

MIC MISSION NEWS

VOL. 45, Nº 4 | OCTOBER • NOVEMBER • DECEMBER 2018 | \$5.00



To sow seeds of joy and hope

SINCE 1923

Bolivia

Mission in Its
Humble State

Canada

Délia on Stage

In Focus

Memory
Links



Missionary Prayer Intentions 2018

OCTOBER

The Mission of Religious: That consecrated religious men and women may bestir themselves and be present among the poor, the marginalized, and those who have no voice.

NOVEMBER

In the Service of Peace: That the language of love and dialogue may always prevail over the language of conflict.

DECEMBER

In the Service of the Transmission of Faith: That people who are involved in the service and transmission of the faith may find in their dialogue with culture, a language suited to the conditions of the present time.

Masses for readers' intentions offered in the following countries:

January: **Canada**

February: **Cuba**

March: **Philippines**

April: **Haiti**

May: **Canada**

June: **Bolivia**

July: **Malawi & Zambia**

August: **Hong Kong & Taiwan**

September: **Madagascar**

October: **Peru**

November: **Japan**

December: **Canada**

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MIC Mission News

Mission magazine published by the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception

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Bolivia – 5th American
Missionary Congress
Photo Credit: A. Charland

Subscription rates (4 issues):

Canada: 1 year - \$15, 2 years - \$25

U.S.A: 1 year - US \$20

International: 1 year - C \$30

Single issue:

\$5 (plus mailing costs)

Digital subscription: \$8

Member of the Catholic & Ecumenical Media Association

Tax Receipt

Registration Number:
NE 89346 9585 RR0001
Presse missionnaire MIC

Legal Deposits

Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
National Library of Canada
ISSN 0315-9655

Canada

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.

Entirely HUMAN

The theme of this issue, *MEMORY LINKS*, led me to reflect upon the proper vocation of each human being. True, memory is important because it helps us remember persons we once knew, or events that took place; it helps us to study, to foresee, to consider. But could we say that the memory is the faculty which best characterizes the human person?

Today, computer memory can store information that can outperform the human memory. The artificial memory can execute specific tasks by figuring out for itself what information to hold in its memory. So then, what is proper to the human person?

That is the big question... Our Lord, during the Last Supper, said to his disciples: *Do this in memory of me*. What did he mean? To remember or to repeat the act? It was more than that. Sharing the Eucharistic meal is to be in the presence of Jesus, to share in the life of Christ and his message which is to love one another as he loved us. *Love* is the human person's specificity.

The moment loved ones are no longer with us, memory takes over. We remember the kind of persons they were. Every year, certain cultures hold great festivities in memory of those who died; countries like Mexico, China, Madagascar, emphasize the importance of remembering. In

different ways commemorating loved ones is somehow highlighted.

It is equally important to underscore anniversaries. Organizations such as the Christian Formation Center called *Agapè* has been preparing young people for the missions over a period of thirty years. On the other hand, *l'Entraide Missionnaire*¹ must close its doors after sixty years of existence; this organization has left its mark in the hearts of many who received help from their various programs. We wholeheartedly thank all those who devote themselves within the Church, sowing seeds of love in the hearts of others. Those who work quietly in the background also deserve our gratitude. The focus of this issue tells us about the many blessings we receive from people who radiate lavishly God's love among us.

Enjoy reading!

Marie-Paule Sanfey, m.i.c.

¹ Entraide Missionnaire: An intercommunity organization which responded to special needs in terms of missionary formation, dialogue, mobilization, international solidarity.

AS WE REMEMBER

Parents instill in the memory of their children the happiness that comes with loving a country, a culture, ... or God.¹



André Gadbois

In the fifties, I grew up in a working class neighborhood of Montreal, called Rosemont. I was born in 1943 and seven of us lived in a five room house: grandmother Mélanie, mother and father, aunt Jeannette and uncle René both single, my sister Thérèse and myself. Without exaggeration, we were a bit crowded and financially limited. However, *I remember* the happiness we had living together and the numerous skills I learned. *I remember* my father who, during Lent Season, would walk to work to economize and have enough money to buy us Christmas gifts. Talented in art, he would draw and oil paint winter scenes on canvas to decorate under the large Christmas tree (paintings that I kept all these years). *I remember* aunt Jeannette, a matchless seamstress, would sew my sister's clothes as well as mine. Uncle René would pay attention to my needs and would buy the gifts necessary with which to play hockey. With her old age pension check, my grandmother Mélanie would discreetly



pay for little treats and *I remember* her rocking me for hours at night because of my ear aches. What about my mother? She was so skillful she could make miracles with few resources, she prepared healthy meals for all of us! *I remember*, when I was eight years old, I went with my mother to our earth-floored cellar (my father had passed away) and I helped her saw wood which had been given to us to heat the stove in winter.

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME

Day after day, those loving acts were registered in the memory of two young children; the minds were steeped with love, tenderness, sharing, confidence, while at the same time being sensitive to the reality: daily life was far from being easy. The death of my father could have scarred us for

¹ CYRULNIK, Boris -
Psychothérapie de Dieu,
(Psychotherapy of God)
Publisher Odile Jacob,
September 2017 (French
only)

PHOTOS:

¹ André's family

² Summer outing

Photos Credit:

A. Gadbois

life, even destroy us, but that was not the case. Today, *I remember* how those five persons, who are no longer with us, fulfilled in their own way the words of Jesus: *Do this in memory of me*. In turn, Thérèse and I continued putting into practice the words of the prophet of Nazareth which our parents, by their example, taught us how to do with joy and simplicity. Probably like the twelve apostles, as well as all those who met Jesus, my memory is filled with marvelous recollections.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM OF JESUS

The words *do this* which Jesus pronounced during the Last Supper were a reminder of every act/deed he performed, of every word pronounced when he met people during his public life; he instilled in their memory positive affective images so they could pursue what he had begun. When I recall memories of mine on Bordeaux Street, I do not see my family members as absent, nor do I address them as being gone; I feel I am in relationship with them in the realization of Jesus' dream because they were among us as persons who served (Lk 22:27). When I am fed up with indifference, with violence, and egoism to which the world is subjugate, *I remember* that Jesus was crucified and that my parents were faithful until the end: *I remember* the love they instilled within me and in turn I now transmit to my lover and two children. *Do this in memory of me*, is to continue Jesus' project, making sure love circulates and generates a resurrection. My sister Thérèse and I were blessed with five adults around us who taught us, during difficult moments, the true path of life. ∞

**Mother was so skillful
she could make miracles...**



DAY OF THE DEAD – a Feast Full of Life



Maurice Demers

A FEAST FULL OF LIFE

The *Día de los muertos* celebrations which take place on November first and second have great importance in Mexico. To highlight this holiday, families create altars decorated with flowers, images of Our Lady of Guadalupe and photos of the deceased persons.

Children who passed away are remembered on November first, the adults on the second. In 2008, this tradition was inscribed in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Being an ideal occasion to stimulate tourism, Mexico City organizes grandiose public celebrations and a parade followed by millions of people. However, to understand the importance of this feast for the Mexicans and to live an authentic experience, we must go to the city or village cemeteries where families place their offerings on the tombs and decorate them with flowers. People spend the night in the cemetery; they gather around the tombs and recall the important moments in the life of the deceased. During that time, some will eat or play cards. Briefly, the *Day of the Dead* is a feast full of life.

PHOTOS:

¹⁻² A night at the cemetery

Photos Credit:

M. Demers

³ Catrina – a popular procession

Photo Credit:

Adobe Stock



PROCESSION AND EXPOSITION

In November 2017, while I was on a trip to Mexico, I had the chance of participating in the celebrations which highlighted the Day of the Dead. The huge procession, organized by the city of Mexico was the first activity of the day. *Alebrijes*, brightly colored Mexican folk art sculptures representing mythical creatures from another world decorated *La Reforma* Avenue at the heart of Mexico.

More than fifty floats took part in the procession as well as thousands of dancers representing the Aztec Society, Christianity brought by the Spaniards and the Catholic syncretism of the Native people. Among the floats was *La Catrina*, a woman skeleton omnipresent in paintings and in the works of some of Mexico's greatest artists; there were some *calaveras*, human skulls representing rebirth into the next stage of life which is deeply rooted in the Mexican psyche. This impressive procession lasted more than one hour and integrated very well the symbols of the popular culture as well as those of Mexican history.

In Pre-Hispanic times, the dead were buried close to family homes, often in a tomb underneath

3



the central patio of the house and there was great emphasis on maintaining ties with deceased ancestors, thus the importance of decorating altars with flowers. With the arrival of the Spaniards and Catholicism, the All Souls' Day and All Saints' Day practices were incorporated into Pre-Hispanic beliefs and customs and the holiday came to be celebrated as it is today.

A NIGHT AT THE CEMETERY

In the evening of November 2, I went with Mexican friends at San Andrés Mixquic, a small town situated an hour and a half from Mexico City. This place is known for its colorful *Day of the Dead* celebrations. Before reaching the cemetery we had to cross the City which was decorated with festival-style booths selling snacks, all kinds of paraphernalia and souvenirs for the thousands of visitors who came to celebrate the *Day of the Dead*. Like many of the Mexicans who participated in the feast, I had my face painted to look like a calavera. I then felt ready to spend the night at the cemetery.

The floral arrangements, the candles, and the thousands of people who were in the cemetery made it difficult to move about; however,

everybody lined up to stroll between the tombs. The decorations were striking, in plain view the bones of certain deceased persons were exposed on the tomb. Families were present before the tombs and people wandered around them. Some children would find means to play in the midst of it all. Behind the chapel situated at the center of the cemetery, a large stage was set up and musical groups animated the crowd. Traditional Mexican music was played and the show lasted all night. *La Catrina* waltzed with the people to melodies and lyrics celebrating death.

On our way out of the cemetery, we took a light meal called *huarache* a traditional Mexican food. It is a flat pancake in the shape of a sandal used by the natives. It is baked with corn dough, garnished with black beans, steak, cheese and sauce. We returned to Mexico in the early morning hours.

The way Mexicans highlight death, and the celebrations full of life on the *Day of the Dead*, is very different from the Quebec way of looking at death which is rather nostalgic and sad. ☹️



MISSION IN ITS HUMBLE STATE

It must have been around four in the morning when the plane landed in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Although this was my sixth or seventh flight since I left Canada, I must admit that the turbulence foreshadowed an adventurous stay. As soon as I arrived at the airport, dozens of AMC5¹ volunteers welcomed the travellers who were somewhat dazed from lack of sleep, slightly nauseous from the aerial roller coaster, shivering from the Siberian cold quite unusual in this generally tropical climate, and immersed in a new linguistic environment. Without realizing, I found myself being taken care of, put into a car with a Cuban man and a Peruvian woman, on the road in the early morning to an unknown destination... The mission in its humble state!



Audrey Charland

WHAT IS BEING SAID

First of all, dear readers, I would like to reassure you: I felt far more fear and surprise than anything bad. The family whom I stayed with during the conference was absolutely marvelous, kind, curious about our customs. There's a lot to say about this. But I want to tell you instead about my experience of this great missionary gathering that took place from July 10 to 14.

These five days were really well planned, believe me! The program consisted of a blend: listening, reflection, sharing, celebration and prayer. The morning was dedicated to conference presentations in a kind of big agora. The sharpness of the cement steps we used as benches kept us awake. Different characters from the ecclesial milieu paraded across the platform, covering

the missionary reality on the American continent from many different angles. While some interventions remained, in my humble opinion, in the field of intellectualization, shedding a somewhat dim light on too-often cited biblical passages, others were able to weave close connections between the evangelical content and the people's situations, deeply affected by the socio-political struggles of their respective countries. These include Nicaragua, Venezuela and Colombia.

These conferences set the stage for the afternoon work sessions. A dozen workshops were offered, all divided into three parts: seeing, judging and acting. I participated in one about new forms of missionary cooperation. I was amazed by the abundance of little groups springing up here and there on the American soil. We are witnessing, without a shadow of a doubt, the emergence of a mission rooted in everyday life, sensitive to cultural characteristics but, above all, inclusive in its varied commitments, consecrated as well as secular.

¹ 5th American Missionary Congress
² Excerpt from a document written by Father Yoland Ouellet, O.M.I. – July 2018

PHOTO:
Crowds of enthused participants
Photo Credit: PMS
Canada / José I. Sierra



WHAT WE LIVED

The conference itself was a vivid testimony to this sincere and complete investment by the Bolivian community. By the hundreds, volunteers—mostly teenagers active in their parish—flocked to the site to help ensure that everything ran smoothly. They were always joyful and in a good mood. In fact, it was difficult to do anything but smile, seeing everyone, young and old, shaking their flags vigorously while dancing to the contagious melody of the event's theme song.

The crowd, several thousand people from twenty-four countries, seemed animated by a radiant, universal faith. Each person was fully aware of his or her saving power. My Cartesian and pragmatic mind, at first disturbed by the misalignments and gaps in the organization, relaxed drastically in the presence of this warmth coming from these missionaries dedicated body and soul. It seemed at times that the omnipresence of Christ became almost tangible, the crowd wrapped in His arms of light, carried by the rhythmic words of the traditional songs and dances.

I had the chance to share this singular communion with the eighteen other delegates from Francophone Canada. Throughout this adventure, with its highs and lows, we had no choice but to stand together, to communicate our surprises and our downfalls. Thus, it seems incongruous to use the word “delegation”... On the eve of our return, we were no longer mere envoys or representatives of the dioceses of Québec and Ontario, but a real family.

WHAT WE HOLD ON TO

Since July 22, I have found comfort in my apartment. It took me a few days to calmly sift through the different moments of this extraordinary experience. That's the question I ask myself today: What's left of this 5thAMC? Should we speak of vestiges, using this term to imply a legacy? The iterative process at the foundation of these conferences is in itself the answer. However, it's important that the people involved in the project continue to move forward and, above all, that the voice begets the action. Risk sits in the vicious cycle of analysis.

A daunting challenge awaits our country and our Church... We will need a good dose of creativity and a lot of perseverance to implement the guidelines established in Bolivia – some of which are: Going to the outskirts, evangelizing the family as a key to Christian transformation and favouring vocations.² These are some conclusive statements. How can we apply these to our respective environments, and are these guidelines an echo of our North American realities? This is an interesting project to consider.

In any case, we seem to be entering an era of reincarnation. More than ever, the Gospel must become part of every missionary disciple, rather than remain a collection of sterile texts. Contrary to popular opinion, stoicism in the face of new technologies is not a way of salvation. It's helpful to use current means of communication with a certain discernment. And at the rate this field is evolving, we can bet that God the Father will soon have His very own Twitter account! ☺

The Fantasies of God in Délia's Life



Suzanne Labelle, M.I.C.

Could we say that Délia was a bit secretive? Starting from her own childhood and youth memories, from what we know of her adult life, we can easily perceive in Délia a tendency of keeping to herself that which was most private. If, one day, she decided to talk about it, it was out of obedience because she was asked to express the blessings she had received from God.

Thus, at a young age, Délia discreetly would climb the attic at her house to read the Holy Childhood magazines. From reading the stories, a desire within her was awakened, she too wanted to go share the faith with those who did not know the God of Jesus Christ. She admitted that she had no intention of mentioning to anyone, not even to her mother, her desire or her dream.

Then as a young adult, she loved reading novels. One day, she heard a sermon on the dangers of reading frivolous books, she then decided to get rid of all those she had without anyone knowing. She writes: *When I came home, I took advantage of the moment when I was alone and not seen by anyone to throw in the fire all the novels and frivolous books I had in my possession.*

From what we know of Délia's discreet or secretive character, we can note that God, fanciful in His own way, knows how to deal with each one's personality and seems to have dealt as such with Délia. How is that? While many others hear the call of God early in their life and at a very definite moment, such as Saint Paul, it was not so with Délia. To know clearly what the Will of God was for her, it took many years of discernment, of prayers, of pleading with the Lord that He might show her the way. Of course, He did reveal His Will to her but gradually, with small signs, with inner insights sometimes in the twilight zone of the soul where contradictions appeared. At one point, the perplexity Délia found herself in propelled her to kneel down with arms stretched out while repeating to God that she only had one desire which was to do His Holy Will. From then on, she experienced inner peace and gradually God did show her the way, leading her to the foundation of a religious missionary institute. ☁

PHOTO: Young Délia on Stained-glass window

Photo Credit: M.-P. Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

With the Youth, Proclaim the Gospel to All!

Ref: Pontifical Missionary Societies

In October 2017, Pope Francis declared that an extraordinary missionary month would take place in 2019. He also wished that October 2018 would be a month to prepare for the following year's event. Below is an extract of Pope Francis' letter dated October 22, 2017.

On November 30, 2019, we will celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the promulgation of the Apostolic Letter Maximum Illud... In the light of this, accepting the proposal of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, I hereby call for an Extraordinary Missionary Month to be celebrated in October 2019, with the aim of fostering an increased awareness of the missio ad gentes and taking up again with renewed fervour the missionary transformation of the Church's life and pastoral activity. The Missionary Month of October 2018 can serve as a good preparation for this celebration by enabling all the faithful to take to heart the proclamation of the Gospel and to help their communities grow in missionary and evangelizing zeal. May the love for the Church's mission, which is a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people, grow ever stronger!



MISSIONARIES FROM CANADA ARE PROPOSED FOR EACH WEEK OF THE MONTH OF OCTOBER:



Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys (1620-1700)

Marguerite was born in Troyes, France. At the age of twenty, through a mystical experience, she felt inspired to consecrate herself to the service of God. At thirty-three, she arrived in Montreal, Quebec, and focused her attention on the needs of women and young girls. She initiated a school system and a network of social services. A woman of prayer, she quickly became a true pillar of the New-France. To a young nation in the making, she relentlessly opened the way to knowledge and she fashioned the French Canadian Society.



Blessed Catherine of Saint Augustine (1632-1668)

Catherine de Longpré was a teenager when she heard the call of God in her heart. At sixteen, she left France and set sail for the new colony. Though she often had health difficulties she nevertheless remained peaceful and a decisive woman of action. From the very beginning, she took on the task of nursing the sick, of evangelizing, learning the natives' language to better serve them; she was a leader and a builder. Catherine had a burning love for the Church of New France and for the people of Quebec, her adopted country. At the age of thirty-six, she passed away with a radiant heart of luminous joy.



Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680)

Kateri was born in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon west of present-day Auriesville, New York. Her mother, a Roman Catholic Algonquin woman, instilled in her daughter the love of prayer. Kateri's parents died of the small pox epidemic (1661-1663) while Kateri survived but was left with facial scars and impaired eyesight. She was adopted by her father's sister and her husband. Kateri met the Jesuit missionaries who came to her village and having experienced God's call at the age of ten, she asked to be baptized. She was then rejected by her own people; she escaped and went to Kahnawake, a Catholic mission in Canada. Kateri was a fervent Christian; she died from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four.



Venerable Délia Tétreault (1865-1941)

At a young age, Délia had a remarkable dream: a field of ripe wheat that extended as far as the eye could see; suddenly, all the wheat spikelets changed into heads of children from all nationalities. This dream became reality in 1902 when Délia established an apostolic school which evolved into being the foundation of the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Experiencing God's gratuitous love, Délia was filled with wonder and she expressed her gratitude through the mission. In 1906, she collaborated with the Pontifical Missionary Societies and revived the Holy Childhood Association in the diocese of Montreal. In 1909, the first group of nine missionary Sisters left for China. Delia passed away in 1941 and it was said: *A saint has just died.* ☞

Illustrations: Anne Marie Forest

Délia on Stage

Before Confirmation, many pastoral agents organize events for the future confirmands. The aim is to help them understand the meaning of this sacrament and experience the faith at a deeper level somewhat like what the apostles experienced on the day of Pentecost.

At Saint Maria Goretti Parish in Pointe-aux-Trembles, Diocese of Montreal, the pastoral agents decided to choose some candidates to act out on stage the life of Délia Tétreault. Her story could help the youngsters better understand, in a concrete way, the commitments they are about to accept.

A photoreport is worth a thousand words!



1. At her first communion, Délia offers her life to the Lord Jesus



2. As a young girl, she teaches classes to the less fortunate



3. A project: the foundation of a missionary community



4. Pope Pius X tells Monsignor Bruchési: You must go on with the foundation... you will call it the Society of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.



5. Year 1902, the foundation of the community



6. The whole wide world beckons you



7. Year 1920, founding of the mission magazine: *Le Précurseur*



8. The theater group and Mrs. Carmen Cloutier, pastoral agent

PHOTOS CREDIT: M.-P. Sanfaçon, M.I.C.



Malagasy Celebrations – Venerating the Ancestors

Madagascar is a unique territory where Africa and Oceania meet; therefore, traditions and customs are diverse. Each region has its own music, dances, processions, legends and they all symbolically express a Malagasy value. In this article you will read about the main stages in human life and their accompanying celebrations according to Malagasy beliefs.



Emilienne Raherimalala

THE UNDENIABLE CULT OF THE DIVINE ZANAHARY

The Malagasy people know that there is one God whose name is Zanahary, the creator of all things, who is omnipresent in their conscience and memory. This God is also called *Andriamanitra* or Perfumed Prince. They also believe that Zanahary is a distant God but one who sees all, is above all and is the origin of all that exists. This divine presence accompanies the Malagasy throughout every aspect of

their life. Whatever happens, happens because of God. For example: when a baby is born, it is a gift from God and when a person dies, it is God's will. This way of thinking leads people to do good deeds and live a virtuous life.

DURING PREGNANCY

From the moment of conception, the child is a gift of greatest value from God — it is a treasure. It is therefore a privilege to bear and give birth to a child. Hence, pregnant women deserve special attention since they are so precious. *They carry water* as it is said. To counter the fear of complications during delivery time or of giving birth to a disabled child, a series of prescriptions are imposed

on them daily. Among other things: they must rise early in the morning and pound rice; they must refrain from breaking a gourd, from sitting by the doorway or on the rice mortar.

THE FIRST HAIR CUT

According to the Malagasy custom, the first hair cut is an important step in a child's life. It is done between the ages of three to five months and from that moment the infant enters the rank of human. This symbolic and benign mutilation represents the challenges the child will have to face in life and the vital power he will need to master them. It is considered a rite of passage into the social and cultural world. A meal known as *hanimpitoloha* meaning the 7 royal dishes is prepared and sprinkled with liquid honey; it is then placed in a winnowing basket on the floor in the middle of a room.

The ritual unfolds as follows: A man with thick hair is chosen to cut seven tufts of hair from the right side of the child's head and offers some to the divinity, to the ancestors wishing the child long life, strength, happiness, wealth and consideration. Then, he sprinkles the remaining hairs on the food that is spread out. The women who wish to have a child come first to devour the meal. For the girls, this is the final ritual to becoming wholly integrated into society. As for the boys, they will have to take part in the circumcision ceremony in order to become real men in the world.

THE "VODIONDRY"—CONCRETE SIGN OF AN ETERNAL COVENANT

The traditional marriage called *Vodiondry* is an event of great value according to the Malagasy people. Indeed, it would be inconceivable to marry without the consent of the parents and without offering a dowry. Living with a spouse without proceeding to the *Vodiondry* ceremony would be a disgrace before society. Formerly, a lamb was offered as a dowry to the girl's family, it was considered as a financial transaction; nowadays, a sum of money is given which corresponds to the *glory and shared honor*. Thanks to the dowry, the couple receives the blessing from their parents and the ceremony expresses the transfer of fraternal/paternal love to conjugal love which the woman will live with her husband. The meal is



the contract which seals the union and it brings the festivity to a closure.

THE ANCESTORS—MEDIATORS BETWEEN THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

The ancestors play an important role between human beings and the supernatural world; they are intermediaries between the living and God. This belief is spread throughout the country. The deceased are given powers to protect life on earth, materially as well as spiritually. Traditional religion ensures such a belief; therefore, venerating the ancestors holds such an important place in our country that we practice what we call *Famadihana*, that is: *The turning of the bones*.

Famadihana is a sacred ritual in memory of those who passed away; it occurs every five to seven years. The bodies of the deceased relatives are taken from the family crypts and are rewrapped in fresh silk shrouds; they are then re-interred as a sign of their definite return among their descendants. During this time, people take advantage of their presence to ask for advice and protection also making sure that their return to the next life be as comfortable as possible. In other words, the deceased accede to the status of ancestors and they bless their descendants. It must be said that during this feast, the guests celebrate, eat and dance to the rhythm of musicians and the objective of this tradition is to build and preserve the relations among the members of the large family. 🍷

PHOTOS: 1-2 The turning of the bones

Photos Credits: Yolaine Lavoie, M.I.C.

Parting and Recalling to Celebrate Life



¹ Postulat des Pères blancs, *Notice sur la société des missionnaires d'Afrique (Pères blancs)*, Société des missionnaires d'Afrique, Montréal, 1932, P. 50. (French only)

² B.A. *A Chinese Superstition: Treating the dead as if they were living* – The Precursor, November-December 1937, Vol. XI, No. 6 - P. 325.

³ Sr. Saint Frances, M.I.C. *Funeral Rites in Africa* – The Precursor, November-December 1952, Vol. XIX, No. 6 – P. 261.

⁴ <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1088462/une-celebration-de-la-vie-pour-donner-un-sens-au-deuil>



Éric Desautels

Parting is an integral part of the missionary life. Before modern means of transportation and the existence of telecommunications, parting took on various forms. Missionaries left behind their motherland to embrace a new land. In 1932, the Missionaries of Africa (formerly called The White Fathers) asked the question: *Will our love of the new land destroy our love of motherland? Not really as it can be compared to the love of a spouse which does not destroy the love one has for a mother. The distant homeland we left behind, is the mother; the new land we have adopted is somewhat like the spouse; in Scripture, the Spirit of God said: Man will leave his mother to be united to his wife (Mt 19:5).¹* Thus, there were two partings: leaving one's country and a well-established life style to adopt a new one without all the material wealth so prevalent in the West.

Parting from one's motherland elicited some resignation. Missionaries had to leave behind friends, live a celibate life, and grieve at a distance the death of relatives. Moreover, the idea of parting and death was omnipresent in the missionaries' mind. The mission experience was undeniably linked to a weaving between one's culture and the adopted culture. The way to live bereavement changes according to the social and cultural contexts. Therefore, the missionaries had a particular outlook on how death and rituals unfolded in mission countries and this sometimes was in conflict with their own Catholic culture. How did they deal with the differences? History gives us some examples.

DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT IN THE HISTORY OF MISSIONARY LIFE

In the early twentieth century, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception settled in China. They took interest in the ways funeral rituals were carried out. In an article written in *The Precursor-1937*, we read: *Actually, mourning is reduced to a retreat of a reasonable length, to the wearing of mourning clothes for a period of three years and*

to ritual offerings made on various dates regulated by the custom.² For the missionary Sisters this was another way of looking at death and bereavement. On the other hand, in comparing this vision to that of the Catholic tradition, they realized that our *All Saints Day* intrigued and interested non-believers.

In 1952, Sister Saint Frances wrote about the funeral rites inspired by superstition in Malawi. She gave a detailed description of the many rituals which would take place from the moment a person died up to the burial, while also avoiding marauding spirits. *The funeral guests remain a whole week in the dead person's hut... After one month has elapsed... dances which last all night officially close the mourning period.* Contrary to the Catholic culture, a commemoration of the dead is never mentioned again: *Nevermore will the departed one be mentioned among the living.*³ Missionaries noticed that in Malawi, unlike the Catholic tradition back home, it was unthinkable of visiting graves on *All Saints Day*.

A last example of funeral rites to better understand bereavement in another part of the world. In 1981, in Taiwan, Sisters Olivette Côté and Jeannette Légaré described the unfolding phases of recollection and celebration the day of a burial. In the beginning offerings are made before the photo of the deceased, special clothes are worn according to the degree of relationship, the ashes of the deceased are contained in a small box; the Sisters observed some similarities and differences with their own Canadian Catholic culture.

RECALLING AND CELEBRATING TO OVERCOME GRIEF

From the given descriptions, there are differences in ways rituals are observed; however, are there any connections? In each story, recalling and celebrating the person who died helps overcome



PHOTO: French edition: *Le Précurseur*, Volume XXXI No. 10, July-August 1981

the grief associated with the loss of a loved one. If, in certain African cultures, the memories of the one who passed away is completely obliterated after the burial, the underlining memory of eternal rest remains. The missionaries observed that in all cultures, no matter their differences — recalling, gathering of families or friends, celebrating life and death are at the heart of healing and overcoming grief.

Even today, the importance of celebrating life to overcome grief is pivotal. For example, a doctor from Nicolet in Mauricie, Quebec, recently created an event to celebrate life, it was entitled *Personal Growth*.⁴ What was his reason? It was a way for him to give meaning to his son's death, which had taken place a few months before. The event attracted a hundred some people and it allowed him to journey through this personal drama. Briefly, the missionary experience abroad as well as that doctor's story underlines that grieving circumstances are also occasions to grow personally, to celebrate and recall the importance of life. ∞

The AGAPE Application

Suzette Jean, M.I.C.

Throughout the years, the idiom: *A Trip Down Memory Lane* has evoked recollections of the past. As I look back, some thirty years ago, when the Agape Center took shape, my heart is filled with gratitude.



Solidarity / Photo Credit: Agape Center



Working together with joy / Photo Credit: Agape Center

A MODEST BEGINNING

In 1988, a group of students in theology and their professor, Mr. Denis Petitclerc, dreamt of a space where they could come together to reflect, speak about their faith, and commit themselves in building a better world. Their dream came true and the Agape Center was inaugurated.

The pedagogy of the center takes root in the Church's rich tradition and its inspiration comes from the Acts of the Apostles: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* (Acts 2:42).

FROM ONE YEAR TO ANOTHER

Currently, we count more than three hundred fifty students or young professionals who consecrated one year of their life to take up the challenge of the Agape experience. In the early days, little did the founder think that in 2018 he would be welcoming a thirtieth group of participants wishing to journey together.

Through Mr. Petitclerc's inspiration, enriched by his personal charisma and support of his former students, we now see the fruitful benefits of the center. At Agape, the life of the students in theology consists in experiencing a fraternal life, a prayer life and a dedicated life. In other words: *understanding my faith, expressing it, and living it.*

Since August 2014, I have been at the Agape Center and my personal experience has enriched my missionary life. Here, the students between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five have the same aspirations as the young adults around the world. No matter the depth of their faith, each one lives a personal inner journey adjusted to the Catholic context of today. To take up the challenge of this formation, participants must have relational and psychological maturity. The focus is on integrating community life as a dedicated Christian who prays and studies.

Facilitators who come from different countries consider themselves as being on a spiritual journey with the participants: Christ's disciples accompanying other disciples. *Agape* is a Greek word, found in the Gospels, meaning the love God has for each one; it is a merciful and unconditional love. The different courses offered by the center allow the young adults to discover what they are called to be in life.

THE FOUR TRAINING COMPONENTS

The orientation of the training includes the following elements:

SPIRITUAL LIFE – The Agape adventure is conceived to facilitate an intimate alliance with the God of Jesus Christ. It consists in a personal prayer life as well as communal highlighted with celebrations, formation sessions, inner renewal and accompaniment. With time, a rich spiritual life becomes imbedded in the everyday living.

UNIVERSITY LIFE – Education is at the heart of the participants' activities. Courses given at the Agape Center target not only the deepening of faith but especially inspire students on how to live it in concrete ways.

COMMUNITY LIFE – To live under the same roof with other young students and doing so in a spirit of family, constitutes a practical pivotal experience. If the Christian faith implies loving each other and building community notwithstanding our differences then, at the center, occasions occur to intensively live this out.

DEDICATED LIFE – By participating to all the household chores, the participants develop a life style conducive to sharing and reaching out. During their practicum in community and ecclesial services, the gift of self is of utmost importance.

During their professional training, the students can opt to delve deeper into one category of their choice: a missionary experience with an immersion in Mexico—*I take root to better serve*; an experience that caters to artists and communicators—*I take root to witness*; vocational orientation—*I take root to better discern*.

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Having lived four years at the center, my confidence in the youth of Quebec has increased though I have noticed they are in search of their faith and identity; they need to be heard and understood.

How rich is the experience of living as disciples of Jesus, accompanying other disciples. Moments of sharing between the participants and intergenerational facilitators bring about an exceptional color to all our meetings due to the spiritual baggage of each one. I must say that I am still learning and I willingly accept to be transformed, surprised and filled with wonder.

Living with the youth is for me a gift, it has become part and parcel of my missionary life. My enthusiasm is nourished by their enthusiasm, even though the daily demands are sometimes felt. Our days are often filled of God's unexpected ways or signs, and as disciples of Jesus *we have chosen to believe in His Love*.

God's ways are mysterious and unpredictable. Throughout my life as a Missionary Sister of the Immaculate Conception, my path seemed to have led me to the here and now at the Agape Center. My many mission experiences always prepared me for what was to come next. The Agape charism: *Learn to live together the Agape love* is similar to the charism which our Foundress, Délia Tétreault bequeathed to our Community: *Live the Love of God in Thanksgiving and share it with the whole world.* ∞



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An Intercommunity Organization

An organization that has helped hundreds of missionaries cannot end its sixty years of service without remembering all the good it has accomplished. On May 5, 2018, in Montreal, we celebrated the achievements of *l'Entraide Missionnaire*.



Marie-Paule Sanfaçon, M.I.C.

Other times, other manners! My first missionary departure was in 1971 and before leaving I took a session at *l'Entraide Missionnaire*. I wanted to know more about how to adequately enter into a new culture. I was shocked by what I learned. Quickly did the participants understand the new challenges missionaries had to endorse; no longer were we to leave armed with knowledge and great experiences hoping to run the affairs of the other—times had changed! The name “Entraide” meant: mutual support. It existed to help missionaries learn how to integrate in a new culture. Some of the advice: learn to listen and observe, appreciate what the other can offer, commit yourself wisely while leaving behind your *peanut butter* and taste the spicy food of the other. That is the process to inculturation.

When we came back to our homeland, after having been ten to fifteen years in mission, it was necessary to readapt to our own culture. Life had changed: hockey stars were no longer the same ones, wine and hugs had made their appearance, many habits were different. It was therefore necessary for missionaries to participate in spiritual retreats, attend conferences to reflect together, and re-educate ourselves to cultural codes. This intercommunity organization provided the mutual support we needed; it understood the importance of coming together and it responded to the demands of the religious communities.

Now, the time has come for *l'Entraide Missionnaire* to close its doors after sixty years of faithful service in social justice formation and respect of cultures. I am proud to say that the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception took part in organization's commitments by being present on the board of directors and participating at their annual congress.

I wish to underline in a special way the work of Suzanne Loïselle, Auxiliary Nun. At the helm of this organization she held the torch lit during thirty years and she also worked abroad as a missionary. Eloquent and direct she promoted motivation and commitment to just causes and was involved in the movement *Collectif Échec à la guerre*. Suzanne is an activist and was nominated to receive the *Prix du Public pour la Paix*. Nationally and internationally,



© Internet

she intervened many times on social justice issues. I take this opportunity to thank her and all the team members; their tremendous work was most fruitful.

With today's communication technologies, missionaries can receive a good amount of information about their destination country. However, formation will always be appropriate and enriching. The *Intercommunity Missionary Formation Program* could be another option for anyone who wishes to serve on the mission field. This formation project focuses on three main points: journeying with a community group, insertion in another culture, love for Christ and his people. Digging deeper into these three aspects of life gives adequate insights for the candidates to understand what is expected of them and to respond as best they can to the many demands of missionary life. ☺

At the Risk of Conversion

Micheline Lagüe, M.I.C.

Once, they were objects and subjects of national pride; now, missionaries are conspicuous in their absence from our collective memory.¹ This gap in the religious history of Quebec is partly filled by Catherine Foisy's doctoral thesis in sociology — *At the Risk of Conversion* (*Au risque de la conversion*). The socio-cultural and political upheavals that have occurred on all continents and the winds of renewal brought by Vatican II have helped to change the way of living the missionary commitment—a transformation as profound as conversion.

The interpretation of missionary work as a meeting place and intercultural conversions comes from the analysis of fifty-five recorded interviews² obtained from forty-three missionaries who are currently living in four Quebec institutes³. Their stories tell the origin of their vocation, their discoveries, and their difficulties adapting in mission countries. They speak of their spiritual experiences which helped them overcome tensions caused by the necessary updating of religious life, the renewed theology of Mission, and the unexpected phenomenon of a culture shock upon their return to Quebec. A valuable source, though limited, is analyzed in light of archival documents and texts from Vatican II, which are precious additions to the seventy-one pages of notes and numerous statistical charts.

The expressed life experiences are situated in the context of the institutes' histories and the countries concerned. In a way, this thesis measures the impact certain events have had on personal lives and community life. For example: the exit of missionaries from China led the MIC Sisters to other countries. The same is true of the missionaries' involvement in traditional fields (education, health, social services, pastoral care), eventually they were called to adapt their ways to countries' socio-political and ecclesial evolution, or to collaborate on innovative projects like the founding of diocesan religious communities. These collaborations illustrate the passage, *Church for others to a Church with others*. Equally significant are the initiatives taken in favour of integrating refugees and immigrants into



the Quebec society. *At the Risk of Conversion* refers more to the consequences missionaries assumed than to the primary motivation to go toward others to announce the Good News of God. The determination required to tackle this complex subject and offer a new perspective most certainly calls for admiration. ∞

¹ Foisy, Catherine, *At the Risk of Conversion* (*Au risque de la conversion*), The Quebec Mission Experience in the 20th Century (1945-1980), Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press 2017, p. 3 (French edition only).

² Interview canvas, pp. 225-228.

³ Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception – Missionaries of Notre Dame des Anges – Missionaries of Christ the King – Priests from the Foreign Missions Society.

With You, O Lord



Thérèse Blais-Guay, M.I.C.
(Sr. Thérèse-du-Carmel)
1930-2018
Granby, Quebec

Totally dedicated to her studies, Sister Thérèse graduated with flying colors at our Holy Family School in Granby, Quebec. Joy and goodness were the personality traits she displayed throughout her life. In 1955, after her training at our novitiate, she pursued her studies in music and received her BA at the University of Montreal. Through her many social commitments she developed her leadership capacity which eventually led her to the service of authority in the community. Hong Kong welcomed her in 1961; the wisdom of the Chinese attracted her and she felt in communion with the people she served. In 1992 she came back to her homeland; her missionary heart full of gratitude was a source from which flowed serenity in spite of her declining health. With you Sr. Thérèse we are eternally grateful.



Marie-Paule Durocher, M.I.C.
(Sr. Saint-Vital)
1924-2018
Montreal, Quebec

"If it is God who is sending you, he will pay your expenses." This Haitian proverb translates the spirit of faith of Sr. Marie-Paule's family whose father died in an accident and left the mother with the task of raising her ten children. This deep rooted faith led Marie-Paule to enter our novitiate in 1945. Serene, confident, joyful and sympathetic were characteristics which she displayed throughout her apostolic life in Haiti. She was an educator but also her involvement in social services, reaching out to the less fortunate, was mostly appreciated. In Quebec, her community services were varied and she fulfilled them with enthusiasm and joy; her sense of humor was appreciated by all. Dear Sister Marie-Paule, your life has been a fruitful one, may you now rejoice in the Lord.



Gemma De Grandpré, M.I.C.
(Sr. Gemma-du-Sauveur)
1926-2018
Saint Simon, Quebec

Sister Gemma entered our novitiate in 1945 and was assigned to Haiti in 1950. During her apostolic years she served as school principal and as superior of local communities. Her remarkable enthusiasm and love of life were her characteristics. After twenty-three years of service in Haiti, Sr. Gemma came back to Quebec. In 1978 she was named provincial superior of the Immaculate Conception Canadian Province; she endorsed this responsibility with competence, devotedness, and joy. In 1984, a new apostolic adventure opened up before her: mission awareness in parishes and promotion of *MIC Mission News/Le Précurseur*; she mobilized hundreds of collaborators to help her in this apostolic field. Then came a medical verdict which diminished Sister's overflowing zeal. Her faith and fervent prayers helped her to accept the last phase of her life. Dear Sister Gemma, you have lived God's Mission to the fullest, may you now rejoice in Him



Monique Cloutier, M.I.C.
(Sr. Monique-du-St-Sacrement)
1925-2018
Ottawa, Ontario

Monique being a tender hearted child became upset by what she heard during a catechism class. To her teacher she declared: *You said that many people still do not know that they are loved by God. Well, when I will be older I will go and tell them.* Faithful to this initial calling, she entered our novitiate in 1944 and in 1951 she was mandated to a mission in Japan. Sister Monique's sixty years of missionary life in that country fulfilled her apostolic wish. Her deep rooted faith led her to reach out to many: inquisitive students, interested parents, MIC associates who wanted to grow in knowledge and faith. To better understand the Japanese mind and culture she studied, searched, meditated. Dear Sister Monique, what a sublime day it was on July 13, 2018 when you were called to the eternal banquet and heard: "Come, my beloved."



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