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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

Summer has already caught up with us. The Spirit of Jesus has come down upon us once more at Pentecost. This same Spirit is at work all over the world as we will see in our survey this month. It is the Spirit that brings new Hope in our lives. There is some good being done by many people, whose goodness does not make the headlines of our newspapers.

This is what a group of young Canadians discovered as they came to meet and chat with our elderly missionaries at Pont-Viau. It seems that their discovery of beauty and goodness came as a surprise. They had to question on and on about the serenity and peace they saw in these beautiful old women who had spent their entire lives serving others in all parts of the world and in all conditions.

The article of Sr. Suzanne will bring tears to many eyes as we see her bending down to hug and kiss the little street urchins of Cocha-bamba. Then we will shudder with her as we enter the prison for women, women who are not guests of the State.

Then Juan, a Bolivian teacher, brings us to his village to show us how the peasants have managed to liberate themselves through work by themselves or with the Sisters.

In Central Africa, we will be pleased to come across a large school for girls. There we will meet some MIC Sisters still teaching and helping the young African women assume their status in life. This is our presentation for Literacy Year.

We'll stop at Kwun Tong, an industrial area of Kowloon to visit the Sisters in their little flat, lost in the crowded settlements and in the pollution of factories. We will see them in action with the workers with whom they share their lives.

These short visits here and there, all over the mission world witnessing their effort to bring hope and justice to their brothers and sisters will inspire us, no doubt. We can realize that God's Spirit is still blowing all over our violent and polluted world. It will challenge us to listen to that Spirit inspiring us to spread the Good News in our milieu, missionaries wherever we are.

The Editor

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Suzanne Longtin, MIC, spent 25 years in South America as a younger Sister. A few years ago, at 73, she went back.



Waiting for a Kiss

"By now, I believe that I have passed the phase of adaptation to a high altitude climate, to the different food, to adjustment to an entirely new environment.

First of all let me give you a few facts about Bolivia and my impressions after an absence of more than 30 years. Bolivia is a very large country. It could lodge on its territorial map, Japan, Uruguay, Greece, Cuba, Denmark, Taiwan, Switzerland, Costa Rica and Holland. It only has 7,400,000 inhabitants. A large number of the population is of Indian descent and these speak either Indian language, Quecha or Aymara.

The poverty all around is appalling! The statistics prove that one child dies every 15 minutes, 96 in one day, about 3,000 each month and over 35,000 each year! (These are UNICEF statistics.) Infant

mortality could be the highest in the world. Over 65% school age children suffer from malnutrition. Lately, people have been warned against a racket of kidnapping children of the marginal zones to claim either their kidneys, or other organs. These are then sold to wealthy families of Europe and elsewhere. It is a very tragic traffic of human organs. So you can see for yourselves how sad is the plight of children in Bolivia.

When I arrived in Cochabamba I used to see some of the street children running after the Sisters to be kissed. I'd see my companion bending down to give each one a kiss... it annoyed me, to be quite frank! But by now, they have won me over. Every morning on my way to Mass while going through a park, I give out kisses by the dozen as I pass through this "toll road". These little beggars of love



Sr. Suzanne with a newly baptized infant inside the women's prison.

need to feel that someone cares for them... imagine being 4 to 10 years old and having no one to give you love each day. They wait for me to get another kiss on the return trip! They won my heart and I realize now what our Foundress meant when she told us that LOVE was the bread of life that people needed most in this life.

Besides "the kissing apostolate", I have undertaken another unexpected one. I visit women prisoners, trying to nourish their faith. Their condition is dreadful! I know that some of them are detained because of murder, robbery, drug trafficking etc. Some are there because they cannot pay their debts... or because of money they lent to someone who has disappeared conveniently. Most of them are there because they come from broken families, from homes where there was no love.

Some had to start earning their living as early as 8 years old.

Prisoners here are in a pathetic state. They are not boarders of the government. If they want a private cell, they must buy it for the exorbitant amount of \$150 U.S., an enormous sum for them! Otherwise they are lodged in a common cell, having to sleep on cement floors among the rats and mice running around all night.

They are obliged to earn their food ration as well as that of their children, since these are with the mothers. One of them has 6 of her children with her there. They do laundry work for people outside the prison to earn a little money. Lately, one the young women gave birth to her baby in prison. She had to tear her own clothes to keep it warm. They are easily sentenced to a day in the dungeon deprived of all food.

There is little I can do for them except to bring a message of hope. I buy them Bibles, rosaries, prayer books and other things they need most. I pray with them and I give them all the love I can, since I cannot afford more for the present.

Now, on a lighter tone, let me tell you about my experiment in raising raspberries which are not known in Bolivia. One day I saw a box of raspberries at the market. I quickly bought it. Then I decided to keep every one of the 60 berries to dry so that I could plant them and raise raspberry bushes. Do you know it took four months, or 16 weeks or 112 days for them to

dry sufficiently so that I could plant them. I bought new soil, I enriched it with natural fertilizer and I planted them lovingly. I watched the plots day by day to see them rise. I had already planned to whom I would pass on some of the shoots... I was actually counting my profit! But lo and behold, nothing came out of my seeds except weeds that looked like raspberry leaves! Now, I have given up my project of raising raspberries... Some people of Bolivia will never know what they nearly had to eat for dessert!"

(From a letter to her friends)



Social Concerns



Four of us Hong Kong MIC Sisters have opted to live in Kwun Tong, an industrial area of Kowloon, Hong Kong, where many factory workers live. We are trying to live a similar life style as theirs.

In HK, 50% of the population are industrial workers. Then 36.5% of these are youth, from 18 to 30 years of age. So we MIC's are here wishing to work through the Workers' Formation Program Centre located here in Kwun Tong.

The aim of the Centre, founded in 1977 by the Maryknoll Fathers, is to bring out in a tangible way the concern of the Church for these young workers. Although the majority of them are non-Christian, we try to help all of them in their personal growth and make them aware of the social problems within their milieu.

For this, the Centre organizes classes, activities and discussion groups according to the needs and interests of those who approach us. This helps the participants to feel at home in the Centre, and gives them a sense of belonging. They live in such a highly competitive society that they have little time for reflection. Our work is to offer courses, to accompany groups or listen to them as they express their problems and concerns. We feel that often by merely listening to them, they acquire more self confidence and become aware of their own personal value, thus opening new perspectives on the meaning of life.





Young workers in discussion at the Centre.

Our flat is on the sixth floor of a twelve storey building. We are surrounded by similar blocks all around us. Like the other tenants, we do our own washing, cooking, cleaning and marketing. We often buy our goods from street hawkers hovering all over the area for a living. Each one of us has her work, her studies and her apostolate. We love visitors and if you happen to be around, you'll find a warm welcome, either to a meal, or a prayer service. We are really an international group of four MIC's. One is a Filipina, another is an American, one is a Taiwanese Chinese and another is a Canadian.

Our witness to God's love is becoming more evident as people become more familiar with us.

That is why one young girl came knocking at our door at 7 a.m. one day asking us to help her in a difficult situation. Our neighbours are wondering where we are going so early each morning as we leave to attend the Eucharist.

We have been here only a short time but already people are beginning to understand why we are here in spite of the fact that we could have better living conditions. This is the challenge that we are accepting by living here in crowded and polluted Kwun Tong, trying to live the full mystery of the Incarnation following the example of the one "who takes delight in his people."

Madeleine Delorme, MIC

Huancarani is a very historical community in the department of Potosi. According to recent researches this little village, lost in the Andes of Bolivia, was already well known even in the Spanish colonial days. It was the site of one of the rich silver mines of Colquechaca. As there were no adequate places to store the ores of the mine, miners of different areas of the country came to settle in this village with their families.

The very word "Huancarani" stems from the Quecha, Indian language of Bolivia. It means the sound of a "sonorous instrument", somewhat like pounding on a kettle drum.

After the 1825 War of Independence, people settled for good in Huancarani. From exploited miners, they became oppressed farmers of wealthy land owners. The oppression lasted until 1953 when Victor Paz Estenssoro decided to operate agricultural reforms.

Today liberated from this type of slavery, the people have become farmers of their little plot of land which they can till for their own benefit. Their other source of revenue is the manufacture of felt hats.

When the MIC Sisters arrived in 1983, the population was optimistic about their future. They were already striving to go forward in their enterprises. The peasants got together to construct a convent for the Sisters and a much needed medical centre for the area.

Muchas Gr

by Juan Molina T

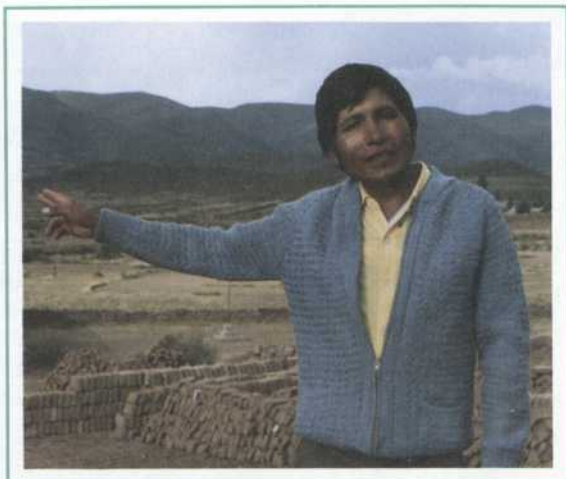
A Bolivian teacher remembers Sisters helped them to grow and t from their static lives to become Christian community.



Gracias!

Iolina Tarqui

members how the Missionary
now and to liberate themselves
become members of a living



In 1985, they built a small primary school for 200 children as education was one of their priorities. Then they organized a community project to obtain drinking water in 1989. Finally, these people have received permission from the Education Department to erect a secondary school.

Today, these villagers, eager to form a Christian community, are now building their own parish church. Together, they still work for their total liberation of life through Jesus.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank the MIC Sisters who came to share our life in Huancarani. I am thinking especially of Sisters Alice, Suzanne, Pierrette, Huguette, Rita and Angele. I'll never forget these names! Muchas gracias!

Hope for a Nation

Today, Sr. Mary Victoria Chirwa would like to introduce you to Marymount, one of the mission schools of Malawi, Central Africa, where the MIC Sisters are offering their service as educators. Vicky served as Matron at this boarding school, then as teacher and finally as Principal from 1973-79.

When the MIC Sisters first arrived in Malawi, in 1948, they set the education of the African woman as one of their priorities. They knew that academic education was given only to boys as future providers for their families. The girl was educated by her mother and the women of her village. Academic education would have been considered a threat to the men and to our traditional mode of life.

On the 23rd of January, 1963, we MIC Sisters opened the doors of Marymount to 65 boarding students for grades nine to eleven. Today, the school is filled to full capacity with over 320 girls in the same grades.

Every year there are about 80,000 students completing their primary education and competing for 8,000 seats in the secondary schools of Malawi. The Ministry of Education determines what schools each successful candidate





Marymount Girls' Secondary School in Mzuzu, Malawi, Central Africa.

will attend. So our students come from every part of the country as they come out of the primary schools. For students of diverse tribes, living together is a great challenge and one that fosters the building of a National Identity. Furthermore, it is an excellent and concrete way of learning to live Christian Unity, starting from within one's own country.

The same Ministry is also responsible for appointing the teaching staff of each particular school. Besides the Malawian staff, we have had teachers from Canada, Zambia, England, France, Japan, U.S.A., the Philippines and Australia. Thus, international co-operation is for us a daily reality in Marymount.

Drawing from the traditional feminine values centered on making the women good wives and

efficient mothers, the school aims to prepare them to live a more adequate life in their homes and in society. For this, we offer a full program of home economics which includes all the basics of home management, nutrition, needlework, dressmaking, etc. We regard hygiene as one of the important subjects because of our tropical climate where we have to beware of foul water and disease carrying insects. Child care is taken up from all angles, including the appropriate care of pregnant women, of the newborn baby as well as that of small children.

In the nutrition courses, we try to help the students become aware of their irreplaceable roles in the family, providing them with nutritious and balanced meals. Here we use ingredients produced in the country for both local and foreign dishes.



Sr. M. Claire Lacombe with Marymount girls.

In Marymount, we have many extracurricular activities geared to develop talents and skills. To help in the formation of integrated personality and to discern how to live the Christian values, we have the YCS (Young Catholic Student), the SCO (Student Christian Organization). The youth of Malawi love to hear the Word of God and turn to it in their search for authentic living. Thus guidance and encouragement in this field is a real challenge for the staff.

Today, many of our former students hold posts of responsibility in different ministries, institutions, companies and banks throughout the country. Others have become leaders in religious congregations and in the Church.

We MIC Sisters are still on the management board and the teaching staff of Marymount. We hope that our love will continue inspiring our young African girls to go through the four years of secondary education, as we watch them grow in maturity, dignity and relational awareness. It is our joy and goal to continue promoting the status of women, blending knowledge with Christian living in our fast evolving world.

Mary Victoria Chirwa, MIC

(Sister Mary Victoria, a Zambian, is presently in Canada, while waiting to go in mission in Cuba.)

Caught Up By the Lord!

Now and then youth groups come to Pont-Viau to meet missionaries and chat with them about their mission experience. The elderly retired Sisters love meeting these groups. It's a life giving process for both young and old. A few wrote their impressions of the meeting with the missionaries.

"Our media is forever shouting news about violence, drugs, wars and scandals. Is there any room left for love, fraternity and solidarity?"

We believe so! Delia Tetreault and the women missionaries who followed her are a living sign of this fact. Delia, that woman apostle who spent her life opening centres all over the world through the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and helped to promote the foundation of the

Seminary of the Fathers of the Foreign Missions, is a proof of that love in a world dominated by violence. To-day, we'll talk about these women.

Caught up by Jesus

Last May, 1989, our school had an outing which brought us students to Pont-Viau. We had no idea how this visit would affect our lives! To meet all these women who gave their entire lives serving others was very impressive. Lis-



(L. to R.) Srs. Lucienne Renaud, Madeleine Blais, Yvette Bélanger with some of the Schoolgirls.

Photo: H. Turcotte, MIC.

tening to their varied experiences was another thing! We just didn't have enough ears to listen to all we heard!

We asked them point blank: "Are you happy in what you are doing now? Do you feel that you had a full life?" Without the least hesitation, they affirmed that they were very happy and fulfilled in life. Their inner joy confirmed their statement. It seemed to us that they had drunk at the fountain of eternal youth!

They became missionaries by choice after hearing the call of the Lord. To see these women assembled in this big house serving God with so much love gave us all the impression that we were out of reality with life. If all of us young people radiated faith the way they did, we'd change the world in no time at all.

The Real Values of Life

One with whom we talked, had spent most of her life in Peru. When she told us something about their daily problems such as terrorism, malfunctioning of the government, the lack of rice, cooking oil, and other basic foods. It surely made us reflect. Here in Canada, we are forever complaining even with full stomachs. We often dramatize our situations. Then the missionary pointed out to us about the simplicity of heart and the gentleness of the Peruvians that she knew.

Another elderly Sister of 95 told us a few things about her 52 years in China. Her vitality, her joy in life, her courage simply

baffled us all. We felt good by simply being in the presence of such persons.

These Sisters were not afraid at all to affirm that they had lived out real values in life, the ones that Jesus wanted us all to live, spiritual values, values of the heart. They gently reminded us that we often bypass the real values in life because we are so engrossed in our material values and our problems here in North America.

Why Are You so Happy?

For us young people, that was our main question. We are forever searching for happiness. Their answer was as simple as this: "You ask us why we're so happy? It's because we have met Jesus in our lives!" We are still amazed at what we saw, what we heard that day. Yet for us it was still hard to understand how you could be so happy living alongside so much misery and suffering.

We did not ask any more questions. We kept them in our hearts. We were so astounded to find such warmth in these persons, such radiance and love. We really felt good among them. If Delia had intended in her wildest dream to create such a community of women giving out new life, she can rest, assured that her wish has been fully realized. To discover women still spending their lives for others today means that there is still hope for our humanity. Jesus is really among us!"

(Translated and adapted from an article by France Royer-Martel, MIC, in LE PRECURSEUR)

OUR PROMOTERS



*Mrs. Jeanne Rosemarin,
an 83 year old promoter,
with Sr Jeannette Pinard,
MIC.*



*Lucy Parial, an Associate of the MIC Sisters,
active promoter*

*Dora LeBlanc and
Minnie LeBlanc,
promoters in N.B.*



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