

SINCE 1923

MIC MISSION NEWS

VOL. 32, No. 4 | OCTOBER • NOVEMBER • DECEMBER 2005

IN FOCUS

ART AND SPIRITUALITY

SPIRITUAL LIFE

MISSION AND JUSTICE: A PROPHETIC DIRECTION

LAY MISSIONARIES

I FOUND THE HUNGER FOR GOD

PUBLICATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

A Word from the Editor

You have noticed no doubt that *MIC Mission News* has grown in size! Our intention is twofold: to make the works of the MIC's known and to nourish the missionary commitment of people here, introducing them to witnesses engaged in various places in our society.

Since one transformation never comes alone, the magazine also has been beautifully made over. We anxiously await your reactions!

Last year saw the sad spectacle of many wars and natural disasters. We hope that Christmas brings a little peace in our world, so ravaged by these conflicts and catastrophes.

May the Peace and Joy of Christ be with you all!

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Art that Contributes to Being



Yves Demers Paris

Marie-Eve Homier

AN ARTIST'S WORK is the meeting place of two creative and free impulses: that of God and that of the craftsman, because human beings are created in the image of God. To understand the role of spirituality in art, we must distinguish between art and entertainment. *Art is a bridge between man and God*, said André Malraux. Some of us have an artist's vocation, in the strict sense of the term, but we all can experience artistic creativity as a way of life that unifies the self.

By working the material—word, sound, image, color, light, or movement—artists take the experience as far as they and their material can go. However, through patient and unrelenting daily work, they manage to transcend their limits and that of their material. Then, from the heart of their pursuit, wonder gushes out and opens them up to encounter the universe, others, and God. This relationship conveys to them their real uniqueness that is expressed in their works. Their artistic expression becomes a true expression of the sacred, and the work born of their being becomes a place for others to encounter the spiritual. It touches us and makes us touch the inexpressible; it connects us to a reality that transcends us. It does not matter whether or not this work depicts a religious subject, or whether or not the artist who produces it is a believer: God reveals himself there. He is present in any form of art whenever it is a pursuit of beauty and truth.

*Beauty will save the world*¹, wrote Dostoyevsky. Artists are sowers of a certain kind of beauty, not only external beauty, but one that is drawn from God. They offer to the world *an art that contributes to being*². Aware that their artistic approach must be filled with a pursuit of the spiritual, they go before our society: without a profound spiritual experience, we cannot live, open ourselves up and take up our challenges. Our society is built on doing, on control; it is wounded by the habits and conditionings that enslave it. *Art can give us back the desire to live, the desire for God and our dignity, now threatened by the absence of internalization, integration, creativity, uniqueness, generosity. Art is a profound part of the opening of our being, of the gift of self*³, of our going beyond all our limitations and of reaching interior freedom.

Witness what some artists are expressing to you in this issue of *MIC Mission News*, each in his or her own way.

Dear Readers:

This column belongs to you. Share your impressions and comments with us in order to further our reflection. Make yourselves heard!

MIC Mission News does not publish unsigned letters. We reserve the right to abridge letters.

Margaret Highley, Cornwall, Ontario

Dear Sister Antoinette,
You recently spoke at St-François-de-Sales church, in Cornwall, Ontario, regarding your missionary work in far away places. I found the July-August-September 2005 magazine, which you provided, very informative as I wasn't aware that other Sisters besides the Scarboro Mission ones were also ministering in foreign countries. May God bless you Sisters for all the joy you have and are bringing to these people!

Marcelle C., Valleyfield, Quebec

My husband passed away last September. He so loved your magazine! When *Great Love Awaits Me!* was published in 2003, he was so stirred up by this reading he made me promise that this page would be read out loud at his funeral. That's just what happened! My son read it: an unforgettable page... Thank you, thank you.

Charles et Cécile Beaulieu, Quebec City

We have been subscribers of *MIC Mission News* for many years. Not judging the content of this missionary magazine until now, we have noticed with renewed interest a wind of rejuvenation which totally honours those crafting this renewal: with well documented, thorough articles that cleverly treat current problems (i.e. ecology). By the way, the humorous anecdotes are greatly appreciated. As attentive readers of *MIC Mission News*, we hope this magazine has a long life and we will continue reading it with increasing pleasure every time. Keep up this pace for the benefit of all your readers!

Following the previous issues, we have received a great number of comments, all very interesting. Thank you very much! Let's keep up this edifying exchange! Keep making yourselves heard!

¹ In *The Idiot*, Part III, ch. 5

²⁻³ "À l'ombre du divertissement", Daniel LeBlond, *Relations*, January-February 2002, p. 9

Like Mary, Giving a Prophetic Direction TO MISSION AND JUSTICE



Devoted specifically to overseas missions, the MIC Institute has been placed, since its founding, under the patronage of Mary, the first missionary and the apostle par excellence. Inspired by her role in the advent of Salvation and by the praise that flowed from her heart, we can discern the contemporary face of mission, one that is embodied in the world of today. Is mission outdated? It's more current than ever!

by Benoît Fortin, O.F.M. CAP.

A former college professor, the author works today in groups that fight for social housing and in a centre for battered women. A contributor to magazines concerning spirituality, justice and insight, he is also preparing a book inspired by the Psalms, **Prayer in the living flesh of humanity**, written with battered women and homeless people.

Photograph: Anonymous

THE STATE of the world and the Church recalls the deep origins of our faith within this new culture. The Women's Global Charter for Humanity, like the recent World Forum of Porto Alegre, Brazil in January 2005, sounded cries of alarm and summoned the world to a new way of life: *This Women's Global Charter for Humanity calls on women and men and all oppressed peoples and groups of the planet to proclaim, individually and collectively, their power to transform the world and radically change social structures with a view to developing relationships based on equality, peace, freedom, solidarity and justice* (Women's Global Charter for Humanity). Our Christian life must be a part of this **great movement of resistance and alternatives** to defend life on earth and to turn

things around, because a different world is possible. Like Mary, we feel sent to build a world of justice and peace.

Like Mary, we are rooted in the revolutionary movement of God and Life.

Mary, as a woman faithful to the God of her fathers and mothers, was part of God's great plan of Life. She knew that her God hears the cries of his people and shows his true face when he releases the slaves, that he hurts with our suffering like a mother in labour. He is present in a special way where life is threatened, but also where life is being transformed. Mary also knew, as the **Prophets** had revealed, that true worship is determined by compassion towards the weak and by working for justice.

Mary's life was changed by Jesus who made himself **SOLIDARITY** in the flesh and blood of history with what humanity suffers, loves and hopes: *And the Word was made flesh and he lived among us* (John 1:14). By proclaiming the Beatitudes and the coming of his Kingdom, Jesus announced that the life of the poor was going to change. Jesus lived with the marginalized, men and women, going as far as being identified with them, and his plan of life in abundance ran up against the powerful ones who assassinated him. Jesus' disciples, going against the current, were ready to risk their lives so that the Kingdom would come with the power of his Spirit.

Mary sings of change to benefit the poor.

Mary celebrates the world of justice that is coming. Through her prophetic song of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Mary was in keeping with the prophetic tradition of the people of God. Mary is a model for her awareness of the signs of the times, for her inner self, holding all these things deep in her heart. The Magnificat proclaims that she is rooted in her history and that she has a burning passion for God who makes great things for us, but who upsets the powerful in their complicity: *We take Mary as a guide and with her we sing the Magnificat like a prophetic warning to the proud of heart, the powerful and the wealthy who do not want to hear the cry of the poor* (Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C., Superior General, November 10, 2004).

At the foot of the cross of crucified humanity, Mary, Mother of Sorrows, is constantly in visitation so she might recognize the signs of the Kingdom. In her Magnificat, she sings her wonder before the changes of history. It is the song of the prophetess with a penetrating insight that sees the coming of the Kingdom of God in the lifting up of the poor and in the arrival of justice. The canticle of Mary was considered in some countries to be a dangerous song that encouraged revolution. A socially committed, female theologian from Brazil said admiringly: *The song of Mary, the Magnificat, is a battle song; it is a song about the struggle of God engaged in human history, the struggle for the establishment of egalitarian relationships, for deep respect for each person in whom the divine dwells... The song of Mary is the*

"plan of the Kingdom of God", just like the one that Jesus read in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-21). Mary's labour has a collective significance in which we all are implicated... It brings about the birth of God in humanity (Gebara and Lucchetti, "Maria" in *Mysterium Liberationis*, TI, p. 607).

The Women's Global Charter for Humanity is like a secular version of the Magnificat of the women of today who condemn and proclaim: *We represent over half of humanity. We give life, we work, love, create, struggle, and have fun... With this Women's Global Charter for Humanity and our upcoming actions, we reaffirm that another world is possible, a world filled with hope and life that is truly a fine place to live. We proclaim our love of the world, to its diversity and its beauty* (Women's Global Charter for Humanity).

Like Mary, we must offer
hopeful alternatives to our times.
A new world is possible!

Working in the prophetic movements

Following Mary, our action and our prayer must be **part of the Holy Spirit's ongoing plan. Where are the promises of the Magnificat currently happening?** We must open our eyes like Mary to see the Magnificat being accomplished. Every country, every village must also find a way of their own through their actions to make the Magnificat happen. Things are already happening. These new movements proclaim that the state of inequity is unacceptable and that a new world is possible.

Like Mary, celebrating the present

Like Mary, we must offer hopeful alternatives to our times. This commitment, following the example of Mary, demands **incarnation, information, analysis and solidarity**. The people who killed Jesus made a pretence of their good practices and big prayers, but they missed the essence of the Gospel. We must accept the social, emotional, economic and political consequences of our choice to follow Jesus to the end, against the current.

THE CANTICLE OF MARY

(Magnificat)
(Luke 1: 46-55)

My soul proclaims the
greatness of the Lord
And my spirit exalts in God
my Saviour;
Because He has looked upon
his lowly handmaid.
Yes, from this day forward,
all generations will call me
blessed,

For the Almighty has done
great things for me.
Holy is His name!
And His mercy reaches from
age to age
for those who fear Him.

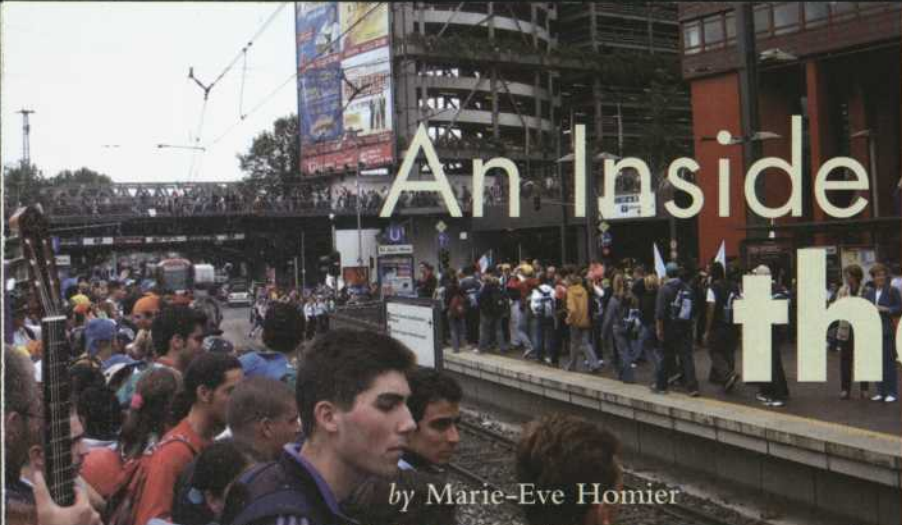
He has shown the power of
His arm,
He has routed the proud of
heart.
He has pulled down princes
from their thrones
And exalted the lowly.

The hungry He has filled with
good things,
The rich sent empty away.
He has come to the help of
Israel, His servant,

Mindful of His mercy –
according to the promise He
made to our ancestors –
of His mercy to Abraham and
to his descendants forever.

Glory to the Father, and the
Son, and the Holy Spirit,
For ever and ever. Amen.





An Inside Look at the WYD

by Marie-Eve Homier

What a shock I had when I returned home and noticed the huge divide between the major media coverage and my own experience in Germany!

A LOT OF INK was spilled on the political aspects connected to the role of the papacy. However, the heart of a World Youth Day (WYD) experience is the spiritual adventure of each pilgrim. But that's not what sells a big national newspaper or the television nightly news!

We Came to Worship Whom?

It is as if there had been two WYD's: one for the young people, with the theme, "We have come to worship Him," (Matthew 2:2) inspired by the three magi who followed the star... and another, very different, for the 7000 journalists on location. The journalists only spoke about the last four days, when the Pope was present, sticking to covering his activities. But how much did they grasp, what did they experience of the true WYD?

With their press passes, they ran to the "events" organized specifically for them and sought above all to determine whether the operation were a success or a failure for the Pope. However, the young Catholics of the world did not come to Germany to put Benedict XVI to the test! In spite of the cameras focused on him, the Pope always directed the young people towards Christ, in his messages of hope, his calls for the constant conversion of their hearts, his praise for the joy of being Christian.

Far from comprising a monolithic group, the pilgrims had **very diverse reasons and motivations** for taking part in WYD. Some had come to meet the Pope, but most just wanted to experience what previous pilgrims had talked about with such enthusiasm.



A Pilgrimage, a Retreat

On the ground, the pilgrims experienced an adventure of a great physical, emotional and spiritual intensity. These difficulties forced them to leave their comfort zone, their habits, what is familiar to them. They were therefore better disposed to meet Christ and to be more present to God. Joseph, 19 years old, looks on the bright side: *After all, that's what it is, a pilgrimage! In tough times, God gives us the opportunity to grow with the help of his Grace.*

The WYD offered a time out, a space conducive to serious reflection on their life choices and their commitment to the Church. *The Lord makes himself very present to me*, affirms Genevieve, 27 years old. *From the very first days, new paths of light have opened up in me. What was a crack became a breach, what was a breach became wide open... and the Light bursts out from all parts. It's amazing! I don't want it to stop. I want more!*

For others, this interval becomes a renewal, a place of healing, a place to overcome adversity, spiritual nourishment that feeds personal growth. *I found what would guide me in life*, confides Joseph. *Real freedom lies especially in my confidence in God and my willingness to do what is good for me and for others. What a great opportunity to have faith in Christ! It is a huge gift from God, a gift that gives me my life. I also understood, by meeting other young people and while taking part in various forums, that each of us holds a part of the Truth. That's why it's important to communicate, exchange and gather together.*

Opening Up to Others

The organizers grouped the pilgrims according to their language and their home diocese, which made getting around the city on public transport, distributing food, allocating places to stay, etc., much easier.

These constraints were greatly beneficial. The **group experience** led to a greater awareness of ourselves and God. It emphasized others' weaknesses... and our own! *It was abrasive!* admits Christopher, 20 years old. *It made us grow on the human level. Our nerves were on edge, and morale too sometimes, but meeting and talking with young people from other countries and other groups eased our pains and our troubles, our fatigue and discomfort. Because they welcomed each other, little by little the group became a circle of friends where respect, listening and mutual aid laid the basis for human and spiritual growth.*

A Great Celebration of the Catholic Faith

The event was built in two stages. The WYD began with the Days of Encounter, a welcoming week in the dioceses of the host country. The objective was to live, talk and pray with families active in their parishes. The Germans accommodated the pilgrims with much warmth, kindness, and generosity: hospitality that was greatly appreciated by all.

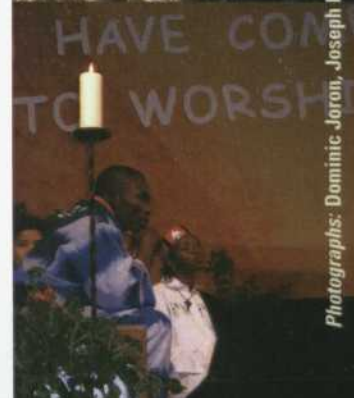
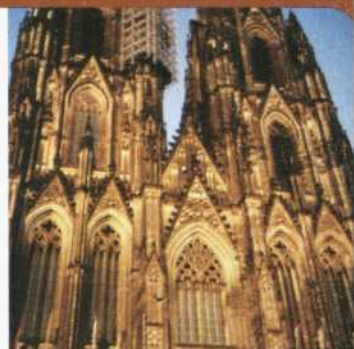
The second week, everyone headed to Cologne, Bonn and Düsseldorf... where the invasion paralyzed these cities completely. There was a flood of people, friendly and enthusiastic, but noisy and somewhat undisciplined... Variable weather, marginal living conditions, different food, fatigue, discomfort... all at an alarming pace. World Youth Day is truly an extreme sport!

At the heart of these days in Cologne was the wonderful **cathedral**. It was so moving to step in and to lay down our prayer where, for centuries, millions of other pilgrims had done the same! To touch the walls built of stone and prayers... and miracles: during the Second World War, this architectural jewel survived the bombs that completely demolished everything around it.

The ultimate finale was the **famous vigil**. It was a breathtaking experience! On the way, the pilgrims converged into a river of pedestrians and flags as far as the eye could see. At the end of the procession, a gigantic refugee camp, but without despair and tents! It was a time for meeting people, conversations and sharing, in spite of a threatening sky... When the Pope arrived in the evening, the atmosphere became prayerful and happy, almost silent. Imagine the quasi palpable prayers of more than one million people!

A Space of Evangelization and Communion for the Young People of the Whole World

Conceived in part as a place for teaching, the WYD sometimes resembles a huge classroom with the many morning catecheses, each one before thousands of young people from various countries. But the WYD is not limited to a one-way communication from the institutional Church to the pilgrims. In the afternoon, the Youth Festival presents hundreds of activities organized by and for the young people of the world: shows, conferences, panel discussions, debates, exhibits, prayer activities, adoration (since it was the theme!) and much more.



Photographs: Dominic Joron, Joseph Morin, Christophe Dick, Alain Mongeau, Marie-Eve Homier

Everywhere, **it was a celebration**, pure joy: the heady joy of hundreds of thousands of young people gathered because of Christ, for Christ and around Christ. In trains so crammed that passengers were lying on the racks with the luggage, they sang their heads off with praises and hallelujahs, to the amazement of the German passengers. There were national rallying cries too, and even some for soccer. What if the train didn't come? We spent the time doing the "wave" on the station platform. *When we are 800 000 making a pilgrimage, when we realize that, after all, we are not alone, the pride of being a Christian goes through the roof!* rejoices Gabriel, 24 years old. Taking part in an international spiritual event as intense as the WYD solidifies the faith and gives courage to young people who have had enough of being put on trial because they are believers. They want to live their faith and shout for joy.

Seen from the outside, the World Youth Day could be a very impressive "Catholic Woodstock", a mega event... But experienced from within, it was something else: the concerns of young people today are not the same as those of their parents. *The past does not interest them, notes Cardinal Daneels of Belgium. 20 years ago, young people were focused on what didn't work. Today, they say: "We know what doesn't work. Tell us how to move forward." They are much less negative. And they are thirsty for content. They have a tremendous need for spirituality.*

The great diversity within this event of global scale showed the young people the **universality of the Church**, united by the mystery of prayer and gathered by the powerful magnetism of Christ. To pray the Our Father with a million people, each in his or her own language, but all at the same time... that really gives you the shivers! In the same way, the songs of Taizé, internationally known, transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. *I had never before sensed so clearly the role that I play in the Church, says Joseph. I am in communion above all with Christ, but also with others, sharing the same faith and a thousand other things.*

A Celebration of Solidarity

One particularly moving characteristic and a distinctive mark of the WYD of

Cologne, was the **reconciliation** achieved between **people** and among the **Christian denominations**. 60 years ago, the same month of August saw the end of a long world war. In this country where some of the young people's grandparents were part of the war, young pilgrims from all over the world celebrated, praised, and adored, side by side, the breadth of God's love and mercy, His promise of forgiveness and His peace to the world.

For the German people, so devastated by History and divided by religion, to become hosts to all these nations, to welcome all these young people in jubilation, to see the flags of more than 160 countries waving along the Rhine, what a balm on their wounds! It was a tremendous step forward that settles the past.

Spiritual life is so rich! exclaims Melanie, 26 years old. *It fills our hearts with the light of God and allows us, in turn, to love and welcome the next person, especially those who have rejected us or that we have rebuffed. God gives us the power and the love to get past the wounds of History. When one has a heart filled with God, there is no barrier, no resentment that is an obstacle to the river of Life that unites humanity.*

A way to renew the Church

Now that they're back, the experience continues. They are bearing the fruits of the WYD of Cologne in their own communities, everywhere in the country.

For the young pilgrims, it will not be easy to keep the "sacred fire" burning on their return. They will have to be supported and surrounded by their Christian community. If there are any WYD pilgrims in your parish, ask them to share their experiences! They will be doing a service to their local Christian community by breathing into it the fire and enthusiasm that moves them... and you will do them a service, because **sharing a powerful experience is the most effective way to maintain it** and make it grow.

What will be the ripple effects over the months to come? It all depends on what these young people do with it... and how they are received in their Christian communities. Because a Christian alone, is not a Christian! The WYD is experienced by young people, but it concerns the whole Church, all generations, all the nations put together.



Next meeting: WYD 2008 in Sydney, Australia!

An Epic Adventure of the Heart

For young people who want to experience a social action project, while getting to know a new culture, the MIC's have offered a five-week training course with missionaries around the world for the last 12 years. Marie-Chantale reports on her experience during the summer of 2005.

by Marie-Chantale Roy

¡HASTA MAÑANA! The last words of little Angelo will remain etched in my memory a long time. Since he had begun to know me better, he bid me leave with a cheery "Goodbye!" The love and confidence of Angelo and his friends transformed me! But let me tell you how I first met them.

For a number of years, I had dreamed of going abroad for a humanitarian work project. The aspects of sharing, faith, communal living, of reaching out to others, of volunteering with children in an orphanage and the length of the commitment persuaded me to go with the MIC's.

During ten preliminary meetings with Jeannine Bélair, M.I.C., I got to know Élizabeth and Stéphanie, my partners in this mission. Together, we learned about Bolivia, our destination. In addition, we were given tools to resolve the conflicts inherent in group living, to make free and informed decisions, to be integrated into the milieu where we would be immersed, etc.

Last summer, after a year of preparation, we finally flew to Cochabamba, a town of 600,000 people, located at an altitude of 2558 m. We stayed there five weeks, working at the *Salomon Klein* orphanage, which accommodates about 150 children from birth to five years. Each of us was assigned a group of orphans. Every day, we helped the women there do their various chores: clean the floors, wash the dishes, fold the linen, dress the children, tie their laces, etc. Most of all, we made sure to play with the children, to stimulate

them, to be with them.

Time took on a new meaning. Quite simply, we were there to give. Being came before appearance, efficiency, or productivity. I discovered the immense capacity of these children to give love. I surprised myself by being able to give so much love to them. Despite all that, spending our days at *Salomon Klein* was no easy job. Most of the orphans expressed a great need for affection and attention. The oldest were wary of passing volunteers. Not to mention the cries, quarrels, bites, colds, stomach flus and lice outbreaks!

We could always count on our priceless leader: Murielle Dubé, M.I.C. For several years, she has accompanied groups like ours. To live with her and her associates allowed us to get to know the daily life of the religious. The spirit of fraternity that reigned in the house really touched me, as did the mutual respect and the *joie de vivre* that were expressed in all they did. Meeting the many volunteers, in Cochabamba and elsewhere, reinforced my conviction that each of us is capable of a great gift of self. One of the most beautiful aspects of this experience was the friendship and concord that Élizabeth, Stéphanie and I maintained. The concepts of responsibility and commitment also took on new meaning for me: they are at once easier and more important than before.

I will probably never see little Angelo and his friends again. It broke my heart to leave them, not knowing how to explain to them that I would not be coming back. These little angels will always remain close to me, in my memories and my heart. Was this a short and sweet trip to Bolivia? No, it was an epic adventure of the heart, of life, love, giving and faith.

Marie-Chantale Roy studies speech therapy at the Université de Montréal.

¹ Élizabeth, Stéphanie and Marie-Chantale with Murielle Dubé, M.I.C.

² Marie-Chantale with her group of children, two volunteers and the leader of the group, nicknamed "mama".

Photograph: Élizabeth Laprise

Was this a short and sweet trip to Bolivia? More like an epic adventure of the heart, of life, love, giving and faith. }



1

2

I Found

THE HUNGER FOR GOD

Moved by a deep desire for solidarity with the most impoverished of this world, a legal assistant embraces the missionary adventure...

by Carole Guévin, lay missionary

IT ALL BEGAN in my hometown, Saint-Hyacinthe, where I hadn't lived for several years. For my parents' 41st wedding anniversary, I decided to give them a "special" gift: going to Mass with them! I knew very well that my being there would make them very happy, because I had drifted away from the Church.

A FIRST SIGN

However, during the homily, a visiting nun of the Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception of Malawi spoke to us about her work overseas and described the apostolate of her religious community. I listened to her with great interest. I was touched and amazed... Wanting to know more, I quickly leafed through the magazine that was left in the pew: *MIC Mission News*. What a coincidence! They were asking for volunteers for PROMIS, a community organization that helps immigrants and poor people in the

Street in order to offer some services to the people in the district: French lessons, tutoring, and daycare. The young people assisted by PROMIS came from difficult backgrounds. They needed to be reassured, listened to, and encouraged, so it was important that they have a loving presence with them. Very quickly, I realized that I received as much as I gave! I was overcome by great happiness: the joy of sharing my knowledge, of making them feel safe, of making them happy. And I had a hunger to go further with this commitment. A great desire took over me, giving direction to my daily life. At that time, I had not identified, specified, or defined the missionary vocation within me.

FURTHER ALONG THE WAY

My life was already full. In addition to my volunteering at PROMIS on Saturdays, I was pursuing my higher education in the evenings, and working during the day. For nine years, I had been working as a legal assistant in one of the largest—world renowned—law firms in Montreal.

I felt a call within me again: through the events in my life, God spoke to me in a discrete, but real way. In May 1999, with the help of the *Regroupement des missionnaires laïques* ("Lay Missionaries Association"), I left, happily enthusiastic, for a four month stay in Nicaragua, in Nandaime, where whole families live in shantytowns on the bare ground. Malnutrition is their daily fare. As an adviser to small businesses, I was responsible for the marketing and management of a cooperative of hammock weavers. In order to better understand their way of life, I lived with a

*I discovered, little by little,
Jesus' loving eyes upon me.* }

Côte-des-Neiges district of Montreal. For years, I had cherished the desire to help, to be with others, to share with them...

After an extremely pleasant and fruitful meeting with Andrée Ménard, M.I.C., I decided to volunteer on Saturdays to tutor allophone children who have trouble learning at school and whose immigrant parents recently fled from war or famine. PROMIS had rented a small apartment on Barclay

National Maronite School in Lebanon,
Carole and her third-grade students
Photograph: Marie Martel

Nicaraguan family. I could not remain indifferent to the way these people live! This experience showed me how my choices and my actions have an impact on the lives of others.

Upon my return from Nicaragua, a MIC sister invited me to review my experiences in Nandaime. This meeting with her was to be decisive for my life. In light of this second evaluation, I discovered, little by little, Jesus' loving eyes upon me; I asked Him to change my heart, to heal me so that I could follow in His footsteps, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me* (Matthew 16:24).

I was eager to be more involved, and I signed up with an intercommunity program for missionary training. During these two years, I got to know myself better, defining my choices, identifying my strengths and weaknesses. My community work had led me to meet God through his multiple faces: from the immigrant child to the refugee woman, from the newly arrived people to the children of the rising sun. These encounters brought me closer and closer to this Father full of love. He wanted only that I share a part of who I am, with my talents and my weaknesses. God loves me just as I am.

THE SACRED FIRE

I set out to understand myself better, both on the human and spiritual levels. That which moved me, that gave me this vitality, that gave me... a *sacred* fire, was being in solidarity with the poor of this earth: fighting the poverty and injustice that victimizes them, living with them simply, being with them, encouraging those who experience suffering. I wanted to get to the essence of my life by giving myself to others. I had received much from life; today, I wanted to give, with my strengths and my limitations. It is through reaching out to others that I felt happy. It was happiness with myself.

I didn't want to carry the weight of the whole world on my shoulders, but I did want to contribute to alleviating the plight of the poor. *I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me* (Matthew 25:40). I wanted to



be an instrument of peace, justice and freedom, three values that thrilled me. My being with others was important. This passion for the weakest was so strong that I was ready to leave my country, my family, my friends, and my work to go... To what was calling me, to what was moving me, to what was essential. I let myself be guided by Him: *Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you* (Genesis 12:1)...

In September 2001, in association with the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, I left for Lebanon, the country of majestic cedars... as a lay missionary.

I was deeply touched and guided in my own life by the MIC nuns. They were for me the crafters of my inner healing, examples of a generous answer to the call to the life and love of Christ, signs of resurrection.

**Regroupement des
missionnaires laïques
(RML) ("Lay Missionaries
Association")**

A Christian non-profit organization, the RML supports international solidarity initiatives that fight for justice, the well-being of all people, and a culture of peace.

Web Site:
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International Aid, What Good Is It?

by Micheline Marcoux, M.I.C.

What could be better than a shocking question to cause a reaction and get everyone thinking! The annual Congress on Missionary Assistance, held in Montreal last September 10th and 11th, asked the burning question, *International aid, what good is it?* More than 250 participants were made aware of the complexity of international aid in the context of globalization. Briefly, here are some highlights from the congress.

The magnitude of the catastrophes that tragically occurred recently in the world led to an incredible wave of generosity. These human crises required us to question ourselves about the forms of assistance offered and the conditions which often are attached to them. In spite of international assistance for more than 40 years, millions of people continue to live in extreme poverty, especially women and children. Where is the political will of the rich countries to tackle the real causes at the root of so much poverty and famine? Have we learned from the people in the Southern Hemisphere solutions that are better adapted for lasting development, respecting cultures and human dignity?

International aid, what good is it? It is an invitation to become aware, to be informed, to respond, to condemn and to humanize. The aid continues to be necessary and essential but... it is also a call to re-examine our habits in order to prevent disastrous consequences to our world. Don't the disasters of recent months give us ample material to reflect upon and to reveal creativity and solidarity?



The MIC's become involved wherever they find themselves.

World Mission Sunday

by Sylvia Dupuis, M.I.C.

Last October 23rd, the Catholic Church throughout the world was invited to celebrate World Mission Sunday. It was a special time to reflect together on our missionary responsibility as baptized people. Since Vatican II, we note with enthusiasm that missionary life is no longer perceived to be the exclusive domain of religious or priests. The Lord commands, *Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations* (Matthew 28:19), and continues to challenge *many generous lay people, ready to leave their way of life, their work, their homeland, to go, at least for a time, to a mission country...* as John Paul II reminds us in the apostolic exhortation *On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful*.

The Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, faithful to their founding spirit, commit themselves, together with their partners, to collaborate in the formation of lay people with the intention of sending them as missionaries to other countries. They share their spirituality and experience with lay people, not because of shortage of manpower, but because they acknowledge a similar vocation.

From Madagascar, a lay missionary writes: *My challenge to myself is to accept God's call for me, rather than to persist in doing something else. I give thanks for what it brings out in me... That is my mission in Madagascar. Another one shares: Living among people of faith gave me the desire to further my own spiritual adventure... I set out to seek God. He teaches me freedom.*

Missionaries here, missionaries there, wherever we live, we welcome the "Love that is itself a gift" so that we "give then with love" (theme for World Mission Sunday 2005). May we, people of all ages, talents and states of life, invent together a language capable of speaking the Good News to the world of today!

To find out more: Missionary Aid
("L'Entraide missionnaire");
www.web.net/~emi

For information on laity in mission:
stdomic@videotron.ca



Art and Spirituality: *what's the difference?*

If we want to live rooted in God, how can we live without beauty? Spirituality and art in various forms have always been part of the life of Daniel LeBlond, S.J. First a filmmaker, then a painter, he now has a studio and his paintings are on exhibit. Since 2004, he has been the Provincial Superior of the Jesuits of French Canada and Haiti. He shares with us his thoughts on the close relationship between the two passions of his life: art and spirituality.

Extracts of a conference given by Daniel LeBlond, S.J.,
in Montreal, in May, 2004
www.jesuites.org/DanielLeBlond

Text by Marie-Eve Homier

ART, LIKE GOD, is a subject that we can discuss, certainly, but it is one that is better to live, because it is first of all an experience. It is not easy to determine where the spiritual begins and art finishes, since they are so closely entwined, overlapping one another. This close relationship can unify a life, a person and his activity. Existence without art or without God is an existence that is fleeting, like the wind. It becomes more difficult to find meaning in life. These days, our world has lots of art, shows and entertainment, but it has a problem finding meaning in its endeavours because it has lost the sense of art and the sense of the spiritual experience. Both go hand in hand.

SOME FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

How do we live our relationship with God? Is it an experience? If so, does it involve our whole being? The experience of God is lived emotionally, intellectually, and also physically. The body takes an active part in contemplation. The liturgy is addressed above all to our body: through our senses, it touches our soul and brings us into God's presence. Any experience, in particular one of God, begins with an impulse in the body.

Who is this God in whom you believe?

Personally, I believe in an incarnate God who came to share our human experience, taking on a human body and showing us that *through* the human experience and with the help of this body, we can live here on earth in a close and real relationship with God. For a long time it was thought, because of certain deviations, that Christianity saw the body and the spirit in opposition to each other. This is not my reading of the Gospels, nor of Christian thought. On the contrary! In the Christian experience, even more so than in other great religions, the spirit and the body are called to a **complete and total unity** and the body is called to become spiritual. Not to be forgotten, but to share the experience of the spirit, the experience of God. All this is possible because He whom we follow and who accompanies us in the faith is this incarnate and living God.

How do you express your experiences?

They cannot be explained by reasoning or theories, but rather by the so-called symbolic language. The symbol reveals another reality. Since the experience is given to us to be shared and is nourished in the sharing, it **must be expressed**. To do this, it is necessary to enter this wonderful world of symbolism, so necessary to the spiritual realm. In the Gospels, Christ uses language that is extremely symbolic. The parables are suggestive, opening, and revealing. They are not told in a rational language that closes and tries to control the experience. Experience HATES control. When you are in love, don't you hate when somebody tries to tell you what you are experiencing?

OUR SOCIETY:

A CRISIS OF SYMBOLISM

Symbolic language withdraws from our daily life and, although our culture appeals to the body, we live disconnected from the experience. As artistic director of the *Gésu*¹ since 1993, I met hundreds of artists who were extremely concerned about the question of how to express their experience of God. Driven by the desire to fully express in their own language this fundamental experience, some of them make enormous sacrifices to respond to this call.

What is rather extraordinary in today's artists is their sensitivity toward sacred places, their respect for them. They sense a certain something... Very quickly, they enter into communion with the place. This sensitivity comes to them owing to the fact that they are connected to the experience. They sense all the human experiences which have filled this place, all the men and women who have come to lay down their quest, their searching, just as in the Holy Land one senses the faith of millions of pilgrims who have passed there for centuries, the human experiences, happy or sad, which have permeated the ground and surroundings. That's what a sacred place is. The artist knows it. It's a shame that the faithful—guardians of these places—often do not have this awareness!

To speak of the *experience* of God today will restore the meaning of symbols. The most sought-after these days are those that create an interior atmosphere of silence even in the midst of sight and sound. Nowadays, our eyes are very, very tired, because there are so many demands placed upon them. They need to rest, like our ears need the quiet, a necessary disposition to be able to grasp God's presence in the material, in the world, and to be in deep communion with oneself, with others and with God.

The artist doesn't take a didactic or rational approach, but a creative one that places him little by little into his own world of symbols. And the more one delves into the human person, the closer one comes to God. For we who believe in an incarnate God, the more one approaches the dignity and the scope of human beauty, the more one touches God. And the more one approaches God, the more one understands what it is to be a man or a woman. Above all, one develops a respect and deep sensitivity for human dignity.

¹ In a Montreal church, a theatre and creative centre for artists in residence. Annual event of sacred art.

² The author distinguishes between "art" and "entertainment".

³ *La Gloire et la Croix : les aspects esthétiques de la Révélation*, Tome I. *Apparition*. Paris, Aubier, 1965. Re-edited in 1990 at DDB. p. 17.

Title page:

Toujours s'unifie

("Eternity is Unifying Itself"), oil on wood, Daniel LeBlond, S.J.

Opposite:

L'Univers restauré

("The Universe Restored"), mixed media, Daniel LeBlond, S.J.

Page 16:

Triptych,

oil on wood, Daniel LeBlond, S.J.

Photographs: Michel Dubreuil

The poorest times were those in which art was at the service of an ideology, the poets were kept silent and the saints were missed.



SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN ART AND SPIRITUALITY

The difference between the artistic experience and the spiritual experience is intellectual.

The same starting point: the material. The artist has only his material when he starts to work. The dancer has his body; the sculptor has wood and iron—nothing else. In the spiritual life too, there is only the raw material: our existence, our being in its entirety. We can't escape it!

An endless quest. Both the spiritual person and the artist², are searching, a profound quest for the absolute, which never ends. A painter knows how to recognize the moment of the last stroke of the brush; he then experiences a profound spiritual unity. One glimpse of eternity. But, here one moment and gone the next! And when he begins another canvass, it is blank again. So the spiritual life alternates between moments of greater or lesser intensity, always returning to the beginning, because God, imperceptibly, escapes us.

Everything is in the material. In the course of one's work, one sees what must emerge, which was already there. The artist is there to bring out the Presence that is there in the material. The primary material of those who create is their lives, their being. The canvass is only a mirror. In our lives too, everything is there. It is not we who bring God there—He is already there, alive, present everywhere, in all things. It is up to us to develop our perceptiveness and our receptiveness in order to allow Him to reveal Himself, that He can rise up through our lives.

The results are uncontrollable. The fundamental vocation of art is somewhat skewed if the artist controls his discipline; if, before beginning, he knows what will be produced. Likewise, the spiritual life is unpredictable. All attempts at control just reveal the need for conversion! There are none so blind as those who think they know where they're going. In artistic acts, as in those of the spiritual life, when we are aware of being finally fulfilled and free of uncertainty, freed from our conditionings, our pains, our life's baggage, we can then savour a **profound freedom**: to be where we are wanted, where we are desired.

Beyond professions, beyond a series of planned acts, however beautiful, art and spirituality are a way of looking at others, ourselves and life; it is a way of living, but especially a **way of being**. Sometimes an artist is asked: "How long did it take to make this artwork?" "Well, my friend, all my life!" Creating does not stop. It is like breathing with the rhythm of God, with the rhythm of our souls.





SOME PRINCIPLES AND FUNDAMENTAL THOUGHTS

By delving into what's human, one is always sure to find the divine. That's for sure. But if we delve into the person we imagine ourselves to be, we are taking the wrong road to meet God. It is necessary to dig, dig, dig. In the workshop, the artist may be alone, but never feels lonely. Solitude is precisely a place where one can really discover his humanity, confronting it, exposing it. This is not done in peaceful quietude. It's a real battle! Just like in the spiritual life. Prayer occurs through a profound encounter with ourselves... and with others, because we come close to touching God when we dig there too.

It is extremely important to marvel at life and our human endeavours. Art makes that happen. The person who creates is struck with wonder and calls those who are looking or listening to enter this world of astonishment. For Maurice Zundel, wonder is that zone where we lose all our familiar landmarks, where we go beyond our limits to enter into the openness necessary to meet God. It is the path to Beauty. It is also the only place where we can hope to escape from our conditionings and enter into another world.

What is your experience of the resurrection? Inevitably, artists face this every day because they always create based on their own limitations and failures. It is through this insight that resurrection comes to them. Accepting mistakes can take the artwork somewhere else. Likewise in our lives, if we want to welcome God and we judge ourselves, we are blocked. We must let ourselves be loved. Nothing happens for nothing. Everything carries us elsewhere. What one perceives to be a failure can prove to be a springboard towards a more abundant life... if and only if one sheds on it a view of resurrection.

The body is pulled by the Breath of the Spirit. A spiritualized body lives a conversion of the senses. In the sacrament of baptism, a secondary rite relates specifically to the senses: the officiant lays his hands on the senses of the future baptized and says *Effata!* ("Open up!"), a word which Christ pronounced when He cured somebody. Beyond the physical cure, it meant *Open yourself up, open the person you are, open all your being!* This baptismal ritual shows that our body takes part in the spiritual experience. Because our knowledge of God comes to us from our senses, our body has to change, **our senses have to be converted.**

Life is indivisible. How can we separate contemplation from action? We are contemplative beings in action.

Art and spirituality are closely linked with humanity. Praying links us with the major challenges of humanity, with the sufferings of the world, with its great stakes. If our prayer does not produce such an opening, it is because we have reached neither the human part in ourselves, nor God. A sacred work of art, even several centuries old, can continue to move us and to speak of a part of the experience of God. If art is not deeply linked with humanity, it is an escape. It is like running away, in order to forget. It is disguising the mission and the meaning, the purpose of art. But to create in order to forget, in order to flee, is also a travesty and betrayal of the religious experience.

FOR A THEOLOGY OF BEAUTY

In the words of theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar: *In a world without beauty, in a world which is perhaps not wholly without beauty, but which can no longer see it, or reckon with it, the Good also loses its attractiveness, the self-evidence of why it must be carried out. In a world that no longer has any confidence in itself to affirm the beautiful, the proofs of the truth have lost their cogency...*³

A few references to take you further...

- *Wonder and poverty*, Maurice Zundel, Translated by Florestine Audette, Éditions Paulines, Sherbrooke, Canada, 1993.
- *Letter to Artists*, John Paul II, 1999.
- *On Spirituality in Art, and in Painting in Particular*, Wassily Kandinsky.
- *Girl With a Pearl Earring*, a film by Peter Webber, 2004.

Our Father Who Art a Potter

The symbolism of pottery led Claire Dupont, S.N.J.M., to discover her identity. Knowing who you are, you can become what you are.

Interview by Marie-Eve Homier with Claire Dupont, S.N.J.M., potter

This former high school teacher became interested in pottery when, during a sabbatical year, she met a group of young hippies who, totally engrossed, worked this medium in absolute silence. *It was the most beautiful monastery I had ever seen! It was as if they wrote icons.* One day, she was asked to plan a Eucharistic celebration around the theme of pottery. From there came the idea of building sessions combining pottery with personal and spiritual growth

Rise up! Go down to the potter's house; there I will give you my message! (Jeremiah 18:2) This truly illustrates how God works: working with clay leads us to meditate on life, to understand ourselves, God and our relation with Him.

The analogy between the potter and the Father brilliantly illustrates God's formative approach to each one of us. The process of making a piece of pottery corresponds to that of personal and spiritual growth. The potter begins by **going to find the clay**, choosing it with great care. God comes to seek us, where we are. "Fear not because I have redeemed you, I called you by name" (Isaiah 43:1).

Then, he **prepares "his" clay**, washes it, removes its impurities, **lets it rest for awhile**, because the more the clay ages, the easier it is to work. He kneads it to expel the bubbles of air that, under the intense heat of the furnace, would cause it to burst apart. Patient preparation, wise maturing...

Then comes the most difficult stage: **to centre his clay** on the wheel¹. This corresponds to a fundamental human question: who am I? To know how to find one's core, is to know oneself. The most demanding path is the one that leads us to our core.

Once the clay is centered, the piece does nothing but become what it is. The All-knowing, Everlasting One already sees in the mound the unique and splendid creation that will be born

from it. When he **works his craft**, the potter does not stop turning the wheel, nor does he lift his hands from the clay, because then how would the piece take shape? For we who are clay between the hands of the Lord, to contemplate Him, to give ourselves to Him: that is not passive! Rather, it is a sacred collaboration: He does not want to work alone, and without Him, we can do nothing. We are His co-creators, made in His image: with the capacity to create... and an immense potential. Once centered, we have to become all that is in us. "A vase is made of clay, but it is its emptiness that makes it appropriate to its task," teaches Lao-Tseu². *We are unfinished beings... and that is good! We are called to holiness, which is a gift from God, not to perfection, which can be a heavy burden to bear. A saint is a sinner who acknowledges he has fallen and picks himself up.*

If by accident there was a mistake along the way because we failed to listen to ourselves and the Word, hope remains. The potter neither loses nor wastes anything. Doesn't God make the old new? The pieces that burst in the firing are crushed into "grog" which, when added to fresh clay, strengthens it like the steel rods of reinforced concrete.

In all artwork, there is a core; this core is like the spiritual heart of pottery, the heart of the divine masterpiece that is humankind. "Put your work twenty times upon the anvil."³ Likewise, this endless world of self-discovery is to be perpetually explored!

¹ A flat disk on an axle, on which the piece is placed

² Chinese philosopher, founder of Taoism, contemporary of Confucius

³ Boileau, in *L'Art poétique*

The most demanding path
is the one that leads us
to our core.



THEATRE OF THE PROFOUND

Playwright, director and actor, Gilbert Karanta uses his dramatic skills to touch our hearts, uncovering the radiance within.



Images and words
burst forth from *I don't know
where...* I realize that God is
my inspiration, my ink.

par Gilbert Karanta, founder and artistic director, Théamo troop

The Théamo troop tours all over Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario sharing a renewed spirituality through dramatic presentations, and offering everyone unforgettably moving and thought-provoking moments.

To find out more:
www.theamo.com
info@theamo.com
(418) 520-4282

Photographs: David Grenier

Founded in January 2003, the Théamo troop's principal role is to encourage reflection on the meaning of life, and a revolution in our personal lives and relationships through the performing arts. The idea to form a spiritually-inspired theatre company rose to my imagination after I plunged deep within myself. I had just finished a Masters in hydrogeology, an interesting field of study, but one for which I had little passion. In October 2002, I completed my thesis and, for the first time, faced the future which was taking shape in front of me if I continued on this path. This prospect made me sick; it was actually my heart that was beckoning hopelessly for me to listen to it. This inner turmoil was beneficial because it forced me to take hold of my future. Then I read with interest Jean Monbourquette's book, *How to Discover your Personal Mission*, which would, two months later, transform my life.

I have many passions in the realm of the arts: song, theatre, dance, writing, directing, etc. To devote my whole life to only one of these forms of expression would have torn me apart. And I refused to be compromised. Today, I feel fulfilled in my position as artistic director since it allows me to live each of my passions while wearing the hats of playwright, director and actor. And yet, I never dreamed I would found a theatre company!

It is through the arts that I am able to meet God. This is a unique encounter that is unpredictable and unplanned, but that I feel through my pen, my spirit, my soul and my body. In the process of creating a play, the presence of God first appears in the writing. In a spirit of total freedom, I let my pencil be guided by the stirrings of my heart. He soothes me, in these moments when I am alone, working in my office, with a peace and an immense sense of well-being. It is then that images and words emerge from *I don't know where*. In these creative impulses, where my pen ploughs row after row along the paper, I realize that God is my inspiration, my ink.

God's presence also appears in the actors who put their hearts into the theatrical productions. God gave each one of us multiple talents that wait only to be developed. These gifts do not belong to us. Our task is to make them bear fruit so that as many people as possible can benefit from them. Whether he or she is an actor, singer, dancer, technician or dresser, each young person, through the talents within, adds a unique and delicious dish to the feast of God.

More than the applause and ovations, I am touched by listening to the stories of the audience members whom I meet after each show. To witness, evening after evening, God appearing right there to touch the human heart, that is my greatest reward, my greatest joy!

IN SEARCH OF ONENESS

Through the universal language of dance, Amrita Choudhury encourages her students to seek union with oneself and the world surrounding one.

Interview by Marie-Eve Homier with Amrita Choudhury

A choreographer, dancer, teacher, dance anthropologist and dance therapist, Amrita Choudhury has developed a unique take on spirituality, philosophy and art as a way of life. Trained from childhood in Indian classical/sacred dances¹, Amrita also studied other world dance forms. Greatly influenced by Rabindranath Tagore's² philosophy, she approaches dance in a holistic manner.

Oneness of Mind, Body, Spirit

In India, dance is a source of life, an expression of life and simply a way of life. It **incorporates mind, body and soul**. No parts of life are separate from the whole, nor one from another. If body and mind were separate, how then could we experience unity? The body **is** the soul. And it is the spirit. And it is the mind. And the body is also simply the body. Each is the other. Humanity is in divinity and divinity is in humanity. Every art form expresses this. It's about being **human and divine**. It's a way of living, accessible to everyone. As per dance and movement, the body being a powerful vehicle and a very sacred temple, what you do with it is a natural and sacred expression of your being.

Dance has to serve humanity. It brings a sense of being, sheer fun and lots of joy, from

which peace comes. Among other ways, peace can also be defined as "organized chaos". Whether I dance to slow or very rigorous fast music, there is always a **centre**, and that is **peace**. This centre spells with capital letters a deep "I am", "I know". The intention is to have this space, this center, this peace all the time... which does not mean stillness, quietness and silence all the time! When performing, Amrita seeks not to please the audience, rather she intends to "seduce from within": to make her spirit completely one with what she does. When that happens, you shine. That's what touches people.

In Indian dance, every session begins and ends with a "Salutation to Mother Earth" that puts us in contact with the world around us. This salutation finishes by "Namaste", a greeting meaning: "The divinity in me salutes the divinity in you." God being present in every one of us, dance brings out our **humanity** and compassion. It is the **ultimate surrender** to God because you use every aspect of your physical and mental being, including your most important muscle of all, your spirit, to express your prayer. You give all you have. In return, you receive divine love.

Healing the Mind-Body-Spirit Connection

Physically, Indian dance has many therapeutic aspects. Yet, most important is the **power of the intention** in which the dance is done. A powerful visualisation and meditation in movement, "mudras"³ play a central part in dance therapy, releasing mind, body and spirit. Everything we experience appears in the body. My first question at the beginning of a dance therapy session is about the patient's social-spiritual-psychological life. These aspects impact physical health. When you feel good socially-spiritually-psychologically, you can tackle anything afterwards. Working with elderly people in wheelchairs, she first made them understand that the *spirit*, the heart can dance. Then the feet can dance. The dance of life comes from within.

Devoted to building a bridge between people and cultures through dance and music, Amrita has great pleasure teaching in various places, even as far away as the North of Quebec and occasionally on a First Nations reserve. I'm blessed to be able to communicate through dance and music... People listen when you speak with the heart. I learn so much from my students. I gain more than what I give! When you teach and communicate, you see people's soul, which is what we should all be able to see and appreciate in the end.



¹ These dances tell the stories of the divinities and human beings.

² Indian poet, philosopher and literary figure. Nobel Prize in Literature 1913

³ Hand gestures expressing human intentions, feelings and emotions

Photographs: Lisa Hatchez

Amrita Choudhury
www.ananda-amrita.com

Sacredness and spirituality is supposed to be a joyful experience and through the powerful medium of dance one is able to experience this ecstasy, this joy.

Art: EXPRESSION AND SHARING

Through painting, Yolande Fortin expresses what she lives and awakens the best in those who contemplate her work.

by Yolande Fortin, painter

Yolande Fortin developed a new technique: pasting pieces of silk batik on her canvas, then enhancing it with acrylic resin, building up shapes, textures and colours.

To find out more:
Galerie d'Art Yolande Fortin
yofort@globetrotter.net
(418) 763-5980

Photograph: *Solicitude*,
batik and acrylic,
Yolande Fortin

To be an artist is to cultivate a sense of the sacred. There are rituals in art. In silence, we must seek what is essential. It is working on ourselves.

Art as a Means of Expression

The syndrome of the blank page is an allegory: if I want to express myself, **what do I have to say?** That is the real question. Children express themselves quite naturally. As we grow older, we become self-conscious. It becomes clear from this that the images we create, whether visual, literary or something else, are reflections of ourselves and especially of our interior world. Every work of art projects the imaginary into reality.

Art calls upon a need, as if artists were channels, who must put themselves at the service of forces that are much larger than they are. As we become totally open, completely available, a source within bursts forth. That is life. That is the impetus that writes the words, marks the wood, traces the line, launches a tune or outlines a dance step. When people forget their individuality, they express life.

As an artist, I searched for a long time for a guide to the essence of life. I looked to some people as role models. These people had an acute sense of humanity. Gandhi, Marguerite Yourcenar, Rembrandt, to mention a few. But within the depths of ourselves, we are well aware that there is only one path for each of us. We need courage and moral fibre to be able to face ourselves.

Eternity Is Here, Now.

One day, I stopped worrying about the great fundamental questions of life (*Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?*, asked Gauguin). That is the day I said to myself: the past does not exist anymore, the future is not yet here. Only the present is true and real. God is not outside me. He is not a reality which I will know only after I die. God is here, everywhere, all the time. I am an expression of God. Like a speck of stardust, I am a small animal on a small planet, in a system so huge that we cannot even imagine its extent. The only real duty that I have is to be fully human, to accept my mortality. Just to take a deep breath, to roll up my sleeves and to celebrate the pure joy of being alive. And especially to keep my sense of wonder. To wake up each day, remembering that I have the chance to live another day in its fullness.

Art is also and especially communication. I share my quest with those who connect with my work. And if my work can rouse consciences, open hearts or simply stir the soul towards that which is the best in us, it is worthwhile. I feel responsible for my work. Even if it is just a little, it is my humble contribution to the great march of humanity.

As we become totally open,
completely available,
a wellspring inside bursts forth.



Moving Beyond International to *Intercultural*

by Michelle Payette, M.I.C.

JUNE 2005. Coming from the four corners of the earth, 51 Missionaries of the Immaculate Conception, from 13 different nationalities, gather to experience a general chapter. It is a special opportunity to look at the road travelled and to set out towards the future with determination and hope.

In the Institute that she founded, Délia Tétrault wanted and encouraged the international character of the community. With time, internationality, this unbounded grace, became a fundamental principle that guided each and every one into a process of deepening her identity. Today, passing from internationality to interculturality means that everyone is invited to enter into a dynamic relationship of qualitative reciprocity, communion and mutual understanding.

May the family spirit always bring you together into the same spirit, that of the Institute. Yes, do everything with a single heart and a single soul, Délia Tétrault often said. Welcoming diversity, dialogue and mutual respect weaves solid bonds. Maintaining personal relationships on a deep level requires looking at the heart, because meeting with other cultures goes beyond appearances. It allows us to reach out to others, to accept their differences, and achieve closeness. The intercul-



The MIC'S new General Council: Victoria Chirwa, Maria-Anthea Raso, Sara Olga Pérez, Louise Denis (Superior General), and Lucie Gagné

tural relationship draws those who believe in it beyond their own borders and reveals a vision that makes it possible to consider the great horizon of universal friendship and a new humanity, in Jesus.

During this gathering of missionaries of different cultures, ages, and opinions, one essential element stood out: it takes continuous conversion to achieve communion. Strengthened by tremendous hope, it is in a life of faith filled with love that representatives coming from here or there invite the whole Institute to accept cultural differences with the utmost respect. **Living interculturality... is possible.** However, this process takes time; it is similar to a long pilgrimage, painful at times, but revealing a wealth of all sorts of things.



Marie-Hélène Roy, M.I.C.
Secretary General



Gisèle Leduc, M.I.C.
General Bursar

Photographs: MIC



Like Mary's Visitation with Elizabeth, we also agree to leave, day after day, to go elsewhere and reach out to our brothers and sisters, living in missionary communion with all cultures and in new social situations. (MIC General Code)

Love in a Time of War

Some time ago, an unusual letter arrived at the MIC house in Laval, addressed to "the last surviving Sisters from Rome during the war"! Intrigued, one MIC looked into it.



by Huguette Turcotte, M.I.C.

1

IN 1925, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception opened a house in Rome. During the Second World War, and especially after the occupation of this city by the German troops, the Canadian nuns were cut off from any communication with the Mother house in Montreal. They lived through these turbulent years under bombardments and experienced severe shortages, especially food, together with the people they sheltered in their house: a Jewish family, refugees, orphans, neighbours, single women... And among them, a student from Montreal, Huguette Morin.

After studying at the Italian Cultural Institute of Montreal, the young woman won a bursary in 1937 to go to study at the Royal University for foreigners in Perugia, in Italy. One evening, during a book sale in the public square, she made the acquaintance of Carlo Karrer, a lieutenant in the royal army of Italy. *Carlo and I had both put our hands on the same book! It was love at first sight! I let him buy the book provided that he would lend it to me, because I was going to need it for my studies. So we met again...*

After arriving in Italy about 15 days late for my studies, I decided to stay for a year instead of six months. That allowed me to get to know

Italian—as well as my Italian—better! I obtained my diploma and, before my departure for Montreal, Carlo asked me to marry him, telling me that he couldn't live without me.

However, many obstacles would come up along their path. Huguette's parents wanted to know more about their future son-in-law... Also, in Italy, no army officer could get married without the consent of the king. And, since 1938, a new law prohibited soldiers from marrying foreign nationals.

Finally, on February 23, 1939, we knew that we were going to be able to get married. Her fiancé succeeded in obtaining the necessary exemption, but it was only valid until March 4, 1939. They had only a few days to carry out their dream: a true love match! It was impossible to get together in time! An ocean separated them: he in Italy, she in Montreal.

With the help of her father, Victor Morin, a lawyer, Huguette got the necessary documents from Italy for a marriage by proxy. And on March 2, 1939, Carlo Karrer went with his mother to Santa Maria Del Transpontino Church in Rome where she said "yes" in the place of the bride, who was held back in Montreal. A telegram from Italy arrived, informing Huguette that, from now on, she was married to Carlo. For her part, Huguette

went to the wedding chapel of Notre Dame Church in Montreal where her father pronounced the big "yes" instead of Carlo. *The whole family was there... except my husband!*

Through her marriage to Carlo, Huguette now had Italian citizenship, which allowed her to return to Italy. She traveled by ship in April 1939 and settled in Rome with her husband who continued his trade as a buyer and inspector for the army. On April 20, 1940, she gave birth to Pia, her beloved little daughter. *Unfortunately, because of the war, we had little time together.* At the end of March 1944, around suppertime, three fascist officers came looking for Lieutenant Karrer. *Pia wanted to hide her father in a trunk... but he was six feet two inches tall!* Huguette didn't know where he was taken.

Eventually, she received a few short notes from him via the Red Cross and the Vatican. (During this time, Italy was divided into two. The North was under the control of the Germans and the South was under the Fascists.) She learned that since Carlo was not captured on the battlefield, he was not officially a prisoner of war; he was called a "deportee" or a "political prisoner". *Since the Germans did not have the right to kill their prisoners of war, they used these political prisoners as hostages whom they kept dressed as civilians. When a German officer was killed by civilians, the Nazis shot ten Italian officers.* Carlo therefore remained under guard in Venice, as a hostage.

Huguette stayed in Rome more than a year without Carlo. As a Canadian, she was an enemy of the Italian-German axis. They were suspicious of her and she was watched carefully. They tried to make her talk... *Several times, I felt very afraid.* One day, she met the Missionaries of the Immaculate-Conception at the home of her friend, Madame Rivest. Huguette already knew that this Canadian religious community had a house in Rome. Her mother and grandmother, who knew about the MIC's charitable works and who were worried for her, dug up the address in the *MIC Mission News*. The nuns provided milk—a highly rationed food product—for Pia, and invited them to come live in their convent, a large country house. It was a question of safety for her and her little girl!

I had the whole first floor. I wore the nun's habit to pass unnoticed during the most dangerous times. I sang, I prayed, I worked with the nuns. Pia was to pass for an orphan. The nuns had made her

a small uniform, similar to that of an orphan living there at the same time as us.

In April 1945, when the Germans surrendered and left the north of Italy, Carlo was able to join Huguette in Rome where he again took up his duties of purchasing and inspection for the army. *We lived a few months as a family and rediscovered the beauty of the city of Rome, before we were separated again. Aware of the deprivation that we suffered, my family tried, for more than a year, to get me to return to Canada with Pia.*

It was not easy! By marrying her dear lieutenant, Huguette automatically became Italian. And, because of the war, she was regarded as an enemy of Canada and Great Britain. She could neither return to her native land, nor receive any food products from the British Consulate in Rome.

Thanks to the steps taken by her father, Huguette was able to regain her Canadian citizenship and return to Montreal with Pia, around Christmas 1945. Her husband, promoted to lieutenant-colonel of the army of the Italian Republic, was not authorized to accompany them. It took another two and half years to obtain all the documents necessary for his immigration to Canada.

In June 1948, Carlo Karrer finally joined Huguette and Pia in Montreal where they spent a few weeks before leaving to settle in Ontario, where Carlo began his civilian life as an accountant for a forestry company. In spite of the difficulties, the anguish, and the trauma of her life in Rome during the war, Huguette did not forget her MIC friends. Fifty years later, she wanted to get together again with them. What joy for one and all!

¹ In Rome, the MIC sisters hid Huguette Morin-Karrer and her daughter. The child was disguised as an orphan!

² Huguette Turcotte, M.I.C., (right) met Huguette Morin-Karrer to go over her recollections.

Photographs: MIC Archives

2



THE JOURNEY OF A YOUNG MISSIONARY

Mika was born to a Christian mother and a Buddhist father in May 1968 in Hokkaido, in northern Japan. She was premature and was given only two or three days to live...

by Mika Inoue, M.I.C.

WHEN I look at my life, I have to say: what wonders the Lord has worked for me! When I was young, I was indulged by my father and helped by my uncle, a Franciscan priest. My mother taught me the love of God even if I didn't want to hear about it: I didn't understand. Today, I see how God acted on me through my mother. What a gift!

I was baptized on Christmas Day, 1984. My real passion, however, was the school choir! I had a pretty soprano voice and my teacher had suggested that later on I could study at the conservatory. Instead of going to church, I continued participating in the choir for three years. But since I had to pay for my studies, I had to give up my dream and I decided to sign up for courses in practical nursing. After the death of my father in 1987, I returned to live with my mother, while working in the hospital, although she began to worry about my future...

A LONG WAY

In 1997, I left to join my boyfriend in the Philippines. But married life was not for me. At the end of my stay, a Japanese priest advised me to go and meet a Missionary of the Immaculate Conception in Davao, in the southern Philippines. I was not thinking about religious life at this time. With this Japanese MIC, I visited several of their houses and learned about their apostolic activities. While working in a private clinic, I returned to visit with the nuns once a month. I agreed to go on a discernment retreat with them, despite my weak knowledge of English. In 1998, I decided to give this life that attracted



Mika Inoue, M.I.C., and her Franciscan uncle • Photograph: MIC

me a try. But it was not easy: I didn't know how to pray nor to sit still for five minutes! In addition, my Christian formation was flawed. I concluded that religious life was not for me. In November 2000, I returned to my home in Japan.

GOD WRITES IN CURVED LINES

Shortly after my return from the Philippines, I was hospitalized, and so was my mother. It was a very useful time for me to think! God was always there with his love and his blessings. I felt the call to religious life again. In March 2002, I joined the MIC community in Tokyo. A year later, I found myself again in the Philippines with better English and a better understanding of the Christian faith. I continued my formation with other young novices at Inter-Asia de Baguio. I often contemplated the Salvation Jesus brings, giving his life for love... Mary, listening with her heart, trusting God completely, became a model for me.

After finishing my noviciate, I went back to Japan to take my first vows there. I had the assurance that the Lord truly said to me: *I called you by your name* (Isaiah 45:4) and I was happy... so happy to answer his call. The MIC's proclaimed to me the Good News of the risen Jesus, whom I did not know and who transformed me! My mother taught me how to say thank you and the nuns taught me about thanksgiving and wonder. When I look back on the path I have travelled since I was born, my heart overflows with gratitude. I am thankful to God and I thank all the people who were with me, helping and encouraging me as I progressed.

Merci en pile*

25 years later, Flore Savignac, M.I.C., finds her former students from when she was a teacher in Haiti.

by Flore Savignac, M.I.C.

IN 1972, when I first arrived in Haiti, I was assigned to teach catechism at the Canado-Haitian College in Port-au-Prince, a technical school directed by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. These young people were between 15 and 20 years old. Like all teenagers their age, they were especially eager to get a taste of life. But catechesis? Could it be meaningful to them?

My work consisted in supervising ten classes of forty pupils. Wonderful memories come back to me from those special times with those dynamic young people, with their beautiful dreams and who sincerely wanted to prepare for their future. In addition to regular courses, the College often offered weekend outings for recollection; days spent working with the poor or socializing so that they would better understand the situation and needs of their country. I remember some things that were said following days of prayer. *I never sensed the Lord so close in my life! I really spoke with the Lord as with a friend and I intend to continue to do so all the days of my life!*

Over the years, I remained in touch with some students. Imagine my joy when I received a cordial invitation to a college reunion, last July 2nd in Long Island in the United States. Here are some pearls collected while chatting with my former students. One of them, now a doctor, showed me a picture where I had written to him: *The Lord has blessed you with beautiful talents, but He expects much from you, too.* Then he added: *This picture has always been precious to me and I try to respond to the Lord's expectations.* Living in Miami, another former student told me that he assists his parish priest on visits to families and sits on the ecclesiastical court for marriage annulments. A third confided to

me: When you came to teach us catechism, I was searching and I felt unhappy. Nobody gave me satisfactory answers. At your days of recollection, I felt that the answer was there; I was deep in prayer. But what emptiness I felt around me: so few people have this ideal! Thanks to you, I was able to put myself back on the rails and that helped me throughout my whole life. Another, a former schoolgirl added: The days of recollection that we spent together drew me into God's presence; today it is so natural to have the Lord in my life.

During this get-together, many other beautiful memories were brought back. I returned with a heart filled with thanksgiving! The Lord really is at work in each person, but it is still necessary that He be proclaimed, known, so that He may take root in the heart of each of us. *But they will not ask His help unless they believe in Him, and they will not believe in Him unless they have heard of Him, and they will not hear of Him unless they get a preacher. So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the Word of Christ (Romans 10:14.17).*

*"Merci en pile" means, "Thank you very much," in Creole.

After her stay in Haiti, the author became Secretary of the Association of Major Superiors of the Diocese of Montreal. She remains Superior of the MIC house in Laval.

Charles Kléber, on the right, and Yves Féquière with Flore Savignac, M.I.C.

Photograph: Rachelle Dupuy



You've Got Mail!

My Mission as a Gift

Dear Sisters, my dear family,

I am pleased to send you fresh bits of news about my work in the diocese of Saitama, Japan. Our international team of sisters, priests and lay missionaries takes care of foreigners, especially those without visas. We also nurture their faith through our pastoral work in several parishes: sacraments, Mass in their own language, catechism, translation, etc. Though I had never done it before, I find this missionary work very significant.

In Gyoda, not far away from Tokyo, I began teaching English to children and adults, mostly non-Christians. Later, a Japanese-Peruvian lady and I launched Japanese classes for recent Peruvian migrants and for parents who want to be able to communicate with their children at home. These classes became so popular that extra help was soon needed! Ghislaine Parent, M.I.C., now comes every week from Tokyo to Gyoda to give English classes to adults.

How is my missionary life going? Well, at first it required some adapting... but now I am happy and joyful where I am. I love the mission because I know the Lord is with me; with Him I can do anything. My heart dwells in hope, for I still have many dreams and plans!

Last December, I was in the Philippines with two Japanese girls from the youth group in Tokyo. Manami and Yurika wanted to experience Christmas in a Catholic country... and they had it! Experiencing the Filipino culture reminded me of my own Peruvian roots. That was my Christmas present.

Merry Christmas to all of you!

Ana Alvarado, M.I.C.

✉ gyoda_mic@yahoo.co.jp



Ana Alvarado, M.I.C., playing the drum during the closing Mass of a youth rally in Fuji, Japan.

A New Mission House

Dear Friends from everywhere:

Rejoice with me! A new mission has just recently opened at Bukidnon, in the southern Philippines. At the express request of Honesto Pacana, S.J., bishop of the diocese of Malaybalay, three MIC's agreed to respond to the pastoral needs of the parishioners of Kiburiao, Kitobo and Salawagan. There are about 22 percent Native people.

We began by visiting the villages. Most of them are inaccessible by public transport; thus we have had to go by foot on muddy paths, or sometimes on horseback. Most of the people travel by *habal-habal*, a motorcycle that carries three people at a time: a very dangerous vehicle, especially during the rainy season.

Our ministry consists of forming lay leaders for the growing base church communities. I prepare the volunteers for catechesis in the public schools and I collaborate with the lay people who preside over the liturgical celebrations in the village chapels. Melanie Delfin, M.I.C., and Lily Manzana, M.I.C., work with the youth and participate in the parish's social pastoral.

The training program for leaders consists of Bible studies, liturgy, leadership training, the creation of base church communities and the promotion of more efficient, more appropriate agriculture. These leaders will become our mission partners in the work of primary evangelization here. We thank the Lord for having trusted us with this new vine. We count on the support of your prayers!

Leticia Dotollo, M.I.C.



Lily Manzana, M.I.C., at the front door of our new Kiburiao mission house

DISCOVERING NEW HORIZONS

May the Spirit
dwell in you and
give you a heart
as vast as the
world, ever joyful

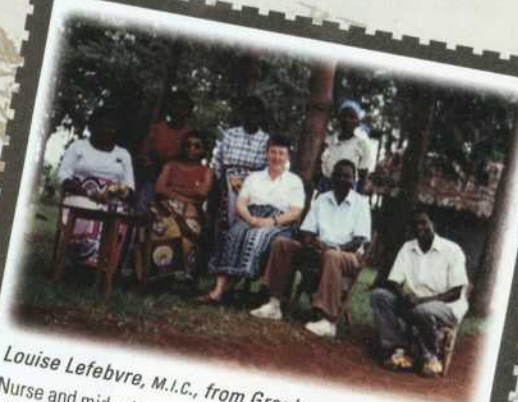
in hope!

May He inspire
you to bring the
light of Christ to
the world with
the apostles'
eagerness!



Bernardeta Collazo, M.I.C., from Havana

Originally from Cuba, Sr. Bernardeta, who acted as provincial bursar in her country, has come to share her expertise with other members of the General Accounting Department of the Institute. She hopes to meet the youth of our country.



Louise Lefebvre, M.I.C., from Granby

Nurse and mid-wife, Sr. Louise has now passed on the torch of the clinic to an African community, after several years of preparation. Returning to Malawi, she will now accomplish secretarial work.



Lise Doucet, M.I.C., from Shawinigan

The Creole language has no more secrets for Sr. Lise. Enriched by her many years in Haiti, she has even taught the language to some Haitians in the Quebec Province. She has returned to Port-au-Prince to organize the library of a new school, the Délia Tétrault Institute, with some other MIC's.



Dominique Leman, lay missionary, from Montreal

Dominique is leaving for Cochabamba, Bolivia in partnership with the MIC's. Her professional training will allow her to work with the Bolivian organization AMANECER which helps young abused women, whether single mothers or abandoned ones, and their children.

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Thank you for your solidarity!

Dawn of a New Life

*May you devoted servants of God leave
with joy! Cheerfully rejoin the Beloved.
He awaits you.*



Juliette Girard, M.I.C.
Sr. Marie-de-Liguori
1910-2005
Danville, Quebec
Mission: Canada

Even if Sr. Juliette never knew the advantage of modern technology, she was a clever and efficient pioneer in the shipping department of Le Précurseur and MIC Mission News for 25 years. Congratulations and thanks from the subscribers.



Rita Blais, M.I.C.
Sr. Du-Saint-Nom-de-Marie
1908-2005
Thetford-Mines, Quebec
Mission: Canada, Japan

As a born leader of artistic talent, Sr. Rita knew how to win the love and trust of each and every one through her simplicity, her wisdom and her communicative joy.



Thérèse Beaudet, M.I.C.
Sr. Blanche-de-Castille
1926-2005
Deschailons, Quebec
Mission: Canada, Cuba, Peru

As an avant-garde educator, Sr. Thérèse chose to be involved in family catechesis. She also led many young people to open up to the missionary dimension of their baptism.



Maria Gloria Sulet Díaz, M.I.C.
1939-2005
Guines, Havana, Cuba
Mission: Cuba, Bolivia, Peru

While being Secretary of the Conference for Religious Men and Women of Cuba, and being committed in parochial ministry, Sr. Gloria left us abruptly within a few days in spite of flourishing health. Her simplicity and her contagious joy endeared her to every one.

Go in the *humour* of the Lord

One November 27, the feast of the Miraculous Medal, one of the sisters was out for an evening walk. It was only six o'clock, but it was already dark as she strolled along a small quiet street. There was neither a single passer-by... nor a car... "This street is not very well lit!" she said to herself. Suddenly, the sound of hurried steps behind her tore through the silence: a young man about 18 years old, wearing a leather jacket, was running up to her. Thinking that he wanted to speak to her, she greeted him.

"Gimme your money!" he replied.

"What? What?"

"Gimme *all* your money!"

"Okay.... Don't you work?"

"I don't have a job."

"I understand... You're lucky. I'm a nun, and I don't usually have any money on me. But I'm on my way to buy my monthly bus-pass. I will give you that money."

In her nervousness, she kept on walking.

"Stay in the dark! Stay in the dark!"

"How do you expect me to find my wallet in the middle of my briefcase in this darkness?"

And she continued to walk towards the light of the street-lamp. Then the young man stood in front of her, blocking her way.

"No problem. You want the change, too?"

"Yeah. Everything!"

"Here. I've also got a medal of the Virgin Mary!"

"Keep it for yourself!"

"I should think not! I'm doing you a favour tonight. You would do me a favour by accepting this medal of Mary. It's an image of the Mother of God. She is your mother, too. She loves you and will protect you."

"Okay, quick!"

In order to take the money, the young man had to free up his hands. The sister then saw that he had a weapon – 25 cm long! He stuck it in his jacket, and cupped his hands as she emptied her wallet. The young man took the medal, held it up to his lips, kissed it... and ran off into the night.

"Back on the bus, I thanked the Virgin Mary for her protection and entrusted the young thug to her," confided the brave missionary.

Merry Christmas

to all Cooperators of our Missionary Publication!

*To you who, with enthusiasm and generosity,
know how to spend time for the Missions, we say:*

Thank you wholeheartedly!

*We wish you, on this Christmas 2005,
the Peace and Joy Jesus brought in coming among us!
May love and serenity radiate through all your family
celebrations and friendly gatherings! And why not share
your happiness with people in need of affection,
light... and stars!*

May the year 2006 burst forth with tender rays of hope!

The Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception
and the Staff of the Missionary Press



Jeanne Berger, M.C., made with *Living with Christ* booklets

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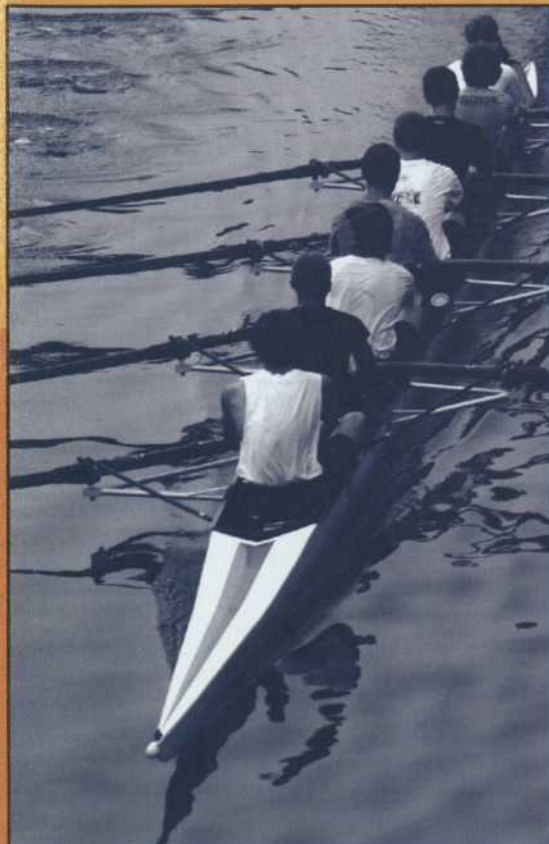
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THE DANCER'S PRAYER

Giver of life, Creator of all
that is lovely,
Teach me to sing the words
of your song;
I want to feel the music of living
And not fear the sad songs,
But from them make new songs
Composed of both laughter and tears.

Teach me to dance to the sounds of
your world and your people,
I want to move in rhythm with
your plan;
Help me to try to follow your leading,
To risk even falling,
To rise and keep trying
Because you are leading the dance.

This prayer was found, untitled and anonymous.

Susan Lee dubbed it in her autobiography "The Dancer: One Woman's Journey from Tragedy to Triumph", where she tells about how she was wounded by violence (father-daughter rape), healed by God, and fashioned into an instrument of His grace.

