

# M.I.C. MISSION NEWS

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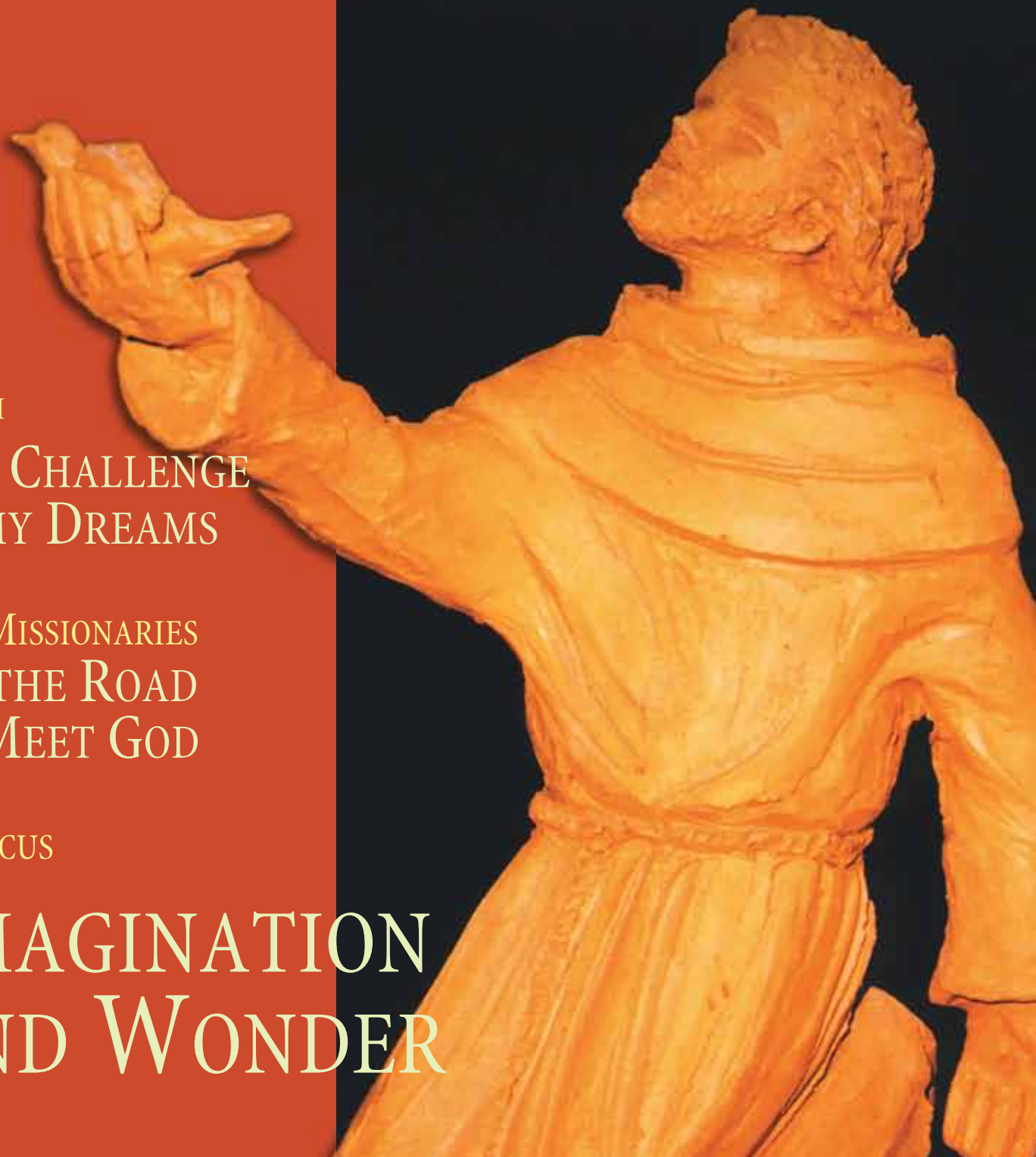
YOUTH

THE CHALLENGE  
OF MY DREAMS

LAY MISSIONARIES  
ON THE ROAD  
TO MEET GOD

IN FOCUS

IMAGINATION  
AND WONDER



PUBLICATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

## A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Springtime is on its way, what a congenial season! It anticipates the coming beautiful days, full of light, warmth and new life. It is a symbol of the Hope that lies within us: to be fully alive!

The paschal season invites us to deepen and nurture that hope rooted in our faith in the Risen One.

We hope that MIC Mission News can offer you a few rays of the risen Lord's radiant life.

**Happy Easter!**

## MASSES FOR READERS' INTENTIONS

January: *Canada*

February: *Cuba*

March: *Philippines*

April: *Haiti*

May: *Canada*

June: *Bolivia and Chile*

July: *Malawi and Zambia*

August: *Hong Kong and Taiwan*

September: *Madagascar*

October: *Peru*

November: *Japan*

December: *Canada*



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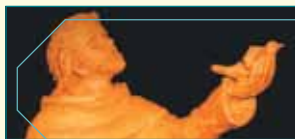
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## MIC Mission News

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# EDITORIAL

## We do not live by bread and reason alone...



Yves Demers Paris

Marie-Eve Homier

**T**he gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing knowledge, remarked Albert Einstein. Truthfully, human beings need reason, objectivity and logic as much as emotions, intuition and imagination; poetry, symbolism and legend.

However, modern scientific thought maintains that Cartesian logic can eradicate the irrational in human beings, that life has no meaning, that the world is absurd. It is not the purpose of Science to provide answers to existential questions, but to offer convincing facts to explain how nature functions or how things are constructed. Its methodology (which is also its strength) is such that it is unable to address the world of feelings, values, and ethics—in effect, the universe of *why* and *how to live*.<sup>1</sup> Didn't the twentieth century show, by leaning further towards barbarism than ever before, that science and technology can bring out the best and the worst?

Scientific progress, as admirable and useful as it is, cost us our candor, our trustfulness, our “naïveté.” At the same time, we lost the secret to happiness. *If you do not become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 18:3). Does that mean that, for we who are so advanced in science, to enter the Kingdom, we will have to return to the spirit of childhood?<sup>2</sup>

The great strength of wonder is precisely to be able to re-enchant the world that our ultra-modernity has disenchanted. *We become what we admire*, noted Gandhi. However, our society does not reflect our qualities, our wealth, or our beauty. It points rather to our various failings... which, according to advertising, can be overcome through consumption. Wonder can break the cycle of overabundance. When we discover something that fills our being to overflowing, our needs are few. We seek simplicity, not for simplicity's sake, but to leave room for what it is that fulfills us, for what lives within us.

To be filled with wonder, we have to begin by stopping! By simplifying our lives, in the current context of performance and efficiency. And then by taking the time to look, listen and allow ourselves to be astonished, to discover something new in everything. Einstein said, *He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed*. A renewed outlook—filled with wonder—can rekindle enchantment in life and in the world... and turn it into a path of joy.

<sup>1</sup> Hubert Reeves, *Les artisans du huitième jour*

<sup>2</sup> Éloi Leclerc, *Sagesse d'un pauvre*

# READERS' CORNER

**micmissionnews@pressemic.org calls out to you!**

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

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

### Rose Bourque, Bécancour

MIC Mission News—a real phenomenon! What an extraordinary and unique periodical where one can learn something about the work of missionaries in various countries! It's a periodical of universal interest which can fascinate you in its articles from beginning to end. I appreciate very much the Mass offered each week. Bravo! Keep it up, you really have the wind in your wings. And to you, directress, staff and collaborators—congratulations and thanks for your dedication.

### Maude Jalbert, Saint-Eustache

Really, your periodical has been enriched by the choice of texts and the quality of the presentation. Congratulations! The write-up on World Youth Day interested me very much. Thanks!

### Diane Lauzon, Saint-Jérôme

I read the last issue during two evenings and one breakfast! This proves how I was caught up with it. There is greater variety, accessibility and facility to read for a lay person like myself. It reflects favourably the younger generation and the in-between one before.

### Benoît Lacroix, o.p., Montreal

The wisely written editorial gave the tone. The columns, the “In Focus” section, the news and the witness articles showed me that the editing could not have been done without the presence of all these generous women—even some rather virtuous stubborn ones—together with the sick ones, to prepare for the future. Thanks for being there!

### Pierre Gagnon, Notre-Dame des Prairies

The liveliness of the warm colors and the invitation to consult other dossiers and articles attracted me... You found the right balance between topics written by persons of various literary talents with excellent taste. The disposition of the articles, in a well aired and colourful framework invited one to reflect on the content.

### Katie Wong, Verdun

I enjoy reading about your work in various countries—Africa, China, etc. from your magazines. Most interesting!

### Monique Bédard Grégoire, Sainte-Foy

The 2006 calendar did not come in. I want you to know how disappointed I was. The messages they had were read by all the members of my family when we had it. This time, I am the only one to read it.

*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!*

# MIRROR ЯОЯЯIM on Humanity

Born more than two thousand years ago in Israel, the poetic songs known as the psalms are still alive today in the prayers of the world.

By Paulette Gagné, M.I.C.

<sup>1</sup> *Voile de carême* (detail) by  
Haitian painter  
Jacques-Richard Chéry  
Biblical fresco created in 1987  
for the Catholic organization  
Misereor (Germany)

**C**HRISTIANS have become increasingly aware of the psalms since Vatican II, when their translation into English and other vernacular languages was begun. Cries, pleas, prayers, songs of praise and thanksgiving... In the Bible, the faithful find a never-ending source of nourishment in the psalms.

## LIKE SO MANY MIRRORS

Historians believe that most of the psalms share very old origins, some possibly even pagan. They were modified over time, reflecting the faith of Israel. Many psalms were spontaneously made up by believers and then adopted by the community to express their faith and fidelity to God. The authors were soon forgotten. At other times, psalms were intentionally revised to accommodate the community's worship needs. David, the renowned Hebrew king, organized Israel's liturgy, and is credited with the composition of many psalms. Not just a poet, the Bible shows us he was also a gifted musician who played the cithara, a lyre-like instrument.

The 150 psalms are gathered into a book called the *Psalter*, and reflect true humanity, full of tears and joys, like so many mirrors of defiance and faithfulness, despair and redemption, yesterday and today.

*You indeed, O Lord, give light to my lamp,  
O my God, you brighten the darkness about me;  
For with your aid I run against an armed band,  
And by the help of my God I leap over a wall.  
(Ps 17)*

## PSALMS OR POEMS?

You can't just plough through the psalms! You need to approach them with care, and become familiar with them. It's like breaking through the bark of a tree to extract the sweet sap from it. It takes effort

and patience. If you're looking for pious and edifying poetry in the psalms, you may at first be disappointed. Joseph Gelineau, the French Jesuit, and pioneer of liturgical music and psalms in French, explains that *the poetry of the psalms won't be found in subjective feelings. It lies in a completely objective linguistic pattern: alternating between moments that speak and moments that don't speak. The person who cries out does not form sentences. He squeezes his message into a few syllables. The words are full of sound and emotion.*

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;  
Lord, hear my voice! (Ps 129)*

For the poet, the literary device of alternating speech is his art form: he breaks up ordinary speech and recomposes it so that, in the new form that he has created, the words fill us with new senses and tastes, ideas and emotions yet unspoken and unheard.

*I want to sing,  
I want to play for you, Lord.  
Lift up my heart...  
I want to wake the dawn. (Ps 62)*

## THE HERITAGE OF THE PSALMS

Not all psalms have the same spiritual quality. Some sing of the beauty of Creation or celebrate the glory of the Creator. Others express humanity's confidence and implore God's pity. Many are calls for help, cries of distress or humble requests. Still others give thanks to God for his kindness and mercy. Some psalms are actually meditations on the human condition or efforts to teach from the wisdom of experience.

Jesus prayed the psalms, as did Mary, the apostles, and the first Christian communities. That's why they became official prayers of the Church and why they're found in all Christian liturgies.

## THE PRAYER OF THE WORLD

Since the psalms express all human feelings, it may be difficult to make a private and personal interpretation of them. These moving prayers, poured from the cup of human suffering, especially from oppression and injustice, take on a deeper meaning when interpreted universally. *For me*, confides Michel Hubaut, a French priest, *praying the psalms means attaching my little history onto a History of the People of God, a History that concerns us all. It's discovering that there is, in the end, only one People that sings, stumbles, moves forward, falls back, and starts over again.*

Therefore, the psalms can be prayed by each of us individually and, at the same time, by the community that recites or sings them. However, through every person who prays the psalms, the petitions and hopes of all the poor and oppressed throughout the world are heard. It is Jesus himself, always identified with the hungry and homeless, the destitute and humble, who raises his prayer and his plea.

*But I am a worm, not a man,  
Scorned and despised by my own people...  
When I cried to God, He heard and came.  
Lord, I will tell my people what you have done;  
I will praise you in their assembly. (Ps 21)*

The psalms that Jesus prayed also formed his dialogue with his Father. Therefore, praying the psalms joins us with the great voice of Christ, that of the Church and that of all people. No one prays alone... with the psalms.

## A LIVING TRADITION

How do we explain that for nearly three thousand years, millions of men and women have read these poems over and over again throughout their lives and that the spiritual sense that they find there never stops growing? Are the psalms filled by a Presence?

The Jews, who composed and prayed the psalms, lived their indi-



vidual lives and the events of their history in faith. When praying today, by repeating these words, they still find in them the expression of their misery, their search for God, and their praise. Once absorbed and reflected upon, these poems change our hearts and our perceptions.

We can also do a **Christian reading** of the psalms. Jesus of Nazareth, who frequently prayed these hymns of Israel, is also the Messiah whose arrival, death and resurrection were foretold in the psalms. To pray the psalms is therefore to pray with Him. We Christians, who recognize Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah promised by God, believe that His Spirit lives within these Jewish prayers. Through Him, we understand them, appreciate them, are nourished and satisfied by them.

Translated into every language, sung in Gregorian chant or in styles specific to various cultures, interpreted by a number of classical

musicians (César Frank, Mozart, Palestrina) and by many contemporary artists, the psalms continue to express the prayer of the world and remain poems that reflect all aspects of humanity. ☺

*Lord, measure the pace of my steps.  
I will not rush.*

*You prompt me to rest regularly.  
You provide me with peaceful images.*

*You restore my serenity.  
You lead me in the ways of effectiveness  
By the calm of the spirit and your way  
of peace,*

*Even if I have a great number of things  
to accomplish each day,*

*I don't worry myself,  
Because your presence, Lord, is with me.*

*(Japanese version of Psalm 23)*



Kenya: November 2002. I'm walking on a little red dirt path lined with flowering shrubs and little red-roofed houses. I stop to contemplate a magnificent sunset of vivid colours. My soul sings a song of joy! My African brothers and sisters have shown me so much love that I feel like I'm living in heaven. Suddenly a thought comes into my head: "Could it be that God has used my passion for travelling to seek me out?"

By Anne Godbout

# ON THE ROAD

## to Meet God

*sPhoto:* The author (center), with young women in training and their leader in the Focolari's village in Kenya

<sup>1</sup> Hosea 2, 16

<sup>2</sup> St. Thérèse of Lisieux

The need to set out on a journey had been a part of me for a while now, but I did not really understand why. That's why I took a year off to make a trip around the world.

### **"I will lead her into the desert and I will seduce her"<sup>1</sup>**

A few months before I left, I got to know a few members of the Focolari movement. Their spirituality, centred on unity, really got me thinking. I wanted to experience it for myself! From then on, the goal of my trip changed radically: instead of being a tourist, I wanted to deepen this spirituality and my relationship with God.

And so I found myself in one of the Movement's little villages in Kenya. The warm welcome I received and the extraordinary brotherly love that was shown moved me deeply, often to tears. There I discovered God's intense love for me in a new way. I learned to see and to love Jesus in those around me and to offer my love to Him in even the smallest actions.

I decided to prolong my stay so I could participate in a *Mariapolis*, the annual meeting of the Focolari. There, I received a special grace: that of desiring to give God the first place in my life. My "yes" allowed Him to spread His light into the darkest and most wounded parts of my being. Far from home, and therefore detached from all my responsibilities there, my false iden-

tities, the expectations others had of me, from my numerous occupations and pre-occupations, I became completely open to hearing this call and to letting Him take His place in my life.

### **What will be my way?**

In Brazil in 1991, profoundly moved by the immense gulf separating the rich from the poor, the founder of the Focolari, Chiara Lubich, assembled people from the business community and proposed that they start businesses that would separate their profits into three parts: the first to help the poor, the second to train people in "the culture of giving" and the last to develop the business. Several entrepreneurs responded to her invitation. Although Chiara Lubich was not an economist, her idea excited the interest of numerous experts, including sociologists, economists, philosophers and others. The economy of communion was born! Today more than 800 businesses all over the world are part of this project and more than 100 university theses have dealt with the subject.

This way of doing business seemed to me to be a practical way to help the poor and a means of putting my talents to use for them. It appealed to me. As soon as I got back to Quebec, I decided to move in this direction by starting a business project that I had put on the back burner some time earlier.

At the time, I had more than 10 years of professional experience as an organizer of group travel. Realizing that my numerous trips had been opportunities for very intense personal and spiritual growth, I dreamed of a business specializing in trips for human growth and spiritual development. When I discovered the economy of communion, I realized that I had found the soil in which my intuition could take root. Spiritours was born.

### The real boss

In the economy of communion, we give God the opportunity to intervene. Oftentimes, when we move against the current (a strongly unadvised approach, according to the business world), He intervenes in the guise of a chance to grasp, an unexpected contract, an idea for a successful product... Knowing this was enough incentive for me to stay my course and to defer everything continually to Him.

At the beginning, I had 1000 flyers printed to announce our first trips. I thought that that would be enough for the telephone to start ringing... How wrong I was!

I had written in my agenda book for one evening: *Presentation: the route of European abbeys*. When the evening came, I was tired and didn't feel like going at all. Still, a little voice inside me kept pestering me. And so I obediently made a little effort.

Not only was it one of the best presentations I had ever heard, but the life story of the presenter touched me so much that shortly after I recruited him as group leader for Spiritours! In fact he created the circuit *The Route of French Monasteries*.

What's more, on that same evening, the group that had organized this presentation (and which regularly holds several others) offered to include my young company's flyer in its mailed publicity! From then on, the telephone really did start ringing and we had our first registrations.

One year later, several dioceses entrusted me with the organization of World Youth Day in Cologne. This important contract allowed me to reimburse some debts and at last to share some of the profits for the economy of communion.

### "My vocation is love!"<sup>2</sup>

The mission of Spiritours is to allow individuals to take the time to gain perspective and recharge their batteries. Our trips welcome everyone, no matter what their religious beliefs are. They are first and foremost spiritual, and not religious trips.

I feel that my mission is to bring Christ to places where he isn't already. My clientele is largely made up of people 35 to 65 years old who have difficulty putting a name on what they're looking for deep within themselves, or who are still troubled by bad memories of their experiences in the Church. Some clients tell me that they were reconciled with the Church thanks to their encounter with the living communities they met on a trip with us. I see in that a real sign that God is at work, since only He can work such miracles.

Like any baptized person, my first mission is to love my neighbour, just as Jesus commanded us to do. In my work, that means actually loving the clients, the employees, the suppliers and even the competitors.

To love my clients, I try to really be attentive to their needs, to be patient with them, not to disappoint their trust and to give them all the information they need. To love my employees, I treat them justly and equitably, I encourage them to take initiatives and to develop their talents and their creativity. To love my suppliers, I try to build friendly and open relationships with them and to quickly pay my bills. To love my competitors, I refer to them clients who seek destinations I don't offer but that they do.

In the Focolari, I have learned the art of loving: to love first (to take the initiative), to love everyone (to see the divine presence in others), and to love even when it's difficult.

In my travels, the contact with nature has an important place. In the "spiritual safari in Kenya," I suggest that participants experience the excursion in silence so they can make an inner experience of it. Nature lends itself to contemplation! Through Creation, we can commune with our Creator. The state of grace we call wonder puts us into contact with God. That's why I think travelling opens a sublime door to meet Him. ∞

Amboseli National Park, Kenya  
Photograph: Anne Godbout



# THE KASIGLAHAN PROJECT



Inspired and animated by the MIC's spirit of thanksgiving, a group of women in the Philippines began an association with the sisters in the early 1990's, so they could journey with them. Today, these women are taking spiritual life and social involvement into their own hands with a bold and innovative missionary project.

*Based on the words of Bec L. Yao, AS.M.I.C.*

In Manila, the Philippine capital, and a metropolis of 15 million inhabitants, many homeless people illegally reside in vacant buildings or abandoned lots. When these squatters become too numerous, the government moves them onto land outside the city, building them small, rudimentary houses and giving them access to a few public services.

Thus was born Kasiglahan "village," some thirty kilometres away from the MIC's primary and secondary schools—their main apostolate in Manila.

Aware of the precarious situation of these newly transplanted citizens, the Associates of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (ASMIC) came up with the crazy idea of adopting the village!

## A Multifaceted, Holistic Approach

Wishing to adopt a holistic approach to working with the displaced individuals—an approach that would take into account the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of each person—the ASMICs put forth a plan to help them in all these aspects.

The most urgent of these was **health**. In 2002, an annual medical visit was established. Two years later, former MIC school graduates who had pursued studies in nursing or medicine began making their precious contribution to the project. These specialists stay in the village for an entire week, working side by side with the Associates. Always much-awaited, this annual visit is highly

appreciated by the families: it even allows for distribution of medication and other services, like X-rays and electrocardiograms.

Aware that **spiritual and religious support** is needed to help these former squatters regain their dignity, some MIC sisters offer Bible study sessions that include sharing and reflection. Meanwhile, the Associates conduct catechesis and offer an eight-session seminar entitled *Life in the Spirit*, which encourages the villagers to deepen their faith-life. Moreover, in a spirit of great simplicity, they have made the sacrament of marriage accessible to many couples who were unable to get married before starting a family because of their extreme poverty. The recent construction of a church and the arrival of a permanent priest have filled these fervent believers with joy. Their relocation had cut them off from many religious services.

As for **studies**, the *Magnificat Scholarship Foundation* has, up to now, provided scholarships and some spending money to 52 young people from Kasiglahan, so they can look after their needs. One of their most important needs is transportation, because the secondary school is far from Kasiglahan. Since there is no school bus, the students must pay for their daily trips—an expense the families cannot afford, because of their great poverty. This foundation was established thanks to the help of parents, friends, former students from the MIC school now residing in the United States or elsewhere in the world, and even Anglophone Associates in Quebec.

In addition, the lively Filipino branch of ASMICs would like to create a "Learning

Centre” where students could help each other with their studies, check reference documents on location, or take home used books. To make this happen, they need a physical space... which means asking the government for permission to use one of its “houses,” granted exclusively to the relocated families of Kasiglahan. They can only hope, because these government authorizations are difficult to obtain.

One of the most ambitious facets of the holistic aid plan is the creation of a **financial support program** that would allow the villagers to borrow small sums of money to set up business projects corresponding to their abilities and skills. This would allow them to properly support their family. A committee of Associates is generously and eagerly working on this new project.

### Mutual Aid

When one gets involved in a project of mutual aid, it often happens that one comes away completely transformed, though the original intent was only to contribute one's expertise and support to help solve a distressing situation. This is what most of the Associates working in the various projects at Kasiglahan have experienced.

For instance, in May 2005, three doctoral students who were doing a compulsory internship in order to complete their training in the field of Family and Childhood Studies gave a seminar on *Life, Sexuality and Values*. While giving this seminar, the trio discovered the generosity, charm and gratitude of the people of Kasiglahan, who freely opened up and talked about their life. Despite the villagers' great poverty and forced relocation, the university students were taken aback by their capacity to give meaning to their lives and keep a smile on their faces. The exchanges between them were all the more enriching on both sides.

### A Temporary Setback

Anxious to give the former squatters a dignified means to earn money and support their families, the Associates created a “Sewing Centre” consisting of five electric sewing machines. What hope for the women of Kasiglahan! One after the other—because there were many of them—they learned how to make good-quality clothing that they could later sell.

Unfortunately, the Centre had to give up its space in Kasiglahan—a government “house”—to a newly-arrived family. Its



operations were therefore temporarily halted. The wives and mothers who participated in the project hope to find a new space very soon, because this work was for them a source of pride and a means to contribute to their families' income.

### So Many Things To Do in the Lord's Vineyard!

The Associates would like to do more at Kasiglahan, but they also have their personal life to manage. To be a good wife and a loving mother on the one hand, while building a career and answering calls of distress from brothers and sisters on the other, is not always easy.

Thankfully, their commitment alongside the MIC sisters allows them to maintain a certain balance. Through deepening the spirituality and vision of Délia Tétréault, founder of the MIC, and through living the Gospel, each one learns to welcome the Lord's unconditional love with a great expression of thanksgiving. Only by building upon this love—both received and given—can they succeed in reaching others in all their complexity, just as they do with the “Kasiglahan Project.”



Vicky Ha

# The Challenge of My Dreams

In order to fulfill the hopes and desires buried deep within us, we often need to trade our certainties and security for a path of humility, for a journey that gives new meaning to our lives.

By Alexis Pearson

**A**S LONG as we are settled comfortably in a pattern of material and social well-being, this quest for deeper meaning—including all its setbacks, doubts, unknowing, and even concern from our loved ones—appears quite hostile. Why venture on such a risky path?

Partly because it can lead us to more perfect happiness. Is the quest for meaning not intimately linked to our most profound hopes and dreams? Hidden within each of us, these strong desires are like maps guiding us towards our own personal mission, the one which draws us closer to God. To unite ourselves to Him in whose image we were created: is that not our ultimate vocation?

## What Meaning for My Life?

Recently, in my professional career, I made a decision that opened the door to fulfilling a dream I have long cherished. From the outside, the changes that this choice required of me might have seemed radical and incomprehensible. But on the inside, I knew that God had been preparing me for this, through previous events in my life.

I was working for a Catholic charity in its Communication Services. I insist on the word “Catholic,” because it was very significant for me at the time. I was brought up in the Catholic faith: since adolescence I have been involved in parish youth groups. I was also very taken by the example of

John Paul II, and, with my work, I wanted to contribute to the “Civilization of Love” our beloved Pope spoke so often about.

With this job, I had everything: a good position, a good salary, a good team of colleagues... Many aspects of the job brought me satisfaction.

But beyond these external factors, my heart ached. It took me some time to become aware of this suffering, and even more time to understand why. Put simply, I think that though I was working for the Church, though I was helping people in need, I still felt very far from my true and profound desire: How could I better accomplish God’s will? How could I better live out the Gospel as a layperson?

## Surrendering to Grace

The more time passed, the more the chasm inside me grew. In this painful state, I understood what it meant to “have everything, but have nothing.” All of my exterior needs were looked after, but nothing could quench my inner emptiness. Even prayer, during this period, gave me little consolation.

Despite my distress, I waited a long time before giving in to the little voice inside of me. Was I afraid of losing the “status” I had gained within my field? Was I awaiting a clearer sign? In the end, after having consulted many people, I decided to leave my job... though I had no idea where I was headed.

My trials did not stop there. In fact, the process of discernment had just begun! I started looking for a job in my field: communications. Strangely, each time I found a job offer, my initial enthusiasm gave way to sadness and my heart filled with dread. In those three months of unsuccessful searching, I was forced to make some decisions I was not at all sure about and disappointed people who were counting on me. The only light to guide my way was my thin, inner voice.

### Courage Rewarded

One day, while I was reading my email, I fell upon a job offer sent to me by one of my friends. My heart leaped: this was the offer I was waiting for since my resignation! In a flash, I sent my letter of intent and my résumé... A few days later, after a selection process that could only be described as miraculous, I received the good news: I had been chosen to fill the position! There was no doubt in my mind: this was an answer to prayer.

I am now employed in an organization that cares for street kids, a sector of society too often marginalized because of their *visible* problems: drug addiction, psychological distress, difficulty in managing their impulsiveness... and all that comes with it: homelessness, prostitution, crime. And yet, deep down, they are young people who need care and attention just like any of us. Often, it is enough just to listen to them without casting judgement. I admire my colleagues who can make them feel that despite the brutality of their environment, despite the humiliating acts they've committed, they remain entirely human.

I am part of the prevention team; every week my partner and I visit different schools to talk to students about the dangers of the streets. The students usually listen very respectfully: I enjoy these contacts very much!

Though my current employment has little to do with my formal education, it does correspond to a deep and persistent desire of mine: to serve the needs of people directly.

### From Dream to Reality

When I was a child, I dreamed of becoming a missionary. After a brief experience

abroad two years ago, I understood that I wanted to fulfill that dream here, in Montreal. My previous job brought me closer to achieving that dream by allowing me to work *for* people in distress. Now, I have a chance to work *with* them.

Somewhat ironically, being able to rely on my own journey is one of my greatest strengths in my current position. Through the trials I experienced, I can help others embark on the uncertain path leading to the discovery of their own identity. The work I do is really very humble, but I cannot imagine anything more profoundly gratifying for me.

God gives me this joy to savour every day. But on top of that: by serving my brothers and sisters directly, I am helping to build a Church whose wisdom and capacity for relationships is turned towards humanity. I am helping to build the Civilization of Love!

Our quest for meaning is intimately linked to our profound hopes, to our Dreams.

### Happy Are the Dreamers!

Because of this new sense of well-being, I know that my suffering—the doubts, the searching, the uncertainty—was not in vain. I learned that we need not be afraid of the journey towards fulfilling our dreams. Since God took the care to craft each one of us individually, what a joy it is to discover and fulfill our own unique vocation!

My journey is not ended. In many ways, it has only begun! Everyday, I am, of course, free to seize or turn down the opportunity to continue on this path... But let us not forget that only by embarking on this journey of self-fulfilment can our capacity for love grow, our talents shine, and our profound desires be realized. It is a path on which we can taste the happiness promised by the Gospel.

Our profound dreams and aspirations are the meeting place with God in our hearts: let us not be afraid to embark on this journey, again and again. ∞

# Mission: grandparents

Once upon a time there were some seniors who wanted to start a “Grandparents Centre” in their neighbourhood. You wouldn’t necessarily have to have grandchildren to do volunteer work there. It would be enough to have love in your heart.

By Suzanne Gervais, AS.M.I.C., Secretary of the Grandparents Centre

Started in 1999, the Grandparents Centre in Grand Joliette grew out of a desire in the Saint Pierre parish pastoral council to follow up on Vatican II’s teaching concerning the involvement of laypeople in their milieu.

At a time when the family is undergoing serious upheaval, bringing generations closer together makes more sense than ever. More and more seniors are finding themselves back in school to share their experiences and their knowledge, but especially their love, their time and their affection. When the grandparents arrive, the students’ eyes light up, revealing just how meaningful the presence of the seniors is to them. The tremendous complicity that has developed between the volunteers, the teaching staff and the administrators of the Family Centres speaks just as loudly. Everyone works together hand in hand toward the success of their mission. Christmas, Valentine’s Day, Easter, maple sugar time, the end of the school year—all and any occasions can serve to celebrate and build interpersonal ties.

Over the years, the area has come to acknowledge our group, and the requests for support have grown. So what do we do exactly? A homework assistance program was started with our help. Young mothers can use the CLSC services while we take care of their kids. At the request of the Youth Centre, we offer teaching support to

9 to 12 year old boys to help them complete the work their teacher assigns them in class.

Grandparents, children, staff—everyone is a winner in this experience. And our volunteers could tell you a story or two! A child who jumps into our arms, tenderly calling us grandma... Another who bursts into tears because of family or school difficulties...

The range of ages (from 55 to 83), gifts, life and work experiences among the volunteers allow for a wide variety of types of support and action, taking into account the tastes, interests, abilities and availability of everyone involved. Everyone is actively involved in the planning and development of the Centre’s projects.

This year, a subsidy from the Quebec government’s Ministry of Family, Seniors and the Status of Women has also allowed us to provide the volunteers with free training in functional communication and support in order to facilitate their interaction with young people.

Over time, wonderful bonds have formed, and the little Centre has been growing and growing. Just like in fairy tales, many grandparents in the region are living happily ever after, and having lots of... grandchildren!

After reading this, maybe you’re thinking of starting an inspiring project like this in your own area. We can only heartily encourage you to go ahead with it, because it’s a wonderful way to build meaningful intergenerational ties and to actively participate in the life of your community.

Good luck! ♡



D. Drouin



# Imagination and Wonder

## Gateway to the Kingdom of God

To be in a state of wonder is to expand one's heart and mind. Through wonder, young and old alike catch a glimpse of a greater, wider world. Human life is made up of much more than we are able to see, touch, and hear. Wonder opens a gateway to God: it puts us in touch with the Infinite and the Eternal. Thank you Harry Potter!

By Guylain Prince, O.F.M.



In the Christian world, especially in English-speaking countries, bitter debates have taken place about the Harry Potter books and movies. Certain groups, above all among fundamentalist Christians, fear that children won't see the seriousness of certain practices associated with magic (card-reading, spells, incantations, etc.). Furthermore, they observe that important Christian references aren't mentioned: the meaning of Christmas and Easter aren't explained to children. What's more, Harry's morality seems to be somewhat shaky, and he can be pretty bad-tempered, too!

As far as I'm concerned, I thank God that the exceptionally rich universe of the author, J.K. Rowling, has been opened up for me. Like so many others, I was totally enthralled. I read and reread every one of her books, in both French and English, and I of course saw all the movies! Every one of them was another chance to talk about them with my nephews and nieces, with my friends' children, with the teens who are growing up at the same time as the books' young hero. Then I took a look at the writings of Tolkien (*Lord of the Rings*) and, more recently, of C.S. Lewis (*The Chronicles of Narnia*). I was already popular with kids... I have become the one uncle that speaks the kids' language, who "knows everything there is to know about Harry Potter." All this for a few hours of reading. I should have done this a long time ago!

**Note about the author:**

Guylain Prince, O.F.M., is editor in chief of the *Nouvelle revue franciscaine*. As a Biblical scholar, he gives lectures and retreats. As a musician, he founded the *Maison InterCD*, which publishes and produces records and shows inspired by the Gospel. An avid reader, Guylain has recently looked into the phenomenon of fantasy stories that includes Harry Potter, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Title page:

Photograph: **Dragonsite**,  
www.munrogifts.com

## THE LANGUAGE OF MINDS THAT CAN SEE FAR INTO THE DISTANCE

I have to admit that as far as amazing stories go, I was well prepared. As a Biblical scholar, I've had a lot of theological training specializing in Holy Scripture. I loved learning Hebrew and Greek; I've explored mysterious and sometimes strange texts, full of life and death. I've had the experience of dissecting a story with older and wiser than myself and of seeing a universe of meaning open up, a universe that still lives in my heart. Imagination takes root within the intelligence and heart of symbols that allow us to interpret reality. Wonder is the pleasure of a soul that has discovered new horizons. Thanks to my Biblical training, which focused particularly on semiotic and rhetorical approaches, I can *read my life* with eyes that are bigger than life... without actually stepping outside of life. People who lack imagination also lack perspective. They have trouble seeing a world that could be different than it is. Even the Kingdom of God becomes narrow in such hearts and souls.

## POOR CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION!

We have considerably narrowed the religious universe of our children by reducing access to the "wonderful stories" from the Bible and from our own religious history. At the end of the 80s I was teaching catechism in a private school in Ottawa. One Tuesday afternoon, I walked into a Grade 8 classroom. *I've got a great story to tell you!*, I said. Right away the students' eyes lit up, their ears opened wide, and a hush fell over the room. It was the story of Zachaeus! *Come on, we've heard that one before! We had it in Grade 1, 3, and 5. We're tired of it, sir!* Something was wrong, and yet... I couldn't figure out what.

Later, I worked for the Catholic Bible Society (SOCABI). Shortly after my arrival, the Quebec Education Ministry (Catholic Education Department) asked us to come up with a global analysis of the programs in Grade 1 to Grade 8 from a Biblical point of view. After having evaluated each year, an overall assessment was sent. It was catastrophic! Well-intentioned people had structured almost all the programs based on a total of about 20 stories. And we noticed that in all the texts, only "heroes accessible to children" were used, that is, positive characters who at first glance seemed close to a child's reality. Our error had been to not introduce stories about complex characters, anti-heroes, and counter examples. By wanting to present only positive models, we have created a generation of children who can't interpret reality any more, including from a Christian point of view. There is no longer a sense of long-term reality, of continuity

or accomplishment. The Christian imagination has been flattened out; and so has the ability to stand in wonder within the religious sphere.

## THE BIBLE: STORIES THAT STAND UP!

The Bible is the work of storytellers. Anyone who has lived in a culture of oral tradition knows what that means. Whole evenings spent listening to the story of a people, the genesis of one's clan, the creation of the earth and the stars, its stories, told by those who know and have come to terms with reality—in certain cases, who have learned to survive in reality—become the key that unlocks the entry into the world. In Gjoa Haven (in Nunavut, an Arctic territory in Canada), I spent a dozen evenings listening to tales about the creation of the aurora borealis and the continent. I came to understand how such an inhospitable place could become the home for a people. Through the world of imagination, the tundra became the source of both their internal and external freedom.

The Bible was written initially by a nomadic people, a people with an oral tradition. Even in Jesus' time, less than 10% of the population could read and write. The Biblical stories were first told orally. Of course with the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel, the great oral traditions were put on "paper," but overall, the people never lost its identity as a people of storytellers.

When he taught, even Jesus never concerned himself with writing things down. As was customary, it was the disciples who took notes. They were the ones who collated and assembled "the sayings and doings" of Jesus. And according to Jewish tradition, both the good and the bad sides of the hero had to be portrayed. James and John had to be shown calling for lightning to strike the towns that refused to believe (Luke 9:54), Peter as someone who understands nothing and who betrays Jesus, the disciples as being slow to believe. The Biblical world knows that life is complex. The world of its imagination includes situations that are difficult to solve, characters who fall and hurt others, people who make mistakes and regret them. The Gospel is filled with characters *whose example must not be followed*, whose motivations are not easy to understand... because in real life, that's the way it is. The imagination needs complex characters and situations so it can interpret reality in all its subtlety.

## "TELL ME THE STORY ABOUT... .. AGAIN"

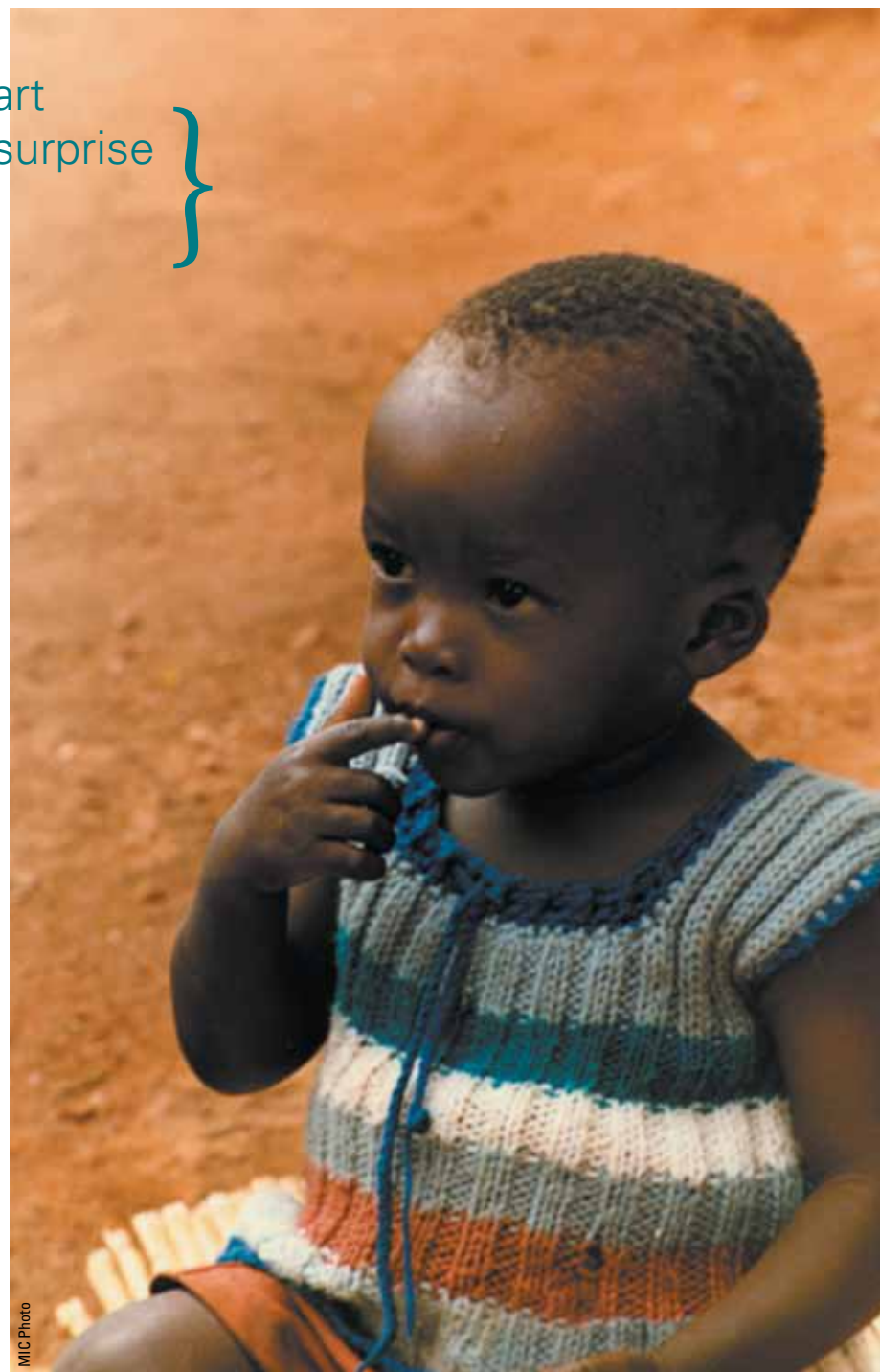
Anyone who has regularly tucked children in for the night recalls having been asked to *tell*

## To recognize God, the heart must be well trained for surprise and astonishment. }

*it again just one more time.* And when you've told the same story thirty times over, you start to wonder just what the child sees in it. The same is true of young people and adults. Some stories just lose interest; there's just nothing left to get out of them. Others seem to be as fresh as when we heard them for the first time. Strictly from the point of view of information, the listener already knows "what it's about". In fact, he's probably already capable of telling the overall story himself. So why is it that he wants to hear it again? As long as there is material left to "be integrated," the listener will feel like hearing a story again. Something important is taking place... To listen attentively is to let oneself be put into motion. The mind is exploring the uncharted territory of its consciousness, meeting friends and enemies, visiting zones of light and darkness. Through the story, for the attentive listener, something is being "solved" in his heart; he is developing tools that will help him to understand reality. Jesus was the champion of those apparently innocuous little stories called parables that hold the key to the Kingdom in the most unexpected situations. The absence of parables leads to an absence of clarity about the Gospel. We can no longer "see God" in the most unexpected situations, for to recognize God, the heart has to be well trained for surprise and astonishment. In a world where the imagination has become a business, it is difficult to find within oneself the wellspring of creative novelty, which is precisely what allows us to encounter God. It's not impossible, but it has become difficult.

### REDISCOVERING THE MEANING OF CREATIVE EFFORT

The greatest heritage of the young generation, that of Harry Potter, *Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, will unquestionably be to have rediscovered a taste for reading, for the effort that opens unexplored horizons. Every one of these books and films, each in its own language, has created expectancy, joy and sorrow. Each one tells the story of heroes and anti-heroes who develop in a complex way in an imaginary world that is equally complex. When the time comes for us to share our faith and our

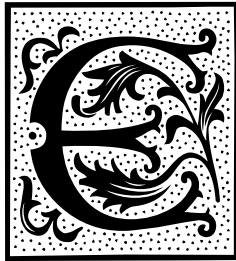


MIC Photo

Christian values, we will soon see generations of children and young adults who have inherited the questioning spirit of these wonderful stories. If we learn their language, we will be able speak to them about God without fear. They will have been trained for grandeur, effort, patience and... invisible reality. The realm of imagination is a marvelous point of entry for faith. Wonder is the key that opens us to a God who knows how to constantly surprise us, now and forever. ∞

# THE SELFISH GIANT

Oscar Wilde



**VERY AFTER-NOON**, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the Giant's garden.

It was a large lovely garden, with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach-trees that in the springtime broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are here!" they cried to each other.

One day the Giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years were over he had said all that he had to say, for his conversation was limited, and he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden. "What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.

"My own garden is my own garden," said the Giant; "any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all round it, and put up a notice-board.

## TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED

He was a very selfish Giant.

The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high wall when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. "How happy we were there," they said to each other.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the Selfish Giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot to blossom.

Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep. The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. "Spring has forgotten this



garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. "This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask the Hail on a visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran

round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the Selfish Giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the Giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always Winter there, and the North Wind, and the Hail, and the Frost, and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the Giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the King's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring, and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the Giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all round it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still quite covered with frost and snow, and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up! little boy," said the Tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny.

And the Giant's heart melted as he looked out. "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever and ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden.



But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run, for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the Giant coming. And the Giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the Giant's neck, and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the Giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring. "It is your garden now, little children," said the Giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the Giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

All day long they played, and in the evening they came to the Giant to bid him good-bye.

"But where is your little companion?" he said: "the boy I put into the tree." The Giant loved him the best because he had kissed him.

"We don't know," answered the children; "he has gone away."

"You must tell him to be sure and come here tomorrow," said the Giant. But the children said that they did not know where he lived, and had never seen him before; and the Giant felt very sad.

Every afternoon, when school was over, the children came and played with the Giant. But the little boy whom the Giant loved was never seen again. The Giant was very kind to all the children, yet he longed for his first little friend, and often spoke of him. "How I would like to see him!" he used to say.

Years went over, and the Giant grew very old and feeble. He could not play about any more, so he sat in a huge armchair, and watched the children at their games, and admired his garden. "I have many beautiful flowers," he said; "but the children are the most beautiful flowers of all."

One winter morning he looked out of his window as he was dressing. He did not hate the Winter now, for he knew that it was merely the Spring asleep, and that the flowers were resting.

Suddenly he rubbed his eyes in wonder, and looked and looked. It certainly was a marvellous sight. In the farthest corner of the garden was a tree quite covered with lovely white blossoms. Its branches were all golden, and silver fruit hung down from them, and underneath it stood the little boy he had loved.

Downstairs ran the Giant in great joy, and out into the garden. He hastened across the grass, and came near to the child. And when he came quite close his face grew red with anger, and he said, "Who hath dared to wound thee?" For on the palms of the child's hands were the prints of two nails, and the prints of two nails were on the little feet.

"Who hath dared to wound thee?" cried the Giant; "tell me, that I may take my big sword and slay him."

"Nay!" answered the child; "but these are the wounds of Love."

"Who art thou?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.

And the child smiled on the Giant, and said to him, "You let me play once in your garden, today you shall come with me to my garden, which is Paradise."

And when the children ran in that afternoon, they found the Giant lying dead under the tree, all covered with white blossoms. ❧



Watercolors: Geneviève Dick

# Joy

## According to Saint Francis

St. Francis was born into a wealthy family in Assisi, Italy. He became a knight and was imprisoned during a war with a neighbouring city. The illness that followed led to profound uncertainty; he searched, he questioned...

By Paulette Gagné, M.I.C.

**O**NE DAY, a passage of the Gospel transformed his life: *Go, announce that the Kingdom of God is at hand... carry neither gold nor silver...* (Matthew 10:10) In a radical way, Francis left everything, power and possessions, and became poor, the better to love. *The Son of Almighty God, he thought, left the glory of Heaven; out of love, He took on our bruised humanity.* With the example of Christ, shedding his possessions became for Francis a way of **freedom** and **communion** with the poorest of the poor, with wounded humanity. He understood that to respect the life of his fellow man, he had to start by respecting all life, no matter how humble. For him, all of Creation formed a great family, a kind of universal brotherhood: people were not absolute Masters of nature; they must humbly take their place in Creation. Transformed by this conviction, Francis developed a **contemplative view** of the nature and simplicity of creatures and things. He was filled with wonder not only at what people could draw from the world, but at the world itself, which was given to us.

*His life was a perpetual intoxication of divine love... He didn't look down on anything; he loved everything; he had joy and compassion for all; a flower threw him into rapture; he saw in nature only brothers and sisters. For him, everything had meaning and beauty* (Ernest Renan, French historian).

Just as a drop of water caught in a sunbeam reveals all the colors of the rainbow, Francis, his thoughts turned towards God, reflected His presence in everything. Discovering the miracle of existence filled him with wonder and opened the floodgates of contemplation to him. He was swept up by the beauty of surrounding nature, which invited wonder and praise, and throughout his life Francis was overcome by enthusiastic and unrestrained joy. He needed all of Creation to go to God to tell Him of his happiness, his joy of living. In his praise, he included all living things as his brothers: *Praise to you, my Lord, with all the creatures.* The sun and the stars, the wind



Sculpture by Franchi (Assisi)

and the water, the fire and the earth all form part of the praise and the prayer of Francis. His love and his abandonment with Jesus, the poor Man of Nazareth, are expressed in prayer.

*Lord living and true,  
You are love and charity, you are wisdom,  
You are humility, you are patience,  
You are beauty, you are gentleness,  
You are shelter, you are rest.  
You are joy; you are our hope and our joy.*

The joy of Francis calls to mind the “Parable of the Pearl of Great Price” in the Gospel. *A trader is in search of fine pearls: he finds one of great price, and then sells everything he has in order to buy this pearl* (Matthew 13:45).

As a knight, he was a man of war, but Francis died as a man of peace... at peace with God, with himself and all of Creation. ☞

*God changed his heart and his renewed heart changed the world* (Murray Bodo, O.F.M.).

# Between Anguish and Wonder

Who has never been struck with awe and wonder when contemplating the immensity of the sky or the sea? Both the infinitely great and the infinitely small, the grandeur and the fragility of life can take our breath away! But between anguish and wonder the distance is small. Like two walls of a canyon, a single little bridge links them together, and that bridge is faith.

By Michaël Séguin, Masters Student in Theology, Université de Montréal

## For further reading:

*The Courage to Be: Second Edition*, Paul Tillich. Yale University Press, 2000, 238 p.

In his work *The Courage to Be*, the theologian Paul Tillich defines anguish as *the state in which a human being is aware of his possible non-being*. In fact, more than a fleeting emotion, anguish is a profound awareness of our finiteness, of our limited being, of the possibility of no longer being, no longer breathing, no longer living.

Tillich identifies three types of anguish: that of fate and death (the fundamental fear of no longer being in the world, of disappearing through fate), that of emptiness and the absurd (the fear of losing meaning, of life becoming

empty and insipid), and finally, that of guilt and condemnation (the anxiety of losing spiritual meaning, of being rejected by God). These forms of anguish are all ways of feeling naked and diminished, unequipped to face life. In each one, the essence of the person, or of being, is threatened by nothingness, or non-being. However, even while making life difficult for us, these existential anxieties open us up to the beauty of the world, for when everything is going well, isn't it so very easy to forget God, to no longer be awestruck by the beauty and complexity of the world?

But how can human beings overcome this existential anguish? According to Tillich, we need the **courage to be**: *the power that life has to affirm itself in spite of its ambiguity*. But where does this vital power come from? From God, who Tillich considers to be *the Being above being*. If anguish is the awareness of our possible non-being, and God, who is transcendent, is above being, he can therefore help us to overcome our anguish! The courage to be is the unceasing **combat against nothingness** and the quest for meaning. To seek meaning and to recognize that meaning can be found, even when it seems impossible, is a radical expression of faith, a risk to be taken in order to **live abundantly**. Tillich concludes that *the courage to be is rooted in the God who appears when God has disappeared in the anguish of doubt*.

Ultimately, this courage to be, which clings to God even in the middle of the night of doubt, turns out to be a prime pathway en route to wonder. Isn't it wonderful to realize that in spite of guilt, in spite of the absurdity of life and the fear of death, **"I am"**? And that God is there in the midst of the doubt that troubles me? Wonder is the courage of dreams and creative beauty, which "surf" over anguish and discover God in the midst of the wave. 🌊

The courage to be, the risk one takes to live abundantly, turns out to be a wonderful path en route to enduring wonder.



Hemier Family

## REAPING THE HARVEST IN MADAGASCAR

By Louise Pagé, M.I.C.

For more than 50 years, women from Quebec, Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, have travelled to Madagascar. They lived among the people, with the families, caring for the sick, and setting up schools. Inconspicuously, they were casting seeds. Years and workers followed one another... Now, the time has come to reap the harvest: in the Canadians' wake, many young Madagascans are involved in our religious Institute, sharing the same mission.

Educating young people requires significant preparation, and several of our young Madagascan sisters are now studying. In Tsaramasay, a poor quarter of the capital where we teach primary school, pastoral education, literacy, health care and vocational training for women, Monique-Joseph is defending her thesis: *Creation of a Centre for Human and Christian Formation*. Meanwhile, at the National Institute of Teacher Training in Mahamasina, a village in the capital region, Erika-Jeanne is completing three years of training to work as a pedagogical adviser in our schools. As for Marie-Angèle, she just recently obtained a bachelor's degree at a French college.

Presently, seven young women are at the postulate level, the first stage in the process of discerning the authenticity of a religious missionary vocation.

In the novitiate, the second stage of professing the religious life, Edwige, Émilienne and Christine welcomed Canadian Josée Martineau last July. Through prayer and reflection, study and work, they pursue and deepen together their experience of fraternal life.



Last September 8th, four young Madagascans pronounced their first vows: *We, Danièle-Frédérique, Marie-Anne, Marie Eudoxie-Eva, Josiane-Georgine, take our first vows. Drawn to Christ who invites us to follow Him, we wish to give ourselves to Him.*

For Monique-Robine, taking her final vows last August was the happy ending to a long journey. With great joy, she committed herself definitively.

Scattered around the world, twenty-or-so other Madagascan sisters work in various activities of the Institute

Some sowed... others watered... still others will harvest. Madagascans, Chinese, Cuban, South American, Haitian, Canadian, Japanese, Philippine, African—coming from many different cultures, our sisters make the Good News known to all the world: Jesus Christ came among us to say, “You have a Father and He loves you all, each and every one of you.” ☪

Founded in 1902, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception number nearly 700 members from 17 nationalities working in 13 countries. In their service for the Church, the nuns and their lay associates (SMIC) work in many capacities: promotion of women, education, health care, parish and diocesan pastoral assistance, social services, etc.

Their founder, Délia Tétreault, left a very rich heritage to the Church and to the world: awakening and developing the missionary aspect of faith, opening up to the world, respecting differences and cultures. Most of all, she handed down to the Christian people a spirituality centered on recognition of God's free gifts to the world, gifts to be shared beyond all borders.

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# Chuño and Chards in the Andes

*In order to give native women in South America autonomy, a feeling of pride, and social recognition in their own communities, Elmiere Allary, M.I.C., has dreamed up some... original projects!*

*Interview by Marie-Eve Homier with Elmiere Allary, M.I.C.*

**I**N OCTOBER 1981, after having experienced various missionary expeditions abroad and in Quebec, Elmiere departed for Yauri, in the Peruvian region of Cusco.

## The Andean Adventure

At an altitude of 3900 m, where oxygen is scarce, and faced with the cold and desolation of the Andean Altiplano, Sister Elmiere first had to let her body adapt. Once she was back on her feet, alongside her fellow MICs, she sought an opportunity to make herself useful. She watched and listened to the Quechua people with whom she lived. The need to fill certain gaps in the local diet appeared clearly: *chuño* (a bitter, dehydrated potato typical of the region) and lamb or lama meat were the daily fare...

Thus, she came up with a program consisting of “community and family gardens,” called *huertas* in Spanish. With the help of the Canadian embassy, which agreed to fund the project, she began to train the women. For several months, assisted by a local promoter and a sociologist, and equipped with the necessary material (seed, a television, a VCR, videotapes in Quechua, and a car battery—because there is no electricity in the Andes), she got to work.

The beginnings were tough. There were many obstacles, for instance the women’s lack of experience in directing and coordinating community projects—a field traditionally reserved for men. Moreover, with no mentors or models to imitate, they were forced to learn everything for them-

selves. For example, they had to design small greenhouses and protect their gardens from hungry animals.

The women worked tirelessly and never gave up. Three or four years later, their efforts were crowned with success: they achieved autonomy by purchasing seed with profits from the sales of their own food products.

## A Wind of Change

*Over time, explains Elmiere, we realize that with better nutrition, we can have a positive influence over many other aspects of life. The training programs created to promote the recognition of women in society improved the education of children, health, training for the Christian life, etc. In our program we had daily prayer, a time to meditate on the attitude of Jesus of Nazareth who, in his day, sided with women (among others). These Andean women now understand that they have a place as well as rights and responsibilities within society. The huertas are for them a practical and worthwhile means to feed their families, but their impact goes much further than strictly improving their diet.*

To change a community’s eating habits requires patience and perseverance. One does not spontaneously acquire a new taste for carrots, beets, cabbage, lettuce, radishes, Swiss chards—the few vegetables that can grow in the Andes. Children were the first to appreciate their flavour. On their way to school, they would pick carrots from the ground and munch on lettuce leaves, under the sceptical gaze of their mothers and grandmothers. Slowly, the village dwellers became

convinced... Vegetables even began appearing on the menu in the village's restaurants!

The program's participants' feeling of self-worth was boosted. This project was theirs: it truly belonged to them. If they wished, men could get involved, but the responsibility for the *huertas* always lay in the women's hands. Consequently, in the families of these women gardeners, the relationship between men and women was transformed, little by little.

### One who Sows, One who Reaps

After having prepared the soil and sown the seed, it was time for the MICs to move on, like nomads. They were leaving Yauri after 19 years. The Ministry of Agriculture, impressed by the original *huertas* project, began reproducing the scheme in other parts of Peru.

As for the missionaries, the fact that a local body was taking up and carrying on their missionary endeavour was a sign of success. Thus, Elmire left Cusco with the serenity of a job well done, knowing that thanks to the *huertas*, women were now standing tall; they would never be the same again.

### New Swing, Same Direction

Pursuing the path of promotion of women, Elmire got involved in another missionary endeavour, this time in Cochabamba, Bolivia, at the *Instituto de Educación Rural (IER)*, founded in 1958 by a Bolivian priest to help young Quechua peasants living poorly and isolated in the neighbouring countryside. In 1976, the arrival of the MIC sisters at the IER gave a second wind to this institute which gradually directed its actions towards the professional training of women.

The IER, which is associated with the Ministry of Education, welcomes nearly a hundred residents, all rural women from the age of 16, who were not able to pursue their studies. Thanks to this training, they can find a job and occupy a place in society. Three technical programs are offered.

**For those who ended their primary schooling prematurely:** The IER offers sewing, knitting, embroidery, and weaving classes, alternating with the principal courses: language studies (Spanish), math, science and catechism. Moreover, an agriculturist teaches them the concepts involved in the creation

and upkeep of a large vegetable garden.

There is only one condition to apply: each student must be sent to the IER by her community or by an NGO, so that when she returns to her village she can work alongside her community, teaching them what she has learned and also conducting religious celebrations. Cut off by mountainous heights, the countryside rarely receives visits from a priest.

**For those who wish to pursue their secondary studies:** Two years of technical courses in **veterinary science** are available. First year: pure theory; second year: theory and practice, either on neighbouring farms or at the IER, which has cattle and even a roost of 6000 chickens!

At the end of their training, some of the young women work in twos as itinerant veterinary teams. Others, hired by the municipal government, look after animal health. During vaccination campaigns they meet with farmers and share recent knowledge about animal care.

**Those who chose health care** follow a program to become **auxiliary nurses**. At the end of the program an official title is awarded by Bolivia's Ministry of Health. This title allows the young women to work in health centres in rural districts and in hospitals. For these women, it is a big step towards autonomy and dignity.

*It is not easy to initiate change, especially change in behaviour, explains Elmire. Working towards the promotion of women in isolated, virtually abandoned areas, requires us to believe first of all in the dignity inherent to every person, and to wish with all our might for the full development of those persons. For me, it remains possible because Jesus of Nazareth, through his life and through his teachings, showed me that human beings created in the image and likeness of God are the greatest and noblest thing on earth.*

Now enjoying a period of rest in Canada, Elmire will return to Peru next autumn. Let us wish her lots of inspiration, so that her future projects may be just as original and brilliant as the last ones!



# I Have a Dream...



## About the Author:

Louise has worked in mission animation in various dioceses in the province of Quebec, in catechism in the Montreal diocese and in faith education in the Peruvian diocesan office.

By Louise Pagé, M.I.C.

Wherever I've travelled in both Quebec and Peru, children have taught me to have confidence and to trust in the Word of God, which I still offer to young people today. To walk at their side is to experience God every day. I see his presence at work in their lives. They simply open themselves up and experience the Word of God they believe in.

I'll never forget little Jean-François, a 6 year old boy, who cried out one day at catechism class, "I wish I could open all the doors and windows in my house to tell everybody that Jesus loves us!" A little naïve maybe, but how deep an expression of the living experience of knowing oneself to be loved, and really believing it. I love to recall the lifeless gaze of Eduardo suddenly

lighting up when hearing the Word: *I love you with an eternal love* (Jeremiah 31:3). He heard Him, he believed in the Word, and his life was transformed.

Eduardo, a child of

the Peruvian rainforest, had been abandoned. When I got to know him, he was living with an elderly woman whom he had been serving ever since she took him in.

Yes, it truly is the Living Word of God! It opens hearts, heals wounds, and gives meaning to life.

In our day, many people are wondering, *Is Jesus Christ still relevant to today's children, young people and adults?* Of course He is! The children, young people and adults of today, just like those in the past, continue to hunger and thirst for a Love that is everlasting. The challenge is raised by another



question: *How can we make Him known in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Here and there around the world, efforts are being made to accompany the awakening of faith, and growth in the life of faith. We are at a turning point in the history of evangelization.

And so I dream of parents who desire to see their child's birth into the Christian faith as much as they desired his or her physical birth. I dream of organized circles in which Christians commit themselves to accompanying these parents, circles that offer the necessary space and material resources, as well as hours adapted to family life, so that each and every one can be born into and grow up with a healthy relationship with God, with others and with himself. In short, I dream simply of the establishment of "Cultural Centres" where Christian faith education is possible.

My project is all the richer because it grows out of the past and the present in order to imagine the future. To bring it to life, I talk about it wherever I go... and I'm discovering that others share my dream! So I'm trying to interest them in turning it into a reality.

Is my dream realistic? I believe that the Spirit of God is still present in our world and that He breathes life into the hearts of those who love the God of Jesus Christ. ☺

I believe in "Christian Cultural Centres" where grandparents and parents can find the necessary resources and hours adapted to today's family life.



## Profession: Messenger

## I Am... a Missionary?

Three months after his election, in January 1959, Pope John XXIII took the whole world by surprise by calling for an ecumenical council: Vatican II. This major event of the twentieth century brought 2800 bishops and theologians from the four corners of the world to Rome to better understand the signs of the times.

Among the many documents resulting from this council, the decree *On the Mission Activity of the Church* ("Ad Gentes" in Latin) was published on December 7, 1965. Much debated from the start, this document radically transformed the conception of missionary evangelization. Previously, the Church sent missionaries to ensure a presence among non-Christians, asking them to convert, to be baptized—in short, to become Christians. Ad Gentes affirmed that during its pilgrimage on earth, the *Church-People of God* is missionary: from now on, evangelization was seen as the responsibility of **all baptized persons**, no longer just that of a group of specialists.

Since the release of Ad Gentes, "the era of mission activity as a unilateral movement of North to South, of Christian countries to non-Christian countries, is now over and the geography of missions has changed (...) Today, social, cultural and religious differences define the borders which the Church must cross in order to fulfill her calling." \*

Forty years later, the council document continues to challenge us. Today, knowing that the Spirit of the Lord goes before, guides and accompanies his messengers, how do we view the missionary role of every baptized person, sent to proclaim the Gospel in a relevant way wherever he or she goes?

Will you put out into the Deep with us? Are you feeling called at this time in your life, to live the Gospel of Jesus more fully than ever? **Scarboro Missions** invites single men, women and married couples to join us for a three year adventure of serving Christ today among the people and cultures of the world.

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We look for people motivated by the joy and energy of their Catholic faith, who desire to serve especially the poor and to learn from them. We seek people who have learned in life to reach beyond themselves by way of their volunteer and/or work experience. Candidates must have post-secondary education and/or some relevant work experience.

Scarboro Lay Missioners come from a wide range of professional and educational backgrounds. Through their presence in mission, they offer many gifts and talents that respond to people's needs in areas of community life, health care, education for adults, children and youth, pastoral work, prison ministry, ecology projects, and building construction, to name a few.

Currently, Scarboro Missions prepares and sends Lay Missioners to China, Malawi, Thailand, Ecuador and Guyana.

**To find out more:**  
John MacInnis  
Lay Mission Coordinator  
(416) 261-7135 ext. 265  
info@scarboromissions.ca

\* *La mission ad extra du plus proche au plus loin*, from the committee for missions of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec, September 2005.



Bertin Dickner

# You've Got Mail!

*Like the stroke of a magic wand....*

Dear friends,

A few years ago during the Easter Mass at Tsaramasay, a poor suburb of the capital of Madagascar, a woman with her 2 young daughters approached the altar to place her offering on it. One of the girls was limping badly: little Brigitte had club feet. I just couldn't get this little family out of my head.

Later, when I found out that Brigitte, her mother and sister were coming back to visit their aunt in the house next to ours, I took advantage of their presence in town to offer them a visit of the Doctors Without Borders dispensary. The medical team there included several good surgeons, and I was hoping that they might be able to do something for her.

After the examination, they accepted to operate on the condition that she be well prepared physically, that is, that she be well nourished. And this we undertook. After a few months of hearty meals, operations on both her feet were able to take place.

The time had come for me to recharge my batteries so I went back home to Canada for several months. Upon my return to Madagascar, I was sent to the west coast, far from Tsaramasay where I had met Brigitte and her mother. The years passed...

Suddenly, a strange turn of events! Last August, I came upon Brigitte at her first communion service! What immense joy to see her beaming, and so happy to be able to walk without any effort! What else could I do but thank the Lord for this marvelous encounter!

A happy missionary,

Thérèse Leblanc-Cormier, M.I.C.



MIC Photos

## Days of Joy!

Friends from all over,

Allow me to bring to life for you the moving celebration of the 35 years of existence of our secondary school Tak Oi, which has just received a face lift.

Built in a working class area of Hong Kong, the school's purpose was to allow young girls to gain access to a trade, just like girls from wealthier backgrounds were able to do. Situated in a very noisy street, the school started modestly, offering only the first grades of high school to about 500 students. Today, the school offers complete high school and pre-university training. Considering the high success rate in both academics and in the lives of our alumni, their continuing strong attachment to the school and the thanks they express, the only conclusion we can draw is that the school has achieved the goal it set out to accomplish.

On the occasion of this 35th anniversary, the time had come to give thanks and celebrate. How many memories were shared at the reunion of so many former teachers, students, MIC missionaries, service staff and maintenance personnel!

Bishop Joseph Zen, who had also come to participate in our gathering, took advantage of the occasion to stress the importance of *Truth and Love*—our motto—in our lives.

The school administration expressed its appreciation to the staff for their faithful services at a ceremony during which an insignia of recognition was awarded to 51 of them.

More than 3000 people participated in the activities of the two-day celebration. Rejoice with us!

The MIC team of Tak Oi Secondary School

The director, Mary Olga Lam, M.I.C., giving an insignia to Mrs. Lydia Lam Lai Chu in recognition of her 35 years of devoted service at Tak Oi.

MIC Photo



# DISCOVERING NEW HORIZONS

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give you a heart  
as vast as the  
world, ever joyful  
in hope!

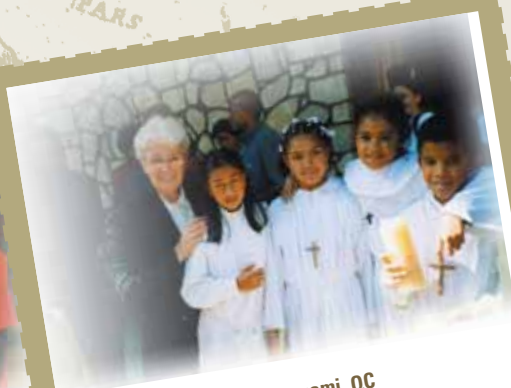
May He inspire  
you to bring the  
light of Christ to  
the world with  
the apostles'  
eagerness!



**DORIS TWYMAN from La Tuque, QC**

The motherhouse of Montreal lost their superior of many years, when Sister Doris returned to Africa where she took up responsibility as Provincial Superior of Malawi and Zambia.

MIC Photo



**SUZETTE JEAN from Kenogami, QC**

Besides giving music lessons in Madagascar, Sister Suzette is also engaged in the liturgy and in catechesis offered to parishioners and young MIC Sisters. After serving 20 years in Antsirabe, she is undertaking a new mission in Morondava.

MIC Photo



**FRANCE ROYER-MARTEL from Quebec City, QC**

Having successfully completed her university studies in missiology, Sister France left for Chile. There she will serve on the national level in the pontifical missionary works of the Church.

MIC Photo



**ANITA DUBÉ from Saint-Eusèbe, QC**

After more than 55 years in religious missionary life, Sister Anita wished to return to Haiti to offer her many services to her Haitian Sisters. Here we see her on the photo in the company of Father Lourdy Dorismond, O.M.I.

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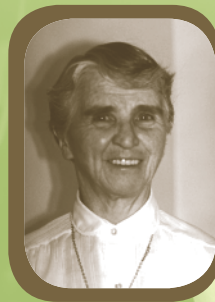
# Dawn of a New Life

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



**Gisèle Lambert, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Saint-Fidèle*  
(1926-2005)  
Quebec City, Quebec

*Sr. Gisèle spent most of her life as principal of our kindergartens in Japan. Her deep sensitivity gave her antennas to perceive the needs of others and to be amazed at God's actions in their lives.*



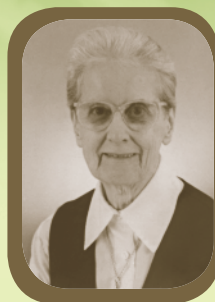
**Marie-Marthe Terrien, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Marie-Délia*  
(1919-2005)  
Ottawa, Ontario

*As a missionary in Africa, Sr. Marie-Marthe mastered chitumbuka (native language of Malawi) to the point that she could teach it to the newly-arrived priests and sisters. She loved very dearly Délia Tétreault whose name she bore with pride.*



**Adine Nadeau, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Marie-Ernest*  
(1908-2005)  
Quebec, Quebec

*While teaching home economics in Haiti, Sr. Adine travelled many kilometres in the mountains to meet the parents of the students. Her remarkable manual talents as well as her exquisite kindness left a mark on all those she met.*



**Madeleine Coursol, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Françoise-du-Carmel*  
(1916-2005)  
Montreal, Quebec

*During her many years in Japan, Sr. Madeleine taught piano to young students whom she deeply admired for their refinement and gentleness. After returning to Canada, courses as librarian and lessons on the computer gave her the opportunity to offer important services at the secretariat of our magazine.*



**Lucienne Ayotte, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Sainte-Chrétienne*  
(1910-2005)  
St-Justin, Quebec

*Sr. Lucienne spent some 20 years on the roads of Quebec to offer our magazine to families. Meeting youth in the schools and organizing activities for volunteers was her aim to keep alive the mission dimension in their lives. As an elderly blind person, she knitted for the needy.*



**Digna Magtibay, M.I.C.**  
*Sister Jose-Andre*  
(1931-2006)  
Calapan, Philippines

*With her unusual educational and artistic soul, Sr. Digna seemed to dance throughout her missionary life. In the Philippines, she founded the Délia-Tétreault Centre and the Delia's Friends Club. Her main mission was to introduce everyone to the life and dream of our foundress.*

### *A Child's Way of Seeing Things*

An extremely turbulent little boy of 4 or 5 years old went to Mass with his parents. Just before saying the words of consecration, the priest had the boy come up and sat him up on the altar with his back to the congregation. Taken by surprise, the boy sat completely still. On the wall in front of him hung a giant cross. The sculptor had spared no details of the crucified body of Jesus. During the consecration, the little boy, transfixed at the sight of the tortured body, cried out in horror, "What did they do to him?" A deep silence fell over the congregation. It's as if the people, used to seeing the crucifix, were able to see Christ's suffering for the first time. The consecration took on a whole different meaning that day... thanks to the lively little boy's fresh way of seeing things.

### *Discovery*

A young unbeliever on a cultural exchange was staying with a Christian family in British Columbia. At supertime, the father of the host family spread his arms to say grace. The young boy, sitting at his side, cried out, "Yeah, high five!" But he soon realized that that wasn't exactly what the father had in mind!

## From the Mouths of Children

### *The Heart's Treasure*

One winter morning, on the way to the daycare centre, a mother was talking with her 4 year old son.

"You know what, honey?"

"What?"

"I love you."

"Okay."

"Honey, don't forget today that Jesus in heaven loves you."

"Come on Mom, how can I forget that? You're wrong, Jesus is in my heart! That's where his house is."

### *A Sleepy Prayer*

A father prayed every night with his 5 year old son by reciting the Lord's Prayer and a Hail Mary. One night when he was very tired, the little boy prayed: "Hail Mary, full of temptation..."

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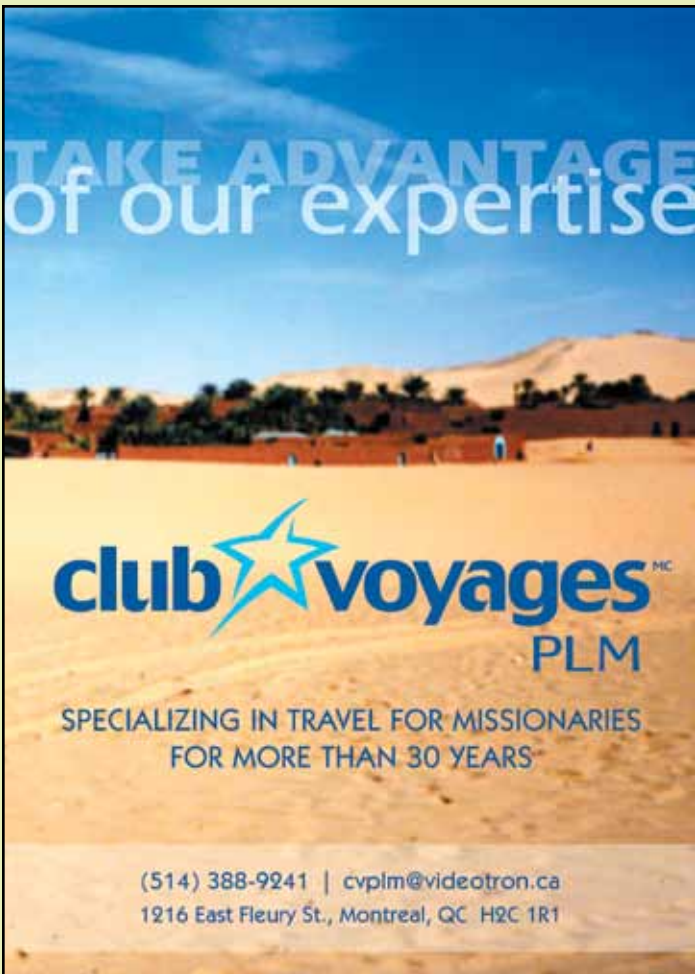
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## Lord, Send Us Fools

Lord, send us fools,  
who commit themselves completely,  
who love with more than words,  
who genuinely give of themselves,  
and till the very end.

We need fools,  
Crazy, passionate beings,  
able to plunge into insecurity:  
an even darker abyss than poverty.

We need foolish lovers of the present,  
lovers of the simple life,  
lovers of peace,  
free from compromise,  
determined never to betray,  
scornful of their own life,  
able to take up any task,  
to leave for any destination,  
both free and obedient,  
spontaneous and tenacious,  
gentle and strong.

Oh Lord, send us fools!

Louis-Joseph Lebreux

Aerial stunt from the Quidam show  
performed in Ottawa from May 18 to June 18, 2006.  
Photograph: Al Seib © Cirque du Soleil Inc.  
Costumes: Dominique Lemieux

