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January-February, 1989

MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

Did you ever stop to reflect that you too could be a missionary? I mean it! A real missionary... It could be a lay partner with those who have given fully their lives to the cause of the missions... It could be by joining a missionary congregation? It's never too late!

You might say: What is so exciting about teaching maths to a group of Form I boys, as Sr. Bibiana is doing? If you read her article, you will soon see how her dynamism and enthusiasm makes her see beyond, further than solving a geometry problem.

If you were accompanying Sr. Veronica in Mati, serving the refugees, you might understand the joy there is in serving those in need and helping them find solutions to their problems.

You may wonder how missionaries can function in Socialist countries where the rights of people to practise their religion is denied them? Yet, Sr. Lucille explains in detail how they do it in Cuba, where people are starving to hear the Word of God. The lay "intellectuals" of Shanghai, China, teach us how to do it in action by ministering to the needs of others.

In Japan? Sr. Suzanne tells how the Japanese today have a living faith in Mary... the one who helped, who comforted them during the persecution days. She is still there alongside the Christians, gently leading them to her Son, through the missionaries.

So, whether in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean... missionaries are busy proclaiming that God is Love. They have much to share, as they have discovered in their own lives, how God is love and how God loves them. Did you ever stop to reflect how God loves you too? Maybe, someone... somewhere... is waiting to hear you proclaim: **God is Love!** Are you going to hold it back from them? Look on the last page of this issue to find out how you could do something about it. See how generous the Asians are, in responding to His invitation!

Yes, God loves you!

The Editor

Cover photo: Sr. Suzanne Morneau, MIC and Sr. Chieko Uchimura, MIC near Mt. Fuji.

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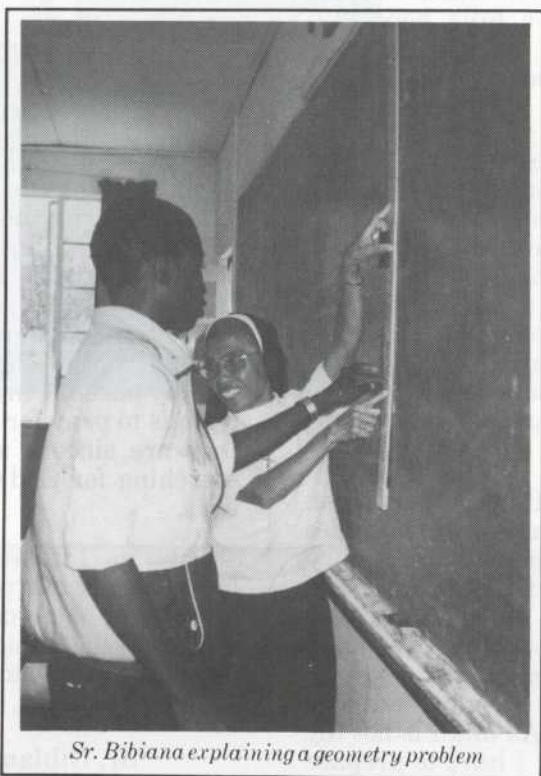
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If God Wants...

Sr. Bibiana, a Filipina MIC, writes to a friend about her mission activities in Malawi, Africa where she is teaching in a seminary.



Sr. Bibiana explaining a geometry problem

Dear Sister,

How nice to hear from you again! Yes, I received your letter, and my apologies for not answering sooner.

As a new arrival in Malawi, I feel I'm carrying on the mission undertaken by our Foundress, Delia Tetreault and taken up by our elder pioneer Sisters. Your letter assured me of solidarity you have with us, your prayers sustain me and my courage. Thanks a lot!

I'm back to teaching after all these years... and in a minor seminary at that! I feel very privileged to be in this mission of teaching future priests in Africa. It may be true that quite a few of these seminarians will never become priests, yet we fully hope that some of them will be generous enough to respond to His Call.

I was asked to take up classes barely one week after my arrival as the school year was opening. So you can well imagine how I was rushed to settle down to make my class preparations. There was not even time for me to begin a fair study of the people's culture. Even now, I'm still continuing to adjust and adapt myself to my new situations, as God's grace is helping me each day.

I'm teaching Biblical Knowledge, English and maths, which includes arithmetic, algebra and geometry to Forms I & II boys. Their age range is from 14 to 18 years old. All except three of them are much taller than I am. They are eager to learn and are very interested in their studies. As math is not my major subject, I have to prepare

carefully each day. But I really enjoy my work and as I love teaching such highly motivated students.

In the seminary community, we share a warm personal relationship with all members of the staff. I take care to go about my work not simply by interest but with a deep sense of mission... to be that witness of the Good News while striving for satisfactory academic results.

The seminary has 120 students of 4 years of study level, that is Forms I, II, III, IV. The teaching staff counts 3 native men of Malawi, 4 priests of different nationalities, that one from Malawi, Holland, Ireland and Canada, and 2 MIC's, Sr. Therese Blais and myself.

When our 4 priests concelebrate the Eucharist, I feel part of the universal Church in a new way and experience the truth of having God as common Father.

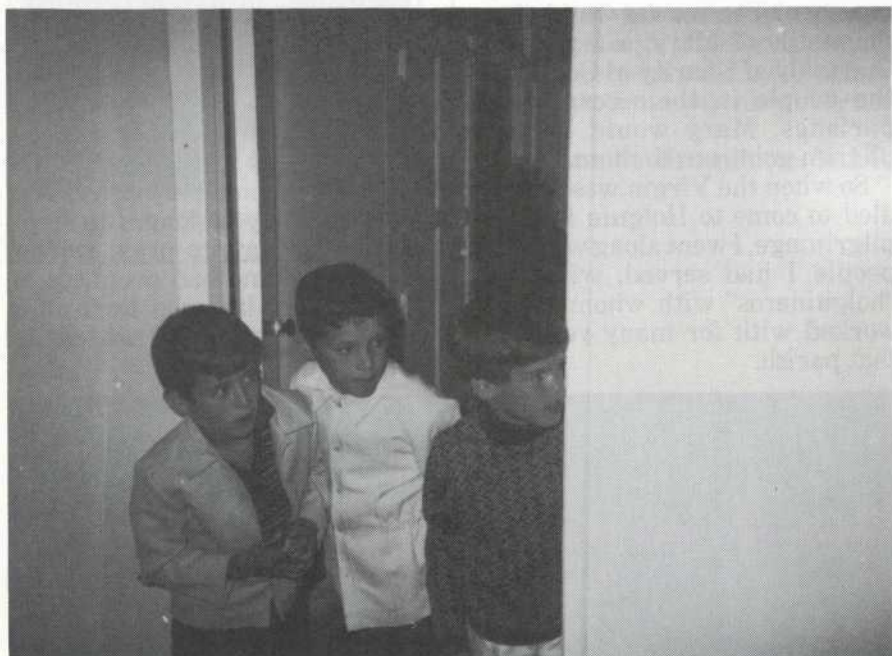
Do pray for the realization of God's plan in the lives of our young seminarians. One of them recently wrote in a composition: "If God wants it, I would like to be a priest, to serve my people in the future, to offer the Eucharist. I beg my parents, my teachers and friends to pray for me." You see, they are sincere as they go on searching for God's will in their lives.

Now, as I leave you, do not forget us in your prayers as you promised. Ask your friends to remember the Seminarians in their petitions to the Lord.

Yours sincerely,

Sr. Bibiana Flora, MIC

What's Going On ?



In Cuba, where 5 Canadian MIC's are working alongside our Cuban Sisters, all opportunities are seized to revive and enlighten the people whose hearts are still filled with love for Mary and Jesus.

When Pope John Paul II invited the world to observe a Marian Year, the Bishops of Cuba with the clergy wondered how they could best carry out the wish of the Pope in their socialist country.

They knew that their people still had a deep devotion to Mary but how could they express it publicly? How could they be brought to the churches to pray together? The answer was, bring the statue of Mary, a replica of Our Lady of Charity of Cobre, to the people in their respective parishes. Mary would be the pilgrim going out to them.

So when the Virgin was scheduled to come to Holguin for her pilgrimage, I went along with the people I had served, with the "holguineros" with whom I had worked with for many years in that parish.

We knew that in the Central itself, only 4 or 5 persons of a certain age regularly came to the services. We kept asking ourselves: "Will they come? Will they have the faith and courage to come to welcome Mary?" Needless question. They surprised us. They arrived in large numbers. In fact, during the days of preparation, they came to inquire what was going on. This was our chance to pass leaflets on Mary, on baptism, on the sacraments, on the duties of a Christian.

When the statue of Our Lady arrived, many were there to welcome her in song and prayer. The following day a long file kept coming all day, to pray, reflect and sing. Some had promises to fulfill. Mary had met them in a meeting they would not easily forget.





O Mary, we praise you with flowers today!

At Mir, the next post, Our Lady was warmly welcomed. People were lining the road, waving white kerchiefs or Cuban flags while singing full heartedly the Ave, Ave, Ave Maria of Lourdes!

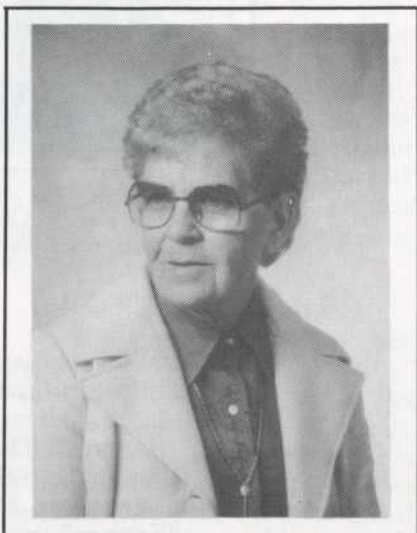
During the two days, the Madonna saw children, teen agers, young workers, married couples, mothers, elderly people, arrive in a steady stream to pay their homage to the Mother of the Redeemer. More than 90 persons received new life in baptism.

On the evening of the last day, the church was packed. A long procession winded about the church as Our Lady was carried by four mothers, while people threw flowers as she passed by.

Their lighted candles reflected their peace of heart as they sang the Ave Maria. These Cubans were experiencing once more the joy of praying publicly and manifesting their faith openly without fear.

These religious ceremonies have a deep impact on the faith life of the Cubans who have not forgotten their mother and patroness. Nostra Senora del Cobre. As an M.I.C., I thanked God for the renewal and revival of faith that I was witnessing. Mary's pilgrim visit would long be remembered by all. Mary would continue watching over her people.

Lucille Brouillette, M.I.C.



Where is Maria Sama?



*Kannons with their distinctive signs: a cross engraved at the back of the statue.
(Photo: Rhea Bigras, MIC)*

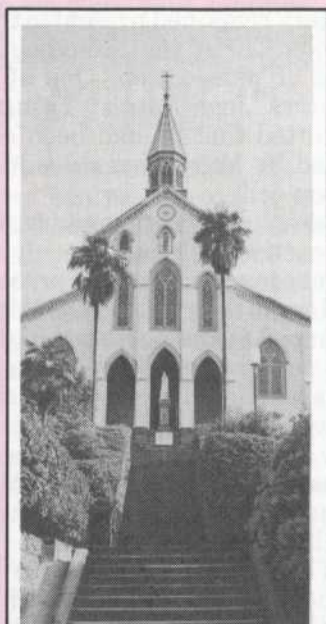
Anyone visiting a Buddhist temple in Japan will soon notice a statue dedicated to the goddess, "Kannon"! The persecuted Christians in the 16th century engraved a cross at the back of their "Kannon", symbol understood only by the Christians.

If you'd happen to question a Japanese person on the identity of "Kannon Sama" you will receive a vague answer: she is tenderness, mercy, warmth, protection, guardian of peace etc. She is the symbol of all that and much, much more. She may be perceived under different features, with several hands... always eyes downcast, as if to look down protectively upon the world so as to assist it.

The Catholics of Nagasaki, at a time when persecution was rife, began praying to Mary through the different Kannon statues on which they had engraved a cross. This symbol was known and understood only by Christians. Sometimes she was portrayed as a woman bearing a basket of fish and loaves. Other times, she carried a baby in her arms. Eventually, the early Christians combined the terms, "Kannon" and "Maria" and it became "Maria Kannon".

When Japan opened its doors to foreigners after a lapse of some 200 years, Catholics still prayed to Mary and had a living faith. This was discovered by a French missionary priest, Fr. Petit Jean.

In 1865, he built a church in Nagasaki to honor the 26 martyrs who had shed their blood for Christ during the 16th century. His aim was to come in contact with those Christians who had hidden from persecution. These Catholics had been told that three distinctive marks would identify a Catholic priest: he would be sent by the Pope, he would be a celibate, he would have a devotion to Mary.



The church of Fr. Petit Jean where on March 17, 1865, the Christians were discovered

One day in his church, deserted since its construction was completed a month before, Fr. Jean noticed a group of some fifteen or so Japanese women enter warily into the building. They wanted to verify whether this was a Catholic church. Prudently, they looked around to make sure that no spies were around to denounce them to the government.

Finally, one lady dared approach him saying; "We are one of yours." Someone added: "Where is the statue of Santa Maria?" Fr. Jean led them before the Virgin: "It is truly Santa Maria! She carries Jesus in her arms!". With a sign of the cross, they immediately knelt down to pay!

Mary remained present to these devoted Christians throughout the days of persecution. One of the martyrs, Jean-Baptist Yasutaro, admitted that he had been comforted by Mary's presence in his prison cell.

Now, in our 20th century, free to practise their faith openly, the Japanese appreciate the presence of Mary in their midst. The "Maria Kannon" of the persecution days has been replaced by a Mary of Japanese features. Many shrines have been erected in her honor. One of the most notable ones lies at the foot of Mount Fuji, — a Mary of many features including that of the Immaculate Conception.

Who knows whether in the modern "Kannons" erected recently, one cannot discern the influence of Mary? True enough, she is often portrayed as a mother bearing a child in her arms!

(From a French article by Suzanne Morneau, MIC. Translated by the editor.)

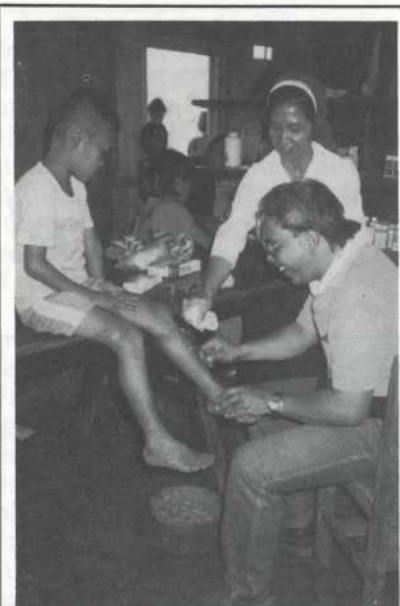


The author with Sr. Chieko Agnes Uchimura, MIC, near one of the statues on the side of Fuji

Mati — Philippines

My Day with the Evacuees

In the Philippines, many families are forced to evacuate their villages because of the on-going trouble with the soldiers of the National People's Army raging war on the government.



Sr. Veronica Maderista, MIC, assisting Fr. Fuentes at the evacuation centre in Mati, Davao del Sur.

Last February 22, 1988, S. Mila Gomez and I, together with our Third Year High School boys, responded to the call of our parish priest to offer a helping hand to the evacuees, victims of a military encounter with the rebel group, the NPA (National People's Army). This military operation had obliged the people to seek a hasty refuge in Mati.

It was a challenge to us to be ready for this kind of emergency call. The school launched a drive asking for donations of canned goods, sacks of rice, dried fish, soap, medicine, clothing etc.

As usual, the Mati families of our students were generous and

soon we were well supplied. We even collected empty carton boxes to serve as floor covering for the bare cement floor where the evacuees were sleeping.

When we arrived at the evacuation centre, we saw a pitiful sight. There were about 300 families, jampacked in the small schoolbuilding, looking so helpless and abandoned. They had run away so hurriedly that they had left all their belongings behind to save their lives. The children seemed malnourished and dehydrated. The hygiene on the premises of the building was lacking and they had no water nor food.

We had joined the Justice and Peace group of the parish to offer our help. Immediately on arrival, one of the members of the team, a doctor, began treating the patients. He offered his medical services free all day. I volunteered to help him treat minor cuts and bruises and gave out medicine as he prescribed them. For me, accustomed to the schoolrooms as I am, it was an entirely different challenge.

Sr. Mila and the students distributed the goods we had brought along with us. Their smiles told us how relieved they were to see us. All day, they kept thanking the priest, the doctor, the Sisters and other volunteers. We too were happy to share whatever we could with our neighbors obliged to flee for their lives.

For us, the day seemed short, but for those away from their homes, it was another long day.

Sr. Veronica Maderista, MIC

They Dare to Believe!



Christians greeting one another in Shanghai after Sunday Mass

Strange things are happening today in China!

The government's new policy of religious tolerance has led some people to question how long this will last. But some professionals of Shanghai are confident and are betting their lives in a project they have publicly organized and are carrying out to this day.

A group of some 380 professionals have come together in what is known officially as the Catholic Intelligentsia Association of Shanghai, the CIAS. A large number of them belong to the medical profession, such as doctors, nurses, technicians. Others are teachers, professors, or members of other professions.

The idea came out after a visit to Hong Kong, their first in 30 years. They saw for themselves what Caritas and other social agencies of the Church were offering to the people of Hong Kong. Dr. Zhu Zhonggang, a dermatologist of a Shanghai hospital, was inspired by what he saw. He threw the challenge to some colleagues, who immediately accepted it.

They drew up a set of "by-laws" with some general provisions that state in article 2: "The aim of the Association is to unite Catholic believers, to render service to society and to make positive contributions to the four modernizations

and to the reunification of the country thereby glorifying and manifesting love for country".

Many of the members are retired professionals, the same Catholic intellectuals who were the targets for arrest and persecution during the long decade of the Cultural Revolution. Most of them have suffered hardships in the hands of the Red Guards, but today they fear no such oppression, giving full trust to the present day government.

They have established a night school where they teach languages, for they feel that foreign languages are an important tool for communication between the world and China. This school is near the once famous Aurora University of the Jesuits. Most of the professors are descendants of old Catholic families that can trace their roots to Catholicism as far back as Matteo Ricci's time. (Ricci was the famous Jesuit missionary who went to China in 1583.)



The choir at the Shanghai cathedral

Neither the professors nor the doctors are compensated but the Association tries to subsidize the trips that the medical team has to undertake to care for distant patients. A retired physician may draw a government pension equivalent to \$60 US per month. He will pay a rent of \$5 per month for a single room apartment, 12 by 20 feet.

These specialized doctors choose to stay in China even if they have members of the family, sons and daughters, living abroad. They sincerely question some of the values of our Western society such as family relationships. They care for their elderly parents in their confined homes; they cannot understand how we separate them from the family in homes for the elderly. They feel that our Western lives are governed too much by money.

These professionals in Shanghai

feel that the government understands how the Church is a benefit to China. They see the attitude of those in power gradually changing towards believers of all faiths, whether they be Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist or Moslem. These well educated men and women believers offer their skills to help their own people by alleviating some physical hardship of their fellow citizens. Their actions will help remove the lingering suspicions that the government may have toward the Catholic Church.

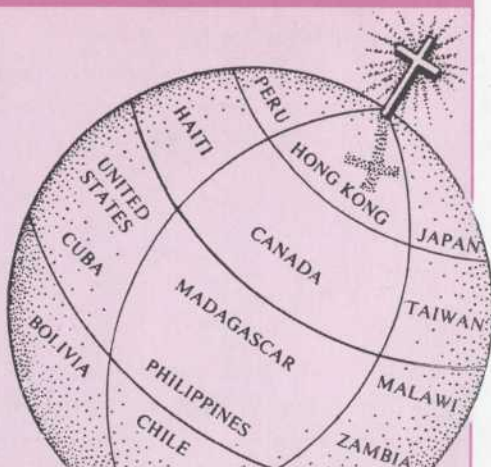
"We love our country", they say. "The Ten Commandments that we observe as Christians and as Catholics also help us to be good citizens. The more serious we are about living good Catholic lives, the better citizens we become."

(+Catholic Intelligentsia Association of Shanghai, By-laws of the Association, as adopted by the General Assembly on June 27, 1986; p.4, article 2.)



The Siu-Jia Hui church, cathedral of Shanghai, dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

How do I become A Missionary Sister?



Call or write to one of these centres or one on the back cover
for other countries.

Missionary Vocational Centres

For the Quebec City
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Therese Lavoie, M.I.C.
1044 Murray Ave.
Quebec, G1S 3B6
Tel.: (418) 687-4093

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645 St. Thomas St.
Longueuil, J4H 3A7
Tel.: (514) 677-3936

For the Toronto
Region (English)
Sister Superior
56 Indian Rd. Crescent
Toronto, Ont. M6P 2G1
Tel.: (416) 530-1887

Something to think about!

There are at present 99,092 women religious in Asia/Oceania

These 99,000 women had the generosity to respond to God's call to serve Him. What about you?

9,312	Australia	181	Macau
436	Bangladesh	1,779	New Zealand
1,003	Burma	103	Pakistan
775	Hong Kong	7,908	Philippines
58,359	India	1,114	Taiwan
4,306	Indonesia	1,443	Thailand
6,407	Japan	4,538	Korea
350	Malaysia/Singapore	1,078	Papua, New Guinea/ & Solomon islands

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