre. Neither does it give the praise due to all who have contributed to this service with so much faith, hope and love. For the pioneers as well as for those who carry on this work today, the one important factor has been to announce Christ and to serve our brothers and sisters of the world.»

*(From «Information MIC», Nov.-Dec. 1987,
pp. 104, 105)*

NUESTRA SENORA DE LA CARIDAD DEL COBRE



Around 1612, two Indians and a little black boy were in a little rowboat on a choppy sea near Cuba. Suddenly, they noticed a floating statue tied to a piece of wood. When they managed to get hold of it, they saw that it was a statue of Our Lady. Her features were dark. They carried it reverently to their village in El Cobre. Soon, she was drawing crowds of Indians and black slaves who spontaneously acclaimed her as their patron saint.

Nuestra Senora de la Caridad del Cobre was proclaimed patron saint of Cuba by Benedict XV.

Lord Jesus Christ
you chose the Virgin Mary to be your mother,
a worthy home in which to dwell.
By her prayers keep us from danger
and bring us to the joy of heaven,
where you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. Amen.

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