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CSJOURNAL

Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry

January-February • Year 2021 - n. 1



GENERAL COUNCIL

Let Us Leave the Ark, Sisters

S. Mariaelena Aceti

General Council

Being on the front page is demanding. Every time I feel the responsibility, I ask myself: what do I have to say that is acceptable, at least in terms of authenticity, in such a prominent position? In times of pandemic this question becomes even more pressing. In this interminable isolation, the media have become populated with appealing interpretations that, however, do not seem to lead to practical change. Even in the Catholic media, where religious women have more of a voice, I have found enlightened and creative reflections in recent months that nevertheless stop at diagnosis. But I have wondered if there is a germinating force among this reasoning.

That said, in the interest of honesty, perhaps I should be quiet.

The risk of adding empty words is great. Maybe I could just write, "2021...sisters, associates, what do you say, shall we go out?" After all, that's really all I have to say. So, I might end by offering you the story of a dream. A dream in which I see myself and you coming



out, as if "from the ark", where we had taken shelter during the flood, and timidly but courageously going out into creation, into the streets, among the people, to discover the face of this "new earth" that the

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Lord has given us.....

I perceive this phase of preparation for the General Chapter, which is also filled with Provincial Chapters, as a year of grace. I ask myself: how can we avoid “drowning” in documents – just to use the image of the flood –, dispersing our energies in sterile re-readings, and instead foster the birth of ideas that will prepare for a General Chapter of true change? “Change,” in fact, is no longer the cry of some solitary voice. Change is now an imperative that resonates in all spheres of human society. Even within consecrated life, it seems to me that the banks of the river that once separated those who were guided by the idea that “new is beautiful” and “change is life” and those who, instead, thought that “change for change’s sake leads to ruin” and therefore it is better to change only if strictly necessary and in the most painless way possible, are growing closer. Today, the videoconferences of the UISG and various religious conferences host more and more contributions that question the structures that have given security to consecrated life in the past, hy-

pothesizing a total redesign of the project.

Giving space to creativity, supporting those who want to dare to change, are new words, or at least the authority with which they resonate among us is new, as if we had no other way, not only as individuals, but as a body. They are words that give hope because they have the taste of the freedom of beginnings, when there were no securities to free ourselves from because there was nothing; everything had to be built.

But these new actions that we would like to see sprout are the finish line of a journey that the pandemic, we hope, has really accelerated. The first step is to accept “the common experience of disorientation”. Not that of the individual, but the common experience. An experience that François Varillon, sj, does not hesitate to define as “a path that can lead us close to pure adoration”, that is, bring us truly close to God and to life. The pandemic has given us an enormous push in this direction; never have we been so “in tune” about anything on earth and never so all together “bewildered”. We

hope that the vaccine will take away the virus but not extinguish this spiritual potential, and that in our provincial and general chapters we will be able to gather it and deepen it.

The second step is to go out into the streets and into creation to listen to the cry of life, to touch and let ourselves be touched by the most fragile and wounded. Perhaps we do not see the newness we hope for germinating among us, because we are too busy looking inward, looking at the structures we need to change, what we need to keep and what we need to leave behind. Nor does it help to have leadership that supports change if the impetus for change is lacking, if dreams and visions are lacking. Here then, it seems to me that the answer is rather to be sought “outside.” But not from the window of the community, sitting at the TV or the computer screen, really outside! I hope that during these months of preparation for the General Chapter, we will all be there “coming and going” to send out the dove (Gen 8:6), ready to go out as soon as “the waters have receded”!

NEW SAINTS

S. Louise Zdunich	94	USA	27.11.2020
S. Carole Mooney	81	USA	04.12.2020
S. Rosalina Zagonel	83	Brazil	11.12.2020
S. Marie-Germaine Monticolo	93	France	20.12.2020
S. Hilde Bahlmann	87	Norway	01.01.2021
S. Rita Maria De Jesus	103	Brazil	12.01.2021
S. Clementina Gemelli	88	Brazil	13.01.2021
S. Nancy Sutton	90	USA	24.01.2021
S. Paulette Roux	86	France	27.01.2021

Water is Life

S. Malati Devigowda

Tanzania

In the district of Songea, located in the Ruvuma River basin in southern Tanzania, the people each need 20 litres of water per day, but only receive 5 litres of water each day, equivalent to 43%. We do experience the richness of the Ruvuma River, an important river in the Southern drainage system, which enjoys a healthy and sufficient level during the monsoons, on which it depends. Yet almost 50% of the ordinary poor and big institutions, even us in the cities, and our Sisters who live in the neighbouring villages, lack clean water for drinking and other purposes.

During the summer, most of the wells dry up, and the level of water is greatly reduced. Tanzania is blessed with hills, valleys, wild animals, precious stones, and minerals, yet lacks gauges. When villages are away from the streams which are in the forests and valleys, it is hard to have access to water.

This year was very difficult with the monsoons delayed, so we took our responsibility and were extra careful, using water sparingly. The Sisters in community use water that is collected outside and is not filtered or treated. This water is used for washing dishes, clothes and cleaning purposes. We sometimes experience severe scarcity of well water so we use this water sparingly.

We, Sisters of St. Joseph of



Chambery, are missioned in 21% of the villages, out of which over half have improved their water supply. Yet most of this comes from surface water sources. While pump sets are quite common, less than 60% of the population are operating these machines. In fact, in 269 villages of the region, 89% of the people still consider traditional water sources to be an important element of the water supply situation. Water collection at traditional sources is a social outlet with large numbers gathered for bathing, washing and watering livestock, as well as water collection. Consequently, there is considerable pollution of these sources.

A bigger problem than distance from a water source is accessibility because of the difference in attitude between source and the village. Because of the topographical nature of much of the region and location of villages, the water sources are often at the bottom of steep valleys falling away from the villages. This is true to make for almost 90% of the villages, with 30% of these having elevation differences of more than 50 meters. This water is used to wash dish-

es in the kitchen and reused for plants, while well water is treasured and used for drinking purposes.

The hostelites at the St. Josephs Centre, too, face a lot of water problems. We raise their awareness about the use of water, as this is a constant struggle for everyone. Both Sisters and Staff see and experience the problem with water. The students are monitored and watched since they have a limited amount of water for their everyday use. Students are encouraged to use 4 litre buckets. We even ask them to use a few clothes, with every student using hostel uniforms rather than colourful dresses. Having hostel uniforms saves time and water, which is important since we witness many places without water. The children do not have flush toilets which consume a lot of water. Dishwater is used for the banana plantation.

Rainwater harvesting was not planned earlier at the hostel, as we did not have enough finances. But since last year, we have made cisterns to collect rain water for various purposes.

We remember that “MAJI NI UHAI” which in Swahili means “WA-TER IS LIFE.

My Organic Garden

S. Fabiyola Morris

Province of Nirmala - India

As a little girl I had grown up seeing my mother keeping a well maintained backyard garden that provided a variety of veggies for our daily use. On weekends I had to assist her to weed and fertilize them. I did these tasks half-heartedly. My little mind did not know I was caring for nature.

One day last year, on an impulse, I decided to start a vegetable garden. I wanted to do something outdoors as it is a form of leisure I enjoy and brings me close to nature. I knew absolutely nothing about gardening, so I found some persons who were able to give me ideas and we discussed what I wanted to do. I made a good plan to grow an attractive vegetable garden and was very excited about it. Soil preparation and planting was completed with precision. Thus began my love of gardening. Although I started planting very late in the season I got the most beautiful yield of French beans, ladies' fingers



Cauliflower in Fabiyola's garden

(okra), greens, pumpkin, lettuce, aubergine, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage and tomatoes. I am now excited about the prospect of growing more vegetables.

So if you are even remotely interested in gardening it is worth growing a garden. There is no comparison between the taste of a garden fresh tomato and a grocery store bought one that's devoid of flavor. The nature of the food system is that grocery store produce has often been grown many miles away, meaning it can be days between harvest and your table. This process results

in the quality of the produce often being compromised.

Though growing your own vegetables can seem overwhelming to some, it's actually much simpler than it sounds. Even if you don't have a yard, consider starting a terrace garden or even an indoor herb garden on a windowsill. You'll be amazed at how many tomatoes or peppers you can grow out of one pot!

If you have nature as your first concern you will be its concern.

In the words of Joel Osteen, "When you focus on being a blessing, God makes sure that you are always blessed in abundance."

NEW SAINTS

S. Marie Aline Perrot-Minnot	88	France	28.01.2021
S. Blandina Rossi	100	Italy	29.01.2021
S. Francis Borgia Kunnathan	91	Nirmala	31.01.2021
S. Maria Gabriela Nogueira	99	Brazil	01.02.2021
S. Marie Bernadette Richel	96	France	01.02.2021

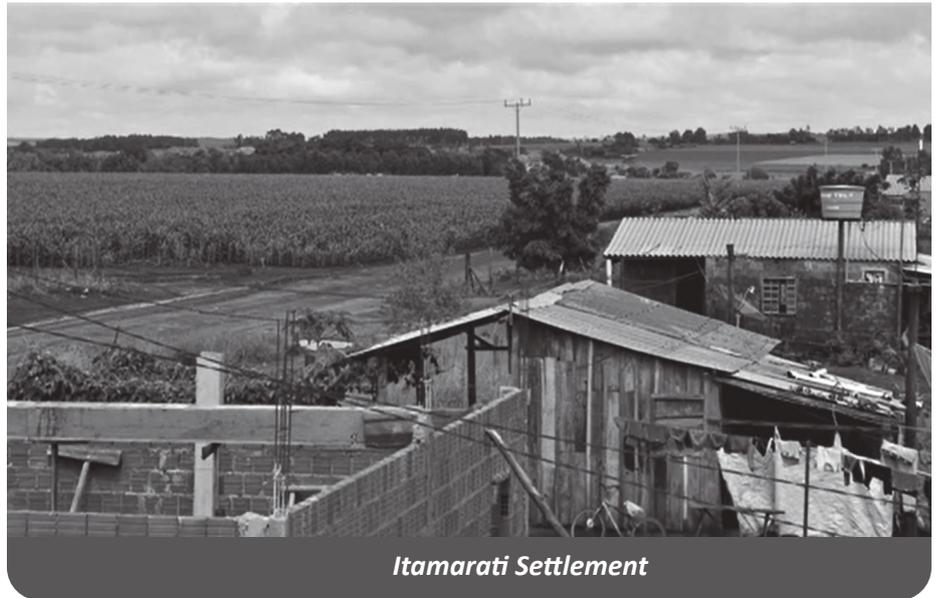
Care for our Common Home

S. Anari Felipe Nantes

Brazil

Environmental protection, being a collective right, is the duty of the state, social organizations and every citizen. This requires attention and care about what happens around us. Only those who develop sensitivity to the protection and defence of life are able to perceive and fight for threatened life, in any dimension. At the end of 2020, the proof of this was experienced by the Sisters of St. Joseph, Olga Manosso, Marília Carra, Neusabete Sant’Ana de Freitas, along with the Associates in the Itamarati Settlement, Municipality of Ponta Porã / Mato Grosso do Sul.

Itamarati is the largest agrarian reform settlement in Brazil. It was handed over to rural workers in 2003. Of the 57 thousand hectares of land that make up the settlement, 800 were distributed in Permanent Preservation Areas and the responsibility for the maintenance and care was given to the residents themselves. It is to be emphasized that these Permanent Preservation Areas are located in strategic points of the settlement such as where there are springs, waterfalls, rivers, streams and ponds. The National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform launched the “Novos Campos” Project in 2010, guaranteeing a resource of R\$ 2 million for all the settlements of the state in order to recover the Permanent Preservation Areas. Residents say that they have managed to buy many native tree seedlings for environmental reforestation.



Itamarati Settlement

Everything was going on well until the second half of 2020 when some of these Preservation areas were invaded by unknown people who arrived and set fire to the vegetation, built shacks as shelter and started preparing the soil for soybean planting. Residents reacted and started a conflict, even to using firearms. As the situation became untenable, they sought competent authorities to denounce the situation, but without any effect. The election period was approaching and everything was stopped beyond filing the complaint. This caused a revolt among the residents because they were putting their own lives at risk and nothing was being done for them.

One of the Associates, who is among the residents responsible for the care of one of the invaded Preservation Areas, shared the difficulties with the Sisters. It was in this process of dialogue that the idea arose of looking for a press agency and asking them to publish a report denouncing what was happening in all the Preservation Areas. Even finding a journalist willing to do the story was difficult. The fact that the settlement is lo-

cated in a border region and has many groups involved, including people from Paraguay, was causing fear and paralyzing people. Fortunately, it was possible to find someone willing to publish about the situation.

After the matter was published, they continued to make contact with the public authorities responsible for the investigation and punishment of environmental crimes. But the environmental police took action only after the election. On the Monday after the elections, search and seizure warrants were issued throughout the Settlement. Several people were fined, shacks removed, machinery seized and investigations are underway to punish those responsible for these criminal actions. We hope that from now on the authorities will commit themselves to the permanent protection of the areas, if not, the residents will be exposed to criminal actions by groups involved in crimes against the public patrimony.

May this experience inspire us to remain increasingly committed to defending life and protecting our common home.

Advocating for the Marginalized

S. Neha Choorathuruthel

Province of Tanmaya - India

Fr. Stan Swamy SJ has been arrested and detained by the National Investigation Agency, on concocted allegations that he is part of the banned Maoist group who organized a violent demonstration in Bhima-Koregaon, Maharashtra. It is clear that the ruling BJP party is afraid of an ordinary man like the 83-year-old Fr. Stan whose strength is not derived from the might of a sectarian ideology but from the values and ideals of the sacred constitution of our Land. Fr. Stan does not represent a parochial religious value system but has committed his entire life to the emancipation of the Adivasis (an indigenous community) who were deprived of their fundamental human rights.

It is clear that the ruling party is disturbed with Fr. Stan's impact on the lives of the tribals in Jharkhand. The whole world has condemned the arrest of Fr. Stan Swamy. The evidence is fabricated; baseless accusations have been made against him. Their ears of the government are shut; their eyes are closed to truth, justice, human rights and secularism. Anyone who speaks against the government is stig-



Stan Swamy, SJ

matized as Anti National. Where are our fundamental rights, the right to free speech and expression? Human rights of the minorities are not to be discussed. The government is silently and subtly trying to wipe out the minorities and activists from the country.

The actual issue is much beyond what meets the eye. The government is in collaboration with the vested interests of fundamentalist organizations. When they set false agendas this mutilates democratic values, the very principle of which they boast about. Anyone who does not profess the ideology of the ruling regime is under threat and the minorities are forced to live in insecurity. This is a direct attack on our fundamental right to security. Based on the prom-

ise of "one India-one election" the hidden agenda paves the way for one religion (Hindu), one ruler, a single business system, orphaned farmers, and an economy without a human face. The impact of this scenario is a threat to the diversity of our nation. And it will risk the fundamental fabric of a peaceful and developed India as envisioned by the founders of our noble constitution.

We who have pledged to live by truth and justice cannot go backward. We will fight for truth and justice. We stand with Stan. When one 'Stan' is unjustly imprisoned, hundreds of 'Stans' will emerge motivated by the spirit of our constitution and the visionaries of our nation to stand by the tribals. We still believe in our constitution and our fundamental rights. We trust the supreme court

and we believe in the paths of Mahatma Gandhi. We live by the ideal of 'Truth Alone Triumphs.' The arrest of Stan, has brought many more people forth to seek truth and justice and uphold human rights. We have pledged to live for the betterment of the other, for the common good of all humanity. Certainly, we are motivated by the spirit of Fr. Stan and those like him in the remote corners of our country who work tirelessly for the underprivileged. We promote peace and love like Christ and no one can stop us. This incident impels us to commit ourselves and work for an inclusive society.

Is this not a time to explore and plunge into the bitter real-



People demanding justice for Fr. Stan

ities of our brothers and sisters who are marginalized and in the peripheries? When confronted with

issues such as these, if we do not rise to advocate for the poor, who will?

Sisters of St. Joseph of Pinerolo in Brazil

Sisters of the communities

Brazil

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Pinerolo, which is in the process of merging with the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry, has been present in the north-eastern region of Brazil for over 40 years. At this time, they have four communities which are carrying out the mission in different realities.

In 1975, Pope Paul VI called for a "Holy Year of Renewal and Reconciliation". To respond to this appeal, the Congregation of St. Joseph of Pinerolo decided to express solidarity and sharing



Pinerolo - communities in Brazil - a virtual visit by Sr. Sally

through concrete action. Three Sisters were sent to Cícero Dantas, Bahia, a region marked by serious economic and social problems: poverty, hunger, illiteracy, illnesses, a high rate of child mortality,

unemployment and few prospects for young people. Faced with these and other realities, the Sisters began a humble work of evangelization and literacy for young people and adults.

The liberating Word of God, read and reflected on in small groups, was welcomed by the poor and rural workers. A great light for evangelization came from the national movement of the Basic Christian Communities – BCC, which the Sisters helped to organize in the region.

The lack of assistance in response to many health problems led Sr. Dolores to offer her services as a nurse in a small maternity hospital. She is remembered with affection and gratitude, even today, after 23 years since she returned to Italy in 1997.

Up to today, the mission of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in this small region of semi-arid Bahia can be characterized as: evangelization, education and human promotion.

In Cristinápolis / Sergipe we have a formation community where much of the time is devoted to studies and formation. The missionary activity of the Sisters is somewhat restricted. We work in pastoral ministry for children, catechesis, celebrations of the Word, biblical circles, visits to families and rural communities, and vocation animation. We monitor the “Despertar” project, (Awakening Project) which assists children who are socially vulnerable. We tutor students after school hours and offer complementary activities, sports and leisure. The Project also offers a course in cutting and sewing to two groups of women, with the aim of creating income-generating possibilities, to help with family expenses, in addition to enabling moments of sharing, interaction, reflection and prayer.

For 33 years, the Sisters have been in Joaquim Gomes and Maceió / Alagoas where they continue to sow the seeds that are possible by their small community. They are involved in catechesis,



Communities of Joaquim Gomes - Alagoas

groups to help the poor, ministry with the youth and elderly, and prayer services. They visit bedridden and paraplegic patients, listen to them and help the poor families. In addition, they have been forming a group of the associates for years and today there are two groups of consecrated associates, enthusiastic and in love with Father Médaille’s charism.

To help the region socially the sisters try to continue with a nursery school for children (from 3 to 5 years old) and projects that welcome children and teenagers

ages 7 to 17. Altogether they reach out to 450 participants in 4 community centres, in the most vulnerable areas of the city.

In March they had to close the school in Maceió in the Ponta Grossa neighbourhood. Now this space welcomes mothers for moments of socialization. Due to the pandemic, these moments were held in freely chosen circles, with participants divided into smaller groups where they read the Word of God. With the help of some NGOs they also offered help with food.



Cicero Dantas Community - Bahia

Walking through the periphery

S. Pratima Kulathunkal &
S. Laveena D'Souza

Province of Tanmaya - India

Gulab Ganj is a village in Madhya Pradesh, Central India with a total population of 1844. The chief occupation of the people is agriculture. They have two seasonal cultivations—Rabi (winter crops) and Kharif (monsoon crops). Kharif crops are mainly rice, maize, soya beans, and peanuts whereas in Rabi, they cultivate wheat, legumes, mustard, and others.

Both the caste system and the feudal system are strong to the core. The landlords hire outstation labourers as they do not want people belonging to lower castes to work in their fields. Due to this, the local villagers struggle for survival.

Because of the monopoly of the rich males in the society, these villagers are exploited financially and deprived of all opportunities for political involvement. In spite of reservations (certain advantages given to historically disadvantaged groups), they are not able to function and fight for their rights, with the low caste representatives in government little more than puppets in the hands of the rich.

Since the society is gender-biased, women's existence is unnoticed and their voices go unheard. Most of the women are illiterate and limited to household chores. They are dependent on the male folk who use the women for work and their pleasure. It is not unusual for these women to be



Women learning to design the bangles

raped by high caste males.

The village of Gulab Ganj has not seen any government schemes or projects. The schools, which lack infrastructure and monitoring, are either empty or have fewer than twenty children with ill-mannered teachers.

Amidst these situations, the Sisters of St. Joseph, Tanmaya Province, India, plunged into this mission in the year 2019. At present, Sisters Dorothy Beck, Pratima Kulathunkal, and Madhu Kapil are continually visiting families, making them aware of their rights and other matters.

A first step was to make the women financially stable. With the support of the congregation, the sisters organized a 'Costume Jewelry Training Programme.' Initially, 15 ladies enrolled themselves, but only eight completed the ten days of training and received certificates.

The women were eager and excited to learn a new skill and are determined to take up this 'Costume Jewelry' trade. In her sharing, Sr. Dorothy Beck said, "These

women not only mastered the skill but have taken the initiative to contact a few shopkeepers to get the raw materials and to market the finished products." Further she added, "Along with building self-confidence, they have developed a positive outlook towards their life. For most of them, it was the first chance to be out of their confined homes."

For Sr. Pratima, it was a different kind of training programme and she was required to create an atmosphere of trust to gather these women. She expressed satisfaction with this training, saying, "Though it is the first training programme in this village, I feel the joy of reaching out to these marginalized women folk. Slowly, we can create awareness and convince them that change is possible through them."

Both Sr. Dorothy Beck and Sr. Pratima have great hope and plans to reach out to these marginalized simple women folk. With great surety, they said, "We expand our mission with the people in the periphery."

A new experience

S. Elisabeth Guo

Sisters of Saint Joseph in China

What a joy to have been able to participate in the Provincial Chapter that took place on December 31, 2020 for the election of the Delegates to General Chapter 2021. I am very grateful to Sister Jona, Provincial of France-Belgium and her Council for allowing me to participate in this Chapter as an auditor. For me it was a new and important experience.

I say a new experience because it was the first time in my religious life that I participated in a Provincial Chapter in an international Congregation for the election of Delegates to the General Chapter. In fact, for me, as a member of a diocesan congregation of about thirty Sisters, we do not need to elect delegates to participate in a General Chapter since all the Sisters who have pronounced their perpetual vows participate.

What I noticed was first of all the active participation of the



The Community of Bois Joli with Sr. Elisabeth: Sisters Pascale, Elisabeth, Marie Pierre, Anne Marie and Jayarani

Sisters. Although some Sisters could not come because of the health regulations in force, they participated through prayer. For the deliberative members, whatever their age (especially the older Sisters), they participated actively in this day which was very intense. They set a good example of responsibility for the whole congregation.

My second point is listening. It was not only listening to the voice of the Lord, invoking the Holy Spirit, but also listening to the other. The delegate candidates were able to freely express their thoughts and concerns. The

Chapter Assembly received them with great respect, without criticism or judgment. The final election ended in peace and joy, effective signs of the Lord's presence.

I am very grateful that God has kept me in France. No doubt the pandemic that has kept me in this country is responsible for this blessed delay. I am also very grateful to the Provincial, the Councilors and all the Sisters of the Province for having welcomed me and for having allowed me to have this beautiful experience among them, and also for having been able to share in the life of certain communities.

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