The bird flu set off a full mobilization,
Now the swine flu – is this a manipulation?
These are unseemly pandemics
To which world leaders give so much importance!

The public in general is faced with an apocalyptic image.
The ones who gain from such fear – the big pharmaceuticals.
Against the bird flu, vaccines and masks on the Internet
To reinforce, with interest, a growing planetary concern.

The reason for this mobilization? A chance to divert attention.
AIDS and malaria do not mobilize the power of intervention.
Underestimated, we hide their reality.
To the bird flu, we administer quality care.

I ask those who commit this communist brainwashing,
If their desire is that the world become pessimistic:
Keep children, pregnant ladies,
and old folks locked away in bubbles.
Let’s make them so defenceless in the fight
against multiple germs…

You wish to create an immortal humanity.
Even God the Creator did not have such a pretention!
You can wash your hands every second and become psychic;
Let us live and discover his Joy in a whole new way.

This global village seems to me to be so powerless,
Manipulated by the very powerful strength of the media,
It must find its own specific way,
Without always hiding behind the economic crisis.

Our relationships are an enrichment.
Rebirth is possible in blossoming forth.
We will always have the unpredictable in our lives…
Only God is perfect – He who is invisible.

Barbara Kołodziejczyk, fmm

Look at the data: it reveals the truth!

Worldwide:
- Bird flu during 8 months in 2009 (according to WHO as of August 30th, 2009) killed 2,837 persons
- Malaria kills each year 881,000 persons with 189,000 to 327,000 new cases each year.
- The common flu kills 300,000 persons a year
- AIDS has killed 33,000,000 persons since 1983
- Gastroenteritis kills 1,000,000 children and 600,000 adults in poor countries yearly.
- Diabetes, on the rise, kills 4,000,000 persons each year.
- And let’s not even talk about tuberculosis which is coming back in force! It kills 2,000,000 persons yearly. That is 5,000 persons a day or one person every 15 seconds. 9,000,000 new cases are diagnosed yearly. That is 25,000 cases a day. In Morocco, it is 100 new cases per year for every 100,000 inhabitants.
In Solidarity towards more Humane Communities

Marlene Perera from who is involved in the mission of building humane communities in Sri Lanka, while sharing on her various projects, brings to focus what can be achieved through solidarity, even in multi-faith communities.

On 5th August, Poya holiday brought together people from two hamlets to Polonnaruwa: Kirimetidamana and Weera Pedessa, in a common endeavour to clean the ‘Aluth wea,’ (lake) of the lotus growth that had enveloped it. The livelihood of some 25 families of fisher-folk depended on this lake. Yet, during the past few years, the lotus continued to expand covering the surface of the lake, making the passage of boats almost impossible. Though this had been brought to the notice of the Fisheries Department, not much interest was taken by them and the fisher families found themselves in dire straits.

Earlier in July, we had arranged a get-together of the people of these two villages in view of building solidarity and providing space for learning from one another. The people of Kirimetidamana were of mixed religions: Muslim, Buddhist and Catholic, yet there is great understanding and mutual support among them. In fact, they worked like one, unlike those of Weera Pedessa who were always at loggerheads – over petty issues. It was at this first meeting that the Weera Pedessa folk shared with the others about their problems with the lotus outgrowth. The other community rose up to the challenge at once, sharing their own experience of overcoming this problem and offering their help to clear the lake of this outgrowth. The people of Weera Pedessa were then hosted in Kirimetidamana on 15th July when they planned and organized for the ‘Shramadana’, (sharing of labour) on 5th August. The Shramadana commenced with a small inter-faith meditation and went on till 5.30 p.m. By that time, a large section of the lake had been cleared and small beetles introduced to keep the rest in control. The women-folk contributed by preparing meals for the group. The ‘shramadana’ was a huge success in that it brought the two communities together besides solving the problem faced by the people in Weera Pedessa. Now, the folk in Weera Pedessa are determined to solve their differences peacefully through discussion.

During the past four years we have been involved in building more humane communities in six hamlets in Polonnaruwa, where the majority of the population are simple Buddhist peasants. A few Catholic families, mainly fisher-folk who have migrated from the western province are found scattered among them and in certain areas, some Muslim families. Our aim was to bring them together to solve their problems
with mutual respect and understanding and move together as a people towards a more humane culture in a common thrust for integral development. We initiated our thrust through small groups of women and men with their chosen group leader responsible for the functioning of the group. They are encouraged to save according to their capacity, even Rs.10/- per week to form a common fund in each group, from which they can get small emergency loans and also substantial loans for small projects for supplementary income: chicken farming, goat rearing, sewing, brick-making, fabric painting etc. Today, some groups have over Rs.50,000/- in savings. All decisions pertaining to loans are taken by the group, considering the needs of each member of the group. Thus, they learn to empathize with one another in mutual giving and receiving.

We coordinate with NGOs interested in fisher folk, in the process of lobbying and advocacy for good fisher policies, support for fishermen to improve their trade, against illegal action of fishermen and others. Since there are farmers also in our groups, the fisher-folk support the action of the farmers in their farmer organizations for gaining their rights and vice versa. In this way, solidarity is being built between farmers and fisher-folk and space created for them to resolve their differences through common understanding.

Awareness-building programs have a very important place in our action for building leadership among our villagers, being enriched by their differences. This year, we have had sessions on: globalization, human rights, women’s rights, child rights, child abuse, land rights, leadership workshops and on peace and reconciliation towards a Sri Lankan nation. Here, space is created for them to grow through respectful discussion and common search with the help of input from competent persons. We also make it possible for them to have training in skills: sewing, fabric-painting, wood-work, bicycle repair, etc through governmental and other institutions for training in small industries.

The youth in these six hamlets are working together, focussed on peace and reconciliation and on building awareness on environmental issues, through discussions, poster campaigns, art-exhibitions, workshops, drama and song. They also had two ecological outings this year to two of Lanka’s nature reserves to appreciate and be at one with nature and also to understand the effect of pollution on the environment. A few of our youth leaders have been able to work for a few days in IDP camps in the North and East twice this year, building friendships with those of the North and East and learning from their experiences.
Gemma Yu Jeong Eun fmm speaks “I’m a Korean religious of temporary vows. I have had a wonderful experience in Malaysia. I thank God for all good things given to me. So I would like to share my experience with the sisters.”

We are aware it is a difficult and arduous journey with the poor of our villages, as it is a struggle against the current ‘money’ culture, where the poor are constantly enticed by the media to have more and more demands and are even led into violence in their struggle for survival and also to have ever more – which tends to put them one against the other. We are encouraged by incidents such as the one mentioned above, where we discover the goodness and wisdom of these poor simple folk, and it remains a real inspiration and challenge to us. Yes, the poor are heirs to the Kingdom of God! We dare to go forward with hope, trusting in the innate goodness within the human person and the Spirit working in us, among us and through us, leading us all to the realization of God’s Reign amidst human misgivings, doubts, fears, groping, weakness and failures and through human yearnings, aspirations and strivings in solidarity.

Marlene Perera, fmm

Malaysia

‘I can understand you, and so will everyone else’

On 2nd March 2009, I flew into Malaysia from Korea not knowing what God had prepared for me. When I arrived at Kuala Lumpur International Airport I could feel that I was in a foreign country – the weather was hot and the people were wearing Islamic clothes. It was so different from Korea. Sr. Jane Cho fmm had come to meet Sr. Marianna Cho and me at the airport. A familiar atmosphere of FMM flavour due to Sr. Jane Cho being there! When I arrived at Villa Hermine where I was going to stay, I couldn’t believe my eyes; the sisters had prepared a sumptuous Korean dinner. How impressive! I felt their love and concern for us. This relieved me of both the fatigue and anxiety of body and mind.

Everything was new for me: the weather, the food, the buildings, the environment. Everyday was a new day for me. However, by 19th March, I renewed my vows. Although my English was weak and everything was strange to me, nothing was an obstacle because I was with the same community - the FMM sisters, and God was with me.

My next challenge was to learn English - it was no easy task. People I came in contact with, encouraged me saying, “You will learn through mistakes. Don’t be shy! Don’t be afraid of being laughed at. I can understand you, and so will everyone else.” I have realized that to be an effective missionary I have to know different languages. So here I am studying English, hoping it makes communication easier. Most Malaysians speak English and I am now able to communicate with them easily.

It was a good experience to see the different races and the different religions harmonizing with each other in Malaysia. Being a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, meeting people of other regions is very normal to them. For me, this was a new experience. When I saw people praying the rosary in different
languages in the church, I realized how universal we are - unlike Korea where everything is in one language.

I can’t forget the time when I visited the two communities on the East Coast in Malaysia. The sisters there are the sole Catholic religious order. In Kuala Terengganu, which is a majority Muslim community, there is no Catholic Church. At the weekend, the FMM kindergarten becomes a chapel for celebrating Mass and a Novena. Strangely ‘Sunday Mass’ is celebrated on Friday because their weekend is Friday and Saturday to help the Muslim community say their Friday prayer. Nevertheless parishioners have kept their faith joyfully.

The sisters in the East Coast have had a very friendly relationship with other religions. One Muslim teacher in the kindergarten said, “I love this kindergarten and the children. The sisters are like my family.” It touched me deeply. How true our Constitutions are: It is our first form of evangelization, the Eucharistic presence and evangelical life in fraternity and prayer, through the sisters’ presence there.

I have been in Malaysia for some months. I have experienced God’s love through the people around me. I no longer feel a stranger. I have grown in my vocation as an FMM.

Singapore, which is just across the causeway, is quite different. The Catholic community is one of the biggest Christian groups in that country - whereas in Malaysia they are a minority. The Novena church in Singapore is very powerful. Novenas are held every hour on Saturdays. It is amazing how people of all faiths throng there hour after hour. What a miracle! I praised God’s glory. I hope vocations will increase and God’s work will continue like a plant growing well in hot weather.

I thank Sr. Assunta Leong for accepting me. I sincerely thank all the sisters in Villa Hermine, especially Srs. Patricia Choong, Regina Ho and Noelle Seah, for helping and encouraging me in my faith journey. I also thank all the sisters in Assunta who always welcome me warmly and generously. I can’t help but thank the sisters in the East Coast and Singapore as I can’t forget how generously they shared their lives. How can I forget my English teachers! They taught me fervently. There are so many friends I am grateful to. I will always remember their kindness and love and will continue to pray for them.

I thank the Korean province for giving me this opportunity to experience mission in a foreign land. It has taught me to accept differences and to open my heart and mind to others. Most of all, I thank God for leading me to be a good missionary.

“For the kingdom, the power and glory are yours now and for ever.”

Gemma Yu Jeong Eun, fmm