

French

English

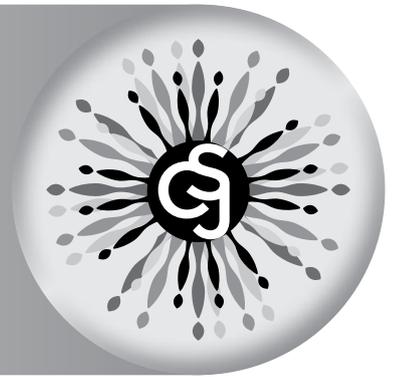
Italian

Portuguese

Norwegian

# CS JOURNAL

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## GENERAL COUNCIL

# Intercultural Communities: A Need and Opportunity



**S. Ieda Tomazini**  
*General Council*

In February, while in some parts of the world people gather to start annual activities, other activities are reaching their peak. Here in Rome, in the first half of this month, there were several meetings where participants with different languages, skin colors and facial features, witnessed to their international and

multicultural character. One of these meetings was held at the headquarters of the UISG - Union of Superiors General. More than 100 Sisters gathered to reflect on the theme of interculturality. Another was the meeting of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the congregations of the Institut, Lyon, Annecy and Chambéry – ILAC. In this meeting, which brought together participants from France, Italy, the United States, India, Spain, the United Kingdom, Wales, Mexico and Brazil, there

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was reflection on the theme “from a multicultural community to an intercultural community.” The reflection was very rich, but elicited some discomfort and a need for further discussion in our religious communities. In all these meetings, the vast majority of the Sisters have lived or are living in countries or social contexts which are not those of their origin. Can we say that these sisters live in intercultural communities?

In Brazil, there is a multitude of cultures, races and ethnic groups coexisting. The diversity is visible, but the “values” of foreign cultures still dominate, namely, the culture of the white, the foreigner. The indigenous culture, for example, is barely noticed. There are still many prejudices and racist expressions in relation to indigenous peoples, Africans and so-called “Brazilians.” In my country, there are communities with international characteristics and various ethnic groups coexisting in the same region. There are some multicultural communities, where

cultural diversity is visible, and there is a certain interaction and tolerance in relations. And, there are a few with some intercultural characteristics, but they are not very aware that they are living the intercultural. The ethnic and cultural diversity and the way we interact, as well as our history of colonization makes us different, but not necessarily intercultural. The meetings earlier this year helped me to reflect on what we express and what we really are. In the event promoted by the UISG, with Anthony Gittin speaking about the intercultural, I realized that, in my country, we have people, communities, and religious communities also with international characteristics, some multicultural and a few intercultural. Already, the multicultural communities include the diversity of cultures in the country. We live together harmoniously and respect each other, but we keep our distinct identity. The new arrival needs to adapt to survive. Intercultural communities do exist, but not with the

consciousness of being intercultural. For what distinguishes this type of communities is the intentional character, the spirit of faith, the desire to build a new way of being community, where one culture is no more and no less important than another. This means being conscious of recognizing what is a value and to welcome and integrate it into your culture. In intercultural communities, there is no negation of a culture, no assimilation of another culture, but rather a conscious interaction that is transformative, a transformation in the way of thinking, of conceiving life and values. The deepening and sharing of our similarities and differences in culture is a necessity and an opportunity we have to encourage the construction of a new style of fraternal life based on respect, on inclusion and the commitment to humanize our relationships always more, as well as our commitment to the poor and to the culture of the marginalized to whom we are sent to live our vocation.

## PROVINCE/REGION/MISSION

# Compassion for a People Crying out for Life and Justice

### S. Anari Felipe Nantes

*Brazil*

Since 1996, I have devoted myself to the service of the Guarani and Kaiowá peoples in Caarapó and Juti, in Mato Grosso do Sul (mid-western region of Brazil). The state is home to the second largest indigenous population in the country. Today, it has approximately 75,000 indigenous, belonging to seven different ethnic groups. The Guarani and Kaiowás

form the largest group, around 37,000 people. The major problem faced by these people is that they have been deprived of their traditional lands and crowded together into small “reserves.” The lands of their ancient villages were handed over to large landowners. The indigenous population has increased, and today it struggles to reoccupy its traditional territory, a right guaranteed in the Federal Constitution of 1988. As Sisters of St. Joseph, we have worked for 20 years in the municipality of Caarapó, where the Te’yikue reservation is located, with a population

of around 6,500 people, distributed in an area of 3,594 hectares. They face many problems with sustainability in the broadest sense of the word. We were able to partner with a project coordinated by a university in the region, in collaboration with the diocese, the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI) and the municipality, in order to develop joint actions in the areas of food production, environmental recovery, health and education. We seek to be a caring presence, and along with the people, reflect on sustainable alternatives to improve quality of life.

I worked from the beginning to build an indigenous education program – specific, communitarian, intercultural and bilingual. Indigenous education is guaranteed by the Constitution, by the laws of the country for education, specifically for indigenous schools. The great challenge in the beginning was to involve the school community in discussions regarding what school we want for our children. What must we teach? How to teach? When to teach? In which language to teach? Everything is built collectively. Another challenge faced was the specific training for teachers from elementary school to middle level, up to a university degree in indigenous intercultural studies. This was a long struggle for the teachers’ movement and indigenous leaders. Literacy training in the Guarani language began in 1997. Today, there are 1,600 students in elementary school, 62 indigenous teachers distributed in a main school and 3 extensions, high school and adult education. They only leave to study in another location when they go to college. One of the first indigenous teachers of the village is already effective as a university professor and is a doctoral candidate in the area of natural sciences. In the village, we have a teacher who has already completed a master’s degree in education, a teacher who finished a master’s degree in mathematics and another who began a master’s degree



*Sr. Anari (right) and members of the local community*

in linguistics this year. A young man who did all his studies in schools in the village is now in the third year of medical school. The indigenous community today lives a very challenging time, tense and insecure. In 2013, there began a process to demarcate their traditional lands around the reservation. This process generated violent confrontations between the armed guards of the farmers and the indigenous peoples. In June 2016, a tragedy resulted in the death of an indigenous health agent and the wounding of seven others, among them, a teacher and a 12-year old child. The climate of tension and fear has changed the routine of this population. In the

middle of the crossfire, I live with one foot in the village and another in the city, being often the only support person for contact with the public agencies responsible for care in the community. In spite of difficulties, I feel blessed to be a part of this long difficult process to restore the dignity of human beings, through which these Guarani and Kaiowá communities have passed and are passing today. We have been recognized on the state and national levels, thanks to the persistence of collective work. For sure, the charism of communion was a big factor in the successful outcome of the work in partnership. The errors have always been assumed by all and the victories celebrated with parties!



*Teachers at the local school*

# Some “Sparks” of Fraternity

**S. Jeanne Thévenet**

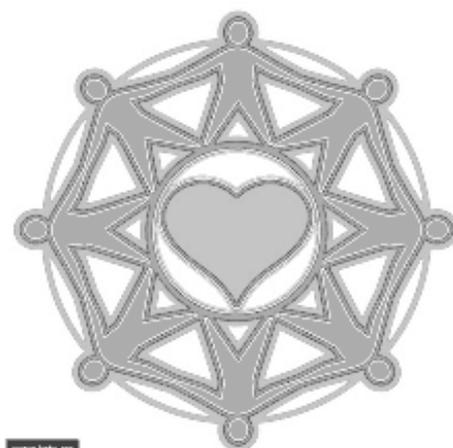
*France*

In the stairway of our apartment building (La Sambuy, Albertville), there are 6 families of foreign origin. One of them consists of a divorced father with two children and his elderly parents. After a holiday in his country, he returned with a “new” young woman, Yamina, who doesn’t speak French. She doesn’t know anyone in the neighborhood and lives with the burden of caring for her in-laws and the children of her husband. She has spent weeks locked in the apartment! One day, her neighbor, also of foreign origin, who saw the difficult situation, told me, “If you teach her French, at least she would have the opportunity to leave her house.” So it was done. These courses have opened

another horizon, making her aware that she isn’t just a cleaning lady at the service of her husband’s family. She can talk with others and be recognized in the neighborhood. Happier still, she is still our neighbor. Some of her words resonate with us, “I was a stranger and you rescued me.”

Hannane (Moroccan) asked me one day, “Who are these families who come every weekend to the halls of the church?” After a few explanations, she said, “I would like to do something for them. How many people?” One Sunday at noon, she arrived with her husband and three children. They brought a much appreciated appetizing couscous for the 15 people that day!

Evelyn, the secretary in the media center, at a night meeting of the Association, said to us, “I don’t have any children! I



would like to help the mothers.” Since then, every Thursday, around 6 pm, after work, she goes to Jehona and cares for her 2 little girls, allowing the mother to go shopping!

The list could be long... If, as Pope Francis says, “we knew” how to keep an open heart.

## Bolivia In Conflict

**S. Gabriela Cuéllar Durán**

*Bolivia*

Since December, 2017, Bolivia is subject to a new criminal code that affects freedom and personal and institutional rights. This code allows, among other abuses, extrajudicial detentions and threatens more innocent children with genocide. The right to life, to personal dignity, and the dignity of others are not respected, forcing submission to the will of a dictatorial authoritarian government.

The doctors were the first to come out to protest. Today, all public, private and civil institutions, religious and others are joining forces to demand the repeal of the aforementioned penal code.



The Bolivian Workers Central, an organization that encompasses the entire working class of the country, ordered scheduled work stoppages. The Union of Transport, urban, inter-provincial, and international, is involved

in this protest that encompasses all of us. The different departments of the country organized civilian demonstrations, and suddenly, people have a happy euphoria and are joining the demonstrations against the abuses

and against the re-election of Evo Morales to the Presidency. He lost in referendums in 2016 and 2017, when people said 'no' to his re-election, and in December last year, they said no to a 'Judicial and Constitutional Court'. In an interview with CNN International, Alvaro Garcia Lineras, Vice President, made it clear that Morales' proposal was for a communist government. That is why he seeks re-election, to remain as head of state in violation of the political Constitution of the State. The

Christian churches of Bolivia, meanwhile, showed support for professional groups manifesting against article 205 and for the rejection of article 88, which bans meetings and all kinds of worship or religious demonstrations, as well as the recruitment of people for religious purposes.

Consecrated religious in Bolivia gathered in Cochabamba from January 10 to 12, and joined the protest, marching silently in the streets of the city, begging God to re-establish dialogue, democracy, peace

and, finally, the repeal of the penal code and against the reelection of the president.

According to Father Guillermo Siles, IMO, a journalist and analyst, the background to all this is the vulnerability of the political Constitution of the State that this government is manipulating. In addition, it creates impunity around Morales to his benefit, robbing people of their freedom and affecting, in all respects, present and future generations.

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# You Also Wash One Another's Feet

S. Maria Cristina Gavazzi

Italy

Once we returned from the meeting of the Extended Council, held in Oslo from September 15 to October 1, 2017, as a Provincial Council, we immediately began to reflect on ways to convey and understand the contents of this congregational event. In the process of reflection, we also involved Sister Mariaelena Aceti, General Councilor, who immediately offered her availability for both the preparatory phase and the sharing of content. There arose the idea to develop a presentation in two stages - one in January, and one in April, 2018 - to give us a chance to address in depth the issues discussed, instead of summarizing the arguments put forward.

At the meeting in January, which was attended by more than thirty of the 52 sisters of the Province, we began by broadening and deepening the insights and questions offered by Sister Sally in her opening address, using three key words: daring, mystery, encounter, to



*Sr. Alessandra, with the help of Sr. Maria Luigia, washing Sr. Clelia's feet*

enter into the mystique that urges us to look with a contemplative gaze on daily life.

We explored the contents offered by the Rev. Ruth Patterson, a minister in the Northern Irish Presbyterian Church, who has devoted her entire life to resolving the bloody conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The heart of her sharing was the development of the theme chosen for the Extended Council — “dare the mystery of

encounter, a compassionate journey.” Daring the mystery and experiencing the dynamism of encounter, our goal is to be a beloved community, where all members live in communion with themselves, with others and with God. Other themes touched upon in the first Assembly were initial formation, starting from the sharing of Sister Philo and focusing the discussion on the reality of our Province. We reflected especially on questions posed by the Initial Formation Commission on

how to meet the requests of young women willing to consecrate themselves to God in the charism of the Little Design and the possibilities offered in being a part of our communities. Finally, we touched upon the topic of contemplative dialogue with a screening of the film, "Men of God" as an example of a community practice of deep listening to the other, where the members enrich each other from what the other communicates, building something new and creating the conditions for a future joint decision.



*Sr. Anna Vincenzena (left), Sr. Cristina washing Sr. Veronica's feet*

## FEEDBACK FROM THE ASSEMBLY

During the meeting, I really felt Jesus' presence among us. It was not a formal meeting of simply deepening content intellectually, but a real experience of the Lord, lived not individually, but together. The film touched me deeply. The relationship between the monks and their taking up the cause of the people led them to give their lives for the Algerian people, despite their fear. It was an Assembly enjoyed and lived with the heart.

*S. Clementina Copia*

This was one of the first meetings I have attended. I felt much communion and willingness to share. The themes certainly led to that. But what helped a lot, in my opinion, was the promotion of more active participation, through the signs we assembled and the dramatization of prayer times. Personally, it was unprecedented and surprising - especially looking at the end result - joining in, improvising in the moments of dramatization and being together with the other, forming something new. This created a greater circularity and helped create a pleasant atmosphere.

*Maria Giovanna (postulant)*

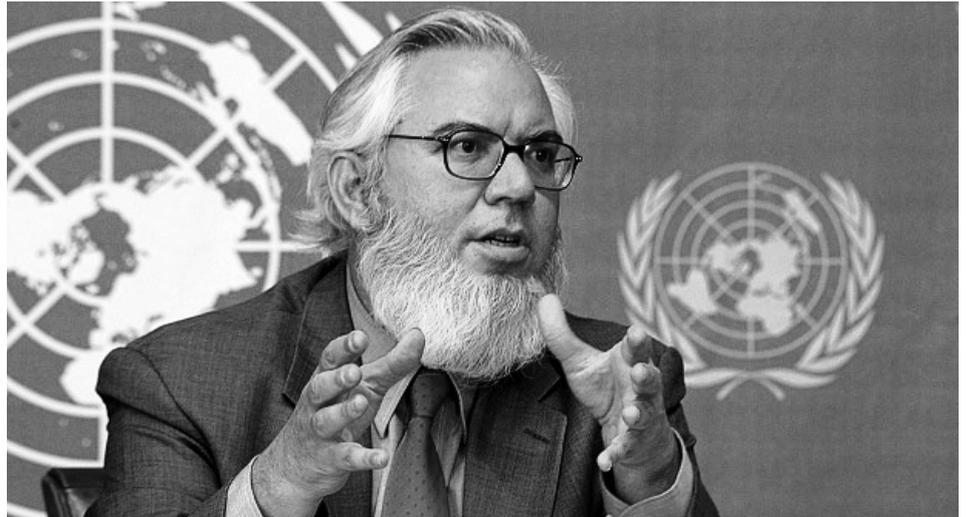
"Dare the mystery of the encounter". This was a concrete experience we lived during the days of our Provincial Assembly. Mutual acceptance, simple, sincere, and affectionate, created an amazing atmosphere of unity, communion, and fraternity among all of us. The stimulating and creative presentation of the content, dramatizations, and the signs, led to my total involvement, not so much at the intellectual level but rather at the level of the heart.

*S. Margherita Corsino*

# Seeking to Eradicate Poverty

S. Barbara Bozak  
USA

The UN Commission on Social Development held their 56th annual meeting in New York, January 29 – February 7, 2018, organized around the theme: Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve the sustainable development goals. Since 2015, the 2030 Agenda with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals is the new framework for all the UN meetings and discussions. This year's Commission on Social Development took SDG 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere) as its main focus. Although poverty is commonly understood as lack of economic resources, poverty exists on many levels, as some speakers noted. Poverty includes social exclusion, loss of cultural heritage (as has happened with many indigenous groups), lack of access to educational opportunities and similar realities. Thus, as Juan Somavia, one of the keynote speakers, said, while many countries have made great strides in reducing economic poverty, few countries recognize or are addressing the other dimensions of poverty, which are equally important. In his address, Somavia noted the importance of policies that integrate the social, economic and



Juan Somavia speaking at the UN

environmental factors of different issues, including poverty, and challenged the UN to propose ways of doing this. He recognized the fact that since regions around the globe differ in regard to their problems and their resources, each region may need a distinct approach to achieving the SDGs, while the final goal is common.

The NGO Committee on Social Development, in their Declaration which they presented to the Commission, focused on the strategy of social protection as essential to ending poverty. In the past, social protection, with its guarantee of the minimum needed for a decent life: food, shelter, education, health care, etc., was assured by charity. In more recent years this obligation has been shifted to the government, who is responsible to protect its citizens, yet

many countries fail to offer adequate, or any, social protection to their people. The notion of social protection is embedded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which opens with the recognition that “the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” Through its Declaration, which becomes part of the UN record, the NGO committee has helped to shape the discourse at the UN and introduced an idea that will influence future discussions and policy. Thus, by their presence at this and similar UN meetings, non-governmental organizations, also known as civil society, continue to learn from and disseminate the wisdom of experts and the discussions of member states, while also offering new insights to the conversations.

NEW  
SAINTS

S. Joan Reilly (82)	USA	18.12.2017
S. Jean McCusker (87)	USA	07.01.2018
S. Mary Dennis Griffin (95)	USA	08.01.2018
S. Stacia Francis Kaniampuram (92)	Pachmarhi	08.01.2018
S. Maria Stepanov (97)	Brazil	10.01.2018
S. Eugenie Maria Pradler (93)	Denmark	13.01.2018
S. Shalini Thomas Kanatt (65)	Nagpur	24.01.2018
S. Julieta Carvalho Rauen (94)	Brazil	03.02.2018
S. Mary Louise Rouleau (77)	USA	04.02.2018
S. Célia Quaresma Zechlinski (81)	Brazil	18.02.2018
S. Mary Sean Reagan (87)	USA	25.02.2018

# Graced Years of Our Lives

S. Cecile Coutinho

Province of Nagpur, India

Today, several communities of women and men religious (and Diocesan personnel as well) face a major problem. On the one hand we see an increasing percentage of Sisters, Brothers, Priests who are elderly; on the other hand, the number of members able to provide care for them, is dwindling.

Religious communities, considering the development of eldercare resources, have multiple needs. They include assistance with personal care, assistance with medication, and nursing home care, depending on the dependence / independence of the individual and the care she/ he requires.

I am now attached to Sandhyavan, a Home for our Senior Sisters in the Province of Nagpur, India. I believe that we can, most certainly, age gracefully. Caring for our seniors leads to self-awareness, self-development. The time with them offers a whole new possibility for learning again and experiencing the emotional and practical aspects of life of these sisters engaged in creative expressions either personally or in community.

They need assistance in many areas of their lives, both emotionally and spiritually - personal hygiene, bathing, dressing, cleaning their rooms, checking on their clothes, etc. They did all this, themselves, before. Yet, we need to be attentive to the emotional aspect, when we, caregivers, give them this personal care. It is not easy for the senior sisters to accept this but they too are helpless and vulnerable.



*Sisters engaged in crafts*

To care for someone who once cared for us is a great privilege and blessing. The additional time that we spend with them also gives us a wonderful opportunity to create fun and laughter, especially at the dining table and recreation. Taking care of them also brings us to consider our own self-knowledge and identity. It renews our self-esteem and enhances our quality of being more human and humane. Taking care of our elderly requires a lot of patience, empathy and understanding. I believe that it is our commitment and consecration as a Sister of St. Joseph that enables us to care for them in a loving and understanding manner. In this process, we also go through a journey of learning from their varied experiences in life and especially, in Religious life. They have a lot of wisdom, knowledge and experience which they are happy to share with us; they certainly find joy in this sharing. The time is also spent in activities, physio-health activities - three times a week. There are twenty of us who participate in this health programme.

It helps to keep the sisters active and healthy. Many have noticed a change in the mobility, strength, flexibility of their arms and legs.

I think if more women talked and shared their experiences openly about getting older, fewer women would feel alone in the journey. We can understand ageing as something no one can avoid, and we can embrace it by holding on to our health as long as we can — instead of trying to stop the clock. Together, we all can age gracefully with energy and good health for decades to come.

The care-givers and myself are deeply grateful that we have the flexibility and courage to accept to wade into deep waters even though it is not easy or comfortable at times. But our reliance on Jesus and His blessings enable us to walk along with Him towards these lovely and loving members who need so much care and loving. They have the right to experience joy, happiness which they readily share with others too.

# Contemporary Art and Dance at Clos St. Joseph

Perrine Coulon

France – from an article in the local press

The practice of contemporary dance in retirement homes is not new in Savoy. For more than a decade, the state government has encouraged artistic exercises with seniors. However, at Clos St Joseph, the intervention of the choreographer Marthe Grey took on another dimension with the residents.

Here the feminine prevails as well as the spiritual. Of the 79 residents, 75 are women, and among them, many are elderly religious. Some 20 of them attend the dance workshop once a week with enthusiasm. After spending their lives on their knees, the discovery of physical expression is a revelation.

When one is 85 or 95 years old and enters the dance hall with a cane, of course, there is no miracle. One does not learn to dance the French Cancan, let alone when you are in front of the altar in the multipurpose room. But, mobilizing one's muscles, joints and imagination to a piece of music is a true wellness experience, judging by the smiles and the glances exchanged. What does dance bring to them?

Freedom, self-confidence and solidarity they say. "The little that we do teaches us about our bodies, and its limits also", says Sister Alix, who hopes already "to go beyond". For Sister Marie des Neiges, the experience takes on another dimension. "It's like liberation," she murmurs, "our generation was not used to self-expression." The dancer Marthe is accustomed to working with seniors. But here, she also



met surprising reactions, like those residents who asked her to call them by their lay first name during the dance sessions.

Yes, Jacob-Bellecombette isn't Lourdes, but the dance brings its small batch of weekly miracles. Here you sometimes forget the pain, and sometimes the cane under the chair when leaving the dance hall.

When the Sisters were asked to suggest the new decoration at the entrance of the House, they did not hesitate long. They wanted something happy, full of life and finally asked for "older people dancing."

This was carried out with the collaboration of the social director of

Clos St, Joseph, Hélène Fuzon, who connected with the visual artist, Claude Burdin. Accustomed to working with institutions, the artist had already come to attend a dance workshop to sketch the movements, life and exchanges between the residents. He came back and this time moved into the residence. For two months he built with them a graphic design around the body and movement. The figure, known as "Gum," refers to Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. The result is a colorful mural that now greets visitors upon entering Clos St. Joseph. The art work called, "Elderly people dancing," was recently hung, and officially inaugurated on January 19.

*The journalist says that dance "is a revelation for our Sisters," (on this point, we agree), but when she added "after spending their life on their knees," we protest. As Apostolic Religious, we have spent many more hours ministering to the sick, teaching catechism to children, animating groups of young people or teaching, than hours spent kneeling in chapel.*

# Faith Formation in Pakistan

S. Sana Bhatti

Pakistan

As a teacher at John Bosco High School in Lahore, I face the challenge of supporting in a special way the Christian students and their families in their effort to live their faith. We try to respond to the needs of the people in Pakistan where religious, political, social, economic and ethical values and principles are in crisis. People are becoming depressed and confused; selfishness is on the increase. We see a lack of tolerance, respect and dignity, with relationships becoming weaker. Family life is suffering. An increasing number of sexual abuse and harassment cases are filed every day and even more go unreported. Women continue to suffer in this male-dominated society. The rights of minorities, which includes Christians,

are not respected. Elections are a sham; the ruling party controls the selection of candidates from the minorities. Christians do not feel secure. Yet they are affected, influenced by the culture and society. After much reflection and discernment we, as religious women feel the call to respond to this urgency prophetically in both the Christian community and in the school where students and teachers belong to different faiths, many being Muslim. We try to create an atmosphere of peace, equality, respect, dignity and unity among the students and staff as well as among the Christians. We have to practice the values of faith each day. It cannot be a show but a faith which comes from the heart and is lived in our concrete actions.

Ministering as teachers and leaders of the Church in Pakistan, we have seen that Christians want to renew or rebuild their faith in God. Our focus is to bring union, love and reconciliation to families through social and spiritual activities. We try to sustain their faith by visiting their homes regularly, praying with them. We promote

the catholic faith, encouraging devotion to Jesus, Mother Mary, Joseph and all the saints through sharing scripture, celebrating feast days, preparing quiz programs for youth and children. We offer youth, women and refugees opportunities to develop their gifts and talents in a way that will enable them to stand on their own feet, help them acquire the skills which will give them the ability to earn money and so have a dignified life in the society. We also arrange awareness programs to help them meet the difficulties they will face on their faith journey, attempting to help them see that they must not compromise their faith, even for the sake of status or love. Listening to their realities we support them to make good decisions. We welcome family members at any time to share their feelings or the challenges they face today either personally or communally.

It is a great challenge for all religious men and women to strengthen their faith community. Yet every Christian has the duty to respond to the call of God and live their faith each day.



# Mission in the Northeast of India

**S. Harshita Joseph**  
Nirmala Province, India

**T**hree sisters: Brigit Ekka, Harshita Joseph and Sonia George from Nirmala Province are engaged in various ministries in the small and remote village of Nongjri in the state of Meghalaya. These sisters are engaged in education, health care, pastoral care and family visits among the Khasi people in northeast India.

The Khasi people, 'Ki Khun U Hynñiewtrep' (Children of the Seven Huts), are an indigenous ethnic group of Meghalaya and Assam. People here speak the Khasi language which is a primarily oral language. Before the arrival of Christian missionaries, Khasi was written in the Eastern Nagari script. Now, thanks in great part to a Welsh evangelist, the Khasi language was transcribed into the Roman script. Although about 85% of the Khasi populace have embraced Christianity, a substantial minority still follow and practice their age-old indigenous religion.

Their lifestyle, food and cultural practices are all very different from the other parts of the country. They live in houses made of bamboo, located in a valley surrounded by huge mountains and thick forest, where the air and surroundings are totally free of any form of pollution. But when people fall sick, there is no nearby hospital to provide medical assistance. The sisters responded to the fact that hospitals are very far from villages and to the lack of public transportation by establishing a small health care center in the village. The people see this as a great blessing from God, even though it is not a complete solution to care for people's health.



*S. Harshita with others in front of the convent*

Another issue is that of education. Quality education of children became a reality only after the arrival of the sisters and OFM priests in this area. When we sisters took up the local school there were only 125 children, and classes ended with Grade 8. But now there are 480 students and they can complete Grade 10. People understand the importance of education and they send their children to Sister's school, so the number of students continues to increase. Not all villages have access to education so a hostel for girls was an urgent need to welcome girls who come from distant villages. At present there are 40 girls in the hostel. Although there is a great demand for admissions to the hostel. due to lack of space more cannot be accommodated. The mission is responding by constructing a hostel building to provide a residential facility to many more children. Beyond this formal education, we have also organized tailoring classes for women from the villages to help them to make a living. And we find time to visit the people and their families, and pray with them, supporting them in



*Gathering of school children and parents*

their spiritual needs.

The three sisters in this mission live a life of sacrifice, as it is a call to live away from modern developments. The rocky road, lack of electricity and lack of communication facilities do not shake the missionary spirit in the three sisters. Instead it strengthens them to serve the people of God in this mission.

# God Manifested in Different Places and Cultures

S. Eliete Dal Molin

Brazil

I believe that to be a missionary is to devote oneself to proclaiming the Gospel and giving oneself in the defense and care of life in different places. As a Sister of St. Joseph and science teacher, I seek to develop the missionary spirit in children, adolescents and colleagues in one of the schools of our Congregation, located in the city of Caxias do Sul in southern Brazil, a city colonized by Italian immigrants who preserved their culture and traditions. During 2017, as a result of reflection and studies in the community about the missionary spirit, I desired to get to know the mission of our Sisters in other realities of the country during my school holiday. In January, I had the opportunity to join the Sisters of St. Joseph and the people in Cansanção, a town in the northeast of Brazil, in wild Bahia, where drought is just one of the reasons for the people suffering. It is a region suffering from drought, bad administration and dependency generated at all levels, including the religious sphere. The political situation is similar to that of all Brazil, one of corruption and injustice. Many people easily sell their votes and have little critical conscience. They live as cheap labor and survive by getting a "family allowance" or state pension. The population faces major challenges like prolonged drought, water shortages,



long distances between towns and cities, poor transportation, precarious migration to São Paulo (the center of the country), and to make all of this worse, access to public health services is very difficult. In the village there are four settlements that, with the help of the government, have homes and small benefits. There are, and increasingly so, problems with drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, individualism, feuds and the emergence of many Protestant sects.

Currently, the parish in which the Sisters of Saint Joseph work consists of 105 rural communities, seven neighborhoods and their region. The pastoral ministry of the different Sisters includes preparation for the sacraments, celebrations of the word and funerals, accompanying catechesis, altar boys, eucharistic ministry, training in scripture and formation of missionary leadership in rural communities. They receive the support, encouragement and confidence of the parish priest.

During the time I was in contact with this reality, I contributed to the parish activities of the Sisters, and I sought

to welcome the different, realizing how small we really are in this world, and how we can be surprised by what life has to offer. When we hold onto our foibles and schemes, we lose our capacity for wonder, to be thankful and rejoice in the unexpected. The mission of the Sisters in this reality is great. Each strives with ardor and without measure for the care and defense of life.

This experience was an opportunity to grow beyond my reality and to commune with the reality of this people who have an unwavering faith and a strong will for the essentials of life. Throughout this month, I experienced and shared many things. I heard a lot of stories, experienced new flavors and expressions. After all, the presence of God manifests itself in many different places and cultures.

I realized that as we become one with the one who welcomes us in a simple, humble way, we feel that the satisfaction of an experience is not in doing things, but in being present, helpful, accepted, kind and caring to those with whom we live and whom we meet.

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