

# INTERCONNECTIONS

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## 150 Years in South Africa



*“Standing on their shoulders....”*

The PBN Family recently marked 150 years’ presence of the Holy Family in South Africa. It was an event celebrated with enormous gratitude for all that God has done through the generous women whose love, devotion, self-giving and hard work have helped the Holy Family to make a difference, and to contribute significantly to the life of the Church and the country.

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**“We love each other, because God first has loved us”**

## HERE IN ROME

The time of grace that we are living through is inviting us as consecrated women to watchfulness, to be ready for the signs of God. We have started our Lenten observances; fasting, penance and almsgiving are important, but what is most important is recognising Christ in the community and in society.



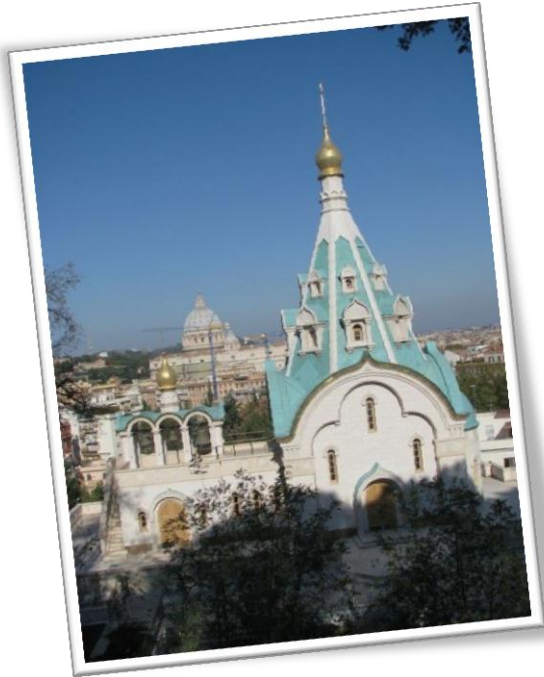
Since the beginning of the year, we have said goodbye to three members of the Local Community at the Generalate: M. Carmen LEACH, who served here in the Secretariat for 37 years in two terms, returned to Spain (Provincial House) on Jan 8, and M. Madeleine FEDRIGO who also rendered many and varied services in two terms over a period of 25 years, returned to France (St. Mandé) on January 31. They continue to collaborate with the Secretariat and the Information/Communication Service as translators. Maristella SOOSAIPILLAI, who has been working here for the Information/ Communication service for 8 years will be returning to Sri Lanka later in the year, after some time following a course in Ireland. We salute them with a deep sense of gratitude, and entrust them to God's hand.

Goodbyes lead to "Hellos" - so there was a warm welcome to Maristella Annie ANTHONIPILLAI, who arrived on Jan 12 from the Province of Jaffna, Sri Lanka for the service of Information / Communication. Ms. Monika KOPACZ a layperson will be collaborating with Annie in this service.



Recently Several Sisters from the Generalate participated in prayer services and gatherings on human trafficking and Christian unity: opportunities to live and to express our solidarity, to embrace and support one another in the Church.

It was with a sense of joy and much enthusiasm that I joined the group of my sisters to participate in the prayer held in the Russian Orthodox church of St. Catherine of Alexandria, here in Rome, on 23<sup>rd</sup> January. This was organized in relation to the week of “Prayer for Christian Unity”. What urged me was a desire to be in solidarity with another tradition different from the Catholic tradition, believing in our common search for the One God and to experience that PRESENCE calling for respect and communion in diversity.



The Church from the outside was huge, yet the inside space for the faithful was too small to hold the crowd that had gathered that evening, that we were almost touching one another. The ceremony was very solemn and prayerful with singing and chanting, both in Italian and in Russian. The Priests alone conducted the

whole service and we were mostly an “observing presence”. The “holy of holies” which kept us at a distance from the priests reminded me of the Old Testament times. Since this was my first experience of attending an Orthodox prayer, I was happy to have come to know another unique yet different way of liturgy. For me, the most touching moment was when the deep desire within all of us to be one in heart, praying for unity and oneness, burst into words, as the whole congregation, spontaneously joined in praying the “Our Father” together.

*Kumudini Dassanayake*

## **Welcoming Masses of Displaced People**

Fr. Edouard TSHIMBA ex-Superior General of the Scheut Fathers is at present a missionary in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic. When he was passing through Rome he offered to share with those who would like to hear him, the situation in central Africa and especially in Bangui where he works.

### **The City of Bangui...**

Bangui is the capital and the largest city in the Central African Republic. It was founded by the French in 1889. It has a river port which includes a dock 400 metres long and a petroleum port downstream. The cathedral of Notre Dame is the seat of the Catholic Archdiocese of Bangui.



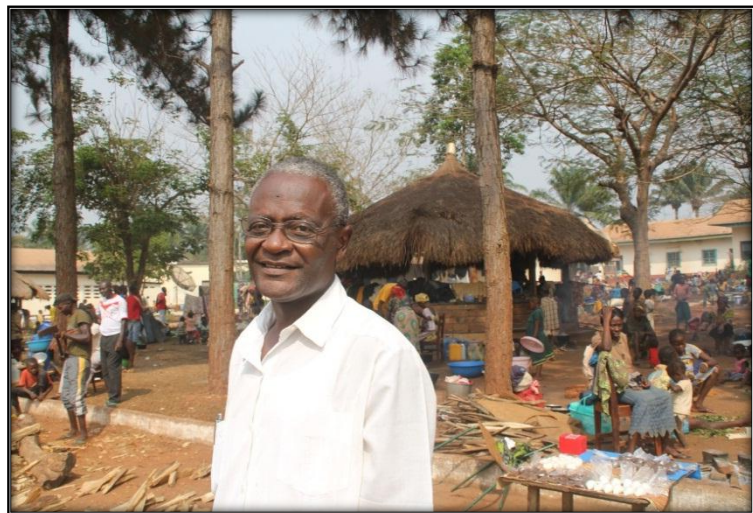


During the second week of December 2013, armed attacks left 600 people dead, 450 of them in **Bangui**. About 160,000 people fled from their homes. This situation continues. At present, Fr. Edouard is the rector and formator in the Major Seminary of the Archdiocese of Bangui. There are about 20 candidates in the seminary. They come from towns where there is continual warfare and where the people live in poverty and constant upheaval.

When the situation in the city worsened, Fr. Edouard opened wide the doors of the seminary to the displaced people. Today, he provides shelter for 7,000 people whose

homes had been destroyed and who were left with only the clothes they were wearing. They had nothing and since Fr. Edouard's colleagues had left for their respective countries some time previously, he was alone in having to provide for them even though he did not have enough money to cater for such a crowd. He said, "Providence does not let us down." This is daily life. The unexpected happens: the rebels come threatening the people and the people look to him for protection. Both adults and children call him "Dad". Many people sleep in the seminary chapel. Each morning they gather up their belongings and celebrate the Eucharist. When that is finished, the chapel becomes a dormitory again.

He told us that they had witnessed terrible scenes, the most cruel murders of both children and adults, scenes that marked them very deeply. "How could we not ask, 'Where is God?' How could we maintain the inner peace and serenity that we need in these situations? We simply said to ourselves that we need to have time for ourselves in the midst of it all. We need to pray to support ourselves. If we abandon prayer and our relationship with God, we are lost. That is the only way. In these circumstances of loneliness and isolation, all we have left is God".



*M. Lourdes de la FUENTE*

# 150 Years in South Africa...

## The Family Celebrates...



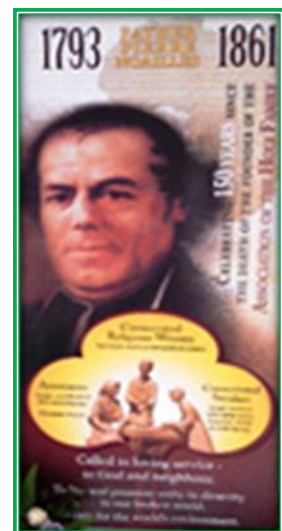
For a year we have been thinking and talking about the 150 years' history of the Holy Family in Southern Africa and preparing to celebrate it. Now at last we have celebrated this moment of Grace in our country. Who can know what those years have meant in the lives of individuals and in the history of our people? We remember those who led the way and thank them for the legacy they left us.



When the Sisters arrived in Natal, the greatest needs of our young country were Evangelisation, Education, and Health Care and the Sisters met these needs as far as they could, with limited personnel, little finance, inexperience and enormous dedication. The Pioneers landed in Natal in May 1864, and had a long wait in Pietermaritzburg before being able to go to their Mission, in April 1865. Mother Mary, Joseph Angot was the Leader of the six Hope Sisters who came to Basutoland (Lesotho). When they

arrived there they lived simply and did not spare themselves to help the people to understand God's love for them and to better their lives. The first missionaries lived and died and were buried among the people they loved and served. The Unit of Lesotho is preparing to commemorate their arrival there in April this year.

On Saturday 4 October 2014, the celebrations began in Johannesburg, the city where the Holy Family has been present since its second year of foundation, 1887. From the first days the Sisters were engaged in teaching, founding the Johannesburg General Hospital and growing with the city itself, as it rapidly expanded. On the altar were a Banner of our Founder, another Banner depicting, in pictures, the history of the Province and the Jubilee Candle that would travel to the other centers and eventually to Lesotho for the 150<sup>th</sup> Year celebrations there.



We gathered in Christ the King Cathedral for High Mass, celebrated by Archbishop, Buti Thlagale. Our Unit Leader, Shelagh Mary Waspe reminded us of the chaos that prevailed in France when our Founder was young and his aim to “Gather together the scattered Children of God”, and the privilege that we shared, of being able to help to promote the dignity of all peoples in the chaotic times that our land has been through. The Archbishop’s Homily acknowledged the ‘ground-breaking’ contribution of the Holy Family to the Church in South Africa that had never been given the recognition it deserved.

The Mass was given a special atmosphere of joy by the drums and trumpet call that accompanied the Entrance Procession. Symbols were presented and the commemorative candle lighted to remind us of what the Holy Family has stood for and the ideals it pursued. A group of our Sisters from Lesotho formed the Offertory Procession, bringing up the Gifts, singing and dancing in rhythm.

On 15<sup>th</sup> October, in Durban, where our first Sisters landed on the African continent, Bishop Barry Wood OMI celebrated the very joyful Mass in Emmanuel Cathedral that was so much a part of our early and more recent Sisters’ lives and Apostolates. Four schools are still in operation in Durban, under the care of Lay Teachers and the loving interest of the Sisters. The Bishop’s message, quoting Pope Francis, was ‘Mission’, defined as a ‘Life Force’, an ‘Energy’ that needs to be channeled into

a ‘Life-Giving Choice’, such as Religious Life, that promotes the Church’s growth and attracts people to God. He expressed a prayer that the Holy Family would always be Good News for the poor. The schools, founded by the Holy Family, participated in the Mass. Two Lay Associates made commitment in the Association and their companions renewed theirs. When the Sisters present renewed their Vows, facing the congregation, the people stood up and applauded the Sisters for at least 5 minutes.

Pietermaritzburg was the capital city of Natal, when Durban was a small port and Bishop Allard, the first Bishop of Natal had a house there that was used by the Sisters to help to accommodate their schools and Orphanage, for many years. In St Mary’s Church, the celebrations took place on 18<sup>th</sup> October. The Provincial Superior of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Natal, Fr. Vusi Mazibuko, celebrated the Mass in St. Mary’s Church. The more mobile of our elderly Sisters in Pietermaritzburg were able to join in the celebration. The Past Pupils of the school enhanced the occasion by singing, from memory, their old School Song.





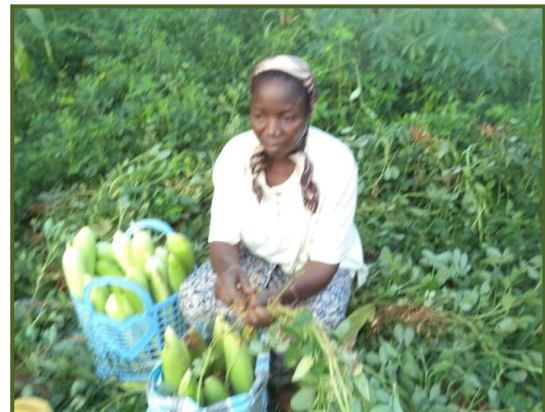
In all three centers, the Thanksgiving Mass was followed by a Meal to which all were invited. It was a joyful experience to meet old friends, pupils, patients and co-workers. There were posters on the walls to depict some of the places and events that had taken place and time fled by. Pupils of the schools entertained us with their ethnic dancing. Many gifts, good wishes and prayerful messages were received at this time and we were happy to share this celebration with everyone.

*In our next issue, we will surely have an account of the celebrations in LESOTHO, where the PBN Family will mark 150 years' presence of the Holy Family during the month of April.*

## EXODUS TO PATU/BOMA (BAS-CONGO)

**B**ecause of our commitment to follow Christ also because of our Charism, we the Sisters of the Holy Family of Bordeaux are especially attentive to the “little ones”, the poor and those left behind by society.

That is why we give priority to the formation of women wherever we are. We accompany and form women marginalised by society whose situation poses a problem. Among these are single mothers and uneducated women. They are ignored and disowned by society.



In an attempt to help them recover their self-worth as human beings and be integrated into society once more, we give them a suitable practical formation and, above all, help them to become aware of their situation, more self-sufficient and more involved in society.

When we arrived in Patu a year ago, we realised that the situation is the same for the women in the province of Bas-Congo (in the extreme south of the country).





Patu is economically poor. The people work on the land and the produce is sold for next to nothing. Therefore, life is difficult. In D. R. Congo, often the women take responsibility for the whole family because it is they work in the fields.

The single mothers of Lukula, in the District of Bas-fleuve, in the Province of Bas-Congo, are abandoned to their sad situation and languish in misery. Their lives are humiliating and this gives rise to a lot of misfortune for them.

Without any support or accompaniment, they have lost all hope and are obliged to do what they can, under very difficult circumstances, to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their children. The instability of their lives leads them to have more than two children

with different fathers and this increases their misery and dependence.

The Sisters accompany and form the single mothers. These young women find happiness again and gradually gain the respect of their neighbours. They come for formation three times a week and work in the fields for three other days. Formation takes place from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. The formation is very practical and we hope that by the end of the year the young women will be able to sew.

The young women are very happy with their formation and the concern the Sisters have for them.

I am happy to be able to share what I witnessed of this apostolic work during my stay at Patu.

*Sr. Anne NKUMUNDE*

### Celebration of the day of Consecrated Life in the diocese of Maroua-Mokolo (Cameroon)

Pope Francis has invited the whole Church to dedicate this year to Religious Life in order to highlight the witness of a life given totally to God for the salvation of the world.

In Cameroon, the national opening of the year took place in Douala. Many Religious women and men from all over the country attended the opening ceremony so as to begin this year together and be a sign of the Church as Family. The laity were also invited to pray for those who had left everything to proclaim the Kingdom.

In the northern ecclesiastical province, the major superiors had a similar meeting in



Garoua. A delegation from that group was invited to take part in the Cameroonian bishops' seminar on consecrated life which took place in Nkongsamba from 10 to 17 January. It was the first time that such an

assembly had reflected on consecrated life. There were more than sixty major superiors present.

We studied the document *Mutuae relations* together. We looked at the relationship that Religious should have with the Ordinary of the place. As members of the same Church, we are all invited to work together for Christ's mission. This fraternal relationship should find expression in dialogue and mutual trust. If not, prejudice could prevent us from looking in the same direction. The bishops' desire is that we collaborate well as Church.

After these important events at both national and ecclesiastical Province levels, Monseigneur Bruno ATEBA, Bishop of Maroua-Mokolo, organised some on-going formation for priests, deacons and religious on the theme, "The place of consecrated life in the pastoral plan of the diocese". The meeting took place from 3 to 5 February after a beautiful celebration for the Day of Consecrated Life on 2 February.



We are very happy to have had these enriching Church events in spite of the difficult situation caused by the threats of Boko Haram.

We make our contribution to the apostolic work of the diocese in the light of our own particular *Holy Family* charism. We collaborate in the building up of the Kingdom in this part of the universe. In our vow formula, each one says "In the desire to give myself totally to God, to follow Christ and to share in his mission of salvation, I... in the presence of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, all the Saints and those who are here assembled, make freely and for ever the vows of obedience, chastity and poverty to God our Father ... in the apostolic life...". (Art 7)

This formula gives expression to what we are called to live. We are not religious for our own sake but for the service of the Kingdom. During these celebrations, we commemorated the Miraculous Benediction. Yes, the Lord continues to bless us and to reassure us of his life-giving presence.

God is alive. God calls us to have but one heart. We look for situations where we can proclaim the Kingdom and we must do this with all the other Churches.

The following were the words spoken to the participants when we were missioned "Go and continue to bring Joy, Peace and, above all, Hope and Love to the world".

Each one of us returned to her/his parish to work for Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus wishing one another A HAPPY YEAR OF CONSECRATED LIFE.

We too wish all of you a Happy Year of Consecrated Life!

*Sr. Agnès ONGWISA HFB*

## LATIN AMERICA



### “Awakening the World”

“Awakening the World” is the title of a letter which the Director of CLAR wrote to the Religious women and men of Latin America. In it she expressed the joy felt by all Religious when the Pope called us to blow the dust off our prophetic identity and be dynamic, courageous and creative.

We share with you a passage which shows us a path for the future and gives us the “recipe” for waking up.

*“In the Pope’s letter “Rejoice!” Francis reminds us that the prophetic dimension of Religious Life calls on us to “Wake up the world”. This is how our radical following of Jesus is expressed. We will wake up the world only insofar as we bear witness to communion, working together inter-congregationally and sharing our Charism and mission with the laity. People will wake up when they see Religious Life with a new look and a new way of behaving, when they see the new and old generations complementing and supporting one another; when they see us happy, living simply, serving others and having good human relationships. We will wake up the world when we go out to meet it with the tenderness and joy of a mother, a father, a sister or a brother. We will wake it up when people see “Light in our eyes, the Word on our lips and Fire in our hearts.”*

Mercedes Leticia Casas  
Sanchez  
President of CLAR

**“Human beings are themselves considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded.....It is no longer simply about exploitation and oppression, but something new.....The excluded are not the ‘exploited’ but the outcast, the ‘leftovers’”.**

**Pope Francis**





## Latin American Network Assembly



The Latin American Assembly met in Yparacrai, Paraguay, from 27 to 31 January. During those days we shared, reflected, prayed, discussed, participated and brought our Charism to life, inspired by the General Council's invitation, "If we don't dare now, then when?"

The presence of 26 Sisters from the countries which form the Latin American Network – Peru, Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina – lent warmth, colour and harmony to the *Holy Family* spirit during those five days. Our slogan was: **"From inside we move out; from outside we move in."** Who will go? **Talita Kum!**

Sr. Daniela Muzzachi welcomed us with the wish that we would feel at home and encouraged us to leave behind worries, concerns and plans so that we could be open to the spirit of the Assembly.

Sr. Ana María Guantay, an Augustinian Missionary from Buenos Aires,

accompanied us, using an experiential methodology: **"From bleeding faithfulness to fruitful emptiness"** based on the story of the woman with a haemorrhage. She invited us to look at the meaning of this in the context of different human situations as well as in reference to our own "emptiness" and to find together some clarification coming from the One whose disciples we are. We began with a prayer, **"Let us be surprised by what is deep within"** part of which was a sharing of our dreams.

There was something special about this Assembly. We are at an important point as the Latin American Network, ending one stage and beginning another. Over the past six years, we have taken our first steps together as a Network. The time is now and we are the ones who have to carry on. So we set out some lines of action, priorities, that we would take on for the first three years with the new Network Council.

**After some personal work, we decided as a group:**

- \* To re-assess and revitalise community life.

- \* To live the mission of communion and to respond promptly wherever life calls.
- \* To re-read and understand the energy and impulse for the Mission which the Spirit of God Alone gives at this time in history.

**These lines of action will dynamise our personal, community and Network lives as a whole.**

We reflected and shared on reports about the structure of the Network and the attitudes and values that both leaders and members need in order to be a living body responsible for the common Mission. We also began a process of discernment for the Network.



We ended our Assembly, celebrating with gratitude all we had lived and shared. Like Jesus at the Wedding Feast of Cana, we drank a toast wishing one another our hearts' desires. Finally, we were each given a nest with eggs in it to signify our responsibility to care for life.

## **The Paschal Journey**

### **A cycle of life**

**Listening**  
**Waiting in hope**  
**Celebrating new life**  
**Nurturing / supporting new life and growth**  
**Standing in solidarity with others – showing the way forward**  
**to Christ in Joy**  
**Knowing “the way” leads to passion and death**  
**Continued Resurrection experience**  
**Listening**



## BRAZIL

### Life in Vendaval

Sr. Luiza da Silva is a member of an inter-congregational community in Vendaval in Brazilian Amazonia. She speaks enthusiastically about the values of the Ticuna people, the ethnic group the Sisters work with. The people are very poor and needy but they have plenty of what is most important – solidarity. The three Sisters who form the little community have been living in Vendaval since last July and are working to form leaders.

#### Luiza tells us about life in Vendaval:



Vendaval is an indigenous community which is part of the parish of Belém in the diocese of Solimões. There are 1890 people in the parish – all Ticuna. It is a lovely community with many children and young people. The people are very poor and live by fishing. They grow some crops and they receive a government subsidy according to the number of children they have. It is a shame that the government does not consider this ethnic group to be normal citizens.



Our work is to form catechists, community and liturgy leaders, and arrange visits to the 24 small communities living on the banks of the river Solimões. It is wonderful to see the interest and dedication of those who take on the responsibility of transmitting the Word of God. They have been accompanied by a Religious for several years but he does not live with them. They have been hoping for a long time that Religious would come and live in the community.

In December, the diocese decided to build a house for the Sisters. The process of choosing the place was very interesting. Together with the Capuchins, who are responsible for the parish, we called an assembly where the Vendaval Pastoral Council was set up.



The place where the Sisters' house would be built was put to a vote. After an exchange of opinion, a group of women who live in the centre of the area made a very strong proposal that the place that was being voted on be adopted. They also agreed to be responsible for the Sisters. They showed how seriously they took this promise when we told them the time the heavy building material would be arriving. They were all waiting. It was impressive to see the number of people – children, women, young and even old people – who went up and down the hill unloading the material.

We were very happy when Sr. Inés of the Conference of Religious of Brazil came to visit us. She encouraged us and endorsed what we were doing. It is very encouraging to know that we have the support of the people who know us and of the Conference of Religious. The visit was worthwhile. It is lovely to live all this, and we thank God for the experience of being with the Ticuna people who are so welcoming and available.



*Luiza da Silva  
Vendaval – Amazonas*

**Watch how you live. Your lives may be  
the only gospel  
your brothers and sisters will ever read.**

**Archbishop Dom Helder Camara**



## PARAGUAY

### When will you begin to know day from night?

**Sr. Selva ENCINA, who works in a middle school (teenagers and young people), shares some of her experiences, inviting us to see how strong an effect social situations of marginalisation have on young people. We let her tell the story.**

Looking back over what we lived during this time, I find that what has left a deep impression on me is my experience with the young people of the college where I work. We also visited and accompanied other institutions and families, including the home for teenage boys and girls suffering from AIDS and old people's homes; we helped people who live in the swamp and in Cateura – areas of extreme poverty. This year we also included Cotelengo.

We had a period of familiarisation and sensitisation with the students in order to prepare ourselves to be open to the various situations we were about to meet. However, when we arrived at the

Cotelengo home, we were very surprised at the way the young people interacted very spontaneously with the residents. They hugged them, danced, played and related well with them until we reached the section for the most severely disabled people. This was an encounter with the mystery of life. There were many questions and few answers.

Afterwards we had a meeting with the students to talk about the experience. The paradox of life was deeply felt. Seeing chronically ill people – the majority of them teenagers – engaged in self-harming behaviour led to questions about our instinct for self-preservation. One of the students shared the following:

***“We also, who consider ourselves normal, often damage our own lives when we do not appreciate ourselves or our families, when we take drugs or alcohol, when we do not take our studies seriously or when we use hurtful words against ourselves. These are ways of harming ourselves. Meeting these people today has taught us to value and care for life.”***

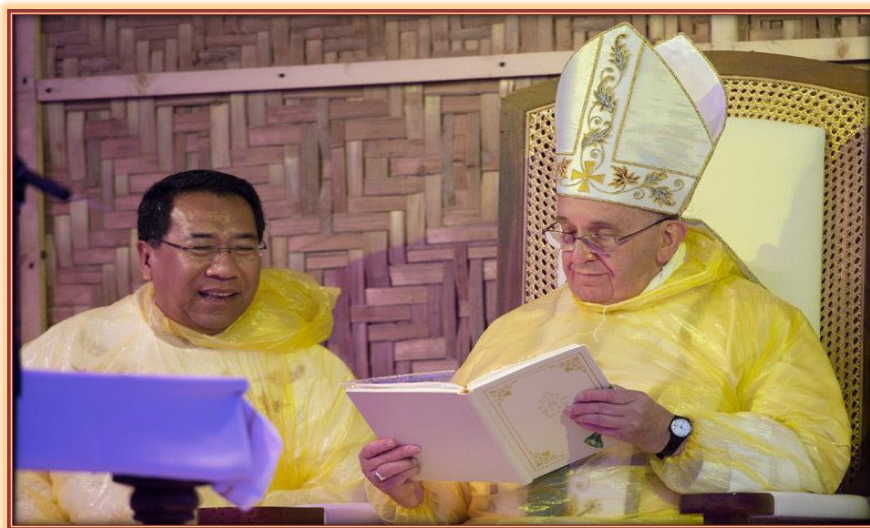
The nurse told us that these people with different abilities have taught her how to love gratuitously and genuinely. They do not make assumptions about others. They know how to give and receive love. They show us who we really are.

This was a true learning experience about life for us. These people did not speak but, with actions rather than words, they showed us that what makes us deeply human is not our mind but our heart; it is not our intelligence, nor power nor ambition – it is love

These sisters and brothers of Cotolengo with their sad stories reveal the mystery of the God of love who dwells within them and through whom they are able to receive and give love in the midst of their differences. We were left with a lot of unspoken feelings but perhaps we could end with a response to the question in the title of this article.

*You will know day from night  
when you can see human beings  
as your sisters and brothers.  
Until that moment, it is night  
and the darkness is still within us.*

## “POPE - FEVER” IN THE PHILIPPINES



The previous days and months were a long spiritual preparation as Filipinos looked forward to the arrival of the “PEOPLE’S POPE!”. They described him as the “Earthquake”, the “Typhoon” meaning to say that Pope Francis rocked the Philippines with warmth, compassion,

love, surprises, humour and spontaneity. On his arrival, the unfavorable weather conditions bothered neither Pope Francis, nor the Filipinos. The Pope was clad in a yellow rain coat to weather the incoming Typhoon ‘Amang’ while on his visit to victims of typhoon- ravaged Tacloban.



Priests and religious, families, youth and children awaited his appearance in Manila Cathedral, the Mall of Asia, the University of St. Tomas and in Luneta Park. Hundreds of thousands had gone during the night to pitch their tent to make sure of a place. We too were privileged to be with our people to receive with reverence the

*“Mercy and Compassion”... these words made me reflect on my own capacity to show mercy and compassion. It demands me to leave behind my ‘own nest’ to be close to the ones who are oppressed and neglected in our society” ... says Catherine*

*“Pope Francis brought us the ‘Joy of the Gospel’. He showed us how to be compassionate and merciful to responding the immediate human situations of the poor and the stranger...” Subhashinie*

*“It’s hard to express my joy in few lines. I saw the face of God in his face. I was spellbound by his simplicity and openness. He is grace and a blessing for a life time” ... Sese.*

*“Pope Francis inspired me to live the realities in life with love and to become a tireless and courageous disciple.” .... Liezl*

*I imagined how people walked from different regions to see Jesus, to be healed by Him, and to listen to His words. Picturing me in the crowd what stays with me is His genuine love for all, shown so visibly, that embodied within his very being the “joy of the Gospel” ... says Mara.*

*The Pope’s presence brought me a great joy – warmed my heart with love; to reach out to the poor and grief stricken brothers and sisters. It’s a blessing for me as I am beginning my missionary journey in the Philippines” ... Sujeeva.*

blessing of Pope Francis on the Filipino nation. We were there in the crowd, one with them in the pouring rain, standing side by side for long hours, squeezing ourselves through the crowds to catch a glimpse this pastor who had brought with him volumes of mercy and compassion to be poured out freely and generously on his flock.



*“I was touched by his flexibility and his swiftness in reaching out to the People around him. I am questioning my availability to reach out to those who are in need of God’s compassion ... Scholastica.*

*I heard and this is true – we saw Jesus in the presence of Pope Francis. He did what Jesus did. We saw the human and the divine in his presence during his short stay. His words re-echo within me. “Go to the peripheries.... Don’t get stuck – just do it” ... Bernie*

*“Do you see the children in the streets? Have you walked the pavements where they sleep? Do not ask how. Do it! This is challenging me with many questions on how to move out of my familiar into the unknown” ... Josie.*

*“With a smile on his face, compassion in his eyes, love over-flowing from his heart, Pope Francis has his feet firm on solid ground, walking lightly and moving around his sheep with outstretched arms,*

*with down-to-earth concerns, human, open minded and genuine – a true Pope to behold – Pope of and for the People, transcending culture, creed and nationality – a lesson taught with example” ... Ida*

*Pope Francis’ visit is a blessing to the entire nation. He is fully human and alive in everything. He was one with the people and so spontaneous in reaching out them. – Mabuhay Santo Papa(long live the Holy Father)!” Aquinas.*

Pope Francis not only electrified the Filipino nation but gained the people’s affection and love in overflowing measures. They topped the record once again – over 7 million flooded the streets of Manila coming from all regions of the Philippines to shower Pope Francis with

the typical Filipino flavour of celebration, welcome and simplicity, and their voices resonating simultaneously ‘PAPA FRANCISCO, MAHAL NG PILIPINO’! (Pope Francis, the Filipinos love you!) It



was indeed a GREAT FAMILY GATHERING to be remembered and to be preserved.

## SRI LANKA

### Pope’s Visit - Colombo



The historic and long-awaited day dawned on January 13 2015. Much speculation and guessing went on before.....“The Presidential Elections will be on 8 January, will he be able to come? Will the country be at peace to receive him?”...

He was welcomed under sunny skies by Sri Lanka’s new president, Maithripala Sirisena,

**“We love each other, because God first has loved us”**

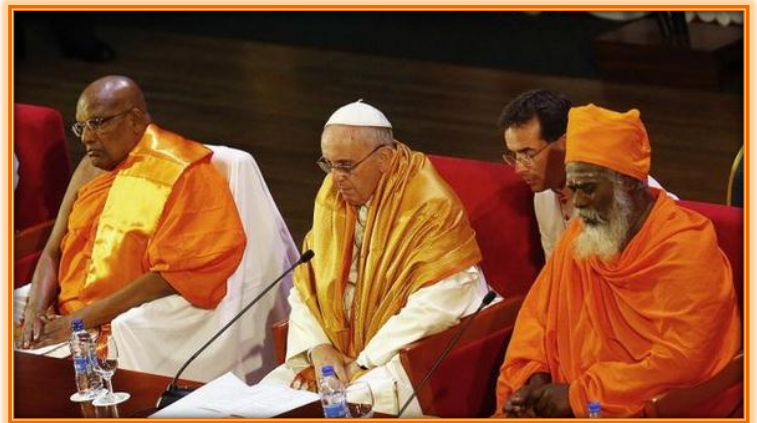
who was sworn in on Friday after a big electoral upset. In a speech he gave before our Pope spoke, President Sirisena said his government aimed to promote “peace and friendship among our people after overcoming a cruel terrorist conflict. We are a people who believe in religious tolerance and coexistence based on our centuries old - heritage.”

On the same day (13<sup>th</sup>) in the afternoon, Pope Francis was greeted by members of Sri Lanka’s Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and and Christian communities. There were religious dignitaries comprising the Maha Sangha, Mowlavis, Kurukkals, Catholic and Christian clergy of various denominations.

**Pope Francis said:**

*“As experience has shown for (inter-religious) dialogue and encounter to be effective, it must be grounded in a full and forthright presentation of our respective convictions. Certainly, such dialogue will accentuate how varied our beliefs, traditions and practices are. But if we are honest in presenting our convictions, we will be able to see more clearly what we hold in common. New avenues will be opened for mutual esteem, cooperation and indeed friendship.....For too many years the men and women of this country have been victims of civil strife and violence. What is needed now is healing and unity, not further conflict and division. Surely the fostering of healing and unity is a noble task which is incumbent upon all who have at heart the good of*

*the nation, and indeed the whole human family.” “For the sake of peace, religious beliefs must never be allowed to be abused in the cause of violence and war. We must be clear and*



*unequivocal in challenging our communities to live fully the tenets of peace and coexistence found in each religion, and to denounce acts of violence when they are committed.”*

On the second day of his visit, Pope Francis celebrated a Mass before a half-million people in Colombo's Galle Face Green to canonize the Rev. Joseph Vaz as Sri Lanka's first saint. Many had been queuing since afternoon of the previous day to secure the ‘perfect’ vantage point. They came from all corners of the island, and from many parts of the world to be present. By many estimates, over half a million people were there. For us Catholics, to attend Holy Mass celebrated by none other than Pope Francis himself is an opportunity that will perhaps only come once in a lifetime.





*"St. Joseph Vaz shows us the importance of transcending religious divisions in the*

*service of peace," Pope Francis said in his homily, "As his life teaches us, genuine worship of God bears fruit not in discrimination, hatred and violence, but in respect for the sacredness of life, respect for the dignity and freedom of others, and loving commitment to the welfare of all."*

To stress the importance of that point, the Pope gave Sri Lanka's bishops a replica of a 17th century decree from the then-king of Kandy — an independent state on the island at the time — allowing Catholic conversions of Buddhists — a somewhat provocative message given the recent upswing in violence against Muslims and some Protestant churches by Buddhist extremists who want Sri Lanka to be exclusively Buddhist!

On Wednesday, an estimated 300,000 people waving the white and yellow Vatican flags welcomed the Pope to the Our Lady of Madhu shrine in the north of Sri Lanka, which is revered by both Sinhalese and Tamil Catholics, as well as people of other faiths. No Pope has ever traveled to the northern Tamil region, and Francis' visit to Sri Lanka's holiest Christian shrine — hours after canonizing the country's first saint as a model for unity provided a sharp backdrop for his appeal that Sri Lankans not only reconcile but forgive one another for the sake of peace.

This was a deeply symbolic show of solidarity with the victims of the country's 25-year civil war and to urge Sri Lankans as a whole to forgive one **another** *"for all the evil which this land has known... Only when we come to understand, in the light of the cross, the evil we are capable of and have even been a part of, can we experience true remorse and true repentance,"* he said after setting free a dove in a sign of peace. *"Only then can we receive the grace to approach one*

*another in true contrition, offering and seeking true forgiveness....There are families here today who suffered greatly in the long conflict, which tore open the heart of Sri Lanka. Many people, from north and south alike, were killed in the terrible violence and bloodshed of those years. No Sri Lankan can forget the tragic events associated with this very place, or the sad day when the venerable statue of Mary, dating to the arrival of the earliest Christians in Sri Lanka, was taken away from her shrine.*

*But Our Lady remained always with you. She is the mother of every home, of every wounded family, of all who are seeking to return to a peaceful existence. Just as she never left the side of her Son on the Cross, so she never left the side of her suffering Sri Lankan children. We want to ask Mother Mary to accompany with her prayers the efforts of Sri Lankans from both Tamil and Sinhalese - speaking communities to rebuild the unity which was lost. Just as her statue came back to her shrine of Madhu after the war, so we pray*

*that all her Sri Lankan sons and daughters may come home to God in a renewed spirit of reconciliation and fellowship.*

When the Pope was presented with a replica of the Madhu statue, we saw him keeping it closely to his heart. When other gifts were given to him, he immediately handed them over to one of the companions, but he was clinging on to this statue until he left the sanctuary.

### **At a Buddhist temple**



Pope Francis became the second Pope to visit a Buddhist temple on Wednesday, changing his schedule at the last minute to pay his respects at an important place of worship in Sri Lanka's capital and to witness a key ritual for Buddhists: the opening of a casket of relics of two important disciples of the Buddha. The head monk at the temple, Monk Banagala Upatissa, said that allowing the Pope to witness the relics "is the highest honor and respect we can offer to his holiness."

At the "Our Lady of Lanka" Chapel, he was awaited by ten Jesuit priests belonging to the Community linked to the Benedict XVI Cultural Institute, a choir and a group of fishermen from the area.



### **What they said...**



*"I believe the Holy Father's visit will be a remedy to our pain," said Mary, 22, who lost two brothers, aged 13 and 15, in 2008 when the school bus they were traveling home in exploded in a roadside blast blamed on Sri Lankan forces. She escaped with a wound in her leg. I have faced enormous losses, not only me, but everyone who is here is carrying some form of grief," she said before Pope Francis arrived in Madhu. "All I pray for is peace."*



*Nuns, who had been at Galle Face Green since 4.00am. "We are proud that we have a Sri Lankan Saint now," they said smilingly after the canonization of St Joseph Vaz. Asked how they felt about Pope Francis and what it was like to see him, the Sisters described it as a blessing for all those who were present that day. Many said the visit and St. Joseph Vaz brought many a blessing to Sri Lanka.*



*Maria Imaculada Rodrigues had come with a group of 34 people from Goa (India). She said it was*

*truly wonderful to see the Pope, and pointed out as St Joseph Vaz was originally from Goa, they were just as proud as Sri Lankans to see him canonized as a Saint.*



*She had been in a group that had come in five buses to attend the Holy Mass. She said they had been at Galle Face since 8.00pm the previous day. "We were all thrilled to see the leader of our Church. I was there 20 years ago when Pope John Paul II came. It was amazing to see the visit of another Pope," she added.*



*Another group from a fishing community in Negombo were still waiting for their buses late in the afternoon. They had been at Galle Face since 4.00pm on January 13, they said. "We have a lot of children in our group. We were a little worried about them being separated and being lost. However,*

*nothing like that happened. We believe God watched over us. We felt as if we were seeing Jesus Christ when we saw the Pope," they said.*



*A Sister from my community said: "We read in the Gospels that many followed Jesus. They wanted to see Him, to touch Him. To be healed by Him. I was reminded of this when I saw how the crowds, people of all denominations, were just wanting and waiting to see our Pope. They felt something happening. This was when we saw our beloved Pontiff, not as someone who sits 'high' at the Vatican, but a simple, humble, joyful, caring shepherd who really who carries Divine Love (God's unconditional love) for his flock, for his people. He was the almost perfect example of Jesus in the Gospels"*

**Colombo Province - Sri Lanka**

**"When you lose the capacity to dream,  
You lose the capacity to love, and the  
Energy of this love is lost".**

**Pope Francis**





## Jaffna - “Behind the scenes at a Papal Visit”



In the first week of July 2014 Sr. Christa Mariathas, our Provincial leader called while was in our chapel and praying the rosary at Holy Family Convent, Jaffna. She asked me if I would be able to help in the preparation for the Papal Visit to Sri Lanka. I was taken aback, as on that very day at lunch, the community Sisters were planning to go to Madhu for the Papal visit and I thought that I can't go to Colombo or Madhu because I have a knee problem and so I had decided to stay at home. In response to Sr. Christa's request I just looked at the tabernacle, not knowing what is expected of me and what I have to do, but within me I heard a voice saying 'yes' and so I responded in the positive to her request and she told me, 'You have go to Colombo and be there from July till the Pope's Visit is over'. So I surrendered my students, who were preparing for an important exam, into the hands of my heavenly Father and daily accompanied them with my prayer to the Holy Spirit.

The 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Committee was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> July. The Committee consisted of priests, religious sisters, lay men and women.

I was selected as the secretary for the Committee and Rev. Fr. Justin Chawhan SSS, the chairperson explained to us the functions and duties that have been entrusted to us. We had meetings in our own Committee and with the Central Committee where all the 9 Sub Committees involved in the preparation for the Liturgy to be celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> January by our Holy Father.

Our Committee had to see to the collection of hosts from the different monasteries that were making and supplying them, 500,000 hosts were needed, there was the need of 1300 Holy Communion distributors, 1300 Umbrella holders chosen from the different



parishes and seminarians from the different seminaries, 14 mobile chapels, with 100 purificators, preparation of Identity cards for these people. The collaboration and good spirit of the people helped us to carry out our work smoothly and efficiently for the glory of God. What touched me most was emphasis placed on the spiritual preparation for the members of the Committees and for the people. At Diocesan and parish level there were special prayers and prayer services to welcome our chief spiritual Pastor and for the canonization of our Blessed Joseph Vaz, the Apostle of India and Sri Lanka.

It was an enriching spiritual experience for me as I witnessed the joy and commitment of each member, young and old, coming together to plan the work as one family. Some of the lay members were holding responsible post in Govt. offices and private companies. They were so committed that they even took leave from their work giving priority to the mission

On the 14<sup>th</sup> January the Eucharist was celebrated by our Holy Father and everything went on well. On the 14<sup>th</sup> morning, the crowd was rushing towards the Galle Face ground and I did not know how I would reach my place with a huge crowd surrounding me; at this juncture two Altar Servers held my hand and I was really carried by the crowd. When I entered the ground a young lady rushed towards me saying I know you Sister, she said that she was journalist speaking to different people and collecting information about this event and their presence in this celebration. She took me very carefully through the surging crowd and left me in the place allocated for Religious. After some time a person unknown to me came

entrusted to them, to come together to listen and collaborate in achieve the goal of helping, the congregation flocking from all parts of the country to have a meaningful experience and memorable Eucharistic celebration with our Holy Father in their motherland. The beauty of seeing them all working without any discrimination on the basis of religion, status, ethnicity and the respect and attention given to each member involved in this preparation was very touching and proved that we can all work together as a family if our goal and spirit attuned towards the greater good of all concerned in the preparation.

The collaboration of the armed forces the Navy, Army Air force and police needs to be highly appreciated and admired. There wasn't a spark of animosity though they belonged to different religions, there were times some changes had to be done and re-doing were suggested they generously listened and accomplished what was asked of them deep respect and commitment.

up to me said, Sister, this is not your place and took me to another place just in front of the altar and gave me a chair to sit and he just vanished, to this day I am unable to recall the man's face. Looking into all that took place for me on the 14<sup>th</sup> I feel the Lord who called me to do this service saw that I benefitted spiritually from this experience He has fortified and deepened my faith in the Lord.



I felt it was a family journey towards the same goal in union of spirit and heart, a great gift from God who loves me and is concerned with my needs and longing. Even my students have all passed with

honors and merit in the examinations. This experience has strengthened my faith and trust in the Lord who loves me beyond my reckoning.

*Sr. M. Bonaventine*  
*HFC, Jaffna, Sri Lanka*

## BLESSINGS ON SRI LANKA

### THE VISIT OF POPE FRANCIS

On his arrival at Colombo International Airport, the Pope said, *I have looked forward to this visit to SRI – LANKA, which is known as “THE PEARL OF THE INDIAN OCEAN” for its natural beauty; even more importantly, this Island is known for the warmth of its people and the rich diversity of their cultural and religious traditions. My visit is primarily PASTORAL As universal Pastor of the Catholic Church, I have come to meet, encourage and pray with the Catholic people of this Island.*”

President Maitripala Sirisena and Cardinal Ranjith welcomed him, together with Government and church officials. A meeting with the newly-elected President followed; our hope is that matters discussed between the two parties will have strengthened the bond between the Church and the State, marking the beginning of a journey towards unity and co-operation, increasing the quality of our faith, and erasing the mistakes of the past dark era, so that all may live in peace,



abide in love, and travel the path towards holiness.

Pope Francis’ meeting with various Religious Leaders is considered vital to the growth of understanding and acceptance between Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The promotion of the principle of universal brotherhood, peace, and charity for the common benefit is very much needed so that all people in this country may work and live as ONE.

### HOLY FATHER’ S VISIT TO OUR LADY OF MADHU

On 14<sup>th</sup> Jan., he went on pilgrimage to Madhu, the first Pope to travel outside the city of Colombo and to visit this National Shrine. All the roads were flooded with vehicles from various parts of the country. About 300,000 people, including a large gathering of schoolchildren in uniforms,





reportedly turned out for the prayer service, which was in both languages, Sinhala and Tamil.

On his way to the altar, the Pope went to the children in wheelchairs who had lost limbs because of bombs or shells or guns. He touched them, patted them, carried some of them and kissed a few on their foreheads. This was a touching moment for the entire praying crowd gathered there. We heard that one of them was cured of his sickness.

**Dear Brothers and Sisters, said Pope Francis,**

*We are in our Mother's House. Here she welcomes us into her home. Every pilgrim can feel at home, for here Mary brings us into the presence of her son Jesus. Here, Sri Lankans, Tamils and Singhalese alike, come as members of one Family.*

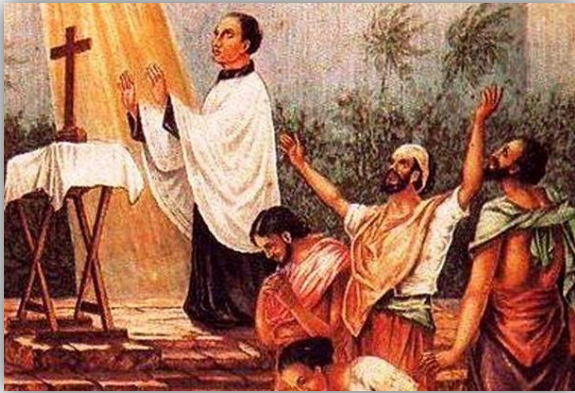
*There are families here today, who suffered greatly in the long conflict which tore open the heart of SRI LANKA. Many people from North and South alike were killed in the terrible violence and bloodshed of those years. No Sri Lankan can forget the sad day when the venerable statue of Mary was taken away from her*

*Shrine. But Our Lady remained always with you she is the Mother of every home, of every wounded family, of all who are seeking to return to a peaceful existence. So she never left the side of her suffering children. Today we thank our lady for that presence. "*

The Pope garlanded the miraculous statue of Our Lady of Madhu, and then, after Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, he was given a replica of the statue. He was seen to hold on to it until he left the Shrine.



## Canonization of St Joseph Vaz the Apostle of Sri Lanka



The ringing of Church bells and the applause of the biggest ever gathering on the sun-kissed greenery of Galle face, heralded to Sri Lanka and to the world that we have a Saint – the Apostle of Sri Lanka, Joseph Vaz. Beatified in Sri Lanka by Saint John Paul II in 1995, he was canonized January 15 by Pope Francis.

Analysts say that these were the biggest crowds ever witnessed at any public event in SRI-LANKA's history. About 800,000 people turned up for the highlight of the beloved Pope's pilgrimage: the Canonization Mass.. This humble, simple, kind and compassionate servant of God attracted all and drew everyone to him. The people who booked their seats to

participate in this great event must have echoed the words of the Gospel, "If only I can touch the hem of his garment" ... "If only I could get a glance or a close look at our Pope, it will be enough for my life."

It began with His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Vianney Fernando, Bishop of Kandy requesting the Pope to enroll the Blessed Joseph Vaz in the heavenly communion of Saints and to proceed with the canonization rite. Saint Joseph Vaz – who was born in Goa, India – shows us the important of transcending religious division in the service of peace. His undivided love for God opened him to love for his neighbor. He ministered to those in need, whoever and whatever they were. His example continues to inspire the church in Sri Lanka today. St. Joseph Vaz gives us an example missionary zeal. Leaving everything behind his home, family, the comfort of his familiar surroundings and he responded to the CALL TO GO FORTH, to speak of Christ wherever he was led. St. Joseph Vaz knew how to offer the truth and the beauty of the Gospel in a multi Religious context, with respect, dedication, perseverance and humility. This is also the way for the followers of JESUS TODAY – followers such as Pope Francis, a servant leader – a feet-washing servant after the example of his Master Jesus.

*Sr. Lily Rita*

*INFO TEAM*



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