

MIC MISSION NEWS

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To sow seeds of joy and hope

Since 1923

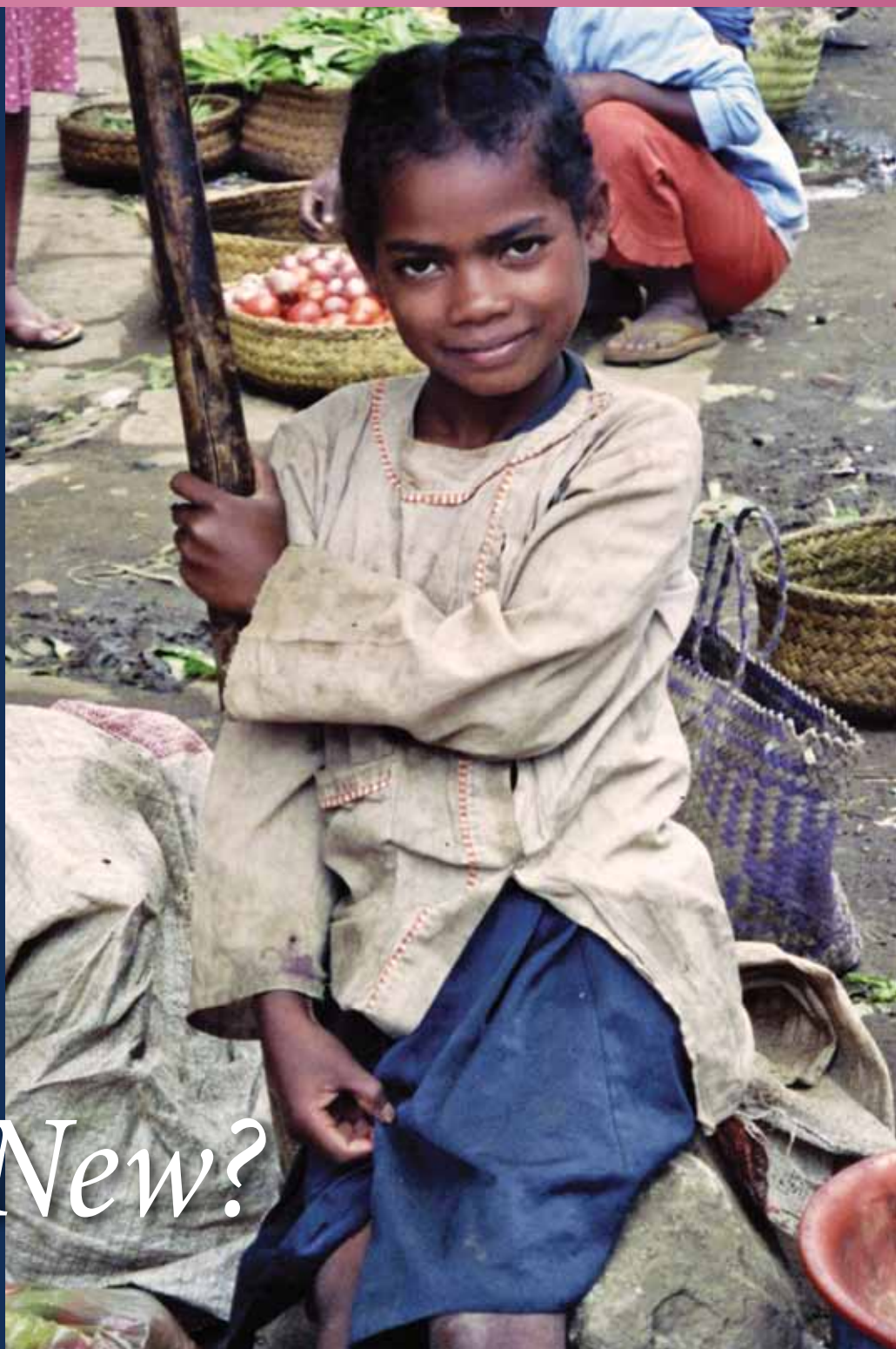


MADAGASCAR
INNOVATIVE
PROJECTS

HONG KONG
WHAT'S IN
STORE FOR US AT
TAK OI SCHOOL?

IN FOCUS

What's New?



PUBLICATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

MISSIONARY PRAYER INTENTIONS – 2015

APRIL

For all persecuted Christians,
that they may feel the consoling
presence of the Risen Lord and the
solidarity of all the Church.

MAY

That Mary's intercession may help
Christians in secularized cultures
be ready to proclaim Jesus.

JUNE

That the personal encounter with
Jesus may arouse in many young
people the desire to offer their own
lives in priesthood or consecrated life.

Masses for readers' intentions offered in the following countries:

January: **Canada**

February: **Cuba**

March: **Philippines**

April: **Haiti**

May: **Canada**

June: **Bolivia**

July: **Malawi** and **Zambia**

August: **Hong Kong** and **Taiwan**

September: **Madagascar**

October: **Peru**

November: **Japan**

December: **Canada**



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Canada

EDITORIAL

One More Step!

When the editorial team came together to reflect on a theme for this issue, we were far from thinking that “WHAT’S NEW?” would be so disturbing.



The event of September 11, 2001 and the one that has recently occurred on January 7, 2015 have shaken our lives and peace has been perturbed. We wonder what the future holds for us. Why all these violent acts?

Why not respect freedom of thought and ways of doing things differently? Domination and power are instincts which break down relationships and these keep the world under tension. Is this because of a misunderstanding of religious messages? Pope Francis reminds us, “*God is not Catholic.*” God belongs to all of us and what He wants is love and respect for each person.

In his message, delivered on World Day of Peace, January 1, 2015, Pope Francis states, “*Since we are by nature relational beings, meant to find fulfillment through interpersonal relationships inspired by justice and love, it is fundamental for our human development that our dignity, freedom and autonomy be acknowledged and respected.*”

The Pope’s message tells us—THAT’S WHAT’S NEW! We are called to take a positive outlook in order to discover the goodness that lies deep in each heart; we are invited to build bridges between people, between cultures. The articles in this issue reveal how we can become all things to all people. We have the ability to discover WHAT’S NEW at every turn; we can help people take their own destiny in hand and rejoice with all peoples who take steps towards democratization while others, as a people of God, take on various responsibilities.

What else is new? It is to faithfully give thanks to our Creator who gave us a heart for loving and wisdom to understand that ONLY LOVE can change the face of our world.

The articles herein remind us that to build a better ‘today’ we need to have a positive outlook, be respectful toward the other, and be an instrument of peace. That’s what it means to *take one more step*.

Marie-Paule Sanjean, m.i.c.

DÉLIA’S COLUMN

CHANGES IN LIFE

Confronted with important changes in her life and in the life of her Institute, Mother Délia always searched for the Will of God; she would either ask to be guided by the Light of the Holy Spirit, or accept His Holy Will.

I count on all of your prayers to receive the lights and all the help I need to accomplish the Will of God. (April 3, 1917)

We have prayed fervently before making this request... I am confident that the Holy Spirit will manifest the Will of God in this important affair, for our only wish is to accomplish it. (May 13, 1918)

Such an event, which can appear as disastrous, is often a way God takes to show us the true plan He has for us.

(October 11, 1918)

I do not know any more what will become of us in Canton. Let us get ready for any eventuality, wishing and asking for only one thing, to do God’s most Holy Will.

(August 1, 1922)

Concerning the purchase of the property as well as all the rest,... be attentive to the action of Providence so as to discover God’s Will. (November 12, 1924)

You can go from one place to another as long as you want, if you do not have in mind God’s Will...you will never taste happiness. (October 28, 1930)

The doctor gave you three months of rest in bed. Conscientiously and joyfully take this time of rest in submission to God’s Will. (July 15, 1934)

**FOR ALL FAVORS
RECEIVED-OR-DESIRED**

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BUILDING BRIDGES

It's quite a challenge to build a bridge linking two river banks; yet, isn't it a goal in life to unite, to bring together? The existence of a bridge brings about new activities and recreates reality.



By André Gadbois

A few days ago I accidentally met Christiane, a long lost friend of our twenties. After a warm hug, I asked her, “What’s new?” Her reply was simply, “Nothing! Tired, weary... always on the verge of crying; a retirement that is boring... Hard times persist and friends are rare. She spoke to me of Jean-Marc whom she met; he was a lost soul on the street who is disinterested in life. Of course, there is nothing new here because people fear those who spent some time in prison. In bygone days we would sit around a campfire and we would wish upon a star, but nowadays heavy teardrops blur the hopes and dreams of many. Nothing new, always the same old story—broken promises, torn contracts, the rich becoming richer and the poor begging on their knees. No bridge between the two... sometimes we can only find a narrow rope bridge on which it is impossible to pause and contemplate the river for any length of time.

Eradicate Desperateness.

Building bridges is an essential task which requires audacity, creativity and humble competence. Such a mission should endorse the motto of the Three Musketeers: ALL FOR ONE, ONE FOR ALL. As I write, I hear Nana Mouskouri sing: *When you're weary, feeling small; when tears are in your eyes... when times get rough and friends just*

can't be found... Like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down... When evening falls so hard, I will comfort you. To be bridge builders, to connect people together is not easy; along the process there can be a certain amount of bickering but it is our responsibility to pursue our goal and stand up for what we believe is best.

JESUS BUILT BRIDGES

In His days, I imagine Jesus of Nazareth observed the pitiable state of bridges that were destroyed, dangerous or abandoned; He certainly was well aware of the sad dehumanizing process which was happening all around, the progressive crumbling of His Father's intention. And I like to think that Jesus being immersed into the water of the River Jordan was a public sign of His strong determination to create something new, to make connections, to convey good news (the Gospel) which would bring joy and reconcile individuals as well as nations. He seemed to humbly say to His people, *If you need a friend, I'm on your side and like a bridge over troubled water, I will lay me down.* (Nana Mouskouri) With the Twelve chosen ones and a few women, Jesus made true statements to eradicate desperateness, to give solace to the hopelessness of His people. He contradicted the phrase, “*Nothing new under the sun*”.

An urgent and essential mission of today's disciples of Jesus is to begin a CONVERSATION with God's people which revitalizes the evangelical messages that have been lost over the years. And in a secular world (forgiveness, reconciliation,

solidarity, sharing, restoring justice, rescuing the most fragile ones, equality between man and woman, right to life, to peace, to happiness...) all these values are greatly in danger in societies that give significance to competition and individualism.

Jesus' ministry was one of reconciliation. Before His death, He broke bread, He shared wine—symbol of His life given for all. Jesus asked His guests to do the same IN MEMORY OF HIM. In communion with Him, questions arise: *What is new in your area, on your street, in your family? In memory of Him, did you open the eyes of someone who could not see? Did you help someone rise above their*

troubles? Did you forgive, or release the burden that weighed heavily on someone's shoulders? Did you rescue someone out of their solitude, their dark tunnel? Did you love?

BE THE BRIDGE

In other words, do we bring about something new? Do we contribute in renewing a person who is eager to say: *Look, I have something new in my life!* Do we participate in the movement which affirms that no matter how heavy and dark was someone's past, the person can be renewed and made whole again? Do we believe that someone can rise from death to Life; that a thief

who stole medals can recognize his fault and become a credible person? Recalling Nana Mouskouri's song, *Like a bridge over troubled waters, I will lay me down*; in other words, I will be there for you. To build or rebuild a bridge is to construct something new. Bridges are not eternal, they must be maintained. Scripture discreetly underlines that it is possible to make something new with what is worn out but do we believe this? To be the bridge that leads people to find their true self, to reach the other bank, to be renewed... oh, what happiness, what joy! ☺



Illustration: Laura DeSantis

He Worked Marvels for Me...



By Suzanne Gervais,
AsMIC



The theme “WHAT’S NEW?” invites us to tell a story that is out of the ordinary. It tells about the course of a recovery which could be termed as exceptional, or perhaps as miraculous.

Nothing led Nicole Gravel, an associate of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, to imagine that an infection could take such proportions to the point it would require six months hospitalization of which one month was in the intensive care unit. During that particular month, the medical team came to realize that SOMEONE, somewhere, was watching over this patient; not only was she receiving transfusions, dialysis, oxygen, but she was also intubated and force-fed.

Everyone had the firm conviction that unless she died, Nicole would remain physically and mentally handicapped. Everyone believed this to be so, except her husband Gilles, her son Marc-André, her family and friends whose faith was unshakable notwithstanding the somber medical prognosis.

What kept their hope alive for those who prayed to Mother Délia? Each one deeply trusted and believed that nothing is impossible to God and if it is His Holy Will, Nicole would be healed. After those uncertain months, I met our friend and interviewed her.

Hello Nicole, we say that you have been miraculously cured... what do you think?

I somehow feel ill at ease with this expression though I recognize that my healing came from a Divine power. Who am I to receive so many graces?

Can you tell me what happened on October 26, 2011?

I thought I had bronchitis, I didn’t think I was so sick. Worried, my husband

called the ambulance. I was admitted at the hospital at 20:45. Two hours later, my husband saw me unconscious being transferred to the intensive care unit. Some unknown bacteria had attacked all my vital organs.

How long did you stay at the intensive care unit?

I stayed there almost a month. I remember very little of those moments; what I know today is what people have been telling me. The medical team was sure I would not pull through, that I would not survive. Do you realize that I needed approximately five hundred donors to provide platelet transfusions and I had thirty-three dialysis treatments? According to the diagnose death was almost certain.

You know, we all prayed for you Nicole and we placed your name at Mother Délia’s tomb?

I know that my family, my friends and associates of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, as well as all the Religious firmly believed that their prayers to Mother Délia would be fruitful. They never doubted.

Though I was unconscious I can remember very well, that at a certain moment, I saw a long black sheet being rolled out over my body and I called upon Mother Délia for her help.

When did you have the certainty that you would be healed?

I did not know if I would be healed. At the end of three weeks, I came out of the medically induced coma, and I was able to see my husband who had been by my side every day during my hospitalization.

I was then transferred to the intensive care unit. I stayed there one month. I was always receiving dialysis, and was force-fed.

PHOTOS:

¹ Nicole at the hospital
Photo Credit: G. Gravel

² Nicole with her family
Photo Credit: N. Boivin

³ Nicole (front-1st right)
with some AsMIC
Photo Credit: J. Dallaire

I could not move any of my limbs; though my intellectual capacity was intact, my body seemed dead. I was so weak that dying seemed easy... just let go, just let the boat drift along, abandon yourself to God...

I never felt anger... I tried to smile at everyone. As days went by I gradually realized that my affiliation with the MIC Sisters, a faith journey I began many years ago, was for me a source of strength, a precious help which was much needed during those months of uncertainty.

When were you transferred for physiotherapy?

I was transferred to a rehabilitation unit on December 22 and I stayed there until April 10. I had to relearn everything: to breathe, to eat, to walk. Even at this stage, the medical staff doubted I would recover.

Christmas was approaching... I was confined to my bed or to my wheel chair. Mother Délia's picture was on the wall close to my bed and I would pray to her; I asked to be made whole so I could hold my two grand- daughters, Audry-Anne and Annabelle in my arms again. My first physiotherapy session proved I could not even stand up. Little by little, I took small baby steps; it was very painful and I cried many times. I kept thinking that life would give me another chance, that the Lord was with me and that He would help me.

Gradually, my strength came back; I went from the wheel chair to the walker and then to the cane. Then they had to amputate my toes due to necrosis. After five and a half months of hospitalization, I left the hospital on April 10, 2012.

In 2013, you had to undergo open heart surgery at the Montreal Heart Institute. Did you blame God for this new trial?

Never! True, I was heavily put to the test, but as one doctor said: *This lady did not row across the Atlantic without reason.*

What's new?

Through these trials I have become physically and morally stronger. More than ever I realize the importance of living fully in the present moment and I believe more than ever in the power of prayer. I thank God for my wonderful husband, Gilles, my family, my friends, and all the MIC Sisters who kept me in their prayers. I am especially thankful to Mother Délia. Today, I witness that God does exist and that we are called to trust. Following the example of Mary, my life is now a Magnificat. Yes, the Lord has worked marvels for me! ☺



...I called upon Mother Délia for her help!



Venerable Délia Tétreault

Mother Mary of the Holy Spirit

Foundress of the Institute
of the Missionary Sisters
of the Immaculate Conception

Born in Marieville, Québec, Canada,
on February 4, 1865
and died in Montreal, on October 1st, 1941



By Émilien Roscanu

SPRINGTIME

Spring

Cut and keep this prayer in sight.
Favors may be obtained through the
intercession of Venerable Délia Tétreault.

Prayer for the glorification of DÉLIA TÉTREULT (Mother Mary of the Holy Spirit)

God, our Father, You filled the heart of Venerable Délia Tétreault with an apostolic desire to proclaim Your Word and Love to all peoples who do not know Your Goodness. In an outpouring of thanksgiving for every gift received from You, she was a prophet of the universal mission of the Church.

May her example inspire us to also be missionaries of the Good News in the world. Confirm the holiness of her life by granting us the favour/miracle that we ask... in the name of Jesus, Your Risen Son, and of the Holy Spirit who gives life to the Church. Amen.

Authorization of the Ordinary of Montreal, N.P. 4/2012

Persons obtaining favours through Délia Tétreault are requested to inform:

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Springtime is that period of year which symbolizes renewal. As the days become longer, darkness gives way to light, snow melts away and green grass appears; the cold wind of the north is transformed into a light warm breeze. Then, the first buds begin to open and soon tender green leaves adorn the trees. The animal kingdom equally takes part in the change. Migratory birds return from their wintering grounds in the south to their breeding grounds in the north, while other mammals awaken from their long months of torpor. We cannot be indifferent to nature's renewal which unfolds before our eyes. This period of year should inspire us; why stand there as spectators when life all around us breathes new life? This season is a perfect time to question ourselves, see what changes can be brought about—personally as well as collectively.

OPTIMAL CONDITIONS

A requirement—introspection; to target a point that needs to be examined and improved we must first know our own self. Therefore, we must begin by asking the questions: who am I? Where am I really going? The exercise is very personal. One day, I decided to experience it. To help my concentration, I went to an isolated quiet and calm place. I took a comfortable position and stopped all distractions that roamed in my mind. Taking long and deep regular breaths, a state of inner calm settled in.

STUNNING RESULTS

This state of relaxation and of inner peace helped me meditate and I began asking myself questions about my past, my present and my future. Such a reflection brings about a different perception—things are not that clear, or clean-cut as in our daily life. What previously seemed obvious or acceptable no longer is. Thanks to this new perspective we can honestly be self-critical either positively

RENEWAL

or negatively but always in a constructive manner. Thinking over questions such as: what do I want to achieve in life? What is the top priority in my life right now? Am I choosing the right courses that will help me in my career? Such questions are necessary, particularly at a time when important decisions need to be taken. Meditation is an excellent way to self-reflection. It helps us accept the changes that come our way and to be at peace with our choices and decisions.

As I am writing these lines, I am starting my second semester at the university. Of course, this new world which is opening up before me is a source of marvel and passion while at the same time one of stress and anxiety. Did I choose the right program, the right course? What do I really want to do later on in life? At one point, many questions were in my mind and I was the only one who could answer. Though at first nothing seemed clear, the questions I kept asking helped me to understand and know myself better.

A WAY OF LIFE

When we know one's self better, when we are serene with our choices, life seems more pleasant and lightweight. Rising in the morning is not as difficult when the

objectives are clear, the orientations are assumed. Self introspection is beneficial for the person but also for others—I've had that experience. A healthy soul in a healthy body reflects itself on others. The aura that is emanated inspires the people who surround us; let it be positive and invigorating rather than negative and dull. To live life positively is to live life fully. To tackle the problems and every day challenges with enthusiasm and serenity is one of the most beautiful gifts we can give to ourselves; it is one of the best remedies to diminish anguish and stress which can cling to us like gangrene eating away our existence.

Springtime—it is the ideal moment of the year to have a facelift, a new image, to find our true self. It is the ideal time to do some inner spring cleaning, chase away the negative, and take up the positive attitudes. This invigorating time of the year must be exploited. We have within us the strength to probe our hearts, to conquer our fears, to overcome hardships that come our way. In the presence of the Other, the Divine, who dwells in the depth of our being, be attentive, be silent and listen, it is the first step to renewal, the renewal of our whole being; let it be a springtime renewal. ♪

A Visit to the Isle of Prayer

For almost forty years, the MIC Sisters took care of the people with leprosy on St. Joseph's Island, providing food, lodging, care and comfort. After overcoming many obstacles, including war, the last four Sisters had to leave their work when they were expelled by the communists in June 1952.¹

Research by: Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.



¹ GAUTHIER, Chantal, *Women Without Frontiers*, Ed. Carte blanche, 2008, p. 320

² *The Precursor*, September 1923, p. 33

PHOTOS:

¹ Zénaïde Marcoux, M.I.C. (standing) and Laura Brodeur, M.I.C. (sitting) on their way to Shek Lung

² 1913, Malvina Biron, M.I.C. with some lepers

³ 1932, A banquet for the lepers to celebrate the silver jubilee of the leprosarium

Photos Credit: M.I.C. Archives

Beneath the serene sky of a beautiful May day, we behold the Isle of Shek-Lung, set in the sparkling waters of an apparently calm and peaceful river. A solemn stillness prevails, broken only by the rustling of leaves in the gentle breeze, the rippling of the waves and the splashing of oars. A sweet melody comes to us across the waters, “*San*

Yi Fouk Malea... San Yi Fouk Malea... Hail Mary, Hail Mary.” It is the voices of our unfortunate lepers mingling their incessant hymn of faith and gratitude with the song of the little birds that have taken up their abode not far from the chapel.

This island has been named *The Isle of Prayer* on account of its profound solitude and the tender piety of its inhabitants. In this little corner of the earth, unknown to the greater majority of men and dreaded by those to whom it is known, hundreds of creatures stricken with the inexorable leprosy, live, suffer, and pray in awaiting a better life. The joy of God's smile shines on these faces, frightfully distorted by the disease, but radiant with the grace of baptism.

How touching is the spectacle presented to the eyes of visitors! How sweet it is to hear the uninterrupted recitation of the Rosary on the lips of these poor disinherited of the earth, whose life is consumed in suffering and prayer.² ☺



IN FOCUS

What's New?

INNOVATIVE PROJECTS

A missionary in Madagascar from 1966 to 2010, Sr. Estelle served in the teaching field. In 1972, when the revolution broke out, she was principal at Morondova College; she soon realized that the Madagascans had the capacity to take over their own schools. She understood that she had to find another mission field.

PERMANENT ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE

Through my contacts with our students' parents, many of whom were struggling with conjugal and family problems I saw the importance of pursuing my mission via a professional outreach program for adults. After my studies in psychology, I felt called to serve at the Permanent Adult Education Centre, located in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. For a period of thirty-two years, I worked with Madagascan animators, building effective human resources in the light of identity, spirituality, communication. Plus, the program also included leadership, human resource management, and conflict resolution. These well prepared animators have become missionary disciples; they continue to offer the training program in various regions of the Big Island to groups of parents, teachers, business leaders, directors of companies and associations. They also reach out to religious who are in formation, to seminarians and to university students.



3



By Estelle Fontaine, M.I.C.
In collaboration with
Fr. Jean Desclos

TRUST IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Looking back, I realize that through interpersonal relationships we come to live the mission of Jesus. So often I observed that one's limitations were complemented through the contribution of others whether in human resources, spiritually or materially. A few examples:

At Ambatomanjaka, an urban municipality located in the Province of Antananarivo, central Madagascar, there is a school and a dispensary which welcomes patients from remote areas; at one time there was no water nearby. This was

an imperative need! A request was made and thanks to Canadian international aid workers competent in hydraulics, eighteen water hydrants, three public washing places and a huge reservoir were installed. These are still functioning very well and respond to the local populations' quest.

A mother, victim of tuberculosis and abandoned by her husband, could not provide for her four children. A compassionate couple from Quebec came to their rescue; their generosity allowed her four children to develop and eventually have a family of their own and live a life of dignity. While keeping a close contact with this couple, it was a joy for me to accompany the four children during their years of hardship.

A UNIVERSITY FORMATION IN PSYCHOLOGY

Following my involvement with young university students, I was called to collaborate with Father Germain Rajoelison, Rector of the *Catholic University of Madagascar*, (CUM/FRENCH:UCM). He wished to establish a Department of Psychology which would contribute to the psychological health and well-being of individuals, assist social government organizations as well as the local communities. *The J. Armand Bombardier Foundation*, presided by Mrs. Janine Bombardier, generously responded to my request. Between 2002 and 2008, two Madagascans, Olivier Rakotomalala and Andry Razakamanana, studied at the *University of Sherbrooke* (USHERB) and worked towards obtaining a Doctorate Degree in Psychology. Olivier is now Director of the new Department of Psychology at CUM and Andry gives courses while recruiting teachers from Quebec. From the very beginning, Father Jean Desclos, brother of our deceased Sister Jeanne Desclos, M.I.C., made every effort for this Department to be created at the CUM; the University of Sherbrooke accepted to work in partnership with the *Catholic University of Madagascar*.

A LOVELY COUNTRY

Madagascar is an island country in the Indian Ocean, off the coast of Southeast Africa. It is a lovely country known for its orchids, gigantic baobabs, vanilla and its lemurs. The culture is based on family and social solidarity together with deep religious roots. Though the country has rich natural resources, its economy is fragile—81.3% of the population lives with less than \$1.25 per day. The daily survival context brings about personal problems and additional miseries; thus the reason for a training in psychology, in a country that is still in development. Madagascar needs leaders who are trained in various psychological dimensions—human and spiritual; there is a growing need to reach out to those who are facing difficulties: adolescents, families, professionals, pastoral agents. The formation of psychologists in Madagascar is welcomed as an initiative aiming at the future which will help the whole population to live its development holistically and not uniquely economically.

SETTING UP THE DEPARTMENT AT CUM

It took from 2004–2011 to implement the different stages of a university level formation in psychology. Throughout that span of time the *Catholic University of Madagascar* received support from the *University of Sherbrooke's* Direction, and its Department of Psychology. In 2007 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the *CUM* and *USHERB*; with this protocol it became possible to implement the very first program of a university formation in psychology, the first of its kind in the country. On that same occasion the *University of Sherbrooke Foundation* created within its projects a fund to support the *Catholic University of Madagascar*.

In 2010, *CUM's* Department of Psychology was officially created and in 2011 it opened its doors to the first group of students. Amazing, while some were predicting a failure, recruitment efforts for the official launching of the program gave excellent results. And this was con-

firmed the following years. Since Fall 2014, *CUM* offers a new 2 year program leading to a Master's Degree. Currently, there are eighty students taking their License or Master's Degree.

CONSOLIDATE THE PROJECT

Due to a lack of personnel and financial means, *CUM* cannot assume by itself the rapid development growth. However, very much appreciated is the generous support of teachers from the *University of Sherbrooke* and the *University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM)* who come to give a helping hand to the Madagascan professors who are already at work in the new department. These teachers come on a volunteer basis and give intensive sessions for a period of five to six weeks. During their short stay, the board and lodging are provided by *CUM*; their travelling expenses are covered by the *University of Sherbrooke Foundation*, thanks to their 'support fund' which was created in 2007.

The future of this new department will be assured when it will have acquired operational independence, with complete Madagascan faculty resources, and a formation program reflecting the Madagascan culture—this is our goal. For this reason we recruit students who are interested in pursuing a Doctoral Degree in Quebec; well formed they will in turn be qualified professors at the *Catholic University of Madagascar*. The formation of these talented students, as well as the shipping of computers and psychology textbooks to Madagascar, is financed by the 'support fund' of the *USHERB Foundation*. ∞

To send a donation, please consult page 23.



Fr. Jean Desclos is a diocesan priest in Sherbrooke, Quebec. He is a former Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Vice-Rector at the University of Sherbrooke; he still offers lectures as a part-time university member. Every year, since 2007, Fr. Desclos gives courses in moral theology at the Catholic University of Madagascar.

PHOTOS:

¹ Baobab trees

Photo Credit: L. Gagné, M.I.C.

² Catholic University of Madagascar

³ Permanent Adult Education Center

⁴ Olivier and Andry

⁵ Father Jean Desclos
Photos Credit: MIC



What's in Store for Us at Tak Oi School?

"Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."¹

By Rossetti Lau, M.I.C.

The whole Tak Oi School community has undergone a grace-filled event in 2014, which set it on a renewed path in God's Eternal Loving Plan.

Tak Oi was founded and is managed by the MIC Sisters since 1970; the school has been serving young girls of age from 12 to 18 in an area called Tsz Wan Shan, which literally means the Mountain of Mercy Cloud in Chinese. Thanks to the passion and great effort of the pioneer MICs, teachers and staff, the school is deeply filled with the Christian Spirit, especially the Gospel values of Love and Truth, which are chosen to be the school motto. Thus, even though the percentage of Catholic students has always been very low (16 Catholics among 816 students in the current school year), formation of young girls in the spirit of Christ is always the first priority.

READY TO LET GO

In 2010 we, the MIC Sisters, announced our intention of passing the school to another Catholic Institution. The decision was made in view of the sustainable development of the school with the hope that the new sponsoring body of the school would have greater human resources. Students, teachers and parents, both present and past, expressed their unwillingness to depart from the MIC root. In moments of uncertainty, the whole school community held on to the trust and hope in God. Slowly, from within, "...the joy of faith slowly revives as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress".²

The theme of the three-year school development plan from 2012-2015 is *"Rooted to the Source; Reach out to the World; We are here to make a Difference"*. This has set the direction for the school community to grasp more deeply the foundation spirit of the school. Different school projects have been launched. In July

¹ Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005)
by Pope Benedict XVI, #1

² Apostolic Exhortation
Evangelii Gaudium
(24 November 2013)
by Pope Francis, #6

³ *Ibid*, #11

2012, an album entitled “Magnificat” was published, unfolding a thanksgiving journey with the MIC Sisters. Starting from June 2012, a booklet “We are TOPs” (TOPs is the abbreviation of Tak Oi Persons) has been an annual publication. It is a collection of interviews with Tak Oi past students on how they are walking with Truth and Love in life after graduation from school. While the whole school community is preparing her heart to let go of her beloved MIC root and be ready to be grafted into another branch, the school was pushed to a NEW turn in 2014.



GOD SPOKE

Two sayings of Mother Delia best captured the cause of this new turn: *“Look for nothing other than the most Holy Will of God”* and *“Events are the best messenger of God”*. Taking the unexpectedly much-delayed process of the transfer as a sign from God, we, the MIC Sisters, took a long discernment process to seek for the Holy Will of God concerning the future of Tak Oi. After much prayer and reflection, the decision was made: To terminate the transfer process and keep Tak Oi as a MIC school.

The announcement of the news in May 2014 brought excitement to students, teachers and parents. Words of encouragement and support came from alumni and past teachers both from Hong Kong and overseas. The mission in Tak Oi continues and it is *ever new* because it is *“the love of Christ that urges us on”* (2 Cor 5:14). *“Christ is the ‘eternal Gospel’... He is forever young and a constant source of newness... Every form of authentic evangelization is always ‘New’.”*³

MISSION IN ACTION

The mission is sustained in Tak Oi and it extends to all those who have received education in the school. The stories put down in the annual booklet “We are TOPs” give witnesses to this extended mission. In the July 2014 issue, Paulina Kwok, a graduate of 1970, shared with the two student reporters how she initiated the establishment of the first Family Crisis

Support Centre in Hong Kong located at the former site of a British Royal Air Force Base from 1930 and the United Nations Vietnamese refugee camp in the 70s and the 80s. Paulina, a Caritas social worker, is at present the supervisor of this centre which provides professional crisis counseling as well as support services for people facing personal and family crisis. The services include a 24-hour hotline service, time out accommodation service, crisis intervention, counseling, support groups and community education activities. Talking to her young schoolmates of Tak Oi, she said, *“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”*

The school year 2014–2015 celebrates the 45th anniversary of the school foundation. The theme “With God all things are possible” sets the school on the renewed path of TOTAL TRUST in God’s Higher Hand. In Love and Truth, all young girls of Tak Oi continue to sing joyously the school song...

PHOTOS:

¹ Sr. Rossetti, on a special annual feast

² Sr. Rossetti with some students

Photos Credit: MIC

*“... Midst towering blocks of Tsz Wan Shan,
where mountains, clouds and mankind meet,
stands our dear school Tak Oi ever bright,
where we learnt of sharing, knowledge, truth and light.
Keen, brave, devoted, we have become.
Through God we learnt to live and be true,
searching for knowledge, wisdom and truth,
Tak Oi you guide us all by God’s light...”*





FACING THE MIRROR



By Louisa Nicole, M.I.C.

I always loved the *Outspoken Old Medea*—an entertainment column which appeared in the RND Review. One time it spoke about the ‘back side of an embroidery design’. You know what that means? The back side of an embroidered fabric is not always lovely to look at but without it, could there be a right side to admire? When I look at myself in the mirror and see my wrinkles I like to think that I am seeing the back side of my face. Is it impossible to turn it on the right side?

On my mother’s side of the family, my uncles and aunts had big noses. With wisdom my mother would say, “A big nose does not disfigure a pretty face.” Although I never really liked ‘big noses’ and that I rejoice having been spared from that heritage, I tried to see what was hidden above and under it: fantastic bright eyes sparkling with intelligence, or simply beautiful because of their gentle appearance full of goodness; a beaming gracious smile with impeccable teeth. We must learn to look beyond what first attracts our attention. And what if the wrinkles would also be hiding an unsuspected beauty!

MIRROR, WHAT DO YOU SAY ABOUT ME?

Before writing this article, I asked the following question to people of various ages, “When you look at yourself in the mirror, what does it tell you?” The answers varied, some were spontaneous, while others were too well thought out to reflect the reality. No one can be indifferent before the mirror because it does not lie about the appearance; however, what is seen can be translated otherwise.

“My mirror tells me that my beard lacks bristles and that upsets me”, says one young man. “I shave it often to reinforce it...; on the other hand, facing my mirror I feel within me a certain conviction that I should take a sabbatical while I am still young and go discover the world.” That is great!

A ravishing young girl told me very simply, “I don’t like my smile, my teeth are too short. You will see I will soon be more beautiful.” Yes, she came back one day with a terrible toothache because her upper little teeth had been lengthened. Two weeks after the ache had disappeared she realized that the incisors could no longer cut the

PHOTOS:
Shutterstock

food. It was irreversible and she was only nineteen. What a disaster! Mirror of misfortune, why did I listen to you?

like pickled peppers!" With the psalmist he proclaims, "*Cry out your joy!*"

With the years, the heart has turned heavenward,
it has unfurled, improved and has been pacified.

When we reach sixty, the mirror is uncompromising. It reflects the devastating effects of ageing: sagging cheeks, double chin, drooping eyelids, facial lines and wrinkles appear in different shapes, some deeper than others, there is the thinning hair, sometimes grey or white, and there are those brown or black spots. Inexorable, it smacks our faded beauty right in the face. With a sense of humor, a woman told me, "*I consult my mirror just when necessary... I give it a grimace and then walk away.*"

A Vegastar song has it as follows:
*I would like to live on the reverse side
To find my illusions;
Leave behind my wear and wrinkles
Take away a candle at every anniversary.
Be able to say
The best is yet to come;
I would like to live on the reverse side.*

AH! I LAUGH TO SEE MYSELF
SO BEAUTIFUL...

Charles Gounod in his grand opera Faust has Marguerite sing, "*Ah! I laugh to see myself so beautiful in this mirror. Is this you Marguerite, is this really you? Answer me, answer me; please answer me quickly. -- No! No! It is not you! No...no, it is not your face. It is the king's daughter; it is the king's daughter!*"

This goes to say—the reverse side of our wrinkles is the joy radiating within us, the love that transforms us. In his address to young religious men and women and seminarians, Pope Francis said, "*Please, let there be no priests or nuns with faces that are*

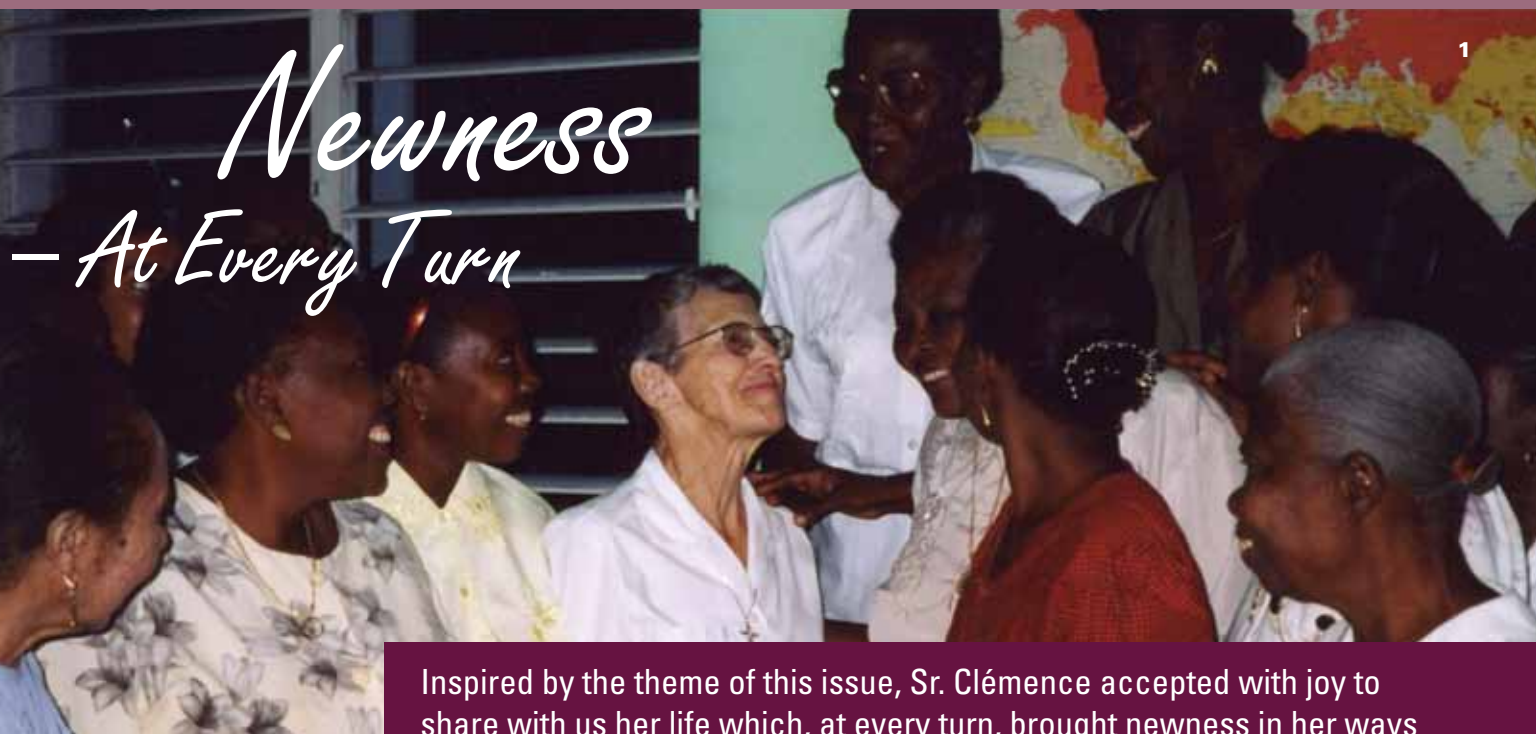
For us missionaries, when the hour comes to return home from the mission field, it is not the wrinkles that give us a heavy heart but rather what accompanies them: leaving a country and people we cherish and love, the feeling of being less useful, the physical ailments that limit our movements, our activities and so much more.

But if we follow the traces of our wrinkles which lead to the road of our heart, memory lane presents us joyful reminiscences of the past, and the present keeps calling us. Happy moments as well as sad moments have fashioned us. With the years, the heart has turned heavenward, it has unfurled, improved and has been pacified. The many responsibilities that lay heavily on our shoulders have been transformed into a rich, tranquil experience: we have nothing to impose, but everything to share, to give gratuitously. God's tremendous tenderness which dwells within us has no other ambition than to spread the warmth of God's enduring love to people around us who live in a cold and impoverished world. And society keeps reminding us, *Wrinkles or not, you will be missionary disciples who follow Jesus until the very end.*

A WRINKLED ICON

Have you ever seen women as wrinkled as Mother Teresa? Yet, her face is an icon of mercy, gentleness and joy. Facing the mirror, let us ask ourselves which icon we would like to resemble and then let's dress our heart; let our adorning be the hidden person of the heart—it is the best face-lift. ☺





Newness — At Every Turn

Inspired by the theme of this issue, Sr. Clémence accepted with joy to share with us her life which, at every turn, brought newness in her ways of seeing and doing things.

By Clémence Trudel, M.I.C.

IN HINDSIGHT

Every year, on my birthday, I ask myself: *What will this year bring me that will be new?* Using Pope Francis' expression, I will make "a pilgrimage in reverse"¹ where every change or new beginning in my life appears to be a twinkling star.

Remembering my happy childhood years: in the calm and wide open spaces of Abitibi countryside, located in Western Quebec, I recall running joyfully in the fields during the summer months, playing various games in the winter, attending the country-road primary school, going to Church for Sunday Mass.

A NEW BEGINNING

I was fourteen years old. I left behind my home in Abitibi and travelled by train to Montreal, an eleven hour trip. It was a plunge into the unknown. In a crowded streetcar I had to stand feeling somewhat uneasy yet hopeful. Finally, I arrived at l'École Normale Notre-Dame on Sherbrooke Street; a school where young girls prepared to become teachers, and at that time there were many. This was to be my vocation for eleven years. Every morning, those lovable children from grade one

to eight, all in the same classroom, would bring with them something new. The older ones tutoring the younger ones, was a big help. Each day would begin with a prayer followed by a reading from the Gospel. Jesus was our friend; Mary was our mother.

A NEW OFFER

Then a job as assistant accountant was offered to me. This was a perfect opportunity to begin a new life in the city: a good salary, many friends, a lover, outings of all kinds: sports, dancing... Life was beautiful! Nevertheless, all those activities did not fulfill me; I was in a sky without stars. Even the prince charming could not conquer my heart. At night time when solitude would set in, I reflected on the essential purpose of life and what roads could be taken to help others, especially the poor. At church, the rising incense would intoxicate me; the silence delighted me, prayers at Vespers and at Mass would lift my soul spiritually. I prayed—the Absolute was my dream.

One evening, kneeling before the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I cried out: *My Mother, tell me what I must do.* "Go, Jesus is calling you, I will accompany you." The message was clear. A twinkling star

¹ POPE FRANCIS – *Rejoice!*

A Letter to Consecrated
Men and Women, 2014 No. 4

² Ibid

PHOTOS:

¹ Sr. Clémence (center) with
a group of AsMIC in Haiti

² The author at the farm

³ Sr. Clémence with students

⁴ Flowers offered in gratitude

Photos Credit: MIC



2



3



re-appeared! In my search, I discovered Délia Tétreault, a Quebecer, and the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception to whom the whole world was given for their apostolate. My choice was made. I was then thirty years old.

A NEW COMMITMENT

In my life this was the most tearful separation. To see my mother cry was heart breaking. After many years of autonomy, the change was radical. *To stay with Christ requires us to share our lives, our choices, the obedience of faith, the happiness of poverty, the radicality of love.*² Hearing about the missionary commitments of the Sisters enthused me and I looked forward to the day when I would go abroad to make Jesus known.

Pentecost of 1961—the Superior General said: *What if we offered you to go to Haiti...* My “yes” was spontaneous. In September, I was taking the plane with my little black suitcase and a hand bag. Four hours later, I was landing at François Duvalier airport; the heat of the day was oppressive. In the car, the mercury showed an even higher degree of heat and with this heat came a heart warming welcome. For dinner, a special table was set for me and for the first time I tasted the sweet juicy refreshing mangoes of Port-au-Prince.

A NEW OBLIGATION

It was urgent... they were waiting for me at Mirebalais; they needed a teacher. The next day, I arrived at Dumarsais-Estimé School. At first sight, I fell in love with the people who were so naturally simple, joyful, free, and welcoming. The little children offered me flowers; they were charming.

My first days in class were full of hurdles. Though French is the official language, Creole is spoken; I had to learn it, if I wanted to communicate well. The time of adaptation was most precious. I discovered a lamentable pedagogy: discipline was obtained by whipping the child, rote learning was the way to knowledge, cheating assured success. The voodoo god “loa” comes on command; no matter their belief, I tried to offer the best catechesis. I promised myself that I would change things, but before that could happen, wisdom had to guide me. I began by learning Creole and gradually assimilated the culture of the people, the only way my Star could twinkle.

Years later, as Directress at the Teacher Training School in Cap-Haitien, I instilled principles conformed to the Gospel in the heart of the future educators:

Replace the whip with dialogue and love.

Replace rote learning with understanding.

Replace cheating with congratulating the effort.

Replace “loa” with Jesus and His Gospel.

WONDER—EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

Some of my former students who have come to Quebec as teachers have sometimes been asked: *Where did you receive your training?* One of them who disclosed her answer astounded me: *Sr. Clémence, I loved the way you taught us the human principles of dignity, justice, and love. Then, one day, I saw you praying; I was stunned.* Amazing how Jesus allows His Light to shine through our simple actions.

I am now 91 years of age. I thank the Lord for His constant guidance allowing me to walk, move about, help others and be of service when asked. I bless Him for the remaining years, allowing me to continue revealing His eternal love. I thank Him for these final years which are preparing the everlasting twinkling star of my life.

With Him, we become creators, we become unlimited space for the others to discover God in us and, thereby, to discover Him in them. (Maurice Zundel)



Discovering New Realities

For many years, mission “ad extra” kept me physically absent from my homeland, except for occasional brief visits. Recently, I was called to return permanently; once settled, I realized many changes had taken place over the years, my eyes were opened to new realities.



By Ditma Luz Trocio, M.I.C.

TAKE NO ONE FOR GRANTED

How often do we stop to think that friends, family and community members will not always be there for us? Upon my return to the Philippines I felt the loss of those I once had in my life and with whom I had shared so much. They are now resting in Peace; as for me, I must learn from their absence.

Looking at the other side, I see that a drastic transformation has taken place in the make-up of our Novitiate and Postulate. Through the Inter-Provincial collaboration, the younger generation of MIC Sisters in formation, comes not only from the Philippines but also from Africa, and Vietnam. It's a new scenario to which

I am adjusting; the interaction is most enriching as we learn from each other.

EVER OLD—EVER NEW

While the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed, popular devotions always had its place and it dates back to the first generation of Christians. In recent years we have seen the development and diffusion of a special devotion to the Divine Mercy based on the writings of Sr. Faustina Kowalska. Chosen by the Lord to be the Apostle and ‘Secretary’ of His Mercy,

Sr. Faustina wrote in her diary entitled *Divine Mercy in My Soul*, the words Jesus spoke to her: *In the Old Covenant, I sent prophets wielding thunderbolts to My people. Today, I am sending you with My Mercy to the people of the whole world. I do not want to punish aching mankind, but I desire to heal it, pressing it to My Merciful Heart.*” (Diary 1588). All her writings concentrate on the mercy poured forth in Christ's death and resurrection, fount of the Holy Spirit who forgives sins and restores joy at having been redeemed.¹ Sr. Faustina was canonized on April 30, 2000.

SHRINE OF THE DIVINE MERCY

In the Philippines, popular devotional practices are many. Upon my return, I had the opportunity of visiting one of the world's largest statues of the Divine Mercy of Jesus. It is located in the eastern part of the southern island of Mindanao in a town called El Salvador, Misamis Oriental. It stands 50 ft/15.24 meters tall; the construction took a few years; through people's donations it was completed and consecrated in 2008. The shrine is under the guardianship of the M.I.C. priests (Marians of the Immaculate Conception from Poland) and it is under the authority of the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro.

The Divine Mercy Hills used to be known for its coconut trees and sineguelas², but now it is fast becoming a popular pilgrim site. The colossal statue of the merciful Jesus attracts people from everywhere. I was touched to see the faith of so many pil-





¹ Liturgy and Popular Piety in a Historical Perspective No. 154

² A deciduous tree cultivated for its edible fruit.

PHOTOS:

¹ Icon of the Divine Mercy of Jesus

² Shrine of the Divine Mercy of Jesus in the Philippines

grims; they come to pray, to beg for mercy, to ask for protection, to cry their hearts out. The beauty of the surrounding area leading to the Shrine is breathtaking and pilgrims climb the steep stairs to reach the top.

Of popular piety, the last four Popes have this to say: Pope Paul VI, *“Popular devotion manifests a thirst for God understood only by the simple people.”* St. Pope John-Paul II, *“Popular devotion can lead one to conversion, communion, solidarity and an increase in virtue and holiness to confront our modern secular culture.”* Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *“Popular piety is a precious treasure of the Catholic Church in which we*

see the soul of the people.” Pope Francis, *“Popular piety is the people’s mysticism.”*

EVERY END IS A NEW BEGINNING

It is said that every story has an end but in life every end is just a new beginning. My homecoming is the beginning of a new chapter in my life and surely more discoveries are yet to come. I welcome each day that is given to me and I am thankful for the blessings that come with it. I consider my new assignment as a God given mission which I embrace with enthusiasm and joy for it is leading me on the path where He wants me to be. ☺

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Eternally Happy in His Kingdom

There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language. (Rev 7:9)



Socorro G. Gumnad, M.I.C. — 1937-2014 — Capariaan, Santa Cruz, Ilocos Sur, Philippines

Humble, simple, soft-spoken and charming, Sr. Socorro entered the MIC Community in 1965. As a child she dreamed of becoming a missionary. Later, as a member of the Legion of Mary she nourished that desire; at twenty-eight her dream became a reality. Sister was a born educator; after receiving her Master's Degree at the University of the Philippines, she taught for many years and was Principal at our schools in Greenhills, Mati and Gagalangin. For seventeen years she was coordinator of the Instructional Media Center and Chief Librarian. Her mission ad-extra was seven years in Bolivia where she served in pastoral animation. For your wholehearted contribution, thank you dear Sister.



Thérèse Boutin, M.I.C. (Sr. Sainte-Praxède) 1928-2014 — St. Marc-de-Figuery, Quebec

Thérèse heard the ultimate call and entered the Novitiate in 1948. From her parents who were colonizers, she inherited boundless energy and resourcefulness. In 1954, upon her arrival in the Philippines, her exceptional talents were put to use. At Sapang Palay, an improvised village for squatters, Sr. Thérèse taught sewing to women and young girls, organized courses in electrical repairs for young men in search of work. With a smile and patience, she responded to the needs. At the *Child Jesus Home*, forty youngsters from impoverished families received her attention and care. Her deep faith and love permeated her actions. Thank you, Sister Thérèse, your humble ways have touched many lives.



Jeanne Berger, M.I.C. (Sr. Joseph-Arsène) 1922-2014 — St. Épiphanie, Quebec

Everywhere she went, Sr. Jeanne created beauty because her artistic soul and her observant eye captured the invisible in nature and materialized it. Mushrooms, rocks, shells, booklets would be transformed into original villages and Christmas nativity scenes. Welcomed at our Novitiate in 1941, her missionary journey was impressive: Cuba, Guatemala, Bolivia and Peru. A road accident, which took place in Bolivia, left Sister Jeanne half-dead at the bottom of a precipice. Determined to live, she recuperated and resumed her activities—teaching art, catechesis, and promoting women's rights. Now resting in God's radiant Beauty, may you be happy Sr. Jeanne.



Antoinette Lebel, M.I.C. (Sr. Sainte Alexina) 1919-2014 — Sayabec, Quebec

Competent with many skills, Sr. Antoinette who entered our Novitiate in 1938 could cook, do electrical repairs, make and repair shoes, cultivate the land; she was a hands-on person. In 1957, she was assigned to Mzambazi, Malawi. She planted fruit trees, cultivated vegetable gardens, raised chickens and turkeys. Using the African method, she fabricated bricks and tiles which were used to build a kindergarten, a maternity ward and some twenty huts to accommodate the sick people. As water diviner she located the presence of underground water and had a well dug for the local population. Sr. Antoinette, thank you for the laborious tasks you handled so well; the Source within you produced much fruits.



Gabrielle Fontaine, M.I.C. (Sr. Saint Donat) 1927-2015 — Roxton-Pond, Quebec

"Open your eyes to life" was a characteristic of Sr. Gabrielle who died suddenly last January. At the age of twenty-five she entered our Novitiate; prior to her entrance she helped her family and was involved in the Catholic Movement of the time. Throughout her religious life, Sr. Gabrielle proved to be discreet, prayerful, joyful, helpful and attentive. During her two mandates in Madagascar she demonstrated her talent in the art of cooking; she also taught cutting and sewing while being present and serving the poor who surrounded her. For all the seeds of joy you sowed, thank you, Sr. Gabrielle.



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Show Us New Ways

*Lord God, give us new steps
to walk the roads not yet taken;
Your Son Jesus, our hope,
will guide us along the way.*

*Lord God, give us loving hearts
capable of uniting all peoples and
bringing peaceful solutions to conflicts;
Your Son Jesus, our hope,
will uphold us along the way.*

*Lord God, give us new words,
to reveal who You are and
speak peace to those who worry;
Your Son Jesus, our hope,
will inspire us always.*

*Lord God, give us a new vision
for our old planet earth and a
new humanity to reinvent freedom;
Your Son Jesus, our hope,
will transform us.*

*Lord God, give us Your light,
Your spirit, Your love, Your heart,
Your peace, Your gaze, Your radiance
but above all: Your Son Jesus.*

Amen!



Madagascar, child at the market place
Photo Credit: L. Gagné, M.I.C.