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EDITORIAL

There was a king, who had a great fascination and love for paintings. One time he decided to offer a very valuable prize to the artist who would paint a beautiful picture depicting peace. On the final day of the judgment, many artists brought their paintings with the hope of winning that valuable prize. The king looked at all the paintings and selected two in particular and he had to choose one out of the two paintings for the valuable prize.



The first painting was a beautiful calm lake with clear transparent waters. The lake was a perfect mirror to the towering mountains surrounding it. Above it was the blue sky with white fluffy clouds like cotton balls floating in space. Anybody who saw this painting thought it was the perfect masterpiece representing peace.



The second painting had mountains too; rugged, dry, bare; above these mountains an angry sky overcast with dark clouds, lightning streaks here and there, a rumbling ferocious waterfall cascading down on the side of this bare mountain. "Peace?" thought the people

who saw this painting.

As the king looked closer, he saw behind this rumbling waterfall a branch of a bush growing out of a crack in a rock. On the branch was a mother bird who had made a nest and within the nest there, was very peacefully and with great affection feeding its little ones.

Which one do you think did the king choose for this valuable prize?

The second one!

The king explained; peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, where there is no trouble, where there is no hard work, where there is no tribulations, where there is no difficulties.

Peace means to be in the middle of all mayhem and chaos and yet to stay calm, yet to stay focused, yet to make that inward journey, having discovered a deeper meaning within and beyond all that. (A story from GAUR GOPAL DAS)

The season of Easter concluded with the feast of Pentecost. In the context of the feast of Pentecost, we were reminded about the integral connection between the gifts of peace and forgiveness; the Presence and action of the Holy Spirit - God's Spirit who 'renews the face of the earth', who brings wholeness to all living beings. Before Jesus's ascension, He greets his disciples with the gift of peace. Jesus then commissions his disciples to continue the work that he has begun, and sends his disciples to continue his work of reconciliation.

Therefore, from the beginning, the Church is called to be a reconciling presence in the world. In situations of conflict, we are to be agents of peace and harmony among people.

"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of
God." (Matthew 5:9)

Peace has to do with a sense of well-being in all aspects of life, for all living beings.

Living in our world of great turmoil, disaster, disunity, sometimes we might feel so insignificant - especially in face of huge problems, conflicting situations, violence in our communities,

countries or poverty and hunger. There are no easy answers to these problems. At times we are called to tackle issues in a big way, other times in smaller ways; but always what we long for, is Peace.

This issue of Interconnections carries stories of chaos, violence and death....also testimonies

of how Peace is built day by day with our small efforts, our love, our closeness, our solidarity, our care and our whole life, as members of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles Family.

Thanks to the gift of the Charism we have received to be peacemakers, planting seeds of communion wherever we are!

HERE IN ROME

From May 27 to 30, 22 Holy Family Sisters of the Italy Unit gathered in the Generalate to look to the past with gratitude, to the present with realism and to the future as a source of life and hope.



Solidarity by a group of Sri Lankans living in Rome

Monica Alexander (General House Rome)

One week after the Easter tragedy in Sri Lanka, where many lost their lives, Nisansala a Buddhist lady felt the need to do something to show her solidarity. She and her husband organized a Catholic and Buddhist 'inter-faith' prayer in honour of the departed, at Via Cassia where she has her "Seven Lanka" restaurant.

In remembrance of the departed, candles were lit and flowers were placed beside the photos of those who lost their lives. A "Pirith" service was chanted by 2 Buddhist monks and a short prayer conducted by one of our priests and a brother. An almsgiving was organized as a sign of solidarity. We were privileged to participate in this, to show our solidarity with people of different faiths.



INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE - DOES IT CONCERN US?

Eithne HUGHES (General Councillor Rome)

When I learnt that the topic of this year's SEDOS Seminar would be centred on interreligious dialogue, I did not think that it would be for me. The image, the impression I had was of a group of high-powered intellectuals Christian theologians, Rabbis, Muftis, Buddhist Monks etc. sitting around a conference table discussing the finer points of their respective religious beliefs.

On the other hand, given the escalating polarisation between religious groups; the increase in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; the fact that Christians are now the most persecuted religious group in the world, and the frightening rise of far-right extremist politics which seeks to divide rather than unite, often deliberately setting one religion against another, I felt that I should set aside my misgivings concerning my lack of expertise, in order to open my mind and my heart to listen to people coming from other faith traditions and the experiences of those for whom interreligious dialogue is a way of life: for surely we need to find ways for all the billions of people in the world who believe in a higher power, in the dignity of humanity and all creation, to come together to find ways to "*salute difference, and stay faithful*" (G. O'Collins) – and then to work towards the communion that is the purpose of God's mission.

So I joined Ana María, Geni and Micheline, and more than 100 other religious men and women, in Ariccia – a Retreat and Conference Centre overlooking Lake Albano, from April 28-May2.

The very first lecture, after the opening paralytic on the afternoon of our arrival, was far from the heavy kind of theoretical exposé that I had anticipated. "Mission as Interfaith Dialogue" (Sr. Kathleen Mc.Garvey, OLA) pointed out that interfaith dialogue is a particularly necessary part of living mission today. She went on to share her experience of working with Muslim and Christian women in Nigeria. Missionaries, she said, are not supposed to be simply development workers, but contempla-

WHAT IS SEDOS?

Every year, around the beginning of May, a SEDOS seminar is held in or near Rome. SEDOS (Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission) is a forum open to Institutes of Consecrated Life, whose members commit themselves to deepening their understanding of global mission. The annual seminars are usually interesting, formative, and deal with topics that often pose serious challenges to our understanding and living of mission today. Holy Family General Leadership Team members have been regular participants; in the past Marian Murcia served as Treasurer, and Geni Dos Santos is a member of the present Executive Committee..

tives in action – and this means contemplating the greatness of God in and through other faiths, as well as our own... There is a need to be convinced of the value of our own Christian faith, and not to be afraid to bring it into the public square. Women can give a strong witness – each rooted in her own religion, her own faith-commitment, but ready to engage in concrete common experiences with a common goal: fighting poverty, being peace-builders, engaging in and promoting dialogue at various levels between faith communities...

When thinking of what to share with you regarding our days at SEDOS, I was overwhelmed by the amount of information we had received. How to convey the experience – the conviction that here, in this Italian Jew, this Turkish Muslim scholar, this Belgian Buddhist, this Irish Sister of Sion and French Dominican engaged in Interreligious Dialogue in Dublin and in Cairo, this Sri Lankan Monsignor who represents the Vatican, here, in all these people, the "Oneness" of us all, in our humanity and our desire to respond with our lives to something greater than ourselves, was saying in flesh and blood that we are all sisters and brothers, children of a loving Creator.

The document recently signed in Abu Dhabi



by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam, Ahmed el-Tayeb, declares, “The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which he created human beings...”

So what stood out for me during these four days regarding this ‘pluralism and diversity willed by God’?

- ◆ To be willing to contemplate the greatness of God through all the diversity – of faiths, of races, in the whole of creation – with which we are gifted.
- ◆ The need for me to love and esteem my own faith-tradition
- ◆ To examine my own mindset, to become aware of deep-seated prejudices and biases
- ◆ As someone who has never studied the beliefs of other faiths, to recognise that, basically, I am ignorant, and therefore have no right to judge
- ◆ To try to learn, in order to allow myself to value and appreciate what is lived by other faiths
- ◆ To recognise that we Catholics do not have a monopoly of the truth; not to approach other faiths with an attitude of superiority, as though we need to teach or convince.
- ◆ To let go of my idea that Interreligious dialogue is only for specialist intellectuals. Though their work is important and necessary, what is essential to the majority of people in this kind of dialogue is the

capacity for relating in the everyday, with truth, respect and openness.

- ◆ To take the risk of trusting – trust builds trust; without trust, there is no dialogue; without dialogue, there will be no peace, no communion.
- ◆ The importance of finding ways of working together for a common goal.

My life up to now has been almost entirely in a Catholic or Christian environment. I have never lived in a strongly multi-faith country. Here in Rome, I found myself thinking that Interreligious Dialogue – the kind I could participate in – a “dialogue of life” with people of other faiths, was not really an option. But when I thought a second time, I realized that I was not taking into account the fact that there are thousands of African and Asian immigrants in this city... who are not Christians.

So – as a member of the Holy Family, vowed to live our charism of communion in this divided and polarised world, can I say that Interreligious dialogue is not my concern?

<https://sedosmission.org/>

Open the SEDOS website, and read/download the articles by speakers at the seminar and others on the subject of interreligious dialogue.

Lived experience of EGC 2019



You have already received the ECHOES of the 2019 EGC, which the Generalate Communications Team sent, but I would like to share very briefly with you my own personal impressions.

They were happy days because of meeting up again, sharing about what we were doing in our different Units and the intense experiences we lived through in our countries – all in the light of the commitments we made “to stop what can no longer continue in order to give life” in each of the Units and as Leaders.

We also noted that there is a lot of life in the Institute. We have a Charism which responds to the challenges given to us by the world and the society in which we live. Scattered here and there as *Holy Family* communities on a Mission of Communion, we tried in the light of the New Consciousness, to be witnesses of the humble and liberating love of the Family of Nazareth.

I would like to thank you because we all felt the support of your prayer and union with us.

YOU HAVE CHANGED MY DIRECTION

María Soledad Fernández.

I begin with Rubeni’s request when she was saying goodbye, “*Sole, write something*” but I wonder what should I write. So many things come to mind. When something new happens plans have to change.

day, in the smallest details, in what we see clearly and are happy about and in what we don’t understand, in consolation or in the darkness of our faith. The place, the circumstances and the situation may change but the project remains the same.



I remember something we reflected on during a community meeting at which we had planned to draw up the community project for 2019. But the four of us were not going to be there. I had to go to Spain for medical reasons and that changed everything. The question came up, “What is our project of life anyway?”

I mention this reflection because it illustrates part of my experience. Just over a year and a half ago, I returned to Peru after receiving a new call. I had just spent six years at my mother’s side and was with her during her last days. I had fulfilled my mission as a daughter.

The answers were not long in coming. Our project of life is what we committed ourselves to live in the *Holy Family* on the day we made our vows – to live the Charism, to live like Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Nazareth, desiring what God desires and which God communicates to us in the big and small events of every

I returned full of hope and ready for anything. I knew that things would have changed after six years. The first place I went to was Jimbe. I spent nine months there getting to know the people and the place and learning how to respond to immediate needs. It was a happy time even though it was insecure because we were thinking of closing the house. Then I went to Comas. I already knew the Sisters and the place. I met people I loved. However, it was all a new experience because life evolves, needs change and there are new projects and pastoral plans etc.

For me, this was a time of less outside activity and more interiority based on the contemplation of daily life in Nazareth in the house and in the neighbourhood. Interiorly I felt I was in no hurry to take up a lot of activities. What I said was, "God will show me what to do" and that is what I did: preparation of adults for confirmation, listening and counselling in the parish, accompanying the María de la Paz



Community, working with the community of San Eugenio, with the Sisters who form a team with Mari and Txaro, a family retreat and now illness. The treatment that I had to have in Spain meant that I had to leave everything and live the project in another place, in another way.

All the time I was living in Comas I felt there was something happening in me that I could not name. It was a time of detachment, of puri-

fication, of relativizing things, of holding on to what was essential and of living the present moment to the full. When the doctor gave me the diagnosis, I must say I was in shock at the thought of how my life would have to change. At the same time, I experienced great peace even though emotionally it was not easy to prepare for the journey in such a short time – goodbyes, the pain of separation, the demonstrations of affection and concern especially from my Sisters in both communities. For the farewell prayer and sharing I chose the text "I thank you, Father, because you have revealed the secrets of your heart to simple people" and "May it be done to me according to your word". Now in the community of Pinto where the Sisters welcomed me with great affection, I continue to repeat, "Do with me and Thanks".

Thank you, Sisters of Peru, for everything I lived with you – the *Holy Family* Charism in Peru, projects, hopes, searching, laughter, happy days and so many countless experiences. They are all engraved on my heart.

Let us remain united. I am convinced that God who sows the seeds will make them grow in God's own time and in God's own way. Let us journey towards our goal with confidence. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

MY FOOD IS TO DO THE WILL OF GOD ...

"MY FOOD IS TO DO THE WILL OF GOD WHO SENT ME AND TO COMPLETE HIS WORK" (JN 4:34)

Amelia Fernández García
Community of Ñemby, Paraguay.



We have seen the photo of 3 January 2019 when our two Sisters Merche and Dani closed the door of de Mariscal/S.Teresita. Two Sisters closed the door but we all left with them because we are all one Family. Fifty three years and eight months ago, another two Sisters, Asunción Novoa and Lucita Santos opened the door in Santa Teresita and Isabel Zabaleta and Dolores Soler did the same in Mariscal. During that time, so many Sisters lived out their commitment there and received so much life from the simple people with whom we shared the journey.

Apart from Brazil, it was the oldest house we have in Latin America since, from the beginning, our option was always to be with the

most marginalised. And that was the way we began in Paraguay with the indigenous people who, in general, and even today are undervalued in our selective societies. It was extremely difficult for us to leave this place where our Sister M. Dolores Paniagua will stay forever among the remains of the indigenous people.

So we launched an "SOS" at the last Network Assembly which was held in Santos Mártires, because there were not enough of us to keep the two communities going. But the silence made it clear that **"our mission there WAS OVER"**. During those days I thought a lot of the days, some years back, when the Jesuits left Santa Rosa and San Patricio. I asked them how they could leave places that had so much history. They replied, "We are not here to look after ruins or museums but to give life, and life is vibrant here now."

When I spent last Christmas with the Sisters in Santa Teresita, I really felt that there was abundant life there. What a difference from some years ago when only twenty-five or thirty children went to school! And now they have a college and all the teachers, nurses, catechists and dance teachers are local indigenous people. This was a consolation in our sadness. One of the families invited us to their home for Christmas and we were very happy to accept. It was beautiful to think that they welcomed us into their home and their family on such a special family feast. I think it was one of the best Christmases of my life. They served us their best food and were affectionate and grateful in their own quiet way. It was their actions that spoke. Afterwards, we sang and danced

until midnight. We will always remember this celebration of the Holy Family in Bethlehem.

We arrived in the days of our youth; we are leaving with a lot of experience after accompanying our sisters and brothers on our journey together. We can say that everything was done with love and we leave with hearts that are much bigger and human. We believe that the Good Father would be happy to see us journeying with them and that, in spite of our frailty, "we did not separate ourselves from those living under the common law" (General Rules) and shared with them as best we could. I just want to say THANK YOU, first of all to our Family the *Holy Family* because it was this Family that enabled us to accompany these communities for so long; thank you to all the people with whom we shared happy and sad times; THANK YOU to the Oblates – Mgr Lucas welcomed us like a father with open arms, Mgr. Lucio Alfert, accompanied us as a brother and bade us farewell, very sad that we were leaving. He gave us a plaque to express his gratitude to the *Holy Family* for their commitment in their daily work with the people, with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and with another priest of the Vicariate.

We wish everyone the best of everything and hope that the reign of God will continue to grow until we reach the fullness of the cosmic Christ. To arrive at the fullness of life we have to pass through death. May our spirit of God Alone and communion sustain, strengthen and animate us to follow Jesus, Mary and Joseph always seeking the will of our Mother/Father God.

*Life is the gift that God allows to
grow in you,
The way you live your life is your
gift to God.*



THE PEACE MARCH

Sr. PEEDI KELO Fernande

Cameroon/Tchad

The area of MOKOLO which comprises six parishes in the diocese of Maroua-Mokolo organised an area pilgrimage to help the children of COP'MONDE to prepare for Easter. The children were mobilised for this prayer-walk and over 700 came from five parishes. I had the pleasure of taking part in this pilgrimage with people from many different places. We walked towards MEFELE in the parish of Saint Jacques de Mboua and were made welcome there. The theme we presented was "Lent, a time of grace and conversion".



I was very happy to see how enthusiastic, dynamic and devoted they were. The children were very happy with the novelty of this new experience, being with others and to have a time of prayer. Taking part in this event made me more aware that "Where there's a will, there's a way" because there were very small children present.



Walking with them, looking after them and helping them to take part showed me the meaning of sacrifice and self-giving. But that is still difficult because supervising and mobilising children demands more and I felt the desire to give more of myself and the best of myself to this mission. We thanked the Lord for the commitment and energy of the supervisors and the children in a beautiful celebration of the Eucharist.



SAINT JOSEPH, A MAN DISCOVERED THROUGH EVENTS (R. D. CONGO)

Pauline MANZUETO , Lydie MBINZA (Délégation de la RD Congo)

The feast of St. Joseph in the diocese of Idiofa this year was more enjoyable and more meaningful than usual. Before the actual feast, the José Moko School Complex organised an open day with lots of different activities. Tombola which is a raffle was one of the most popular activities. This is a way of alerting people to the "**broader meaning of sharing and solidarity**".

From 6 am, about a thousand people from the surrounding villages had been gathering in the esplanade of Saint Kizito's cathedral. Young and old, adults and children, people from all social strata

and religions waited together expectantly in the burning heat. Everyone **was hoping to win the jackpot** as a reward for paying 5000 Congolese francs (\$3) for a tombola ticket.

There was great excitement. They all wanted to try their luck. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

There were several prizes – two fridges, two motor bikes, two sewing machines, two computers, two satellite dishes, two bicycles, salted fish etc.

The lucky ones danced for joy and blessed heaven and the bishop for this original idea.

The bishop of the diocese, José MOKO, presided at the Mass, accompanied by the bishop of Kenge, Jean-Pierre KWAMBAMBA.

During this Mass, the bishop announced officially the tenth anniversary of his episcopate and inaugurated a modern building for the **José Moko School Complex**, a school which he himself had begun in order to give young people the opportunity to study under suitable conditions and to receive a top-class education. That is why it is called after him and is under the patronage of **Saint Joseph**.

This rekindled in us the flame of our Charism and commitment. As formators and educators, we are called to pool our talents and skills and to work as a team to ensure a high-quality education as well as our apostolic dynamism as we work with the young people, especially in the schools, which we ourselves run.

Finally, we express our wholehearted gratitude to the bishop and the staff of the José Moko School Complex for giving us a Feast of St. Joseph with a difference.



The Sisters who were there took part in the raffle like everyone else. The Novitiate won a salted fish, two telephones and a packet of notebooks. Like Jesus, Mary and Joseph, they marvelled at the gifts received from God.

OUR FIRST STEPS IN MALAWI...

Matilda Lazarus - MALAWI

MTHASEWE is a village in BENGA Parish. Visiting this village, we recognized that girls of age 13 to 18 do not go to school. Not being selected for secondary education, (standard 9 to 12) or poverty, have been the causes. As a result, their lives end up in early marriages.

Our attention was drawn towards such young girls. The fruits of our reflections and discussions made us to draw up a Vocational Training Programme with the aim to **“UPLIFT THE GIRL CHILD”**. Under the themes of;

- Self-Development
- Health Education
- Handicraft
- Home Garden



We experienced God's power at every step we took... The spirit pushed us to move forward... and the day dawned....yes... The inauguration of the programme took place today the 1st of June 2019.

We thank... God, Good Father, PBN Family; Rev. Fathers, Sisters and Parishioners of Benga Parish, International Ladies of MALAWI and Mr. Innocent –the Catechist of Mthasewe.



THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST ENGLISH NOVITIATE IN UGANDA

Novices (Rwanda & Uganda)

It really felt like a dream come true on the 3rd of March this year when we were welcomed into the novitiate here in Uganda Kitumba, Kabale Diocese. We were novices from Lesotho and Rwanda. The feelings of happiness overwhelmed our whole being. This happened in the presence of the Chancellor of Kabale Diocese, diocesan priests, nearby Religious congregations, our apostolic sisters from Uganda and Rwanda.



Novices - Unit of Rwanda and Uganda

Since then it has been a beautiful experience in the novitiate, we are experiencing the Novitiate as a Holy place of silence and prayer as our Good Father told us. As much as we are

enjoying this atmosphere, we are also facing few bearable challenges. Firstly, we are from the different cultures but we are really trying to live in communion as the Daughters of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles. We experience this difference in our way of approaching people: some are external and others internal, being in different pre-novitiate (Rwanda and Lesotho), having different background demands us to make an effort and to become aware of the gift of life in each other, to face the differences with faith. We come to welcome each other by accepting and integrating our different ways of doing things like cooking with success and failure.

Secondly, we are facing language barrier, it is difficult to talk to the people outside the community who are unable to speak English but we are making an effort to interact with them by visiting them, thus we are slowly learning the local language [Rukiga]. When we go for the family visits in the village; it is heartbreaking to see people suffering especially the aged, for it has come to our realization that in Uganda they do not earn pension; as a result they starve. The disabled are also not given anything and they suffer a lot for their survival. Over all these challenges we are always with them in prayers and all that our community is able to offer them, no matter how small it may be but we always praise God because it makes a huge difference in their lives.

The climate in Kabale diocese is also different from ours because a few days after our arrival we got sick due to winter coldness every morning here. The good thing is that we are adapting well nowadays with this climate. The food is not a problem because some of the foods are the same as those from our countries as we are still in an African country. Some of them it was our first time to taste e.g. matoke (Steamed green bananas with groundnuts sauce), katogo (Bananas cooked in tomato sauce).

By visiting people, we came closer to them by our presence and our prayer. This gives us happiness to build oneness not only with the Sisters but with a large community of the children of God.

Here in novitiate, we are so occupied all our

time is given for God and we have given ourselves fully to our responsibilities and adapting to the fact that we are now novices (sisters to be) no longer pre-novices to be fed almost everything to do, instead we take decisions for our works.

Not leaving out prayer, in prayer we are really progressing because we made a vow among ourselves that whenever we lead prayer, our prayer has to be vibrant, active and meaningful so as to bring people we are leading to God. We appreciate the relationship among us novices, we fell really leaving the spirit of family that allows us to overcome our differences, to leave self-denial and to be a gift to the community.

We are grateful to all members of our Family who support us by their prayer and encouraging words.

THE INAUGURATION OF THE PRE-NOVITIATE HOUSE IN GIKONGORO

Delegation of Rwanda-Uganda

The entire family of Pierre Bienvenue Noailles in the unit of Rwanda-Uganda, we encountered great happiness, joy and gladness on the 11th May 2019, the day of the inauguration of our Pre-novitiate house in Gikongoro, Rwanda.



The ceremony was graced by the presence of the Bishop of Gikongoro diocese, His Lordship Celestin Hakizimana, who celebrated the French mass at 18;00 Rwanda time. It was con-celebrated by the Vicar General Eugeni and the

other diocesan priests. Men and women religious, our Unit Leader, our Apostolic sisters from the whole unit, the novices, pre-novices, candidates, lay associates, neighbors and friends were all united for this event.

In his homily, the Bishop congratulated the Holy Family Sisters for the success of this house and explains the importance of having a shelter as a sign of a stability and strength for the mission. The intercessions were presented in all our international languages; English, French, Tamil, Kikongo, Spanish, Sesotho, Polish, Rukiga[Uganda] and Arua[Uganda]. That was really a thrilling moment for all of us as we tasted the sweetness of our inter-culturality. Immediately after the intercessions, the Bishop sanctified our altar and the whole chapel by the sprinkling of Holy Water and incense. The tabernacle was also sanctified.

After Mass we all went out of the chapel to the main entrance of our house where the Bishop officially opened it. This was followed by ulula-

tions and songs of praise to God for making the dream of having our pre-novitiate house come true. Still continuing with this we followed the Bishop with procession as he blessed the entire house, both inside and outside. He also sanctified our beautiful statues of JMJ [Jesus, Mary and Joseph] which prayerfully welcomes you as soon as you enter our gate.



We then went to the dining hall where we sat, prayed and enjoyed the scrumptious food and drinks, followed by speeches delivered by Sr. Julia Mabitso, the Bishop and pre-novices. The Unit Leader, in her speech praised God for this success and expressed her gratitude to Brother Aristid, the Entrepreneur and his group including Engineer Sr. Alice, sister of Charity of Jesus and Mary. She thanked the Gikongoro community for working so hard in this project, Sr. Joaquina, Sr. Anuarita and Jean d' Ark [novice]. She also appreciated all the Sisters of the unit of Rwanda-Uganda for their different contributions.

We then enjoyed the thrilling performances of our different cultures. Then the Bishop concluded with the Final Blessing. The following day we all went to our different communities.

A TRUE EASTER EXPERIENCE

Sr. Chandani Jayasuriya

It was Easter Sunday – 21st April 2019 – a day that shook the whole nation and even the world! By now, all of us know much about what happened on that morning in some parts of Sri Lanka. What remains are shattered dreams, hopes and a fear instilled into the hearts of all. Thanks to goodness, however, the sense of solidarity with the suffering did not allow fear to overpower!

The Provincialate at Rosmead place, Colombo, is just a lane away from the national hospital, thus the hospital chaplains requested our help. The two of us present at the moment grabbed whatever was in the house and rushed with pounding hearts. My eyes were not ready to see what I was seeing. Along the corridors charred, skin peeled or bleeding casualties. I didn't dare to stop and check whether they are living or dead. With my heart sinking and body shivering, I gathered courage to join the rest who were attending to the immediate needs of the victims.

Sri Lanka - Colombo

The smell of blood, burnt hair and skin was the 'aroma' in the hospital. Faces disfigured with burns or ashes, half-naked, bodies with burns or blood stained clothes made us feel helpless not being able to provide immediate assistance.

Those weeping were inconsolable. Though some questioned as to why God let this happen, what we witnessed was a remarkable spirit of sharing, patience, discipline and deep sense of trust in God with no murmuring against or cursing the ones who caused this pain. We helped those hospitalized to find information about their families or relatives. Some were oblivious to the disaster, or in a state of denial; many didn't want to open their eyes. Some others were unaware of the death of some of their family members - husband on the sick bed, waiting to be reunited with wife, wife with husband; children with parents, and parents with children ...

A pregnant woman who delivered the baby soon after the blast, waiting eagerly to join the

husband who wanted the child even before the due date. His will fulfilled, as he wished the baby to be born on 22nd, but the father was not there to embrace him. Her other dream is to celebrate their 2nd wedding anniversary in June with the new born baby... For many, the wish to be reunited as family after this disaster, remained a dream that will never come true!

Except for foreigners, majority of casualties were simple Tamil speaking devotees from Kotahena St. Anthony's church. Unlike in Negombo, they were not from one village. They were the bread-winners of families living in tea or rubber estates, especially from the central hills - Nuweraeliya, Bandarawela, Kandy and Hatton - but they being employed in minor jobs in Colombo. They were all alone without any family member visiting. For them we became their loved ones trying to express a consoling word.

Hats off to the doctors and hospital staff for their diligent service!!

Declaring curfew with immediate effect shattered our hope of providing their emergency needs. But without giving up, we approached a few neighbours who generously shared their clothes. With whatever we could pooled together from sisters, we walked back to the hospital along the deserted road amidst curfew, with high security, knowing that the families could not visit their patients till the following day. It was a sleepless night to most of us.

With the initiative of the hospital chaplains, Fr. Jude Jayamaha and Gihan Wanigasekera OMI, hospital chapel became the center to provide the service to the patients, spiritually, morally and physically to both the national hospital and the Children's hospital. Even though many lay people volunteered, access to the hospital wards were only for the religious. While some distributed communion, another group went round providing their needs. This routine continued for nearly 2 weeks. The untiring services of the two hospital chaplains were remarkable.

I consider our Christian brothers and sisters as martyrs whose death saved millions of lives. We being the Christian minority (less than 7 %) in the country, bore witness to the Christian values of forgiveness, patience, peace and above all the inner discipline, keeping away

from retaliation.

Our gratitude and honour to Cardinal Malcom Ranjith who led not only his flock but also the whole country to peaceful pastures, standing bravely to raise his voice on behalf of humanity.

For us Holy Family sisters who are preparing for the bicentenary in this island, these tragic events are a retrospect of the French revolution 200 years ago, during leaving us with food for thought, challenging us to read and respond to the signs of times!

Sr . Timali Lowe

(Link person of HF Sisters in Psycho-Social Pastoral Supportive Program for Easter Sunday Disaster)

In my 18yrs of religious life, this is my first experience of collaborating in a great mission together with religious priests, Sisters & laity.

All our hearts & minds were connected in responding faithfully to the current issue, journeying with the affected. Empathetic listening...courageous stepping towards mission revitalized my zeal to be passionately involved.

I am grateful to my God for having chosen me to be with these affected families in their time of need.

It's painful to see children struggling to begin again, having lost their dear parents. I met two children who had lost their beloved mother, now in turmoil, agony and untold pain...It gives me joy to be a consoling presence to them.



A photo during the visits with two schooling children who lost their beloved mother

Sr. Sanjeewani Hendalge

It was a great experience to come together with Social and Economic Development Centre (SEDEC) and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors (CMRS), for the psycho-social, pastoral supportive program for the Easter Sunday disaster.

The program commenced with a Eucharistic celebration in each house where they have lost their loved ones in the village of Katuwapitiya,

Negombo. 'Breaking bread' with them in their brokenness was a touching experience.

Nearly 100 priests and 125 sisters were present. As groups we were entrusted with two houses to accompany for 3 months (minimum) up to one year. We share our lives and presence with them while entering into their pain and grief, whose faith in their God is still strong. An inter-congregational group working for one common purpose was an encouraging experience.

AN ALLELUIA NEVER SUNG BUT LIVED!

Jaffna-Sri Lanka

Sr. Shanthi Simon (On behalf of Dehiwela Community)

The unforeseen and the shocking explosions on the 21st April 2019 Easter Sunday in 3 churches and some hotels saddened the whole world, killing more than 290, wounding hundreds and the missing not yet numbered.

This immediately triggered my memories that we have buried for decades, what we went through during the civil war in Jaffna; Especially the deadly air bombing at St. James' church - which is very close to Holy Family Convent Jaffna, where I was and St. Peter's Church in Navali in the 90s.

Once more we were shocked...left speechlesstraumatized, a feeling of helplessness glued us to the TV wanting to know what exactly has happened. The Christians were targeted - but why? And by whom? No explanations at the time!

The next day Christa and I rushed to the hospital with heavy hearts to see the wounded and be close to them with our compassionate presence. This is only a glimpse of the whole massacre. We were speechless but with tears closely connected walking in the Spirit of Love. The pain is untold.

In visiting the children's hospital we saw the courage of parents, especially mothers who rushed their children to the hospital to save their lives. We really admire the dedicated, wholehearted service of doctors, nurses and other staff members who gave themselves so generously!

Christa, Laurentia and myself took a risk of travelling to Katuwapitiya, Negombo, knowing the possibility of few buses but more of another attack that terribly scared us. Though with heavy hearts we wanted to be in solidarity with the inconsolable brothers and sisters. The mass grave, weeping and howling of family members, coffins brought one after the other for blessing ... We stayed in silence and prayer one with those deeply saddened.

On the 23rd Laurentia and Clara visited the families in the neighborhood of St. Anthony's church Kochchikadai, Colombo.

Every story is unique, pathetic... agonizing... A newly married couple - the husband, 27, leaving his wife, 7 months pregnant and this will be the Only child for the mother.

An IT engineer, completing studies in India arrived home, not even 6 months. The mother coaxed him to go for mass. After searching the

whole day, they find his body in the mortuary that night.

An A/L student sitting for the exam this year - his two legs damaged, fallen, but risking to save a little baby... finds himself in a hospital bed with both legs and right hand bandaged, his whole body is with scars. He silently shed tears and related this story.



A young girl of 16, a chorister, shocked to find a first a body being flown onto her and the next moment a hand of someone falling on her face... She has lost hearing on her right ear and is traumatized beyond telling.

A Hindu young father, badly injured on his legs says 'I am so grateful to God that my life is saved.'

Unbearable tales! What better prayer was there for us, than "just simply BE"? This indeed was a blessing for them. Though sad and shocked some were grateful for being able to have a funeral to wish good bye to their loved ones. We deeply connected ourselves with their deep sense of gratitude.

We keep journeying in the Spirit of love and compassion, with those who are traumatized and grieving. What tragedy... why kill each other? Who gains and who loses? No more killing, no more fight, no more terror!

When do we as a nation realize that compassion is the only way to remove violence and hatred? Our country, Sri Lanka is soaked in cold blood. It is enough and no more hatred, no more violence ... no more bloodshed ...God, let our country be awakened to compassion and communion.

Let us hope that *'Each day in our world, beauty is born anew; it rises transformed, through the storms of history. Human beings arise, time after time, from situations that seemed doomed.'* *'Where all seems to be dead, signs of resurrection suddenly spring up.'*

'IT IS AN IRRESISTABLE FORCE.'

(Evangelii Gaudium 276)

JOY OF GIVING NEW LIFE!

Kodaikanal Taluk in India was one of the most affected areas in the recent cyclone, which hit in November 2018 and made havoc in the most of the North West area of Tamil Nadu. Kodaikanal is situated in the hills. In general, the whole area suffered without transportation and electricity for more than a week.

People in the hillside area lost their cultivation due to soil erosion and a few houses were damaged.

Sisters from Mangalamkombu
India

Malayakadu is a small village just one-kilo meter away from Mangalamkombu community, which we have chosen our target village where we wished to concentrate and give new life to the eighteen families. Their huts were blown off, the small kids were caught in flood, and the water carried their belongings away. Immediately the PEAK organization and village leader rushed to the scene and brought all the people to the Government school Mangalamkombu. Good-hearted people, volun-

teers and NGOs collected relief materials like clothing, food items, and beddings to give immediate support. Due to change of climate and poor facilities in the Government school, made the people sick. We provided medical assistance. In the meantime, the people in the school building were asked to leave, because the school has to be reopened so the people were brought to the Panchayat building.



Sr.Vimala and some volunteers planned to collect funds and motivated the other Organizations and NGOs to support this urgent need. There was a network of representatives created.

Holy Family sisters organized a meeting in our convent to see this project materialized. Partners sincerely mobilized the remedies to achieve the target. We estimated around Rs. 20,000/- for a family but we realized that the amount was very little to construct a house in that area. God had his own plan. Slowly we began to get enough support from other different

places of Tamil Nadu and some of our communities came forward to support these tribal people to construct a better dwelling.

We as a community worked together with all these NGOs and distributed Materials according to their needs. In December 2018, our ULT came to the Spot monitored and encouraged the work to be continued. They appreciated the joint work of these NGOs and their dedicated service rendered to this Tribal people. Sisters coordinated its process. Srs.Viyakulam and Vimala went to the Grama sabha meeting to speak about the proposal since there was a need to build a community hall for these people.

Finally, we had an evaluation for the work so far done. We promised to continue this project to uplift the livelihood of the Tribal. So that they will have, their basic needs and enjoy their life and rights. During the evaluation, there was Mrs.Nagu from the beneficiary, expressed her feelings ...

“Before we were in huts and now, we are in a brick houses, secure and comfortable. We felt the presence of God who filled us with peace of mind, and we enjoy God’s providential care.”

We are grateful to God and to all our sisters who have lovingly supported to this project at Malyakadu. Already 17 houses are built and a community hall is being constructed.

We realized that God is always on the side of the poor.

EXPERIENCING THE NEWNESS THROUGH RESURRECTED JESUS

Novices- Sri Lanka

“My own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete”

Easter is a time of thanks giving and rejoicing. It is a time to remind us of the many blessings that we have received. We the members of the Holy Family of Bordeaux march towards 200 years of the birth of our Association, let us cele-

brate our blessings at this special season.

As we become aware of the signs of the times, we are called to be connected with our realities. Our awakened consciousness reminds us that we are the space, and the time is now. We need to own our responsibility to make this world a better place for all.

As novices, we joined with our sisters to respond to the signs of the time at Wahati-yagama and Kandasurindugama. They are the areas at the periphery in Sri Lanka. The people who live there are marginalized by the society. The children are abandoned by their parents, they don't have interest in their education, and the youth are addicted by drugs and alcohol. The people do not have proper environment to live their lives happily. Therefore as a community, we started to help the children not by the gifts but by our love and concern towards them.

Every Monday we go house by house and bring the children, gather them in their Churches. Then we start teaching them, Basic English, games, songs, sports, and narrate inspirational stories to them. We notice that they gradually grow in good values; changes begin to evolve in their daily activities. Now we see their growth and enthusiasm in their studies. In order to show their talents and capabilities, in both villages we arranged a "talent show" so they enthusiastically waited to perform their items, to show their level of capacity to their parents and others. Being in novitiate community it was a good opportuni-



ty for us to share our gifts and talents with these people. The parents were very happy to see their children progressing in life-giving values to support life and to function within the society. We feel, as a community we have opened our hearts and minds to respond to these realities and to give space for them to experience the newness of their lives during this Easter time.

May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts, minds, in the society, and in the universe. In reliving the story of the disciples to Emmaus, enable us to encounter Lord in in faces marked by suffering, marginalization, and oppression.

