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MIC

MISSION NEWS



THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

Dear Readers,

Summer is a time when we can find more space for the Lord in our lives... space to praise Him for His goodness to each one of us. Space to thank Him for our faith, that faith which millions of our brothers have never known yet.

The Missionaries still go out to help plant that faith. They are forever creating new ways to meet their brothers with whom they can share their love and faith in a loving Father. They cannot do that alone, they need the cooperation of everyone in the Church. Thus, they can maintain a loving presence and support hope among the poor, the voiceless ones, the non-believers.

This issue introduces us to some of these dynamic Christians who are aware of their baptismal obligations to help bring the Good News to all men of all times. They understand that they can bring support to the missionaries in creative ways.

Some senior ladies in a small town of Germany found ways to relieve the suffering of the underprivileged in the Philippines. Sr. Lilia Frondoza was among those witnessing the joy of the recipients. Another Lilia of the Philippines explains very simply how she is sharing, not her wealth, but her very life serving others as a lay missionary. She too has found space to be present to those who need her.

Then, Sr. Charline takes us around her mission field in Cuba where she is not confined by space in spite of the obstacles in her mission apostolate. Sr. Estelle of Madagascar shows us how she has been rewarded for the gratuity of her services among the people with whom she is sharing her life.

Finally, a Catholic school in Japan,—a paradox for some,—a work of love for others,—shows that space can be found even in a country where geographically, space is so limited.

Just as the Lord did not confine his mission to this or that type of work, to this or that country, we can ask ourselves how much space we have given Him this summer? How much have we done for our brothers and sisters in that mission He has confided to each and every one of us at our baptism? It is not too late to give Him the space He wants from us.

The Editor

*Cover photo: Gisele Lambert, MIC
with a Kindergarten tot*

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Secondary School students in their library at Xaviero School in Koriyama

A Paradox — the Catholic schools

by Monique Cloutier, MIC



A Catholic school in Japan! It is so paradoxical that you could hardly believe it. We are on the frontier of a world of non-belief, yet the Spirit blows in all freedom. I say paradox, because the school population is mostly non-Christian, with only 31 Christian students out of a population of 938. The same can be said of the teaching staff where out of 54 teachers, 15 only are Christian, including the six Sisters on the staff.



Sr. Kimiko Fujimatsu with primary school pupils



Kindergarten tots in prayer

In Japan, private schools are partly subsidized by the government and have full freedom to teach religion as long as the curriculum of other subjects conforms to the directives of the National Board of Education.

Our students all benefit of religious education lessons, and slowly the Faith grows in the hearts of these children. Our 288 tots of the Kindergarten, our 422 primary school pupils and our 228 high school students all benefit of these regular lessons given by the Sisters. Special attention is also given to Christian students to help them grow in their Faith.

The school day begins with a morning prayer, prayers composed by the students themselves, followed by other prayers and a hymn. This one is always in relation to a Gospel value. This year we have as motto: "Consideration for Others." At lunch time, grace and blessings are said before meals. The day ends with the Ave Maria and the offering of the day's work.

The school year finds many religious activities such as exhortations, the month of Mary, recollection days, with special ceremonies on the feast of St. Francis Xavier, the school patron. Special celebrations are carried on around Christmas, graduation or the blessing of the children on National Children's Day. Furthermore, religion clubs are active and carry on charitable visits to the elderly or the poor. The students also contribute financially to help the needy and the under-privileged

in the Third World. The primary school has adopted a school in Africa and their contributions helped to put up a new roof on the school. The secondary division offer scholarships to Filipino youngsters and contribute to help collect food for the starving children of the island of Negros. To raise funds, the students organize bazaars, collect and sell old newspapers, cartons, etc.

The teachers' days also begin by a prayer and a Gospel reading. After this staff assembly, the teachers join in with the student prayers which are diffused through the public address system all over the school. Sr. Louisa Nicole gives regular religious exhortations to the teachers, both Christian and non-Christian, to help them understand the spirit of Christ so that they can pass on in their lessons some of the Gospel values. Each semester as well as each year, the teachers have the opportunity to take a few days of reflection or retreat with fellow teachers of other schools.

Every two years a new committee of two teachers is selected to make parents, teachers and students aware of problems of injustice, poverty, world suffering through films, videos, or conferences by resource persons. Regular religion courses are offered to teachers. All are invited to participate after the first two compulsory years.

Parents are not forgotten either. Besides the religious influence they receive through their contact with

the Catholic school, they also benefit of regular conferences. They also receive the little school newsletter explaining the meaning of the religious feasts and activities. In it they receive an open invitation to participate in certain activities.

The Association of Parents also raises funds to help the needs of our missions in Madagsacar and Haiti. They are also invited to do some volunteer work in the orphanage of Momomidai. There Sr. Simone Saint-Amand finds ways to welcome them and create an atmosphere of joy in their volunteer work.

Each year the parents are invited to attend religion courses. Over 100 persons attend these sessions either on subjects such as the growth of the human person or in pre-catechesis classes etc. A well stocked library is at their service all year round with books on child psychology, the Christian religion, Gospel values etc. Some of them take up private English lessons in the Convent.

You may wonder if we often have the joy to bring some persons to become members of the Christian community through Baptism? Yes, it happens in small numbers each year. But we believe that the Spirit works in silence, at His own rhythm within the hearts of people. We are sure that like in all mission schools, it is nothing more than the cry in the desert of unbelief: MARANATHA! Come Lord Jesus!

CHILE

New Visions

Speaking of escargots, or edible snails, one can visualize a slimy worm gliding along with its own house on the back. And if this creature feels it's being hunted for all the damage it causes to green plants,—today,—it is discovering that many people are trying to save it. Expert fingers now pick up these escargots carefully for the purpose of raising them for gourmet meals.

Hilda Baeza Flores, is a widely read young woman who came to Chiloe when her husband was transferred. She was interested in everything...including the study of the life style of the escargots! She decided to experiment on how to raise them so as to help interested parties. This went on for three years. She studied their feeding and breeding habits, their life span, the cause of death etc. Then Hilda approached Caritas to solicit funds to edit a book, "Escargots in Chiloe". But this organization informed her that they do not give grants for such projects. So then, Mrs. Baeza Flores decided to offer courses to anyone interested.

The first courses registered only 12 participants. The classes were held in our MIC house in Ancud where Caritas has its diocesan offices. The participants were asked to pay the equivalent of \$2.00 (500 pesos) while Hilda had to deposit \$48.00 (12,000 pesos) for the same courses in Santiago. In solidarity with those in need, this lady helioculturist joined forces with Caritas in the same spirit of that organization.

It wasn't long before several persons started raising escargots in cages along the principles she was teaching. They set up an association somewhat like a cooperative. They would export their products to different larger centres for the gourmet meals. Their affiliation obliges all the members of the cooperative to work hard so that the group will benefit from their work. The profit is divided among the members, in such a way, that all must take interest in the enterprise.

What about evangelization here? Firstly, this project is geared to help small entrepreneurs of modest economic resources with the aim of helping them. Thus they become agents of their own development. We also make them aware of their worth in respecting the person. Each member must pay an initial contribution on joining the group. In this way, everybody is equal, no one is more equal than the other! There is no inferiority complex in the group.

Secondly, the efforts to show forth the human values as well as evangelical ones is affirmed.

Everyone feels welcomed in the association. Friendships are established, and among the members is a growing fraternity and solidarity. No one feels alone! Contacts are made with business men who can export their products. Escargot and evangelization now tend to extend its project to other sectors of our society here. It is also a solution to the unemployment problem and a source of revenue for the mother who has to remain at home with the younger children.

Gilberte Perras, MIC

(Adapted from an article in LE PRÉCURSEUR)



Mrs. Hilda Baeza Flores lecturing on her subject

Being the Hand

A friend and relative of Sr Lilia Frondoza came from West Germany to visit the family in the Philippines. Mr. Meinhard Spikermeier was appalled at what he saw in the squatter areas of Manila. He took video pictures of the areas and on his return home showed them to his mother, Mrs. Margaret, living in the parish of Wenachen, San Paulus, where many senior citizens reside.

The senior ladies were very impressed especially when they saw their little street beggars around Quiapo. Then they decided to organize a bazaar to find funds to help. They managed to raise the amount of 50,000 pesos. Then they wrote to Sr. Lilia and asked her to channel their donation through an organization which has contact with the poor.



Sr. Lilia Frondoza at the distribution



With a Filipino brother

Hands of Christ



Lilia Frondoza at the distribution centre



A Filipino brother

Sr. Lilia explains: "I contacted the Institute of the Urban Poor Inc., a non-government and non-profit organization run by lay people with a Jesuit priest. The money was divided to help people in different areas of Manila and other parts of the Philippines. A share was offered to 100 soldiers guarding the television channels as well. The final compilation showed that we had helped over 600 families.

The project was a wonderful occasion to thank God for the generosity of these donors who so unselfishly gave their time and effort to help the underprivileged squatters and beggars found in many of our large Filipino cities."

Lilia Frondoza, MIC

Smiles, Presence and Songs

Sr. Charline is a Malagasy MIC who has been in mission work in Cuba for the past 5 years. Presently, Charline is recovering from knee surgery. In a long hand-written letter to her friends she tells us what life is like for an MIC Missionary Sister in Cuba these days.

"Now that I am handicapped by knee surgery, I have time for long hours of prayer to praise God and thank Him for all His goodness to His children all over the world, especially those in Cuba and in Madagascar, my home country. But even in this awkward position of being restricted by an outstretched knee, I can still offer small services to our community of four Sisters. I help to sift the rice, I prepare the garlic for the meals. I also share in the preparation of the community prayers, I write down the community diary etc. So you see, I am not altogether useless.

But I had to forego my apostolate and there is no one to take my place right now. Do you want to hear about my evangelization work here this year?

I work in a team with two lay persons and the Vicar General. I am the one in charge of the public relation with non-Christians, with those who have withdrawn from the Church. I visit families regularly. One home leads me to another. "Sister," they say, "please visit my daughter. She has a 14 year old daughter about to decide on her life career. (At 15 the young girls become free to do as they wish, to associate with whom they want. At 16 everybody attains majority in life, with the right and duty to vote.) I had brought up my daughter, her mother as a good Catholic. I am concerned about the future of my grand daughter."

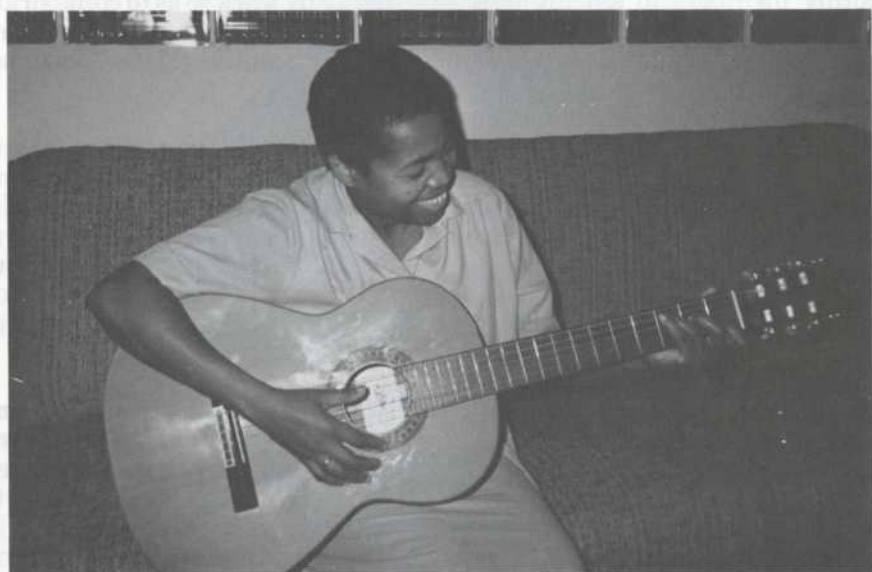
Our catechetics lesson is carried on in a peculiar fashion. It goes on from questions raised by the family

members. They may ask for instruction on the sacrament of reconciliation, they may wonder at my being in religious life, sometimes they may even compare the works of the Church to those maintained by the Government. I don't argue with anyone, I explain my point of view and listen to theirs.

It may happen now and then that I have to spend hours playing around with the baby or young tot before I can get in to the conversation about religion. Sometimes these same young children are the ones who want to meet me again, so they bring their parents to visit us.

It is consoling to hear many persons express a desire to return to the Church. Here, in Holguin, they had the privilege of the visit

of the pilgrim Virgin Mary, as well as that of the Cross a few years ago. These pastoral events really had an impact on their Christian lives. This was the statue of Our Lady of Caridad, the national patroness of Cuba. At that event, there was a real spiritual renewal and conversions. This year, they are circulating a wooden Cross as we are preparing to celebrate the fifth century of the landing of Christopher Columbus on these shores. This Cross was blessed by Pope John Paul II and offered to the Conference of the Bishops of Cuba. Rather than leaving it in one spot, the Bishops decided to have it circulated all over the island wherever evangelization work is being carried on. Where there is no church building, the people welcome it on their verandahs or in the homes. Occasionally, we run in to difficulties



Charline Zafisoa, an MIC from Madagascar

when large public manifestations are convoked for religious reasons.

You could never imagine how much people are really thirsting for God. But there are many difficulties, for the families fear for the future of their children.

I love my mission work in Holguin. I could summarize it in three words: smiles, presence, and songs. On certain days each week I visit the Lenin Hospital. Each Sunday, after four p.m., I am in the cemetery. There I meet five persons whom I am preparing for First Communion. I accompany families who have a Mass offered there for their deceased members. I pray with them and speak to them. It is the custom here for family members to assemble at the grave to say the Rosary for nine days after the decease, so that gives me a chance to meet them. I do carry on a real cemetery ministry... my companions tease me. But then, I remind them that new life can come out of this apostolate as New Life was born on the first Easter.

I shall be returning to Madagascar soon to take up another form of apostolate. I'll miss my Cuban Sisters, I'll miss all my Cuban friends but I'll keep them forever in my heart and in my prayers of thanksgiving.

Charline Zafisoa, MIC

MADAGASCAR

More Honey in my Cup

Thanksgiving is a value that Madagascar people like to express through gifts. Sr. Estelle Messier tries to explain it to us in this article.

I first left for Madagascar in 1962. I was in charge of the school Ste Therese of Mahazoarivo, in Antsirabe for the past 21 years. In communion with all those who must earn their daily bread, I know that I also have to earn my living by work so as to collaborate to the happiness of the greater human family. (MIC Const. no. 12.4)

When I left the country for my last home leave, I was given many gifts to bring back to Canada. This is a beautiful Malagasy tradition. Some were personal souvenirs, others were gifts for members of my family; they were all sizes and types.

But I want to tell you about one particular gift that I cherish very much. It was a pencil box carved and engraved by hand, offered to me by a past student. You will understand more fully the meaning as you read the accompanying letter.

"On your departure, it is with joy that my family and myself come to offer you this parting gift. It is small in comparison to all that you have done for us. But according to our traditional Malagasy proverb, 'it is but a half cup of honey', but the heart supplements what is lacking.

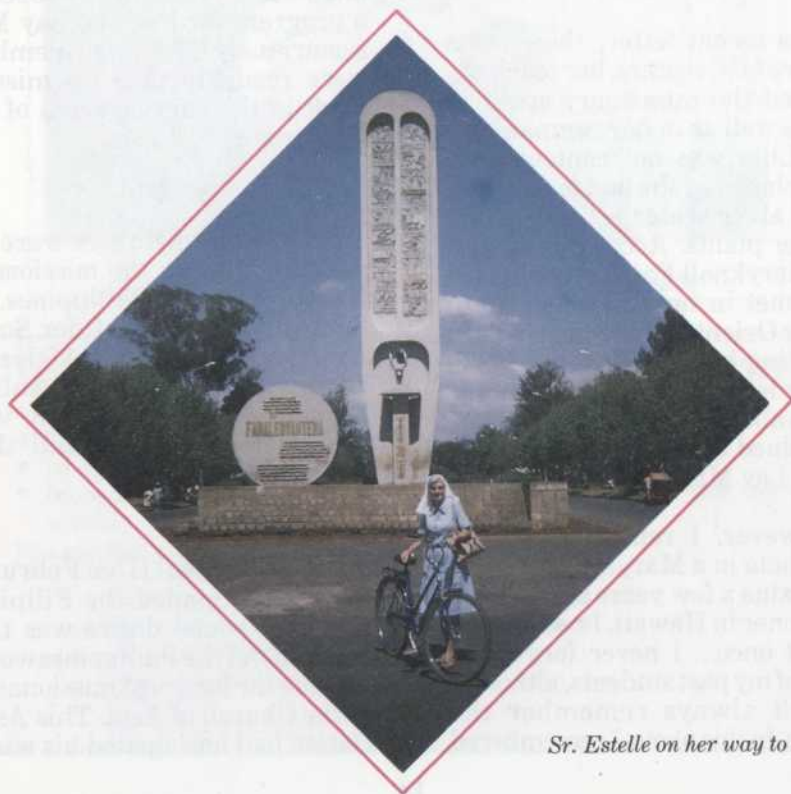
For us people, this object has many meanings. L'Aloalo, the top part symbolizes continuity in life. No matter how far away you may be you will continue living in us and with us. It expresses the symbol of the great love you gave us when you lived here in our area of Mahazoarivo.

The lower part on which you can read the names Ranomasina-

Ranomanoro is the emblem of the moving sea, the emblem of Antsirabe, the location of the thermal baths. It was in this city that you offered us your love, your efforts to help us.

On the pencil box you may notice the inscription which says that the word may be forgotten but the writing will not. What you have done remains engraved in our hearts and in our city, especially in the school of Ste Therese. We wish you Bon Voyage!"

This letter flows with the same spirit of thanksgiving that spurs Sr. Estelle to carry on her work for her dear people of the "red island", Madagascar with its red earth and waters.



Sr. Estelle on her way to school

Sowing Seeds of Hope

I first met Lilia when she was a student in our school, Immaculate Heart of Mary Academy in Mati, Davao Oriental. I remember her as a generous young lady always ready to offer a helping hand. One cannot easily forget the dimples of her ready smile. Many times that same smile encouraged me as I was teaching her.

In a recent letter, she admits that we MIC Sisters, her teachers, planted the missionary spirit in her as well as in her companions. But Lilia was not content with only planting, she had to do something about watering and caring for her plants. According to her, the Maryknoll Fathers whom she first met in her parish in Mati, Davao Oriental, had much to do in orienting her to follow her ideal. In her letter, Lilia did not tell me much about herself up to the time she joined the PLMP, the Philippines Lay Mission Program.

However, I remember seeing her photo in a Maryknoll mission magazine a few years ago as a lay missionary in Hawaii. I recognized her at once... I never forget the faces of my past students, although I can't always remember the names. In this photo, I remembered

both the smile and the name. Lilia Palma had been a very special student. Then I inquired about the program of the lay missionaries in which Lilia played such an active role.

It was in 1975 when the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers set up a program for Filipino Lay Missionaries. By 1978, seven members were ready to take up mission work in the various areas of the Philippines.

By 1979, 15 members were already serving in the missions in Hawaii and the Philippines. In 1980 the first team left for South America, in 1984 it was Africa. In 1985 they could count 100 members in the Association. In 1988, they ventured into Japan and then Venezuela.

Pope John Paul II, on February 22, 1981, reminded the Filipinos that his special desire was that the people of the Philippines would become the foremost missionaries of the Church of Asia. This Association had anticipated his wish.

To become a member, one must be Catholic, single or married with some previous experience in Church apostolate. This faith-oriented person must be in good health, between the ages of 15 and 60. After a formation period of seven months with courses in Scripture, liturgy, the sacraments and pastoral work the candidate may accept the term of service. This may be a two year commitment for serving the Church in the Philippines or a three year contract for service outside of the Philippines.

Lilia travels from one part of the Philippines to the other to meet and interview the candidates. She has spent some time in Hawaii in service before being in the formators team in the Philippines. She thanks the Sisters for having come to Mati to sow the seeds of the missionary vocation in her heart, seeds that she and several other past students of IHMA are now sowing in their turn.

Therese LeBlanc, MIC



Miss Lilia Palma (center) with her brother Mario and the PLMP Director, Fr. Clyde V. Phillips, M.M.

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