

MIC MISSION NEWS

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1995

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DIGNITY

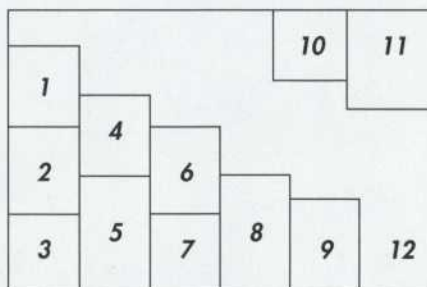
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FRONT COVER :

Start of the Women's March against Poverty, last May, in Montreal

Photo: M. Marcoux, M.I.C.

SPACE!...

Photo: T. Lortie, M.I.C.



Early one fine morning in a large city of South America we went to the public market: hundreds of people crowded around stands that were overloaded with goods; there was a lot of hollering and jostling in a flurry of colours... and all this in a very limited space. Everyone inched his way through, bumping into everyone else. Being new to this environment, I watched the scene and marveled, in spite of all, at everything I saw! The place was full of life!

At one point, a woman in elegant dress came accompanied by her servant; she made her way pushing and shoving through the crowd. So far, so good. An Indian dressed like the humble peasants of the Andes, also tried to make his way. His back was bent under the weight of a large and heavy burden which he was carrying. The two met: the woman and the Indian - "Indio!" - She pushed him aside with contempt and he disappeared, his back bent even lower and his eyes full of sadness... I was shocked: my sense of wonder vanished... I was upset and angry. I was ashamed! Lord, have mercy.

I have never forgotten this encounter. It dwells in me as a cry from all those people who struggle for space: space to work, space to learn, space to play. Space to live, to survive and to die! Our beautiful planet is torn by wars and struggles; the furrows of injustice often seem deeper than the furrows of hope. We divide up and we cramp space!

Yet didn't God create men and women in His own image and likeness? Didn't He give them the entire universe? Didn't He "put His own light in their hearts to show them the magnificence of His works"? (Si 17, 8) Didn't God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Creator of men and women of all races, cultures and religions, build into our beings a space for His gratuitous love? If not, where does our thirst for something more come from? What is the origin of our quest for love which knows not the finiteness of our space and time? Our vision of faith projects us into the space in God's heart where there is room for everyone!

By inviting us to "widen the space of our tent" (Is 54, 2), the Christian vocation beckons us toward commitments which are carried out in the spaces of human dignity. Whether it be to claim the rights of the most destitute, to support the searching of young people, to share the Good News of the Risen One, or to love and forgive day in and day out, love remains the true dynamic force of our spaces. It is the mission of Jesus today, our mission.

Thank you for allowing us to share "the missionary spaces" with you. On behalf of all my companions throughout the world, of our associates and of the lay missionaries who work with us, our best wishes of health, peace and happy spaces for 1996.

In His Joy,

Évangéline Plamondon

Évangéline Plamondon, M.I.C.

Superior General



Photo: H. Turcotte, M.I.C.

THE OTHER HALF OF THE WORLD

In collaboration

Who hasn't heard of the Conference on Women in China? Peking, the capital city, called Beijing in Chinese, hosted thousands of women from the four corners of the earth. They sounded for all to hear the cries of suffering and the cries of hope of all their sisters of the South and of the North. How can anyone not feel concerned by the situation of these women claiming the right to dignity? One little step, one at a time... not **for** but **with the other half of the world**.

In recent years, the media have been presenting various aspects of reality concerning the condition of women, both the women of this country and those abroad. It is like a many-faceted crystal showing the faces of those millions of women all similar, and yet all different.

cast live situations which are unacceptable and must be denounced.

In Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia and other warring countries, rape has become a weapon used to overcome the enemy. To feed the industry of sexual tourism in Thailand, Nepal and elsewhere, very young children are sold and young mountain girls are lured to the city under the guise of a job. In many countries, excision is still practiced on little girls for cultural or religious reasons. In India and China, for cultural or political reasons, girls are not desired and a great number of them are eliminated through abortion or infanticide, or abandoned in orphanages. What can we say of the most elementary living conditions of certain countries where poverty generates other evils? Can we remain unmoved when so many human rights are flouted?

How can these situations affect us? What can we do? Are they any concern of ours? How can we as Christians get involved in terms of our faith? It is very difficult for one person alone to make a difference. A group can look at its environment, discover problem situations, discuss them, find creative solutions to improve the situation. We must believe in the politics of humble means and little steps and not expect everything of governments.

It is not enough to be against abortion. How can we support this high school student who is pregnant and would like to go on with her studies? Or this desperate

Illustration: J. Dalpé, S.S.A.
Photo: M. Marcoux, M.I.C.



In Quebec, Women's March against poverty under the theme: Bread and Roses!

The great gathering of Beijing concerns and challenges us in our various environments. Is there anything that can be done to improve the fate of one woman or of a category of women, to call into question structures or ways of doing which are contrary to the recognition of women's dignity?

FACING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

In the age of Internet, communication is so rapid that the voice of women in Africa, India or China can join that of women in America or Europe and we can see broad-

mother faced with a new pregnancy? What are the welcoming and support facilities in our area to help refugee women to integrate in this country? How can we be present to this couple in the next apartment who have a problem of conjugal violence and prevent tragedy? Like Mother Teresa, we must begin with one person, the one who is right here. Yes, little steps, one at a time...

TAKING ACTION

Last May in Quebec, women took action to denounce poverty. The instigator of the March of Women against Poverty, Françoise David, was inspired by an event which took place in the U.S.A. in 1912 when striking textile workers chose the slogan *We need bread and roses too* to illustrate their claims. At that time they were demanding less working hours, higher salaries and the abolishment of child labour. In 1995, the theme *Bread and Roses* is still relevant: *Bread* for better economic conditions and *Roses* for quality of life. More than 800 women marched for ten days to take their demands to the Government of Quebec and, by the same token, sensitize the entire population. All of society is concerned by the issues raised. The pastoral message of the Bishops of Quebec *Let's Eradicate Women's Poverty* published on the 1st of May is quite indicative of this coming to awareness. Mrs. David pointed out in an interview that even if all the problems had not been solved, the important thing was the step that was taken.

This mobilization of the women of Quebec is in continuity with the long term struggle undertaken by other women in the course of this century. It was not until April 26, 1940 that the Government of Quebec granted women the right to vote, while in Ontario this right had been secured back in 1914! A large number of militants had to struggle in those days to obtain this right, which is essential to liberty and dignity. One must go back in History to shed light on the present and remember key figures such as Thérèse Casgrain, Idola St-Jean, Marie Gérin-Lajoie and (in more recent times)

Jeanne Sauvé, Pauline Vanier and so many others.

In the ecclesial sphere, the place of women in the Church has been at the heart of many debates. A group of women theologians, both lay and religious, working in various universities of Quebec and Ontario, such as Lise Baron, Yvonne Bergeron, Pierrette Daviau and Micheline Laguë, elaborated a vast search and action project among people involved in pastoral work. Their book, *"Voix de femmes, Voies de passage"* (1995) "conveys the questions, aspirations and hopes of the *Réseau Femmes et Ministères* (Network of Women and Ministries) working for the improvement of the status of women in the Church", as stated in the introduction of the book. Another step which will be followed by further developments.



Photo: É. Plamondon, M.I.C.

The Barbie doll: a controversial female stereotype

Walking with women, men show their solidarity!

REDISCOVERING THEIR POTENTIAL

In his letter to women dated June 29, 1995, Pope John Paul II recognizes the harm done to women all along history. He thanks them for their contribution to society and to the Church. *My word of thanks to women thus becomes a heartfelt appeal that everyone, and in a special way states and international in-*

stitutions, should make every effort to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role. Here I cannot fail to express my admiration for those women of good will who have devoted their lives to defending the dignity of womanhood (...) demonstrating courageous initiative at a time when this was considered extremely inappropriate.

Something more than legislation is needed for all women in our world to live in dignity. Men and women together will have to find the solutions in a true partnership and in the respect of differences and complementary traits. Men and women must rediscover each other, in society and in the Church, value each other and learn a new way to live together for a common mission. Is it so unrealistic to believe in God's great plan at the dawn of creation? "God created man in the image of Himself - in the image of God He created him - male and female He created them". (Gn 1, 27). □



Photo: M. Marcoux, M.I.C.



Equality, Development and Peace



Photo: A Forum delegate

Sr. Jacqueline (left) and Canadian delegates

The rights to equality, development and peace are major issues in the struggle to improve the condition of women in the world. These issues were central to the discussions of the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) (August 30-September 8) on women in Huairou, China. So says Sr. Jacqueline Villemure, M.I.C. The holder of a Doctorate in management and an expert in Chinese culture, Sr. Jacqueline works on joint projects in Canada and in China. While taking part in this Forum, she granted us this interview... by FAX! Meanwhile, the UN Conference (September 4-15) was in progress in Beijing. *

Interview by Micheline Marcoux, M.I.C.

Jacqueline, in what capacity are you delegated to the Forum of NGOs?

I went to the Far East in early June at the request of the M.I.C. Province of Taiwan to help with the implementation of their pastoral plan. I then took advantage of Taiwan being so close to China to organize with the National Ministry of Health in China a management training seminar for hospital executives and for those of other public health facilities. It was therefore possible for me to plan on staying somewhat longer in Beijing to attend the Women's Forum, which I proceeded to bring about.

What are the major issues raised at this Forum?

You must have read in the newspapers the main theme of the Forum, which was attended by more than 30,000 women: Equality, Development and Peace - the perspective: Look at the World through Women's Eyes - the vision: To bring together women and men to challenge, create and transform global structures and processes at all levels through the empowerment and celebration of women.

The programme was divided into three major parts: 1. Overview and Analysis of

the Global Forces - Framing the Questions; 2. Strategies and Mechanisms; 3. Commitment to the Future. There was an impressive number of workshops, panels and other activities (5,000 according to some estimates) discussing such themes as: Economy - Governance and Politics - Human/Legal Rights - Peace and Human Security - Education - Health - Environment - Spirituality and Religion - Science and Technology - Media - Arts and Culture - Races and Ethnicity - Youth.

What is the most outstanding result of this Forum?

Without any doubt, women became more conscious of their responsibilities, they put their heads together and realized that it is now time for action. The declarations of principle, the guidelines for action worked out in Nairobi in 1985 as well as the initial awareness raising process are a part of history. Today, women have just passed a major turning point: they are now looking to the future!

What will be the influence of this Forum on the Official Conference of Beijing?

The women are thoroughly familiar with the issues, they are convinced of being the spokespersons of thousands of

women and above all they are aware of the urgency to act. There is a convergence of demands. Women are demanding nothing less than a commitment in effect, i.e. a financial commitment on the part of all levels of government to verifiable projects with a significant impact for women and young girls. The women are very conscious of the obstacles they must overcome, but they are also very determined.

What will be the impact in China? in Canada? on the international level?

For those who attended the Forum, the discussions made it possible for women of all five major areas of the globe (Europe and North America, Asia and Pacific region, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbeans, and Africa) to join together in solidarity and take action. The Forum also awakened them to the necessity of creating international bodies to improve the visibility, credibility and weight of their demands.

In China, both television and the press praised the excellent performance of the country with respect to the rights of Chinese women. Nevertheless, Chinese women know well how long they still have to go and they will continue to strive, to the extent that their system permit, to promote the cause of women.

In Canada, I am not at all aware of how much coverage the Forum was given by the media. Whatever the case may be, I personally hope, as do other members of Canadian and Quebec delegations, to be able to give a report of the fundamental debates which took place at the Forum, to sensitize the social milieu and to help promote throughout the world concern for the condi-



Sr. Jacqueline Villemure at the entrance of the Forum

Photo: J. Chang

tion of women. With regard to the last point, my work in Canada and China will be a powerful tool for me.

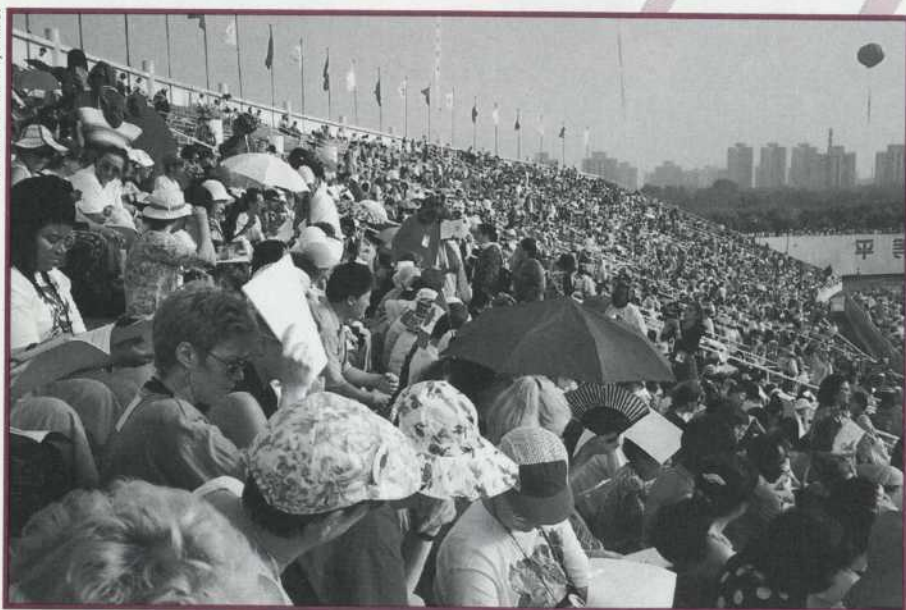
What is your personal vision of women in the context of today's world? What are your impressions concerning this Conference of the UN on women?

I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the issues and by the competence of the women in every area: arts, health, education, sports, as well as business, economy, law, science and technology.

But we have barely started breaking through: I feel like saying that, in actual fact, almost everything remains to be done. There are theoretical commitments, good will in everyone, but even among women many haven't had the opportunity to reflect on the matter; they are too preoccupied with the daily rat race or too isolated to dare think of devoting part of their knowledge, abilities and talents to the promotion of this cause. I am convinced that much of the work is for women to do, but part of it will have to be done in cooperation and partnership with men; otherwise any progress will be short-lived. □

* ED.'s NOTE - As we go to press, the UN Conference in Beijing has just come to an end. Some important steps were taken toward the recognition of the fundamental rights of women and they will be recorded among the human rights. Details of the platform of action will be presented in the media. Undeniably, the condition of women varies widely depending on the social, political and religious conditions in each country and the platform will therefore be implemented in many different ways. It is hoped that concrete action will be taken at all levels of intervention so that our sisters throughout the world may live in dignity and the respect of their rights, whether they live in the North or in the South.

Photo: J. Villemure, M.I.C.



30 000 women participated at the NGO Forum

More than Handicraft Work

Photo: M. Baños, M.I.C.



Sr. Marta, 2nd left, and a group of women of Colón proudly exhibit their work.

by Marta Romero, M.I.C.

Work, however minimal, is a way to express one's ability; it gives people dignity regardless of age. During the time she spent in Canada, Sr. Marta Romero, from Cuba, observed the benefits of keeping the elderly or the sick busy on some kind of handiwork suited to their condition. This gave her the idea of a project to help the women in her environment to regain their sense of pride despite difficult economic conditions.

Three years ago I was in Canada to undergo a delicate surgical operation. I spent my first five months of convalescence at our Infirmary of Pont-Viau, and the last month at our house of Trois-Rivières. I therefore spent this period among elderly or sick Sisters. It was a great and wonderful experience of gratuitousness which made me discover more in depth God's love in each and every event and in the thoughtful gestures of the Sisters and of those working at the Infirmary.

LIFE-GIVING ACTIVITIES

During my stay in Pont-Viau, I was tremendously impressed by the witness of Sr. Jeanne Berger, who is in charge of the handicraft workshop of the Infirmary. In addition to improving the health condition of the Sisters through ergotherapy, Sr. Jeanne had such a way of directing the activities that despite their advanced years, our elderly Sisters felt useful by making various handicraft items. I saw how creative they were in getting some use out of the smallest things. They managed to make them into valuable items. I saw the joy of one sick Sister in being a missionary in her room, the pride of another in seeing the items she had made being put up for sale and the sense of responsibility of a senior

Sister who helped with the display. They were motivated by one purpose: they felt they were contributing to the Mission, for the revenue generated by their work went to help support M.I.C. formation houses for our young Sisters throughout the world.

I lived this experience again at our house of Trois-Rivières. I can't forget what Sr. Mariette Bouillé would say at certain times: "The Sisters are very old. Confined to their rooms, they just wait... I can't let this go on. I give them knitting to do and as

I make the rounds I stop and talk to each of them. They are happy to help our missions by the work of their hands. The sale of the items they make brings financial aid to our various works. This gives joy to our dear senior Sisters..."

Photo: H. Turcotte, M.I.C.



At age 91, Sr. Gertrude Paradis, M.I.C. still makes jolly leprechauns at the Délia Tétreault Pavilion in Pont-Viau.

This was the beginning of a dream for me. There are so many women in Cuba - elderly ones and even young ones - who feel frustrated, useless and exhausted!

A DREAM WHICH CAME ALIVE

When I returned to Cuba, I was assigned to our house of Colón. A few months later, I decided to gather a group of women: widows, divorced and single women. In the first year, we had meetings every two

weeks. Various themes were chosen: psychology, spirituality, promotion of women; but the purpose was always the same: to bring these women to know themselves better, to discover their abilities and resources, to help them experience the gratuitous love of the Father and live in the awareness of their dignity as women.

In a second stage, we began doing handicraft work. Ever since we started, we've been faced with one great difficulty, the lack of materials: fabric, thread, sewing machines, etc. In response to this reality, we lived the miracle of sharing what little we did have, "five loaves and two fishes". Each one brought in her own poverty, and... the results appeared. A modest exhibition of the work done drew in a certain sum which was used to buy new materials. But it was not enough. This is when I presented to the organization Caritas Cuba a small project consisting of a handicraft workshop for the promotion of women. After one year of waiting, our project was approved. Right now there are three small groups which are active; they work with whatever materials each one can bring - which is often very little.



Sr. Jeanne Berger (left) in charge of handicraft at Pont-Viau

Photo: H. Turcotte, M.I.C.

I am very glad to give these women a little of the joy and gratuitousness which I received. My dream becomes a reality to the extent that each one discovers her dignity as a woman, a beloved daughter of God. Then I see Jesus coming to the woman of the Gospel with a bent back, touching her and saying: "Woman, stand up straight again, become aware of your dignity, of your potential and of your freedom!"

WHAT THE WOMEN SAY

"I feel happy. I'm somebody... I know now that I'm worth something because God loves me. I love myself too."

Gladys

"What a wonderful experience! When we share like this in unity and trust, we let out our secrets and problems. We tell it all: our childhood memories, our memories of how we developed."

Elisa Alvarez

"These meetings taught me how I can free myself, defend my dignity as a person and as a woman."

Eneida Noda

"These meetings were most enriching for us, adult women. They helped us psychologically and, at the same time, the work we did made us feel useful."

Nereyda Cabrera ☐

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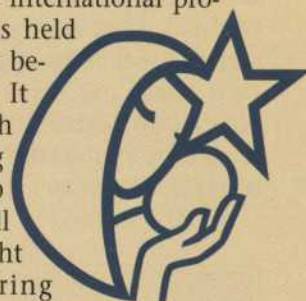
Every Day is Christmas Day

*La Bicoque,
a drop-in
center for
the homeless
friends of
Monica in
Brussels*

Around Christmas time, a special fever of generosity takes hold of every heart. Many organizations solicit donations for the poor of our world that they also may have a share of the joy of the Season. How about having Christmas every day? Hundreds of volunteers commit themselves to the poor, here and abroad, in the hope of making this dream come true. Sr. Huguette Turcotte has met several of them during her various stays in Europe. Thanks to Monica, Marie-Noëlle and others, men, women and children are given back some of their dignity.

MONICA AND "NATIVITAS"

If you are in Brussels at Christmas time, you will see the international procession which is held on the Saturday before Christmas. It is a manifestation of faith and joy around a living Nativity scene, made up mostly of children of all nationalities. This starlight march is prepared during Lent, for it is intended as a gradual ascent stressing the religious meaning of Christmas. The procession begins at a neighbouring church and ends at Brussels' marvelous "Grand-Place" with a children's concert. Since 1974, this annual event has been one of the activities of "Nativitas", an association of friends with a common ideal: to bring back the spirit of Christmas in keeping with the Gospel and continuing it all year long. The members of "Nativitas" help facilitate the liturgy in parishes, deliver meals to shut-ins, support homes for unwed mothers, ex-prisoners, refugees and immigrants and for the homeless and the lonely.



NATIVITAS



*Monica
surrounded by
her protégés.*

Photos: H. Turcotte, M.I.C.

To find out more about this group, I met with Monica, the foundress of "Nativitas". She received me at La Bicoque, a tiny restaurant and the main meeting place in the popular district of Marolles. Cornered near the entrance door was a grand piano! The rest of the space was filled with small tables at which "customers"

were having a meal or a coffee for a minimal price. There were old men with patriarchal beards, jobless men with sad faces, young people struggling with drug problems... La Bicoque is a warm place to be and it provides some important services: clothing, showers, a hairdresser, a telephone, smiles and friendship. Some spend hours there before returning to their unheated rooms or makeshift dwellings. Above all, they find Monica and her team of volunteers who know everyone's first name, everyone's story, everyone's silent woes. Their hospitality is untiring as are their smiles and their comforting words, while they go about serving beverages and sweet rolls. Back in the kitchen, we could hear the clatter of cups and plates being washed...

Who is Monica? I found out that she is a mother, even a grandmother, a musician - the grand piano is used to cheer up her clientele and make them sing - the director of an orchestra, an archaeologist and a historian. She was born in a family of nine and raised by parents who had a deep faith. How did she end up in this bistro among the homeless? Monica chuckled: "I was a mischievous child, she said, but I was forgiven a lot because they said I was kind-hearted. Ever since my childhood years, the two main interests of my life have been the poor and music. I gave some thought to becoming a missionary - I'm still thinking about it - but right now I'm doing missionary work here. My husband has been very understanding; he even does my bookkeeping! I come here every day. My team and I often meet for Gospel sharings in the little chapel at the end of the garden. Our charitable activities are financed for the most part by the engagements of the choir for weddings and funerals. 'Nativitas' is also the Mass of the Flowers in the spring, an homage to nature and to the Creator, music lessons for children... Sometimes we go out as troubadours singing on the village square, or quite simply on picnics. Or in the prisons... where we present a folk programme nightclub style, ending with the Ave Maria. I've seen prisoners weep, especially when we sing a Christmas Mass."

What Monica didn't tell me I found out from other sources. Her family name, which she doesn't disclose at La Bicoque, is of noble Belgian lineage. Her home is a comfortable family house in a wealthy neighbourhood of Brussels. Her past includes an education received in prestigious institutions, travels abroad and the whole range of honours and privileges which are the hallmark

of the well-to-do. My encounter with Monica was a grace for me; a bond of friendship developed spontaneously between us. We recognized each other as missionaries working in different ways. Monica's way, her "Nativitas" movement, aims at "continuing the spirit of Christmas all year long because there is no season for loving". Her secret? She told it quite simply: "I love each and every one as though he were the only person in the world".

I went away from La Bicoque in awe at having discovered lay people so utterly committed to the service of others with love inspired by the Gospel. And I know others like them...

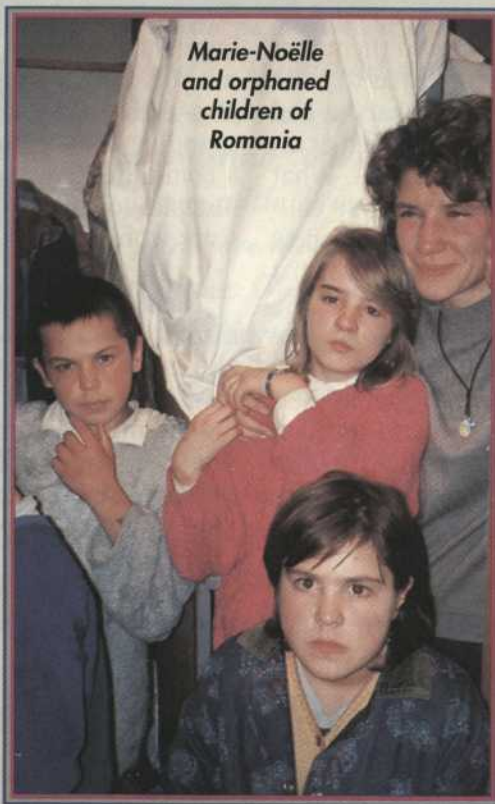
MARIE-NOËLLE IN ROMANIA

"My orphans here are my children! They have no future except the street. I try to give them a little human warmth, a presence that will be a ray of sunshine in their lives." The one saying these words is a young woman of Belgian origin brought up in Switzerland. She began her career as an educator, a religion teacher, a parish facilitator, and then interrupted it to pursue her quest for meaning, which led her to Taizé. Won over by the prayerful atmosphere, the ecumenical fellowship and the simple lifestyle, Marie-Noëlle discovered her rootedness in this place and became a full-time member of the movement.

In 1989, the walls came down in Eastern Europe. A number of young people from those countries came to Taizé and established initial contacts. Marie-Noëlle was sent first to Poland, and then to Prague to prepare young people for their stay at Taizé. Romania opened up next and she went there for two months. But there were Lutheran groups in Scandinavia expressing interest and asking to be sent a few young people. No problem: Taizé is an ecumenical movement. Marie-Noëlle went. Then she accepted to go to Hong Kong to replace a

companion held back in Oslo. There she was, in Asia, part of the Norwegian Lutheran mission, the only Catholic in a group of four. One year in Hong Kong, the Philippines and Malaysia. Was this the end of Marie-Noëlle's experiences?

"No. In Romania I had seen the fate of orphaned children. My heart often went out to them and I went back, sent by a Swiss organization which donated material to improve the living conditions. I was given carte blanche to build, facilitate and set up camps and to bring the children on outings. Next summer, we would like to or-



Marie-Noëlle
and orphaned
children of
Romania



At the summer camp of 1994

ganize a camp, but we would need to buy tents and the budget may all be spent by then. I must often go out to business. When I return, the children don't give one moment's rest to "nostra mama", as they call me. They find all sorts of excuses to catch my attention. The other day, an eight year old boy told me a whole story about a recent visit of his parents; he wanted to write to them that he feels lonely at the orphanage. I was prepared to write the letter when his educator informed me that he had made up the whole thing since he was abandoned as an infant and never had a visit of any of his family... What utter solitude! What sadness on the faces of these children! This is why I love them and I always find new courage to continue giving myself to someone, when I can be of help..."

GABY AND ALFONS, AN INTERNATIONAL FAMILY

The commitment of this Belgian couple began in their work place: a travel agency. A trip to India to broaden their market and encounters with missionaries fired up their interest for foreigners. This was the start of a wonderful adventure which had repercussions in several continents.

Gaby and Alfons have two daughters and two grandchildren. Because of their foreign contacts, they gradually opened their house to students from other countries: from India, Brazil, Spain, Germany, Burundi and even from Tibet. Today, now that these girls are married and have children, they spontaneously call on the "grandparents" in Belgium; the large house in Flemish country continues to be open to the new generation. Without mentioning international visitors, and I have the joy of being one of them.

In their parish, Gaby and Alfons have been "pilot-couple" of the "Equipes Notre-Dame" for thirty years. One chaplain wanted to do something for young people, so they began group meetings. Then the parish became involved in ecumenism. Occasional meetings were held with friends of other churches with sharing, lec-

tures, songs and celebrations revolving around specific themes. Another endeavour which continued to grow. In addition to Christians of Protestant churches, Buddhists, Jews and Orthodox members have joined. A steering committee was formed to work with these different churches in their district. The intercultural and interreligious interests of Gaby and Alfons bring great enrichment to their lives.

Above all, don't ever mention retirement to them! Their presence to young people is permeated with mutual trust and high quality relationships: "We try to maintain a very personal and human contact with them. They can be approached with a lot of love. It

is the basis of any relationship and it can only be inspired by God. One must be open to this love. These young people confide to us things which they wouldn't confide to their parents!" Gaby and Alfons candidly admit being amazed at what is happening to them. It all developed a little at a time, like a snowball. They are ageing gently together, surrounded by the young and the not so young, by people of every nationality and creed, always available, attentive to persons and events, responding in faith to the trials and joys of life. They are a committed lay couple with a considerable number of disciples looking up to them. "They are apostles" said a sister who sees how they live.

There are many witnesses such as those I have just made known to you and they are everywhere. There are also many in our own midst. But they don't make a big fuss. They go about what they are doing without drawing attention to themselves and they are seldom mentioned by the media. It is for us to find them out and to share this good news so that many others may follow after them. Because of these people, "every day is Christmas day"..., Christmas and all the gestures of solidarity, generosity and love it brings to the poor, the voiceless, the lonely and the powerless. □



Gaby and Alfons with Yeshi from Tibet

Mary... Woman of a People



Illustration: La Presse Evangelique, Haiti

Mary, like everyone else you have a history, a past, a present. You were born in a country which also had a history. Your family was no different from any other and you grew up in a small and simple town. Your people experienced periods of crisis, periods of domination. A political and social situation which was not easy to live with. Life in such an environment was a formative experience for you. This is why you would later sing your Magnificat with your people.

Mary, as a young girl, you had plans for your future like every girl in your day. Your desire to carry out your plan gave meaning to your life. You prepared for it and for everything great, noble and worthy that would come with it, including freedom and love. Like everyone else you experienced the feeling of being inwardly torn apart... It was not easy. God's plans are not our plans, His ways are not our ways. Mary, I understand your wondering "why?", your asking "how?". Your love plans with Joseph, your fiancé, were practically ruined. There are moments, events and sorrows in life which one

cannot bear all alone. There are also great joys, so great that our hearts are too small to contain them. We feel the need to share them with someone we trust, able to understand and sympathize.

Mary, woman of a people, after receiving God's message, you set off, regardless of the distance, to see Elizabeth who was pregnant, to share your good news with her, to communicate your joy to her and to help her to experience God's presence too in the present reality of her life. Your cousin in turn helped you to discover God's marvelous deeds in your life. "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb." And lo! Mary, this spontaneous revelation prompted an outburst of your inner jubilation: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit exults in God my Saviour. The Almighty has done great things for me, holy is His name". With your oppressed, downtrodden people you sang a song of hope in the faith that one day, the poor of Yahweh will stand on their own feet, a people set free.

Mary, woman of a people, I see you going to Bethlehem for the great census to perform your citizen's duty with Joseph. In the course of your journey, the day came for you to give birth to your only child in a stable. When you are poor and have no title... there is no room for you in hotels. Such is life. Mary, woman of courage, you could not understand, but you trusted the God of the future. Thanks for this deep joy which you shared with us despite your poverty. Mary, Mother of Life, thanks for the precious gift you have given us: your Son. □

Muriette Hilaire, M.F.C., Haiti



Children at the Ren Ai Kindergarten
in Kuanhsi

A DISTURBING CHRISTMAS

by Françoise Larouche, M.I.C.

How can you help people in a non-Christian country to get the meaning of Christmas and to live it better? The M.I.C.'s of Taiwan asked themselves this question at one of their community meetings. Srs. Eulalia Loreto, Françoise Larouche and Huguette Chapdelaine got together as a team to do something new. Sr. Françoise shares with us last year's experience among the Christians of Kuanhsi: a Christmas such as to open all hearts and challenge all families and friends.

The Spirit was at work! He inspired us with the theme: A DISTURBING CHRISTMAS! We had to provide an activity which would require the cooperation of parishioners during each week of Advent. The process was proposed to and accepted by our community group, our pastor, and despite some reservations, by the Liturgy Committee of our parish of Kuanhsi. On the last Sunday before Advent, every Christian in the parish received a letter at home, proposing the process and inviting each one to take part and to enter seriously into the experience of "A Disturbing Christmas".

PEOPLE WERE MOVED! DISTURBED!

ADVENT was here! There were parishioners standing at the entrance of the church holding the little houses they made. They are invited to write their family names on it as a sign of their belonging to the great family of the children of God. The church becomes full. At the Offertory, the families headed by the pastor lined up in the main aisle with their small houses. Each family came forward and offered a prayer to the Father for its members. We commune with the joys, sufferings and crosses each one carries. A few mothers ended their prayer in muffled sobs. This offertory which lasted more than half an

hour focussed on reality and generated communion and openness to others. Each little house was then placed to form the first part of the decoration of our Christmas Crib. Instead of the village of Bethlehem which is very far from us, the hamlet built that morning by our Christian people made them discover how close God is to their lives.

After the Eucharistic celebration, the facilitator explained the meaning of the second week: gestures which can generate light. On their way out of the church, the participants were given each a thought from Scripture. They eagerly shared this personal message with one another. Some of the Christians were happy to tell us: "This is my son; I invited him to come and share our project." It was an experience of hope and fraternity! *The second Sunday of Advent*, the people found a group of greeters at the entrance of the church holding a variety of candles. We noticed an increase of the attendance. Once again the Offertory was the time chosen to pray and to lay a candle near one's little house, a symbol of all the good deeds done for one's family and neighbours in the course of the week.

Our journey toward Christmas continued. *The third week* the people came in with newspaper clippings on the causes of suffering in the world. We added to the basic decoration a bare tree, a map of the world and a basket. The Offertory prayer was for the whole world and the participants came forward to decorate the Christmas tree with the clippings. A profound and prayerful silence prevailed. Some of the people presented gifts and food for poor families. This was the first time such a thing was done in our area. After the Mass, those willing to volunteer some of their time set out to clean the church. Thirty-five volun-

FIRST WEEK:
TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW
"GOD COMES INTO OUR MIDST
AND BECOMES ONE OF US RIGHT HERE
IN KUANHSI".
EVERY CHRISTIAN FAMILY IS ASKED TO
BUILD A SMALL HOUSE AS A SYMBOL.
AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF MARY
AND JOSEPH, TO SET OUT ON
A JOURNEY.

SECOND WEEK:
"LIGHT UP EVERY HOME".
EACH DAY OF THE WEEK, INVITE
PARISHIONERS TO DO GOOD DEEDS:
INVITE A LOVED ONE TO RETURN TO
THE CHURCH, DO A FAVOUR TO A
NEIGHBOUR, VISIT A NEEDY FAMILY,
ETC. SYMBOL: OFFERING OF A
VIGIL LIGHT.

THIRD WEEK:
OPENING OF THE HEART TO
INCLUDE UNIVERSAL CONCERNS.
THIS WEEK, "LOOK AT THE WORLD".
WATCH TELEVISION AND READ THE
NEWSPAPERS TO "LET THE WORLD ENTER
INTO ONE'S HEART". BRING NEWS-
PAPER CLIPPINGS OF VARIOUS
SITUATIONS OF SUFFERING IN
THE WORLD.

FOURTH WEEK:
THE PREPARATION BECOMES
MORE INTENSE AND MORE
SPIRITUAL AS THE GREAT FEAST
DRAWS NEAR.
A PENITENTIAL CELEBRATION AND A
RECOLLECTION ARE SUGGESTED.
ACTIVITY: CUTTING OUT STARS TO
SYMBOLIZE THAT WE ARE
BEARERS OF LIGHT.

teers accepted to be disturbed on this beautiful sunny Sunday! Motivation makes all the difference. In previous years, the pastor's appeals were heard by only one or two people. A few hours later, everything was "spic and span" and we went home enriched by a new experience of sharing, joy and fraternity.

The fourth Sunday was a time to reflect on the attitude of Mary and Joseph as they waited for the Redeemer, the Emmanuel, "the One who became one of us". It was an especially prayerful occasion. We lived a communal penitential celebration. At the Offertory everyone was invited to place on the fir tree a star of faithfulness. Following the Eucharist, Sr. Eulalia Loreto offered the parishioners who so desired the opportunity to spend some time in prayer and reflection on Mary, with the help of Sr. Martha Lwo for the Hakka language. Ten people or so participated in this with great interest.

A CHRISTMAS SPENT IN JOY, SHARING AND OPENNESS

December 24th was graced with fine weather. People first gathered in the large hall near the church. An atmos-

phere of joy and fellowship reigned in the crowd among which were many non-Christians.

The parents and grandparents of the little ones of our kindergarten played parts in the Nativity play. A young couple and their eight month old son represented the Holy Family. Before everyone marched out to the church, the facilitator explained the experience lived during Advent and the religious significance of Christmas. At the appropriate time,

we distributed lit candles to everyone to symbolize that Jesus came to bring light to all the peoples of the earth and that we too are bearers of light. When we entered the church, the only lights on were those of the little houses surrounding the Crib. There were so many people, several of them had to remain standing. At the Gospel, our young pupils in angel garb sang the Gloria with the crowd. A layman, Mr. Lwo, driver of the kindergarten car and well known to all, delivered the homily. For the non-Christian relatives in attendance, he took this special opportunity to proclaim the Good News to those who do not know it. It was a very appropriate and lively homily, which reached the audience. After Communion, Sr. Eulalia Loreto took up her guitar and our little ones sang a few Christmas hymns in thanksgiving to the Father for giving us His Son Jesus.

The fellowship that developed during Advent continued after the Midnight Mass with a "réveillon" (Christmas night meal). Several mothers of the parish had prepared local hot dishes. This was "A Disturbing Christmas", but also an opportunity to give joy by experiencing fellowship and sharing. It opened our parish of Kuanhsi to universal concerns. □



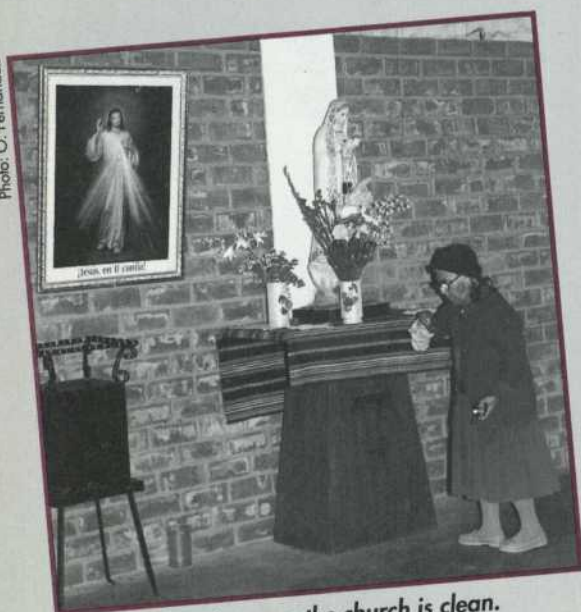


*Half of the World...
is a Woman.*



SAINTS IN WEEKDAY CLOTHES

Photo: O. Fernandez



Doña Jesus makes sure the church is clean.

by Véronique Bernatchez, M.I.C.

These are not the great saints you have heard about: Saint Martin of Porres or Saint Rose of Lima. No! Sr. Véronique Bernatchez introduces us with humour and admiration to saintly men and women in weekday clothes... Simple people she knew while she was in Peru.

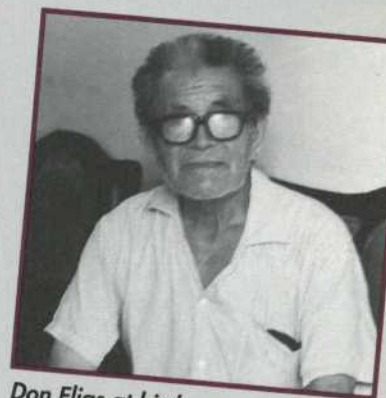


Photo: J. Boily, M.I.C.

Don Elias at his home

These are every day saints like those you know and of whom you could make a marvelous collection. Why not? It gives you a good feeling to discover such people, to identify them, to look at how they live and to be inspired by them.

Let me first introduce to you **Doña Jesus**. She is very small, very petite and close to eighty years old. She lives almost one kilometer from the parish, but attends all its functions. She trots along from one place to another, ready for every chore: washing and ironing altar linens, changing the water in the flower pots, taking the collection baskets up to the floor where the pastor lives, preparing the altar for the Mass, and what else? At every Eucharistic celebration, when the faithful exchange the kiss of peace, Doña Jesus affectionately embraces her neighbours and turns her beautiful wrinkled, but smiling face toward many of those around her, never forgetting the Madrecitas! On party nights, come dancing time, she needs no coaxing to swing her discoloured, but always clean skirts about with grace. Here as everywhere else, she is the tireless one!

The second one is named **Elias**. He owns a shoe shop three minutes away from our house. I bring him my shoes for repair: worn out soles, heels that need to be changed, colour to be touched up. It'll all be ready on time. "How much is it, Don Elias?" - "Three soles." - "Three soles?" - "Madrecita, if you find it too dear, it can be two soles or... one fifty." - "Well no, Don Elias, it's not too dear, it's not dear enough!" In addition to repairing shoes in his dark and crowded shop, Don Elias also does... dentistry! Yes, indeed! in his home which is as bright and orderly as his shop is not, there are... dentures being made!

One day, after knowing him for years, I ventured to say to him: - "Don Elias, you're an extraordinary man, remarkably industrious and honest. Yet one thing amazes me: I often see your wife in church, but I never see you." Amid his leather cuttings, Elias stopped pedalling on his old sewing machine and answered: "You see, Madrecita, on Friday after school, the children bring me their shoes. Each of them only has one pair and it is often in very bad shape. I spend all my weekends repairing them so they can go back to school on Monday morning." - "Yes I understand, Don Elias, and God

too surely understands." I went out somewhat embarrassed that I had more than one pair of shoes to wear... and more so that I had made a rash judgment.

Now let's knock at the door of **Julian and Consuelo**. This is an extremely poor, but very clean house. Julian is at work or looking for work, for these last few years there are not many stable jobs. They have five sons; three of them are in school, studying hard; the two youngest, three and five, play in the small yard or follow their mother. In addition to her housekeeping, Consuelo is involved in the Collective Kitchen group. She and her fellow-members take turns shopping for the fifteen to twenty families who will come for dinner the next day at eleven. There are normally one hundred to one hundred and fifty portions to prepare. Imagine what this means in terms of vegetables to peel, rice to wash and pots to keep an eye on! Yet Consuelo does this community work, added to her own daily chores, always with a kind and welcoming smile, to the delight of all her guests.

Consuelo and Julian have been sponsoring the family catechetical programme, which is a commitment of two evenings a week. If you meet the five boys of the family, you will know



Elena and one of her children

them by the impeccable cleanliness of their clothing. Dad and Mom sing in the choir at the Saturday evening Mass, and on feast days the oldest boy brings his flute. It is my guess that the Lord smiles every time they walk into His house together.

Another saint who is quite unaware of it is **Elena**, David's wife. This couple is also involved in family catechesis. They moved to Lima from the jungle to try for a better life. But it is not easy to settle in a capital city! Like many others, they had to resign themselves, along with a group of other immigrants looking for a place to live, to invading one of the many sandy tracks of land which eventually become the city's slum areas. But they had a lot of heart and a strong will! Little by little, the walls and roof they had built with straw came down to be replaced by *adobes*, earthen bricks. There was no water in the house; only public fountains supplying the whole district. The neighbours got together, followed procedures and insisted. One day, electricity was brought in.

In the summertime David sells ice cream through the streets of Comas, a densely populated area of Lima. Elena worked with the *Collective Kitchen*, but she soon had to give it up as well as the catechetical programme for she recently found out she had cancer. Thanks to an early treatment, however, the cancer was overcome. One day, while she was still very sick, I found her sitting on a low stool doing the family's laundry. She greeted me with the most beautiful smile: "Good morning, Madre! It's so good to see you in our home! I'm not doing too badly. David helps me a lot. Before leaving for work this morning he brought in the water we need for the day. The three children give me a hand too. My father

will come soon. Since my mother died, he doesn't want to live in the jungle any more. David agrees that there be six of us here with him."

Finally, here's **Lucho**. He is married to Betty; they and their three children



Lucho, (2nd left) and Sr. Véronique at the organ

huddle together in the very small place which is their home. Lucho works in an office supply factory. At one point there was a strike; the demands were fair at the outset, but in time they became more and more arbitrary and, finally, unacceptable. Lucho, who on occasions gave an opinion opposed to that of the strike leaders, made a number of enemies among them. One afternoon, when the time came to go home, orders were given that no one was to leave the plant: the workers were going to stage a sit-in. After 48 hours, Betty went to the factory and got to talk to her husband for a few moments. Lucho told her what was happening and that the bosses would probably call in the police and there would be a violent confrontation. Betty went away in tears. This is when Lucho thought a way out... He came home, but came to see me at once. "Madre! he said, I lied. Is it a sin?" I thought about it for a while. The strike is unjust. Between two evils... If I were God... I reassured Lucho and he went away at peace.

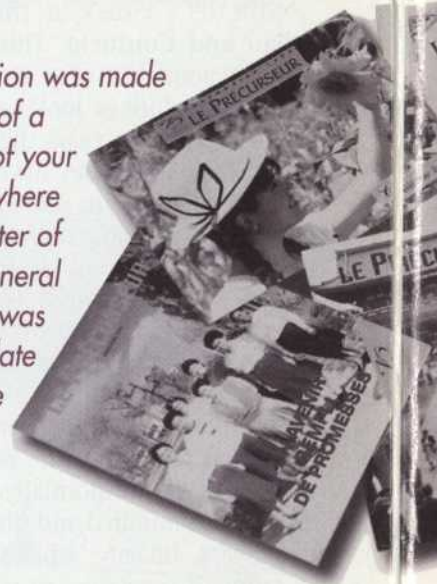
Isn't it an extraordinary grace of the Lord to have rubbed shoulders for ten years with people of such transparency, simplicity and richness of heart? Even without being God, one eventually comes to adopt His criteria and His preferences and to praise Him for revealing Himself as He does to the little ones of the earth... who are indeed saints in weekday clothes. □

Photo: M.I.C., Peru

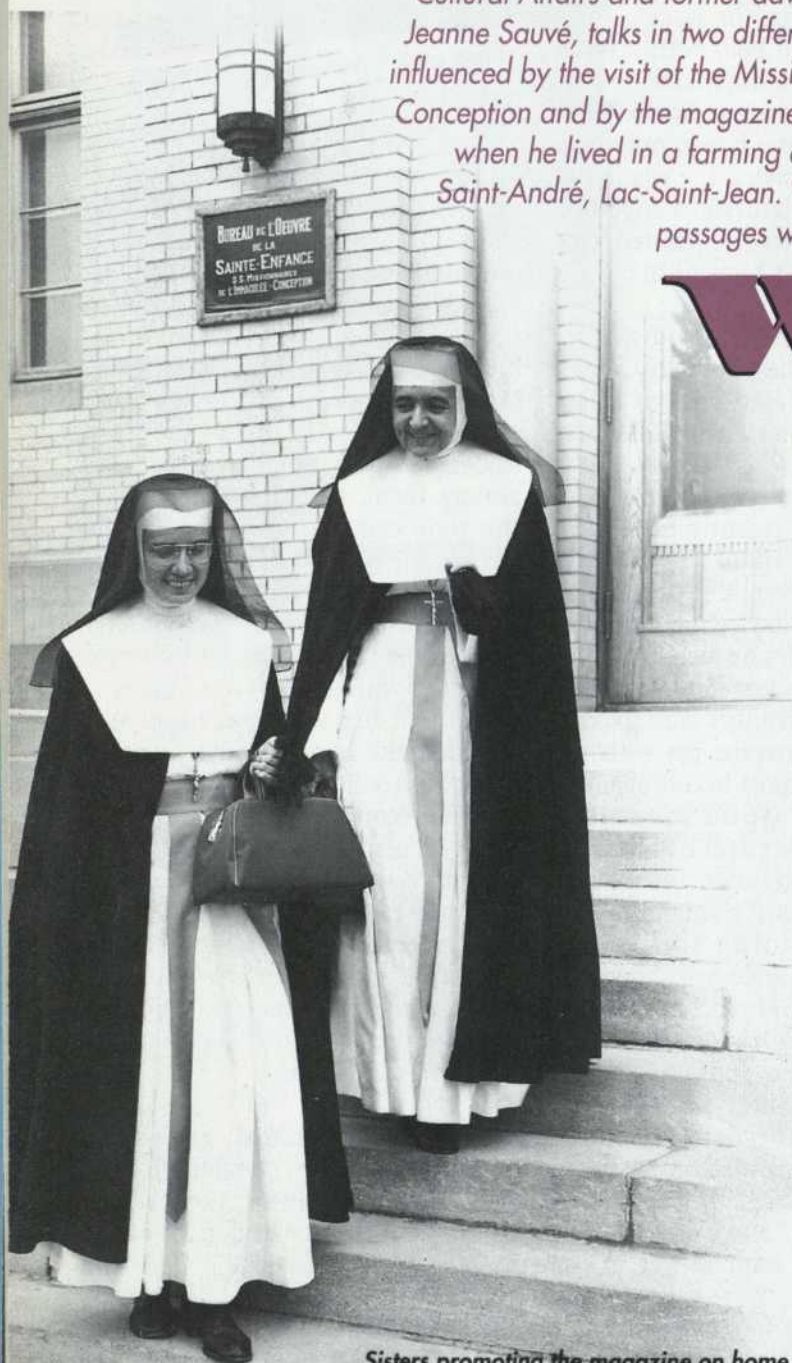


At the End of

In the anniversary issue of May-June 1995, p. 30, a suggestion was made to let us know if the reading of the magazine or the visit of a missionary had a major impact on your life or on the choice of your vocation. In his book *Le lieu de mon espérance* (The Place where my Hope Lies), Jean-Noël Tremblay, former Quebec Minister of Cultural Affairs and former adviser of the late Governor General Jeanne Sauvé, talks in two different passages about how he was influenced by the visit of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and by the magazine *LE PRÉCURSEUR* at the time when he lived in a farming area near the village of Saint-André, Lac-Saint-Jean. We reproduce these short passages with permission:



When I made my "solemn communion", my profession of faith as they call it today, I felt no such thing. This phase of religious education was accompanied by a rigorous preparation: we had to "march to catechism". (...) I deplore the fact that I wasn't to understand the meaning of this profession of faith. I was taking on in my own name, commitments which others had made in my place when I was baptized. I was officially joining the Church. My Church in those days was a very restricted group: my family, the people of my town and of the next one where we went on business, relatives living far away, friends, people we knew, the faithful we didn't know and over whom the Pope reigned. I heard words like universal, Christian, Catholic. These were vague and abstract concepts. The Church meant the people who went to Mass and made their Easter duties, plus the missionaries who came from time to time. For instance, the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception used to visit us every year, going from door to door. They were dressed in white and wore a blue sash. They solicited donations for the missions of China. We received their magazine, *Le Précurseur*, which I read devoutly. This is how I came to know about Blessed Théophane Vénard, who was martyred in Tonkin; this made me twice as eager to help with the evangelization of non-Christians (pagans, as they were called). The sisters also collected alms for the *Holy Childhood*. We would buy a little Chinese baby for twenty-five cents; these were infants abandoned by their parents and cared for by the sisters. This undertaking has been ridiculed among us, yet today the same would be termed a "humanitarian work". For my part, it had the advantage of awakening my con-



Sisters promoting the magazine on home visits in the '50s- Sr. Yvette Ricard (right) and Sr. Thérèse Bellerose

Photo: M.I.C. Archives

f this Jubilee



cern for others and inspiring me to perform my first acts of sharing. I used to save pennies so that every year I could buy a poor child, who would remain unknown to me, as do all those who benefit from the funds given to Centraide or Oxfam. What this experience did for me was to begin raising my awareness of the misery of others. There was the seed of my sense of universal brotherhood and the beginning, in a different order, of my belief in the communion of saints. I didn't use these words. I called it "charity", which covered all the things we do without in order to give to others. What has become of my little Chinese children? It is enough for me to think that the naive generosity of a child may have helped them in their far-away and fascinating country. With the same naïveté I believe that I shall know them some day.¹

(...) There was no shortage of edifying biographies. I found them in the religious magazines we used to receive: *Le Précurseur* from the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, and *Les Annales de la Bonne Sainte Anne*. I hear some people gibe at this sort of reading. In retrospect, I am not ashamed to say that I delighted in it and that I owe many pious authors the taste I developed for books and the awakening of a mystical fervour which has pervaded my life forever.² □

1. *Le lieu de mon espérance*, Jean-Noël Tremblay, Edition Anne Sigier, 1993, pp. 33-34.
2. *idem.*, p. 152

A message from Mrs. Luce Dion, coordinator of the International Network of Young Journalists in Geneva which is part of the Catholic International Union of the Press (UCIP). Mrs. Dion was at one time a member of the board of directors of the M.I.C. Missionary Press:

Dear Sisters,

Congratulations, all the way from Geneva, to you, busy bees of the team of journalists of LE PRÉCURSEUR and MIC MISSION NEWS, on this 75th anniversary! You have come such a long way! You are so full of élan in singing out your present and your future! In reading your May-June 1995 issue, I discovered once again with joy and happiness the life story of Mother Délia, her faith, her energy and her vision as a communicator.

In the last three years, your magazine has made gigantic progress. The layout, the editorial quality and the marketing techniques have been renewed without any rupture of continuity with the values of the past. I know how ardently and actively you seek to position your magazine effectively in a society and culture based on media exchange. You possess an essential quality: you keep questioning yourselves! You keep your ears open! By so doing, you open wide the windows of LE PRÉCURSEUR and MIC MISSION NEWS to the world that the Spirit may blow in!

Seekers of meaning and of faith rooted in daily life, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, by choosing to get involved in communication and journalism, carry far and wide the words and actions of those working in the field in the name of the Gospel. Surely, it is such an alliance of the heart which gives LE PRÉCURSEUR and MIC MISSION NEWS its radiating power. It is a source of life, a source of dialogue.

I therefore add my voice with great joy to those of your friends, colleagues and collaborators in this anniversary year. To all, especially to you, who are at the helm of this great sailship: bravo and may you enjoy favourable wind!

With all my affection and united with you in action and prayer.

Geneva, June 16, 1995

Luce Dion, Coördinator □

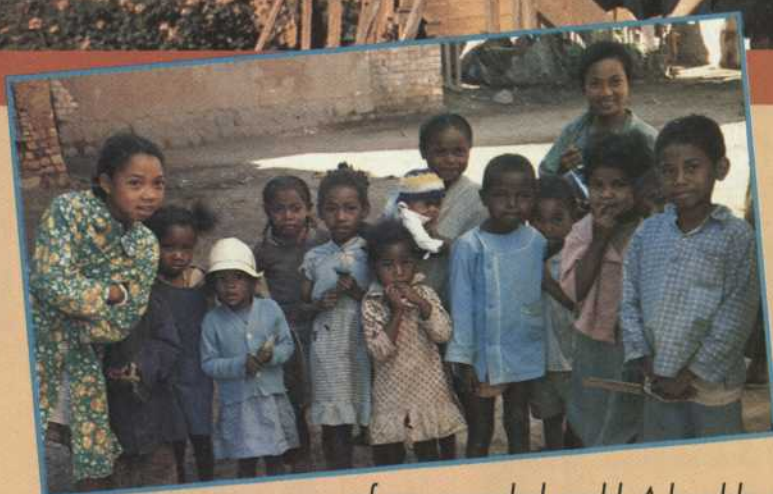
The 75th anniversary of the magazine comes to an end with this issue. We thank each one of you who has marked this jubilee by sending us a word of congratulations and encouragement, by renewing your subscription or finding new subscribers, by sending a donation or supporting us by your prayers that we may continue with our work despite these financially difficult times for most publications. Thank you for being partners with us in our mission to proclaim the Good News through the Catholic press.

*The M.I.C. Missionary Press Team:
LE PRÉCURSEUR and MIC MISSION NEWS □*

MADAGASCAR

A LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

District of Andohatapenaka



Malagasy Children

In Collaboration

The poor were the passion and purpose of his life: they were at the heart of all his activities here in Canada and in Madagascar. Fr. Jacques Couture, S.J., also has crossed over to the other shore... Following the example of the prophets of our day, he had a way of challenging the powerful and giving hope to the lowly of our wounded world. A humble prayer written one weary night reveals the source of his strength as he faced the magnitude of a task that was greater than himself. In your company, we wish to pay homage to him.

"A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." In 15, 13. This Gospel text, which was read last August 12th at the funeral of Fr. Jacques Couture in St-Jérôme, adequately reflects the life of the servant grafted on that of His Master. A text which he wrote on the day of his ordination in June 1964 outlines the orientation and vocation of his whole life as a priest: to be a servant of the lowliest among his brothers.

ADVOCATE OF THE POOR

Fr. Jean Bouchard, S.J., Superior at St-Jérôme, aptly summarized his social commitments in the homily he gave at the funeral: "You were present to all of humanity, the rich and the powerful, and especially the poor, who were your favourites. You took on their cause for greater equity and justice: in St-Henri as a worker and community organizer; in politics as a candidate for Mayor of Montreal in '74, and Repre-

sentative in Quebec in '76; then as Minister of Labour and Immigration. As minister you opened your mind and heart to the expatriates and personally adopted two Cambodian sons. Then as a missionary in Madagascar from '81 to '95, you stretched yourself to the limit in the service of the poor."

Mrs. Louise Gagné, a close collaborator of his for 30 years, added: "Jacques was a happy man, a man who chose his life... Thousands of people found the will to live again because of him. He organized family vacations... When taking stock of his life, he used to smile at the thought of the thousands of immigrants who now have a country."

A DIVERSITY OF COMMITMENTS

Some of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception have shared common concerns with Fr. Couture, either here in Quebec welcoming refugees, or in Mada-



In Andohatapenaka in 1987, Jacques Couture, S.J., welcomes Mrs. Jeannine Guindon, Sr. Marie-Marcelle Desmarais, C.N.D., of Montreal's "Institut de Formation Humaine et Intégrale", and Sr. Suzette Jean, M.I.C., of Tsaramasay.

gasgar living among the poor. A few incidents were told which exemplify the concrete commitments of his life.

"Around 1980-82, as part of the sponsorship programmes of the parishes of the Diocese of Montreal, I went several times to the Immigration offices of Quebec as the 'boat people' came in great numbers from Southeast Asia. When I went with a family that had just arrived, I was well received and the government officials paid careful attention to the needs of the people: registration for family allowance, recognition of foreign diplomas, resolving problems of delays in bureaucracy, in short, any step involved in the welcoming of refugees. This attitude of service and respect of persons was truly remarkable. A French sister who worked in the refugee camps of Hong Kong wrote: 'It is said here that the reception is best of all in the Province of Quebec'. This was at the time when Jacques Couture was Minister of Immigration. He once wrote these encouraging words to us: 'The interest shown by our missionaries for the refugees is very consistent with their traditional dedication to the peoples of the Far East.'" *Huguette Turcotte, M.I.C.*

"In Madagascar, Fr. Couture contacted us shortly after his arrival in Antananarivo. In 1982, hurricane

"Dany" devastated everything and we sheltered many refugees in the school hall in Tsaramasay. Fr. Couture lived a short distance from this place in another district of the capital, i.e. Andohatapenaka. He was overwhelmed with requests for help in his poor neighbourhood which had been severely affected, and he wanted some assistance with bookkeeping, for he was not yet too familiar with the language. He insisted so much that I finally agreed to help him with this work." *Doris Trottier, M.I.C.*

"Known as a brother of the poor, Fr. Couture was often invited as guest speaker to meetings of religious superiors in Antananarivo. How ardently he shared his sense of justice for all, his spirit of solidarity with the marginalized of society, his ingenuity in finding with us means of development for the less fortunate! His lively faith assured us that the Lord is behind us with His strength in any response He calls us to give to the cries of the sisters and brothers of our society." *Denise Bourgeois, M.I.C.*

"There was a vacant lot behind our secondary school in Tsaramasay, an abandoned lot that had become a sort of garbage dump. We made plans to buy it and to set it up as a playground for the students and the parish. But it had to be filled, sanitized and drained, and the cost of

this was considerable. We prepared a project and Fr. Couture came to see the lot in March 1995 as chargé d'affaires for the Canadian Embassy in Madagascar. Everything was settled very quickly for I went to his house on April 7th to pick up the cheque. He had never mentioned his illness. He went to the Reunion Island in the hope of getting better, but

they brought him to Montreal from there in May. When I returned to Canada, I brought pictures of the finished playground to show them to him in St-Jérôme, but he died before I had a chance to visit him." *Thérèse Leblanc, M.I.C.*

A FLAME TO BE CARRIED

"Unless the grain of wheat dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest." *Jn 12, 24.* To give one's life, to lose one's life... The life of Jacques Couture was not that of a hero, but of a prophet. He was a Christian who took the Gospel seriously, who heard the call of Jesus Christ to follow Him on the roads leading to the poor. Speaking at his funeral service, Mr. Franklin Midy, representing the Haitian community of Quebec, said: "He was a remarkable figure in terms of openness to others, openness to the peoples of the Third World. He was able to recognize the dignity of human beings. What can we say of the way he welcomed people! It is now our turn to take up the flame from the hand of Jacques Couture..."

Let us listen discreetly and in silence as he prays to His Lord and Master on one especially weary night. An outpouring of the heart, a sincere, realistic, unassuming prayer, that of a weak man and of a disciple of Jesus in the service of the poorest of the poor.

PRAYER OF A TIRED MISSIONNARY

*Lord, I want to talk a little...
Evening has descended upon my neighbourhood,
A wonderful silence enfolds us on all sides.
The lights are going out one by one in the houses.
It is barely eight o'clock.*

*As I sit alone in this little nook of a house, You are here,
The silent Companion who welcomes me every night
And receives my weariness and my human misery,
As well as that of all the people I met today.
This day was not much different from all the other days:
Sufferings and joys..., discouragement and hope.
Yet how powerless I feel...
You opened up a void of poverty within me;
In the words of the Psalmist,
It was Your design that I should be stripped bare.
Yet can one really want to follow You
Without sharing some of the life You chose for Yourself
In solidarity with all those who struggle and suffer.
Everything in and around me seems frail.*

*Nothing, nothing is sure, tomorrow is unknown, tomorrow is another mystery.
Everything is so much beyond our strength.*

*You saw this family coming to my door in a dreadful condition:
The children full of sores everywhere,
With rings under their big eyes, crying with hunger,
A mother completely exhausted feeding a baby already suffering from rickets.
And the others, and the others...
Lord, why are we so inadequate for the task?
You did say: Unless the grain of wheat dies...
What a mystery Redemption is!
And yet the feeling is very strong that there lies the truth of liberation:
To lose one's life for others,
To merge into the caravan of the poorest of this world,
Struggling with all one's might for more justice, more dignity, more freedom,
Moved onward by Your mysterious and disconcerting divine plan,
A plan which more often than not is incomprehensible,
In stark faith, holding tightly on to Your hand.*

*Thank You, Lord, for being here with me.
Thank You for this Peace which suddenly floods my house.
I know that Your Resurrection is at work each day.
Lord, may I tell you tonight, honestly,
That I love You and want to serve You. □*

Jacques Couture, S.J.



Photo: M.I.C., Madagascar

To decorate your classroom,
the Christmas crib... or to play
a game at a party...

MERRY CHRISTMAS can be
translated in many languages.
Find which language
corresponds to each of
the following phrases:



1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Answers on page 31

CONTEST

FIND THE INTRUDER

You will need your Bible and maybe your
dictionary.

Some characters have slipped
inadvertently into the story of
the events surrounding the birth
of Jesus, creating an anachronism. Which of
the following words is not found in the text? Read
again Luke 2, 1-21:

census taken by Ceasar Augustus - Quirinius, governor of Syria -
shepherds - flock - angels - Joseph - manger - Apostles - Jesus
- Mary - city of David - Nazareth in Galilee

Send your answer along with your name and
address before December 31, 1995:

ANSWER: _____

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H7N 4Z4



Nativity scene made up with copies of the Living
with Christ in the handicraft shop of Pont-Viau by
Sr. Jeanne Berger, M.I.C.

Photo: M.-P. Sanfeyon, M.I.C.

The draw will take place January 5, 1996

The name of the winners will appear in March-April 1996

PRIZES TO WIN

- Depending on the winner's age, book or comic book
on Délia Tétreault;
- Stationery, bookmarks and cards with quotes
from Délia Tétreault.

GRACIOUSLY OFFERED BY THE OFFICE OF THE CAUSE OF DÉLIA TÉTREULT

INTERACTION CONTEST

Answers of May-June 1995: 1b. Délia Tétreault (1920), 2c. John the Baptist, 3a. Precursor

Winners: Judith Richardson, Pierrefonds, Qc - Elizabeth Thai, Vancouver, B.C.

Answer of July-August 1995: Youth

Winners: Isabelle Baillargeon, Windsor, Ont. - Brittany Hill, Montréal, Qc.

CONGRATULATIONS AND THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!



Madeleine Delorme, M.I.C.
from Woonsocket,
Diocese of Providence, U.S.A.
Left for Malawi
in April 1995.

MISSIONARIES OF THE GOSPEL

Witnesses of the Risen Lord

**"...Go, work
in my field"**

(Mt 20,4; 21,28)



Adelaida Santiago, M.I.C.
from Manila, Philippines,
Diocese of Manila.
Returned to Peru
in May 1995.



Ditma Luz J. Trocio, M.I.C.
from Baroy, Lanao Del Norte,
Philippines,
Diocese of Ozamis.
Returned to Taiwan
in June 1995.



Agathe Durand, M.I.C.
from St-Jean-de Matha,
Diocese of de Joliette.
Left for Zaïre
in July 1995, on a special mission
with refugees of Rwanda.



Jeannine Lavallée, M.I.C.
from Montreal,
Archdiocese of Montreal.
Returned to Madagascar
in June 1995.



Myriam Laroche, lay miss.
from St-Constant,
Diocese of St-Jean-Longueuil.
Left for Taiwan
in June 1995.



Rosalie Raivomanana, M.I.C.
from Ambohimadana,
Madagascar,
Diocese of Antananarivo.
Left for Malawi
in July 1995.



Catarina Hongo, M.I.C.
from Tokyo, Japan,
Diocese of Tokyo.
Returned to Haiti
in July 1995.



Fenecia P. Dapitanon, M.I.C.
from Mati, Philippines,
Diocese of Tagum.
Left for Hong Kong
in August 1995.



Denise Duhamel, M.I.C.
from Granby,
Diocese of St-Hyacinthe.
Returned to Africa (Zambia)
in August 1995.



Noëlla Bernard, M.I.C.
from Ste-Madeleine,
Diocese of St-Hyacinthe.
Returned to Madagascar
in July 1995.



Yolaine Lavoie, M.I.C.
from Ville-de-la-Baie,
Diocese of Chicoutimi.
Returned to Madagascar
in August 1995.



Hélène Gemme, M.I.C.
from l'Ange-Gardien,
Diocese of St-Hyacinthe.
Returned to Africa (Malawi)
in August 1995.



Vilma P. Masinda, M.I.C.
from Nalook, Philippines,
Diocese of Kalibo.
Returned to Zambia
in July 1995.



Lisette Fortin, M.I.C.
from St-Octave-de-Métis,
Diocese of Rimouski.
Returned to Haiti
in August 1995.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR SOLIDARITY

Newsbriefs and excerpts...from letters:

PHILIPPINES

Last April 4, about 200 members of a terrorist group executed a daring attack on the town of Ipil, in the Zamboanga del Sur Province, on the Island of Mindanao. When they left three hours later, taking with them about forty hostages, there were 46 dead and as many wounded, streets of burning buildings and a terrorized population. This act of violence by members of a Muslim extremist group received wide coverage in the international press. It also touched deeply our Sisters in the Philippines as one of them, *Sr Maria-Teresita Rapadas*, was in Ipil visiting her family when this tragic event occurred. She wrote an account of the anguish she lived through during this attack:

It was exactly twelve noon. Six of us had just started enjoying a favourite dish my Mother had made when all of a sudden we heard gunshots. We looked at one another for a moment, and then continued eating. Sounds like these are not unusual in Ipil. After a few seconds came another set of gunshots. We paused again. There was silence for another few seconds, then the firing continued just nearby. This is when my Dad shouted: "Close the doors!" One of my brothers dashed to the right side of the store and the other to the left.

The doors had just been closed when a group of armed men passed by our place. Some of them went straight ahead, others stopped. Peeping through a small hole I saw two of them just in front of us. We thought they were soldiers as they wore camouflage uniforms... Yet they were firing mindlessly, not even targeting anyone. By this time, my youngest brother realized that these men were not our defenders but our attackers. I grew nervous. Dad ordered us to lie flat on the floor and to hide. We waited for them to fire at us as they did at the neighbouring stores. Then, to our horror, we saw smoke coming out of the building across the street. A fireman came to the rescue, but he was shot. We became increasingly scared, nervous and confused...

I found myself praying and invited my mother and the two women who sought refuge with us to pray with me while my Dad and my brothers watched by the closed door. My knees were shaking. Many thoughts came to my mind, but I knew we would not be harmed. I tried to peep through the door. I saw one of the armed men looking at our building and at my Dad's motorcycle parked in front of the store. I waited for his next move... He turned around as if he hadn't seen anything! Dad told us to start packing the medicine and



Sr. M. Teresita Rapadas, M.I.C. (left) and her pupils of the Immaculate Conception Academy in Manila

all the important documents. When we finished packing, we realized that the terrorists had gone away. We opened the door and looked at the stores across the street being consumed helplessly by a raging fire. Suddenly we felt hungry. People started moving, looking for food, looking for their missing ones. I glanced at my watch: it was three o'clock.

With tremendous relief I looked at my parents and my brothers, one by one... We could have lost our property, we could have lost one another... We had the feeling of getting a new lease on life! At 6:30 P.M., supper time, with only three candles lighting up the darkness, we gave thanks to the GOD OF LIFE for this near escape. To this day, knowing that my dear ones are still in danger, for there are threats to burn the rest of the city, I continue to trust God to protect them as they struggle for life, and me as I try to share it." □

NEWS IN BRIEF...

CONCERTS IN PONT-VIAU

Last July, the International Federation of Pueri Cantores held its conference in Quebec City thanks to Msgr. Claude Thompson, President of the National Federation of Pueri Cantores and director of the "Petits Chanteurs de Trois-Rivières" boys' choir. Over the past 50 years this meeting was always held in Europe. 1600 choir boys from 11 countries came together for this prestigious event. The movement was initiated in Paris at the end of the Second World War to promote world peace through the best of sacred music and through the evangelical values which are bound up with it.



Grégory Charles introduces the "Petits chanteurs d'Aix-en-Provence" in Pont-Viau.

In the course of this conference, our house of Pont-Viau hosted the "Petits Chanteurs" of Aix-en-Provence thanks to Gregory Charles, director of the "Petits Chanteurs" of Laval, who particularly loves our chapel because of its acoustic quality. It was a joy for those two choirs to join together for the finale of this excellent concert, which included both secular and sacred songs. A few weeks later, another concert was given in the same chapel by the choir of the Abbey of St-Pierre de Montmartre in Paris. □

75 YEARS IN CANADA

On February 18, 1920, an M.I.C. sister returned from China accompanied by seven young Chinese girls. The youngest, named A Foun, was twelve years old. The purpose of our Foundress in having these young girls come to this country was to form a small association of catechists who could give Christian instructions to Chinese immigrants in their own language. A Foun was baptized and confirmed by Archbishop Paul Bruchési on May 19th, the eve of Pentecost, and given the name

of Marie-Pauline; she received her first Holy Communion the next day.

For more than 60 years, the golden fingers of Marie-Pauline Wong produced magnificent works of embroidery to adorn the liturgical vestments made in those days in the workroom of the Mother House. She also had the privilege of accompanying Mother Délia in many occasions when she went out. These are fond memories of the past which she loves to recall.

Marie-Pauline is now retired in Pont-Viau, and the year 1995 signaled several anniversaries for her: those of her arrival in Canada and of her entrance into the Church. 75 years of joyful service in a religious family which has become her own! The event was marked by an intimate celebration. □

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UN

1995 is the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II and the 50th anniversary of the creation of the United Nations. In Canada, various activities have marked the occasion between October 24, 1994 and December 10, 1995, on the theme: "We, the Peoples of the United Nations... Joining Forces to Build a Better World". Keeping peace in the world is one of the many missions of the UN. Two major international conferences were held in 1995: one in Copenhagen on social development and one in Beijing on women. December will mark the end of the International Year of Tolerance decreed by the UN, and 1996 will be devoted to the eradication of poverty in the world. □



A feast in Pont-Viau marks the 75th year of Marie-Pauline Wong's life in Canada - With the jubilarian are Sr. Madeleine Grenier, M.I.C. (left), Superior of the house, and Sr. Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C., Provincial Superior.

1995 MISSIONARY INTENTIONS

NOVEMBER

God of life, grant that respect for all human life and for its dignity may increase in the world.

DECEMBER

Lord Jesus, may your birth inspire in us a love for all children who are the victims of violence, and the determination to defend them.

Called Home by the Father

Photo: J.-d'A. Turcotte



**SISTER CLARA LEBLANC
(MARIE-FLORIDA)**

Sister Clara Leblanc died at our infirmary of Pont-Viau on April 2nd, 1995, at the age of 81, having lived 59 years in the religious life. Born in Glen

Robertson, Ontario, on March 13th, 1914, she grew up in that area and became fluently bilingual. She was 21 when she decided, following a closed retreat, to become a religious. She entered the novitiate in August 1935. In 1942, she went to our home for the elderly of Oriental origin in Vancouver. There she poured out the treasures of her kindness, cheerfulness and dedication coloured by a very personal brand of humour.

In 1947, when the M.I.C.'s were able to go back to Hong Kong after the war, Sr. Clara was among the first contingent to set out for the Far East. Everything had to be started over from scratch... Along with her companions, she took part in the reopening of Tak Sun School. This signaled the beginning of a career which lasted 34 years as a teacher and school director for the education of Chinese children. During a Requiem Mass celebrated for her in Hong Kong on May 26th, a former pupil of hers recalled her patience, amiability and remarkable devotedness to all her students. Her whole life spoke the Gospel message to the thousands of pupils she encountered, most of whom were non-Christians.

In her contacts with her sisters, Sr. Clara was the same generous woman who responded with love to every need. Always charitable in words, she had a way of spicing up recreations with her gift of humour. When in 1987 she was called back to Pont-Viau, she still managed to make herself useful despite her declining strength, and she remained present to everyone, as evidenced by the letters she wrote to her family, former pupils and work companions. She took advantage of retirement to study the Bible and to pray more, always gentle, patient and grateful despite the difficulties brought on by age and sickness. She was determined to live her M.I.C. vocation to the end: "To be perpetual thanksgiving in the Church in the name of all our brothers and sisters", a text of our Constitutions which she had copied in her notebook. This missionary educator now sings with Mary in eternal thanksgiving the greatness of a life lived in humility and gratuitousness in the service of the Kingdom. □



SISTER LOLITA T. VILLAGRACIA

The life of our Sister Lolita, who died in Manila, Philippines, on April 24, 1995, at the age of 58 after 30 years of religious life, was a life of trials, but also of courage, gentleness and even joy.

Born the eighth of a family of nine, she was very young when she suffered the death of her father and the loss of the family estate in Ronda. This is when the family moved to Davao where her mother hoped to find more easily the necessities of life for her loved ones. Lolita experienced severe deprivation, yet she helped her mother as much as she could. She was spurred on by her love of study and by an intense desire to obtain her college degree. She worked her way through college and managed to fulfill her dream.

Having known the M.I.C.'s in Davao, she responded to the Lord's call by entering our novitiate of Baguio in 1964. Soon after her profession, she devoted herself as an educator to pastoral activities among children and adults. She was quite successful in missionary and vocational promotion, always happy to make known our Foundress, Délia Tétreault, whom she deeply loved.

In 1971, she underwent surgery for cancer, from which she recovered, but the disease continued to develop and in 1985 she was near death. After a long period of convalescence, she resumed to a limited extent her apostolic activities. By 1990, she was well enough to work at the Retreat House of Davao. Here again she displayed all her gifts and wonderful qualities. She instilled into her team a spirit of joyful service and was noted for her simplicity and amiability, her warm approach, her ability to listen and her love of the poor.

After a few years of activity, her health began once more to deteriorate. In March '94, it was believed that the cancer had spread to the bones. She bore her illness with patience and remained joyful, filled with gratitude to Jesus, Mary, Délia Tétreault and all those around her. Her heart was filled with thanksgiving as she prepared to appear before her Lord on April 24, 1995, surrounded by her sisters who joined in her eternal hymn of thanksgiving. □

Georgette Barrette, M.I.C.

We are nearing the end of 1995. Many of you have suffered the loss of loved ones who have been called home by the Father. Our hearts are with you in your sorrow as we assure you of our prayers, especially in the Masses offered every week for your intentions and for your departed ones.

Several comments have been made, expressing your appreciation of this column. Our usual writer, Sr. Cécile Legault, has been unable, for health reasons, to write it in the last few months. The obituaries of SS. Marie-Thérèse Sansfaçon, Berthe Crevier, Émilienne Cantin, Isabelle Michaud, Marie-Paule Laroque, Rhéa Allard, Alice Gagné, Socorro Carjaval, Jacqueline Taillon, Yvonne Jolicoeur, Louise Guimond and Cécile Sansoucy will be published in 1996.

The Editor, October 1995.



Dear Readers:

We've always tried in every possible way to keep the cost of subscriptions down, despite successive increases of the cost of paper and postage. In 1995, the price of paper went up by 80%.

For this reason, **beginning in JANUARY 1996**, we shall be forced to apply a slight increase of the price of the magazine. Thanks for understanding. Together we shall meet the challenge!

If you wish to contact us, here are a few addresses:

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121 Maplewood Avenue
Outremont, Qc Canada
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CENTRE D'ANIMATION MISSIONNAIRE
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OFFICE OF THE CAUSE OF DÉLIA-TÉTREAU
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Pont Viau, Laval, Qc Canada
H7G 1A4 Tel.: (514) 663-6460

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Cuba, 12100

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InterAction: Answers of page 25
Merry Christmas: 1f - 2h - 3b - 4j - 5d - 6e - 7a - 8g - 9c - 10i

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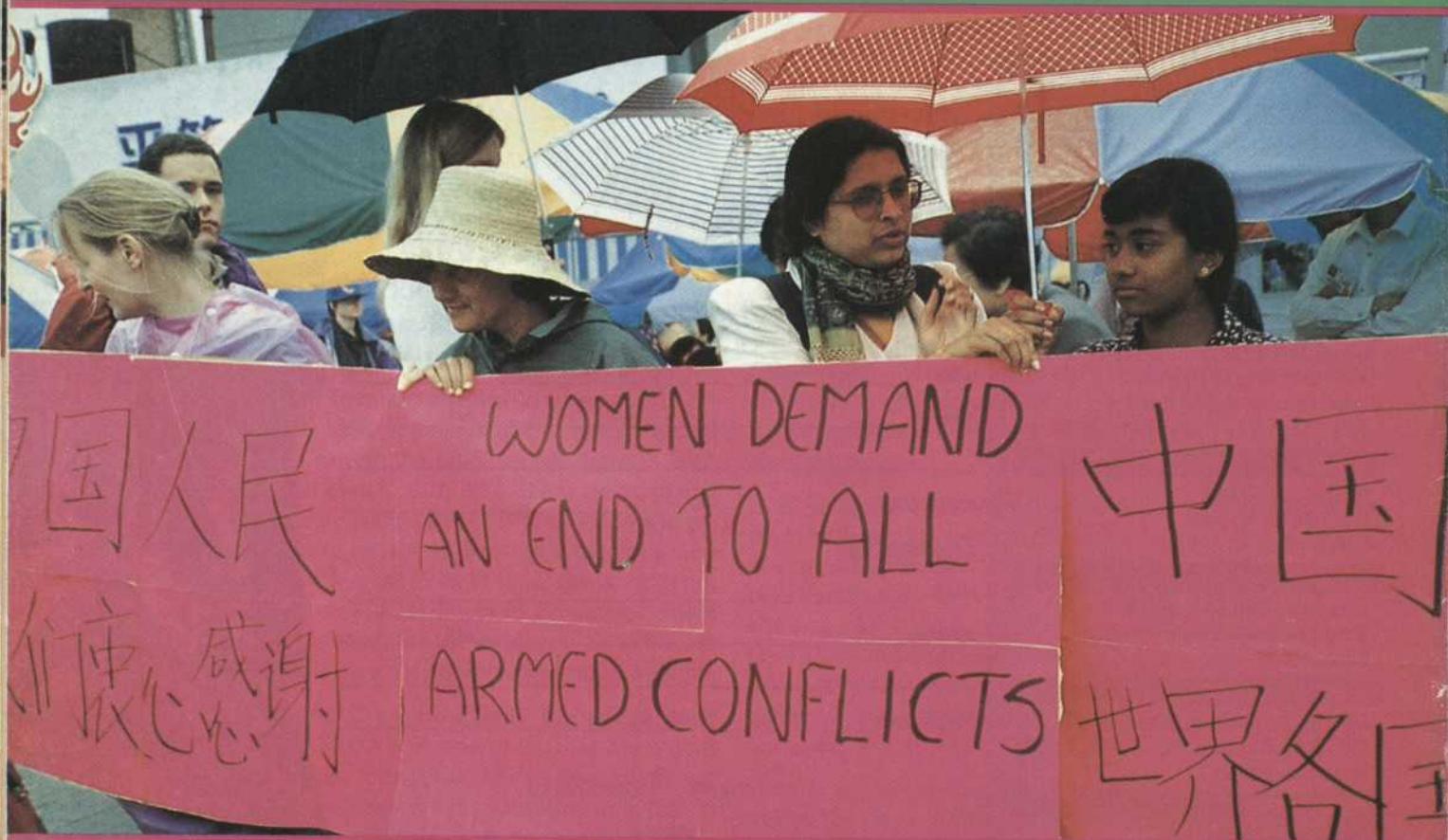
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At the NGO* Forum on Women at Huairou, China, women demand an end to all armed conflicts.

Photo: J. Villemure, M.I.C.

Women: Teachers of Peace

Authentic peace is only possible if the dignity of the human person is promoted at every level of society, and every individual is given the chance to live in accordance with this dignity.

To educate in the ways of peace means to open minds and hearts to embrace the values essential to a peaceful society: truth, justice, love and freedom. I invite women to become teachers of peace with their whole being and in all their actions. May they be witnesses, messengers and teachers of peace in relations between individuals and between generations, in the family, in the cultural, social and political life of nations...

Pope John Paul II, message for the 1995 World Day of Peace

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