

# Interconnections

ComInfo Service - Suore della Santa Famiglia di Bordeaux - Via dei Casali Santovetti, 58 - 00165 - Roma - Italy e-mail: sfbinf@pcn.net

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## Here in Rome

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### African Itinerary

The Christmas festivities were scarcely over when the members of the General Leadership Team began departing for Africa. Details of the itineraries already sent out show that no country where there is a *Holy Family* presence on that continent was left unvisited.

For some, the visit to one or other country was a familiarisation tour to enable them to get to know the place and the situation of the sisters there. For others it was a visit of animation.



### Continental Meeting

From 14 - 25 January, the whole team gathered in South Africa for the first *Holy Family* Continental Meeting. With them, to ensure certain essential services, were three members of the Generalate community, Mary Loughran (Secretary General), Martine Pottelet (French-language Secretary) and Síle McGowan (Translation and Communications). Anne Marie Glynn also came from Ireland to help with simultaneous translation. As soon as possible, there will be a special publication giving echoes of the meeting.

### Marching for Peace

In union with people everywhere we are supporting the cause of peace by our prayer and action in these days when the spectre of a new and terrible war is looming.

On 1 January, World Peace Day, together with many other religious institutes, we joined a Peace March organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio. The walk started from the Chiesa Nuova (the Church of St. Philip Neri, for those who know Rome) and arrived at St. Peter's Square in time to greet the Pope when he gave his midday blessing. The purpose was to show support for what His Holiness is doing to promote peace in the world and demonstrate opposition to violence and war as a solution to conflict.

The organisers had prepared placards naming all the areas in the world where there is conflict. They are too numerous to mention but

we noticed particularly those where we have sisters, such Sri Lanka, the Basque Country, Northern Ireland, the North of Uganda, DR Congo, Philippines...

Several of us also joined the mass demonstration in Rome on 15 February. From late morning to late evening traffic in Rome was at a standstill or re-routed as thousands of people from several meeting points converged on the Square in front of the Basilica of St. John Lateran to demonstrate their opposition to war. Like similar marches that took place around the globe, the Roman march brought together an extraordinary variety of people and organisations. That such diversity could be so happily united in a common cause can only be a sign of hope.



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## Just another UN International Year?

The UN International Water Year 2003 follows logically from the Year of Mountains proclaimed in 2002. For many of us that event may have passed unnoticed. The only mention of it in our Institute news bulletins came from Canada (cf. *La Sève* no. 121, June 2002).

The task of promoting the Year of Mountains was entrusted to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). In their report at the end of the year the organisers felt that “thanks to the global awareness-raising campaign ... many around the world know the truth:

- ◆ That mountains are crucial to all life on earth.
- ◆ That half of humanity depends on *mountains as a source of fresh water* (italics inserted).
- ◆ That the genetic diversity preserved in mountain ecosystems helps to ensure the world’s future food security.
- ◆ That each day the future of these unique eco-regions, and the people who call them home, are threatened by armed conflict, global climate change, exploitative mining and unsustainable forestry and agricultural practices.”

They feel that they have changed the way many in the world think about and relate to mountains. They urge ongoing action to improve the well-being of mountain people and ensure the protection of fragile mountain ecosystems.

In Rome the JPIC (Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation) Commission organised a conference on the *Universal Right to Water*. Many of us attended as a preliminary awareness-raising effort. The unavailability of water is obviously a global problem and one that will only be solved by the concerted efforts and goodwill of all peoples and governments. However, this is a situation where, more than ever, we are called to *act locally while thinking globally*. It is for each individual and local group to see how this may be done in particular situations.

For information on the IWY visit: [www.wateryear2003.org](http://www.wateryear2003.org)

International Women’s Day of Prayer - 7 March 2002  
This year the prayer is prepared by the women of Lebanon on  
the theme: *Holy Spirit, fill us.*

## Historical Notes



### Why Quasimodo Sunday was important to our Founder

As she was working her way through our Founder's writings for a thesis she is doing, Áine Hayde hfb (Britain and Ireland) became more and more puzzled by his constant references to Quasimodo Sunday as the 'principal feast of the Association' or 'the patronal feast of the Association'. She asked herself why this Sunday was so special that it was our principal feast and how it could be our 'patronal feast'. She wondered why the gospel of that particular Sunday was so important that it was even represented on our coat-of-arms by the olive branches signifying 'Peace be with you'. There was also the fact that this particular Sunday was followed by forty days of prayer to the *Holy Family*.

In the course of her research Áine discovered that, before it became a general Church feast, the feast of the Holy Family was celebrated in different dioceses either on a Sunday in Eastertide or on a Sunday in November. It seemed logical that Bordeaux, which had been consecrated to the Holy Family as early as 1675, would have such a feast.

The answer came while she was in Rome reading through the first issue of the *Annals of the Association of the Holy Family* published in 1831. In the section on indulgences she read that one of the days on which a plenary indulgence was granted to the Association of the *Holy Family* was 'The Feast of the Most Holy Family, (Quasimodo Sunday)'

And Áine concludes: "No wonder then that it was an important feast for our Founder, that it was the 'principal' and 'patronal' feast of the Association. No wonder the Gospel of that day was so special to him and that he chose it to remind us of our apostolic mission. So, when next we celebrate Quasimodo Sunday and reflect on our mission in today's world, let us remember that what we are really celebrating is the feast of the 'Most Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph', and what being members of the *Holy Family* of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles means to us."

(Adapted from *Voices*, vol. 2, no. 2)

# VICARIATE



## Communion of Persons: Trinity, Nazareth, Community

Israel has always seen its God in dialogue: with the world there before him through his creative Word; with the human person as his familiar friend, capable of welcoming this Word; with Israel itself whom he has made the people where he is present through the Covenant. With Christ and in the Spirit, both sent by the Father, God has finally revealed himself as a communion of Persons, and opening up to humanity the secret of his desire for unity.

The reading of the Word of God done in the light of the Holy Spirit is divine. Thus the title *Lectio Divina* which monastic tradition gives to the reading the Bible. *The Word of God has a charm and an unction found nowhere else.* Father Noailles lived and practised *Lectio Divina*, and he passed it on to us as a heritage. When Christ opened the minds of his disciples to understand the Scriptures, it was a question of a spiritual Intelligence, a gift of the Holy Spirit. For our Founder, the key to understanding the Scriptures is the inexpressible mystery of the Incarnation: *The Son of God came upon earth to form a Holy Family.*

Nazareth signifies: the one who keeps. Mary and Joseph, the first believers in Jesus, taught the first Christians how to keep the Presence of the Lord in the human heart. To speak of Nazareth is to recall God's love for us and our responsibility to keep the Word, living filial obedience in daily life, like Jesus, Mary and

Joseph, *who loved, sought and desired only God Alone in all things.*

To live in Nazareth, is to experience familiarity with God, to be members of his Trinitarian Family; it is to experience evangelical simplicity, filial and fraternal life, communion in mutual love and the constant and actual fulfilment of God's will, He who was only Love and Salvation for the whole of humanity.

Father Noailles' spiritual Family, was honoured at its birth by an extraordinary favour. The Miraculous Benediction of 8 February 1822 was seen by our Venerable Founder as an assurance of the Presence of Jesus, Eucharist, Word made flesh with us, in our midst. I am *He who is and there is only I who am.* Strengthened by this Presence, we have to reveal it, in the humble reality of every day, always doing what pleases the Father, in communion of mind and heart, so that *the world may believe.* And, as Father Noailles insisted, may gentleness be the distinctive characteristic of the Sisters of the Holy Family: gentleness purifies the look, enlightens the mind, disarms the heart and unifies our life for the service of the Mission of Jesus Christ.

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph inspire, fortify and make us radiate this Presence of God, Father, Son and Spirit, who wants *to gather together all his scattered children into one Family.*

Françoise Daigneault  
Community of Oteiza (Shekinah 2002 - 1)



# AFRICA

## Cameroon-Chad

### Pastoral care of vocations

*Gounou-Gaya, where the Holy Family sisters provide pastoral care, is in the diocese of Pala. This diocese celebrated 50 years of missionary presence in the year 2002. Agnes Ongwisa hfb describes one aspect of the activities.*

She writes that many young people feel called by God to continue to proclaim the Good News to their brothers and sisters. The diocesan commission for vocations asked each parish to form a committee to reflect on vocations in the church and to follow up those who wish to give themselves to God. The Gounou-Gaya committee proved very active.

Five young men, four from the Minor Seminary and one from the Major Seminary attended a meeting held in the middle of the year. They shared with the members of the parish committee on the call, the experiences, the joys and difficulties met with on the way. They all expressed their joy at following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Agnes, who participated, noted that many stressed the importance of the role of their godparents before and after their baptism. This gave them a first experience of spiritual

accompaniment. It follows that if godparents take their commitment seriously the young people can draw from them the strength to go on.

Among the difficulties encountered is the inter-ethnic living in the seminary because of differences in culture, mentalities, education, and origins. We all have this difficulty. The 'other' is always a mystery to discover and to welcome each day.

They all have to face questions put to them about their relations with women and girls. "Since you want to give yourself to God without marrying why do you talk with women and girls?" This poses a problem in a culture where women are considered mainly as child bearers.

The committee encouraged them to continue in their chosen path, relying on the Lord who has called them and being open with their accompanier. This is an indispensable

aid to spiritual growth requiring authentic dialogue. "The harvest is ripe in our young churches," concludes Agnes, "but the workers are few. Let us pray to the master of the harvest."

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### Being open to differences

Inter-religious dialogue does not mean sitting down and talking formally about our different religions. It is above all a way of being and interacting with one another. This is borne out by the following anecdote related also by Agnes Ongwisa. It happened at Tagal.

In Chad and Cameroon, each community has to find a way of procuring certain vital necessities not available locally. Some of these come from Nigeria. In Tagal, Mr. Saleh, a Muslim, has been providing the sisters for many years with things like petrol and oil. He is a faithful, if irregular, provider. His relations with the sisters are always cordial and trusting. He even wishes them a happy Christmas and New Year.

The sisters, in turn, offered him their good wishes at the end of Ramadan this year and asked: "Even when you are tired and dusty from travelling you don't even drink water?" He replied: "Allah likes fidelity." This answer made the sisters think of their own fidelity to Jesus Christ.

He came back a week later to visit them. Not being able to bring them a leg of mutton from the feast he brought them little cakes made for the occasion, "Your share of the feast", he told them.

He was accompanied by one of his community. As usual they talked at length of his family.

His companion said: "That woman has been talking to you for fifteen minutes. Where is her husband? Will he not be angry with her?" Saleh replied: "She has no husband. She is there for God; she will have neither husband nor children." His friend stood up, clapped his hands, shook his head and said: "What God, and why? Why did her parents allow that?"

Saleh translated his questions for Agnes and she replied: "It is not my parents but I who decided. They let me choose." This was even more difficult for him to accept. But when Saleh said Agnes was not even from

Chad but from the 'country of Kabila' he wondered what sort of a God could ask people for what was unjust. When Agnes assured him she was happy without a husband and children because she could serve God and go wherever she was needed, he said: "You Christians are fools. You give up what is necessary in life."

"It is God who is necessary in life," Agnes replied. His final words were: "It may be good for you but I could not live like that nor would I let my daughter suffer such a life." Since then, Agnes is more conscious of God's gift in enabling her to live consecrated celibacy.

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## D. R Congo

### A Stay at a Monastery

The monastery of Kasanza is in the Diocese of Kitwit in the Province of Bandundu. It is situated on the Kwango-Kwilu plateau surrounded by open grasslands, and forested avenues. The grasslands are sandy and not very fertile while the forest areas have rich red soil.

Fr. Henry Paul, a Jesuit who became a monk, opened the monastery in 1949. He lived as a hermit in the ravines of Lukwila and died when he was struck by lightning in his cabin. His mother, wishing to carry on with his project, contacted some French and Belgium abbeys. In 1957 the Cistercian abbey of St. Benedict d'Achille in Belgium agreed to continue the work. The aim of the Trappists of Kasanza is to live

in communion with God and with the world through prayer, and continue the creative work of God by manual work.

#### Why were the *Holy Family* sisters there?

Christine Beneki hfb tells the story. The Delegation of the DRC is trying out ways and means to be self-supporting in spite of the economic difficulties of the country. To improve their skill in raising the cattle they possess some sisters were sent to Kasanza for a three-month stay to improve their veterinary knowledge.

Their day began at 7.30 a.m. and continued until 11.30 a.m. Sometimes they worked until 2

p.m. depending on the illnesses of the animals or other work such as the preparation of drinking troughs and licking blocks, setting up watering places, building the house for the herdsman, and renewing trees. It was a useful but difficult experience.

They noticed that animal illnesses are like those of human beings. How can you diagnose an animal illness? You have to observe its attitudes, its temperature, its eyes and hair. In all, they saw and cared for 17 types of illness.

#### Other aspects of their life

Their presence at Kasanza was challenging. They saved a little girl of 9 years who was anaemic by giving her a mixture

of tomatoes, eggs, meat and soya when the dispensary treatment did not help. By their advice they helped some young people and families. The witness of their discreet

lifestyle, like that of Nazareth, impressed the people.

Christine says that their experience at Kasanza was rich and beneficial, in spite of

the difficulties. Now they are counting on the support of all to put into practice what they learnt. They can also be certain of the prayer of the monastic community where they lived.

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## Lesotho

### A Family Day

*During the visit to Lesotho of Margaret Muldoon (General Leader), Françoise Aubin (General Bursar) and Adela Vanaclocha (General Councillor), from 29 January – 4 February 2003, the Province organised a Family Day. This took place on Sunday, 2 February, feast of the Presentation and Candlemas.*

Every sister who could manage it came to greet the visitors and rejoice at their presence. They were joined by Lay Associates and *Holy Family Youth*.

Many of them had been at an all-night vigil on Saturday night organised by the Religious of Lesotho to give thanks for their call to the consecrated life and pray for vocations. This did not prevent them from entering enthusiastically into the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday morning.

The ceremony of the blessing of the candles outside the chapel, the procession inside, the various parts of the Mass, from the penitential rite to the final blessing, were all accompanied by the beautiful singing and dance movements for which the Basotho people are renowned. It was a triumphant expression of joy and glory to God alone.

The rejoicing continued without interruption after Mass. All shared in the common meal and then the feast of singing and dancing began. The music

Visiting with King Letsie III of Lesotho



During the visit Margaret presented his Majesty with a copy of the Acts of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Congress and the Declaration produced at it.

of a modern pop band, alternating with traditional dances, had all on their feet moving rhythmically to the sounds. It is not possible to name all who contributed to the programme but we must mention the item from *Kananelo*, the *Holy Family School* for the deaf and dumb children. Although unable to hear or speak they had mastered the dance movements by careful

observation so that their performance almost equalled that of their more fortunate brothers and sisters. Their sight is not impaired so they were certainly aware of the delight of the audience at their performance.

The President of the lay associates of Lesotho, Simon Phafane, and the President of the associates of Southern Africa, Bernard Moeketsi, both

warmly welcomed the visitors and spoke of their commitment to the *Holy Family*. Eleanora Molai, Provincial Leader, speaking on behalf of the Province, added her words of welcome. After the singing of the beautiful and moving *Holy Family* hymn in Sesotho, she invited Margaret to address the gathering.

Aware that her audience was mainly composed of members of the large Family of Pierre

Bienvenu Noailles and people associated in some way with the *Holy Family* in Lesotho, Margaret spoke of what touches us closely.

After thanking and congratulating the sisters for the wonderful liturgical celebration she encouraged all to live the *Holy Family* values and live the declaration made at the Congress. She recalled the miraculous benediction to be commemorated the following

day with the reminder that the blessing was for all time.

It was also an opportune time to mention the forthcoming foundation in Botswana as the two Basotho foundresses were present.

The singing of the Lesotho national anthem signalled the end of the festivities. It was time to disperse. Some had long distances to travel and clouds were gathering.

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## South Africa

### Remembering acts of Sharing and Collaborating

#### ■ With the Society of St Vincent de Paul

Thanks to the *Holy Family*, the members of the Society at Frederic Place, Coronationville (Johannesburg), were able to celebrate their silver jubilee of service to the poor on 25 October 2002. Twenty-five years ago the sisters found themselves with a building that had been a novitiate and had also housed a community involved in teaching and pastoral ministry. It had become too big for their reduced numbers and they wondered how they could put it to better use for the mission.

At the same time the St. Vincent de Paul Society were anxious to do something for the aged people of Soweto. That was what brought the two together. The convent building became a home for the aged, known as Frederic Place, while the Society built the sisters a

little convent on the same property. Frederic Place is at present home to 62 residents many of whom are very frail. The newly appointed matron for the home is *Holy Family* associate, Brenda Lewis, who participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Holy Family* Congress.

The jubilee was celebrated with a Mass of thanksgiving in the chapel where many sisters of the Province had made their first commitment in the *Holy Family*. Marie Bergin hfb, our reporter and a member of the Society, did the readings. The oldest resident formed part of the Offertory procession presenting the gifts from her wheelchair.

At the end of Mass different members of the Society led the congregation over the journey begun 25 years ago to the present. They were filled with gratitude for God's help and guidance through those who

gave themselves totally to the task. Then it was time for refreshments in the large marquee set up for the occasion between the convent and the home. It was an opportunity for people to meet together and reminisce.

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#### ■ With St. Augustine's Catholic University of South Africa

In January 2002, the *Holy Family* Sisters in South Africa vacated their large Provincial House in Victory Park (Johannesburg). For several decades it had housed postulants, novices and the provincial community. It had also been a retreat and conference centre. There was, therefore, some sadness at the departure. It was softened by the fact that the property had been bought by the St.



Augustine Catholic University of South Africa.

This University was established in 1997 and in 1999 was given permission by the Minister of Education to function as a private higher education institution. It aims to meet the critical need for value-based teaching and to serve as a community that studies and teaches disciplines necessary for authentic human development.

In a lovely gesture, the sisters made a gift to the University of all that was in the chapel, including the beautiful, large crucifix dominating the altar. In appreciation the University had a plaque inscribed with their thanks affixed to the wall of the chapel near the entrance.

The ceremony of unveiling took place on 27 January 2003. Presiding at the Eucharist were three well-known South African theologians who are on the University staff. In her introductory remarks the Vice-Chancellor said the chapel was a focal point in the life of the institution. The

Eucharist was frequently celebrated and they were thus united with the many others, sisters and laity, who had worshipped there before them. The hosts were delighted that the event coincided with the presence of Margaret and the General Council in Johannes-

THIS PLAQUE WAS ERECTED  
IN THANKSGIVING TO  
ALMIGHTY GOD  
AND IN GRATITUDE TO  
THE HOLY FAMILY SISTERS  
FOR BEQUEATHING  
THE CHAPEL TO  
ST AUGUSTINE COLLEGE

JANUARY 2002

burg, making it possible for them to attend. Also present were several participants of the African Continental Meeting who were accommodated in the former Provincial House for the few days they had to spend in the city before and after the meeting.

## Uganda

### Photo Essay

(See Interconnections, no. 7, p. 10, for more details)



Functional Adult Literacy: Cake baking demonstration

Functional Adult Literacy trainer, Mr. Karusa, with the bicycle he was awarded as an incentive



Engosi Ambulance Carriers discussing with the clinic nurse: *Why are mothers and babies dying?*



Ambulance Carriers Discussion Group  
Buhara Parish



# AMERICAS

## Argentina

### Twenty five years in Quitilipi

*The event was prepared by a triduum of thanksgiving organised by the local community and Associates. There was much to be grateful for. It was above all a celebration of presence.*

A form of presence was the unconditional support and collaboration the sisters received over 25 years from so many people who had given themselves in the work of evangelisation.

The bishop of the diocese was there to thank the sisters for the work done for the Reign of God in good times and bad. Those with whom the *Holy Family* first came in contact, such as the parish priest, Fr. Hugolino O.F.M.,

and other friends, both religious and lay, also came.

The local channel (radio or TV?) broadcast the event during the month of August, transmitting congratulations from the sisters in Spain and Italy who had been there at one time. It also had some of the people relate their experiences of the 25 years.

The commemoration, bringing back as it did so many memories, served to inspire

and urge the sisters to continue living the charism of communion so often mentioned by the people as being characteristic of the *Holy Family*.

The community expresses its thanks “to the sisters of the Institute, to the Associates, the Seculars, the Contem-plative sisters and to all the people who, by their prayer and support confirm us in our ‘being Family’”

### Diocesan Synod

**T**he diocese of Santa Maria del Yguazu held its synod from 11-14 October 2002 in the Sanctuary of Santa Maria del Yguazu (Our Lady of Yguazu). It was the second in the 16 years of the diocese’s existence. In all, 320 people participated. Among them were 218 lay people, 40 religious, 36 priests, 15 deacons, 8 seminarians and consecrated lay people. The theme was:

***Proclaiming Jesus and his Gospel and denouncing what is opposed to the Reign of God.***

For a year all the parishes had been preparing for the synod by a process of reflection so that there was a working document before the participants. In his words of welcome the bishop, Joaquin Pina, spoke of the importance of the synod for the

diocese. He called it an opportunity to “review what had been lived and make proposals for the coming years”.

Several resource persons helped them in their reflections. Key Scripture passages were those from Isaiah concerning the Servant of Yahweh: Is. 42, 1-9; 49, 1-6; 50, 4-9. They reflected and prayed about the situation of their country and

their diocese with special reference to the social aspects of pastoral care, youth, evangelisation, the clergy and religious, the laity and movements. They looked at the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and problems in each of them.

They came up with proposals for action and, inspired by the Canticles of the Servant in Isaiah, tried to see to what the Church of Yguazu, God and the people were calling them. Little

by little conclusions were reached and they produced a declaration and commitments for action for the whole diocese.

The community of Montecarlo, to whom we are indebted for this account, write that the atmosphere of the synod was one of deep communion considering the diversity of attitudes. The reflections were serious and responsible. All were conscious that what they were doing and proposing was for the

life of the diocese and its continuity. The Eucharist and the prayers were a great help in enabling them to be fully open to the Spirit.

After a memorable closing Eucharist the synod participants dispersed to spread the good news in their parishes. The bishop proclaimed a post-synodal period in the whole diocese up to the feast of Santa Maria del Yguazu in August 2003.

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## Canada

### Among the Amerindians

#### A Precious Gift

*The town of Schefferville in northern Quebec takes its name from Lionel Scheffer O.M.I., first Bishop of the diocese of Quebec-Labrador. More than 1000 of the approximately 1400 people living there are Amerindians.*

**A** Holy Family community of two lives among and with them, providing pastoral care. They are Srs. Martha Groffen and Lieve Bosmans.

A very tangible sign of acceptance and gratitude was recently presented to the sisters by the people. A group of them worked secretly to offer the sisters a gift of a dream chalet. During an open air supper in the black spruce forest on the St. Anne lake they were given the key.

When they entered they discovered it was completely furnished. Surprise upon surprise: there was dry wood, spirals to ward off the mosquitoes, mattresses and all

the necessities to live comfortably in it.

It provides the sisters with a space of their own for solitude, rest and meetings. As the need arises the chalet is a place for prayer, sharing, helping, dining, and can even serve as a confessional. Lieve receives the women for Labrador tea and they talk about this and that. Once the conversation starts time no longer matters.

Sometimes the sisters spend quiet moments in their oasis listening to the deep silence of the forest that reveals the all-embracing presence of the Great Spirit. They can only exclaim: "What a treasure we



Shefferville

have received! Thanks be to God and to our generous Indians who have given us tangible proof of our belonging to their community."

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#### Participation in the World Youth Days

Although it is now several months since this event took place in Canada the communities still recall with joy how they participated by opening their doors to the youth of the world. In Schefferville

many activities were organised to enable young people and couples to join the Sept-Iles group going to Toronto to meet the Pope.

When it is a matter of finding the means to go on outings of whatever kind the people are incredibly resourceful. It is almost unbelievable but funds were raised for 9 people to go on this wonderful journey. They saw the Holy Father, were immersed in the crowds, prayed, experienced strong emotions and came back with hearts full of happy memories.

### The Caribou Festival

Schefferville is the caribou hunting capital of North Quebec and the caribou festival is a traditional event. The day of the celebration in 2002 was dull and a strong wind helped to give it a religious meaning. Fr. Laurent prayed towards the four cardinal points. The prayers were carried very high and very far to intercede for the community.

To conclude, everyone assembled in the Chapitum (large tent) to enjoy the delicious meal of caribou and other dishes prepared by the cooks. It was a feast to delight the hearts of all and everyone expressed it by saying: TSHINASHKUMITIN (thank you).

### Service to the community recognised

The following letter speaks for itself:

The Honourable Stéphane Dion, M.P.  
House of Commons  
Ottawa,  
Ontario

Sr Thèrese Deshaies  
707, rue Filiatrault  
Montréal  
Québec

November 5<sup>th</sup> 2002

2002 is the 50th anniversary of the accession to the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. To mark the Jubilee, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General of Canada, asked the Royal Canadian Mint to strike a medal.

Canadians in every region of the country are being chosen to receive the Jubilee Medal. Your dedication to our community makes you an ideal recipient of this honour.

It is therefore my pleasure to invite you to the official medal presentation ceremony, which will take place on Friday, November 29, 2002 at 6:30 p.m. at the

**Centre des loisirs de Saint-Laurent,- 1375 Grenet**

Congratulations on this richly deserved honour. I look forward to congratulating you in person on November 29.

Signed: Stéphane Dion



# Asia

## Pakistan

### Silver Jubilee in Rangpur

*On 31 October 1977, Srs. Stephanie Ranasinghe, Evelyn Hanley and Mercia Peiris set foot on the soil of Rangpur. When the sisters arrived there all the bishop asked of them, writes Mercia, was that "they be a presence of God's communion of love." That they were faithful to this injunction is shown by the fact that the parishioners wanted to commemorate their arrival in a spirit of deep gratitude to God for the countless blessings they had received through the sisters. They made all the arrangements and saw to the organisation. Mr. Lucas Zia, headmaster of the school and an appointee of Sr. Stephanie, gives the following details.*

There were great preparations at both parish and school level. The ceremony began at 10 p.m. on the 29 November 2002. The elders of the village gathered at the convent premises, offered prayers, sang hymns and placed 25 illuminated lamps on the convent roof. On the following morning the people warmly welcomed Bishop Andrew Francis, who came to preside at the festivities, the accompanying priest, and the visiting *Holy Family* sisters. They garlanded them and poured oil at the main entrance to the village. Dancers escorted the bishop to the church, while Srs. Dominic and Stephanie were made to sit in a beautifully decorated bullock cart.

#### Reception

At the Church 25 pigeons were released as a sign of peace. The formal welcome followed. The sisters were once more garlanded to the accompaniment of songs, dances and

costumes of many countries. The boys and girls gave a drill display and formed 'Happy Jubilee' to congratulate the sisters.

#### Eucharistic celebration

People from all the villages of the desert gathered around the Eucharistic table. Twenty five children with flowers in their hands led the celebrants in dance to the altar and placed the flowers on 25 sticks placed in front of the altar. The beginnings in Rangpur by the Dominican Fathers and Sisters and the continuation by the *Holy Family* sisters were recalled by Babu Aziz, a retired catechist. The bishop in his homily spoke of the deep prayer life and effective pastoral work of the sisters through the years.

Every part of the Mass had been prepared with special attention. The choir, under the expert guidance of Sr. Angelina and Fr. Sami George, sang beautifully. At the offertory

procession various groups placed symbols of their different activities and their fruits on the altar. Little children dressed in pink depicted the Lord's Prayer.

#### Tributes

At the time of the sisters' arrival in Rangpur there was no electricity, no greenery but just a few houses with a few people and plenty of sand. Since their arrival the atmosphere of the whole village and surroundings has taken on a new outlook. Mr. Lucas Zia and colleague, Mrs. Iris, paid a rich tribute highlighting the activities of the sisters.

They were concerned about human dignity at all levels. They were involved in social, spiritual, economic, educational and health work.

- The school has been upgraded from primary to high.
- Young girls are assured of a future.
- A sewerage system has been installed.

- Prayer groups have been established, to mention only a few.

An award ceremony followed. Each sister who had given her services in Rangpur was recognised. Entertainment included singing, dancing, and a drama giving the history of

the parish. At the end, a member of the District Council thanked the sisters, assured them of the Council's cooperation and requested them to continue their services. The Lay Associates and the women's groups also expressed their gratitude. Sr. Angelina thanked one and all

for their contribution to the day and then everyone shared a simple meal. A beautifully decorated cake had been cut after the Eucharistic celebration by Srs Dominic, Stephanie and Yvonne.

As the day ended all hearts were filled with joyful gratitude.

## Sri Lanka – Colombo Province

### Partnership for Human Dignity

#### *The Child and its Future* Foundation

One evening while Sr. Thecla Sangapala and others of her community were reviewing the days' visits to the nearby clusters of poor families at Wadduwa two foreign visitors appeared on the doorstep. They invited them to enjoy a cup of tea with them, not realising the far-reaching consequences of this chance meeting.

The two visitors were members of *The Child and its Future* Foundation in the Netherlands. Thanks to them, the poor of the area have been helped beyond their wildest expectations. It was these same poor with whom the sisters have identified themselves as part of their own ministry. One of the visitors, Ms. Bertie Treur, began coming annually to Sri Lanka. She

would spend about 10-15 days travelling several hundred kilometres monitoring some of the projects she had initiated.

Over the years the Foundation has spent millions of rupees relieving the poor. Thanks to Ms. Bertie's intervention, many



One who can look forward with hope

children can look forward to a brighter and more prosperous future. Hundreds of families have been provided with a roof over their heads and other basic amenities such as a kitchen, a toilet, and water wells.

Under-nourished children are provided with milk food. Books, school uniforms, tuition fees, season tickets, and scholarships for school-going children form part of the Foundation's services. It has also donated books for libraries, school buildings, desks and chairs. Financial support given to female drop-outs in order to develop their latent creative skills and talents was another worthwhile contribution.

Thecla is full of praise for the tireless devotion and transparent love Ms. Bertie showers on the poor, oppressed families. She has succeeded in forging friendly links with the many of them.

Thecla says it is a great joy to collaborate with her because she also is working to promote the dignity of the human person.

## Twenty years working with the *Holy Family* Sisters in Sri Lanka

*Ms. Bertie gives her own account of the partnership that grew up between her and the Holy Family.*

She explained why she looks forward to travelling to Sri Lanka each year and to working together with the sisters:

“Because I feel that they are really a family and I have the privilege of taking part in this family for some weeks. During these weeks I feel truly at home. The way the sisters treat each other with love, patience, humour, and understanding is really great. The way they care for each other, including the elderly sisters, touches me very much.

But this was not the only reason to come over to Sri Lanka. I was looking for a congregation which ‘is reaching out’, reaching out to people who are around them, regardless of their religion. I found this with the *Holy Family* sisters. They are trying to lift up lives in many ways. While doing this they come across many people who are hardly

living a human life, people who can scarcely feed their children, people who are literally living in the mud, people who cannot afford to send their children to school.

I feel very thankful that I have the opportunity to do something in these fields together with the sisters. Our common, main goal is to try to give these poor people a better chance in life, not by making



Sr. Deepa Fernando visiting a poor family  
(Archival picture)

them dependent on us but by giving them the feeling of being respected as valuable persons again.

Every time I arrive in Sri Lanka, Sr. Thecla has prepared our trip in such a way that we can do the maximum within a short time, which is great. During every trip I meet many sisters who are involved in all the projects which I appreciate very much. I love the way they are concerned about them, how they feel free to share their doubts about some people with me and how they take care of me.

I hope we can continue our work for many years to come and that our Lord will give us the strength and health to go on working for the people who are less fortunate. Working with the *Holy Family* sisters is really a blessing for me. Without them I would never be able to do what we have been doing for almost twenty years.

When I founded our Foundation for Children, the *Holy Family* sisters made it possible to carry out this wish, this goal in Sri Lanka.

*‘Thank you so much!’*”

# Sri Lanka – Jaffna Province

## The Inter-Congregational Women's Desk

(Report from Sr. Eudoxie Sebamalai hfb, Team member)

*A number of Religious Congregations of Women became aware that their recent General Chapters committed them to work for the promotion of human dignity especially that of women. They were also asked to work to bring about a change in the structures of society that exploit and marginalize women.*

That was how a group of sisters from six religious congregations felt the need to get together and organise a Inter-Congregational Women's Desk to learn from each other, and share their efforts and resources. They would also combine their efforts to think of new, creative ways of fulfilling their mission as religious sisters.

This came about when a Good Shepherd sister, the animator of women at the national commission for the Laity, came back from the Beijing Conference for Women 1996. She organised reflection and study days, open discussions and workshops on women's issues. Each year they chose a different topic for raising awareness.

### Some examples of Action taken

- ◆ To counteract Child Abuse they had sessions on "Christian attitudes to sex education" focussing attention on mothers and teachers in their schools.
- ◆ Women migrant workers and their families was another area for study since 700 000 women work abroad and 70% are mothers.
- ◆ Sessions on gender discrimination and forming women to take on leadership roles in their work places and villages were also held.
- ◆ A group of sisters and lay women were encouraged to attend sessions on gender-sensitivity organised by ecumenical groups.

### National Convention of Women Religious

In May 2000 the Women's desk organised a Convention on the theme "*Women Religious seeking new horizons awakened and unafraid*".

Four hundred and thirty six religious participated and they became aware of the power they possessed as a Corporate Body. They committed themselves individually and corporately to deepen their lives as religious to reach the fulfilment that is the Creator's plan for all women. They feel that the empowerment of women and their full participation in the decision-making process in all spheres of society and the church is of vital importance.

### FOLLOW-UP to the May 2002 Convention

This was organised for 1 – 2 June 2002 in Colombo. Three hundred and ninety five religious from thirteen congregations participated. The proceedings have been collected into a booklet with the title:

#### *Religious Life re-imaged for today.*

The main resource person was Sr. Rose Fernando fmm. Using the story of two 'courage' women from Scripture, Shiprah and Puah (Ex. 1, 8 – 2, 10) she developed aspects of a New Spirituality for the 21st Century such as:

Spirituality of

- partnership,
- empowerment,
- resistance,
- non-violence,
- relationship.

At the closing Eucharist, each congregation was invited to offer its action plan at the Offertory procession. The *Holy Family* sisters presented the plan drawn up at their Provincial Chapter.



# Plan of Action of the Province of Jaffna

Being attentive to the signs of the time as women Religious of the *Holy Family*, we decided at our Provincial Chapter the following action plan:

## OUR PRIORITIES

### The dignity of the Woman

Becoming aware of our own dignity we promote the empowerment of oppressed and marginalised women, in view of a structural change in our society.

#### ACTION

- ◆ In our schools to organise seminars on the empowerment of women.
- ◆ Conscientise the young women working in our convents through workshops on empowerment of women and the sacredness of creation.
- ◆ Affirm this new thrust in our work in Damam Pasalas.
- ◆ Each community, especially in rural areas, to form a women's group to empower them and to live interreligious dialogue of life.
- ◆ Form peer groups for widows
- ◆ Counselling for the traumatised in war-torn areas.

### The Protection of Children

In view of promoting life in them, especially the victims of war, those in border villages, street children and school dropouts.

#### ACTION

- ◆ Teaching the weak children and school dropouts to read and write
- ◆ To give at least temporary protection to those children who face sexual harassment and to find ways of securing their life.
- ◆ Accommodate orphans and abandoned children and educate them.

### Integrity of Environment

Accept the sacredness of creation and denounce all forms of environmental destruction.

#### ACTION

- ◆ To collaborate actively with groups that are working towards the integrity of the environment.
- ◆ To be conscious of the destruction pollution of the environment and with people to collaborate with the groups who preserve these natural resources.

### Our Communities to be prophetic wherever we are:

- ◆ Each community to decide to work with the ASIPA groups in the milieu, in building a participatory Church
- ◆ Form experimental communities with our lay associates.
- ◆ Our communities to become information 'centres', (to make available information on current issues).
- ◆ In keeping with our option and according to the needs of the apostolate among the poor in remote areas, the sisters to be open to remain with the people in their homes.

### Formation

- ◆ To awaken the image of an Asian religious during the Novitiate stage.
- ◆ To provide opportunities to experience working in the periphery.
- ◆ To introduce analysis and theological reflection and also self awareness programmes with emphasis on empowerment of women directed towards a deep personal relationship with God and God's people.



# EUROPE

## Belgium-Antwerp

### Caring for the Senior Citizens



For several years the *Holy Family* community of Ternick have been ministering to the elderly people of the area where they live, to the South of

Antwerp. Leona Van Den Abeele writes that recently they have begun to work with a group called, *Care for Senior Citizens* (Attention pour les Seniors). It is part of a wider service in the city of Antwerp whose aim is “to learn to live together” that was begun in 1996.

Senior volunteers are called upon to visit elderly or isolated people once a week. To help the volunteers in their task, half-day training courses are held. They deal with the following topics:

- ◆ Solitude and being alone, isolation,
- ◆ Information about available home care ,
- ◆ Bereavement and bereavement counselling,
- ◆ Alzheimer’s disease,
- ◆ Depression in the elderly,
- ◆ Empathy,
- ◆ Parkinson’s disease.

Experts, who always provide handouts, give the talks. In that way the sisters have lots of material to help them in their visits. On the day of the conference all the volunteers are given a free meal and this provides them with a wonderful opportunity to meet and get to know one another.



On 22 October they went to visit the Union of Turkish Assemblies and the Mosque. They were able to hear about Islam and question the older Turks. They also took part in the 3 o’clock prayer. The cordial reception they got will enable them to refute racial prejudices.

#### National Week of the Elderly

The third week in November is designated *The National Week of the Elderly*. In 2002 it took place from 18 – 24 November. *Care for Senior Citizens* took part by organising a roses campaign in the different districts. For the district where the sisters are it was held on the 18<sup>th</sup> and involved distributing 1 200 roses to people over 65 years of age. Maria, Longina and Leona were among the volunteers.

For the first time the V.R.T.1 showed an interest in the event and came with their cameras and interviewers to two of the places. Leona and another volunteer with her were among those captured on TV. The reporter asked her: “Is this attention for the elderly really necessary?” With six years of experience behind her she was able to say, “yes” with all her heart and relate how those who live alone want someone to listen to them, to help them, to visit and encourage them. The interview appeared on television at the midday and evening news.

Being part of *Care for Senior Citizens* is demanding but, Leona says, “We also receive a lot; it is enriching.”

# Britain and Ireland

## Two Anniversaries

### ■ 125 years in Stockport (England)

*“Saturday, 28 September, brought together sisters who had served in any capacity in Stockport, Lay Associates, past pupils of all the Catholic schools in the town, prayer groups and people from the various parishes. All had reason to celebrate because they had been touched in some way by the spirit of the Holy Family of Bordeaux. The occasion was the celebration of 125 years of our presence in the town.”*

Patricia O’Hara hfb, writing in *Voices*, gives a vivid account of the celebration that was “one of dignity, simplicity and joy”.

Education was the first ministry of the sisters in the town and over the years they had built up a flourishing school for primary and post-primary pupils. The school has since passed into other hands but the memory of the sisters’ work lives on. Like all beginnings, life was difficult in the early days and the workload heavy.

As well as teaching in the school during the day the sisters held night classes for girls who worked from a very young age in the cotton mills. In addition the bishop of the diocese asked them to look after the Borstal School for boys that he had founded. This was today’s equivalent of a school for young offenders.

That is why there was such an atmosphere of excited expectancy as the congregation gathered at the Church of Our Lady and the Apostles. Parishioners and past pupils were eagerly waiting to see the sisters and friends they had not met for many years.

*Remembering with thanksgiving* was the theme of the liturgy. The symbols presented in the opening rite reflected what everyone wanted to bring to the celebration.

- ◆ A plaque of the Holy Family, carried by a lay associate, reminded all that “we model our lives on the Holy Family of Nazareth”.
- ◆ The Bible, carried by Mary Slaven hfb, a past pupil, symbolised the gospel values, which the sisters’ work in education tried to inculcate in generations of pupils, as well as their prayer life and pastoral ministry.
- ◆ A parishioner carried a framed list of the names of the 36 sisters who had died in Stockport. The first name was that of Sr. Bernardine Walsh who had died in 1885.
- ◆ The ongoing mission of the *Holy Family* sisters in Stockport was symbolised by a lighted candle carried by Francis Nolan hfb.

The history and dedicated service of the sisters were recalled in the homily. There was also an attractive display of the history of the *Holy Family* Association in the Parish Hall where everyone gathered for refreshments after the Mass.

One of many notes received by the community after the celebration expressed the general feeling:

*“It was a wonderful experience to meet so many old friends and very moving to see again the girls we had taught so long ago. It was very humbling to hear them say that they remembered the things we taught them.”*

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### ■ 75 years in Magherafelt (Ireland)

*On 6 December, St. Mary’s Grammar School celebrated 75 years of existence. The school opened with one pupil, Molly Devane, who is remembered in the Province as Sr. Salome R.I.P. By the end of September 1927 there were five pupils. Today the school has over one thousand pupils, both boys and girls. We are indebted to Margaret Bradley hfb for the following details.*

The Archbishop of Armagh, Sean Brady, presided at the thanksgiving Eucharist. With him were the

parish clergy and two priest past pupils of the school. The liturgy was specially prepared for the

occasion and the choirs from the Junior and Senior schools surpassed themselves. Margaret draws attention to the fact that both music teachers are male and Protestant and one of them composed the music for the Magnificat.

After the Mass there were the customary congratulatory speeches. That of Canon O'Byrne, who spoke on behalf of the Board of Trustees, deserves special mention. He spoke in laudatory terms of the great contribution made by Teresa O'Connor hfb to education in the locality over so many years when she had been Principal of the school. He mentioned her great caring qualities and her commitment

to the school's development through "The Friends of St. Mary's".

Teresa, who is now Provincial Bursar for Britain and Ireland, was the last *Holy Family* sister to lead the school. Some years ago she retired and was succeeded by Ms. Una O'Kane, a past pupil of the school.

Seventeen *Holy Family* sisters were present for the occasion, of whom twelve were past pupils. Among the past pupils was Margaret Muldoon, Superior General of the Religious Institute, who took time to be there for the celebrations to the great delight of all.

Archbishop Brady launched *St. Mary's Story*, a book specially written for the occasion by Dr. Diarmuid O'Doibhlin from Magherafelt. The story is beautifully told and colourfully illustrated. Teresa was presented with a copy and one was given to Margaret for the archives in Rome.

Needless to say, lunch was served to all the guests during which many old friends met again and had time to look back together.

Margaret (Bradley) concludes by saying "it was a wonderful day in the life and history of a school that is still second to none in the whole of Northern Ireland".

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## Change is possible

*"Power to change" is a major, ongoing, all-Ireland Media Campaign mobilising Christians to share their faith, writes Elizabeth Murphy of the Moneenroe community in Ireland. It works through Church, Parish, and Prayer groups. The media campaign uses TV, the Press and a Website to give testimonies of changed lives to increase an awareness of Jesus Christ.*

The organisers are an interdenominational group of business people who invested more than a million euros in the project. It equips lay people through training workshops to become effective witnesses to Christ in their sphere of influence. The aim is to serve the Church, Parish or Prayer Group in its efforts to help people reach a personal relationship with God.

## Stories of change

Two speakers of different denominations visited the schools in the area and told their stories to teenagers in a very moving way. They also spoke in the parish church.

■ David Hamilton, originally from Cookstown, Co. Tyrone (Northern Ireland), spent sixteen years in prison for his activities as a member of the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) paramilitary unit. He became a Christian while in prison. At present he is co-ordinator of Teen-Challenge, Manchester (England), and directs a Centre called ARK, where they train street Samaritans to reach hurting youth.

■ Tom Kelly comes from the Turf Lodge area of Belfast (also Northern Ireland). He

joined the IRA (Irish Republican Army) at the age of fifteen. He spent ten years in various prisons and was very bitter when he was released. He married and his wife took him to Mount Melleray Cistercian Abbey. An American priest came into his life and helped him to accept Christ. Today, with an ex-loyalist (Unionist supporter), he heads an interdenominational ministry promoting reconciliation and forgiveness throughout Ireland, visiting schools, church groups and conflict areas North and South.

The organisers of *Power to Change* are very pleased with the success of their Media Campaign, which ran from 23 September – 8 November 2002. Two thousand people attended the final Youth Rally held in Dublin.

# Corporate Commitment

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## Two Letters

The Letter to a Madam printed below was produced by the Comboni Fathers of Castel Volturno in Italy. They offer pastoral care to immigrants in a parish called *S. Maria dell’Aiuto* (Our Lady of Help). Their parish includes a rehabilitation community for girls and young women rescued from the streets.

The second letter is addressed to the clients without whom there would be no demand for ‘sex work’, as it is often termed. It was written in the Jubilee Year by Bishop Raffaele Nogaro of the diocese of Caserta, which includes the parish of *S. Maria dell’Aiuto*. He is a frequent visitor to the rehabilitation community and is one of the few who realise that trafficking is not just a women’s issue but also a men’s.

### *Letter to a Madam\**

#### **Madam**

I see you often on Domitiana elegantly dressed, with tight clothes and precious rings, driving a beautiful car. I find you in grocery stores where you always buy expensive food, in pharmacies to buy condoms for your girls, in the Western Union where you go from time to time to send to Nigeria the money you got from the girls you exploit; or at the door of one of the many Christian churches of Castel Volturno.

I know that your life has not been easy. You, like many girls, left Nigeria some years ago after getting deep into debt and after going through a Voodoo rite that filled you with fear.

Following a dangerous journey, full of incident, you arrived in Italy and were bought by another madam as if you were a packet of cigarettes or a kilo of fish.’

You were pushed out half naked into the street and for years you were the victim of men who bought you, used you, humiliated you, and sometimes beat you up;

the victim of policemen who persecuted you, of many people who insulted and looked down upon you, of a madam who kept you in slavery, to whom, at the end of each day, you had to give the money you got, and who often mistreated you.

#### **You were a victim**

You were a victim of the cold that froze your exposed limbs in Winter (maybe you still feel even today the pain that the cold inflicted in your bones), a victim of the sun that burnt in Summer, of the rain and the wind from which you tried to defend yourself with big umbrellas, of the fear of catching some disease that would destroy your life for ever, of the fear of being arrested, of the terror of being killed by some mad customer, or by an enemy of your madam.

Finally the day came when you paid the last cent you owed your madam. At last you were free. To do what? *“To return to Nigeria as poor as I left... it does not bear*

*thinking about! I will stay in Italy”*. But you had no documents. Your madam had taken them from you to use for other girls. The only way out was to go on the street again on your own account. You only had to pay 250 Euro per month to the camorra and all the rest was yours.

After some months you had saved money, and a satanic idea came to your mind: “A madam exploited me for years. Why can’t I start to buy girls, send them to the streets and get rich on their work?” Thus, when you came to know that a group of girls had just arrived in Castel Volturno, you went to the ‘sale’ and bought your first slave... You instructed her how to do her work and sent her to the streets.

#### **There are many things I do not understand..**

- ◆ *How could you do that?*
- ◆ *Have you already forgotten how much you suffered when you were a victim of another madam?*

◆ *Don't you remember how hard it was for you to have lost your freedom, to be a slave?*

◆ *Have you forgotten the humiliations you endured from so many men who treated you like an animal and used you, making you do things you would be ashamed to talk about?*

◆ *Don't you remember the diseases you caught and those you were afraid of getting?*

◆ *Have you forgotten how much you were offended and destroyed in your dignity, and how many times you risked your life?*

◆ *Don't you remember how many times the police made you feel like a criminal, putting you under pressure, arresting you, threatening you?*

◆ *Have you forgotten the cold, the rain, the heat, the scars, and the violence that destroyed your young body?*

◆ *And if you remember all this, how can you think of making another girl go through the same things?*

◆ *Don't you have a heart any more? Does the suffering of others not bother you at all? Don't you ever think that that girl has a mother and a father too? Would you be pleased if all this happened to your daughter?*

◆ *Have you got the courage to look at yourself in the mirror, and wish another girl the same things you went through? And if you do, do you think you are still a human being?*

### **Let's speak about money for a moment, madam.**

From each of your girls you are demanding 50,000 Euro because you say you have spent a lot of money on them. But when you bought them you paid only 10,000 Euro each.

Don't you think you are exaggerating? Don't you think you are taking advantage of the situation? Don't you think you are exploiting them too much? That you are sucking their very blood? There is a limit even for thieves!

### **When I see you coming out of a church or carrying a crucifix I ask myself.**

"Who can her God be?" And I have the impression that the name of your god is "Money". \*

To "Money" you have consecrated your life, for money you are ready to do anything, and to get more and more of it you are willing to sacrifice the life of the girls you have bought, to destroy their dignity, their health, their future.

When you enter a church, when you sing hymns, when you pray, do you think the true God, the father of Jesus Christ listens to you?

I have studied the Bible for a long time. I can assure you that **the God of the Bible does not listen to your prayer.** He cannot listen to the prayer of someone who, even while praying, is destroying the life of those poor girls who have fallen into the trap?"

Instead, God is listening to the desperate cries for help that go up to heaven from the lips of those girls that you have made slaves. *"I have listened to the cry of my people, I have seen your sufferings and I am decided to save them"*. Exodus 3: 7 - 8

You have plenty of money, madam, but I am sure that in your heart there is no peace, because peace cannot exist where there is violence and exploitation.

God does not listen to your prayer, madam, and He cannot do it while you treat his beloved daughters in this way!

### **And yet God loves you too, because God loves everybody.**

And He is waiting for the day of your conversion, when you no longer use these girls to get rich, and you give them back their freedom.

On that day God will come and listen to your prayer. On that day ***"your light will shine like the dawn, you will invoke the Lord and He will answer you; you will ask for help and he will answer you: Here I am! Because you have destroyed oppression from your midst"*** Isaiah 58.

Repent and be converted, madam! You are still in time, and we will call you sister again. You will have somewhat less money, but you will find God's love again, as well as the friendship of the girls to whom you give back their freedom, the respect of all of us, and peace in your heart.

#### **(Footnote)**

The woman who runs a brothel, where these are legal, is called a Madam. It is also the name given to the woman who controls the sex slaves in the large towns and cities.

## *Open Letter to the Client*

Brother client

I thought of speaking to your heart because as a man, as a Bishop of this church, but above all with the heart of a father. I feel so much sadness faced with the drama and despair of so many of our foreign sisters constrained to work on the streets. Today, the God of history, the God of life is addressing this question to us all, and to you in particular:

### **Where is your sister? Where are your sisters?**

It is a question that we cannot escape because it touches the depths of our being as creatures, of our being as children of God. It is a question that disturbs us and wounds us and leaves a mark, like the mark left on Cain and all the Cains of history.

### **Where is your sister? Where are your sisters?**

You, brother client, know well where your sister is; you know well where your sisters are. They are there on the streets, in the freezing cold or the burning heat.. They are there awaiting your arrival and also to endure your humiliating violence in addition to all the pain they bear in their hearts and their flesh.

### **Where is your sister?**

You know that she is there, in that precise spot, in that corner of the street, under the sign of that hotel! And there, like merchandise for sale, with chains on her feet even if you do not see them because in fact she is not free. She lives in slavery, sold, bought, sold again, beaten, robbed of her youth, her dreams, her hopes, and her dignity as a woman.

### **Where is your sister?**

Today you cannot escape this question, brother client. You are responsible for this new and repugnant form of slavery. Your continuing demand renders this international trade in human beings, particularly women and children, ever more brutal and violent.

Therefore, do not ask for respect, or security; do not call for justice for yourself if you, by your private behaviour, encourage the dirty game of organised crime by keeping alive this ignominious form of slavery.

### **Where is your sister? Where are your sisters?**

Brother client, give up these demands from today!

You, too have a heart. You, too, are a father, a brother, a son...

Your sister has a face, a name, a heart, a story.

Listen to the silent cry of your sister.

It is a suffocating cry of pain and tears that furrows her heart and asks for help, freedom, the chance for a new life.

Brother client, there is need of you, of your human heart, your change of life to free together the hope in the life of so many sisters, so many of our sisters and daughters. May this Jubilee Year be a year of grace and freedom for them and for you.