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Profiles of Women

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL :
WHEN EYE MEETS EYE 3
ÉVANGÉLINE PLAMONDON, M.I.C.

A LIFE-GIVING PROJECT 4
MURIELLE DUBÉ, M.I.C.

50 YEARS OF M.I.C. PRESENCE IN CUBA 7
BERNARDETA COLLAZO, M.I.C. AND GLORIA PÉREZ, M.I.C.

A JUBILEE THAT ENRICHES OUR HISTORY 10
ÉVANGÉLINE PLAMONDON, M.I.C.

A CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY 11
AGATHE DURAND, M.I.C.

THE COURAGE OF BOLIVIAN WOMEN 12
ANITA PERRON, M.I.C.

DÉLIA TÉTREAU, CHILD 16
COMIC STRIPS

**WORD AND LIFE:
TOWARD UNKNOWN LANDS** 18
CHRISTIAN BEAULIEU

PROFILES OF WOMEN 20
ESTHER VARGAS

THE STRUGGLES OF PILAR COLL 22
MARIA ARROYO, M.I.C.

INTERMISSIONS 23

IN THE GARDEN OF GOD 26
JEANNE GUINOIS, M.I.C.

MISSIONARIES IN CHILOÉ 28
IN COLLABORATION

COVER PAGE:
Peruvian woman
Photo: A. Eichenlaub

When Eye Meets Eye

A brief look that
sinks deep into the
recesses of the heart...

Surely, this kind of experience has happened to you? In our records of personal memories, such experiences are among the valuable treasures. Why?

If you really think about it, are not those moments actual encounters? From the years I lived in South America, I brought memories of many such experiences which broaden one's horizon. That young woman of Lima carrying her 15-year-old disabled son on her back still challenges me. *He's my son. Yes, it is a cross to see him like this... but I love him. The Lord gives us strength... he's my son.*

And what can I say of all those glances of the women I came across at the public market of the neighbourhood of Breña? Early in the morning, they begin setting up their booths: flower booths, fruit and vegetable booths, fish booths, etc. All day long they stand or sit on a little stool offering their goods with a profusion of gestures, words and occasional shouts to draw our attention. Their life is similar to that of millions of women throughout the world... The banality of their daily life is transformed because they love their families, because they want their children and grandchildren to be educated, because they have hospital bills to pay, because they are struggling to survive, because... because...

MIC MISSION NEWS invites you to *make eye contact*, so to speak, with women of Latin America. May you spend some pleasant moments in their company, and perhaps experience an enriching encounter. The M.I.C. Sisters and the lay missionaries working with them have a constant concern in the integral formation of women and they work at it in different ways. In and beyond America, women of the South and women of the North all unite, creating bonds of cooperation, mutual understanding and friendship to build a better world. And sometimes, all it takes to get started is *the time to make eye contact*...

On behalf of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and of their partners in mission, thanks a million for your solidarity and generosity. In the coming year dedicated to God the Father in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, may His watchful eye bring blessings to you.

In His Joy,

Evangelina Plamondon
Superior General

Photo: E. Plamondon, M.I.C.

A Life-giving Project

By MURIELLE DUBÉ, M.I.C.



In Latin America, which counts 318 million inhabitants, around 100,000 women religious dedicate themselves to the work of evangelization. In 1994, the CLAR (Latin American Conference of men and women religious) launched a research project on the mission of women in the South American continent. Religious sisters were invited to look back on their personal, communal and social history. Murielle Dubé, M.I.C., took part in this comprehensive action plan of CLAR and shares with us some fruits of her research.

Since its establishment in 1959, the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR), has been a lighthouse, a driving force... and a disturbing one at times. Made up of representatives of the national religious conferences of more than 25 countries and supported by a team of highly qualified theologians, the CLAR is rich with the experience of men and women religious. With a dynamic leadership, the organization keeps its members alert and invites them to live with an audacity worthy of the Gospel so as to be prophetic signs of hope. A preferential option for the poor, a down-to-earth spirituality leading to liberation and inculturation, a renewed ecclesiology - these are the fundamental principles

that have sustained the CLAR from the very beginnings. It is an organization with an eagle's wings and eyes, giving it a view from on high that reaches far and wide. Also, it has the simplicity of a seed thrown into the earth, enabling it to take root in places where the future of ordinary people is played out.

HISTORY REVISITED

To celebrate its forty years of existence (1959-1999), the CLAR has just launched a large-scale project: To retrieve the historic memory of women religious life in Latin America and in the Caribbeans. Why? The answer was given during CLAR's latest General Assembly in Lima, June 12-21, 1997:

A sign of hope in this period of change

through which we are living, with its uncertainties and its questioning, is the reinforcement of the role of women in the Church and in society. CLAR predominantly represents women religious. It is fitting for this organization to offer its contribution to help everyone to move beyond the patriarchal mentality, beyond sexism, machismo and discriminatory practices in both society and the Church. Let us remember that in Latin America, the proportion of women to men religious is four to one.

The awareness of the need for women to claim their rightful position in society and in the Church is a sign of the times. This awareness gives us new insights as we read in the Gospel how Jesus dealt with women. It thus resets our focus on



Sr. Murielle Dubé and Marie Teresa Porcile, Uruguay theologian at the '96 CLAR seminar, Guatemala

M.I.C. Sisters of Peru live in deep solidarity with Peruvian women.



In Lima, Louise Pagé, M.I.C. (1st row, 1st r.) and some parents learning together how to improve their parenting skills

a fundamental point of the practice of Jesus, which should always have been that of His Church.

This inspiring principle does not concern only women; it concerns humankind as a whole, men and women. It is fitting to note that the new-found self-awareness of women also helps men to revise their ways of thinking. It helps them in their understanding of themselves and of their place in history, their interpretation of history and the way they organize the social, political, economic, religious and social life. (John Paul II).

Mindful of one of the most profound and universal cultural changes ever to occur in history, the CLAR thus invites us, religious of the Latin American continent, to share our experience while placing it in the global context of history. What we live on the local level has an impact both on the continental and universal level: cultures, races, religions, churches and nations. The fact that women everywhere in the world are taking their place, claiming their rights and exercising their leadership, has an impact on our everyday life. Here is a marvelous project for us:

to revisit our history as women, as religious, and for us, M.I.C. Sisters, as missionaries.

REMEMBERING...

Stimulated by this project of the CLAR, I recall names, experiences and situations. I imagine that you too, our readers, would have many women in mind, women who got involved and thus enriched humanity: a mother, a sister, an aunt, an artist, a working woman, a social worker, a missionary. Their creativity and audacity, their love and respect for life enabled them to write pages of history that changed the outcome of events. Allow me, in this article, to mention two women who marked my life as a missionary in Bolivia and in Peru. I would also like to touch briefly on our past and present

journeys with the women of these countries.

DOMITILA BARRIOS DE CHUNGARA

This was 1961. The women of Siglo XX created the homemakers' organization (*Amas de Casa*) to improve their living conditions. Domitila joined the group in 1963 and soon became an audacious leader. The Committee began by demanding better salaries for their husbands, who worked very hard in the mines; they then demanded a better service at the grocery store run by the mining authorities, and good schools for their children. *Little by little, confided Domitila, we realized that this was not merely an economic struggle, but also a political one. The first battle had to be won at home, for the husbands to allow their wives and children to participate in the struggle to improve their life situation.* Domitila continued: *Every woman was doing two days' work in one, and this was not recognized, either by society, or by the husbands, or, often, even by the women themselves. For these women, there was no other choice but to join the quest for justice and dignity.*

The hunger strike they undertook at the end of 1973 allowed the Bolivian people to take a step toward democracy. This was an enormous step forward in a country which had too long been governed by military dictatorships and usurped power. Domitila was subjected to torture. While in prison, she gave birth to a child who did not survive the ordeal. Today, she still transmits to younger



Young animators for family catechesis in Peru

generations the memory of this whole experience. Mauricia del Pilar Delgadillo, a Bolivian journalist, wrote: *Domitila symbolizes one of the most important historic landmarks for the return of democracy in our country.*

MARIA ELENA MAOYANO

She was nicknamed *Madre Coraje*, Mother Courage, by the people of Villa El Salvador, in Lima, Peru. She worked closely with the town's Mayor and was a member of grassroots organizations that aimed at improving the life of her people. A wife, a mother, a leader and facilitator, she was committed, loved and so well known. She wanted peace and respect for all, mutual help and joy. In February 1992, she was murdered in a cowardly manner by members of the *Sendero Luminoso* (*Shining Path*). This signaled for them the beginning of a shattering defeat. The people would never forgive such a brutal killing of one of its leaders. *Madre Coraje* remained alive in the hearts of her people.

THE M.I.C. SISTERS OF LATIN AMERICA

The Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception who have been in Bolivia since 1957, and in Peru since 1960, knew these women. Some of us stood by Domitila through her most difficult struggles. We rubbed shoulders with cooperative leader, managers of people's kitchens, the rural missionaries and catechist mothers. Young students, women in a sewing school and in an Institute for Rural Education crossed our paths. Our services reached out to the pupils and teachers of primary, secondary or commercial courses. We have a long history written in times of military dictatorship and during the slow and painful growth of democracy. Besides, a history written in times of subversive revolutionary movements and at the emergence of

neo-liberalism and of its consequences. That history is also marked by our journey as a Church in which we have been called to experience some major changes, especially after Vatican II and the Medellin Conference. How many times we were asked to readjust our way of being religious and of living the mission in Latin America.

This is what the CLAR invites us to revisit. What a grace! To stop and take time to remember what we have lived, to discover the richness it has

brought us and to acknowledge our mistakes. To tell the story of how we and the women we know have been unmistakable architects of change through our courage, determination and vision. To also tell in what ways we have, at times, thwarted life and prevented progress. Participating in the project of the CLAR means expressing our faith in the future and preparing for the third millennium with renewed enthusiasm. And we do so, knowing that a world in which women have their place will undoubtedly generate social relationships that could be different from the current ones. The project of the CLAR is a life-giving project that leads towards a journey of progress for all of humankind. Along with all the women and the men who will dare to take part in it because they believe in the seed of a new humanity, I bless the Lord! □



Rose-Alice Rousseau, M.I.C. cannot forget her Latin American friends who remain hopeful despite their difficult living conditions.

Editor's note: The voice of Haiti is silent in this issue on Latin American women. However, the Conference of Haitian Religious is very involved in the project of the CLAR. The M.I.C. Sisters of Haiti have taken several initiatives particularly in the area regarding the rights of women. This aspect we hope to feature in a future issue of our magazine.

50 YEARS OF M.I.C. PRESENCE IN CUBA

BY BERNARDETA COLLAZO, M.I.C., AND GLORIA PÉREZ, M.I.C.



1955. Official visit of Madeleine Payette, M.I.C., Superior General (center)

Havana, March 1998. Our Community, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (M.I.C.), celebrates 50 years of missionary presence in Cuba! Over this half a century of history, the M.I.C.s have formed deep bonds of friendship with the people and the Church of this country. Bernardeta Collazo and Gloria Pérez, M.I.C. Sisters of Cuban origin, recount the faith adventure of the very beginnings, and that of the last 38 years during which the Sisters have encouraged and sustained the people through the different stages of the revolution.

To celebrate 50 years of M.I.C. presence in Cuba means to relive the personal and communal history of many women missionaries who, in faithfulness to God and to themselves, have witnessed to the Gospel. These women played a vital role in the life of the Church and people of Cuba.

1948-1961: THE PIONEER DAYS

July 1948. Twelve M.I.C. Sisters were assigned to Cuba and left in the following months. In less than six years, 46 Sisters had landed on the island. They worked closely with the priests of the Foreign Mission Society (P.M.E.) in seven parishes of the provinces of Havana and Matanzas.

In a letter which he wrote at the time, Bishop Martin Villaverde of Matanzas thanked the M.I.C. Community for accepting his request to come and work in Cuba, and expressed the needs of the missions under his charge: *I have not the slightest doubt that the coming of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception will be most beneficial to this diocese. Ever since the beginning of my episcopate, I have wished for a Community which, besides assuming the direction of the parish school, would take an interest in catechism in the parish and in other evangelical works. This called for sisters who would not be afraid to go out of their convent to bring the knowledge of God to those places where the need is felt... I have great hopes that the Canadian Sisters will meet my expectations, for they undoubtedly have the same spirit of sacrifice and ardent zeal that characterizes my good Canadian priests.*



A choir of young students with Véronique Bernatchez, M.I.C.

The young Sisters who arrived in Cuba precisely had this élan, this unsparing dedication that our Foundress, Délia Têtreault, tried to instill in her missionaries from the very beginning of the Institute. Their program of apostolic action gave priority to Catholic education: the parish schools where they taught at the elementary and secondary levels, courses for the bachelor's degree in business, home economics and music. They also helped with catechism, preparation for the first Communion and other parish activities. They helped the poor and visited the sick and the prisoners. The Sisters invited a few women and young girls to join them in this work of evangelization, and visited the campos with them. Personally, confided Sr. Anne-Marie Magnan, *the time to which I looked forward the most was Saturday. At four in the afternoon, the inner yard filled with children of the parish and from the countryside. They went in groups into the classrooms where teachers told*



1998: M.I.C. Golden Jubilee at Havana. Sr. Gloria Pérez (3rd row, 1st l.) and Sr. Bernardeta Collazo (2nd row, 1st r.), authors of the article. At center, Sr. Amélia Mejides, Provincial Superior and Sr. Évangéline Plamondon, Superior General

them about the Good News, and they all concluded their classes with a hymn to Mary.

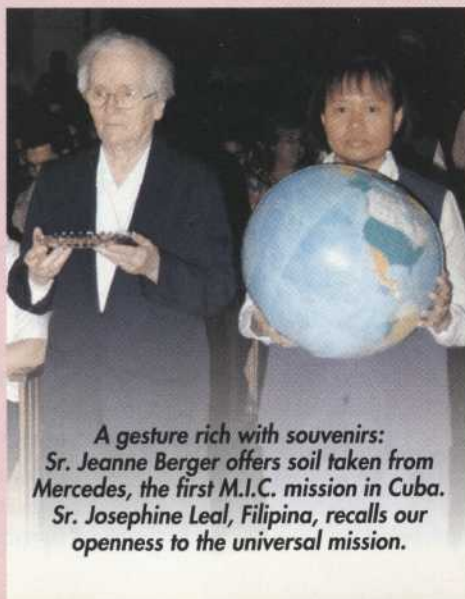
As we read the letters of these pioneers, we are amazed at not finding a single reference to the difficulties encountered in those early years. There is no mention on their part of the sacrifices involved in learning the language, or of the discomfort endured because of the heat, or of the effort to adjust to a different culture. They only mention the sorrow they felt in 1961, when the revolution government took over the schools. They then had to relinquish their responsibilities in education, which for many of them meant leaving forever a mission land that they deeply loved and to which they had given the very best of themselves.

PRESENCE AMONG THE PEOPLE

One testimony enlightens us concerning the Sisters' teaching and organization skills: *The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception are the ones I knew best. They were in Los Arabos when I arrived there in 1956. Through the school, they trained Christians to be more enlightened and stronger in their faith. They reached the parents. They were evangelizers. In fact, they wasted no time. With a vocabulary of only two or three words, they went to work. From Monday to Friday, school. Saturday, catechism in the neighbouring villages and in the parish. Sunday, animation of the Masses, catechism for the children, preparation of the catechists. Was there a small choir? The M.I.C.s looked after it. Did the church or hall need to be decorated for some event or other? Yes, there was the white habit, with blue sash and black veil, all drenched in perspiration, but eyes and heart filled with joy. The young women from my homeland were there. Ah! I almost forgot their fears. Not momentary scares, but real fears during the years of the revolution war. There was a great deal to be afraid*

of! But they were there - in Los Arabos, Manguito, Marti, Maximo Gómez, Colón. A long road of suffering in their fidelity to God and to the Cuban people led to a flowering of wonderful vocations. This is how Father Roger DeMontigny, P.M.E., a missionary in Cuba from 1953 to 1971 and pastor of Los Arabos, recalls this period of our pioneers in Cuba.¹

In the curriculum of those days, the emphasis was on the quality of academic education, of commitment and of social interactions, in short, on integral formation. In the days following the jubilee festivities, a former student of Los Arabos College wrote: *This golden jubilee celebration allowed us to go back to a beautiful stage of our lives and to remember more than one pleasant moment: the classes, the mission, your patience and your delicate attentions, the respect that you inspired us with, the experiences of our life together. Know that we remember you with affection and are grateful to you for our education.* Another alumna, expressing a desire felt by many former students for a return to a type of education that integrates every dimension of the human person asked, *When shall we have religious colleges in Cuba? We would like our children to have the same kind of education as we received in the Catholic colleges.*



A gesture rich with souvenirs: Sr. Jeanne Berger offers soil taken from Mercedes, the first M.I.C. mission in Cuba. Sr. Josephine Leal, Filipina, recalls our openness to the universal mission.

UNLESS THE GRAIN OF WHEAT FALLS TO THE EARTH

The political and social events of 1959 signaled another form of M.I.C. presence in Cuba. In 1961, an atmosphere of uncertainty about the present and the future prevailed. The revolutionary process which already made headway towards practical atheism gave rise to new situations and required new training. After the exodus of 27 Sisters, the remaining group consisted of only ten Sisters. With the absence of schools as a privileged means to

exercise their apostolic work, the Sisters faced the major challenge of finding other ways to live their mission.

Determined as they were to continue their apostolic commitment, the Sisters kept up their catechetical work in parishes, their visits to the hospitals and to the families. They continued animating the Christian communities. But these faith groups were decreasing in numbers because of the massive exodus of Cubans to the United States and because of the pressure exerted by the government on those who practiced their faith. Those were years of tried fidelity, confident surrender into the hands of God, incredible creativity to compensate for the lack of resources, and persistent struggle to preserve joy in the midst of such uncertainty.

To this group of Sisters who have distinguished themselves from the beginning by their closeness to the people and by their capacity of inculturation, young Cuban women have been added. They came, desirous of devoting their lives to the proclamation of the Gospel and attracted by the Sisters' missionary spirit in thanksgiving. The M.I.C. Novitiate was opened in 1965, facing the many challenges of that particular period. The arrival of the new members made possible the opening of new foundations in other dioceses, whose needs in terms of religious presence were enormous. Because of the legal impossibility to acquire houses, the Sisters transformed small church sacristies into places of residence. Again, feminine ingenuity went to work along with creativity and the spirit of initiative. This lifestyle raised admiration and respect among the laity, the clergy and the bishops.

DOOR TO-DOOR-VISITS

Little by little, the Sisters found new ways to respond to the necessity of evangelizing the people in a climate where fear and the rejection of manifestations of faith prevailed. With fervour and audacity, they went from



*The people build communities whose faith sets an example.
Sr. Bernardeta Collazo (1st I.)*

door to door to meet the people. It was a risky mission, for they never knew whom they were going to meet. But the experience proved positive. Several lay people involved in the Christian communities joined them in this patient labour, the fruits of which were barely visible. The fond memories the Cuban people had of the Sisters facilitated dialogue. People opened their homes and their hearts and allowed themselves to be challenged by Gospel values.

In these small faith communities, animation revolved around the Word of God: Gospel sharing, revision of life, celebration of the Word, lively liturgies. This formation enabled each one to be nourished by the Word of God and to live more fully by the Gospel at a time when the strength of one's witness was in itself a means of evangelization. In the following years, the ministries became more diversified and new possibilities presented themselves. Besides catechesis, animation of basic ecclesial communities and formation of pastoral agents, the M.I.C.s became more involved with youth and families. They also accepted various responsibilities on the diocesan and national levels. Some of us began a more specialized work with women and with prisoners. Through this ministry and through the witness of our life, we participate in cultivating in other young Cuban women the seed of a religious missionary vocation which God has sown in them.

I SHALL BE WITH YOU EACH DAY UNTIL THE END

Today, our Community in Cuba has become international: 16 Cubans, 4 Canadians, 1 Malagasy, 1 Portuguese, 1 Filipina. We are committed to devote all our strength to continuing the mission with the same missionary zeal and thanksgiving as in the beginning. We try to live our commitment by recognizing and making known the work of God among our people. We want to promote the Gospel values of peace, unity and faith in God's gratuitous love and we give thanks for our people's hunger and thirst for God. □

Photos: M.I.C. Cuba



M.I.C. Sisters and a Church dignitary during the Pope's visit in Cuba

¹ Roger DeMontigny, P.M.E., *Mission Étrangères*, Vol. 25, n° 10

A JUBILEE THAT ENRICHES OUR HISTORY

By ÉVANGÉLINE PLAMONDON, M.I.C.

Joy and thanksgiving overflowed in the Cathedral of Havana on March 25, 1998! On that day, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, about thirty priests, a number of men and women religious, and many relatives and friends celebrated 50 years of M.I.C. presence in Cuba. On that special occasion, Sr. Évangéline Plamondon, M.I.C. Superior General, spoke to the assembly in the following words:

When, in 1948, Bishop Martin Villaverde of Matanzas welcomed the first two Canadian Sisters, no one could have predicted the pages of history which we are reading today. For us, Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, those 50 years are among the most valuable of the life of our Institute, and you have been an intimate part of them.

With you, we learned how to live and share our faith discreetly, silently and, at times, in difficult situations and with scanty means. Day by day, we stood in solidarity with the Church of Cuba and with the people around us. We discovered that poverty and sacrifice make us more welcoming to others, more compassionate, and foster a greater audacity in the service of the Gospel. Staying with you has enabled us to ensure a new generation of Cuban M.I.C. Sisters; it enabled us to diversify our pastoral commitments and to reach out to the people in places where we never would have gone if we had stayed in our schools.

But what we, M.I.C. Sisters., must receive today as a grace and thank God for is having discovered with you, all along those years, new faces of Christ in this land of Cuba. Our faith has grown stronger. The Gospel never ceases to challenge the truth and the courage that must be ours. And if we scan our horizon as a missionary Institute, we have Cuban M.I.C. sisters in mission in other countries. The faith engraved in our hearts by suffering has matured and is now being shared in this land and abroad.

We cannot forget the words spoken recently by John Paul II: Let the world open itself to Cuba and let Cuba



M.I.C. pioneers of Cuba reunite to celebrate the jubilee! (l. to r.): Fabienne Bernatchez, Claire Carrier, Jeanne Ostiguy, Eliette Gagnon, Jeanne Berger, Simone Perreault

open itself to the world. Received in a vision of faith, these words are a call to our missionary Institute to be missionary here in Cuba and beyond its borders. We believe that the faith experience of the Cuban people and that of your Church can greatly enrich other peoples and other local Churches. The Christian people of Cuba have lived through special circumstances which are an asset to them in sharing their faith, and the visit of the Pope made the outside world aware of the faithfulness of the Cuban people to the God of Life. This God has heard their cry of hope. I am personally convinced that the Church of Cuba is currently going through a significant stage of its history, one that is more deeply rooted in the universal dimension of faith.

Yes, let us give thanks to the Lord! In the name of our Institute and in my own, I thank the Church of Cuba and the people who welcomed us. They have enabled us to live with them, on this magnificent island, a page of the sacred history of the People of God. May the coming years allow us to make further progress in building a civilization of love in which all Cuban men and women can live in truth, peace and justice. As for us, our M.I.C. Institute is always ready and happy to commit itself to this. It is a matter of fidelity to our charism. To Our Lady of Charity, Patroness of Cuba, we present our prayers and our hopes. To her we entrust your beautiful country and the new awakening of the Church. □

A CELEBRATION OF DIVERSITY

LADY NATURE BEING MADE UP OF CONTRASTS,
IS OF ALL AGES, DESIGNS EVERY LANDSCAPE
CLOTHED IN LIGHT AND SHADOWS.
EVERY CORNER OF MOTHER EARTH TAKES ON
MEANING AND VITALITY IN THE CREATIVE EYES
OF AN ARTIST, A SEEKER OR POET,
OF PEOPLE OF THE EARTH, LOVERS OF THIS PLANET.

NO WILDERNESS IS BUT SHEER SAND,
NO OCEAN, BUT AN INFINITE STRETCH.
OASES AND DUNES DANCE THEREIN.
WAVES RISE AND FALL IN A SHIMMERING WALTZ
REFLECTING THE INSCRUTABLE DIVERSITY OF THE SEA.

AS THE BIRD FLIES, THE FOREST,
IMMENSE, DARK, MYSTERIOUS AND SURE TO IMPRESS,
STRETCHES AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE.
GIGANTIC TREES RISING TALL, IVIES INTERTWINED,
NEW GENERATIONS DARTING THEIR YOUNG SHOOTS IN THE GLADE.
LISTEN: THE TINY SPRIG, THE SHRUB, THE GROWN TREE,
EACH ONE TELLS IN ITS OWN WAY HOW THE SAP
RUNNING FROM THE ROOTS AND SHARED OUT AMONG THEM ALL,
IS THE BEARER OF A HISTORY AND A DESTINY.

AS WE NEAR THE END OF THIS MILLENNIUM, HAPPY ARE YOU
IF, IN YOUR HUMAN BALLAD, IN YOUR FAITH
AND IN YOUR STRUGGLE FOR MORE DIGNITY AND MORE LIFE,
YOU KNOW IN YOUR HEART HOW TO APPRECIATE DIFFERENCES.
YOUR VULNERABILITY IS NO LONGER THREATENED
BY THE APPARENT SECURITY OF YOUR NEIGHBOUR.
THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURES, LANGUAGES, SEXES,
RELIGIONS, COLOURS AND OPINIONS,
IS NOT A WALL BETWEEN YOU AND OTHERS;
IT IS RATHER AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO SEEK
IN YOUR OWN HERITAGE THE STRENGTH WITHIN YOU
AND THE SPRING THAT SINGS YOUR SONG.

YOU BECOME FREE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND CELEBRATE
IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE THE UNTOLD MESSAGE OF DIVERSITY.
YOU CAN GO ON, AND HARMONIZE YOUR NOTE
WITH THE CONCERT OF THE UNIVERSE:
THE SPIRIT OF GOD PROJECTS YOU TOWARDS UNKNOWN LANDS.

AGATHE DURAND, M.I.C.

The Courage of Bolivian Women

BY ANITA PERRON, M.I.C.

Sr. Anita Perron spent thirty years in the Bolivian Andes in deep solidarity with the Ayamara and Quechua women, whose needs are enormous. She is thus well-placed to make us better understand Bolivian women in quest of justice, dignity and freedom. Her testimony also shows different facets of the missionary activity of women in South America.



Sr. Anita Perron and young people of Cochabamba

In October 1997, the M.I.C. Sisters celebrated their 40 years of presence in Bolivia. It was like turning the pages of a family album and recognizing the struggles, joys and hopes of an entire people. Today, what I want above all is to share my admiration for the courage and resourcefulness of the women of the rural areas and of those of the Altiplano mines.

A COURAGE OF MANY FACETS

In July 1969, I ventured into the Cordillera of the Andes and reached the famous pewter mines of Siglo XX and Catavi. I readily understood that my mission in these parts would be carried out in a climate of tension. The miners were conscious of the existing injustices and demanded their rights, with the support of their wives and of the young people of the area. Brutal military repression was not long in coming. I lived ten years in this context of oppression.

The courage of the women of the mines manifested itself in many

ways: the patience to stand in long waiting lines at the miners' store, or else, the zealous search for bits of pewter in the water and stones left as waste; the audacity they showed during exhausting demonstrations alongside their husbands to obtain better living conditions; their determination to resist the military who threatened to destroy their community radio station. Some women even spent the night inside the building. I saw them prepared to attack if necessary. It was like *little David* against *mighty Goliath*!

I also witnessed the heroism of five women and 14 children who, at the end of 1977, went on a hunger strike at the Archbishop's residence of La Paz. Among other things, these women were demanding the liberation of political prisoners and the return of hundreds of exiles. This initiative triggered a nationwide solidarity movement that included more than 5,000 strikers. The President of the country, who was then an army general, was forced to

resign his post and an election had to be called. The weakness of the regime had become too obvious on the economic and political levels. Again, *little David* got the upper hand of *mighty Goliath*.

Under the military regimes of 1969 to 1982, history recorded several acts of heroism by women. The one that remains engraved in my memory involved three of them. These women wrapped themselves in the national flag to resist a military attack and were shot at point blank range. There have been too many women martyrs in Bolivia... in South America! Where is the source of such courage? In their faith in the God of the impossible, in their unshakable confidence in Mary and in their hope for better days.

Despite military control, I saw women interested in learning how to sew and acquiring handicraft skills. They initiated procedures for the establishment in Catavi of a branch of the Santa Rita Academy of La Paz.

This school, administered by the M.I.C. Sisters, aims to offer integral education. A few hundred women have followed the courses which entitled them to a qualified worker's certificate. They were unaware, then, of how helpful these new skills would be to them. In 1986, when thousands of miners were laid off, the women undertook work that helped them to face part of the financial difficulties their families encountered.

The resistance of several husbands to the initiative and autonomy of their wives opened the eyes of the women. They saw the need for reflection on equal opportunities and the equal dignity of partners. Radio programs with concrete scenarios were prepared by the women to create a space for dialogue between workers and within families. A change in mentality began to set in.

The M.I.C. Sisters stood in solidarity with the miners' struggles. They tried to respond, in keeping with Gospel values, to the needs of the people. They offered services in health care, education and the integral formation of women. In 1979, the Sisters left the area, leaving behind responsible women at the head of an Academy which, today, continues to teach women sewing and handicraft techniques. In the area of health care, the People's Health Cooperative still offers its services with Bolivian personnel, one of whom, a woman, is the hospital

administrator. The women's grassroots organization, born of their own initiative, also continues its course and responds to the pressing local needs through appropriate social services.

QUITE A DOSE OF COURAGE...

Today, at the Institute for Rural Education (IER) of Cochabamba, I witness the awakening of young peasant women. Their life involves much courage. IER is a boarding school that receives for one year some forty young women aged 17 and over. They learn sewing, handicraft, and receive courses of general culture, reading and writing, first aid, agriculture and catechesis. They actively participate in small-scale production projects. This formation strengthens their sense of community and their self-esteem.

In the second year, about ten are chosen among those who have the desire and the aptitude to become assistant nurses in rural areas. They follow courses and go through practical internships in two hospitals. Being thus prepared, they can work in a small dispensary in their own village. These village clinics are often very far from a better equipped medical center with adequate personnel to respond to more serious cases. Brave young women that they are,

they risk the adventure! These young assistant nurses are astonished at their own progress. Only a few months ago, they were tending a flock of sheep, and now, they have reached unexpected goals. One of them recently obtained a bursary to become a laboratory technician. Who would have said this when Floria arrived at IER two years ago?...

The M.I.C. Sisters help these young peasant women to be proud of their feminine and cultural identity. They are encouraged to appreciate and respect their own language, music, dances and customs. The formation they receive is not limited to technical and academic learning; it also aims at preparing active promoters of the dignity of women, of their rights, of equal opportunities and of an improved quality of life in their own milieu. Such a formation is a concrete contribution in the process of change in mentality that is currently taking place regarding women.

I also listen to my M.I.C. companions involved in the rural areas. They help me to see, in that environment as well, the determination of Quechua women. They assume all at once their family responsibilities, the work on the farm and their



The M.I.C. Sisters accompany miners and their wives in their difficult struggles.





Graduation day for the auxiliary nurses trained by Sr. Suzanne Labelle, M.D.

Students of the I.E.R. acquire skills to obtain a livelihood.

integration in grassroots organizations involved in health care, education and work with the unions. Current laws of the land in favour of women are making headway in the mentality of men and giving rise to new and more egalitarian modes of behaviour. A team of three young graduates of IER now works in four villages of the Chaparé region. Here they put into practice what they have learned and the new orientations they have received from the Institute. They live the experience of being in a foreign situation as they must integrate and adjust to rural communities different from their own.

What I have lived, seen and heard has made me appreciate the determination of the women of the mines and of those of the rural areas to stand up and affirm their rights.

A LARGE-SCALE ENTERPRISE

Bolivian women contribute in a major way to the labour market. Thirty-nine percent of the gross national product is attributed to them. However, research shows that the statistics do not consider the contribution of women through productive agricultural activities, in the informal sector and through unpaid domestic work. Discrimination is obvious in the working place. For equal



Photos: M.I.C. Bolivia

competence, a professional woman earns 74% of a man's salary.¹

In Bolivia, women are also affected by technological progress. They are the first ones to be excluded from this sector. The economic crisis unleashed by the structural adjustment program of 1985 has forced many women to join the labour market. They work mostly in sectors that are not very productive. This reality generates greater poverty and widens the gap of inequality of opportunity between women and men. Some investigations reveal that employers limit their work contracts with women to avoid having to pay the cost of a maternity leave. Discrimination is also linked to the degree of education and competence. Domestic employees are very numerous, because for this task, no account is taken of the women's degree of education. Also, they are paid less and have less chance to get an education.

What courage it takes for most

Bolivian women to arrive at the stage of feeling like full-fledged citizens! They have to fight for democracy in role distribution at home and at work. They have to struggle for the official recognition of their economic contribution to the nation, to resist the violence perpetrated against them and to turn the pyramid upside down in the workplace and in the political arena. It is a large-scale enterprise! This is why, in Bolivia as elsewhere in the world, women get together in groups to affirm their dignity and take their place in society. Many of them go beyond conscientization and organization. They stand on the strength of their own identity and, according to their talents and aptitudes, get involved in every field of endeavour. They do so most capably. Indeed, women in Bolivia are going forward with courage and perseverance! □

¹ *La mujer en le estratificado mercado laboral, Vida & Futuro, 27 de mayo de 1998, Cochabamba, Bolivia*

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Photo: M. P. Charbonneau M.I.C.

Mona Henry, M.I.C., and pupils, Haiti



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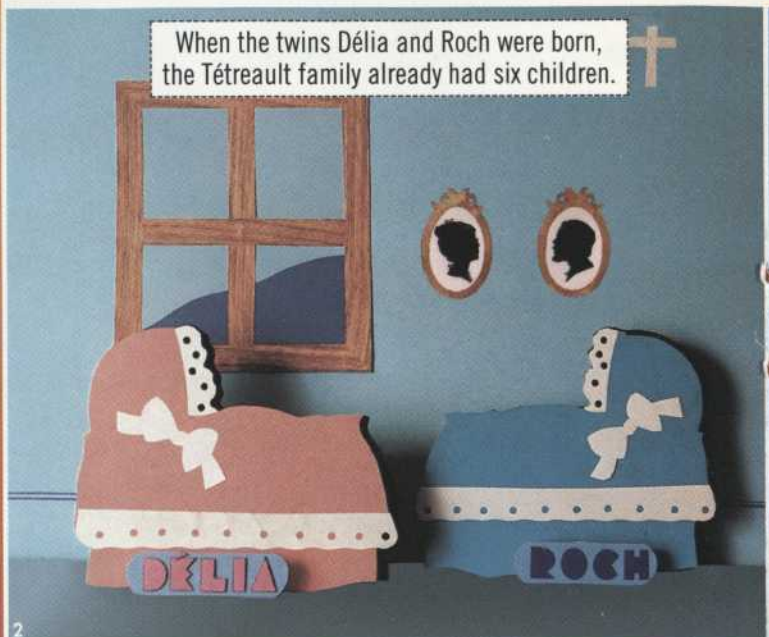
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HERE IS THE
STORY OF
DÉLIA
TÉTREULT,
A WOMAN
FROM QUEBEC.

DÉLIA HAD
A BIG
HEART, AS
BIG AS THE
WORLD!



The religious Community founded by Délia Tétreault was named Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Today, it has more than 750 members of 17 different nationalities working in 14 countries.



When the twins Délia and Roch were born, the Tétreault family already had six children.

One day, Délia saw Uncle Jean coming home from work. She started shouting:



PAPA! PAPA!

Off she went... straight into Uncle Jean's arms, kissing him with all her heart.



I'M NOT YOUR
FATHER,
AM I?

YOU DON'T
KNOW WHAT
PAPAS ARE LIKE,
I DO!...

From that day on, Uncle Jean became a loving and understanding father to Délia.

Then came time to go to school. Délia had many friends!



RRRING!
RRRING!

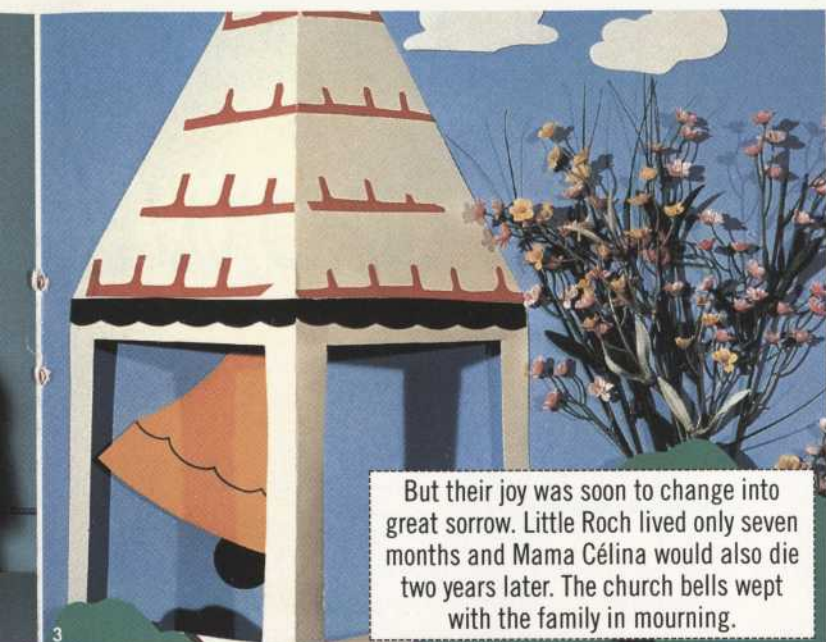
I'M ANXIOUS
TO READ IN
MY NICE NEW
BOOK.

Often, at home, Délia went up to the attic. She opened a large storage chest full of beautiful missionary magazines.



I LOVE ALL
THESE CHILDREN. I
WOULD LIKE SO MUCH
FOR THEM TO BE
HAPPY!

She read stories about children in China, Japan, Africa...



But their joy was soon to change into great sorrow. Little Roch lived only seven months and Mama Céline would also die two years later. The church bells wept with the family in mourning.



Who would look after little Délia now?

SLEEP! SLEEP! MY BEAUTIFUL DOLL!

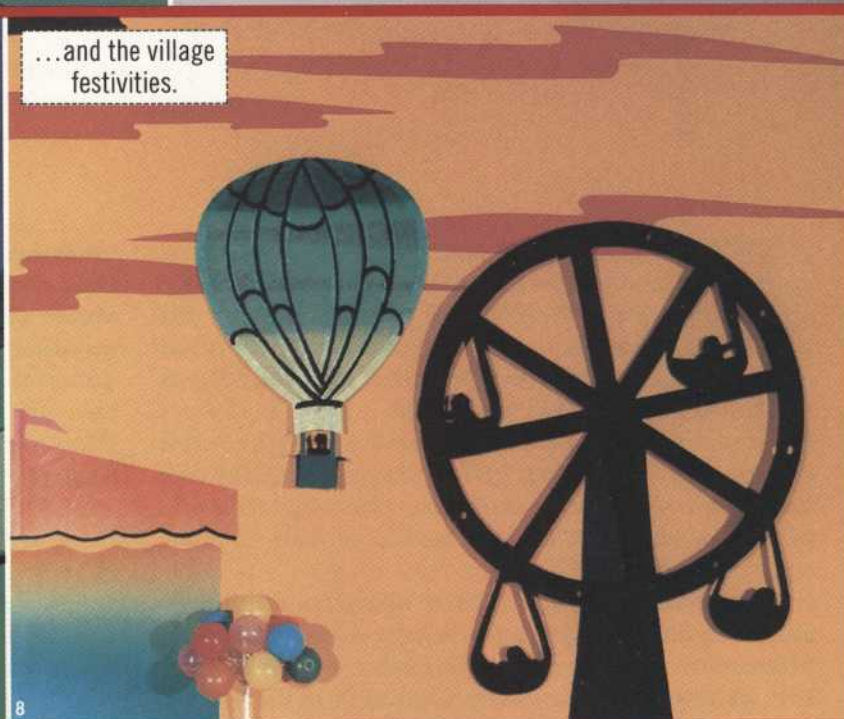
Aunt Julie and Uncle Jean Alix, her godparents, took her into their home. In spite of her frail health, Délia continued to grow.



Délia grew up happy... She loved nature, flowers and animals...

HOW SWEET IT SMELLS!

ARF! ARF!



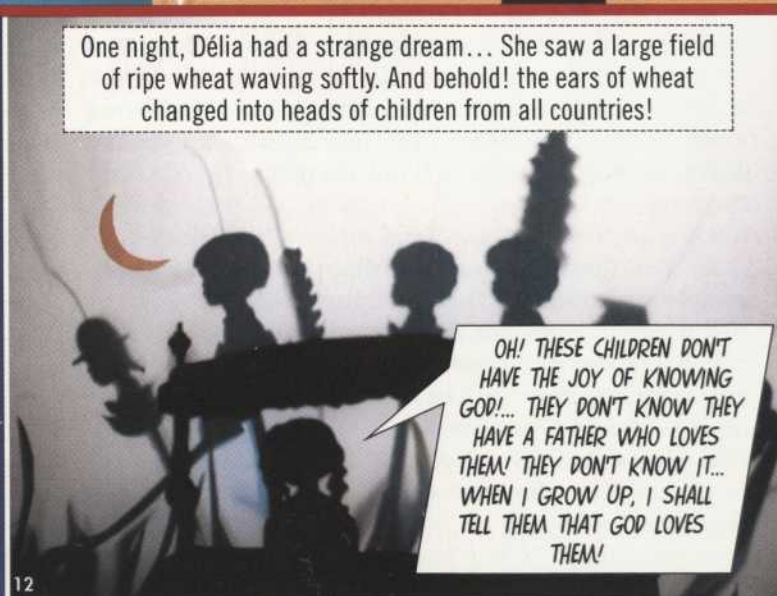
...and the village festivities.



Every night, before she went to sleep, Délia thanked the Lord.

THANK YOU, JESUS, FOR THIS LOVELY DAY!

BLESS MAMA JULIE, PAPA JEAN, AND ALL THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD!



One night, Délia had a strange dream... She saw a large field of ripe wheat waving softly. And behold! the ears of wheat changed into heads of children from all countries!

OH! THESE CHILDREN DON'T HAVE THE JOY OF KNOWING GOD!... THEY DON'T KNOW THEY HAVE A FATHER WHO LOVES THEM! THEY DON'T KNOW IT... WHEN I GROW UP, I SHALL TELL THEM THAT GOD LOVES THEM!

Toward Unknown



BY CHRISTIAN BEAULIEU

In the Gospel, Mary takes part in the struggles of faith. Her life is full of risks. The birth of Jesus signals for her the beginning of a unique mission, and she will fight to the finish to accomplish it. Christian Beaulieu invites us, here, to consider Mary's faith as she says YES repeatedly. He challenges us also to believe in the unfailing love of God who leads the journey of our lives. "

The angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph with the command: *Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Joseph got up and took the child and his mother and left that night for Egypt.*

(Mt 2:13-14) Overnight, Mary took to the highways, became a displaced person - Our Lady of the immigrants and of the refugees! Like Jesus, Mary was homeless, without a permanent address, *without a pillow on which to lay her head.*

Ever since Mary said YES to the impossible mission required of her, she lived on the road. The unknown, the unpredictable hung over her daily life as a permanent threat. Remember the dangerous trip she took through the high mountains of Judea to visit her cousin; the flight to Egypt to escape Herod's madness, the genocide of all the children of Bethlehem, the inexplicable running away of her Son. Mary was there, hurled into life and its daily tragedies. What dangers did she not have to face?

In her flight along unfamiliar roads, Mary concretely experienced the suffering of immigrants, of the uprooted, those of the past and those of our day. She moved to another place to escape suffering and suffering followed her everywhere. What a dark night of faith! What questions she must have asked: *Where are You, my God? Where are You hiding? How can You allow all this to happen? What message are You trying to put through to me?* She must have wondered if her vocation to follow Jesus did not mean that she would live all her life in transit,

or at least forever in temporary accommodations. Like Son, like Mother! Where did Mary find the secret of such strength that enabled her to move mountains? Where was the wellspring in which she immersed herself, day after day, and restored her energies to face the terrible ordeal of daily life? What was the unfailing support, the unshakable rock of her life?

IN WHAT DIRECTION WAS SHE TO TURN HER EYES AND HEART?

His love is from age to age on those who fear Him. That is the encouraging certitude Mary had, her indestructible support in the concrete reality of her life. *I know in whom I put my trust and I shall not be disappointed. God remembers His love and the promise He made to our fathers.* Mary knew this by heart and it was an absolute certainty for her. The memory of God's mighty deeds... that is what helped her to go through the rough seas and through the worst storms of her existence.

What God once did for His people, He can do again. He is not short of means or out of breath, far from it! He is very consistent in His purpose. What He has so well started, He can bring to completion. What He has promised, He does in His own time.

So then, it was up to the grace of God, *for everything is grace! My grace is enough...* Mary must have heard this in her heart, and so she went, carried by the One she was carrying. Full of grace... she surely must have repeated to herself, which

Lands



Photo: HCR / C. Shirley

meant empowered by God, naturally and supernaturally, to fulfill the unique mission which no other woman would ever have to fulfill in the entire human history.¹ Fully blessed, yes, but that did not mean preprogrammed!

WHERE DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD US?

I would love to see you in Mary's place, charged with such a mission, one that was totally beyond her and wreaking havoc in her life. How would you have reacted in her place? It is never easy to hear God say to us: *You matter a lot to me. I have no one else but you for these children, these young people, these poor people, these parents.* It is never easy, and yet, it is always moving to see God kneeling before us, begging, asking us for a hand in making some changes in this world. It is never easy to be favoured by someone, especially by God's unconditional love!

When we are visited by such a grace, by the whims of the Spirit, and charged with such a mission, we all have the same reaction: *O God, don't You think You are exaggerating? Love me a little less. Could You not be content with loving me simply like everyone else? Leave me alone and don't love me so much. At any rate, You see that I don't have what it takes!*

When we see God putting such trust in us, does this mean that there is no more fear, no more doubt, no more temptation, no more upheavals? When the Spirit comes and takes over the helm on the voyage of our lives, does this mean that the

weather will always be fair? That we will always sail under a blue sky, without clouds or stormy winds? Far from it! On the contrary, it is necessary to die to one's comforts... to one's false securities... to one's manner of dealing with things.

TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH AND TO THE END OF TIME...

Mary! What strength of character this exceptional woman must have had! Here is a woman who knew what she wanted: she wanted what God wanted! So, nothing could stop her. She was capable of facing the unknown with courage, of marching head-on into the impossible, of taking every risk and of going through all the changes with audacity. She was faithful to the love of God unreservedly and to the end. What a responsible woman like no other!

This is the woman whose faith summarized, so to speak, the faith of all the women whose audacity changed the history of the People of God: Sarah, Judith, Esther, Deborah... Women of the past and women of today who have put the Lord to work in favour of His people. Women whose faith is so daring that God sanctions their initiatives and honours them with His own signature. This is how Mary's YES triggered off the action of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in favour of our world. This action will continue until the end of time, and for as long as there will be other women, other young people with daring hearts who will say YES! □

¹ Jacques Beaupré, *Et Marie entra dans notre histoire*, Éd. Bellarmin, p.30.

Profiles of Women

By ESTHER VARGAS

Their names are Elena, Maria, Lucero, Leonor and Apuja ... These women are both ordinary and wonderful. In Peru, they are, among many others, the life and the breath that enable whole groups of people to stay alive. Esther Vargas, Peruvian, makes us discover their daily life ... one full of difficulties and pitfalls.

Women of Peru, they impersonate courage, solidarity and love. In each of them, there is a hidden story, a face that cannot lie. Solitude and strength, hope and bitterness, solidarity and misery. Women of Peru, who, day after day, face the daily challenge of surviving and, sometimes, of forgetting.

RUBBING SHOULDERS DAILY

Sixteen years ago, Elena Reyes discovered that, in Comas, she had to divide her time between her duties at home and the needs of her people. Being director of a women's group for the defense and protection of women, this 43-year-old woman has experienced some major struggles. My companions and I have worked a lot... I remember a march to demand that we be provided with drinking water. I remember, too, our vigorous protest march a short time ago against the government because it would not supply the baskets of food needed for the community kitchens. We stand up for our rights, even if the government and the cities ignore the role of women in Peruvian society.



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



Photo: E. Plomondon, M.I.C.

They embody courage, solidarity and love.

Elena lives in the working class district of Kennedy and is in charge of the *Sagrado Corazon* dining hall. She is not economically in dire need. *I am committed to this work not so much for myself, for I actually have three grown-up children and a certain economic stability. I carry on the struggle because I want my people to have better living conditions and because I am angered by the oblivion and indifference of the authorities, and by their arrogance and abuse.*

THE SOLIDARITY OF ONE WOMAN

Maria Espichan no longer has to worry about her ten children because they are now grown up and going their own ways. At age 56, Maria thinks about the many destitute

people - 500 and sometimes 1,000 - who knock at the door of the *Lord of Miracles* dining hall, at Emancipacion Street. *I have seen some poor, very poor people. They need us and I pray for them. I believe in solidarity. If one day, just one day, we were to cut off breakfast or lunch, I am sure they would suffer from hunger. This is the reflection she shared with us while preparing an immense pot of soup, which was on that day's menu. Two hundred people had already lined up at the door for lunch and it was only 11 in the morning. Maria prayed that there would be enough for everyone, that the pot would be bottomless, that it might be larger than it actually was.*

WOMEN AMONG THEMSELVES

Lucero Rivas and Leonor Prado are legal counsellors of the *Well-Being* residence of Manuela Ramos, in Pamplona Alta. Every day they listen to stories that violate the dignity of women: ill-treatment, abandonment, sexual abuse. They have been serving in this type of work for five years and they still are very emotional about it. They say it was worse before; it even kept them awake at night.

Why are they doing this work? Leonor, 38, answered: *Out of sheer desire to help, to stand in solidarity and not to sit idly by.* She considers herself a happy woman because she has a wonderful husband and a 17-year-old daughter who causes her no problems. Lucero, 27, explained that she too wants to help the women of her community. But for her, there is

THE VIOLENCE IN HER EYES

She wants to be alone. In the daytime, she watches the river as her eyes wander through some long-gone memories. At night, she lights a candle and shuts her eyes. She speaks Quechua; she does not, she will not learn Spanish because she does not want to. Silence is the best thing there is when you have cried so much. Jesús Apuja of Ayacucho is 75 and carries scores of wounds in her heart.

Barrio Andino is the most destitute district of Callao. The houses are nothing but discarded material and scrap metal. There is no light, no drinking water, nothing. The only thing you come across is junk of all kinds and a menacing river. The people make a living selling junk. That is where Dona Jesús lives, with her old black hat, her country skirt and her

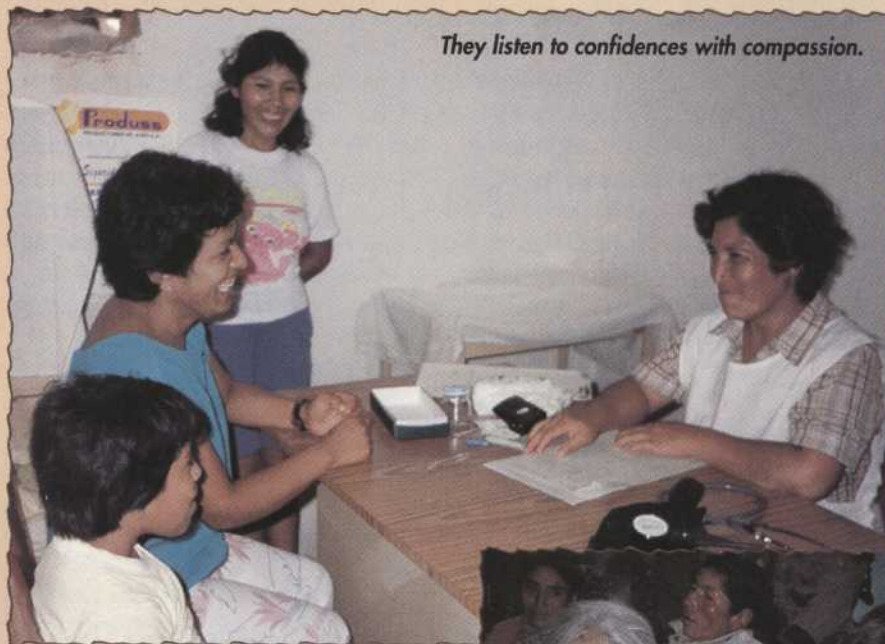
worn-out shoes, one blue and one black. She fondles two ducklings, glances at the junkies walking around and returns to her ducks.

The neighbours retraced Dona Jesús's daughter, a 29-year-old woman named Deufelia, who told the story: *I wanted to take her to live with me in Gambetta, but she refused; she wanted to be alone. Since we work in the dump sites, we built a house for her. She talks very little, almost not at all. She is traumatized; she has seen a lot of violence, a lot of blood. She is not afraid of the river; it is people she is afraid of.* Dona Jesús left Coracora, Ayacucho, in 1990. Deufelia, for her part, grew up with her older brother in Callao. Looking for a better future, they encountered misery and became dealers in junk of all kinds.

Dona Jesús insisted on staying in Ayacucho to the end. Is it out of stubbornness, courage or love of her land? She saw with her own eyes the cruel violence of the *Shining Path*. She refuses to describe these images of pain and blood. All she wants is silence, and according to what she tells Deufelia, she is at peace, almost happy. □

Excerpts from the newspaper
Diario La Republica -
Peru, 8 de marzo de 1998.
Translated from Spanish
by Murielle Dubé, M.I.C.

They listen to confidences with compassion.



something more: *My father abused us as children and teenagers; there were seven of us, brothers and sisters. It was very hard; I was traumatized by it... Then, I got married and after one year of marriage, my husband started beating me. I didn't know what to do until one day, by mere chance, I met counsellors of the group of Manuela Ramos. They taught me my rights; I learned how to defend myself, and now, I can assure you that I am happy. I have been married eight years. There is respect and we have two beautiful children.*



In each of them, one discovers a hidden story, a face that cannot lie.

The Struggles of Pilar Coll

By MARIA ARROYO, M.I.C.

In Peru, as everywhere in the world, there are women who launch major social movements and take on indisputable leadership in the struggle against poverty and terrorist violence. Pilar Coll is among them. Faced with situations of extreme violence, Pilar chose to defend life. Maria Arroyo, a Peruvian M.I.C., met with her. Here is how she summarizes the struggles of Pilar Coll for the defense of human rights.

Pilar Coll, a woman of Spanish origin, is the youngest of a family of seven children. Marked by the cruelty of the Spanish civil war which took away her father when she was barely seven, Pilar developed a humanitarian vocation rooted in her faith. She grew up to be a lawyer and a member of a secular Institute. She came to Peru in 1967 and was put in charge of the Social Service department of the Catholic University of Trujillo.

In 1976, she was asked to set up the Human Rights Service of the Episcopal Commission for Social Action (CEAS). This was at a time when there was a general strike. The management's reaction to the strike was immediate and repressive: massive lay-offs of union leaders and arbitrary arrest of more than 3,000 union members. Police stations and prisons were overcrowded. Many people were injured. Despite the insecurity of the area, Pilar realized the urgency to assist the people, to bring them food, blankets and medication. Also, to exert pressure for an end to torture, to awaken solidarity and to spread information, even if the media had been silenced. *The response of the Peruvian people is extraordinary, reported Pilar. It is extremely valuable and profoundly evangelical. Women gather in groups: they cook for the prisoners and for those in the hospitals, they visit and comfort them. And after the prisoners' release, the people celebrate, receive them in their homes and help them until they can return to their home towns. This has been an extremely difficult period for me, when the experience of God was altogether a political, human*

and Christian experience.

In the name of the Church and as a Christian, Pilar confronted danger, took on the defense of people's rights and accomplished things which no other institution could risk doing. She did not abandon those who were in danger, but accompanied them through this difficult situation. She was not afraid. But sometimes, she would rebel: *Why is there so much injustice, so much ill-treatment, so much contempt?* In 1988, Pilar became the first national coordinator for the defense of human rights in Peru. It was during a period of unprecedented terrorism in the district of Ayacucho. Many people of the rural area were reported missing. Who cared? Pilar listened to the cry of the families, and along with many

friends, became the voice of the voiceless denouncing both the *Shining Path* and the *Forces of Order* which imperiled the lives of thousands of people. Together with numerous Christians and other leaders, she assumed her duties with such courage and dignity that she became something of a myth in Peruvian society and in the Church of Peru for her promotion of human rights.

Now 69, the age of retirement, Pilar works in two maximum security prisons. With the CEAS pastoral team, she accompanies men and women prisoners. She wants to do this for as long as her strength will permit. The experience of Pilar reveals the important role of women in the defense of human rights, in the struggle for life! □



Pilar Coll listens to the cry of families.



Photo: E. Allary, M.I.C.

NEWSBRIEFS... FROM HERE AND ELSEWHERE

Photos: ICAM Alumnae



Sr. Guadalupe Sempio (4th r.)
and ICAM alumnae in Las Vegas;
below, with alumnae in Anaheim

PHILIPPINES-UNITED STATES

ALL IS GIFT!

BY GUADALUPE SEMPIO, M.I.C.

Immaculate Conception Academy of Manila (ICAM) welcomed the first of its many generations of students in 1947. Today, the school still gives priority to the Christian formation of its students in the elementary and secondary levels. Imbued with a strong sense of belonging and gratitude, graduates come together to renew bonds of friendship and to honour their Alma Mater. Sr. Guadalupe shares with us the blessings and joys of class reunions organized by ICAM alumnae residing in the United States.

It all started with an invitation from the 1963 High School class graduates of ICAM. The alumnae were celebrating their 35th year reunion in Las Vegas, Nevada, on May 28-31, 1998. Having been their teacher and school principal, I was requested to attend this gathering and at the same time, conduct an evangelization seminar to the group. What an opportunity to meet once again former students very dear to me! I was deeply touched by their gratitude and generosity and their desire to follow an evangelization seminar. Truly a lovely, unforgettable surprise gift from the Lord!

Such initiative of the '63 class triggered another gathering for the '67 to '74 graduates who met in Anaheim, California. They expressed deep appreciation and gratefulness to the M.I.C. Sisters and former teachers at ICAM. With



heartfelt pride and joy, I congratulated them for keeping the ideals of their Alma Mater and for their personal accomplishments. It was inspiring to witness their generous response to the appeal of Sr. Mila Gomez, M.I.C., school directress, for scholarship funds and pledges for the construction of a new school building.

Eleven members of the '63 class met in Las Vegas for the three-day evangelization seminar. Scripture texts were read, followed by the sharing of insights and lived experiences. I invited the group to offer their lives as thanksgiving to God and to give thanks for all His blessings. I also took the occasion to distribute copies of the MIC MISSION NEWS issue on Délia Tétreault. With joy, I spoke about my short visit to Montreal where I had the privilege of attending the Eucharistic celebration commemorating the proclamation of our Foundress as Venerable. My former students and I parted with a deepened awareness that together we can continue to build a community of faith and more actively carry out the mission bequeathed to us by Mother Délia: *to give God children who will also sing His goodness for ages to come!* □

MISSIONARY INTENTIONS

NOVEMBER 1998

That the phenomenon of the diffusion of sects may stimulate the local Churches to value more ardently the true gifts of the Spirit.

DECEMBER 1998

That those responsible for peoples and for international organizations protect human life and act with steadfast resolution against violence towards children.

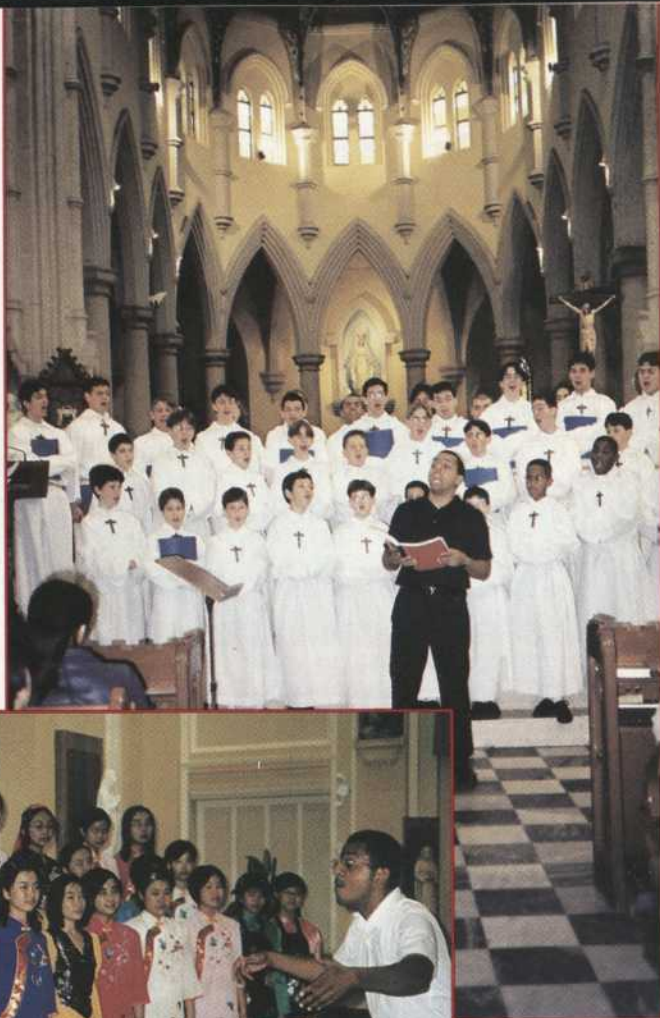
COMPLETE HARMONY

BY HUGUETTE TURCOTTE, M.I.C.

For young Canadians, Hong Kong is the Chinese city with an impressive forest of skyscrapers and is one of the most densely populated in the world.

For the youth of Hong Kong, Canada is the country with vast stretches of land, with cities that are green, spacious and good to live in. To see Hong Kong and to see Canada are two dreams that came true in 1998

for *Les Petits Chanteurs de Laval* and for the Good Hope School Choir, a choral group of the school directed by the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Hong Kong.



Hong Kong Cathedral.
Les Petits Chanteurs de Laval perform a few pieces from their repertoire.

Concert at Pont-Viau. Gregory Charles directs the Good Hope School Choir.

LES PETITS CHANTEURS DE LAVAL IN HONG KONG

Last February, Gregory Charles, the famous director of *Les Petits Chanteurs*, was welcomed in Hong Kong along with the 45 members of his choir. A whole spectrum of activities awaited them: concerts, tourist and cultural excursions, stays in Chinese families, and of course, opportunities to taste the renowned Cantonese cuisine.

The talents of Gregory Charles as a musician, singer and drama artist are well known in Quebec and in America, but they stood to be revealed in Hong Kong, and this happened indeed! Gregory conquered his audience, not only by his artistic talent, but also by the humour of his presentations and by his giftedness as a born communicator. On February 27 and 28, Delia Hall was filled with more than one thousand invited guests, teachers, parents and students. In the first part of the program, the choirs of Good Hope, the orchestra and the brass band executed a few pieces of their repertoire. In the second part, *Les Petits Chanteurs* took over with English and French songs,

including Negro spirituals in which the audience was made to participate, a particularly appreciated feature. For a finale, four mixed choirs sang *Let There be Peace on Earth*. Led by Gregory Charles, the hundreds of young people of Hong Kong and Montreal raised their voices as a moving prayer to God for peace in the world.

The young Canadians' tour ended with a concert in Shenzhen, a city of China located just beyond Hong Kong territory. It was truly an international cultural exchange in which the visitors from Canada, the students of Hong Kong and the hosts of Shenzhen were united in complete harmony.

THE CHOIR OF GOOD HOPE SCHOOL OF HONG KONG IN CANADA

Invited to visit *Les Petits Chanteurs*, 40 students from Good Hope School and their teachers, led by Sr. Mary Olga Lam, M.I.C., arrived in Montreal on June 24. Both guests and hosts were thrilled to see each other again. The Chinese girls were given hospitality in families while

in Montreal and in some ways discovered how people live in our country.

For Sr. Mary Olga, the concert of June 26 in the M.I.C. convent chapel was the realization of a plan she had been entertaining for a long time. Several of the elderly, retired or sick Sisters who were present that night once lived in Hong Kong or China. It was especially for these Sisters, who dedicated many years of their lives to the education of children in her country, that Sr. Mary Olga, in a gesture of gratitude, wanted to bring the Good Hope Choir to Montreal. The songs in Chinese, the costumes and the folk dances evoked numerous memories for our dear missionaries of China.

During their stay in Montreal, the students of Good Hope visited the most renowned tourist attractions of the city; they also went to the M.I.C. Mother House in Outremont, from which the first Sisters left for China in 1909, and later, those who settled in Hong Kong in 1927. On their return trip, after brief stopovers in Joliette, Quebec City and Toronto, the Good Hope Choir spent some time in Vancouver, where they had several opportunities to sing. In this city, as was the case in Toronto, former students of Good Hope who had emigrated to Canada, organized accommodations for them in families, as well as a program of artistic events and tours.

These mutual visits of young people of America and Asia were, as they put it, a unique opportunity to experience fraternity, openness to other cultures and enriching exchange. For each of them, Hong Kong and Canada bring back the memory of faces, names and friendly voices of people with whom it was great to sing. Everyone, hosts as well as guests, keep unforgettable memories of these international gatherings. Without doubt, they experienced once again that music is truly a universal language. □

WE ARE OFFERING...

A souvenir album **Make Life Sing** realized to pay homage to Délia Tétreault who was proclaimed venerable on December 18, 1997. Some one hundred participants from ten countries, mostly M.I.C. Sisters, share what has touched them and filled them with wonder in the life and spirituality of Délia Tétreault. 190 coloured pages with songs, prayers and poems, written in eight languages, *make life sing*.

An original way of keeping attuned to thanksgiving, to the joy and missionary ardour of Délia Tétreault, a woman with a heart as big as the world!

The album is available at \$30 + \$4 postage (in Canada)



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QC Canada
H7G 1A4

Telephone: (450) 663-6460

WE ARE LOOKING FOR...

For the centennial of foundation of our Institute in 2002, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception plan to publish **the history of the M.I.C. missions**. We would like to have on hand documents exchanged between our missionaries and the population in countries where we are. We would appreciate any travel accounts, letters, notes or souvenirs pertaining to the life of the M.I.C. Sisters.

We therefore solicit help from you - parents, friends and other people connected with us: employees past and present, former students and retreatants, volunteer workers in our sewing rooms,

priests and pastoral agents, members of religious communities, benefactors, collaborators to our magazine **THE PRECURSOR / MIC MISSION NEWS**, people associated to our Community (ASMIC), lay missionaries, co-workers in development projects.

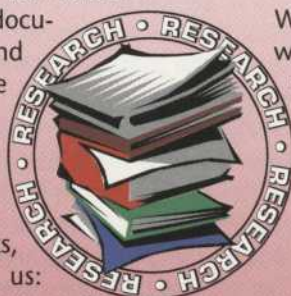
Whatever you can forward to us will be received with appreciation and gratitude. These documents will be returned to you if you so desire. Thank you for your assistance in the realization of this project.

Please contact:

Mireille Morin, M.I.C.
1, Saint Catherine Road, Apt. 807,
Montreal, QC H2V 1Z8

Tel.: 514-273-2588

E-mail: m.morinmic@sympatico.ca



In the Garden of God

*Parting here on earth
foreshadows a
rendez-vous in eternity*

Délia Tétreault, M.I.C.

Sister Jeanne d'Arc Nolin (Jeanne-d'Orléans)

Jeanne d'Arc was born February 21, 1915, at Notre-Dame-du-Chémin parish in Quebec City. As a young girl, she had occasions to meet the religious of our Community. Deeply impressed, she grew up with the desire to be a missionary in China. She was often sick and with the years, obstacles multiplied, making it difficult for her to realize her dream. Nevertheless, she obtained an elementary school teacher's diploma and asked to enter our Institute, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. She was admitted on August 8, 1935.

As a young religious, Sr. Jeanne worked for a few years in the promotion of our magazine *LE PRÉCURSEUR* and in our art studio at the Mother House. In 1947, she was assigned to the mission of Haiti. For almost 30 years, she taught in primary schools in several towns and villages in the country. Later appointed to the Normal

School of Cap-Haitien, she ardently dedicated herself to the training of well-prepared teachers. Wherever she went, she especially aimed at giving the Eucharistic Crusade all its spiritual significance and at spreading this youth movement to other schools of the villages. She also taught catechism to adults in view of training lay catechists to go out to the countryside.



In 1976, she returned to Canada definitely. The Word of God was her passion. Despite her poor health, she was always enthusiastic in organizing Bible study sessions and sharings for lay people and the M.I.C.s. Sr. Jeanne died in Pont-Viau on February 10, 1998, at the age of 82 years, having lived 62 years in the religious life.

Sister Alice Buteau (Marie-Esther)

On July 30, 1906, Alice was born in St-Honoré-de-Shenley, in the county of Beauce. After having worked in her father's general store, she entered our Institute, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, on August 8, 1927. Four years later, her sister Éva also joined our Community.



In 1931, Sr. Alice left for Manchuria, in the north of China. She spent one year in Fakou where she studied the language. Assigned to Szepingkai, she became formation mistress for the Chinese religious community founded by Bishop A. Lapiere: the Sisters of Our Lady of the Rosary. For 13 years, she was entrusted with the spiritual animation of the students, the postulants, the novices and the professed sisters. Then came the Japanese occupation. Sr. Alice and her companions received the order to stay at the bishop's residence. This was the start of a four-year internment where she would go without news from her home country or even concerning happenings in China. The scenery changed: American bombardments defeated the Japanese, then came the Communist takeover. The

Sisters had to take refuge in an air-raid shelter at the bishopric and through barbed wire, trenches and bombs, flee hastily to another shelter. From there, it was the exodus to the south of China. Due to the advance of the communists in this area, Sr. Alice stayed only 10 months in Suchow and returned to Canada in 1948.

Eight years later, she left for Taiwan to open a house in Taipei. Her knowledge of Mandarin and her experience in religious teaching greatly contributed to the growth of the existing group of Christians in the area. She remained 15 years in Taiwan, working in catechesis, in pastoral work at the parish and assured the administration of this new foundation. Returning to Canada definitely in 1972, she continued her mission in different community services. In 1993, Sr. Alice entered the Infirmary of Pont-Viau where she handed her soul over to God on March 3, 1998, at the age of 91 years, having lived 70 years in the religious life. For her family, her M.I.C. companions and friends in China, she was a gentle guide and a source of comfort.

Sister Denise Bélanger (Denise-de-Jésus)

Denise was born on December 4, 1931 at St-Aubert-de-l'Islet, in the Diocese of Ste-Anne-de-la-Pocatière. The eldest of a family of 12 children, she discovered her missionary vocation through her involvement with youth movements and her training as a teacher. Ardent, joyful and determined, she joined the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception on August 8, 1951.

In 1958, after several years of teaching and missionary animation, Sr. Denise left for Hong Kong. Gifted in learning languages, she applied herself to the study of both English and Mandarin. In Kowloon,

she taught at our primary school for boys where she later became the directress. These years were strongly marked with creativity, a preoccupation to inculcate the Christian faith and solidarity with the poor. She shared with the teachers her knowledge and vision of catechetical renewal to better adapt the Gospel message to the Chinese language and culture. She also helped refugees from China and other families in need. After her studies in catechetics in Canada and in the Philippines, her life was shaken. In Manila, in 1972, she was struck down by paralysis



just at the moment when she was ready to return to Hong Kong.

She thus returned to Canada and, after ten months of hospitalization, she went to live in Pont-Viau. She derived great benefit from the acquisition of a motorized chair which allowed her to turn towards others, especially the disabled. She kept a telephone hotline for people in distress. Fully conscious to the last day, after twenty-five years of struggles and suffering, Sr. Denise breathed her last on March 6, 1998. She was 66, having lived 46 years in the religious life.

Sister Marie-Ange Cadieux (Saint-Henri)

Marie-Ange was born on the 3rd of June 1903, in St-Roch-de-l'Achigan, in the county of l'Assomption. She made her profession in the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception on September 8, 1931.



In 1936, Sr. Marie-Ange left for Rome and lived in Monte Mario, a poor sector of the city where our sisters ran a little school. She prepared the needy children of the neighbourhood for their first Communion. Four years later, she and her companions had to face the hardships of World War II. At the request of Pope Pius XII,

they sheltered Jewish, Italian and Japanese families. Meanwhile, communication with America was impossible. Food rations were very limited. Sr. Marie-Ange knew bombings, sirens, and fear. During this difficult period, she became anemic and had to be hospitalized.

In 1943, the Americans and the Canadians came into the city. July 1944 marked the triumph of the French Canadian 22nd Regiment. Letters, food and clothing arrived from the Mother House and from the Sisters' families. In 1947, the community moved to Via Giacinto Carini, near the Vatican, and again started a kindergarten

for 400 children. Sr. Marie-Ange devoted herself to this service with love and generosity. Named superior in 1964, she was later charged with closing down this house which had become less necessary.

She returned to Canada in 1969 and provided different services in several houses of Montreal. In 1987, she went to stay in Pont-Viau. Her life overflowed with thanksgiving. She remarked to a companion: *If I do not see the sun tomorrow, you can thank the good God.* A few hours later, on the 13th of March 1998, she passed away peacefully at the age of 94 years, having lived 70 years in the religious life.

Sister Aline Ratel (Sainte-Aline)

Aline was born on February 11, 1916, in St-Lin-des-Laurentides. On August 8, 1934, she entered our Institute, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Ten years later, she welcomed with joy her young sister Renée, admitted as postulant in our Community.

As a young professed sister, Sr. Aline devoted much of her time to the promotion of LE PRÉCURSEUR and to mission animation in the schools. For several years, she travelled through the parishes of the diocese of Rimouski where she made many friends. Her presence in their midst brought comfort and peace. Confident in her prayers, many of

them would phone her from neighbouring parishes to recommend their special intentions to her. She shared her vision of faith and prayed with them. Her visits in the schools awakened the sense of mission and encouraged vocations.

Sr. Aline left for Japan in 1949. That was the period after the war, marked by reconstruction of the country and by poverty. After taking time to learn the language and the culture of the country, she gave piano lessons with success to pupils of our elementary school in Wakamatsu. She then provided the same service in Koriyama. In 1953, she



had to return to Canada for health reasons. She performed several community tasks in our houses in Quebec, and then taught music in Perth, NB. Always ready to offer her services, she spent the last years of her active life in Pont-Viau, where she attended to the sewing room and visited the elderly and the disabled. The spirituality of Saint Therese of Lisieux inspired Sr. Aline's life and gave her a great missionary zeal. She entered eternal life on March 21, 1998, at the age of 82 years, having lived 63 years in the religious life.

Jeanne Guinois, M.I.C.

Missionaries in Chiloé

Gisèle Lachapelle, M.I.C. knows from within the life of the Diocese of Ancud, Chiloé, in the south of Chile. Having worked successively in family catechesis and in missionary promotion, she has been for 24 years, the secretary of Bishop Juan Luis Ysern of this diocese. In an interview, she describes the missionary situation of the Church of Ancud. In turn, Julia Barria Cardenas and Inès Vidal tell us how they are deeply involved in the mission of their Church.

Photo: S. Garneau, M.I.C.



Gisèle Lachapelle, M.I.C.



Gisèle, sometimes we hear about the Diocese of Ancud, and sometimes the diocese of Chiloé. Are these one and the same reality?

Yes and no. Let me explain. The Diocese of San Carlos de Ancud comprises all of the Chiloé Archipelago as well as a major part of the civil province of Palena and the Guaitecas Archipelago. Ancud is the episcopal city, that is, the site of the cathedral and of the bishop's residence. It is located in the Chiloé Archipelago. That is where I work.

Tell us something about this diocesan Church where you have been involved for almost 30 years.

With pleasure, so much more so since the Church of Ancud is in a special missionary situation! It faces some grave difficulties of communication due to the geography of the diocese. A part of it is insular, and the other part, Palena, is located in the Andes Cordillera with high mountains and deep valleys. Besides, the severe climate of the south, with long, windy and rainy winters, accounts for roads that are impassable at times, and for rough seas.

Isolation is particularly felt in the rural communities. The organization of the pastoral activities rests on the formation and commitment of lay leaders of Christian communities and on itinerant missionary teams.

Is this type of pastoral organization, dependent on the laity, a novelty in Chiloé?

It is rather a rich tradition inherited from the early Jesuit missionaries. When they first began evangelizing these southern regions, the Jesuits formed Christian communities with structures that are still suitable today... This type of organization is very much like the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) of our times. Since 1621, from generation to generation, men and women from among the people - the fiscales and the catechists - have been faith leaders and caretakers of the places of worship. When you think that the diocese has 24 parishes, only 12 of which have a resident priest, and that every parish has 10 or 12 chapels! The church of Chiloé depends heavily and with reason on this kind of lay participation and strives to increase the mission awareness of the baptized. This is very important for evangelization.

Besides evangelization, are there any new needs and challenges for the church of Ancud?

I am tempted to say that anything which has to do with human beings automatically concerns evangelization. These days, with the intensive exploitation of the resources of the region, of the sea and the forest, the quality of life of the population is jeopardized and sometimes undermined. This new context demands various forms of commitment by the Church: the defense of human rights, social assistance, development and others.

How about the participation of women in the life of this missionary Church?

The women of Chiloé take a very active part in the life of their neighbourhood and village. They are present in various organizations able to change their environment. The same is true in terms of the Church. When I think of the commitment of women in the Church of Ancud, one familiar face comes to mind, that of Inès Vidal. Her spiritual experience and her manner of commitment are very much like those of many women of Chiloé.

The greatness of Inès comes from the simplicity and depth of her life. She goes about quietly, doing good. She has an apostolic soul and her heart is on fire. Straightforward and simple, she is close to people on a daily basis. She is sensitive to the suffering of others and is ever looking for ways to relieve the miseries

she comes across. She meets with her God in the silence of the countryside and in the beauty of nature. A woman of prayer, she knows how to combine faith and life. Inès is a member of the pastoral council of her parish in Ancud. Her specific commitment is to visit the chapels of the parish - 46 in all - to help

the parishioners form their own pastoral councils. The Church of Ancud is rich with the participation of women like Inès, who at different levels of responsibility, share their deep faith and their daring missionary spirit. □

Comments gathered by Céline Gauvin, M.I.C.

In Charge of Lliuco

By JULIA BARRIA CARDENAS

My name is Julia Barria Cardenas. I live in Lliuco, a chapelry of the central parish of Quemchi, Chiloé. The people of Lliuco, approximately twelve hundred families, are mostly farmers. In the summer, their livelihood consists in gathering sea algae. The women, besides their domestic chores, do handicraft work. Lliuco is divided into five sectors and I work in the Villa sector, which is the largest and most densely populated.

Around 85% of the people participate in the life of the community, at least at the important moments. There is strong solidarity in our community, especially in times of difficulty, trial and grieving.

My involvement in the Church dates back to the time of my first Communion and Confirmation. I felt called, then, to get involved in my community. At age 15, I became a catechist. I wanted to accompany other young people in their life of faith, especially in their preparation for Confirmation. This mission continued for 20 years.

As the years went by, my participation in the life of the community became more intense. In 1989, I became a *fiscale* with the

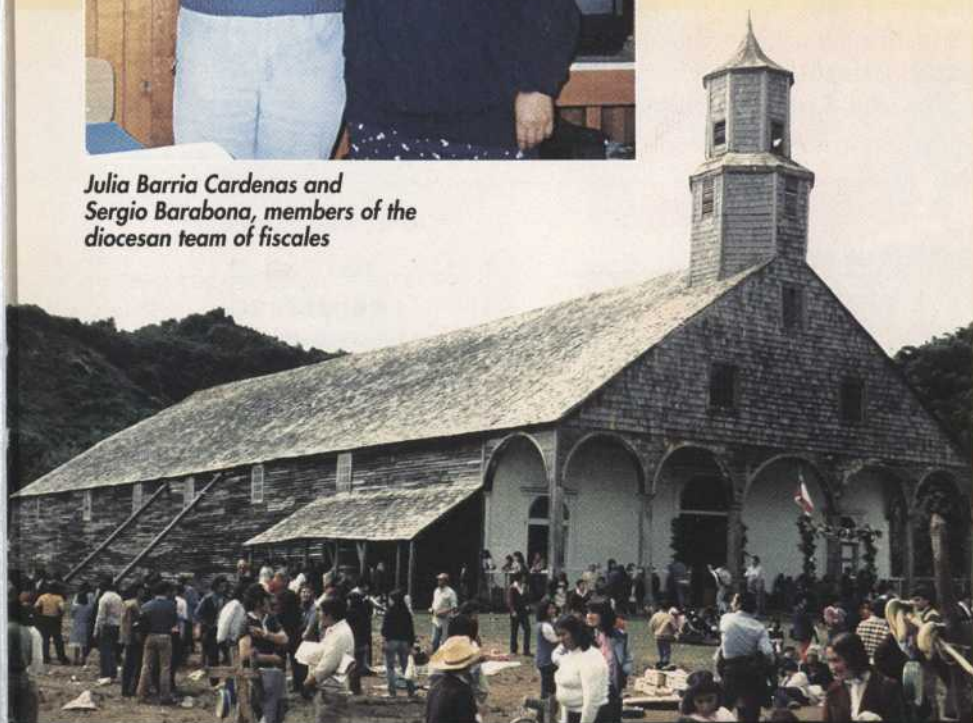
mission to coordinate the life of the community of Lliuco. It is a very important ministry to support the faith of the people. As a *fiscale*, I am in charge of bringing the people together and striving with them to know Jesus better and to live according to His teaching. Catechesis, visits to the sick, preparation for the Sacraments, accompaniment of families in mourning, celebration of the Word on Sunday when there is no priest - these are the peak moments of our gatherings. In 1995, I was delegated by the *fiscales* of my district to become a member of the Diocesan Team, and I was confirmed in this mandate by Bishop Juan Luis Ysern.

Year after year, I take part in the study days prepared for the *fiscales* of the diocese. The Bible removes the scales from my eyes, opens me up to the light and makes me savour the taste of God's Word, which is my strength. I try to serve the people of my community as well as those of neighbouring communities. Sometimes it is difficult and costly to live my mission as a *fiscale*, but in time, a core group of people comes together; they in turn work together and become Church, People of God. I find great support in my family. We pray together and try to create good relationships with the people around us. Welcoming and giving to each person generously, whoever he or she is, without distinction, this is the service I try to provide with love. I know that the Lord Jesus accompanies me on my journey and I want to give Him thanks for all that I have been able to do with Him. □

Photos: M.I.C. Chile



Julia Barria Cardenas and Sergio Barabona, members of the diocesan team of *fiscales*



The Church of Quinchao, built during the 18th century, is a popular pilgrimage place in Chiloé.



After two years of studies, a diploma in Catechesis for each team member.
Inés Vidal (1st row, 1st r.)

A Novel Experience

BY INÉS VIDAL

My name is Inés Vidal, and my husband's, Harry Yunge. We have two children. The older one, Romy, 29, completed a course in business administration. As a catechist, she is also a group leader of *Youth without Frontiers* and *Missionary Childhood*. She has just returned from Peru after working two years as a lay missionary in connection with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Our other daughter, Greta, 23 years, in her third year of studies in social services is a catechist in the small community of Coaquio located about

20 kilometers from Ancud. Like Romy, Greta works with the *Missionary Childhood*.

Our little family lives on a modest farm in Ancud. Harry and I are involved in pastoral work in our parish, which has a resident priest and 46 chapels, 38 of which are in rural areas. Each of these little communities is structured in a way that fosters the growth of faith. Some people are in charge of spiritual leadership: the *fiscal* and his assistant, the *sotafiscal*; the catechists, and a *patron* in charge of the

material maintenance of the chapel and of preparing the patronal feast. Delegates of various organizations - small farmers, youth movements, sports clubs, etc., are included in the group.

In Chiloé, the pastoral priority at present is to strengthen these leadership teams in their mission, and thus to form dynamic pastoral councils. For three years now, I have been among those mandated for this work. From May to November 1996, my husband and I, as well as two other lay people and Sr. Thérèse Lebeau, M.I.C., visited several rural communities. This has not always been easy and we did not succeed everywhere. However, the distant location of these communities, the bad weather, the pitiful state of the roads and the apathy of some people did not dampen our courage. To date, seven chapels have their own pastoral councils.

I must say that the special training given by the Diocese of Talca has helped me enormously. Our two meetings per month for two years enabled me to study various catechetical themes. With Sr. Thérèse Lebeau as facilitator and teacher, these meetings provided me opportunities for renewal. About fifteen women of all ages took part in this experience. My commitment in the Church of Chiloé gives new meaning to my life. Harry and I are truly happy to do this missionary work and to make God's love for us better known. □



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

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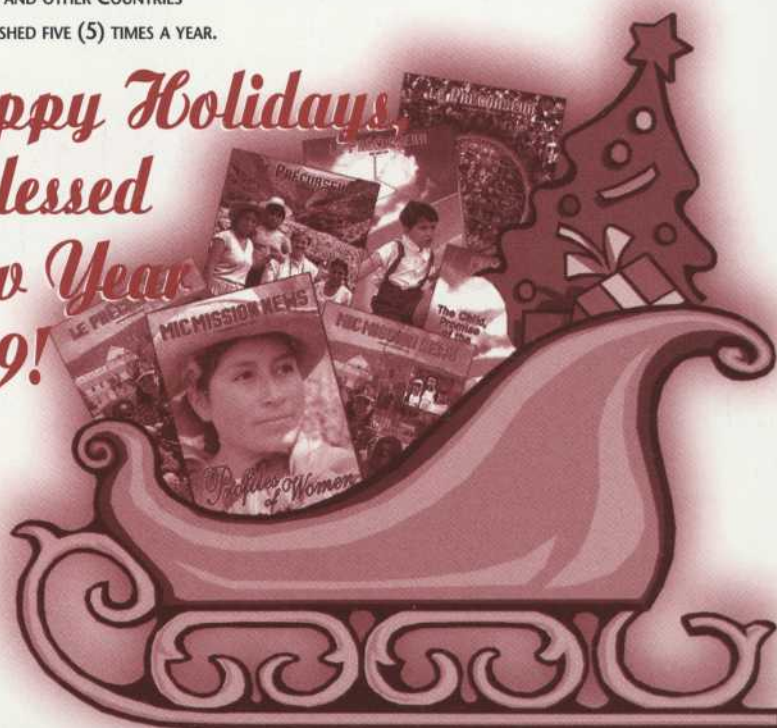
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on all correspondence.**



Cipriana Ccahuana, M.I.C., Peruvian

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

I CROSSED THE FRONTIER

*I crossed the frontier loaded with dignity.
In my bag I bring home a lot of things from this land of rain.
I bring home the memory of a thousand years . . .
The scents of spring,
the fragrance of the grass, the caress of the corn field,
the brightly coloured sash of childhood ...
I crossed the frontier ... Tomorrow, I shall come back .*

**Rigoberta Menchu of Guatemala,
Nobel Prize for Peace, 1992**

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THE RELIGIOUS OR LAY MISSIONARY LIFE?
DO YOU WISH TO DISCERN THE LORD'S CALL WITHIN YOU?
CONTACT THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.