

MIC MISSION NEWS

Series 21, No. 3
May-June 1994



Vocation: Call to Life



Every vocation —
to marriage and
family, to a career, to ministry, to
mission — requires a lifetime of
listening and discernment. God's call,
the vocation to love and serve others,
invites us to conversion, renewal and
response.

We are called to an ever renewed
freshness and vigor in our own lives.
And with life we are given a rich
variety of gifts to be brought together
in one Spirit. We witness to the Good
News in different ways, but each of us
is called, chosen, invited, sent.

Within our great vocation as members
of God's family, we see the various
ways He has gifted and called men
and women to services of every nature
in society. At this Pentecost, may the
Holy Spirit bring new life, new
beginnings to each of us as we
recommit ourselves to the vocation
the Lord called us to exercise in His
name.

Ma. Anthea Raso, M.I.C.

Back cover:

Mésina Paulémon, M.I.C. (Haiti) and
Aline Quirion, M.I.C. (Canada) with
parishioners in Lima, Peru.

Front cover:

The *jakaranda* tree in full bloom —
harbinger of a season of hope for a family
in Katete, Malawi.

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(Malawi)

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Counting 100 Years of Blessings!

Celebrating a one hundredth birthday is not as rare now as in the past because medical progress has considerably increased the life expectancy of our contemporaries. On June 1, 1994, Sister Gratia Blanchet, M.I.C., will be 100 years old. For us Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, this event will make her the first centenarian of our Congregation.

Now retired at our house of Pont-Viau after a career of fifty-two years in China, our most senior member shares the important stages of her long life. Her impressions were gathered by Sr. Huguette Turcotte, M.I.C.

Sister Gratia, I know you've looked forward to the day of your centenary. It is now close at hand. What impressions are yours when you think of your long journey?

I'm filled with joy and thanksgiving for all the marvelous things that have happened in my life. Yes, I've come a long way since my birth in Connecticut, my childhood in Drummondville, my years in Canton, Hong Kong and in Canada! Sometimes, I sum up my itinerary by saying that I'm American by birth, French Canadian by my family, I "married a Jew" and have Chinese children in faith down to the fifth generation. I am overwhelmed! What more can I ask for?

I agree, nothing more; but tell me, you knew our Foundress, Délia Tétreault, very well since our Congregation was very young when you entered the convent?

Yes indeed! In 1912, the Community had been in existence for only ten years when I joined the novitiate in Outremont. Our Mother was in the best of health at that time; she looked after everything, especially the formation of the novices. I was the 38th sister to take final vows. I can still recall the advice she gave us when we left for the mission, for we left very young.

I was appointed to Canton and I left December 8, 1915. In those days of travelling by sea, China



Among the 'hundredfold' of blessings for Sr. Gratia: welcoming Mr. and Mrs. Luis Wei, dear friends from Hong Kong...

was truly at the farthest ends of the earth and we left for the mission for life. Since I loved my family very much, I think it was the greatest sacrifice of my life... The good Lord allowed me to return to Canada several times up to my final homecoming in 1973.

So, upon arriving in China, you studied the Cantonese language. What then?

Did I ever have my hands full! I worked with schools and students for many years. I prepared a number of adults for the sacraments, baptized babies, directed an asylum for the mentally ill and also looked after lepers for a while. I was young, full of life and ready to face challenges which sometimes led me into difficult situations. There was never a lack of these due to the wars which compli-



Joy-filled moments with "palette and brush".

cated our lives: civil wars, the Japanese occupation, bombardments, living in fear... And we were cut off from the Mother House, without news for long periods of time.

Finally, in November 1951, the Communists took over and we were forced to leave Canton. How heartbreaking it was for us to abandon the babies at the nursery, the orphans, the pupils, so many people dear to us — and

all our works! Thank God there was much for us to do in Hong Kong; the city overflowed with refugees and among them were many children. With government aid, we were able to find a piece of land to build a school which developed well — 2000 students still attend this school today. I felt at home in this place. A dozen more lovely years with my dear Chinese friends before the time came to return to Canada.

Such a career as yours has met with many ups and downs. You've just mentioned the great hardships caused by the war, the exodus, the separations. Can you mention certain events which brought you joy?

I was always happy! Tragic moments never hindered my interior peace. Among the happy events was the conversion to Catholicism of some of my students, two of whom are Helena Fount and Lucia Ho, who joined our Congregation. These students, baptized in 1924, are at the forefront of many generations of Christians who transmitted the faith to others. Before I left Hong Kong in 1972, I met them all again at a gathering organized for us. Like the old man Simeon, I felt like singing my *Nunc Dimittis*, "Now, Lord, you can let your servant go in peace"...

There were the joys of returning to Canada to meet the members of my large family, of talking about China in various places — even on radio and television — of giving testimony of God's love for me. My years of retirement at Pont-Viau overflowed with activities. I even realized wishes of my youth — to do oil painting, to keep a large correspondence, to meet groups of young people who wished to know more about Délia Tétréault. The opening of China these past years, the freedom of Christians to worship, the news from friends left behind... such things are sources of great joy for me. Also, the good care, the kind attention of my M.I.C. companions and the lay personnel of the Infirmary... I could never finish enumerating the joys of my retirement days and to give *Thanks!*

Sister Gratia, many people will join you in giving thanks for your one hundred years of life on June 1: your M.I.C. companions from the four corners of the world, your relatives and friends and all who will know you through today's interview. And, of course, your large heavenly family, at the head of which is our Foundress, Délia Tétréault, who transmitted to you her love for those in distant lands and who sent you to them way back in 1915. *

The secret of happiness is to keep our hearts united to God.

Délia Tétréault, M.I.C. Foundress

A Brief Look at the Malagasy People

The Malagasy family encompasses the whole clan, characterized by strong ties of belonging. Greatly desired is a united family, living together even beyond death. From this stems the practice of keeping a common family grave. A Malagasy proverb says: "We will be united in death as we are united in life". If anyone dies in another region or in another country, the family tries to bring the body back to the family grave. The greatest sign of a family rupture is the division of the burial place following a misunderstanding among family members.

Our ancestors do not pass on to us a family name. Each child has a personal name. All names start with *Ra*, a sign of respect, and have their own significance. At times parents choose a name resulting from an event or circumstance. For example, when a child dies at an early age, the next one is named *Rasolo* (Substitute). Or, the parents will name a little girl *Rafanomezan-janahary* (Gift of the Creator). Nowadays, some Malagasies like to have a family name but this has not yet become customary nor obligatory in the country.



We are a joyful people and festivals hold an important place in our lives. There is never a celebration without dancing, never a gathering without singing. Each region has its own folk dance and its own way of feasting. In church or in social gatherings, we like to sing hymns or songs which lead to reflection or contain a message. Every time we meet is an occasion to dance: a wedding, a Baptism, any get-together, especially the event of the *famadahana* (turning of the dead).

After a deceased family member has been buried so long that the silk *lambamena* (the shawls) in which the body was wrapped have disintegrated, it is time for the family to replace them. The tomb is opened, the remains taken out and carefully wrapped again in new *lambamena*. The people dance and sing and everyone has a good time. This is not a sad occasion but a happy reunion with beloved ancestors. The remains are then reinterred in the tomb which is sealed until the next *famadahana*.

This celebration, in remembrance of our ancestors, is unique to us as a people and is celebrated every 5 or 7 years. The



T. Lortie, M.I.C.

Sr. Perpetue shares family joys with a Malagasy couple in Montreal.

event is an occasion to gather the whole clan. It brings special blessings upon the family and is also a time of reconciliation.



Traditions which characterize our people are very vivid in the hearts of those born and residing in Madagascar. But what about those who live outside the country?

Here in Montreal, the number of Malagasies is not sufficient to form a strictly Malagasy community. However, we like to come together and the least gathering gives rise to a celebration.

I've met two young Malagasy couples who have lived in Montreal for a few years. Together we reflected on the adaptation of our customs to our current environment.

The parents realize that difficulties begin when their children start going to school. They prefer to speak French and

seem not to understand customs and values held sacred by their elders. At church on Sundays, it is surprising for us to see so few young people attending. In Madagascar, the youth take part in all religious activities and the church is often too small to seat the large group of young people present.

Canadian society is very open and welcomes Malagasies warmly. Our people feel at home and find that it is good to live here. However, the dilemma for them, as for other immigrant families, is to find an appropriate way to harmonize the values of the country of origin with the values of their country of adoption. In such a case, it is greatly hoped that a dialogue and a solidarity would come about between generations and peoples. Would this not settle many conflicts, particularly within the family, the basic unit of society? *

Perpétue Razafindrahaingo, M.I.C.

Mary of Nazareth

*Much has been said about you
Yet, you, who are God's "yes", have said nothing,
you have said so little.*

*Much has been written about you,
Yet, you have left nothing in writing, no testament.
Yes, you did — Jesus Christ.*

Mary... Who are you?

*The joy of Yabweh
The gratuitousness of love.*

*I know you are there, monitoring the discovery
of a God who works wonders.*

*Sweet tenderness
Silence of dawn*

*I know you are there, weaving with us
the fabric of our "yes" each day.*

*Mary most beautiful
Most graced by God*

*I know you are there, offering to soothe the
coarseness of our days with infinite love.*

*Mother of all ages
Mother of all centuries*

*I know you are there, sharing the intimate
Covenant between humankind and its Creator.*



A Bolivian representation of Mother and Child

Mary,

Mother of Jesus

Mother of God

*For ever and ever,
We sing to you.*

*For being there
For saying "yes"
We give you thanks.*

*For helping us discern that part of tomorrow
which is offered to us today,
For holding out to us the colours of hope,
We give you thanks.*

*For believing in our preferred future with us,
For setting out with us on our way to what-is-to-come,
We give you thanks.*

*For gathering us together in **A Long Magnificat**
For helping us to live out the mission of the beloved Son,
We give you thanks.*

Evangéline Plamondon, M.I.C.

English translation: A. Kinlough

“What Ever Made You Become a Nun?”

I have been asked this question hundreds of times in these 19 years of my religious life. Yes, what made me enter the convent? It certainly was not my plan nor ever my intention in the beginning... but when the Lord calls, who can resist Him? Like the *Hound of Heaven* He pursues and when one's heart is touched, one feels drawn to Him like steel to a magnet.

I remember how in my high school days, I was questioning the meaning of my life... why am I here?... what purpose do I have in life other than to study hard so as to prepare for a good job opportunity in the future? “*What is life all about, Alfie?*”... and what is death like?

After college graduation and a few months of work experience, my search led me to Los Angeles. I was even more miserable for not only did I not find any answer, but I was homesick, missing my parents and friends. But I enjoyed the independence of having my own apartment and was determined to stick it out there. I gave up searching and decided to stop asking myself disturbing questions, accepting that life is meant to have no answers. I spent more time going out, dating and having fun. At

the same time, I could not deny the feeling of “emptiness”.

Then, 3 years later, I happened to have the bright idea of visiting with the MIC Sisters in San Francisco during the Christmas holidays. When I entered into that old, creaking mission house in Chinatown, I just felt a sense of coming home.

I joined the Sisters in their communal prayer and saw how God was so much a part of their everyday life that they talked about Him so easily. It struck me how God had never been very real to me. He was a doctrine I memorized from the catechism classes; He was someone I prayed to during exam time or in times of need; He was someone I said “good morning” and “good night” to very automatically in my prayers.

I started asking the Sisters many, many questions about God and I bought a Bible for myself. When I returned to Los Angeles, I started to go to Mass before work every morning so as not to lose that “good feeling” I had acquired. I read the New Testament stories with interest to discover who Jesus really was... I wanted to know more about Him.

It was some time later that I felt the Lord inviting me to be fully His... to be an MIC Sister. *"What nun-sense!",* I thought. My intention was to get married as other girls do and, besides, *"I know nothing about being a nun, and I am not the holy, praying type as some of my classmates are. They would make better nuns, Lord... call them",* and I started to give Him some names and recommendations.

I struggled intensely for a time, but the feeling became stronger. The Lord was leading me towards the meaning of my life for which I had been searching for many years. I had to dare to trust and leap into the unknown or else, just let the years slip by, always wishing that I had done something worthwhile with my life. After much praying and bargaining with the Lord, I finally had the courage to say **Yes** to Him and, then, I found peace — a peace the world cannot give, as Jesus said.

It's been 19 years now since I first joined the M.I.C.s. What has it been like, you probably wonder? Well, I feel more deeply my littleness and I trust in God's love for me and for my loved ones. What have I found as the meaning and purpose of my life? It is to love as God loves me. In loving, I live the fullness of who I am. I ask Him to enlighten my way and be my strength.

There's a line from a song which speaks to me of what I believe in and feel called to live. It says: "At the sunset of our lives, it is not how much we have accomplished or accumulated that will really matter, but the way we have loved one another."

I believe this is basically each one's call, the meaning and purpose of our existence, and in it we truly find ourselves. *

Nancy Vy-So, M.I.C.

Sr. Nancy and friends at a mission exhibit held at the Holy Rosary Church, Taipei.



An Orphanage Without Orphans!



Mrs. Cui and her 'sons' welcome Colette Soucy to their SOS Village home in Tianjin.

An SOS Village, what is this all about? A Chinese Government policy authorizing only one child per couple provokes some tragic situations. What is to be done with the second or third child? Inspectors visit the homes and non-complying parents are punished severely, resulting in children being abandoned. However, some of them survive and are brought together in orphanages called SOS Villages, subsidized through international aid. Colette Soucy, a professor of French in Beijing, with a group of her students, takes us inside an SOS village.

The SOS Village of Tianjin

This village covers a surface of 2.66 hectares and is composed of about 20 small two-storey houses painted red and white. The site resembles a youth vacation camp. In reality, it is an orphanage, but not the usual kind. It is more a family project than a

large institution for orphans and abandoned children.

The Village opened its doors in November, 1986. It shelters more than 100 orphans, the eldest being 14 years of age and the youngest less than 2 years. The children are grouped into 18

families and 'mothers' are responsible for them. The 'mothers' are in no way related to the children. These women take on renewable working contracts of 5 years. In general, they have no intention of marrying and wish to dedicate themselves entirely to the care of the orphans.

A Motherly Heart

In the structure of the SOS Village family, the role played by the mother is of utmost importance. She is the pillar and soul of the home. To be accepted, one needs to pass a psychological test and prove herself qualified to face the challenge of such a delicate mission. When a candidate is judged to be fit by the selection committee, she is placed on probation for 2 years and if this doesn't work, her service is terminated.

Doctor Sui, one of the University trainees, asked Mrs. Cui, the mother who greeted us so warmly, why she chose such a life. Mrs. Cui, who is less than 30-years of age, responded as follows: "In China, because of the one-child policy, women can have only one child. In my case, I can love 100 or even 1,000 children!" She is often seen hugging one or the other of the children under her care. Haven't these kids, who now go by her name, become her own children? They are her unique family!

All Her Children

Mrs Cui introduced to us each of her 6 children, 4 of whom are boys. All go to school except for

the two youngest ones. A family spirit prevails in their stylish home in Tianjin. The house is well kept and the atmosphere, pleasant. There are many family pictures. The walls are covered with children's drawings and the small rooms are well decorated.

Proud of the success of her family, Mrs Cui admits that she is heartbroken when visitors ask to adopt her children. She feels they haven't understood her role of being a mother. "I'm not playing the role of a mother, she says, I'm really the mother of these children. My life would be empty without them and I don't want my children to be taken away or be distributed here and there!" She is well aware of the situation of so many other Chinese children, victims of bargaining. Often, these children are traded off to the highest bidders.

One element casts a shadow on the SOS Village tableau: it is the absence of a father. We were told that the situation should not be dramatized for it is remedied by the strong influence of male teachers. Moreover, as soon as the boys reach the age of 14, they are sent to a village for young people. These boys leave their home and are regrouped around a 'common' father. It has been said that there are no cases of delinquency... the children grow up in a protected milieu.

A System to Be Encouraged?

After World War II, Austria took the initiative to create this

type of children's village. This is because too many children were lost and without parents. The founder himself, Hermann Gmeiner (1919-1986), was an orphan. No sooner had the idea been launched that it was welcomed. There are now more than five million persons contributing to the maintenance of SOS Villages. For the villages established in underdeveloped countries, funds come from developed countries.

The SOS Villages subsist on international help, but in China, foreigners are not allowed to look after the children directly. This privilege is reserved for people of the country. In these villages, the children are brought up in the Chinese way and are imbued with values compatible with socialistic ideals.

The SOS Village of Tianjin is far from perfect, yet can't we say that it is a step forward to improve the quality of life of children separated from their real parents? Surely it is evident that the boarders of the SOS Village were selected with care. Is this not a sign of progress —

the idea of such an initiative now being accepted in mainland China?

Small children left in hospitals, clinics or simply by the roadside, at a train station or at an intersection are picked up and taken to these orphanages. Obviously, they are unwanted and doomed to be sold or given away. Such is the tragic fate of hundreds and thousands of young victims. These children are abandoned because the parents do not wish to be reprimanded by the authorities and obliged to pay the fines demanded. They do not have the means!

Surely, international adoption is a solution, but it would be equally right that family units be created locally to care for these children. One can thus say that the SOS Village formula is a good beginning. Let us hope that the original version of the SOS Village "in a Chinese way" might be improved to include a father! Then it would be exact to say that in mainland China, one can find orphanages — yes, but orphans, — no! *

Colette Soucy

Missionary Intentions 1994

May

That popular piety nourished in pilgrims at Marian shrines inspire fervent zeal for the mission.

June

That the witness and intercession of Blessed Josephine Bakhita foster respect and dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Sudan and elsewhere.



First Prize



H. Turcotte, M.I.C.

Marco Grégoire receiving his prize from
Sr. Micheline Marcoux, M.I.C.

WINNERS of the Raffle organized by the MIC MISSIONARY PRESS

- 1st Prize: Mr. Marco Grégoire — Trip to Cuba
Courtesy of the Tourism Office of Cuba
2nd Prize: Mrs. Marcelle Déry
3rd Prize: Mrs. Sylvie Hubert
4th Prize: Mr. Pierre Armstrong
5th Prize: Mrs. Monique Gougeon

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and finds a home among those she serves.**

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