

Editorial



Joy is a value of Christian faith, this secret of happiness; it comes from peace of mind, from the enthusiasm of sharing, from radiating of spiritual satisfaction; it is a grace.

In various cultures, joy is expressed in different ways : song, dance, gestures, laughter, the youyoukilili cry ... as in the African cultures. This translates an enthusiasm that is difficult to contain. Joy manifests a happy and healthy life. Although this value is a treasure of Christian

faith, can we really speak of joy when we see the sombre reality of the world deprived of durable peace?

Yes, Christ has risen from the dead, from the world of darkness, in order to give humanity its true face and a definitive joy. If Christ has conquered the forces of evil, how can we live in fear without hope? No more fear nor despair for Christ lives forever. The joy of the Risen One transcends all uncertainty and makes us remain upright, rejoicing, for salvation has been acquired. The Redemption of the Saviour brings infinite hope.

Saint Francis of Assisi, after the example of Christ, lived joy in its fullness. Even in suffering he experienced deep joy, “perfect joy”. Francis is universally known as being the man of perfect joy. All through his life, his main and supreme concern was to possess and preserve spiritual joy always. He invites his brothers and all those who share his spirituality to live of this total joy and to let it radiate from Christ in His Passion and His Resurrection.

For Pope Francis “Our job is to be able to say like Simon Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” That is the mission for each of us in this time of grace, this Paschal time. Let us be in the joy of the Risen One, let us sing with all our heart “He is Alive” and let us communicate this to everyone. There is nothing more beautiful than to belong to Christ the Redeemer!

In this issue of Meeting Space the joy of the risen One is shared through the missionary action of our sisters all over the world. The articles allow us to see the self forgetfulness of our sisters in the dynamism of the gift of self to others, in the love for the little ones, and the abandoned ones of society. The heading ‘History’ plunges us into the mission of our first sisters in Cuzco, Peru, through a narrative which stimulates and challenges us. Happy feast of Easter! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

M. Rachel Zongo, fmm





Japon - Special Exhibition Program at the National Hansen's Disease Museum

Go... Make people love Jesus. Poverty awaits you. Be courageous. God will help you.” These are the words of Mary of the Passion to the foundresses of Japan in 1898. The same words were given to us by Sr. Francoise at the closing ceremony of the 2014 Chapter, and they struck me and stayed with me in a special way without knowing the reasons. Five sisters were sent to Japan with these words of Mary of the Passion, and the poverty they started the mission in Japan, cleaning the wounds of so many (Hansen's with Disease) patients lying on the streets and in the temple compounds.

They struggled a lot because Japanese people did not allow foreigners to touch their wounds. Then the Institution called “Tairoin (待労院)—taken from Matthew 11:28” was established, and for 115 years FMM took care of these patients. Due to the decrease of patients with Hansen's Disease in Japan the Institution was quietly closed in January 2013.

However, from October to December 2015 the National Hansen's Disease Museum opened a special exhibition program on “Tairoin” to show appreciation for the 115 years of dedication given to the patients with Hansen's Disease. This Museum was established as part of the national efforts to erase the stigma associated with Hansen's Disease and to recover the dignity of the people affected by the disease.

In the past people were afraid of this disease because of the outward disfigured of by Mycobacterium Leprae, thinking it was an incurable disease. At that time the Japanese government placed introduced the Leprosy Prevention law to force patients to live in leproseria, Leprosy “Sentence” and Detention! The conditions of the national Leprosarium were miserable and like a prison. Many many patients died there. In addition to this isolation policy created discrimination and stigmatised those with the disease.



Japan Tairoin poster

Eventually the drugs to treat Hansen's Disease were invented, and in April 1996 The Leprosy Prevention Law was abolished. People were given the freedom to live in society, but the stigma and the discriminations are still so strong that it is not easy for these people affected by the disease to live in society.

The recuperates stood up and accused the government for the past isolation policy, the suffering and hardships they had gone through, and they won the case.

Those recovering from leprocy in “Tairoin”, however, did not join protest, saying they were very much cared for and loved by the sisters even their isolation and poverty. In Tairoin the patients and the sisters cultivated the land together in order to survive. They celebrated feast day together with OFM brothers, and they said they were treated with dignity. Then they gave witness to their faith in God given to them through missionaries.

I was really touched by their witness that the sisters brought Jesus to them. I heard the patients in Tairoin offering their prayers for the Japanese sisters who were sent on mission abroad realizing the importance of their presence.

God is really working in us and the words of the Blessed Mary of the Passion have been actualized in the mission of Japan. Now our question is “Who are the leprosy patients today ?” This was the question posed by Sr. Christiane during her visit to Japan and we find people suffering from prejudice, hardships and discrimination especially refugees, marginalised communities, ethnic groups, and people affected by great earth quake, tsunami and explosion of the nuclear power plant. We continue to ask this ourselves this question in community, in the province and in the world in order to be credible witnesses to the compassion and love of the Gospel.

Victoria Keiko Kataoka fmm

Australia - FMM community in Sunshine West

Mission in western Melbourne

Sunshine West is a low socio-economic, intensely multicultural, industrial and residential suburb in Melbourne’s western region. At the end of World War II it became a first settling place for many refugees and migrants from Europe, particularly Malta, Italy, Greece and Croatia.

In succeeding years migrants from Southern Europe, China, Philippines, Southeast Asia and India made it their home. They were followed by waves of refugees from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Tibet. As each group of immigrants/refugees became established and moved to greener fields, another group quickly replaced them. The current newer arrivals are more notably from Samoa, Sudan and the Middle East.



FMM Community, Sunshine (L to R) : ToAnh Bui fmm, Vietnam via USA; Madge Hore fmm, Australia; Majella Tracey fmm, Australia Patricia Lazum Ji Jan fmm, Myanmar; Pamela Barretto fmm, India

Recent census records that there are 86 nationalities resident in Sunshine proper and 60% of the population in Sunshine West speak a language other than English in the home. It has the highest increase in the number of residents with no English or speaks it with difficulty. There are pressing needs around youth support and employment, and women’s domestic isolation and integration.



Pamela at local nursing home with staff; Wendy and Judy; residents, Josefa and Nellie

FMM Community-in-mission

Our first insertion in St Paul’s Parish, West Sunshine, was made in 1978 with a fledging community of five sisters and two postulants. The house was purposely built to harmonise with the local residences and as a pastoral insertion with possibilities for initial and professional formation.

Over the years there have been many changes in the number and nationality of the sisters and the ministries and studies they have undertaken: Nursing, teaching, hospital and prison chaplaincy, social work, aged and home care; catechetical and pastoral leadership; religious research and formation, group facilitation, spiritual direction and counselling, social Justice advocacy and non-violent peace-making. But the one constant has been our internationality with our insertion into the neighbourhood and daily life of the parish.

Today we are five, from four different countries, three of us experiencing the letting-go and letting be of old age, and two embracing the challenge and gift of a new mission, new culture and new inner growth. Our outreach is as wide as we are able and simple as it has always been: from involvement in the parish; visiting isolated people in the local nursing home; volunteer support teacher in the catholic school, involvements with Burmese and Vietnamese communities.

Through hospitality and friendships, pastoral and parish school support, aged and homecare, advocacy and music we seek to be an oasis of love, healing and joy in our neighbourhood in fidelity to our FMM charism.



To Anh volunteer support teacher at parish school

FMM Community

South Africa - Graduation 2015 at Buhlebuyeta Day Care Centre, Mpuluzi

As we welcome the New Year 2016, we take a moment to give thanks to God for the year 2015 had passed with many blessings and gifts. We also feel the pain of wars in Syria and the threat of terrorism around the world such as in Paris, France and in San Bernadino, California, USA. People become suspicious of each other. However, there are many events and stories that assure us of the hope God is offering each and every day of our lives. This is one of the highlight events at Mpuluzi, Mpumalanga, South Africa in 2015.

Here is our story:

At 9.00am on the 27th November 2015, all the sisters, staff, parents and children of Buhlebuyeta joyfully started the graduation ceremony for 36 graduates. The weather was perfect for the day with no rain and thunder storm (typical summer weather in Mpuluzi).

Sr. Lindiwe, our new provincial, Srs. Bongekile and Rozina with all the sisters of Mpuluzi Community, responded to the invitation, came to celebrate with the children and the preschool.

The ceremony had so many items from prayer, speeches, singing, dancing, drama and music. The parents cheered, screamed, shouted, and praised when the children performed. The graduates expressed their dream to be doctors, social workers, nurses, teachers, soldiers, traffic cops, police officers, paramedics, pilots, fire fighters and engineers. I pray that their dreams will come true in their lives because this graduation is just a beginning a long journey ahead of them toward further education.



As I recalled some of the precious memories of our graduates, I remembered Muzi Lushaba, one of the 24 boys who attended at our school since he was 2 years old. His first day at school was full of confusions. He came with the transport and didn't know his name and the school where he was supposed to get off. The driver ended up taking him home to verify with his family and the next day he showed up at our school missing the first day. From that time on he was sure to know his name and his school.

I also have one Ghanaian girl named Blessing attending from the beginning of 2015. When she came to the

preschool she could not speak Zulu (the language of the area). However, she managed to communicate with all the children in her class. The amazing thing was that the children in her class also help Blessing to learn Zulu and to communicate with them. She picked up the language very fast and blended in with the children in no time.

There is a boy whose parents came from Ethiopia. His name is Sibusiso (a Zulu name means Blessing). He was born in South Africa, so he can speak and understand Zulu very well. He can dance the Zulu dance just like the local children. Sibusiso is very friendly and easygoing. He can perform whenever we ask him to dance for us. It's such a joy to have a talent like him in our school.

There are many cute stories about our graduates that I don't have enough space to tell. I would need to write a book.



One thing I would like to emphasize here is the progress of these children. They came to school scared, home-sick and nervous. After 4 years attending they became totally different group of children. They became so full of confidence, independence and self-knowledge. They can read and write, sing and dance, perform and social. What a transformation!

I remember a proverb which says "For the benefit of 100 years, we educate a person". If we imagine these 36 children be educated, the human family can benefit for 3600 years. The effect is enormous. Each day when I see them I see the hope of the future; I see the promise of a world filled with goodness and free of discrimination.

When I see the children play nicely and peacefully with each other, they can see that we are moving closer to a world that knows how to share with each other and to grow in love and harmony. That world is within our reach, the only thing we need to do is to teach and to witness to our children the goodness and sharing of our human community wherever we are.

Thao Phi, fmm

Malaysia - Assunta Children Society

When you have children from broken families and refugees behaving aggressively, hiding under the table or not motivated to learn, how would you respond to them? In Assunta Children Society (ACS), we would be happy if the children behaved in such manner. Why? Usually, when children come to a new place, they would be quiet and will not show their true selves. They will only show their true colours when they feel safe and settled. Therefore if the children exhibit what has been described, then ACS has achieved its objective in providing a safe place for these children to experience God's healing and unconditional love.

One can expect children who have been abandoned, abused or neglected to be angry and depressed. They will throw tantrums. They will show the same aggressiveness and violence as they have experienced. They will lie and steal for survival. Acknowledge their brokenness and help them find better ways to overcome their hurt and trauma is one of the objectives of the mission in ACS. Staff and volunteer teachers are trained to create healthy boundaries. When these children misbehave, they are reminded that they are good children but their behaviour is not good. Therefore, they need to strive towards changing their negative behaviour. These children are also empowered to discover their talent through creative learning processes, music, games and self-development sessions organised in ACS.



Sr Angeline during the teaching session

It takes a lot of effort and time to journey with each child but the trouble is worth it because at the end of the day, when you see the children grow holistically, you know the change is permanent. You know that the children exchange negative with positive behavior for their own good, not because of their fear of the teachers or to please the adults.

Brief historical background of ACS

Assunta Children Society (ACS) is a learning centre for underprivileged children including refugees and

undocumented children. In Malaysia, undocumented children are not able to attend government or registered private school. Therefore, there are many learning centres for this group of children set up by local churches and NGOs.



Sr. Teresa Gier, foundress of Assunta Association

ACS' original programme, known as Assunta Foster Care was first set up in 1966 by the late Sr Theresa Gier, fmm. Her compassion towards the welfare of the poor and orphaned children arose when a mother died while giving birth to her tenth child. Thus began her dedication to the task of seeing families to love, care and foster children who have lost their parents or were abandoned by their families.



Fund-raising activity involving FMM sisters, children and volunteers

In May 1994, the Assunta Foster Care was registered as Assunta Children Society. ACS' role now has progressed to protecting, caring and supporting underprivileged children while they live with their families or relatives.

Angeline Poh, fmm

Senegal - Education field for anytime and for all ages

Imagine our women in school, a real dream for their future. The day has come, the "kairos" for them, when the school opened the doors of knowledge to our women, and so, to facilitate the process of their daily life and prepare for a stable and better future. For the sake of these women our community of Salemata has for many years offered a vital service to empower many women with skills, since many years ago.

One of our sisters Louisa Some, being coordinator of the women development programme worked with depressed, underprivileged women coming from different areas, tribes and religion to seek the empowerment of education.

Each year, Sr Louisa, gave many sessions to different groups of women with regard to sustainable development activities and to enable them to use their own talents and resources.

This year especially women took many sessions in the following areas: soap - making, bread baking, ordinary bread, couscous from rice, shoe-making.



Manufacturing of soap by the women trained by Sr Louisa Somé

goal in empowering women to wake up and to take their place and dignity in society by fighting ignorance and poverty in all their dimensions.

However concerning shoe making, she actually invited an expert to teach and help them to use the local material to make bottles, plastics, threads... The workshop took three days. At the same time other groups had their own program such as cous-cous bread from rice. One week later, it was a time for baking bread and cake from corn and other cookies. Annie Dupoeh fmm, gave these sessions..

Finally we could not allow them go home without teaching them Soap making for their basic daily needs. Indeed they were grateful and happy for the workshop, and its contents, because they meant many things in few time that can build their whole future. In addition the workshop: achieved their

Annie Dupoeh, fmm

China Hong Kong - When My Desire for Mission Came True

Since i first joined our FMM Congregation, deep down in my heart there was a desire to leave my own country (India) and be a missionary, but when the time came for me to be sent as a missionary, there were many questions in my heart, like: am I capable? Am I worthy enough to go for a mission outside my own country? Will I be able to adapt to the new culture, the lifestyle of the people to the food and most importantly the learning language? Will my sisters accept me as I am? There were lots of fears within me because I was happy and comfortable with my ministry which I was doing in my own country.

Now to leave my comfort zone and to go an the unknown country, people, culture, and to learn a new language was not an easy thing. I need to let go many of my dreams and what I like in order to venture into the new mission which God planned for me.

Before coming for my mission country, I had great opportunities to read the call of Biblical persons like Isaiah and Jeremiah. They thought that they were not capable of carrying out the plan of God. But God who chose them did not leave them alone; instead, He molded, shaped and used them as effective instruments. When they were assured by the Almighty, they in turn surrendered totally to the will of the Heavenly Father.

Another great privilege that I had was reading and reflecting on the call of Mother Foundress and the co-foundresses, especially their missionary vocation. Those readings and reflections strengthened me and challenged me to accept the plan of God in com-



plete surrender, faith and trust in Him who also chose me to be a missionary. I spent a lot of time in prayer. Though I prayed a lot it was a painful journey.

After I reached my assigned province, Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China, I found that the sisters are very good, they accepted me, show a lot of care and concern to me, they are very supportive and thoughtful. Yet sometimes I feel that I am alone even with sisters around me because I am not sure what I am going to do. At the



beginning there were lot of fears, worries and

anxieties. But with prayer I am able to accept the realities of life. My prayer is always this “Lord, I am yours, use me as you want”. Now I am learning the language though it is difficult but I am putting my full effort to learn and trying to adapt myself into the province and the community. This is my experience within these six months in my new province.



Regina Baskal Mary, fmm

Italy - The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

The appeal to proclaim the admirable deeds of God” (cf. Pt. 2, 9), is the biblical theme that this year characterizes the week of prayer for Christian unity (January 18 to 25).

This theme invites us to recognize ourselves as only one people, thanks to the mercy our Lord has given as a gift, and to share the responsibility to ‘see’ the marvelous deeds that God continues to accomplish or do in our history. We are called to a people, even though “we are limited in our complex ‘differences’ we are made one people. In the hidden common reality underlying the differences, the communion is manifested” (J. M. Tillard—‘L’universel et le local’. Reflection on the Universal Church and the Local Churches—Irenikon 1988, no 61, 28).

‘Communion’, is already the first marvelous deed that God realizes in us, and in our actual history although it is at times neutralized by confusion or separation provoked by fear.



But it is indeed remarkable and worthy of interest doing it in Turin, and again, of the many events of the week for Christian unity, since years ago there exists the firm tradition the Thursday vigil is prepared and animated by the youths of the different confessions.

I participate in the work because I form the Catholic Diocesan Commission for Ecumenism and Dialogue, having assumed the commitment to organize the week with the orthodox Communities of Turin and the Evangelical Commission for Ecumenism.