

# Interconnections

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## Here in Rome

### The First Hundred Years

An incentive to go forward in creative fidelity

For weeks the Community had been busy with reflection and sharing on Margaret's centenary circular as well as other remote preparations of a more practical kind. These ended with a flurry of activity in every part of the house on 17<sup>th</sup>.

18 December 2003 - the big day finally arrived. A quiet excitement pervaded the corridors and breakfast table. Punctually at 7 a.m. a convoy of cars left in the grey light just before dawn and merged into



Communion during the Eucharistic celebration

the early morning traffic of Rome. On arriving in St. Peter's Square the grey sky had given way to a rosy blue of dawn seen through the branches of the 25m high Christmas tree dominating the Square. Inside and outside the Basilica, workers were already busy dusting and sweeping. Most of our sisters from the Italian Province and two sisters doing a renewal course in Rome joined us as we waited to descend to the Crypt and tomb of St. Peter where Mass was to be celebrated.

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At the tomb of St. Peter

Given Pierre Bienvenu Noailles' adhesion to the Church and the successors of Peter, it seemed the most appropriate place to give thanks for 100 years of approbation by the Holy See. Fr Eugene King o.m.i. (Assistant General) was our celebrant and his opening words were of joy that he was able to share with us in the thanksgiving celebration. He also assured us of the union and prayer of Father Steckling, Superior General, and of the Oblate community in Rome.

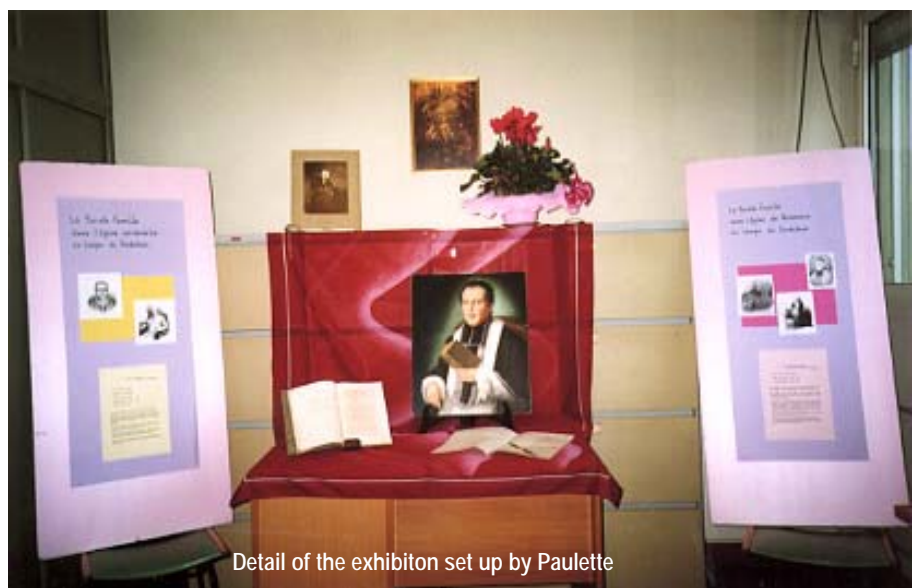
A beautifully prepared multilingual Eucharist followed in which all took part wholeheartedly. The texts

chosen were *Rev. 3:14; 20-22* and *Jn. 15:1-8*. and Eugene chose the second and related it to the occasion we were celebrating. Then came the renewal of vows in four languages. During the prayer of intercession we prayed for the whole people of God and the Family of Pierre Bienvenu past and present, asking that we will be able to respond to the needs of our time in creative fidelity to his spirit. After the final hymn, the letter confirming the blessing of the present Holy Father was read and acclaimed by the singing of the Magnificat.

At first it seemed that we were reluctant to leave the Crypt, which had brought us back to the beginnings of the Church and indeed to the spirit of the first Christians. Once outside, however, the cold sped us on our way again to the Generalate for a welcome cup of coffee and panettone. Now was the moment of greetings as exuberant as all Holy Family reunions are. (We were some 55 sisters.)

### A Varied Programme

The general programme for the rest of the day foresaw time to visit the exhibitions before gathering in the big meeting room. Here M. Carmen Vilardell, using all her artistic skills, had prepared a bilingual audiovisual presentation.



Detail of the exhibiton set up by Paulette

No words were spoken but images and text led us to deep reflection on the spirit of our Holy Family and pointed us towards the future.

A profound but pregnant silence reigned. Afterwards Adela invited those who wished, to share their thoughts in the time remaining before lunch. Fr. King joined us for both the presentation and lunch. This was a family feast, our usual work suspended for the day, so we sat a long time enjoying each others' company, commenting on what we had experienced and felt, catching up on family news.

Finally, at about 15.30 yet another (but smaller) convoy set out as our Italian sisters left to arrive home before dark – it is a long way to Naples. They were very happy and we were delighted that so many of them were able to come. The spirit of Pierre Bienvenu is alive and well in Italy.

## EXTRACTS FROM THE HOMILY

**T**his place where we are celebrating is highly symbolic. The liturgical time is highly symbolic as we live the final week of Advent in communion with Mary and Joseph – in faithful longing and expectation.

Today's liturgy, which you have chosen is full of images. I was gripped by three of them: the pruning of the branches, the vinedresser, and creative fidelity.

*-The pruning of the branches:* At this time of year the pruning hooks come out. Faithful to the promise of nature the pruner prepares the bush or tree for the surge of creation in spring. This centenary has been prepared by forty years of pruning since Vatican II. You have watched branches disappear and works closed – in a necessary act of ecclesial renewal that you have shared with all other congregations

*-The vinedresser:* God in the Family of the Trinity has been the all-enveloping guardian of your charism. You are the work of God the Father's creating hand, you are the family of God the Son drawing all women and men to himself, you are the bearers of a divine fertility in the working of the Holy Spirit, creating and recreating your charism for the life of the Church and the world.

*-Creative fidelity:* When I read the letter of your Superior General I remembered what diocesan clergy and laity have taught me repeatedly. They look to religious to exercise a freedom, a creativity to risk and to do things that being committed to a particular church makes hard to accomplish.

Your history of generating religious, active and contemplative, while associating clergy and laity in your mission and charism is a remarkable feat of creativity. I could not help thinking of a challenge for the future, that your creativity find a way to bring together women and men in the life of the Church and the world. Creativity has not been exhausted in this dimension of life.

In your centenary celebration, history justifies your dreaming of the future like Isaiah in this time of Advent.

## TWO EXHIBITIONS

*“Celebrations of anniversaries are times to look back, to remember, to give thanks and also to look forward with hope,”* Margaret’s letter of 18 September reminded us. To help us to remember and give thanks two separate, but interrelated, exhibitions were prepared for all to visit in the interval after coffee.



The first, prepared by Paulette who was at hand to explain and answer our questions, situated us in the Church of Bordeaux and the universal Church during our Founder’s lifetime. It showed the various editions of the Constitutions and Rules written by him, in their manuscript and printed versions. In pre-computer times, what an arduous task, though undoubtedly a labour of love on the part of our Good Father. He himself said: *“The work was difficult; it required much time and experience.”*



The second exhibition, fruit of M. Carmen Fernandez Shaw’s work in the archives, spanned the century 1903 – 2003. We journeyed along the path of evolution from the Decree of Approbation of Pope St Pius X on December 18 1903 and the presentation of the new Constitutions by Mother M. Nativity Lionnet. In her Circular, (24 December 1903) she wrote *“I expressly use the word “new”, my dear daughters, to make it understood that if, like each one of you, we wished to maintain the integrity of the Good Father’s Work, we*

*would have to resign ourselves to these modifications. Without them the Constitutions would not have received the sanction of the Church, and what is more, we know that the Good Father himself would have accepted them with joy.”*

These sentiments were repeated in different words as we wound our way through the succession of Superiors General from Mother Nativity to the present day as each presented new editions, modifications, or clarifications as in the various forms of our Corporate Commitment and Chapter Decrees.

Our last stop was 2003 and with Margaret’s **Call to Creative Fidelity** we began to *“look forward with hope...As we respond to the Chapter call to ‘go forward’ can we dream of new possibilities?...Let us have faith in the fact that God did not give us a spirit of timidity but rather a spirit of power and of love.”*



For the text of the Pope’s message see page 20



## Botswana

# AFRICA

### Masunga Catholic Mission - Brief news

On 21 November General Councillors Geneviève and Winie arrived to visit the community. They were warmly welcomed by both the sisters and the local people. It was a wonderful grace for the community and an opportunity for them to strengthen their

links with the whole Institute.

The visitors were able to assist at the first baptismal celebration held in the mission

church on 23 November. Eighteen people embraced the Catholic faith, so it was a day of great rejoicing.

The parishioners organised a sponsored walk to raise funds for the building of the church. The sisters also joined in.

Another cause for joy was the arrival of Sr. Wivine Kwili, originally from the D.R. Congo Delegation, to join the community. Wivine had been delayed in South Africa because of travel documents. She was also preparing for her final profession.

### Cries of Botswana

Botswana is said to have the highest rate of HIV/AIDS in Africa, if not in the world. Our sisters can see for themselves that many people are dying from and living with the virus. Awareness programmes as well as prayer services are being organised. The focus is on family life and fidelity. Three of the Masunga sisters participated in the awareness programme which was very much appreciated by the people.

## Rwanda

### From the land of the thousand hills

*Clementine Sekantsi, the newest arrival at the community of Rushaki, shares her first impressions and gives an account of the events that struck her since her arrival.*

### Women celebrate together

The women of the rural areas of Rwanda had a special holiday on 15 October. It was a day of



Scholastica hfb with Mama Apolinaria, a widow whose daughter is mentally ill and who has a son of 8 years

celebration and feasting but also of discussion on matters of particular concern to women. For this reason it was a rather historic occasion. Clementine tells us that in the past women were not allowed to feast in this way. It was only the men who were allowed to get together and discuss

issues of development in the country. Women were to remain at home and bear children.

The *Holy Family* sisters joined the women in their area. Everybody was very happy to have the sisters who live and work among them share in their important day. The celebrations were well organised and everything went off successfully. The women had prepared music, dances and speeches. They also invited the regional authorities. The latter seem to have been attentive to the aspirations of the women.

The women were very happy because they now see a way forward for the improvement of their lot in Rwanda. They declared that they also are part of the nation and their message is loud and clear for those who have ears to hear. Clementine was impressed by the behaviour of the men who were present and who helped to harmonise the women's day.

### **The Social Centre**

At the Centre the sisters help young girls and women who never had an opportunity to go to school. The girls live far away and some have to walk for three hours or more each way to reach the Centre. Their determination is great and they



Social Centre, Rushaki

do not want to waste a single day on holidays.

They are taught religion, reading, writing and sewing which they like very much. They also do agriculture and put what they learn to good use. Visiting the families the sisters can see the difference between those who attended the Centre and those who did not.

### **Nutrition Centre**

The area around Rushaki is extremely poor and people often die of hunger. There are many cases of malnutrition because of poverty, but also ignorance. The birth rate is high with women giving birth nearly every year. When children get sick they are taken first of all to the traditional healers who see

everything in terms of witchcraft. When they fail to cure the child the parents come to the Centre where the children are looked after with the help of a nutritionist. Unfortunately, it is often too late.

Clementine relates the case of a man and wife who separated. The father took the two children aged 5 and 2 with him. After a long time he realised he could not look after them and early one morning he left them at the door of their mother's house.

The 5 year-old was a moving skeleton and, in spite of all the efforts of the people at the Centre, he died. She had never seen a more touching sight. There is hope for the second child.



## Peru

# AMERICAS

### Children living with HIV/AIDS

No matter how paradoxical it may sound, children diagnosed as HIV positive or living with AIDS are being made happy by a programme called *Happy Life*. With outside help, it provides them with a nutritious diet and help in developing psychomotor skills. Their mothers accompany them and join in group therapy sessions.

Silvia Coronel hfb of the Community of Condeville, a helper at the centre, finds the

group sessions a great help to her in her personal journey. She mentions a few of the participants' testimonies.

"Here in this place, the San Camillo Home, I find a space where I can speak freely about my problems and my suffering. Elsewhere I have to say that my little son has leukaemia, not because I am ashamed of the illness but because his friends and companions might ostracise him out of fear."

Another mother said it had become known at the school her 11 year-old son was



A mother watches over her child who is HIV positive

attending that he had the virus. He was made to sit apart in the classroom. She had to change his school as he did not want to go any more.

She emphasised that it was the parents who were most reluctant to prepare for and speak about the topic. The teachers understood. One of her alternatives was to go to the schools and speak about it and the means of prevention hoping in this way to overcome the prejudices that are the fruit of ignorance. All were in agreement about the importance of being informed about how the virus is spread and what precautions to take.

May the Lord continue to strengthen these mothers (many of whom have since passed away) and grandparents so that we may learn to resist through love as they do.



Women's support group, Peru



## Philippines

### Asia

#### Sorsogon Diocesan Pastoral Assembly

*In his Apostolic letter, Novo Millennio Ineunte, Pope John Paul II urges us to "cast our nets into the deep". That is perhaps why the acronym, DEEP (Diocesan Ecclesial Evangelisation Programme), a plan of action drawn up by, and for, the faithful of the Diocese of Sorsogon has a special significance for them at this time.*

*The plan was elaborated at the Seminary of Our Lady of Penafrancia, Sorsogon as a follow-up to the Diocesan Synod of 2000. It is hoped that the objectives and activities contained in it will begin to be implemented from 1 July 2004.*

Aquinas Cyril hfb reports that the Assembly was a truly inclusive event with participants from every sector of the church. Newly appointed Bishop Arturo Bastes SVD presided over the gathering of about 165 people. They included priests, women and men religious representing each congregation, and laity from all walks of life

representing all the organisations/commissions of the diocese.

An encouraging sign was that lay people were in the majority with a good number of men present. The women contributed well and were listened to. Throughout, the atmosphere was one of enthusiasm and the bishop was both positive and encouraging in his guidance.

The homily at the opening Mass was on the gospel of the widow's mite. The homilist made the point that the widow was a typical member of the

poorest class. She offered the two smallest coins, all she had, thus endangering her own existence in order that the liturgy in the temple could continue. God alone was her security. She gave where it really hurt.

With this in mind, the appeal to the participants at the end could not fall on deaf ears. They were urged to ensure that the three days work did not end up in a document only. DEEP is the responsibility of each one. Its success will depend on the conversion and commitment of everyone in the diocese.



Participants at a previous Diocesan Synod

# Sri Lanka

## International Acknowledgement for Peace Efforts

### MultiMedia International Awards 2003

*An account of the project, Girls bonding for Peace, an initiative of the Inter-Congregational Women's Desk, Colombo, figured in our September edition (no. 10). To further their aims the group members, sisters from several congregations, make use of 'multimedia'. That is why it seemed to be an ideal entrant for this year's MultiMedia International (MMI) Awards competition, an event held every two years by this organisation (see box).*

#### About the event

Beginning in 1991, MMI began to offer encouragement to religious who are creative in using the media through an awards competition. Member congregations were encouraged to nominate candidates for the award and to ask them to submit some of their work for judging. Over the years awards have been won by religious working in every part of the world.

Some entries are highly professional in quality even though done by non-professionals. Others are produced with strictly limited resources by people with little formal media training. The main criterion for judging is the effectiveness of the project in furthering the gospel message. The committee interprets media very broadly and entries include print, photography, audio-visual, videos, web-sites...

This year, in view of the theme for World Communications Day, *The Communications Media at the Service of Authentic Peace in the Light of 'Pacem in Terris'*, the organisers decided to award a special prize for the entry representing the greatest contribution to furthering the gospel message of peace.

#### What is MMI?

MMI is an association which seeks membership from religious congregations and similar groups in Rome. It was founded by Fr Stephen Bamberger S.J. in 1970 to raise awareness of the growing importance of the media and communication technology in the world and to stimulate and help religious to use them in their ministries.

Today, when the Church in general and religious congregations in particular are keenly aware of the power of the media and the advantages of the media and modern information technology, MMI offers religious the opportunity of working together to use them more effectively.

To fulfill its purposes MMI maintains a resource center with equipment and other material for the use of its members. It also organizes seminars, workshops, projects and other services for its members.

#### Peace Prize 2003

##### *Girls bonding for peace*

This was the title of the winning peace entry which Eudoxie Sebamalai hfb was encouraged to submit on behalf of her group. It is described as follows in the listing of entries:

"This a project of the Inter-Congregational Women's Desk in Sri Lanka that depicts: 'Media at the Service of Authentic Peace'. The various materials sent include a brochure explaining the project, a bookmark, pen-friend letters, greetings, a children's periodical, slogans, an audio-cassette, 5 summary reports, a photo album covering the project, and posters.

## Judges' Report

Title: Girls bonding for peace  
Format: Campaign  
Rating: 10/10

Additional comments of judges

Message: A multimedia campaign to promote peace between opposing factions

Quality: Good steps thought out for an overall campaign.  
An example of creating a large campaign with relatively low costs.  
Very good audience research.

Communication: Simple, clear, very interesting, highly motivating for peace, strongly linked to the culture.

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Another comment:

"I think there are no doubts for the peace prize. I really enjoyed the campaign "Girls bonding for peace".

## Congratulations

Our warm congratulations and continuing prayerful support to Eudoxie and her companions. When they started the project they had only one thought in mind: to help bring peace and reconciliation to their beloved country.

We hope this international recognition will encourage them to continue in their efforts and be an inspiration to others in similar situations of conflict to believe that there is always something we can do.

The next MMI Awards Event will be in the year 2005. Perhaps another *Holy Family* sister will have something to offer then.



Winifreda Wasalanthrige, General Councillor,  
receiving the trophy on behalf of Eudoxie



## EUROPE

### **Caring for the Senior Citizens (Attention pour les Seniors)**

In our February issue, no. 8, we reported on the work of a group of volunteers in Antwerp whose main aim is the visitation of the elderly in their society. Recently the organisation celebrated its 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At a celebration in the Sports Centre at Vergen Street, Antwerp, the role of the 75 volunteers was given special prominence. Among those singled out was Leona van den Abeele hfb who has given 5 years of dedicated service to the cause of helping the senior citizens feel less isolated. She and several other long-serving volunteers were presented with flowers as a mark of gratitude and affection.

### **Missionary Vitality**

The Province has always been a sending country with sisters going mainly to Africa and the Americas. It maintains strong links with its missionaries abroad who come back from time to time to renew themselves spiritually and physically and share their experiences. Those who return

## Belgium-Antwerp

permanently find outlets for their dedication in the local church. They also come together for special celebrations such as the National Pilgrimage of Missionaries at Banneux.

This year a group of *Holy Family* sisters who had worked in Africa, Yvette Mundele, Simone Bothyne, Madeleine Morlion, Rachel Van den Flaurve and Maria Pernet (Belgium-Antwerp), with Marie Rose Soubise and Leo De Visser (France-Liège), went to the sanctuary for the 10<sup>th</sup> Mission Day.

It was the feast of St. Monica and the theme for the day was: *In the footsteps of St. Monica*. During the Eucharist her way of life was explained as a call and an example.

The opening speaker referred to the great faith and persevering prayer of St. Monica that secured the conversion of Augustine. Following the example of the Blessed Virgin she offered her son to the Church. The

congregation was invited to become more aware of the place women hold in the universal mission of the church. St. Augustine himself, in his Confessions, describes the part played by his mother in his conversion. Several extracts from his account were read.

During the day there was a moving testimony from a missionary working in Venezuela, as well as



workshops for those who wished to take part. They could also simply spend the time walking in the magnificent surroundings or in quiet reflection and prayer. Altogether, it was a very beneficial time for meetings and seeing old friends.

## Britain and Ireland

### The Closing of a Chapter

*On 15 July 2003, Marymount Convent School (England) where the Holy Family sisters had worked for 125 years, closed its doors for the last time. The final 'school Mass' was celebrated in the school on 7 July by the parish priest. In his farewell address the Chair of the Board of Governors said: "For me this was a Mass of thanksgiving for 125 years of education in Marymount and also to lend support and prayers for all currently involved with the school."*

*He went on to urge those concerned not to let sadness at the closure cloud all the good that had been achieved over the years. He evoked memories, inspiring and humorous, of the religious and lay staff who had devoted themselves to their work so that during the last school inspection, the inspector could comment on the "welcoming, unique, caring ethos as well as the high standard of education" that prevailed there. That is why we are happy to note it was not the end of childcare at Marymount, as the following news release indicates.*

#### News Release

##### CARING FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CONTINUES AT MARYMOUNT

The sisters of the *Holy Family* of Bordeaux have offered temporary accommodation in the former Marymount School to the Catholic Children's Society enabling them to extend their work in the Wirral area.

The Society is the social and community work agency of the Catholic Church in the Shrewsbury Diocese working with disadvantaged children and families to help build strong communities.

Following a major review of its activities, the Society has expanded its Family Group project and set up two new projects, the Home Visiting Service and the Second Step project. Progressively, from November, projects will start to operate from Marymount.

Ged Edwards, the Director, commented, "I am delighted that we are able to expand our current services and introduce new services to help disadvantaged children and families in Wirral. I am grateful to the *Holy Family* Sisters for making available the school to us while we look for larger permanent Head Office premises".

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## France-Liège

### An apostle even in sleep

**S**uzanne Rouanet describes the following beautiful experience from the community of Toulon. This community is one of the houses dedicated to the care of the elderly, *Holy Family* sisters and lay people. There is usually a night nurse on duty as some of them require constant attention. The hours are often long and taxing for the night nurse.

On one occasion Ginette, whose turn it was to watch at night, felt tired and on edge after many calls for her attention. She wondered how she was going to cope until morning. After thinking a while, she went into Sr. Amelia's room and sat in the armchair. Amelia was sleeping peacefully and unaware of her presence. Half an hour went by and Ginette

felt pacified and went back to her work.

In the morning before going home she met one of the sisters and told her what had happened. "I can't get over it!" she exclaimed. "A deep inner peace emanated from the room where Amelia was sleeping and I felt it was really the presence of God."

## Building relationships, an ongoing task

When the community of Marseille, Prébois, moved into their home in an apartment block three years ago their first concern was how to create links with their neighbours who were obviously pleased to have the sisters among them.

They soon discovered which families had affinities and used this to begin their contacts. At the end of two or three months they had had several evening meetings with a few families, explaining to them their wish to be better acquainted.

The community was very touched by the spontaneity with

which everyone responded to the invitations, showing great sensitivity towards the sisters. They were particularly moved when the two Israeli families in the building answered their invitation and arrived at the door with their arms full of flowers.

Afterwards their neighbours said to them, "You have revived the bonds that used to exist among us but had got stretched with time. Thanks to you sisters there is another atmosphere in this building."

During chance meetings in the lift or the corridors they brought up the possibility of a gathering

at their place for Christmas. It was well received. A fortnight before Christmas the sisters put an invitation in all the letter boxes inviting those who wished to come and share the message of Christmas with them. Eight people turned up. It was a long evening that finished with Christmas songs and sharing the goodies brought by each one.

Ms B, a declared non-believer, said on departing that it was an event to keep up. For three years it has been done for Advent and Lent. Ms. B.'s husband said to them a month ago, "Perhaps I'll come to the next meeting."

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## The fields of Boaz

The event related in the Book of Ruth 2, 3-10 provided the inspiration for the name of the Association, The Fields of Boaz. We read there how he welcomed Ruth and defended her from the racism and sexism of his harvesters and included her among his workers. This Association is composed of several religious communities of women who are involved with immigrant women awaiting refugee status.

The places where these women are accommodated, welcomed and assisted are so many "fields" where it is hoped they will be helped to find a place in the country to which they have fled for refuge and protection. The Provincial and

Council of France worked hard to make the project a success and the community of Saint Mandé opened its doors to them. Two rooms were put at their disposal. The directors of the Association can receive and accompany the women individually in their different needs.

They, the community, admit quite honestly that it was not an easy decision to make, giving up those rooms even though they were not being used. The experience has proved to them



that with their small means they can realise great things in the line of the Corporate Commitment and help these women to regain their dignity.

# Italy

## Prison Apostolate by Correspondence

*“More than once I have noted that the Lord likes to work in silence, almost in obscurity, in land where nothing could be expected to grow, where everything is dry and only stones and thorns are to be seen. And yet even a few drops of dew can make a flower sprout there...”*

With these words Frederica hfb gives some indication of what her accompaniment of two men detained in prison is like. She feels she can be a ray of light which they await and to which they cling. She is grateful to God for using her to reach their hearts.

One of them, Tullio, wrote to her in June of the joy he felt at having been given 4 hours leave to attend his daughter's first communion. He said it was a marvellous day, one of the

happiest of his life. Seeing his daughter receive the Host brought tears to his eyes. His eldest daughter noticed it and remarked, “Papa, you're crying.” He told her it was because he was so happy. They went together to the restaurant while the guards kept a discreet distance. They even prolonged the leave by nearly two hours. Two days later he had still not got over the joy of the occasion nor been able to get used to the prison again.

Tullio's constant preoccupation is for his children and Frederica encourages him to think positively of the future. Through his work in the prison kitchen Tullio is able to send some money to his family. It helps to pay the rent of €450 a month as his wife earns only €50. His faith is a great help to him and enables him to see his life as it has been and realise that he

deserves the penalty he is paying for his crimes. In the month of May he entrusted himself and his children to the Lord and the Blessed Virgin, that their future may be more peaceful.

Throughout his letters, Tullio displays great esteem for Frederica who is his confidant and friend. He listens to what she says to him and feels that he is becoming a better character. He is more outgoing than before. From her he learned the value of small things, for example, that a smile can alleviate the gloom of someone he might like to avoid.

Frederica concludes: “If these little drops of dew were to multiply through correspondence who knows how many flowers would spring from the rocks! I ask the Lord to enlighten many people to be close to those who suffer.”

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The Polish Provincial Leadership Team  
In Rome, May 2003, to work with the General Leadership Team



L. to R. Barbara Sygitowicz, Dominika Cendrowska, Marta Mierzejewska, Kinga Bartos (Provincial), Iwona Debska

# Spain

## The Blind empowered by the Blind

*CECO (Ciegos Españoles Católicos), is an association for the Catholic blind of Spain. It attempts to cater for needs that are not met by public services. It is composed of Christian believers who are either blind or visually impaired. CECO is affiliated to the International Federation of Associations for Blind Catholics. They meet annually to pray together, deepen their faith and thus stimulate one another to help others with the same difficulties.*

**M**aria Teresa Otermin of the community of Angli (Barcelona), herself visually impaired, describes this year's annual meeting held on 24 and 25 May. In all, 61 people from different parts of Spain - Madrid, Alicante, Castellón, Zaragoza, Bilbao and of course Barcelona - took part. For practical purposes they were divided into six groups of ten or eleven persons. After the

opening prayer on the first day, each group shared what they had lived during the past year in accordance with the guidelines of CECO: prayer, formation and service. They added personal testimonies and experiences expressed with simplicity and freedom. All this was a source of enrichment for everyone.

On Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Eucharist was celebrated at the shrine of Our Lady of Monserrat in Barcelona. It was very touching to hear the Word of God proclaimed by a blind participant reading the text in Braille. The cane of the blind was the symbol carried in the offertory procession. They also did all the singing. To fulfil their aims and coordinate efforts, the Barcelona group meets once a month.

This year they have taken the following topics:

- the blind and the Christian community,

- Apostolic Experience with the blind,
- an Advent retreat,
- the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.

At the beginning and end of the course they have a celebration of the Eucharist.

In planning this course they bore in mind the importance of inserting the blind into the life of the parish. The youth especially ask for greater participation. They would like to be one more element in the parish, to be admitted to full participation in the lay movements of the parish and be helped to realise the mission the Lord is asking of them in their present situation.

We must never forget, says Maria Teresa, that the blind in general have had a painful experience of God. They have to sharpen the inner light of faith insistently asking the Spirit for that light.

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## Walking with the immigrants

**T**he four sisters comprising the community of Río Urederra (Pamplona) live in a small apartment block owned by Caritas. Other apartments in the block are reserved for immigrant families who are given shelter there until they can find accommodation and employment for themselves.

The sisters work in collaboration with the social

worker to give a warm, friendly welcome to those who come. In so far as they are able, they try to make the family's stay in the centre as pleasant as possible, creating close bonds that continue once they have left the house. They share practically everything with the tenants, their preoccupations and joys, as well as the daily household tasks and meals in the house.

Up to now, the sisters say, 19 families in all have passed through the residence and, at the moment of writing, they had 4. Most of them have achieved their fundamental objectives of getting housing and employment. Some have even got work and residence permits because of a child born in Spain. The first family to stay at the residence is negotiating to gather the whole family

together by bringing their three children from their country of origin.

Not everything is positive. Single mothers face enormous difficulties in confronting the reality of a society that marginalizes them. One of the mothers they had welcomed felt it necessary to send her child of a few months back to

Ecuador with her aunt. Another had to separate temporarily from her year-old son, leaving him in fosterage, while she worked as a live-in domestic servant.

Claudia finished her time at the residence and things did not go well for her even though she had a work permit. She could not find accommodation and

having a young child made it difficult for her to fit into the usual working hours.

*The community is grateful for the interest and support of the Province and the sisters. Several visited them to see the house and rejoice at how they were responding to such a topical issue.*

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## Echoes of a Centenary, 1903 – 2003

*Villa Elvira, in the diocese of San Sebastian, is a community of elderly religious today, but the memory of another era when the Holy Family sisters dedicated themselves to health care in the district remains alive. The celebration of the centenary of the community on 27 September was an opportunity for all, the Province and the local people, to give thanks to God for the years of devoted, disinterested service given by the dispensary to so many migrant families from other parts of the country.*

As everywhere, the beginnings were not easy. The sisters realised the need to visit the sick they were caring for and go out towards the most needy. Soon, their commitment and professionalism were acknowledged by the families of their patients. The collected testimonies to their dedication are numerous.

The Eucharist, presided over by a Vicar of the diocese, was the high point of the thanksgiving celebration. The church was packed with people come to share their joy. The congregation included the Provincial leader, Sabina, and two members of her Council, sisters from the surrounding *Holy Family* and other religious communities, friends and neighbours.

In the homily, based on Matthew 25, 34 - 40, the Vicar stressed the pastoral zeal of the sisters who gave concrete expression in their health ministry to the words: "I was hungry and you fed me, sick and you visited me". They were conscious of what the language of goodness, compassion, tenderness and service can bring to those who understand it, and that is everyone. Referring to the example and spirituality of Pierre Bienvenu Noailles he went on to demonstrate how the religious of the *Holy Family*

had exemplified it by their commitment to the Church in the parish and the diocese, through their varied services. It was a particular joy for him to see how integrated they were in the local church, present in a human community, sharing the sorrows and joy of those around them. In this way only will they be able to open new forms of mutual support and collaboration.

A candle was brought in the Offertory procession, a luminous symbol of the faith, hope and love with which our sisters served the sick and needy, fulfilling in that way the beatitudes of the Reign of God. After the Eucharist everyone assembled again for refreshments and conviviality.

The community of Villa Elvira would like to express its gratitude to all those who were present at the event as well as to those who sent messages in any form and were present in spirit.

# A Holy Family Retreat

*The Provincial and Council of Spain organised a Holy Family Retreat for the whole Province. Here is their account of the event from its inception.*

The first step was a communication in these terms:

*“To continue on our way, and TOGETHER, we have for some time been listening to an inner and exterior call that developed into a desire to make a Holy Family Retreat. Our wish is to deepen our spirituality and incarnate it more deeply within us so that it may be a greater source of life guiding our steps...”*

It is now possible to speak of an experience. In September the retreat had already been given to 12 groups comprising about 30 sisters over a period of 7 days. Two remained for the month of October, mainly communities of elderly sisters.

The starting point was a vision, an intuition and a call. They relied on a text drawn up by a group of sisters in the Province who had done a seminar on the intuition of the Founder's Charism. Since the Noailles Sessions at general level and the sessions on the Sources in the Province a group of sisters expressed the desire to continue deepening the Charism. Five years of reflection, study and prayer bore fruit in a text entitled, *Seminar on the Charism*, that they offered to all.

When this work was being presented, the Provincial felt keenly what richness it would bring to all the sisters of the Province if they could devote a lengthy period, in silence, to



dwell on this charismatic intuition that we are living. The object would not be to know more but to savour and take delight in it.

Taking this text as a starting point the Council went on to work out the steps necessary to implement the idea, not without some fear and trembling but also in the

certitude that the Holy Spirit was guiding them. They entrusted the Formation Commission with the task of continuing the preparation of the Retreat. It was to be distributed over seven days, with prayers, texts, and symbols.

Once the materials were prepared the question arose as to who the accompaniers were to be. The Provincial convoked some sisters to the Council, including the Ongoing Formation Commission, some sisters who had done the Seminar and others, to the number of 19. This group made the retreat in March 2003 with the material already prepared. They then evaluated the experience and made changes where needed. It had proved to be a profound and joyous exercise.

Another strong support was prayer. All the sisters joined in prayer for the retreat during the period from March to October. They also asked the other members of the Family, the contemplative communities that they know, and other people to pray for the same intention.

When the project was presented to the Province it received a warm response.



Many remembered the other Retreat on the Constitutions in 1989 and some sisters wanted to have a similar experience. The groups were formed, locations chosen to suit each one's convenience and two sisters were sent as companions to the various groups of retreatants.

After this unique retreat the general feeling of the sisters was:

*"We have been to Nazareth".*

Their sentiments are expressed in words such as: grace, joy, peace, gratitude, gift, commitment, richness of the charism, light and strength for the mission and such exclamations as:

*"I learned nothing; I tasted everything."*

*"How rich our charism is! It contains such depth and life that it has the power to reorient ours."*

With the whole Province we give thanks to God for this event and pray that it be a continuing source of inspiration and energy for each of the sisters.

## “And they followed him”

Jn 1:37

In St. John's gospel (1:29-51) each one makes Jesus known to family and friends in a personal way in response to their seeking. John the Baptist preached a baptism of conversion. He pointed out Jesus to his disciples as *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”*. Sharing the messianic hope of the people of Israel, Andrew told his brother Simon: *“we have found the Messiah that is to say the Christ”*. Nathaniel was studying the Scriptures. Philip said to him: *“we have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote”*.

Each of them addresses the Lord in a unique way thus expressing his own expectation of salvation. Nathaniel recognises Jesus and proclaims: *You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!* Andrew and the other disciple call him *“Rabbi - which means teacher”*. The first disciples of the Lord are Jews formed in the Tradition of Israel and its awaiting the Messiah. They saw in Jesus the One sent by God and they followed him. He approached them and his coming filled them with joy and set them off on the adventure of announcing the Good News of Salvation.

After the experience of Pentecost which made people say of the disciples: *“are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ... in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's wonderful deeds!”* (Acts 2:7-8). Cardinal P. EYT said in 2000 that a priest is sent *“to an entire population who, in the section of the town and in the villages, far exceed in number and diversity the minority group of Catholics (in Gironde at least)”*. The priest brings the Beatitudes to every place and to every milieu and everyone can hear the Good News.

Like Nathaniel, the priest lives in the shadow of the Word; like John the Baptist, he cries out in the desert of our world and proclaims *“be converted and believe in the Good News”*; like Peter, he guides the community of believers who are confided to him along the way of unity and peace, of pardon and reconciliation; like Andrew who revealed his joy at being like his Master, the Messiah, Lamb of God, in his martyrdom, the priest gives his life.

Sr. Bernadette Taurinya  
La Solitude - Martillac



SECRETARERIE D'ÉTAT

PREMIÈRE SECTION - AFFAIRES GÉNÉRALES

N. 549.390

From the Vatican, 3 December 2003

Reverend Mother,

You asked for the Blessing of his Holiness on the occasion of the centenary of the approbation of your Constitutions by Pope Saint Pius X. Having been informed of this event the Holy Father has asked the Cardinal Secretary of State to send you, in his name, the following message.

HAVING BEEN INFORMED OF THE CENTENARY OF THE APPROBATION BY POPE ST. PIUS X OF THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF BORDEAUX, THE HOLY FATHER UNITES HIMSELF IN PRAYER TO THE JOY OF ALL THE RELIGIOUS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS, PRIESTS AND LAITY OF THE SPIRITUAL FAMILY OF PIERRE BIENVENU NOAILLES. HE THANKS GOD FOR THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE WORK OF THIS PRIEST, TEACHER AND SPIRITUAL GUIDE FROM BORDEAUX, WHO DID SO MUCH TO SPREAD THE VALUES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION BY PROPOSING THE HOLY FAMILY AS MODELS. REJOICING IN THE MISSIONARY CHARISM OF THE CONGREGATION, WHICH HAS SPREAD TO FOUR CONTINENTS, HIS HOLINESS ASKS THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BREATHE ANEW ON ALL CELEBRATING THIS ANNIVERSARY. MAY THEY TAKE TO HEART THEIR MISSION OF PRAYER AND APOSTOLATE IN THE SERVICE OF THE WHOLE CHURCH. CONFIDING THEM ALL TO THE INTERCESSION OF MARY AND JOSEPH, THE HOLY FATHER WILLINGLY GRANTS THEM HIS APOSTOLIC BLESSING.

CARDINAL ANGELO SODANO  
SECRETARY OF STATE

Reverend Mother, I am happy to send this message and to assure you of my prayerful remembrance.

+ L. Sandri  
Substitut

Reverend Mother Margaret MULDOON  
Superior General  
of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux  
ROME

# Corporate Commitment

## European Social Forum

*The European Social Forum (ESF) took place in Paris from 12 to 15 November 2003. Two Holy Family representatives, Bernadette Balzan, coordinator of the French JPIC team and Maria Teresa Florensa, international JPIC promoter (Rome), participated. The following is Maria Teresa's account.*

The activities of the Forum were held in four different locations: Saint Denis, Bobigny, Ivry-sur-Seine and La Villette in Paris itself. The vast numbers of participants from every country in Europe, as well as some from other continents, made this necessary. Everyone came together, however, for the great closing demonstration on the evening of Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup>.



Altogether, there were more than 300 seminars and workshops scattered throughout the geographical area of Paris. The themes were as follows:

### **For a Europe of peace and solidarity:**

- North-South relations
- the debt
- the enlargement of the European Union
- relations with all the Mediterranean countries

### **For a social and democratic Europe**

- avoiding discrimination and exclusion
- striving for a “human” economy of solidarity
- freedom of information, culture and education

Each day we chose the seminars or workshops that interested us most, knowing that by so doing we were omitting many others that were also very important. Afterwards, we shared our impressions and the different information we had gathered.

It was very enriching to participate in those groups. When I begin to think of what struck me most in this Forum, I can say with some surprise that it was a feeling of HOPE. It is not easy for me to explain why because feelings cannot be explained; they are felt.

I have spent years observing, with great concern, the situation of the world at all levels. In the past year my preoccupation frequently changed to despondency and pessimism, two not very christian sentiments certainly but which came in the guise of 'realism'. I am not now going to say that I see everything as rose-coloured. That is not the case. But I believe that I discovered the action of the Spirit that blows where it wills and where we least expect it. The Spirit can open up ways we could not imagine, write straight with crooked lines and open doors where there was nothing more than a thick wall.

That is what I intuited profoundly as I walked with thousands of people of all ages, nationalities, languages and cultures. Hundreds and thousands of young people were in Paris for the forum; they had certainly not come as tourists. Most of them belonged to communities, groups, movements or associations that work directly to create a different world in the places where they live, and who are capable of lifting their eyes to see beyond their immediate surroundings so as to create a different world for ALL.

Sometimes it is a dream but it is also a reality that will take shape and grow strong. It is a network that we can visualise in our imagination, that spans and encompasses the whole planet with links of solidarity, sharing experiences, difficulties, and projects. It is a reality that does not appear on TV nor in newspapers, but that exists and is at work, reflecting and influencing society.

All these groups, though very different in their ideology, have common aims: to seek for a different world – *“another world is possible”* – where the human person is central, where the dignity of all is respected in justice and solidarity.

The Powers of this world are starting to take notice of this other Power: Civil Society, and even though no one will acknowledge it, they have to take notice of it. We are stronger than we think and precisely because we do not believe it we do not exercise our power. During those days spent in Paris I became acutely aware that we (and in this 'we' I include all those in religious life) belong to this Civil Society. I often remembered the lines from the prologue to the Rules, “... you have not separated yourselves from those who live under the common law ... you share with them as far as you can all the fatigue, the trials and the dangers of the journey ...you asked for nothing – nothing, except the air we all breathe and the common burden borne by us all...”

Each one, wherever she is and according to her possibilities, can join with others in solidarity, work together, inform one another, support and share with others. Once more I invite you to visualise that network that encircles the world with its solidarity. Let us tune into this network with all our heart and allow ourselves to be caught up in its meshes.

### **World Social Forum, Mumbai 16 - 21 January 2004**

#### **What the World Social Forum is (cf. [www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br))**

The World Social Forum is an open meeting place where groups and movements of civil society opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism, but engaged in building a planetary society centred on the human person, come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, to formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action . The WSF proposes to debate alternative means to building a globalization in solidarity, which respects universal human rights and those of all men and women of all nations and the environment, and is grounded in democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.

We look forward to hearing of the Forum from the *Holy Family* sisters who will be attending.