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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

As I sit here in my office at Pont-Viau, I can see a small tourist cruiser going by on Rivieres-des-Prairies. I notice some people pointing at our big house, 100 Juge Desnoyers. They seem to be wondering who lives there? Perhaps a tourist guide can inform them that it is the home of some 200 sick, retired, semi-retired Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, as well as a full staff of active members of the community.

Yes, our house is big... and so are our hearts! Most of us living here have spent years in the mission lands. There, we loved and were loved! There is Sr. Gratia, our 92 year old senior who lived over 50 years in China. There is Sr. Alice Pepin on her sick bed, one of the pioneers of our African mission of Malawi. There is active and smiling Sr. Delia Philippe who lived through four political revolutions in Central and South America. There is 90 year-old Sr. Agnes Guenette who suffered imprisonment during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines. I must not forget Sr. Aurore Lusignan, a former missionary in Manchuria, who had come back sick for ten years, and who has served more than 20 years in our mailing and corresponding office of our mission magazines.

This house is filled with memories that these brave women carried with them. Today, in their weakened state of health, they pray for all the people they met all over the world, for the Church they served so faithfully, for the benefactors and subscribers who are in solidarity with us in our mission of the Church.

Their mission is not yet accomplished: they are missionaries in thanksgiving until their very last breath.

Will someone inform the curious tourists about this big house by the side of the river? I hope so.

The Editor

Cover photo: Sr. Veronique Bernatchez, M.I.C. in Lima, Peru

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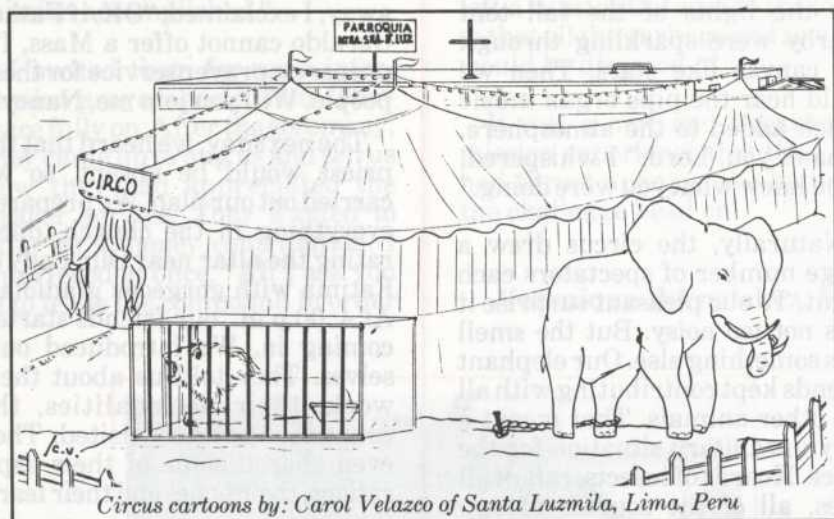
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Circus cartoons by: Carol Velazco of Santa Luzmila, Lima, Peru

Mission in a Circus

Believe it or not! On the lot separating us from the church were vans and vans of circus equipment. They were already pulling out tents and iron posts, benches and platforms. Horses, lions, tigers, elephants and some 40 persons were seen and heard. Another circus! It was Christmas Eve! Is it possible? If only they had waited until after Christmas! But no! Before 7:00 p.m. the big top had been installed with its hundred lights and its loud speakers blaring out the news about the next showing. We were disappointed. We had gone to so much trouble to prepare a real Christian Christmas this year!

It was nearly 9:00 p.m. Christmas Eve. People had started

arriving for Mass. Besides the beautifully decorated creche, this year there was a huge camp fire in the church yard. The parish priest presiding the assembly explains: "It's the feast day of Jesus, that same Jesus who came to bring light to the world. Today is the anniversary of the day when Mary gave birth to Jesus. Here, our parish is called Our Lady of the Light. We are going to sing together "Jesus, Light of the World" after lighting our candles from the bonfire." Then the procession started, led by our tall Father Geraldo carrying the Holy Infant, while the choir, sustained by the powerful voice of Sr. Michelle Payette, sang out its melodious Christmas carols.

I realized then that it would have been quite dark with our mere small candles in the night, but the lights of the tall tent nearby were sparkling through the canvas like stars. Then we could hear the pipe organ music which added to the atmosphere. "Thank you, Lord," I whispered. "You knew what you were doing."

Naturally, the circus drew a large number of spectators each night. To our pleasant surprise it was not too noisy. But the smell was something else. Our elephant friends kept contributing with all the other animals. That meant a very unsanitary situation for the place. Hordes of insects, rats of all sizes, all of the sources of epidemics. We were worried.

That afternoon, it was Nancy's turn to go out buy the bread for the community. Nancy is one of our three postulants, living with us to study their vocations. She heard one of the circus troupe singing a song of her native, Ancud, on the island of Chiloe. She recognized the tune at once and joined in the song. The circus members were enchanted! Right away, one of the Chilean artists, recognizing somebody from his home, came up to introduce himself. Nancy identified herself as a religious. There and then, the singer confided that he had wanted to go to the church to ask for a requiem mass for one of their troupe who had met an accidental death the previous month.

That evening, as we Sisters were sharing our day's experience,

Nancy told the group about her meeting with the circus member. Everyone was interested. Right away, I exclaimed, "OK, if Father Geraldo cannot offer a Mass, I'll prepare a prayer service for these people. Will you join me, Nancy?"

The next day, we heard that the priest would be absent, so we carried out our plan. We prepared everything in the church, decorating the altar near Our Lady of Fatima with gorgeous gladiolas. At 4:00 p.m., our friends started coming in. We introduced ourselves. They told us about their work, their nationalities, the countries they had visited. They even shared some of their aspirations, their hopes and their fears.

We found out that Luisa, the tight rope walker, as well as her daughter, had been born in the circus. So was Juan, and Pablo, and Andrew, and Dennis. One was a clown, another a trapeze performer, others were employees of the circus. Luisa rushed out to fetch the two daughters of the circus owner. They came in and gave us a cool, formal greeting. All in all, we had 29 participants for the prayer.

I had prepared the prayer with great care. During my homily, I reminded them that a circus was like a Christian fraternity, walking toward the Lord whom we would all meet some day as Sambo had. I told them how I had disagreed with a lady who had feared that the circus would take away a lot of money from the area. "No," I said, "I see it from all together different angle. If the circus provides clean entertainment for the people, it can bring a lot of joy in their lives.

God loves you for bringing that joy to all of us in your team work. Even if one child laughs, it will be mission accomplished."

I invited them for some intercession prayers and hymns. They were fully on. After the ceremony, they came up to hug us and tell us how they had appreciated the prayer service. They wanted to offer us a money contribution. I interfered at once. "All I ask you is to leave the compound in order

when you will fold your tents so that our sanitation will not be affected." They did just that. They left a substantial sum to the town so that all the garbage and sewage would be disposed of.

It was a new and unexpected mission experience that the Lord had thrust upon us! We had met the challenge head on!

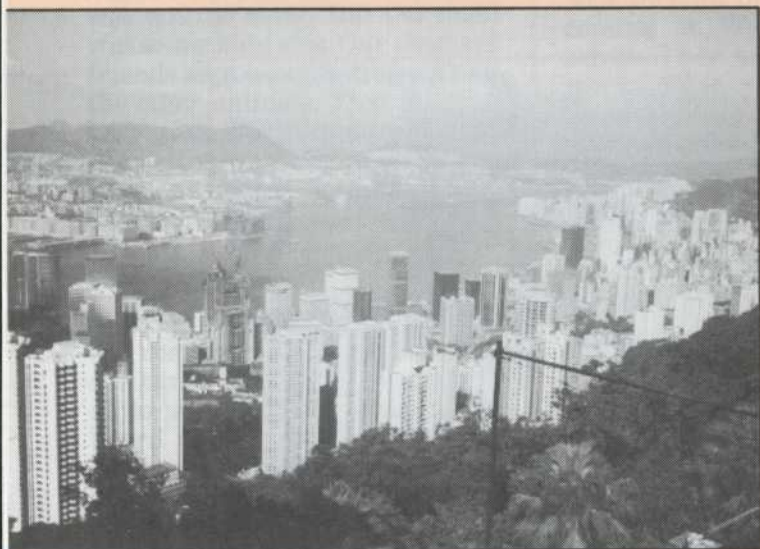
Veronique Bernatchez, MIC



Grandmother and twins, Maria and Rosa, ready for the circus

The Way We Were...

As editor I have to write about the mission experiences of my MIC Sisters all over the world. Today, I thought I'd share with you something of my own mission here in Canada.



Hong Kong today



*Good Hope School,
Kowloon, Hong Kong*

Five years ago this summer, I left Hong Kong for good in tears. Someone next to me aboard the jet asked me if he could help. No, he couldn't. Nobody could help. I had just left behind me a host of friends and Sisters whom I loved and who loved me. I had spent nearly 20 years of my life in Hong Kong after living 15 years in the Philippines. Asia had become a part of me. Her people had won my heart. We had worked so close together all those years trying to build up the Kingdom of God.

In Canada, my tears soon dried and I adjusted relatively well and fast with the help of family, Sisters and friends. I accepted work proposed to me as editor of MIC MISSION NEWS and soon felt at ease in the job. I had the privilege to meet a large number of dedicated Christians as I visited English speaking parishes in and around Montreal and Toronto.

But, what I did not know, as I left Hong Kong, was that many unexpected joys were to be mine in meeting past students. These girls had filled me with joy when I taught them in their final years of Secondary School. Together, we had reflected on the Acts of the

Apostles. I had transmitted them the love and admiration I had for the great apostle, Paul. We had studied the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke together, while praying over the Good News that these Gospels brought us. Many of these girls were not Christian, that is, they had not received baptism yet. Some never would, but that was their choice. Nevertheless, all were led by the Spirit of God which is found in all human hearts.

I shall not linger too long on the delightful hours I spent with them on the plays of Shakespeare, the British classics, the poems that made us reflect on life and agree that literature is the study of meaningful life experiences. Their life was just beginning, mine was blooming and growing each day as I faced these classes of Chinese girls.

Today, these same girls are married and many of them have immigrated to Canada. I first met a large group of them in Toronto where they had organized a Good Hope Past Student Association. Their leader was Navens (Hui) Tse. I had the pleasure to spend a few days with Navens in Willowdale. Her 8 year old daughter,



*Good Hope School
Primary girls*

Teresa, played the piano for me, while cute little Teddy entertained me with his Kindergarten English about his love for carrots! I met Alice, Josephine, Margaret, Jane and many more whom I had not met for years. We shared old memories over a meal as we discussed religion together.

To my surprise came an unexpected trip to Vancouver when I attended the Annual Serra Club Convention. This time, I stayed with Shirley. Along with Athena and young Derek, her small children, we went to see the dolphins, as mother and I talked over about our lives today. Shirley, like Sheila, both have enrolled their children in Catholic schools. They appreciated the education they had received from us Sisters in Hong Kong and wanted their children to have as much. Sheila was away that summer, but she popped up one winter day in Montreal. We spent a long evening looking backward and forward in our lives while browsing over a 1967 Good Hope School Yearbook!

The following year, I was delegated to attend the Calgary Christian Festival. It was Losita (Yuen) Chan of Tak Oi Secondary School who met me at the airport with her husband. She had phoned one of the "girls" and in no time we managed to assemble at a restaurant to chat over old days. There were many girls, and each one had her children for me to meet.



L. to r.: Sr Therese, Josephine (Yeung) Chang, Isabella (Yung) Woo, Losita (Yuen) Chan, Agnes (Chan) Palmer in Calgary, Alberta



Losita Chan & Sr. Therese at Banff



Sr. Therese with Navens Tse and her son Teddy in Toronto



Sheila (Wong) Page of Vancouver visiting Montreal



Allan, Sr. Therese & Elton Chang in Calgary

I'll never forget the little boys of Billie Chiang, Elton and Allan. As I was packing to leave, Allan came up to me stating: "Don't tell me you're leaving so soon!" That night, they had spent the night sleeping in a tent in their yard near my room. Josephine's little daughters, cute little Michelle and Claire, recited a poem dedicated to "mama's teacher" whom they looked at with awe!

Agnes Chan soon organized another meeting in her beautiful new home that Pentecost Sunday night. As the meal was coming to an end, the girls asked me to talk to them as I had done in class. I was happy for the invitation. It was Pentecost. I talked once more about the early Church, about Peter and Paul, about the Coming of the Spirit on our Church today. It was easy for me to talk from the heart on a subject so dear to me, the Spirit of God resting in each one's heart. We prayed and sang hymns, praising the Lord for his goodness to all of us.

My mission among these girls has not come to an end. No true spiritual mission ever does. I write to them, I pray for them and their growing families. I admire them for their beautiful Chinese customs and values that they brought with them from Hong Kong. Now, they are our neighbors, yours and mine. They need us to help them integrate fully into our Canadian society which they have adopted. Getting to know them will make you love them as I do!

Therese LeBlanc, MIC

Just One More...



The orphanage & Creche of Canton

MIC—Archives photo

“We are now in 1942,” the MIC chronicler reminds us. “The Japanese are ruling our part of the world in the Pacific area since 1941. Poverty is rampant all over the city of Canton where we are living. In our Creche, we have 50 to 60 babies to feed on a regular basis, over 100 orphans besides a staff of helpers. We are running out of funds. To survive, we decide to knit sweaters, mittens, scarves and hats. We can sell them to Japanese and to the wealthy Chinese merchants siding with the occupying Japanese forces.”

Gradually, things began improving. One day, a student brought along a wealthy Chinese lady, whom we will call Mrs Tong. She needed somebody to knit for her family. On her way out of the compound, she noticed a group of 4 to 6 years-old toddlers playing in the yard with Sr. Marie-Anne Rompré. She was struck by the healthy appearance of the children. She was thinking of her own little baby boy, Ah Wai, at home. He was losing strength each day and already fighting for his life. Perhaps, if she brought him here

and left him in the Sisters' care, he might recover.

The Sisters agreed to take him in spite of their overloaded work schedule. They showed him to a German doctor. Right away he told the parents and the Sisters that he could do nothing for the dying seven month old baby.

The parents, in a desperate gesture, got down on their knees and begged the Sisters to keep him. They knew from their traditional beliefs that a baby dying in the house meant bad luck for the household. They were ready to pay anything. The Sisters needed the money to buy medication for their other babies. They accepted.

Sister Marie-Anne and Ah Luk, a helper, watched over the dying baby day and night. They fed him with a medicine dropper. His condition continued worsening until one day Sister Marie-Anne began deliberating whether she should baptize the dying infant as was their custom at the Creche, for orphan babies. She prayed Our Blessed Mother, then held back. However, she promised Our Lady in her prayer that if the boy recovered, she would do her best to evangelize the family. The Blessed Mother evidently heard the prayer. The next morning, to everyone's surprise and delight, Baby Ah Wai was gurgling in his crib and smiling at everybody. He was on the road to recovery! The overjoyed mother left him in the care of the Sisters for the next 3 years.



Sr. Marie Anne Rompre in Canton with some of the orphans

When she came to bring him home, Sr. Marie-Anne explained to Mrs Tong that she was not the one who had cured the baby. Our Lady herself had done that, she explained as she handed her a picture of Our Lady. She expressed her thanks to Mrs Tong for all the gifts the lady had been showering on her all these months. She told her about her promise to Mary that she would try to bring the Good News of the Gospel to the family, if the baby were spared. Mrs Tong listened and graciously acknowledged the information but left it at that.

In 1945, the Japanese withdrew from Canton. In 1949, the Communist Army marched into the city and took over the government. Thousands of Cantonese fled in terror and escaped to Hong Kong for safety. The Tong family was among these refugees... and soon some MIC Sisters followed.

Years passed by. The Sisters opened a boys' primary school in Kowloon and Sr. Marie-Anne lived there while she carried on her work among the poor refugees.

In 1951, one day, the Tong family arrived at the Convent and asked to see Sr. Marie-Anne. They had searched for her all over the city for months. Luckily, someone informed them that she was living at Tak Sun Convent. The two friends flew into each other's arms and wept with joy. Mrs Tong then introduced her family of 4 boys and 3 girls. Ah Wai, now an eleven year old youngster, was beaming with joy as he extended his hand to the Sister who had saved his life.

Then Mrs Tong solemnly announced that she had thought over many a time about the promise Sr. Marie-Anne had made to the Virgin. "Sister, I have been searching for you all these years. I wanted to tell you that now I am ready to follow instructions in the Catholic Faith. Will you teach me?"

Sr. Marie-Anne's joy knew no bounds. She directed her to the nearest catechumenate at St-Theresa's parish in Kowloon. The catechist prepared the mother for baptism together with her two youngest children. The older children were eventually baptized after studying in Catholic schools.

Sr. Marie-Anne, now 83 years old, is retired in Canada. Now and then, she meets the Tong family

who have settled in Canada also. Ah Wai is now a prominent doctor in a large Canadian city. He loves to visit his former friend with his growing family. Sr. Marie-Anne still shares their gifts with other Asian refugees. Her heart has stayed behind in the China she loved so much where she spent 25 years of her life.

** (Fictitious names have been given here to the Chinese family.)*



Sr. Marie Anne Rompre today

Amazing Grace:



Dear Sister,

Recently I was sharing life experiences with an African Sister. We began telling one another our vocation stories, about God's amazing grace in our lives. God's ways are surely not man's ways!

This is the beautiful story that my African Sister related to me. I'm sure you'll love hearing it. I'll relate it to you in her quaint way of expressing herself.

"My father is special in our tribe. He is a 'medicine man'! This gives him a very special status among our people. Because of his gift for healing others, he has added years of life to many who came to see him for a cure.

He also has the power to read people's mind as well as to foretell their future. With these charisms, he is often called upon to advise people on various issues. He also has certain dreams from which he can make all kinds of interpretations.

When treating sick people, he can be very kind but he can be extremely angry when he sees his patients using "poisonous medicine". He never charges fees for healing a person but he appreciates gifts for the services rendered.

Besides being the "singanga" that is the "medicine man", he is also some sort of business man. He cultivates large patches of maize, millet and beans. He uses the profit to buy more goods for his store.

My father followed the custom of the country and had five wives. With them and with his many children he even formed a choir. Often at night, we would all gather around a bonfire to spend hours singing together. He managed to give a good education to all his sons and daughters. We loved one another in our large extended family. My father also believed in God, and now and then, he would go to pray at a National Church.

When I was young, he saw me as his favorite daughter. He liked to tell my mother (his second wife) that when I would be married he would be delighted to finish his days with my own family. Once, he even had a special dream about me and my future. He saw me over a large pot of boiling water; I seemed untouched by the heat, he said. He saw me in a beautiful body and with a radiant face. He seemed pleased to repeat to my mother that I was "a special daughter". He often wondered about my future.

In school, I learned about Christianity. Towards the end of my adolescence, I asked for baptism. Later on, I met some Sisters. When I decided to enter a religious congregation my father felt very miserable and unhappy. He could not understand at all why I wanted to leave my people, my home. Why would I be going to sacrifice my life and never raise a family of my own. This was beyond him. But he allowed me to go.

Later on, he tried to find a link between my happiness in religious life and the dream he had had about my future. However, my religious vocation remains a puzzle to him. He still cannot understand why I took such a step in life.

Everyday, I pray that he will come to understand a little bit more about my option. It was a choice I freely made for my own life. Now, when I look back on the numerous graces and blessings I have received from the Lord, my heart overflows with gratitude. I want to sing: Amazing Grace, how sweet thou art!»

Her vocation story is one "amazing grace", isn't it? So is ours—yours and mine. Who can praise Him enough for his call?

Your loving Sister

Lucille La Salle, MIC



Poor Clares of Lilongwe

Mary, Mother of the Redeemer



Remember, most loving Virgin Mary,
never was it heard that anyone who turned
to you for help was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence,
though hardened by my sins,
I run to your protection
for you are my mother.

Mother of the Word of God, do not despise
my word of pleading
but be merciful and hear my prayer. Amen.

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