

# MIC MISSION NEWS

*To sow seeds of joy and hope*

VOL. 46, Nº 2 | APRIL • MAY • JUNE 2019 | \$5.00



SINCE 1923

## Peru

FROM MOUNTAINS  
TO THE JUNGLE

## Philippines

FROM BREADWINNER  
TO RELIGIOUS LIFE

## In Focus

*HEAD INTO THE  
UNKNOWN*

# Missionary Prayer Intentions 2019

## APRIL

We pray for doctors and their humanitarian collaborators in war zones, who risk their lives to save the lives of others.

## MAY

We pray for the Church in Africa, that through the commitment of its members, it may be the seed of unity among its peoples and a sign of hope for this continent.

## JUNE

We pray for priests, that through the modesty and humility of their lives, they may commit themselves actively to a solidarity with those who are most poor.

### 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**

# MIC MISSION NEWS/ LE PRÉCURSEUR

*On the way to its centennial!*

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## A Choice – TO MOVE ON



On certain roads, roundabouts are built to reduce speed; they allow U-turns and drivers to choose the direction they need to take. In our lives, should we not have some roundabouts to examine and to reflect on our life's journey... have I really taken the right road? If yes, then I must not hesitate and MOVE ON.

I imagine that all the people who walk to find a refuge in a host country must have seriously reflected before leaving everything they have acquired behind, and this, without guarantee of success. They move on without knowing what is in store for them. Many of them certainly experience stressful worries and ask themselves: Have I taken the right decision? Will I regret it? Though they may be close to their goal, the last stage of their journey is the most difficult because it is

life risking. However, the hope of a better tomorrow is stronger than fear and they are ready to overcome all obstacles.

Life often challenges us to move on. Sr. Melanie, in the Philippines, questioned her choice before deciding what was best for her. Deacon Paul Ma, hesitated before moving on in response to God's call. It often happens in our personal life that we must stop to reflect before pursuing the chosen road. Many

obstacles can come our way which can slow down our walk: sickness, joblessness, failure, — but not to forget, the Lord is always present to help us move on. Like Peter, like the adulteress woman and the daughter of Jairus who all thought they were at a dead-end — but no, the Lord gave them a helping hand to move on. Didn't the Madelinot fisherman have a good reason to call Him his Captain?

With confidence, let us move on without fear because we are never alone. The Lord is there, walking with us, moving us on at our roundabouts.

*Marie-Paule Sanficon, m.i.c.*



# A Madelinot Fisherman and His Captain



By **André Gabdois**

I recently met a man who earned a living for himself and his family as a fisherman, a real miserable trade, he writes in his book, *Histoires d'astheure et d'en premier*. This proud and happy Madelinot, Claude F. Bourgeois, had practiced this trade since the sixties, just as his father had before him, in the same difficult conditions. Many times he had to repair the indispensable boat that faced the daily waves, so hidden treasures could be scavenged and brought back late at dusk. Effective tools had to be invented to avoid catastrophes and increase the gathering. Objects were collected in order to maintain the house on an island beaten by bad weather every season. With his wife and children, he had to oversee the sale of fish and organize the production of the vegetable garden, all while thinking of the unwitting force of winter. Claude, the Madelinot, could not neglect participating in the social life of the people of the island and witnessing the effectiveness of the fishermen's cooperation.

This happy man never seemed to doubt or lose confidence or to have given up, even though his boat, the *Marie-Annick*, sank during a major storm. He confided in God: *Like many humans on Earth, I believed that by my will I would invent, in my own way, the secrets of freedom. You had to teach me that You*



*alone master the waves. I wanted to be your captain and make you my sailor.*<sup>1</sup>

In his book, Claude Bourgeois writes: *Because I never know today what will happen to me tomorrow, in You, God, I put my hope; You, my Captain (God), you know all of my needs. And if the storm breaks loose and comes to shake my boat, come back again, Captain, soothe your sailor's heart.*<sup>2</sup> Here, I think of the actions of the apostles and Jesus, whose boat was tossed and moved by the storm (Luke 8: 22-25): Master, Master, we are going to drown. Wake up! It does not matter to you that we perish! Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and the raging waters and calmed his companions, then he said to them: *Why are you afraid? Do you not yet have faith?* Jesus sought to stir up his apostles without rejecting them, to tear them from the swamp of opinions, ideologies and arguments

<sup>1</sup> *Histoires d'astheure et d'en premier*, p. 144.


<sup>2</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Jésus L'encyclopédie*, under the direction of Joseph Doré at Albin Michel, p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> *Histoires d'astheure et d'en premier*, p. 144.

<sup>5</sup> *Jésus L'encyclopédie*, under the direction of Joseph Doré at Albin Michel, page 527.

<sup>6</sup> *Le miracle Spinoza*, Frédéric Lenoir, Fayard, p. 155.



*And if the storm breaks loose  
and comes to shake my boat,  
come back again, Captain,  
soothe your sailor's heart.*

of authority, to wash them<sup>3</sup> so they could manage and ease their conscience. *I give you my joy*, he says, *so your joy may be whole* (John 15: 11).

### JESUS PROPOSED A TRUTH

In everyday life, Jesus orients us as he oriented the apostles. He specifies what is important to him and questions us, inviting us to base our existence on the only filial RELATION with the God he calls Father: *When your Love breaks our chains and frees us from our dungeons, life is never the same again. Ah, freedom! How beautiful it is.*<sup>4</sup> Jesus did not establish a small school for the Twelve and the future Christians to be the first teachers. Instead, he gathered a group of people who would witness a DRASTIC CHANGE — a change of heart which only the Gospel is able to bring into being and scatter around. Often in the Gospels, Jesus was asked: *Are you the Messiah?* He responded: *It is you who say it!* Perhaps, for him, it was a pedagogical way of

saying: think with your heart, stop repeating just anything, dismiss the arguments of authority, do not let yourself be persuaded by the subtlety of arguments, deliver yourself from the pressure of crowds, look into your conscience... Jesus did not seek to be the representative of a tradition; instead, he gave everything so that Love would be the nourishment and work of all humans; he gave everything so that everyone could adhere to Love. As Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt said: *Jesus is not a triumphant god, but a God who makes God triumph.*<sup>5</sup>

In the tossed boat spoken of by the evangelist Luke (Ch. 8), the apostles showed the type of faith that lived within them: a narrow faith based largely on opinions and ideologies. A faith that must be purified! Jesus did not condemn them (think also of Zacchaeus, the Samaritan, Peter...) — He invited his followers to grow in joy, to reflect on themselves and understand that it is within them that they must look for what needs to be done to adjust their target called Love—an immense task. He called them to go forward and out into the

unknown without fear, he offered a new way of thought, did not condemn error, but invited them to trust him; he assured them of his presence and that of the Father who lived in them. Jesus invited those who followed him *not to build a model of humanity according to how we judge human actions, but to take the human being just as he is, in his universal and singular nature, and to judge his actions based on the reasons, the root causes that motivated them.*<sup>6</sup>

Jesus presented himself as a wise shepherd uninterested in a set of concepts built on one theory, but was passionate about the importance of welcoming the present moment and going off into the unknown to join those who were shaken and injured. The Lord Jesus continues questioning us and shaking up what we create and what we entrust to the Future. 🌊





# Japan, a Country to Discover

A missionary in Japan since 1981, Sr. Ghislaine Parent, originally from Drummondville, Quebec, tells us about her adopted country.



By **Ghislaine Parent, M.I.C.**

Japan is an island in East Asia; it is located in the Pacific Ocean between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan. In 2018, the total population in Japan was estimated at 128 million people while Tokyo, its capital, counted 13 million. Japan, a fascinating country, has a rich history and culture. It is a land of contrast with a variety of colors where the East meets the West. Today, its population is ageing and birth rate is low. Migration policy is strict notwithstanding the urgent need for a greater workforce.

*The country lacks personnel in many fields especially in health care for the elderly, in aid for the younger children, in agriculture, and in the building industry. Recently, the government indicated it would introduce a bill allowing workers to come from abroad. The candidates would have to submit to certain demands, such as having some knowledge of the Japanese language in order to live their daily lives without being constrained in their way of communicating. Those who would master the language and be better qualified would benefit*

*to live longer in Japan and would be authorized to come with their families.<sup>1</sup>*

According to official statistics, in 2017, Japan had more than one million workers from abroad. Those people came from Japanese descendants who had migrated to Latin America or they were spouses of those whose nationality was Japanese. The country's historical link with Peru and Brazil has made it easier for those immigrants to be accepted.

It is in this social context that the fifteen MIC Sisters, one of which is Canadian and another is Peruvian, work with the population. In Tokyo, Sr. Kyoko Takahashi, directs a Catholic kindergarten. It specializes in the Montessori Method of education, a child-centered educational approach based on scientific observation of children. This is a unique opportunity to introduce Jesus to the young students and initiate them to prayer. Often, the parents ask to follow courses to better understand the Catholic religion. Sr. Imelda Takahashi meets those who wish to dig deeper in order to know more and comprehend. Though Buddhism

<sup>1</sup> Newspaper:  
Le Parisien, France –  
October 12, 2018

**PHOTOS:**<sup>1</sup> Japanese garden<sup>2</sup> Sr. Ghislaine Parent  
with a Japanese friend*Photos Credit: MIC*

and Shintoism are the main religions of the Japanese population, many express interest in Catholicism and after having followed the courses they wish to be baptized. As for the children, they are naturally *zen*, therefore, entering into prayer is simple for them.

After kindergarten, most of the children attend public school where there is no teaching of religion. From this fact emerged the idea of offering the children, graduating from kindergarten, an invitation to attend, once a month, a special class of activities including practical ways of meeting their friend Jesus. The participation is optional, but many respond positively. Sr. Sato and Sr. Hongo are happy to prepare the activities.

Sr. Ghislaine is regional secretary for the MIC community; her work consists of translating important documents, from Japanese to English. She also takes time to volunteer at the women's House, a temporary refuge for foreign women who are victims of marital violence. The women stay there with their children until their case is clarified. They appreciate Sr. Ghislaine's visits who listens to their stories, pacifies them and offers educational games to the children. The House, a non-profit organization, was founded by some Japanese who saw the necessity of helping foreign women; the aim is to fight against the abuse of women and organized trafficking of women. It is able to remain open thanks to the donations and support of religious communities.

Sr. Alvarado, originally from Peru, works with the immigrants from various nationalities but especially with South Americans. Gifted and speaking

many languages, she is able to help, in more ways than one, those who are in need. For many years she has been giving courses in catechesis to children and has been doing pastoral work with other adults.

In certain parishes, the presence of Peruvians is very much appreciated; they bring along a new vitality. The same goes with persons coming from the Philippines, Brazil, Vietnam or Indonesia. In Japan's vast field of Evangelization, the MIC Sisters have different ministries. Sr. Sumitani, regional superior, accompanies the group members associated to the MICs. Wishing to become missionaries in their respective milieu, they learn about the spirituality of Thanksgiving. Sr. Uchimura guides them in their commitments and is also involved in welcoming other groups who are interested in sharing the Word of God.

Sr. Hasegawa gives Bible courses in a parish while Sr. Moriyama works with youth leaders. The latter also welcomes visitors and out-patients at a Catholic hospital. Sr. Ohashi and Sr. Yoko welcome the visitors at our convent. Sr. Sugiyama, who is the regional bursar, takes pleasure in cooking and she prepares tasty dishes for everyone to enjoy. Sr. Hongo generously distributes communion to the homebound sick and elderly; she visits them on a regular basis while Sr. Kofuji and Sr. Maeda visit those who are in day care centers.

Notwithstanding their advanced age and fragile health, each one gives the very best of herself and works towards creating harmony between nationalities; they are faithful missionary disciples. 🌿

# Class of Its Own<sup>1</sup>

To integrate new students coming from abroad is not so easy. The teacher must juggle multiple levels of children who speak different languages all in the same classroom. A lack of the French knowledge inhibits their integration. We could maybe compare the work of these teachers to that of those who, years back, taught in a rural one-classroom school; but today, the system is more complex.



By **Suzanne Lachapelle**

## ADAPTATION AT ALL LEVELS

Canada welcomes 250,000 immigrants annually. Among them, there are children who have to adapt in more ways than one: school, language, social, relational, cultural. The beginning of a school year is a true challenge. Sometimes enrollment can vary sixteen times in a month. Often, after two weeks, the teacher must integrate four or five new comers and start over the process of integration specifically for them.

## THE RECEIVING CLASS TEACHER

The teacher of such a class has multiple roles. She teaches the language while at the same time integrating cultural elements (ex: to explain — what is a corn roast, a hot dog, a Mr. Freeze); this must be done slowly and

gently, remembering that the child is a whole entity. The knowledge of cultural codes is essential in order to socialize and integrate into the Quebec of tomorrow. School is the social matrix that teaches acceptable behaviors and within this environment children learn what is expected of them.

## DIFFERENT LEVELS IN THE SAME CLASS

The greatest problem is to deal with the different levels in the same classroom. Some students are way behind and have difficulty answering simple questions such as: What is your name? What country do you come from? In one class there can be four different levels of knowledge. The beginners are not at all familiar with the language while others are at the intermediate level. The latter become bored when the teacher has to explain the basic notions which they already master. For administration reasons, the more advanced students have to wait before being transferred to another class appropriate to their knowledge and that is unfortunate because it can cause failure to keep up with their studies. It is a fact that when students are not classified properly according to their intellectual abilities, they lose interest and drop out. There is also the case of students who excelled in their own country but in this new environment feel





devoid of talent. They have to start learning from point zero, accept a lower level of performance for a while and that can be frustrating. The ideal would be to divide the classes according to levels of understanding, but that is not always possible; the decision belongs to the direction.

### THE NOTION OF DISCIPLINE

Sometimes the students form the bad habit of speaking their native language during the course; this is difficult for the teacher and it can be exhausting. Others are unruly and talk while the teacher is providing useful information. Some children have difficulty observing simple rules such as not chewing gum during the course or keeping quiet while the teacher is talking.

### MISSION IN QUEBEC

A parallel can be established between today's teachers who work to integrate new comers and the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception who taught in Quebec at one time, before the government took over the schools; they had to help new comers integrate in their new environment. The same problems prevailed: many different levels in the same classroom, lack of the French knowledge, difficulties in adaptation.

Today, in a different way, the MIC Sisters still help families integrate in their new milieu. A Colombian family who recently arrived in Quebec came across the Sisters who offered them courses in French and support in their many adjustments. At Christmas they celebrated with the Sisters! Their gratitude is infinite and they expressed it as follows:

*... I can say that, thanks to you, we can start a new life with tranquility and faith because we*

*are not alone. God has surrounded us with a family that will forever remain in our hearts. First, I thank God, the Federal and Provincial governments, Sister Michelle Payette and all the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. I thank God who placed you and other families on our path. Yes, there is a God who loves us, who takes care of us, and in return asks us to love one another.*

### CONCLUSION

Integration and learning a new language is not easy. We expect from these new comers a degree of flexibility and adaptation out of the ordinary, but we must be realistic. Let us hope that they will persevere notwithstanding the obstacles and difficulties they meet along the way and that they will become responsible citizens capable of contributing to the advancement of our society.



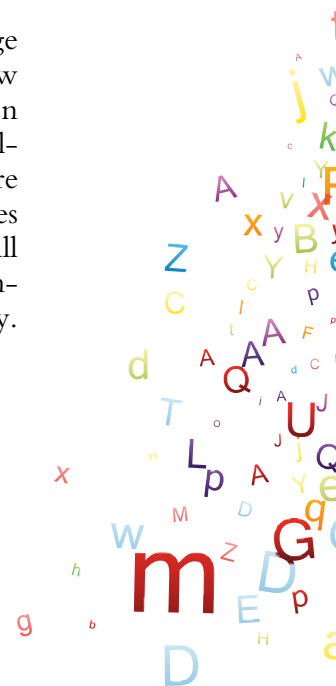
<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a TV5 program entitled *Classe à part*.

#### PHOTOS:

<sup>1</sup> Class of young students / Photo Credit: Shutterstock

<sup>2</sup> Language school (Quebec mission) with Sr. Fernande St-Pierre (2<sup>nd</sup> row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from the left)

Photo Credit: MIC



# The Fantasies of God in Délia's life



A celebration in Peru / Photo Credit: MIC

By **Suzanne Labelle, M.I.C.**

In His creative or fanciful ways, God inspires some of his own creatures to be personally imaginative or original. Hagiographers give us multiple examples. Among others, St. Teresa of Avila once said to a young Carmelite nun who wanted to forbid any entertaining comments during recreation time: *It is bad enough to be stupid by nature without trying to be stupid by grace.*

Without doubt, the Holy Spirit of God inspires thoughtful gems to those who are close to Him and hear Him. In turn, they know how to enliven their own statements which at times can be witty, or considered as food for thought. Mother Délia, our Foundress, provided us with such examples. For her, as well as for many Christians, charity was vital. In her letters and conversations, she often underscored the importance of charity in community life. Tactfully, she would tell her Sisters: *Love one another gently, peacefully, pleasantly.* In this context the word love did not mean a vague feeling or a great emotion but rather the

WILL to live harmoniously with others. In a concrete way, Délia specified: *Support each other gently, peacefully, lovingly. In community life, a way to be happy is to apply yourself in seeing the beautiful side of each person, as it is done in families; this helps in forgetting the faults and in creating holy affections.*

Indeed, for Mother Délia, it was not sufficient that her Sisters would be resigned to endure the shortcomings of people around them. She encouraged them to

act positively and strive towards unconditional AGAPE love which transcends and persists regardless of circumstances; she advised them to see the 'best' in the others, to wish their well-being and collaborate if possible. In this sense, she cleverly multiplied her recommendations: *Be bearers of sunshine for those who come to you. Sow happiness by the handful. Give each other joy. Make each other happy.* Time and again she insisted and repeated the statements.

Mother Délia followed Jesus' Gospel very closely. She remembered his words: *Be perfect as my heavenly Father is perfect.* In turn, she would resume that ideal to her companions by telling them: *Be holy.* However, being a realist, she knew that sometimes holiness could be mistook for an austere way of being towards self and others, therefore, she would add with a smile: *Be a saint, but an amiable saint.* With this in mind, we could ask God to help us on the path to holiness, a holiness that is more amiable than admirable. 🌸



HEAD INTO THE UNKNOWN

# FROM MOUNTAINS TO THE JUNGLE: Peru

By Audrey Charland



**(Part 2)**

The luggage agent carefully opened Sister Rosario's suitcase as she tried to explain that there was nothing dangerous inside. All the same, he took the time to look inside the plastic bag containing the frozen guinea pigs, wrapped in alfalfa to ease the transport. Once he realized what was inside, he barely looked surprised and let us go on our way.

I should clarify something here. About the guinea pigs, *cobaye*, or *cuy* mentioned above — it is very common to eat their meat; apparently it's extremely nutritious. Yet, I was unable to try this culinary experience. It was impossible for me to imagine this little rodent being served as food after having seen it, crying in the street, held by the skin of its neck, proudly exhibited by a young peasant girl looking for potential buyers!

**JULY 3: A DUSTY HORIZON**

In the region of Pucallpa, the primary means of transportation is by moto-taxi. I was really intrigued to learn about the usefulness of these vehicles—all in all, they were more or less stable when accelerating and taking corners, even if the city streets were generally paved. At one point, I quickly understood why Sister Ederlina took a cotton handkerchief from her bag to cover her nose and mouth.

The moto-taxi turned onto a dirt road, the driver zigzagging carefully to avoid the ditches carved out by the rains from the previous days. The extreme dryness of the climate plus the sun's scorching heat, which wrinkled both skin and foliage, had rendered the soil very volatile. Not surprising that the numerous vehicles that were circulating kept sending endless streaks of dust in the air.

**JULY 4: ASMIC, A PRAYER AND SUPPORT GROUP**

Today, the group made an exception. Usually, meetings are held at the parish. However, under special circumstances, the women visit one another in their home. Once the troops had assembled in a café on a big street and after the usual hugs (a big wet kiss on the cheek like my aunts used to give me at Christmas—long live the famous saying, *the more things change, the more they stay the same!*), we hit the road again. I could not help but smile seeing these brave little grannies riding their motorbikes, ready for an adventure!



We arrived in front of an impressive low wall. A woman opened a big door to let us enter the courtyard inside of the building. From the outside, you could not guess the charm of this real manor. Compliments were exchanged and then the women formed a circle in the shade, pulling out their Bibles and rosaries. During this precious time, moments of discussion, reflection, and contemplation took place. Such sharing allows those living in difficult situations to receive inspiring words, to continue their daily lives with renewed strength.



## JULY 5: SOME VISITORS FOR YOU, SIR

Luis waited for us calmly, his look clearer than the previous weeks, according to Sister Colette who regularly came to see him. Two high school students, on mission in Pucallpa, accompanied us to the young man's bedside. His parents were very welcoming, although their faces seemed worn with worry. For the past two years, their son was suffering from an illness I had already seen wreaking havoc in previous pages of *MIC Mission News*. Leprosy had literally burned his skin, his muscles extremely emaciated to the point where he could not stand up. His days are spent on a mattress on the ground in the centre of a stuffy room overloaded with random objects. Yet our presence, though very brief, seemed to brighten his heart. The fairer sex seemed to have the same effect as it would have before, in the prime of his life.

## JULY 6: TALK ABOUT RAIN!

We had just finished dinner in a nearby restaurant when torrential rain began to fall in several short bursts. The pleasant aroma had suddenly changed, the water reviving the somewhat smelly and spicy odours of the dusty roads. We could not wait any longer, as we had to get to the airport, so, armed with our courage, we managed to find a moto-taxi. Despite the fact that the ground had become very muddy and lined with deep trenches dug by the storm, the driver barely slowed his pace. In silence, I prayed that the vehicle would not get stuck...

## JULY 7: AT THE MEETING OF CHRIST OF HUACHIPA

In the little village bus, I found a seat by the window so I could see the landscape and get away from the people clambering more and more in the middle row. I'm not used to such debauchery—it's oppressive at times. The driver stopped at nearly every street corner to the sound of old American rock hits I used to listen to as a teenager. We changed vehicles and began a short and arduous journey. It didn't seem like we were on a road, rather a hilly stretch of sand and gravel. I had the feeling that we were traveling in no man's land. Recalling the historical past of this area, we could feel its wounded-ness and its need of healing. Finally, we went down to the cross.

Around us, nothing. Nothing that could seem like a city, a district, a habitable environment, except this cross, alone on a dense, foggy horizon, even in the middle of the afternoon. Nearby, a chapel that looked like a shed. I could hear hungry dogs howling in the distance. This chilling atmosphere, like a surreal scene out of a play, formed a knot in my stomach. What were we doing here? Then, some children came out from the dunes and came towards us. There is only one call of faith that can pierce through the cold and dim light, to come meet the Christ of Huachipa. Risen, literally.

This experience was an opportunity for me to see a glimpse into all the efforts and sacrifices the missionaries made and, from another angle, what immigrants must live through. It takes a lot of resilience and openness to adapt and put roots down in an unfamiliar place. It takes a lot of patience and love to get used to new customs, dialect and the whims of a climate. Nonetheless, I imagine we always find a way to grow and enrich a new environment in our togetherness. Now, in my head and in my heart, I carry a little piece of the mysterious Peru. ☺

**PHOTOS:** P. 11: Audrey Charland / *Photo Credit:* Rosario Zari

P. 12.13: Off we go! (Pucallpa region) / *Photo Credit:* Audrey Charland

# An Incredible Journey — An Amazing Grace

## *From Conversion to the Diaconate*

**Fountain of Love and Life (FLL)** is a Chinese Catholic evangelization multi-media which was founded in Toronto, Ontario, in 2004 by Mr. Paul Yeung — a man of great vision and zeal. Over the years, this ministry has spread across the globe and has done wonders. At a retreat, which I gave in Mississauga, Ontario, I met Deacon Paul Ma who spoke about his incredible faith journey and through the FLL T.V. channel draws people to God through Scripture. His story reveals that when God calls, He never gives up!



By **Cecilia Hong, M.I.C.**

### AN INEXPLICABLE HEALING THAT OPENS THE SEARCH

Growing up in an atheist communist China, Paul denied the existence of God. While studying in a university in Shanghai, he met Maria, a fellow student and they began dating. All went well until he was hospitalized for a serious liver virus; many patients in his ward became terminally ill with this same virus. Knowing this Paul was devastated. However, in his hopelessness, his long-time friend Maria, unexpectedly asked him to marry her. He was utterly tongue tied by such unconditional love.

After their marriage, in 1986, Paul was completely healed beyond medical explanation. Full of gratefulness he didn't know who to thank. This was the beginning of his search for the God who heals. At first, he turned to Buddhism and was happy for the wisdom and serenity he gained, but this did not satisfy him, he felt there was a greater Source somewhere.



### THE JOURNEY TO CONVERSION BEGINS

During a trip to Hong Kong in 1996, Paul and Maria saw a Christian poster depicting *The End of the World*. Maria was quite disturbed by what she saw but Paul was unconcerned. She wanted to meet a Catholic priest for an explanation and out of love for Maria, he accompanied her. This was a turning point in Maria's faith journey; however, Paul remained indifferent.

One day, he decided to accompany Maria to her catechism class. Upon hearing the words: *reconcile with God*, it was like a double edged sword piercing through his being. Suddenly he saw the crucified Jesus speaking to his heart telling him that He is Jesus and He died out of love to save him! This inner experience was so deep and strong that he burst into uncontrollable tears. He suddenly understood that God truly exists and He loves him! Maria was flabbergasted by Paul's extraordinary reactions. Both understood that they had been touched by God. They were converted and were baptized along with their first daughter in March 2000. The Parish priest gave him

#### PHOTOS:

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Maria Ma after their marriage in Shanghai, China / Photo Credit: Family member

<sup>2</sup> Paul Ma's ordination as deacon in Toronto, Ontario; with his wife and three children

<sup>3</sup> Deacon Paul Ma explains the Word of God.

Photos Credit: Sr. Cecilia Hong



the baptismal name Paul because his extraordinary conversion seemed like that of St. Paul.

### AN EXODUS INTO THE UNKNOWN

Paul was working for a US company in Shanghai while Maria was teaching Ethics at a University. Being a university professor, she was forbidden to practice her faith. Living under constant fear of being caught while practicing her faith, the couple decided to immigrate to Canada. In April 2000, they arrived in Toronto. Though they had countless challenges ahead of them, they never gave up their precious, fragile gift of faith; they nurtured it through daily prayer and by attending Mass.



### THE MA FAMILY GROWS IN FAITH AND LOVE

Blessed with three children, Paul and Maria continued their spiritual journey. Their unfailing devotion to Mary and Scripture studies kept the family together; they grew in knowledge and wisdom. This couple's faith and love spread far and wide and they became a model Catholic family for many.

In 2003, with the influx of new immigrants from China, Paul was asked to help teach new catechumens. Willingly, he accepted; in a humble and caring way he touched the hearts of countless new immigrants who eventually embraced God. Many claimed that Paul was an extraordinary catechist; he was special!

### THE GOD OF ALL SURPRISES NEVER CEASES TO SURPRISE

*Paul, you will one day become a deacon!* What a surprising statement coming from a friend, Deacon Peter; however, a seed was being sown. Six years later, in 2008, while tending to the need of his



child, Paul suddenly heard an inner voice calling him to consider the diaconate. Shocked, he prayed: *Lord if it is your Will please let Maria bring this subject up.* A few moments later, Maria approached her husband and asked: *Are you still considering becoming a deacon?* Stunned, Paul wondered why she asked such a question. Her response was that it came as an inspiration and she felt the urge to ask him. He then realized that this was indeed the work of the Holy Spirit! Nonetheless, he continued to procrastinate but God never gave up on him.

### THE JOURNEY TO THE DIACONATE — AN AMAZING GRACE

Unbelievable but true! In 2009, Paul's company offered him and his wife a visit to Australia, but Maria had a health problem. Again, he bargained with God and said: *Lord, if you heal Maria for one month, I will accept becoming a deacon.* God answered his prayer; throughout their travelling Maria was feeling better and eventually was cured.

Without delay, Paul responded to God's call. This was a challenge for the whole family because the couple had to meet the requirements of the diaconate -- four years of intensive formation, this meant to be periodically away from home. Their eldest daughter had to assume the responsibilities of caring for her two younger siblings which she accepted joyfully.

Paul was finally ordained deacon in 2014. Committed to spread God's Word via the Fountain of Love and Life, Deacon Paul Ma, acknowledges being a simple instrument of the Lord. His devotedness as husband and father, and his attentiveness towards everyone he encounters makes him a visible sign of God's love for humanity! ☺

# From Breadwinner to Religious Life

By **Melanie B. Delfin, M.I.C.**

I am the eldest in a family of eight children: three boys and five girls. I grew up on a farm because my parents were farmers. After my primary and secondary studies I pursued my collegiate degree at the Colegio de la Purisima Concepcion, Roxas City, Province of Capiz on the island of Panay, in the Western Visayas of the Philippines Archipelago.

As the eldest child, I was the family's breadwinner. I knew that if someday I decided to embrace religious life it would not be easy for me and the consequences would affect my brothers and sisters. In 1988, after my college education, I could not find work in the Philippines; therefore, I went abroad to Bahrain<sup>1</sup>. Three years later I had to leave on account of the gulf war in Kuwait. Back in Manila, Philippines, I found work in one of the big shopping malls at SM Northpoint. The income was not enough to pay for my siblings' studies, so I left for Brunei<sup>2</sup>. Again, I did not stay long due to the unjust treatment to the Filipino workers.

Going back home was a chance for me to take the teacher's board examination which I luckily passed. I applied for a teaching position and taught for a period of two months after which I received a visa to work in Hong Kong. I had to quickly discern whether I would continue teaching or leave for Hong Kong to work as a domestic helper. At that time, one of my younger sisters was studying nursing and as a teacher my salary was not enough to pay for her tuition fees and other needs. Therefore, I decided to leave my teaching job and go to



A celebration in the Philippines / Photo Credit: MIC

Hong Kong for a higher salary. Thank God, after four years, my sister graduated. It was then time for me to discern my call to religious life.

## MY VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

While in Hong Kong, I participated in church activities. I felt God's unconditional love and my heart was filled with gratitude; however, I was restless. Though I had accomplished much as a young lady and had a boyfriend who was ready to marry me, I had a longing for something else and I was not at peace. With the help of the elders in our church group, I was able to join the Evangelization Seminar which was started by Sr. Fenecia Dapitanon, M.I.C. and Father John Isabel, P.M.E. I was also invited to the vocation search-in sessions given by Sr. Aida Sabandal, M.I.C. My life then became colorful. I prayed more than I ever had before. I felt the Holy Spirit was alive in me. Every afternoon I prayed the Divine Mercy chaplet for guidance. I felt the desire to give my life to the Lord in Thanksgiving for His many blessings: He took care of me and protected me in all my adventures in other countries; He provided for my family's needs, keeping us safe and alive despite all the difficulties we encountered throughout the years. When I discovered that the



MIC Sisters' spirituality is Thanksgiving, I thought: *this is it!* God's desire and my desire have met, this is my place. On the discernment day of the search-in period, a key element came up during the guided prayer. I saw a vision — it was a door and the Word came to me saying: *Unless you enter through that door, you will not be at peace.* I understood the message which meant — entering religious life. From then on, everything happened quickly. I applied to enter the MIC community in Hong Kong and I was accepted but I needed to go back home to wait for my visa.

### STRUGGLES/CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

One of my great struggles was to leave my family. As the breadwinner I was used to being the provider of my family. I worked almost ten years for them not thinking about myself. Moreover, another one of my sisters was studying computer engineering and she needed my financial help; she asked me to think twice before taking a final decision. I wrote her a long letter explaining that for me it had to be — *now or never*. I had that deep conviction and I thanked God for the grace.

In addition, my circle of friends did not agree with my decision; they wanted me to marry the boyfriend I had been going out with and who was their friend as well. I really felt condemned and excluded because I chose to follow Jesus. Yet, I continued to pursue my heart's desire and my choice.

### INITIAL FORMATION YEARS

During my formation years, I received so much that my heart is filled with Thanksgiving. I consider all the colorful and meaningful things that happened as being God's loving interventions. The events helped me to grow and be transformed. I learned to be humble, to seek His Will, and to give thanks. I also realized that everything is grace and when I

cooperate with God's Will, I gradually discover His gifts, my giftedness and my being a gift to others.

### MISSIONARY LIFE

In 2004–2005, I taught at the Immaculate Conception Academy (ICA), Greenhills, Philippines. I was then appointed as one of the pioneers for our newly opened pastoral mission in Kiburiao, Quezon, Bukidnon, Philippines. The following three years I was involved in youth ministry and catechetics. I then went to the MIC International Scholasticate in Canada.

God's gratuitous love overwhelmed me. While in Canada, I had the courage to share His love and goodness with others. I gave the Evangelization Seminar of twelve modules to parents of the Confirmants at St. Kevin's Church; I also had the chance to give a few sessions on the sacraments at St. Thomas' Parish, now Our Lady of the Philippines.

Upon my return to the Philippines in 2010, I was assigned to do vocation promotion and to journey with the aspirants. I joined the Basic Ecclesial Community where I learned the people's language quickly because of some similarities with my own native tongue. My former experiences as the breadwinner of my family and work with parish youth helped me for this important mission. Being a trainer the challenges are great as I am called to "walk my talk" both in my personal life and responsibilities.

Vocation promotion is my passion because I believe that the young people are the hope of our Congregation. I am confident that there are still many young women, all over the world, who are generous in offering their life to follow Jesus. Indeed, it is the road less travelled but when you decide to follow Him you will never regret. For me, I have no regret to have chosen Jesus. I am happy with my MIC family and the mission God has entrusted to me. The spirituality of Thanksgiving which Mother Délia has bequeathed to us is alive and ought to continue. The world needs such a spirituality. So, I appeal to our young people to please be open to God's call and be generous.

God bless us all! ❧

<sup>1</sup> Bahrain: an island country in the Persian Gulf, located in Western Asia

<sup>2</sup> Brunei: a country on the North east coast of the island of Borneo, off the coast of Malaysia





# Head Into the Unknown... to Move *FORWARD!*



By **Éric Desautels**

Unlike my previous articles, I'm going to move away from the historical and sociological approach that I usually take, since the theme of this issue has inspired me to write on a more personal level. I'm going to try to evoke the meaning I assign to the idea of heading into the unknown. The expression goes beyond simply leaving your homeland, going into exile and venturing off the beaten path. To me, heading into the deep or the unknown signifies progression or evolution, undertaking a personal journey or wanting to mark important moments in your life. It was mostly through my own travel experiences that I was able to see what this expression really means, for me as well as for the people I met along the way.

To me, heading into the unknown at a very important moment of your life represents not only the desire to discover new horizons or the hope to better understand foreign lands, but also to search for the meaning of your own existence. It's a question of overcoming your sometimes false conceptions of other people, freeing yourself from prejudices or preconceived notions. Meeting the OTHER and the confrontation between two different perspectives of the world are certainly part of what drives us forward. Two examples from my recent travels made at pivotal moments in my life come to mind. They are also examples involving religion.

The year 2015 was a very trying one for me. It consisted in my participation in a symposium, the visit to the White Fathers Archives in Rome and a solo trip to Southeast Asia. These were events that helped me

overcome my difficulties. My trips to Europe and Asia had a special meaning for me: they were to help me move forward and on to another stage of my life. Far away from my family and friends on Christmas Day, I found myself in the city of Côn Thò in southern Vietnam. I walked along the city, which, to my surprise, had been decorated for Christmas. By chance, I walked into a Buddhist temple. The head of the temple, Man May, welcomed me warmly and served tea. Ostracized from his home village of Cambodia years ago, this monk went to Vietnam with his community, where they now face unending prejudices. Vietnamese Buddhist monks, who have a temple on the other side of the street, do not even speak to them. When they do, it's with arrogance. Nevertheless, they carried on with their activities in Vietnam with conviction. The very touching story of this Buddhist monk made me think about his homeland roots; it made me realize that, at times, uprooting is necessary to move forward in life. His story also opened my eyes to an important point – the need to persevere in your personal convictions when you are in a minority context and even when hostility is shown towards your personal beliefs.

Another traveling experience sparked similar reflections. Last October, at the end of my doctoral course, I again felt the desire to head into the unknown. I set off for Mexico to visit cities in the southern part of the country. In the village of San Juan Chamula, in the mountains of Chiapas State, a visit to a Catholic church being used by local Mayan people performing shamanic rituals struck me profoundly. In front of a large Sunday market where

several local communities gather, is a church that tourists can visit for a few dollars. Inside, the floor of the church is covered with pine needles and candles are lit by the Tzotziles (Maya of the region) who pray out loud. References to Catholicism are omnipresent in the rituals. This syncretism is reflected in the many statues of Catholic saints dressed in the traditional clothing of neighboring peoples, including Saint John the Baptist, dominating above the altar. Catholic symbols are re-appropriated and adapted to their culture. The scene was impressive; it made me think about how these minorities, living in Mexico, associate their lives in light of their history, beliefs and culture.

Thinking back, the desire to head into the unknown takes different forms for many people. Yet I do not think my travel experiences are too different from the missionaries who went abroad in their youth. Those journeys helped them progress and marked an important moment in their lives. I believe that one of the greatest riches of meeting the OTHER is in confronting and comparing our own values and knowledge, while questioning one's own certainties. The beauty of traveling, meeting people, seeing landscapes and historical monuments—contributes in arming us against the prejudices and stereotypes we hear in our everyday lives. As we approach the summer season and vacation time, the insights we receive from our traveling, their meaning which help us progress in life, individually or collectively, must not be forgotten. ∞



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# Souvenirs of Africa

Young people as well as not so young dream of Africa. The African landscape is an attraction with its mountains and valleys extending as far as the eye can see, where elephants, giraffes and lions roam freely. Among all the beauties, it is the people who have touched me the most: men, women and children with whom I forged ties are still very much a part of my life today.

By **Doris Twyman, M.I.C.**

I am originally from La Tuque, Quebec, Canada and I studied in Shawinigan. During my youth, I became active in the girl guides and worked as a playground instructor. Everything contributed to my simple lifestyle while experiencing joy rooted in sustained effort. Then, one day, I felt the Call. Wanting to consecrate my whole life to Jesus' mission, I decided to join the *Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception*.

## **A NEW CULTURE WITH ITS CHALLENGES**

When I first arrived in Africa, I was assigned to the mission of Mzuzu, Malawi; there, I felt the famous culture shock. I had to take up many challenges such as learning English, the official

language in all the secondary schools; I had to become familiar with the different cultural pedagogies. However, perseverance and support of the local people helped me overcome the difficulties proper to all radical change. Gradually, I became enthused and began animating young Christian groups by way of: SEE – JUDGE – ACT. This dynamic method teaches the young people about democracy, social justice, human rights, and how to live an honest Christian life. During those courses, I observed the spirit of solidarity among the students; I felt joy and confidence in the future of those adolescents.

## **UNEXPECTED CHANGES**

A change of course came about in 1985. Administration duties and animating sessions for the MIC Sisters as well as for the Association





of religious women in Malawi took up most of my time and energy. The goal was to develop co-responsibility and promote women religious in the African society. We wanted to create more solidarity in a spirit of trust and hope.

Notwithstanding the heavy schedule, I remained in contact with the local people; every day, the simplicity, joyfulness and love of life were present. Many times I saw women working in the fields singing their sufferings. I observed the children's creativity who would build small autos with strings or wires, bottle corks, pieces of rubber cut out of old bicycle tires no longer in use. With patience and ingenuity some women made rugs with plastic bags or from the fibers of old worn-out clothes. There is little waste and nothing is lost. When I visited the families, how often I was in awe before their creative ways of improving their homes.

Africa is for us an eye-opener and obliges us to appreciate what we take for granted: life, water, medical aid, schools, and social services. What about rain? In Africa, rain is a blessing from God: it makes the seeds grow and is a source of life. Unfortunately, like everywhere else, urbanization and contemporary living is somewhat diminishing the African heart's spontaneity and sensitivity. Certain values such as hospitality, mutual support, hope and love of life are progressively declining.

## NOSTALGIC FEELINGS FOR AFRICA

Sometimes, at night time, Africa comes back to my mind; I recall the majestic bright moonlights, the sounds of the tom-toms and of the crying hyenas, or the chickens' desperate cackling upon seeing a serpent infiltrating itself in the henhouse. In the evening, before retiring for the night, I would often walk outside while humming the French song: *La paix du soir vient sur la terre. La paix du soir vient dans nos coeurs.* (Evening peace, come on this earth. Evening peace, come in our hearts.)

As I go over the story of my life, I thank God for my grace-filled missionary life; the souvenirs remain ever present in my memory. Currently, I work at the office — *Cause of Délia Tétreault*. One day, I hope, she will be beatified for having led us on unknown paths where we met people of different nationalities and cultures, where we learned to be opened, and to adapt ourselves to their ways of living while welcoming their cultural originality. 🌀

**PHOTOS:** <sup>1</sup> African village / <sup>2</sup> Sr. Doris Twyman with MIC novices /

<sup>3</sup> Giraffe in Zambia / Photos Credit: MIC



# With You, O Lord!



**Réjane Gaudet, M.I.C.**  
(Sr. Saint-André Avelin)  
1916-2018  
Quebec City, Quebec

Her childhood Christian education oriented Sister Réjane's whole life. As an adolescent, she understood that God chose her to be a religious. Mixed emotions of joy and suffering were felt: she had to leave behind her family. However, she wrote: *Never did I have the idea of coming back on my decision.* Faithful to the Call, she was accepted at the novitiate in 1934. Réjane had many talents and she excelled as educator, as superior, as directress of the MIC Missionary Press, as organizer of the Délia Tétreault Center. At the age of sixty, she had the joy of a brief mission experience in South America. On August 9, 2018, Sister Réjane received the ultimate call and she lovingly offered her life into the Father's hands at the age of one hundred and two.



**Marguerite Roy, M.I.C.**  
(Sr. Marie-Angéline)  
1927-2018  
Pain Court, Ontario

Marguerite was born on the feast of the Miraculous Medal; this underlies her great devotion to Mary and her choice of our Marian Institute. She was blessed with a pacifying nature and easily created bonds of trust and friendship. On February 1, 1948, she entered our novitiate where her sister Jeanne had already preceded her. After her formation years, she pursued her studies in nursing in Vancouver, B.C. She then assumed a service at our Mount St. Joseph Hospital. In 1975, Sr. Marguerite was welcomed in Haiti where our health care services benefited of her competence and unlimited dedication. *To sow love and reach out tenderly* resumes her long life. Dear Sister Marguerite, may God now bless you with His gentle love.



**Marie-Jeanne Dumas, M.I.C.**  
(Sr. Saint Valerie)  
1926-2018  
Saint Eloi, Quebec

Nursing was her profession and Marie-Jeanne was welcomed at our novitiate in 1949. Not long after her religious formation years, our dispensaries in Africa welcomed her. With competence and a smile, she always trusted that God would provide the needed medication. She once wrote: *I never lacked medication...* even though she treated sixty or so patients a day. Natural medicine, such as reflexology, was her specialty and numerous patients benefitted of her competence in this area. Sister Marie-Jeanne was also a great artist; everywhere she went, she created beauty. In summary, she reflected the words of our Pope Francis: *the strength of tenderness, affection, and humility that makes the other person feel important.* Thank you, dear Sr. Marie-Jeanne, you came among us sowing God's love and joy.



**Thérèse Giroux, M.I.C.**  
(Sr. of the Nativity of Jesus)  
1924-2018  
Levis, Quebec

Five boys preceded Thérèse; her parents were more than happy to welcome their one and only girl. One day, she met the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception; their presentation awakened in her the dream of embracing the missionary life. It became a reality on August 8, 1947. Sister Thérèse's mission was in Taiwan where she worked as a full time lab technician. After some years, she came back to Canada and pursued her studies in nursing after which she returned to Taiwan to serve for another fifteen years. In 1985, Quebec was waiting for her; she dedicated her time to the Sisters who had medical needs. As of 2011, Sr. Thérèse serenely accepted her illness until God called her to His Eternal Banquet in December 2018. May you now rejoice in Him, dear Sister.



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A photograph of a garden filled with lupine flowers. Several tall, upright spikes of pink and light pink flowers are in full bloom, surrounded by lush green leaves. To the left, a smaller spike of purple flowers is visible. The background shows more green foliage and a stone path.

## ***Buds of Beauty***

*For every aspiration of the heart,  
God has made a living, vital counterpart  
In buds of beauty, fragrance, color, form;  
And each glad spring these blossoms are reborn.*

*As long as God sends forth His graceful flowers,  
Man's heart can hold no dismal, haunted hours.  
They are His breath, a loving benediction,  
Blessing the soul's sweet search for recognition.*

Mabelle A. Lyon