Happy Birthday, Aguchita!
Please send your articles on or before 5th of January, March, May, July, September and November.

**JANUARY- FEBRUARY**
- Central South US
  - Peru
- Eastern Central Africa
  - (Kenya, Congo, South Sudan, Uganda)
- Italy-Malta
- North Mexico
- Indonesia

**MARCH- APRIL**
- West Africa (Senegal, Burkina Faso)
- New York-Toronto
- Europe-BFMN
  - (Belgium, France, Hungary, Netherlands)
- Southeast Latin America (Brazil, Paraguay)
- Great Britain
- Egypt-Sudan
- Ecuador
- Colombia-Venezuela and Cuba

**MAY- JUNE**
- Montreal, Canada
- Philippines-Japan
- Angola-Mozambique
- Central America
  - (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico)
- Argentina-Uruguay
- South Africa

**JULY- AUGUST**
- Mid-North America
- Lebanon-Syria
- West Mexico
- Australia/Aotearoa-NZ
- Eudist Family
- East Asia
  - (Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam)

**SEPTEMBER- OCTOBER**
- Bolivia-Chile
- Northeast Asia
  - (China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, South Korea)
- Germany-Albania
- The Isles (Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion)
- Portugal
- Austria-Switzerland-Czech Republic
- Singapore-Malaysia
- Spain

**NOVEMBER- DECEMBER**
- South West India
- Central East India-Nepal
- Ireland
- Sri Lanka-Pakistan

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**In This Issue :**

P. 3 - Tree Planting
By Communications Office

P. 4 - Blessed Is She...
By Communications Office

P. 6- Echo from Montreal
By Province of Canada, Montreal

P. 8– Mission partnership as a way of life!
By Lian Michael Quinn

P. 10– Empowering futures...
By Lian Michael Quinn

P. 12 - Building up each other
By Lian Michael Quinn

P. 14 - Sharing vocational Joy!
By Ana Isabel Hernández Navarro

P. 16– Living in Freedom
By Province of Argentina/Uruguay

P. 17 - Mission in times of pandemic
By Province of Argentina/Uruguay

P. 16– COVID-19 and its effects on the Children
By UISG Child Safeguarding office
Reflection During the Tree Planting in the Generalate
Sr. Ellen Kelly and Sr. Susana Franco

Happy birthday, Aguchita!

100 years ago, Aguchita was born in Peru and by means of her life and her martyrdom she gave us one of the highest examples on how to follow God in a very special way!

We would like to thank her for this special gift, as gratitude is what we all feel today.

Gratitude is founded on humility, which is the virtue by which we know and acknowledge ourselves as we truly are. It consists in accepting the truth about ourselves, as sons and daughters of God.

The word humility comes from the root word “humus”, or “earth”, which is the humble origin of humanity. For this reason, humility is the mother of all ecological virtues. According to Pope Francis lack of humility leads to mindless domination over the planet. As he says:

Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility […] when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace Him with our own ego and think that our own subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong (Laudato Si’ 224).

The practice of the virtue of humility attributed to Aguchita emerges from her entire life. In one of her writings, she stressed the importance of linking the virtue of humility with her personal mission as a Sister of the Good Shepherd: “in serving God, there are no triumphs or failures; do not try to deceive God, your neighbor, or yourself […] be careful not to be vain”. She wrote also that the Christian life is summed up “in the constant search for humiliations, as a swift and effective way of becoming like God. Let us learn how to react to humiliations with a peaceful spirit, and if we wish to renew life, we need nothing more than to humble ourselves”.

In all of her letters, Aguchita revealed her love for the virtue of humility, often signing with the name “[your] little sister”. In one of these, addressed to a friend of hers, she confided that the virtue that she loved most was precisely that of humility and for which reason she told her, “I wish you always to be little”. Aguchita is an example to us of humility with a great love and respect for Creation, which she has always recognized as God’s revelation! She gave us a real model of how to find ourselves, though humility, as creatures of God, all connected by His love!

Pope Francis speaks of this universal communion as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. As he also said: “God has written a precious book: whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe” (Laudato Si’ 85).

We gather here today to celebrate this humble love by planting a tree in memory of Aguchita on her 100th birthday and in the 5th anniversary of Laudato Si’.

Our common home requires committed persons willing to serve in humility. Ecological humility is indeed vital for the salvation of Earth and of humanity today. As one of the Gospel beatitudes states: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth” (Mt 5:5).
E: Blessed is she, Aguchita, who modelled for us the scripture readings of today. In the eyes of those who knew her, there is no doubt that Sister Aguchita lived the three evangelical counsels with steadfast commitment. Aguchita also professed a fourth vow, that of zeal for the mission of the Congregation. Through this, Aguchita committed herself "to live and work for the salvation of persons, especially those to whom [she was] sent."

W: She worked tirelessly to offer suitable training to the people of La Florida, especially to young people, promoting their integral human development in line with the specific charism of the congregation. In addition to the catechism, she taught them, in her own small way, practical skills that would enable them to break free from the extreme poverty in which they lived, by giving lessons in sewing or teaching them how to cook. As a lover of Creation, she tended to the vegetable garden with devotion and taught others to do the same. In fulfilling her vow of zeal, she demonstrated not only spiritual qualities but also shared her material goods in offering daily support and accompaniment.

E: Through the vow of chastity, a gift of grace given by God, Aguchita offered herself to Jesus with an undivided heart, loving Him and becoming, in turn, a witness of His love. She had already learned the "cleansing of soul and spirit" in her family, and she nourished this vow with Marian prayer and devotion. Aguchita expressed this virtue through her motherly love, proving herself to be free from every human attachment. Someone described her as "a woman who had a singular belief, in her connectedness, in zealously giving everything for the glory of God, in a transparent way." Aguchita showed herself to have that simplicity and naivety characteristic of a child.

W: One can sense Aguchita's fidelity to the evangelical counsels, given the absence of any vain action or any malice in her interactions with others. Sister Aguchita, therefore, was not only a sister who was able to offer herself spiritually and materially, but one who knew how to understand "that everything is done out of love." She appeared to be a woman of affective maturity who had no difficulty relating to men and women with great ease and gentleness, especially to priests, to whom she had a particular devotion.

E: Even the virtue of obedience, everyone who knew her remember Aguchita as a sister who was wholly immersed in her apostolate, and who respected and loved the Constitutions and the mission assigned by her superiors. Her remote willingness towards martyrdom can be illustrated by examining how she did not abandon her mission but remained there until her death, despite being aware of the dangers involved. In fact, it is clear that Aguchita "was murdered for serving her people, for obedience to her mission."

W: She did not allow herself any small pleasures that might distract her from her apostolic work. For example, in response to an invitation from the Province Leader, she wrote: "I appreciate your invitation for me to go to Lima, I would very much love to, but it would disrupt the work and besides I'm not too bad. We've stayed close to Jesus for Him to take care of this matter, while I do what I need to do."

E: Her love for the virtue of obedience was, therefore, the fruit of her love for the Church: "she was a woman who deeply respected the Church;" someone said "she loved priests, she was always in communion with the members of the congregation; I know myself, the respect she always showed to her superiors." None of her superiors made any negative comments about her, to whom, on the contrary, Aguchita showed deep respect.
W: Sister María Celina, who had been her local leader during the final years of Aguchita's life, is clear and substantial in this regard. She described her as "a woman who obeyed the rules to the letter":

[Aguchita] never contradicted her superiors. She accepted everything and was always available to everyone. She used to say: 'I am in God's hands for whatever He wants.' She was a woman who gave herself to God, to serve, and to work, to do everything she could.

E: Fidelity to the vow of poverty is also extensively attested. Aguchita, who did not come from a wealthy family, never sought the easy route for herself and, as a religious sister, always zealously carried out the humble tasks that were assigned to her. When she began her mission in La Florida, she became poor among the poor, sharing their difficulties, while remaining humble and trying to alleviate the hardships of her people. Many witnesses recalled her resourcefulness and creativity. Precisely because she was aware of the poverty in the area, she tried to make the most of what she had, to then share it with the people. Poverty was not a problem, but a means for her to become closer to her neighbor.

W: Poverty never let go of hope: even in that situation, despite being aware of the different needs, Aguchita became an exemplary witness of trust in Divine Providence. She never put anything aside for herself, fully embodying the poverty that surrounded her. One sister recalled a situation in which she had witnessed that people had begun to despair in the face of lack of food.

E: Sister Aguchita, confident that God would hear their prayers, told them not to lose heart, and so it was that a truckload of cobs arrived at the community. Immediately, these were shared among the people, and Aguchita "blessed the food, and there was enough for everyone." Aguchita "knew that in giving, we receive more. She abandoned herself to God's providence. She used to say: '[What] I have today I will give away, and tomorrow we will have more,' she trusted that more would always arrive. She knew very clearly how to see the suffering Christ in the poor." Reaffirming this abandonment to God, Sister Celina vividly recalled that Aguchita "often prayed to the Providence of God and said that we wouldn't be short of anything because God is provident."

W: However, it is interesting to note, how for Aguchita, the virtues of humility, poverty, obedience, and living the vow of zeal are also deeply linked to other virtues, such as prudence, faith, charity, and chastity. In a concise but straightforward and exhaustive sentence, it was testified that:

Sister Agustina was obviously a clear example of a great missionary; this was the fruit of being faithful to the virtue of obedience to which she had made a promise on the day of her profession.

E: Similarly, someone emphasized how her obedience was linked intimately to her humility, her love of neighbor, her poverty, and her lack of pride, stating that "she was an ordinary person, she lived like any other villager; despite her age, she never complained about anything [...] Anyone could talk to her with ease because she was simple and modest, she was not arrogant in any way, and she never imposed her own will."

W: The recollections of one sister are also worthy of mention as they link humility and the absence of vainglory with the virtue of chastity as an example of love:

She expressed her vows by loving her neighbor; chastity was reflected in the example of her life. She was very humble and simple. […] people would say to her, 'Mother, you can do miracles,' [to which] she would reply, 'I don't, God does.'

As could be expected, there are many examples in this regard, and all are worthy of note. Small pieces that reconstruct the life of a humble sister who was entirely devoted to the mission, and who fully lived and put into practice the evangelical counsels. However, just a few of those considered most significant have been highlighted, but which, it is hoped, have done justice to a truly virtuous life in which martyrdom was only the final and most exceptional testimony. Blessed is she….

Echo from Montreal
By Canada Montreal Province

Carrefour / Providence Pavilion: (The vast majority of the Sisters in the province have lived there since December) All of our Sisters, both at the Pavilion and at Carrefour are well. There are no cases of COVID-19 among our Sisters, and following the detection of two cases in the big house (Sisters of other communities), very tight restrictive measures have been successfully put in place to counter the virus.

Our Sisters in the infirmary are confined to their floor and have their meals in their rooms. Our Sisters in Carrefour Providence cannot visit them, but all of them keep in touch by phone and support each other in this way. There are also communications and information exchanges that are done by email for those who have computers.

Our Carrefour Providence Sisters are invited to limit their circulation in the house and to stay as much as possible in their rooms. They take their meals in the dining room at different times, and keep to the required distancing at tables. As in many communities, they participate in daily Mass via internet.

In a few other houses: All our Sisters carefully respect the hygiene and distancing instructions and are doing well to this day, thank God! They carry on their various apostolic activities and continue to support and accompany individuals and families through social media.

Most of the administrative work is done online. However, as our Pierrefonds Campus has been sold and must be handed over to the new owner in June, there are a few others working to finalize everything in due time. It’s a race against time under the circumstances.

We are enclosing a text, which was shared with our Sisters on the occasion of Easter and which could prove interesting to share in this edition of the GSN.

Handwashing: A Grateful Practice

“Washing your hands is an act of love.” ~ Dori Midnight

The 20 seconds recommended to “lather up” invite you to experience gratitude and wonder. Notice how you feel when you intentionally cultivate gratefulness in an activity that could feel like an obligation.

Here are some ways to give thanks every time you wash your hands.

♦ When you go to wash your hands, take a moment to pause and express gratitude for the opportunity at -hand (pun a little intended), remembering that this activity is a privilege and a luxury that not everyone has access to. You might express thanks for the gift of warm running water as well as the miracle of soap. You might even express thanks for the discovery of handwashing itself and the
scientists credited with the discovery (Ignaz Semmelweis and Oliver Wendell Holmes). During those 20 seconds, reflect on your good fortune in the opportunity to make a truly meaningful difference through this simple activity. Rest in gratefulness for the chance to help protect both yourself and others.

♦ Embrace this opportunity to breathe consciously for a few moments. Do two rounds of simple breathing: Slowly inhale for four seconds and exhale for six seconds. Rinse and repeat as desired!

♦ As is often suggested, singing is another wonderful way to mark the recommended 20 seconds of handwashing. A couple rounds of “Happy Birthday!” is easy, but you might play with songs you love, songs that move you, calm you, and inspire you. Embrace the feeling of singing as a gateway to aliveness. Savor the connection to the mystery of life through music, in even the simplest of forms, whether you are alone or sharing this moment with another sister.

♦ While washing, reflect on the wonder of your hands. Notice the feel of your skin and palpable bones. Sense the varying textures. Delight in the dexterity of your wrists and fingers. Reflect on the remarkable ability of your hands. Consider the ways in which they serve as the body’s physical gateway to connection with others through touch and through giving and receiving things, even in these times when we consciously refrain from those activities. Take a moment to thank your hands for the richness of experience they afford as well as their tireless service.

♦ Use the occasion of handwashing to delight in the extraordinariness of the ordinary. Perhaps you notice the details of the space surrounding you, the shape of the faucet and the sink, the intricacies of the floor beneath your feet, and even the quality of the air in which you find yourself. Maybe there is a window near the sink that offers a curious glimpse of the outdoors. Consider the wonders contained within just one square foot of the space before you.

♦ Show extra appreciation for your hands by massaging them with your favorite hand cream once they’re dry. Savor the feeling of gently rubbing joints, moisturizing skin and cuticles, and playfully mobilizing your fingers and wrists. Relish this added self-care.

How does your experience of handwashing change when you embrace it as an opportunity to practice gratefulness?

Source : https://gratefulness.org/resource/handwashing-a-grateful-practice/

Adaptation : Sylvie Plouffe
**Mission partnership as a way of life!**

By Liam Michael Quinn

An interview with Bernardino Culombola, Program Manager, MDO Angola. The following is an interview with Bernardino Culombola, who is Program Manager for the Congregation’s Mission Development Office in Angola. Although presently under quarantine in Luanda and working from home, he has a permit to carry out voluntary outreach work to those in need within the city.

Q. How did you come to encounter the Congregation, and what made you confident to say: “Yes, this is my place?”

A. My initial contact with the Congregation was in 2015 when, while working for the Red Cross, I was contacted by Andrea Curreri [Program Manager for the Good Shepherd International Foundation], with whom I had worked fifteen years previously on an HIV prevention program delivered by GOAL Ireland. Throughout my professional life, I had always been involved in humanitarian work. As I learned more about the charism, spirituality, and mission of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, it became clear to me that I could belong there and do my part for the mission too. It was this realization that gave me the confidence to say “yes!”.

Q. You mention that you identified with the Congregation’s charism, can you describe a time when you were a good shepherd to others?

A. While still working for the Red Cross, Angola suffered from a major Yellow Fever outbreak, the victims of which were often children and the most poor. Through my role as National Program Director, I was invited to a meeting by The Global Fund in which I was able to secure two million doses of the vaccine for Angola. Later, in my present employment at the Mission Development Office, I was able to use my contacts in the Red Cross’ Family Reunification Program to locate the husband of a woman and her two daughters who had found refuge with the sisters in Angola. Having borrowed the sisters’ car, I drove the woman and her daughters for two days to reunite the family — even with the car breaking down...
and being towed for part of the journey! These actions have given me a sense of offering protection and leading the stray home, like a good shepherd.

**Q. What does it mean for you to be a mission partner?**

A. Being a mission partner means being open to work in partnership with the sisters and other lay partners and complement each other’s skills to achieve the mission of the Congregation. When I visit the Generalate, I am struck by the holistic understanding of the meaning of ‘lay mission partnership.’ I hope that we can continue to develop this same level of understanding in the Sector of Angola/Mozambique. Since I became a mission partner, I am not the same person as I was before. I feel that the mission of the Congregation now pulses through my blood, and I understand that being a mission partner is not merely a way of working, it is a way of life!

**Q. You mention that you have the opportunity to visit the Generalate, have these visits changed your perception of the Congregation?**

A. Except for this year, I’ve visited the Generalate each of the past four years. Each time has allowed me to appreciate further just how vast and international the Congregation is. On my second visit, having studied for two years the history, charism, and spirituality of the Congregation, I joked with the sisters that I had now ‘passed’ my novitiate! That year, I was able to spend three weeks living and working in the Generalate, and I was so touched by how the sisters welcomed me in and took care of me. I would sometimes forget about dinner time, but a sister would always knock on my room door to remind me – they never forgot about me! One gesture I’ll always remember was when Sr. Ellen Kelly joined me in the dining room one day. She brought some ice cream from the freezer, and we shared it while we talked. I then truly understood that in the Congregation, every opinion is valued, no one is greater or more important than the other, and there is no discrimination.
Nestled in a lush landscape, the city of Bobo-Dioulasso is located in the south-west of Burkina Faso. Similar to much of western Africa, the people here are known for their great ethnic and religious tolerance and the city’s tree-lined streets bustle with the sounds of different languages and dialects. When the sisters arrived in 2011 to establish the Congregation’s first mission in the country, they were warmly received – and have continued to feel welcome ever since.

Bobo-Dioulasso is the county’s second-largest city but is often referred to as its economic and commercial capital; the city thrives with the types of small businesses that drive the country’s economy. However, located in one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods, the three founding sisters soon began to receive women at the door asking for food. These women, many of whom were illiterate, were trapped within their traditional roles and struggled to find employment. Some were widows or had been abandoned by their husbands, and the Muslim women were often just one of many of their husband’s wives whom he struggled to support. Troubled and challenged by the extreme poverty they witnessed, the sisters entered into dialogue with the women to explore ways to raise them out of poverty and become self-reliant.

Some of the women explained that they were unable to access existing loan options to develop their small business ideas because they had no savings and nothing to offer as collateral. The sisters identified that by creating a microcredit financing scheme, these would-be micro-entrepreneurs could develop income-generating activities and become economically empowered. By 2012, funded by donations from external benefactors, the Women’s Economic Empowerment Microcredit Financing Scheme was established, and the sisters began to work with an initial group of eight women.

Now in its ninth year, 50 women currently receive loans through the scheme. Each woman has been supported to identify the business activity best suited to her skill set and future aspirations. On this, Sr Hilaria Puthirrikkal, one of the community’s founding missionaries, says: “every woman is able to do something, working together with her, we discover that she is never lost, that there is always hope!”
In addition to the start-up loan, the women receive ongoing training and accompaniment from sisters – both professed and in formation – and lay mission partners to improve, develop, and sustain their business activities. As time goes on, the women can access increased amounts of aid to expand their businesses further. Through the project, women have now successfully established a range of micro-business ventures, which allow them to earn enough money to repay their monthly installment, provide for their families and send their children to school. The women’s business activities include selling fruit, vegetables, cereals, dry wood, charcoal, clothes, shoes, craftwork, sandwiches, and cakes. Some have their own premises, such as a restaurant or dressmaker’s shop, and even now employ other women.

One of the women supported by the project said: “I didn’t go to school, what could I do? This was the question I always asked myself. But thanks to the microcredit [scheme], my nightmares are over. I’ve been able to make some of my dreams come true. It has enabled me to develop my business venture. I’m no longer an employee but a manager of my own small business”.

Yet this project has not merely been about the economic empowerment of women. The project has incorporated an array of political and socio-cultural empowerment strategies that have involved education and training being delivered by lawyers, psychologists, and health and medical professionals. During these workshops, the women have been able to discuss and tackle some of society’s taboo subjects for them, such as forced and early marriage, abortion, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, sexual abuse, and HIV and AIDS. They have further been educated to learn ways to better care for and look after themselves and their families through attending workshops on human rights, family law, conflict management, health, and hygiene, etc.

This is a project that has not just raised women from poverty. It has also raised their consciousness in terms of political and socio-cultural issues. These holistically empowered women have gained new self-confidence and a better perspective on life. They are breaking down the walls of the vast gender inequality in Burkina Faso and playing their role in driving its economy forward. Their lives have been transformed, and they are now also in a position to be able to challenge and transform some of their society’s most taboo subjects.
From within two simple shipping containers, the Good Shepherd Sisters run the ‘Akhanani’ ministry in an area where poverty is so severe that some families go days without food. The project’s name means ‘building up each other’ in Xhosa – an indigenous South African language – and it seeks to respond to the needs of the local black and “colored” (mixed-race) Xhosa-speaking people who live in the surrounding shack dwellings, or ‘informal settlements.’

Located in Port Elizabeth on land leased from the local municipality, the shipping containers have been converted into a center with enough space for a hall to seat 300 people, with a kitchen, a food store, and toilets.

With only two sisters involved in the project, the ministry relies heavily on the support of its volunteers, lay associates, and board members. These mission partners supported the sisters to receive NPO certification for the project in April 2017. Since then, they have explored ways to network with other organizations and NGOs in the area; they now receive food and other donations from local churches, a local school, the Children’s Trust, the Blue Ribbon, People Opposing Poverty in Society, and the Knights of Da Gama.

Through the work of its mission partners, and the support of these outside agencies, the project is able to run two main activities during the day. In the morning, volunteers teach the women and men new skills in sewing, woodwork, and handicrafts – such as making necklaces and earrings (from waste materials). In the afternoon, an after-school program for children provides homework support and the chance to have a meal. About 100 children aged from five to twelve years old attend these sessions five days a week.

However, the center also offers training and opportunities to its mission partners. In January, twice-monthly training sessions were introduced, which included topics on human trafficking and gender equality as well as on the procedures involved in the Congregational Child Safeguarding Policy. These sessions have been led by two social workers who volunteer at the center. In addition, through sponsorship received from Lions Clubs International, by way of one of the project’s board members, three of the volunteers have been accepted to commence study for an Early Childhood Development
certificate from the local college. Unfortunately, the Congregational-level sessions on the Child Safeguarding Policy that were due to be held in South Africa in May this year – and to which all the mission partners were invited to attend – was canceled due to the present travel restrictions.

Yet God’s goodness flows in both directions. The Project Coordinator, Sr. Martha Thuranira, talks about how her spirituality and sense of mission have been deeply affected by this ministry. “I find it very powerful,” she says, “that we sisters have been able to venture into this area and find our home here, deeply aware that this is not because of us but because of God who is using us for his work. In an area where everyone feels threatened and unsafe, I feel secure, and I am not afraid. I have such a great sense of belonging that these are my people: my sisters and my brothers. This is such a privilege for me.”

Everyone involved has high hopes for the future of the project. Discussions are currently underway with the local municipality for the project to purchase the land. If these are successful, then the next big challenge will be to secure funding to construct a more permanent structure. Bernardine Hendricks, a lay mission partner who sits on the Board, says, “it is vital for us to own the land to be able to construct permanent premises and have the space to extend our services.” Future plans include daycare services, counseling and psychotherapy services, and an education program for early school leavers. With larger premises, they intend to invite a mobile health clinic and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) to offer outreach services from the center.

In this area, where there is no other Catholic presence, the sisters and mission partners have been able to shine a light of hope and solidarity among these people. Despite the obstacles encountered along the way, Sr. Martha states with confidence, “we have not given up, we shall journey forward to achieve what we can. Mobilizing our mission partners to move the mission forward, constantly ‘building up each other’ every day.”

Two shipping containers were combined to create one large center.
Sharing vocational joy from Central America!

By Ana Isabel Hernández Navarro

Nelly Ortega Espinal

Originally from Honduras and committed to the Mission for many years, Nelly said YES to the irresistible invitation from Jesus, Good Shepherd.

“To live with a great heart and arouse with courage our Apostolic Zeal.” S.J.E

I thank God, Father and Mother, for being able to experience God’s goodness and mercy throughout my life. Today, I am grateful for the gift and grace of my vocation.

Now that I have been accepted to make my First Vows, I am filled with great joy and gratitude for the mercy that God has had with me, that God has set God’s sights on me and for our Congregation that welcomed me with so much love.

There are many elements that have helped me grow: Personal Prayer that leads me to a deeper intimacy with God, living the Community Prayer that is incarnated in reality, deepening and returning to the sources of our Spirituality and Charism, in order to respond as did Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia.

The sisters who have gone before us encourage me to continue building community life together, in which we have walked, grown, helped each other, supported and learned together. The different experiences in the apostolate have also increased and strengthened my love for the mission. It has been a constant call to work for Justice and Peace, in humble sharing with the people, from whom we are and what we do. New challenges regularly appear, especially today, as we face the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. I feel called to accompany our brothers and sisters who live very painful realities, especially those most vulnerable. I want to live: “Drawn by love and Passionate for Justice.”

JOSELYN ALVARADO SOTO

Originally from Costa Rica, Joselyn approached the Congregation and after seeing and liking what she saw…she no longer could ignore the voice of Jesus that told her: Come and follow me!

“Put out into deep water and lower your nets. Lk5:4

I want to share the great joy that I experience, for the news of being accepted to pronounce my First Vows. I feel immense gratitude for the gift of my vocation and for the mercy that God has had with me and for our beloved Congregation. For me, consecration as a life option is a great hope and also a challenge that commits me to a continuous renewal, to continue making our way in community, transparently witnessing the compassion, tenderness and mercy of Jesus Good Shepherd. I wish to continue growing in the spirit of zeal that risks, welcomes, embraces, accompanies, heals and celebrates human dignity, as Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia did.

I am convinced that this step that I am going to take, I must live every day: in my prayer, in integral formation, in the Mission, with girls, boys, women, families and with all creation.

In the midst of this joy, I am discovering and welcoming new challenges, in relation to what we live in our world because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which shows us concrete faces and cries, especially of the people who suffer the most.
During this time, I have seen my boat moving away from the shore and I experience a depth full of riches and challenges in light of the congregational charism. Jesus' invitation to me is to "go out to sea", with full CONFIDENCE that He guides and strengthens me.

**Brush Strokes of Life in the Mission ... Puerto Rico!**

*Maritza Rodríguez*

Greetings Sisters, I hope you are all well.

Today, I want to thank you for everything you did for me at the Saint María Euphrasia house. Thank you very much for what you do with all the young women who pass through this Home. Everything that you offer us is really worth gold and if a young woman does not value this opportunity, she will do so in the future, when the process that life demands of us passes. I have valued it from the first day I arrived at the Home.

Now out of it, I have another Princess and I understand more how difficult it is to raise and care for a child. In this Home, you help us prepare, for when the time comes for us to take flight.

In these moments of my life, I continue to be grateful for everything you did for me and for my daughter Sofía. Today, with my head held high I can say: I am from the Saint María Euphrasia house and my daughter was born there, together with you! If I had to relive this experience, I would do it with pleasure ... We love you so much! Maritza Rodríguez

Puerto Rico
Project "Living in Freedom. A Stop to Trafficking"

As the north of Argentina is a highly vulnerable area for people who do not have sufficient resources to lead a life worthy of work and training, these people are likely to be victims of human trafficking. A prevention project based on the program of care for adolescent girls operated by the Congregation was developed. With financing from the Hilton Foundation and staffed by a team of two social workers and two sisters from April to November 2019, the project was established within the area of prevention of the Network Towards Freedom, and with the accompaniment of the Good Shepherd Foundation Latin America. Its objective was to contribute to the prevention of Human Trafficking in Northern Argentina through actions of sensitization with the community and institutions of civil society. It was divided into three stages: training and leadership workshops in Human Trafficking for secondary level students; preventive actions for peers and the community; and, conducting a forum at the "San Antonio Maria Gianelli" secondary school located in the Mariano Moreno neighborhood in the city of San Salvador de Jujuy.

Training and leadership workshops: This stage focused on training young people in the subject of Human Trafficking and leadership so that they can become involved in future actions as active agents of prevention.

Preventive Actions: To raise awareness among the community and adolescents about Human Trafficking, this stage included many activities including providing information stands in different public spaces; presenting a prevention workshop for first year students of the Gianelli School; participation in youth events (in the Student Painting of the National Day of Students, in the International Day against Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons (September 23) in the National Day of Students, in the Inter Orchard 2019, in a recreational training meeting in the Youth Home, and in a day of evangelization in the Sanctuary of the Virgin of Rio Blanco and Papaya, patron saint of Jujuy. More than one thousand five hundred people participated and gained awareness including members of the community and youth according to the indicators present during the monitoring.

The Forum, "Strengthening our commitment to a society without trafficking:" With the goal of strengthening the cooperation among the institutional work of civil society organizations and governmental organizations that address the issue of trafficking in persons, the forum was organized jointly with the Kawsay Argentina Network (name of the Talita Kum Network in the Americas). Several speakers from government institutions participated. The project team presented the objective of the project and all the activities carried out during the year. The young people shared their experience, highlighting the importance of having joined in raising awareness in the community at large as well as family and friends. Currently, an extension of the project is being implemented in the same school, which, given the situation of Covid-19 , is being developed virtually. The objective this year is to expand the impact community, reaching other young people from different schools close to the first one.
As soon as the Covid-19 pandemic compulsory quarantine started, our community, spurred on by the "zeal that never says enough", considered some initiatives, such as offering to shop for some elderly neighbors, etc. A time without certainties, we never even in dreams saw an experience like this, so strange and extensive. Through the news we learned the reality that the Provincial State had to host people who returned to the Province and that it was necessary to protect them from contagion. Due to the novelty of the experience, discerning in community we consider that our task would be carried out in coordination with the local Church. We communicated with our Bishop who hoped to have the availability of our house and that of other retreat houses, in order to respond to the request of the ad hoc entity: Emergency Operating Committee (COE). In the following days, a member of the COE came to see the facilities of our Retreat House.

This is how on Easter Sunday, April 12, complying with the prevention and hygiene protocols, we received the first contingent: 58 people, called in our jargon as "Swallow workers", all of them simple and impoverished people who move, individually or as groups of families to other provinces to develop tillage tasks, various crops, in order to provide for their livelihood. In this group there were several adolescents and about 7 children. In principle our responsibility with the COE was fulfilled by when providing our facilities, but soon the sisters noticed that afternoon snacks were not included, and that food at both lunch and dinner was very scarce. To help, two sisters from the community offered to prepare them. In turn, this led to request collaboration from Cáritas Diocesana, known to families and relatives of the sisters who generously contribute to make food reinforcements and hygiene items. In addition, VC Communities, Catechists Group, Kawsay network, neighbors and friends have joined. Thank God, after the 14 days quarantine established by the health protocol, no one within the group manifested any symptoms. So, with much excitement and gratitude, they retired to their respective homes.

Then, after the necessary days of disinfection and hygiene, the second group was received, people with the same characteristics. With the knowledge of past experience, it allowed us to start and sustain the service with another organization. We are reaching 14 regulatory days, without any infected person. With vigor we continue to pray to God, the source of all grace, goodness and mercy, for the end of this and of all the physical and spiritual plagues that also plague humanity.
Covid-19 and its effects on the children who are vulnerable and need care and protection

By Sr. Mary Niluka Perera

If the coronavirus crisis has brought home anything, it’s that we — each of us, separately and together — can change the system. We are one global family and together we can make a difference. (Otto Scharmer)

In every catastrophe, whether natural or manmade, women and children are the most vulnerable group of the population that are affected in any part of the world. The outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19 made us ever more conscious of our interconnectedness. It clearly showed us that there are no boundaries of cast, creed, color or/and gender; Yet the hard truth is that, in all this, it is the poor who are the worst affected. Why? the lock down and quarantine limited their access to find their daily bread. The visible truth is, that women and children belong to the category of the poor and are doubly victimized by COVID-19 or any type of crisis. According to Child Poverty Network, the pandemic might push up to 42-66 million children into extreme poverty in this year, adding to the estimated 386 million children in 2019.

The many stories behind children living in institutional care is the story of the vicious cycle of poverty. Of the estimated 8 million children separated from family care and living in orphanages, most are at high risk as the institutions have been sending children back to their homes and communities, without a proper plan of where they will reside, how their transitions will be supported, and their safety monitored.

While we acknowledge that care reform or family care is the best environment for the growth of children, at this present moment of crisis, releasing them back to their families without proper planned transition process is not beneficial. The unplanned transition of children definitely could cause the child emotional stress, starvation, health issues, lack of education, as well as increased risk of being abused and trafficked. Therefore, institutions need to undertake carefully planned measures with respect to deinstitutionalization in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is also a risk of many children being abandoned or separated from their families as a result of COVID-19. The effect of the pandemic is not only limited to high rate of mortality and poor health conditions but increased family stress, poverty and starvation, domestic violence, losing the bread winners and care takers of children; thus leading large number of children vulnerable to lose parental care and to seek protection in an institutional settings. Widespread job and income loss and economic insecurity will lead to the increase of child labor, bonded labor, sexual abuse, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and street children. The risks posed by the COVID 19 crisis to children are countless.

This is the hour for the authorities; government, non-government, faith based groups, especially religious congregations who express the charism of care for children and vulnerable persons, to focus on supporting family and community based programs and services for children and vulnerable persons, including those who find themselves orphaned, abandoned or homeless after the pandemic.

Family is the fundamental group of society and natural environment for the growth, wellbeing and protection of children; thus, every effort should primarily be directed to enable children to remain in the family. Strengthening families through community based (parish based) programs including livelihood programs to support the income of poor families will pave the way to reduce the number of children getting into institutional care. This will enable children to enjoy their rights to survival, family, education and protection is of utmost importance.

Together may we create a better world for every child – the future is in their hands and what we do for them today, impacts the global community immensely.
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