

S I N C E 1 9 2 3

MIC MISSION NEWS

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Calendar 2006-2007
inside!

SPIRITUAL LIFE

THE GEOGRAPHER
OF TWIGS

FAMILY

MY FAMILY:
THE MOST
BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY

WITNESSING

FLOWER IN
THE BUSH



Publication of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Instead of the usual
'IN FOCUS' section
you will find in its place
a wall calendar.

It covers 16 months from
September 2006-December 2007.

Have a good year with us!

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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Offices

Presse missionnaire MIC
120 Place Juge-Desnoyers
Laval, QC Canada H7G 1A4

Phone: (450) 663-6460

Fax: (450) 972-1512

Email: micmissionnews@pressemic.org

Web site: www.soeurs-mic.qc.ca

Directress of Publication

Paulette Gagné, M.I.C.

Editor In Chief

Marie-Eve Homier

Administrative Assistant

Carole Guévin

Translation & Editing

Claudette Bouchard, M.I.C.

Thérèse Leblanc, M.I.C.

Robin Dick

Regina Farrell

Marie-Eve Homier

Alexis Pearson

Promotion

Antoinette Castonguay, M.I.C.

Elizabeth Relacion, M.I.C.

Circulation

Alma Couture, M.I.C.

Thi Hien Duong

Accounting

Thérèse Déziel, M.I.C.

Layout & Design

5/5 Communication

Marketing

Printing

Solisco

Cover Design

Alexandre Léveillé

Editorial Board

Monique Bigras, M.I.C.

Pauline Williams, M.I.C.

Geneviève Dick

André Gadbois

Tax Receipt

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Reveal To Us Your Secret

For people from the Nordic countries, summer is a special time to meet others. While admiring the breathtaking scenery of the oceans, the forests and even the distinct beauty of cities, people greet each other with more ease. Friendliness and new relationships arise in times of relaxation and rest.

But, elsewhere in the world, much has happened during this summer of 2006. In countries at war, bombs explode and beautiful landscapes disappear behind clouds of smoke. People no longer speak: they cry out their distress, their suffering, bewildered by what has happened.

You who filled our TV screens in these last months: Zeina, Amal, and Karim of Lebanon; Noah, Nafez, and Hannan of Palestine; Bella, Amaya and Yosi of Israel, reveal to us your secret. Behind your disfigured silent faces, tell us how you keep up HOPE in the midst of such outrageous, devastating wars. André, Brigitte, Herbert, Paola, Idil, Jeanne, Philip, Marie-Paule and Chrissie, tell us, here and now, in this magazine, how you have become witnesses of the Gospel.

And all of us, no matter what our origin, let us look at each other in the eyes. Let us name our differences and accept them, discover our similarities that we may bring about peace and reconciliation. Jesus of Nazareth came to remind us that we all have the same Father. In Him we are all brothers and sisters: that is the most demanding evangelical call of all times.

In these troubled times,
may our prayer be a heartfelt plea:
*Lord, change our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.*¹

Paulette Gagné, M.I.C., directress

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, nor letters whose subject matter infringes on the journalistic code of ethics. We reserve the right to abridge letters.

To our faithful readers,

For many, the summer season is a time for reading rather than writing.

Therefore, we have received no comments from our subscribers.

We hope to hear from you soon!

*Lord, I'd like to climb very high,
A bove my city,
A bove my world,
A bove time itself.
I'd like to purify my vision
A nd borrow Your eyes.*

Michel Quoist

Quand la vie devient prière

Les Éditions ouvrières 1990

¹ Ezekiel 36:26





The Geographer of Twigs

Could there be something in common between the snail in “In praise of slow” by Carl Honoré and the heart of Jesus’ message to balance our lives amid the modern commotion?

by André Gadbois

About the author

Married, and father of two children, André Gadbois, after several years in pastoral work, taught children with serious learning disabilities for 20 years and was school director for ten years. He has been very involved with catechumens of the church in Montreal, and is the editor of their journal, *le Sénevé*. He has been retired for three years.

It feeds off the path itself, wrote Jacques Lacarrière in a very beautiful text on “taking it slowly” in the spring of 2002 when speaking about... the snail! And since then I haven’t stopped referring to this apparently poor, deprived and defenceless little creature to meditate on daily life, *because we have better things to do in life than to go faster*, as Gandhi reminded us. Traveling up to four or five metres per hour, the snail absorbs the wet earth along the way and discards it while moving ahead, which gives it TIME to admire the landscape, to enjoy it, to learn from it and to feed itself. A “geographer of twigs”, it takes the TIME to appreciate the intimacy of beings and things that it meets ON ITS WAY without ever getting all worked up; it is alert and contemplative in a world of giants that bustle around it, protected by a reassuring shell. Unable to hurry, it finds the things it needs to grow ON THE WAY.

The snail fascinates me, challenges me, unsettles me more and more: what is LIFE, and particularly my own life, when I am rushing, hurrying and racing to gain... what? A few dollars? What has become of those people whom I brushed along the way while I was actively awaiting retirement so I could have time to do what I really wanted to do? I, whose conscience was at peace because I did not waste any time today and had a full agenda, what did I savour that fed my soul? I, who am concerned with justice, fraternity and commitment to a better world, how do I reconcile this vision with the pace of the snail? *Martha, Martha, you worry and you*

are concerned about many things, but only one is necessary... said the Nazarene. What Lord, which one? Two hundred years before the Nazarene’s arrival, the Roman playwright Plato wrote about his dissatisfaction: *The gods curse the man who first learned how to tell time, and they likewise curse those who built a sundial here to cut up and carve my days into miserable little pieces. Since then, I cannot even sit myself down to eat without the sun’s permission. The city is so full of these cursed sundials...*

Taking Time by the Hand

I’m not the only one who is fascinated by the snail and who is bothered by the “speed” demon, others also are attracted to the slow life and are upset by the multiple “slips” caused by the fact of being pulled in all directions by this culture of speed. One trend in public opinion disputes this madness for productivity of which speed is the essential tool: Carl Honoré has written a brilliant analysis in his book entitled “In praise of slow” (English

edition published by Vintage Canada) and which inspires me every day to adapt my spirituality to the challenges of our time.

Did he not nourish himself along the way, this extraordinary Jesus of Nazareth who traversed the roads of Palestine? Was he not attentive to the “twigs” he encountered (a fisherman, a soldier, a child, a synagogue chief, a woman who had hemorrhaged for twelve years, a fig tree, a vine, birds...), calm and patient, favouring real connections, taking the TIME to appreciate the depth of people, accompanying them in their hour



We are what we eat...
and this “fast food”
is indigestible }



of need, drawing nourishment from them to speak about his Father's business in an understandable way, and acting so that his Word would be realized before eternity passes away? Was there not in this Prophet a balance, a pace which he could step up when it was logical to do so and slow down when it was necessary? And could it be that this pace comes from the Spirit who made him go about his Father's business, a spirit of liberty that enabled him to take time by the hand and lead it wherever he decided to go?

Taking Time Without Rushing

Production, production, production to stay in first place...acquiring, consuming and consuming in excess for pleasure, imposes an unavoidable pace on us because we have limited time to get there and to enjoy it. This unsustainable pace ends up unbalancing the body, the heart, the spirit, relationships, our appetite, sleep, and imposes its will: system first, human after. Such a race against time is a spirit and a lifestyle that come with significant losses and deep wounds: that's the way of speed. And if we slow down? We are what we eat...and this “fast food” is indigestible. If only we would take the slow way! Slow does not mean indifferent, lazy, not fast, isolated, disconnected, dysfunctional, or obsolete. The praise of slow is another lifestyle, another philosophy inspired by the recent dissatisfaction of thousands of agitated people eager to live calmly, even in the city, to nourish themselves and to grow. In 1999, Carlo Petrini stated the three great principles of this philosophy: pleasure before profit, people before

business, slow before speed. Not against but ahead of. The snail's pace demonstrates this philosophy beautifully, and I consider that this has something wonderfully in common with the Spirit of the Man of Nazareth.

What did Jesus want to say to Martha? Perhaps that the quiet Mary was correct at that moment to take time to connect more deeply with the guest on her path: isn't this the essence of Life? What did he want to emphasize by declaring that the Sabbath was instituted for man? Probably that people come before any institution! And what about his parable where the man whose hard work earned him a hundred sheep takes the time required to find the one that is lost! The slow way is that of the hiker who takes his time to draw sustenance from whatever crosses his path and who constantly adjusts his pace so that he won't hastily overlook another person who is considered to be too slow. ☺





Photo: Development and Peace

Pachamama Centres in Peru

by Nicole Côté

*Living in Peru in a shanty town
north of Lima.*

*Living with destitute people
who offer their hospitality,
culture, humour and friendship.*

*Living to give and to receive...
simply living the Gospel values.*

*Having beautiful and not so beautiful
experiences, but always exciting.*

*Living day after day, dreaming up projects,
getting them started,
carrying them out...
seeing them develop.*

That's Peru. That's my life in Peru.

For ten years now, I have been living this lovely adventure, with the end not always in sight; but also with wonderful swells of emotion which make me want to continue for the sake of all those people whom I have met and who have become my friends, for the children who came into my life and whom I love so much. In their midst, I have discovered and developed aspects of myself which were yet unknown.

Life in Peru, much like anywhere else in the world, consists of contrasts: there are the very rich who live in great luxury; then there are the others, the poor and forgotten... my friends. To them, I offer my experience, my energy, my love of people, my patience... in turn, I experience friendship and a different way of looking at life.

With the Peruvians, we have set-up Pachamama (Earth Mother) centres. In these four centres, the women come not only to learn sewing, hairdressing, knitting, fabric painting, macramé, crafts, etc, but also to find friendship, someone to listen to their problems; they've made it their meeting place.

We have also organized day cares where they can safely leave their toddlers during class hours.

Standing Tall

In these Pachamama centres, there are two “children’s houses”: rather well furnished libraries where children can do their home-work with the assistance of caregivers. The houses have computers now, thanks to donations made at the Canadian embassy. We also organize plays and various activities there. A psychologist works with us a few hours per week, in each house, because we have so many cases of troubled children.

Five free clinics make up part of the project; they were set-up by a nun who has worked there for a little more than six years. A lady doctor spends one morning in each clinic and well trained women meet the needs of the people the rest of the day. The government has increased its support to health care, and the clinics are not as necessary as they were in the beginning, but we still help many people.

The Pachamama centres, the children’s houses, and the free clinics form part of the pastoral community of Nuestra Senora del Mar parish. Thanks to the assistance of various organizations, we can continue this project which is always growing. We are trying to become self-financing.

A Heartfelt Invitation

I have briefly presented to you this project that I hold so dear to my heart. At this time, I am returning to Quebec to tell my three Québécois daughters how much I love them. In addition to them, there are now dozens of Peruvian girls... and many other children whom I love dearly.

If I have touched your heart, if you are interested in having a heartfelt experience, there is still much to do. The door is open to any person who wishes to give of her time, her experience and her love to the Ventanilla project... and you will see... that’s my life in Peru! ☺

I have
discovered
and developed
aspects of myself
which were
yet unknown. }



Nicole (on the right, with glasses)
in her artisans’ workshop for women.

This story first appeared in the journal *Le St-Glé*, April 2006, no. 54
The title and subtitles are the editor’s.

rml@cooptel.qc.ca
www.cooptel.qc.ca/~rml

Photo credit: RML

Hope?

It's all about loving life!

Monica, Paola Laura, and Herbert, three Latin American youths involved with JOCAHIM in Montreal, share their vision of the Gospel in their own culture. Originating from poor countries where they personally experienced war, they are living witnesses to hope.

Interview with Monica Lizet Gonzalez, Paola Carolina Laura, Herbert Roberto Lemus

JOCAHIM (Spanish-speaking Catholic Youth in Montreal) was born in 1996. That summer, Sister Jacqueline Brage, m.i.c., from Cuba, was given a thrilling but challenging mission: to work with young people. In collaboration with the Diocese of Montreal, her choice fell upon young Latin Americans. The group took shape and urged its young members to forge new paths for evangelization within the Church, and to rediscover the wealth of their cultural heritage and traditions as special gifts to the Church in Quebec: no less!

Monica is of Salvadorian origin and was born in Canada. Paola Laura is Guatemalan and Herbert is Salvadorian; all three say they have “encountered” Christ here in Quebec, through JOCAHIM. *I’ve been in Quebec for fifteen years, explains Herbert. Through this group, I have had a personal encounter with Christ. When I arrived, I started serving my community. Then, I taught catechesis to children, adults and groups. Afterwards, I worked at the Diocese for the World Youth Day. When we ask him where he got his desire to serve, Herbert answers that he only wants to show the true face of the Church: young, alive, and welcoming. A face that reveals Jesus Christ present among us, and a God who smiles and is committed especially to the most needy.*

In big cities, newly arrived members give the Church a face-lift. The Church in Quebec is changing and these young

people want to take part in the transformation. *We see a gap of many generations, says Paola, as if the values have not been handed down. And yet, I attended the Montée Jeunesse in Quebec City and I saw hundreds of young people... From far away, I saw Cardinal Marc Ouellet crying for joy! If you know the hearts of young people, continues Monica, you can detect a great thirst for God. The knowledge of God’s existence is something we can learn, even though our society wants to refute His existence through its own logic. What we are lacking are witnesses because many people are “falling stars”. Jean Paul II often spoke about the family as the “first” church. That is what Christ showed us: the Gospel is the centre of our lives. We are Church!*

Loving Others

In spite of everything, says Paola firmly, we need to proclaim that God loves us as we are. We need to be the reflection of God: I mean to be human, friendly, simple; and to do it with Him. To love! Paola is nourished by the Bible passage where Jesus sends out his apostles to proclaim the Good News (Marc 16:15). I am his instrument and I let myself be guided. That’s what moves me to work for others. Work is a means to evangelize. We cannot place religion on one side and work on the other. It’s all connected. In each of our professional fields, explains Paola, we must demonstrate our love for life and our respect for others.



We can't place religion on one side and our work on the other.

as He was suffering terribly. The culture of South America is founded on hope. Immersed in brutal conflict, they know that hope is present, close at hand, just like their mother Mary. This image of Mary as mother is central to their faith. Mother of Christ, but also mother of the world – she is, in their eyes, the first of all missionaries. Like the apostle John at the foot of the Cross, we have become her children: *That passage touched me the most... At that moment I pictured myself in John's place and Mary became my mother. I was her adoptive son. Jesus was my brother.* In her womb, Mary carries the hope of the world: love. *I think we've lost sight of that, answers Herbert. We've become so materialistic that we no longer love life. Why so many suicides? Because we are lacking hope... And what is hope if it is not about loving life!*

To share hope by way of being and living, not seeking to convert so much as to empathize with others, and, in this way, to reveal the face of God – that is the mission of the young people involved in JOCAHIM. Will they change the world? We can hope; they are off to a promising start. ☺

It's amazing to hear these young people, who've lived in the heart of armed conflict, talk about respect for life. In Salvador, Herbert was confined to his house for two weeks. And yet, two kilometers away, life went on! *When I came out of my house, I felt frustrated. I suddenly realized a terrible thing: I now knew that, for some, human beings have no value and deserve no respect. Those who engage in war don't suffer its consequences. They're the "good guys". I think we need to have experienced war from the inside to really appreciate the gift of life.*

The Latin American way to sustain this thirst for life is to take time to celebrate. Throughout the war, Saturday remained a day of celebration. It was a way to forget, to say "I am alive!" and to give thanks. Life is stronger than death! *A gun can kill my body, concludes Herbert, but life goes on... forever.* In the countries of Central America, almost every day calls for a celebration. The people share their joy and their happiness. It allows them to see things differently. Songs, music, drama: all these are reminders that God loves his children. It is a means to change suffering into hope.

Mary's Love

This hope amidst suffering reminds us of the Virgin Mary, who never left her Son's side

¹ Herbert and Paola, centre, Murielle Dubé, M.I.C., left

² Jacqueline Brage, M.I.C., right (seated) with a World Youth Day Group

Photos: MIC

MY FAMILY:

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL JOURNEY

This summer we got the most wonderful idea for a trip. I think the Spirit blew so strongly that we are still sailing.

by Brigitte Bédard



What? You have four? And you hope to have more? You're crazy! Children are expensive, you know! And you two... think about your retirement! This is our first summer as a "blended family", as it is called these days. Finding a four-bedroom house with an office was a miracle. We got lucky, some would say, but my husband and I believe it was Saint Joseph who heard our prayers. What will we do during this much-anticipated summer? Spend a fortune on a vacation in Florida at Walt Disney World? Spend a "dream week" at Club Med? What could we do to share our happiness with the children? Take them to the beach... La Ronde... the Biodome... the Botanical Gardens... Rent a country cottage at the lake... they are so small: Marijanie is 7 years old, Nathan 5, Vito 4, and Andrea 3. We thought of going to a Bible Camp but we were too late. One day was spent playing with a ball, laughing while watching a movie, working in the garden, squealing under the spray of the watering can. It was a day of getting to know each other better, refereeing conflicts, calming emotions and drying tears.

One evening, it became clear in our minds. A revelation. Our vacation was an

extraordinary opportunity to depart on the most beautiful journey; to build a solid foundation and keep this family walking the Way. It's a sending forth on a mission: to love your husband, to love your wife, to love your children. Realizing that God entrusted them to us, thanking Him and asking Him for His help... "Because the world around us seems without hope..."

The Trip of a Lifetime

In His image, man and woman, establish a fraternal community. What an odyssey! To be one flesh so that our four little treasures from Heaven can see Him and know Him. The first challenge came as a call: to attend Sunday Mass without disturbing the other parishioners. In order to "occupy" our children, we brought books and toys. Bad decision. They mistook the pews for intergalactic launching pads... Fascinated by Christ on the Cross, the baby shouted: *Big boo-boo, Mom. Why does Jesus have blood, Mom? Why is Jesus on the cross, Mom?* We stayed after Mass, took a tour of the church with them and answered all their questions. The following Sunday, we left the toys at home; they would have to be satisfied with the missalettes...

Our boat had taken in water... slightly. As in every crossing, it is necessary to be prepared for bad weather... and to understand in the end that these unexpected moments provide an opportunity to evangelize and to teach the faith.

Stay seated, whisper, read with Dad or Mom, you will be taken out if you don't obey, and, in the end, get a reward for "good behavior". All of it, gently... ahem! One week later, Mass took place in nearly perfect silence, thank God!

Do Disturb... I'm on Vacation!

Another call — to pray as a family. Praying as a couple was a dream that finally came true for the two of us... but for them?
- *You want to make them say a rosary?*
- *No! But if we started by explaining it to them and doing little bits each evening... then put ten together... They already know how to sing the "Hail Mary". By listening to us, they would get it. Dangerous road... But, it's either an adventure or it's not! The younger ones listened: If you do not know the prayer, you just have to look at Jesus' mom, there. Marijanie wanted to know*

everything: Why is there a large bead? What do we say on the large bead? And what is the Creed? Are all rosaries the same? Yours is different... why? I want to see it! We put off the explanations until the next day, promising to explain everything before we started!

Practicing your religion within the family is more exciting than a trip to Park Safari. We discover unknown paths: ourselves! Our family sails peacefully along, doors opened, and the Creatures show themselves. Our goal? It's the journey, the Way we walk: the house, the car, the park. It's two hands cooking meals, giving baths or changing diapers! One evening, we had a barbecue and enjoyed lettuce from our garden. We had so much fun and laughed like fools at a frog in the wading pool that swam faster than us. Tomorrow, we will put up the tent in the middle of the garden. This morning was the inauguration of our compost box, constructed, piece by piece, by Dad himself. It was a good opportunity for us to consider that where death is (and stink!), there is also life... We spent the day at Grandma's and surprised our elder daughter with her birthday cake. The other day, in the thick of the raspberry plants, we stuffed our faces like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden! The excited children played at the farmhouse, along with the goats and the pigs. How can you not thank the Creator a thousand times over?

Next week we are going for a day-long retreat at 'la Famille des Puits de Lumière'¹ (The Family, the Fount of Light.) The founts are the parents; we let the light pass through us for the happiness of our children. *Will you do anything special with your family this summer?*, one of my colleagues at the office had asked. I had listed all the best vacation spots, the most beautiful cities, the biggest events...

When I get back to work, I will tell them that we had the best vacation... within ourselves and at home! And it's only just begun! ☺

¹ La Famille
des Puits de Lumière:
puitsdelumiere@sympatico.ca

Three Christian camps for families:

Le Camp biblique de Charlevoix:
pasto-mission.iquebec.com.

Le Camp Patmos (Evangelical)
au Lac Saint-Jean:
www.camppatmos.org.

Le Camp La Rouge in
the Outaouais area:
www.camplarouge.qc.ca

Photo of the parents: Brigitte,
Hugo and Andrea at Mont
Saint-Bruno.

Photo of the four children:
Andrea, Nathan, Vito and
Marijanie.

Photo credits: The Bédard family

Daddy! Daddy!

by Evelyn O'Neill, M.I.C.



A few years ago, the Sidow-Moyow family - Bashir and his wife Faiza, together with their two children, escaped from their country, Somalia, and went to Kenya as refugees. During their stay in that country, they applied to Canada as political refugees. Meanwhile, Faiza gave birth to a baby girl named Idil.

A year later, Immigration Canada informed them that they were granted refugee status. The happy couple made preparations for the trip; however, their joy was troubled by sad news. Their little girl, born in Kenya, had no identification papers. Therefore, she could not leave the country. The parents were devastated and inconsolable. They entrusted their child to a Somali cousin who was also a refugee in Kenya. The separation was heart-wrenching; leaving Idil behind meant that perhaps they would never see her again.

After some time in Canada, the couple met Sr. Monique Breton, a Missionary Sister of Our Lady of Africa, who knew their language well. Without delay, Sr. Monique took the necessary steps to claim Idil. This was far from being an easy task, as she had

to prove that the little girl was Bashir and Faiza's biological child. One year later, Sr. Monique was transferred and left Quebec.

At that time, I was working at the Immigration Center in Quebec, therefore, I had become acquainted with the case. After Sr. Monique's departure, I took over her work. The process was slow: it lasted more than two years. At last, the good news came. The DNA tests were positive: little Idil was in fact the child of Bashir and Faiza.

Obstacles, Obstacles...

A missionary sister, working in Kenya, was scheduled to return to Canada. This was the perfect opportunity to entrust Idil to her care for such a long journey. But the little girl had no visa and Air France could not accept her on a flight. Her departure was, once again, delayed. The mother, a fervent Muslim and always hopeful, said "My little girl will come: God will take care of her."

Indeed, a Canadian couple from Sudbury, Ontario - a missionary sister's brother and sister-in-law who had been visiting her in Nairobi - were

told about the situation and accepted to travel with Idil. The parents were ecstatic and relieved with the thought that the family would be reunited. The date of departure from Nairobi was scheduled and Bashir left for Toronto to welcome his child.

At the airport, he held a large poster with the couple's names followed by: "I am little Idil's father. Thank you! Thank you!" A tall man, Bashir could easily be spotted with his poster. Suddenly, he heard from the crowd a child's voice shouting "Daddy! Daddy!" The young daughter had recognized her father whom she had seen on photos. "Oh, how I cried as I took her in my arms and embraced her," exclaimed the happy father. Two days later, Bashir and his daughter Idil arrived in Quebec City by bus. What a joy for the whole family!

Mission accomplished

Thanks to the precious collaboration of so many people, including the Sisters of Charity of Quebec City, the Sidow-Moyow family has been reunited with Idil. She can now enjoy the love of her parents and two brothers. ☺

With Love and Humour!

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 sisters and their lay associates (ASMIC) 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.

Provincial House

10 710, boulevard Grande-Allée
Montreal (Quebec)
Canada H3L 2M7
Telephone: (514) 384-4624
Email: provmic@videotron.ca

Mission Animation Centre

314, chemin Côte-Ste-Catherine
Montreal (Quebec)
Canada H2V 2B4
Telephone: (514) 495-1551
Email: animamic@yahoo.ca

www.soeurs-mic.qc.ca

In Longueuil, Quebec, about eight young MICs from different cultures have come together to share a year-long experience of multicultural fellowship. This time and place called the 'scholasticate' is an intense stage preceding a definitive commitment.

Together, they take time

...for relationships, dialogue and sharing

Through our daily life together we learn to get to know each other, to appreciate and truly love one another. The small challenges we encounter are so tiny, when we consider them with love and humour!

Monique from Madagascar

...for human and spiritual growth

I left Haiti with so many questions, worries and concerns; now I am going back with my luggage 'full of sunlight'. I found a direction for my life, I found joy and the desire to serve my brothers and sisters, no matter where they are from.

Francise from Haiti

...for reflection, formation and prayer

United and reunited in the One who calls us, Jesus Christ, we are one family, we share Bread at the same table and we drink from the same Wellspring.

Sylvie from Madagascar

...to celebrate Life

Celebrating the God of Life is vital for these young women.

In Haiti, Life is sung!

In Africa, Life is danced!

In the Philippines, Life is celebrated!

In China, Life is admired!

In Madagascar, we give thanks for Life!

In Cuba, we struggle for Life!

In Canada, we accompany Life!

As a result, Life and Love shine forth at the international scholasticate!

Ruth from Zambia ☺



MIC Photos

Flower in the Bush



Head of the Obstetrics Department in a hospital in London, England, Chrissie tells us of the beauty and goodness of a long friendship.

by Pauline Longtin, M.I.C.,
and Chrissie Hay

Toward the end of the 1950s, a Scottish engineer came to work for the Malawian government in Central East Africa. According to the local custom, a house and personnel were provided. Some time later, the African cook, who was also considered the housemaid, became pregnant; she therefore had to leave her work.

A little mulatto girl was born and named Chrissie. The young mother, a poor, single parent, had difficulty raising her child. When her daughter reached school age, things began to change. Her path crossed that of Sr. Marie-Paule Gaudreau, a Missionary of the Immaculate Conception. This religious had a determining impact on the child. After some years, Chrissie's father returned to Scotland. At the end of his life, he revealed to his family that he had a child in Africa.

In January 2006, Chrissie heard about the death of Sr. Marie-Paule. With much gratitude, she sent a letter to Sr. Pauline Longtin, M.I.C., whom she knows well. With all her heart, she wrote the following letter and proposed that her life journey be published.

Dear Sister Pauline,

I thank God for the life of Sr. Marie-Paule, who was a special friend and a mother to me; she will be missed as she has a special place in my heart. Sr. Marie-Paule first spotted me when the MIC sisters opened the provincial house in Mzimba, in 1966.

She found out that I was an only child, brought up by a single mother in a nearby little mud house. Sister taught religion in the school. One day, we were given a test and I happened to be top of the class. She had prizes to give and I had the first choice. I took a rosary among other bigger prizes which people thought I might have chosen. Touched by my choice and seeing me often at morning Mass, also knowing my capacity for learning, Sister wanted me to pursue my studies; I was then in Standard III. After school hours, she would teach me some math and check my homework. She would also give me extra assignments while she did her own chores; upon her return, she would verify my performance. All this care was essential to my success.

In 1969, Sr. Marie-Paule wanted to send me to Katete Girls' Boarding School which was then run by the MIC sisters. She discussed this with my mother who thought it was a good idea, but she did not have enough money. Sister said she would ask her brother to support me and he kindly agreed.

So, I went to the Boarding School for two years. In 1972, I went to Bwaila Secondary School, in Lilongwe, the capital of Malawi. Sr. Marie-Paule continued to be my guardian; she was very happy and proud of my success. All my school reports went to her and she would explain to my mother how I was doing; she never left her out. We were all together in this adventure.

One day, I found out that my father was still in the country. I went looking for him and discovered he was working in Kasungu. I phoned him - he seemed delighted to hear my voice. He expressed his wish to help me financially. But I told him I just wanted to get to know him, as my school fees were being taken care of by Sr. Marie-Paule. He asked me to send him Sister's address. Without delay, he wrote to her explaining everything. He thanked her and all the other sisters who looked after me. He wished to reimburse their expenses and added: "Of course, I will never be able to give all the love you have given to Chrissie." I never met my father, but "my second mother" has had the opportunity.

After completing secondary school, I wanted to do my nursing course. However, for some reason, that year I wasn't accepted. I was very upset! My mother just said: "Why are you sad? Does God close all doors?" When I went to see Sr. Marie-Paule, she said: "Doesn't God take care of you?" She decided to call Sr. Marie Stella at St. John's School of Nursing in Mzuzu and she arranged that which was necessary for me to start studying nursing.

When the way seemed dark, Sister was always there by my side, reminding me of God's presence reassuring me that light would be at the end of the tunnel!

Years later, I found my father's relatives in Scotland. Sr. Marie-Paule joined me and we visited my Auntie Mary and my Uncle Graham. In 1997, my husband Keith and I visited Sr. Marie-Paule in Rimouski, Quebec. We met her sisters Blanche and Huguette, her sister-in-law Jacqueline and her niece, Claire; it was like meeting my other family.

Though apart, we remained united by means of correspondence or phone calls. Sr. Marie-Paule rejoiced when I went to Ireland and to London to complete my midwifery studies. She shared my greatest joys: my marriage and my two children.

Today, I thank God for Sr. Marie-Paule's undaunted missionary life; her determination

encouraged and inspired me through all the years of my life. She also has helped many others. The exceptional work she did with groups of handicapped children changed their lives. After rehabilitation, most of them were better accepted by their own people in their villages. I thank all the sisters who were in Malawi with Sr. Marie-Paule for they too welcomed me wholeheartedly - all are my mothers and sisters.

I thank Délia Tétreault for her dream, and for her courageous endeavour in realizing the work that has led other young women to follow Christ. May the Lord bless you all for the wonderful apostolate you are doing. May the Holy Spirit fill you with grace, joy and peace.

In her last letter, Sr. Marie-Paule wrote: "Chrissie... I love you!" In turn, I say: "I love you too! Rest in peace!"

Chrissie Hay ∞



MIC Photo

J EANNE... and an extraordinary document

In August 2005, a Chinese couple rang at the door of the MIC convent in Laval, Quebec. After years of searching, they had finally found the right address. Sr. Jeanne Bouchard, without knowing it, was to be the heroine of this amazing story.

by Huguette Turcotte, M.I.C.

Sister Jeanne in China

On October 14, 1939, six missionaries of the Immaculate Conception climbed aboard the Empress of Russia in the Port of Vancouver. We had been at war for nearly a month, but it didn't matter. Twenty-six year old Jeanne Bouchard left to find her Lord among the people of China. She contemplated the ring she received at her profession, and her recently-awarded diploma in nursing. From now on, she was to be called Sister Saint-Charles-de-Milan. She had come a long way from her hometown of St. Eloi.

In Manchuria, she learned the language and worked in two dispensaries. But the growth of communism in the north of China and the war with the nationalist army that followed threatened the missionaries. In 1947, with the siege of Szeping kai, the Sisters were forced to live in the bishop's coal cellars; the General Council of the MIC in Canada decided it was time for them to get out. Sr. Jeanne was among a contingent of thirty sisters who were forced to leave Manchuria under these dramatic circumstances; going by truck to Moukden, from there to Shanghai, and finally taking refuge with the Sisters of Tsung Ming was just a small part of the heroic history of our Community. The fugitives were assigned to Suchow and Canton, south of China, to Hong Kong, the Philippines, and to Canada. Sr. Jeanne was entrusted the leper colony at Shek Lung in China. To everyone's surprise, she was thrilled. Caring for lepers was for her a dream

come true. Through war, murders, bombardments, attacks by bandits, famine and shortages of all kinds, Sr. Jeanne and the small team of MICs bandaged wounds, gave injections, and encouraged each and every one they met.

A Heart-Wrenching Departure

On June 3, 1952, the four sisters who ran the leper colony were replaced by the communist government and expelled from China. At the same time, across the globe, the MICs were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of their founding, but for Jeanne and her Sisters, it was tragic. The MIC work at Shek Lung, begun in 1913, now had to be totally abandoned. Next stop... Hong Kong.

In that great city, Sr. Jeanne joined Sr. Laura Thérien, M.I.C., helping the refugees who were filling up the rudimentary shelters. While visiting the hospitals, she discovered patients from the leper colony and formed a support network. Donations from Raoul Follereau's organization to aid lepers and other sources were sent to patients and to the poor; together they reached as many as 2000 lepers.

Sister Jeanne's love for her "children" of Shek Lung was undeniable. She returned home to Canada in 1999 and enjoyed telling about her life in China. She had given so much.

A Mysterious Letter

On the 25th of June, 2005, a letter addressed to me arrived in the mail from British Columbia. *Sister Huguette, my name is*

Philip Fung. I was born in Hong Kong 47 years ago. When I was three months old, I was very ill. My mother had gone to Kwong Wah for me to receive care. A Catholic sister came to the hospital to baptize me, because I was expected to die. She gave a note to my mother as proof of my baptism. To my family's surprise, I got better! My mother was so poor that she gave me up for adoption to a childless couple of the Anglican faith. Eventually, I immigrated to Canada in 1993 and found work at a Vancouver hospital. The next year, I married Pauline, who is Catholic, and I wanted to convert. In 2000, my biological mother decided to tell me the story of my baptism, and my adoption, and she showed me the note signed by Sister Saint-Charles-de-Milan on May 12, 1958. I had been baptized Catholic! This summer, I have to go to Toronto, and I would like to find my benefactress. The Archdiocese of Vancouver gave me your name. Can you help me?

I called immediately. Philip was on the line. *I received your letter. The sister you have been looking for is here at our convent! Her name is now Sister Jeanne Bouchard, and she is 92 years old. Philip almost shrieked. It's impossible! God has answered my prayer!*

A Moving Encounter

On August 25, 2005, Philip and Pauline arrived at the convent. During the course of our conversation, Philip acknowledged that he experienced quite a shock five years ago, when he learned about his adoption. He was not an orphan, nor an only child, as he had always believed. I asked him why he wanted to find Sister Saint-Charles-de-Milan? *After my baptism, he explained, when I was near death, my mother saw me move. I believe that Sr. Jeanne wanted to give me Heaven and that she also resuscitated me! I admire the missionaries who came to China. It was very difficult for them because of the customs and the language. I understood that when I immigrated to Vancouver.*

At a visit to the Tomb of Délia Tétréault, our foundress, Philip exclaimed, *I recognize that picture. It was at the hospital where I found my first job. I didn't know that Délia Tétréault had founded that hospital for the Chinese and that "my" sister was one of hers. That's amazing!*

The next day, Philip and Pauline arrived at Sister Jeanne's room, carrying an impressive spray of flowers. She was waiting for them in her easy chair. Very respectfully, Philip knelt in front of her and said, in

Cantonese, Thank you for my baptism. Thank you for coming to China. He placed the flowers in front of her, and with much emotion, left her a paper. Here is the certificate that you gave my mother on May 12, 1958. Do you recognize it? Sr. Jeanne smiled and said, Yes! Yes! I am so happy to see you! Pauline and I immortalized those tender moments, so difficult to describe, with our cameras.

During his last visit, Philip gave Sr. Jeanne a lamp shaped like an angel, whose wings wrap around a cradle. *You have been my angel, Sr. Jeanne. When you look at this lamp, think of me. Continue to always protect us, Pauline and me.*

Eight months later, just days from her ninety-third birthday, Sr. Jeanne left us suddenly. When informed of her death, Philip and Pauline expressed their sympathies by sending a huge floral arrangement and these simple words: *In grateful memory, your Chinese son.*



Photos: Huguette Turcotte, M.I.C.

You've Got Mail!

News from a Canadian novice

Greetings from Madagascar —

On the red island, what has a MIC novice been doing since one year? I have been learning! I have to say that there's much to learn for a city girl like me! Taking care of the rabbits and chickens, working in the garden, planting and sorting out rice, harvesting the soya and voanjobory, walking across the rice field on a little block of wood, mashing the corn, drawing water by hand, cooking on coal, preparing new recipes and adapting those I know to the local food. I have also learned dancing, moving only my shoulders, and sewing underwear with polar cloths to fight the cold! I have learned some Malagasy customs one of which is to adapt to new ways of preparing meals. I have been managing with 300 vocabulary words and many gestures!

Along those wide cultural challenges, I continue my initial formation in the Institute with six other Malagasy novices with whom I interact and enjoy being with! We have our classes at home or sometimes at the inter-noviciate where 90 novices of different congregations meet. My apostolate is at the French speaking parish where I teach catechism and I'm in charge of the family Mass. I also help, sometimes, at the pharmacy of the Brothers of Charity. Slowly, but surely, I'm taking root in the Malagasy land and in the Institute! Sincerely! *Veloma!*

Josée Martineau, MIC novice

smic_noviciat@mel.wanadoo.mg



La moisson du riz
Photo MIC

Greetings to our friends of the Holy Childhood!

We are youngsters from the Philippines, happy to tell you about one of our greatest moments of the year: "World Children's Day". This celebration which usually takes place in January has a specialty: young people, from our school, have the responsibility of organizing the program and activities of the day. All classes participate in planning the Eucharist, the games, the quizzes. Each mission country is represented by groups of children, who highlight a value of a particular culture.

The theme of the day - Children helping children - was chosen so that each one of us could experience the joy and gratitude that comes in helping others. Thus, some develop their talents in song and dance, others enhance their Bible knowledge or simply enjoy participating in games that develop their sportsmanship or sense of honesty.

At the Eucharist, Father Dennis, insisted that we retain the following: not only must we share money, but most of all, share our prayers, our presence and our happiness, particularly with the neediest.

Thanks to our teachers who helped and encouraged us in the preparation of this great event. The youngsters of Mati, Philippines, are proud to be "children helping children".



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'

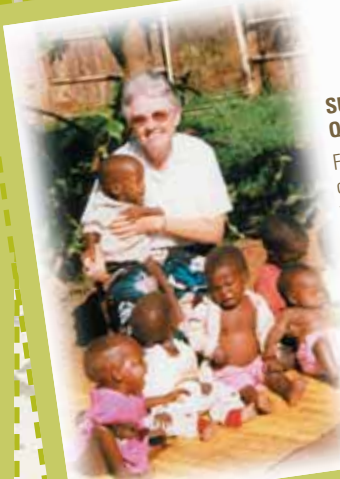
eagerness!



FRANÇOISE DE VARENNES (front — right)
Quebec, Qc

After a few months in her native land, Sister Françoise, a missionary in Madagascar for 40 years, is returning to her mission where she will help train the young MIC sisters.

MIC Photo



SUZANNE LECLAIR
Quebec, Qc

For many years in charge of the administration of a health care centre, Sister Suzanne will now direct a centre for human and spiritual development in Zambia.

MIC Photo



MARIE LECLAIR - Quebec, Qc

Dedicated to the youth, and taking part in their activities, Sister Marie, in Zambia, also teaches French to aspirants interested in the Institute.

MIC Photo



THÉRÈSE LEBEAU - Repentigny, Qc

A missionary and catechist, Sister Thérèse is returning to Peru, resuming her work in directing retreats and accompanying Christians on the path of life.

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Dawn of a New Life



Jeanne Bouchard, M.I.C.
Sister Saint-Charles-de-Milan
(1913-2006)
St-Éloi, Quebec

Sixty years in China and Hong-Kong: what a feat and what a joy for Sister Jeanne! As a nurse, she cared for the lepers, south of China. In Hong Kong, she treated and provided assistance to refugees. A missionary life lived to the fullest.



Marie-Marthe Lorrain, M.I.C.
Sister Marthe-du-Rédempteur
(1917-2006)
Beauharnois, Quebec

A missionary in Cuba, Chili, and Guatemala, Sister Marie-Marthe taught music and composed musical works. Creative and artistic, this educator with remarkable energy knew how to relate to young people by using drama and creating magnificent choirs.



Émilienne Marchand, M.I.C.
Sister Saint-Émilien
(1910-2006)
Montreal, Quebec

A woman of all seasons, Sister Émilienne worked in Haiti, Peru, Bolivia and Honduras. School principal, competent educator, convinced catechist, she was imbued with a special love for Mary and those she served. She brought her contribution to many mission projects.



Marie-Berthe Beaumont, M.I.C.
Sister Marie-Laure
(1927-2006)
Saint-Pierre-de-Montmagny,
Quebec

A woman of great initiative, Sister Marie-Berthe awakened prisoners in the Philippines to the gift of self by working for others and even donating blood to an organization she founded. She established a Charismatic Centre where prayers and the Word of God were shared.



Fabienne Bernatchez, M.I.C.
Sister Sainte-Véronique
(1919-2006)
Neuville, Quebec

A missionary in Cuba and Peru, Sister Fabienne had multiple talents. She occupied positions of authority, worked towards the formation of young religious and was involved in the field of education. Blessed with a sense of humor and remarkable writing skills, she radiated abundant joy.

From the Highest Branch

Monkeys are keen observers. Every day the sisters take a siesta: it's a great moment for the colony of monkeys to invade the palm and banana trees surrounding the house. One day, at noon, Sr. Evelyn decided to forgo her nap, remaining on the porch to catch the looters. Quickly, the monkeys dispersed, except one who remained behind, inquisitively looking to see how things would turn out if he stayed "put". Testing the watchful eye of Sr. Evelyn, he picked a banana from the tree and settled in the highest branch. Chasing this intruder was no easy task. After many unsuccessful attempts, Sister decided to move toward the tree to scare this stubborn monkey away. Stunned, she received, on the head, the banana peel which the offender just finished licking clean! He won...

Word Puzzle

I was in a group of immigrant students learning French. On the first day of class, the teacher encouraged us to introduce

ourselves by saying a short sentence in French. Since I had a small dictionary at hand, I looked up the word "available". When my turn came, I said, slowly: "Je m'appelle Elizabeth. Je suis célibataire mais pas disponible." That is: "My name is Elizabeth. I am single but not available."

Could It Be... Perfume?

There is a 12 hour time difference between the Philippines and Canada. I arrived at the Mother House from the Philippines at 1:00 am. I slept the whole morning and my meals were over quickly. After supper, I was returning to my room, when, on the way along the corridor I detected a strange smell. I asked myself: "What kind of perfume is this? Is it an air freshener? If so, it is a strange kind of air freshener..." A sister walking by explained that a window must have been left open and that the scent must have wafted in. "But what kind of perfume could this be?" I soon discovered where the scent was coming from: it was a skunk, an animal unknown in the Philippines!

...

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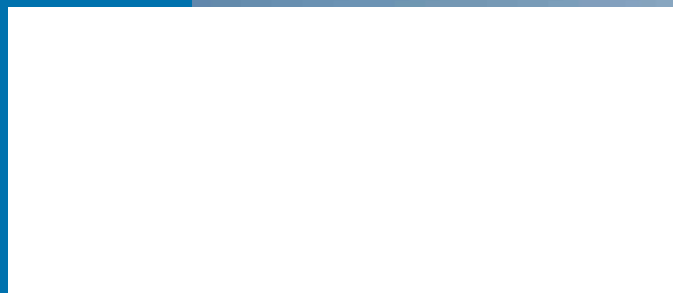



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Homecoming

*Something in me is stirring;
I think it's the part of me
that waits in lonely exile
and yearns for a homeland.*

*It's the hidden part of me
that wanders aimlessly,
stumbling in the dark,
crying to be found.*

*O God of exiles and strangers,
find the homeless parts of me;
guide them toward yourself,
for you are my promised land.*

*Take the stranger inside of me
and find familiar soil for it.
Keep me mindful of the Emmanuel,
whose sojourn brought a glimpse of home.*

Joyce Rupp

May I Have This Dance Ave Maria Press - 1993
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