

#ASSUMPTA

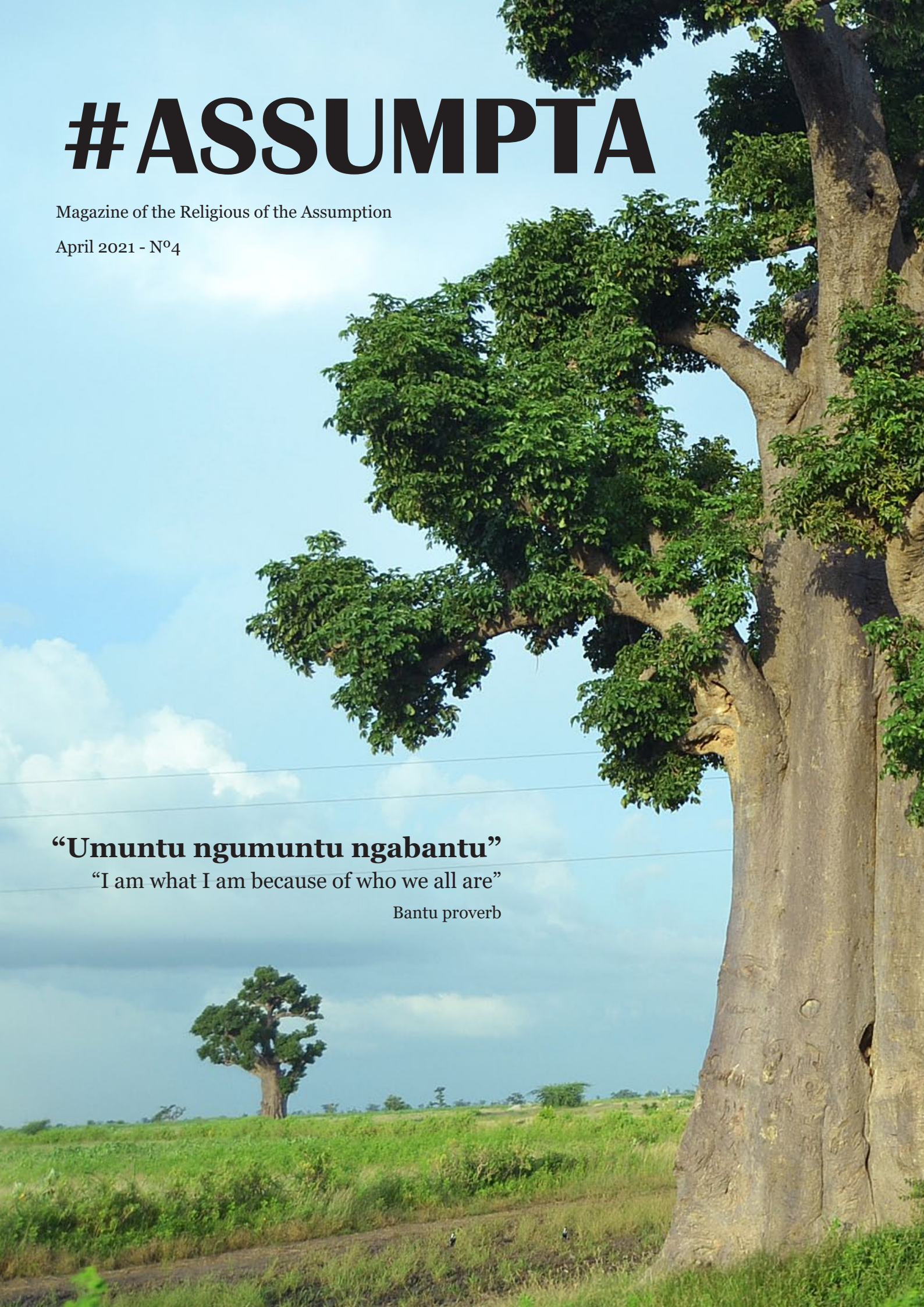
Magazine of the Religious of the Assumption

April 2021 - N°4

“Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”

“I am what I am because of who we all are”

Bantu proverb



summary

"Each one of us has a mission on earth" (Marie Eugénie's credo)



#ASSUMPTA

Year 2021 - n°4

Edition
Mercedes Méndez

General Council
Isabelle Roux

Design and layout
Almudena de la Torre

Photography
Religious of the Assumption,
Almudena de la Torre, Pexels

Translation and proofreading
Asunción Quiros
Benedicte Rollin
Carmen Amalia Ortiz
Carmen Escribano
Catherine Cowley
Cristina Massó
Elsa El Hachem
Helen Granger
Irene Cecile
Jessica Gatty
Marie Bonin
Marie-Yvonne Lanciaux
Miriam Moscow
Regina Victoria Yulo
Stella María Sanz
Véronique Thiébaud

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ECHOES FROM THE ARCHIVES

Explanation of the sentence on the cover: "An Ubuntu person is a person open to and available for others. This person is not threatened by the fact that the others are better or more capable than she is. This is based on a healthy self-confidence that comes from the fact that this person knows that he or she belongs to a larger whole and that he or she is diminished when others are humiliated, when others are tortured or oppressed." Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Noble Peace Laureat, in his book 'No Future Without Forgiveness' (1999)

editorial

“The Assumption grows in Africa, gift and task”



To understand today's Africa is to begin with the Berlin conference of 1885 convened by German chancellor Bismarck. There was the threat of a Europe-wide war over Africa coming among the stakeholders: Germany, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain & Italy. The solution? Partition Africa. No Africans were present in this meeting that was thinly disguised as an effort to help Africa. This was 'the scramble for Africa' as informal imperialism of control through military influence and economic dominance transitioned to direct rule. Today, many of the tribal wars and border conflicts in Africa are rooted in this arbitrary dissection of Africa cutting across tribes and traditional and cultural boundaries.

The Assumption and Africa

This was the Africa Marie Eugenie would have known towards the end of her life. European exploration of the African interior had already begun in earnest at the end of the 18th century when in 1849, Marie Eugenie received the invitation for missionaries to British-controlled South Africa. She was impassioned to respond to the request of Bishop Devereux of the Cape for four Sisters to administer a school for girls in Grahamstown. The Sisters, new to religious life and to their charism still-in-the-making, found themselves overwhelmed by the ordeals of the mission. This was aggravated by the distance and the poor communication with the Motherhouse. In the end, Archbishop Sibour of Paris, who had oversight of the young congregation, ordered their recall. Sr. Gertrude, the leader of the community, chose to stay on with the new candidates she had accepted and formed to respond to the radically new context they were in. This would eventually become the congregation of the Missionary Sisters of the Assumption.

It would not be until the 1950's with the encyclicals *Evangelii Praecones* (1951) and *Fidei Donum* (1957) of Pope Pius XII which presented the condition of Catholic missions especially in Africa that the Assumption, in the person of Mere Marie Denyse, would once more hear the irresistible call to extend the reign of God in Africa. Despite the interruptions created by World War II, there had been a

steady growth of the Church in Africa. There was a dearth of good, solid Christian education to bring the Christian truth in the formation of the new Christians. The Assumption felt they were now ready and responded with zeal to the invitations of the Bishops. This was first in East Africa in Rwanda, then Tanzania. Then it was West Africa in Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Togo, Niger, Benin, then Central Africa in Cameroon and Congo, and onwards to Kenya and Chad. And in 2015, God stretched their tents to embrace their new Sisters from the Augustinians of Notre Dame de Paris (ANDP) in Madagascar.

Missionaries from France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, England, even from the younger provinces of the Philippines and India came and opened schools, both college and technical, dispensaries, run catechetical and literacy classes, initiated livelihood projects for women, agricultural projects, did pastoral work in parishes and centers, etc. AMA volunteers joined the Sisters in their mission. The Sisters were also asked to accompany the foundation of local congregations.

Like their fellow missionaries who responded to the Pope's call for Africa, the growth and achievements of the Church and of the Assumption in Africa are due largely to the heroic and selfless dedication of generations of missionaries. It is thanks to those 'giants' of the Assumption who laboured with unstinting generosity that Assumption-Africa lives and flourishes today. They courageously surmounted challenges of language, culture, diseases, harsh climatic and travel conditions, that the seed of the Assumption may take deep roots in African soil and grow strong branches. The charism found fertile ground in the hearts of young African women as vocations soon came from every Province of the continent. Today, there are 303 Sisters in the 13 countries that make up the 4 Provinces and 1 region of Africa. They comprise 26% of the membership of the Congregation.

Humanity launched in Africa

However, it is not right to begin Africa's story just with its dissection by European nations. More importantly is how humanity traces its

origin to a common ancestor 5-10 million years ago to a hominid in Africa who began to walk upright. These used their physical capabilities to enlarge their brains, develop the technology of stone tools... and begin to explore... crossing the seas to Asia and Europe. This implies that all modern people are ultimately of African descent. Does this reality of the origins of humanity in Africa have any import for the world today?

A great Saint of Africa, St. Daniel Comboni, had seen from the beginning how Africans could become protagonists of their own process of liberation and evangelization. His clarion call was "To Save Africa through Africa..." It was a 180° turn from the mercenary intent of the Berlin Conference. With the growth of the Church and of the Assumption, this is becoming more and more the reality. A new generation of leaders in both the Church and religious congregations are taking their place with their gifts at the service of the life of their people. They now carry on their shoulders the major part of the work of evangelization of their continent. Many sons and daughters of Africa now took into their own hands the torch of total consecration as religious to the service of God and the Gospel.

A gift and a responsibility

The Synod of Africa (1995) attests that the tremendous growth of the Church in Africa over the last hundred years and the fruits of holiness that it has borne can have only one possible explanation: all this is a gift of God. No human effort alone could have performed this work in the course of such a relatively short period of time.

It is this gift that is at once a task and a responsibility that both the Church and the Assumption recognize as a privilege and an opportunity. Africa is today called to an exchange of gifts as African missionaries

are asked to support the new evangelisation in the now secularized countries which once produced missionaries who first went forth to Africa to announce the Good News.

Africa is endowed with a wealth of cultural values and priceless human qualities that it can offer to the Churches and to humanity as a whole. Africans have a profound sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. In African culture and tradition, the role of the family is fundamental. With this comes love and respect for life, a love for children who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God. Africans show their respect for human life until its natural end, and keep elderly parents and relatives within the family. African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life deeply embedded in their core values of Ubuntu (humanness and moral regeneration) and "Umoja" (togetherness). These values are key to the effective reversal of the Continent's dramatic situation and facilitate the emergence of a new post-pandemic world. Would Ubuntu and Umoja be part of Africa's cultural DNA that is her gift to the Assumption, too? These are precious values which have to be nurtured in the young in religious formation and in our schools if we are to contribute to a continent of reconciliation, justice and peace.

There are 1.31 billion people (17% of the world's population) in the 54 countries of the. Africa is huge with a land area of 30.37 million sq km — that can fit in the U.S., China, India, Japan, Mexico, and many European nations, combined. Africa is a resource-rich continent of both natural and human resources, rich fertile land and deep cultures. Yet, today, Africa continues to live the great irony of being impoverished by its wealth.

The heart-breaking drawback to Africa's economic development is primarily a problem of governance



Junior Sisters' continental session 2019

by their own leaders. After their long courageous battle for independence from their colonizers the people find themselves with leaders who privatize the state and directly steal from the state and the national treasury. Politicians who are the richest persons of Africa siphon off foreign aid and peddle their country's resources to foreign corporations. They are party to the extensive land grabbing of over 10 million hectares of prime land by foreign investors for supposedly global food security. Dispossessed, hungry and destitute Africans end up risking their lives as migrants, victims of human trafficking, and suffering from diseases like HIV/AIDS that leave kids orphaned. An estimated 32.1 million orphans live in Africa, many of them taking charge of households at very young ages. Poor infrastructure of transport, power and digital connectivity leaves Africa behind the rest of the world. Only 13.5% of the African population have Internet access - a distressing absurdity when the mineral coltan (columbite-tantalite) used in the development of computers, cell phones and electronic devices largely comes from Africa.

The response of faith

What has been the Church's response to this reality? From the beginning, missionaries have set up social service institutions that redeemed slaves and rehabilitated them. They have established Christian villages, provided education and skill training empowering people, especially women. They have put up healthcare institutions reducing mortality and diseases. They fought against poverty by providing training in agriculture, irrigation and technology to farming communities. Church people have risked their lives standing for the cause of justice, creating networks to promote and advocate for the dignity and fundamental rights of the exploited. They built bridges across ethnic communities, nurturing the democratic process, forming the youth who hopefully will create a better tomorrow for their nations. They laid the foundation for a strong religious life that has led to the flourishing of priestly and religious vocations as well as the birth of new religious congregations. A significant indicator is the exponential growth of the Christian Population in Africa as the figures show:

- 1900, 9 million
- 2000, 380 Million
- 2025, 633 million

And Assumption's present response?

Endowed with the presence of the young, a critical priority is formation. Formation that will make them truly African and truly Assumption, able to bring the gift of the charism for the life of their people. This has further been highlighted by the arrival of the many young Sisters from Madagascar, with their faith and cultural gifts that enriches the Assumption. Transformative education in their schools, from pre-school to college...with quality education characterised by faith, character formation, social responsibility and academic excellence as the trademark they give to the youth. They want to

form transformative leaders not only for the Africa of tomorrow but even now, for the Africa of today. This they undertake with lay partners in Assumption Together who are committed to Marie Eugenie's spirituality and principles of education. Sustainable in terms of human resources, a shared concern of all the provinces is to arrive at financial sustainability. With creativity and resourcefulness they initiate projects that will ensure the life and mission of the Provinces. In a continent where the Assumption is already present for over 60 years, a concern is the care of their aging first Sisters, the pioneers who are now their powerhouse of prayer and contemplative energy.

The context and the challenge shared by the Sisters in the 13 countries of Africa and Madagascar lead them to collaborate and network as a continent. An African proverb says, "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion." The needs and demands of the mission may be formidable but united and sharing resources they discover their strength and potential to do and to be more. They have continental sessions for educators, formators, provincial councils, the young and the professed Sisters. They experience the Congregation as the "wind behind their back" in their efforts to truly make the Assumption in the continent a precious gift to the Church and to their people.

SISTER VICENTA

Province of East Africa
Original English

general community

**“...we were
and are able
to see the
good in every
situation and
allow this
to blossom
and shed its
radiance.”**

What is in store for us this year 2021? What unexpected realities will we welcome and experience? What surprises awaits us?

In the recent United States presidential inauguration of Joe Biden, we heard Amanda Gorman deliver a poem entitled: “The Hill We Climb”. It is about the journey of hope amidst trying times. Quoting the last verses: “For there is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.” These are challenging and encouraging powerful lines as the whole world continues to experience the crisis of the pandemic.

We have been through almost a whole year of being in situations beyond our grasps and plans. These experiences could have led us to breakdowns or breakthroughs! We believe that true to our Assumption spirit and grace, we were and are able to see the good in every situation and allow this to blossom and shed its radiance.

Allow us to share with you our experiences of breakthroughs that gave birth to possibilities and creativity.

We are continuing to explore new ways to enable canonical visitations and, increasingly, we are becoming aware of the possibilities offered to us by this time of confinement. We hope that communication technologies can help us to deepen still more our desire for communion with the Congregation and solidarity with our world.

The visit of Sisters Rekha, Isabelle and Sandra to Mexico took place from 3 to 22 November 2020. This was our third virtual visit. Thanks to ZOOM we could be close to our sisters and the lay people of the 5 communities that make up the Province: Querétaro, Carrasco, Puebla, León and Águilas. Their warm welcome and openness to the Spirit enabled us to welcome together the grace of God’s presence. The visit was very well prepared, with technology allowing personal contact. We could sense the apostolic vitality of the province, the openness to the international, a creative vocations ministry, as well as the commitment of the laity imbued with the charism and impassioned by transformative education.

We, the whole General Community, visited the Province of Europe which, since the General Chapter, continues its journey in faith. Their openness of mind and heart has allowed the sisters to try new ways of becoming one province of four countries with different languages, historical backgrounds, and structures. The journey of communion they have made is a precious witness in today’s society for which differences can be a source of division.

Our gratitude to our sisters of the Province of Europe for allowing us to touch our tradition as Religious of the Assumption through the apostolate of presence and the evangelical companionship of our elder sisters.

Collaboration with the laity brings an apostolic energy shown in new ways of being educators and in taking care of our Common Home. Our charism of educational transformation is answering, creatively and boldly, the needs of the times and the appeals of the Church today.

Let us journey together on this path of communion which seeks to unite three former provinces, each with its own history, culture, and tradition.

The path of communion extends beyond the Provinces to the Continents. The lockdown and distance brought about by the COVID-19 crisis did not stop the Continental Journeys for mutual support, accompaniment, and restructuration processes. We continue “to strive to forge a union with purpose” (Amanda G.). We admire the commitment of our Provincials and Provincial Councils to greater communion as a Body – Congregation. We, the General Council, are grateful for the opportunity to journey with the different continents.

This interconnection experience is also carried out through commissions, ad hoc teams, and secretariats. These organize, each in their own way, meetings with the referent persons sometimes accompanied by their teams, either all together with a translation system, or by language groups. These meetings allow them to get to know each other better and to organize formation moments.

Virtual connections are creative and helpful, but actual experiences of connecting with nature, and with our communities of sisters are irreplaceable.

As a General Community, we have had several escapades: we had the opportunity to visit the communities of Orleans and Bondy on two Sundays. The visit, the mass with the people of the neighbourhood, a community meal followed by a walk (Germiny des Près and Saint Benoît sur Loire in Orléans and the Canal de l'Ourcq in Bondy) did us a lot of good! The day after Christmas we shared a snack with the sisters of the Rue des Plantes. They were still camping in a poorly heated building while waiting for the work on their new home to be finished. Covid had slowed down the building work a lot. Now each one has her own room, and the common areas are still being completed. Congratulations to our sisters for their tenacity and courage and to all the willing people who came to lend a hand!

Advent gave us a deep sense of Hope: we had witnessed then the signs of Life through our visit to the Province of Europe and the liturgy gave us a taste of this dimension of hope and of Christian watchfulness.

This year, the retreat in preparation for Christmas was led by Sisters Sandra and Véronique and, as is the tradition, in this atmosphere of prayer together we welcomed Sister Rekha's Christmas Chapter,

which prepared us for the renewal of our vows in communion with the whole Congregation. The Christmas celebration was festive, simple, with a great family spirit. Due to health restrictions, we were not able to share the Christmas table this year with our sisters in the neighbouring communities and our friends, but we experienced communion in a different way.

These months of lockdown have allowed us to focus on our ongoing formation.

We had a time of formation, via Zoom and in the presence of Cécile Franquin, organized by two organizations: Global Catholic Climate Movement and Catholic Impact Investing. The topic was on the disinvestment of fossil fuels and the importance of impact investing, in the context of climate justice and ecological transition.

As a Congregation, we also have our share of responsibility and are seeking ethical criteria in line with the approach of Pope Francis' Magisterium on this issue (Laudato Si, other recent documents) regarding investment policy. In addition to the commitment approach (in favour of companies that are committed to sustainable ecology, renewable energy, human rights, social investments) and the exclusion approach (exclusion of companies with controversial activities eg. tobacco, alcohol, weapons, or child labour...), we learned about the impact approach, which selects companies that stand out for their (measurable) intention to positively impact the environment and society through their practices (integration of young people into their workforce, gender parity, inclusion of disadvantaged groups...) as well as through their activities (renewable energy supplier, waste treatment, medicines...).



Rue des Plantes Oratory - France



Visit to Bondy - France



Visit to Orléans - France



CPP Mexico - Zoom



CPP Europe - Zoom

Another formation session was on Appreciative Inquiry. This is a change management method, introduced in the 1980s in the United States by Professor David Cooperrider, which differs from the more traditional problem solving method.

Appreciative Inquiry looks at what works well, what brings a person or group or situation to life. It starts from the premise that every person / group / situation has something good that we can understand and value. In practical terms, language, and the art of asking appropriate questions are important. More than a theory, it is an experience.

We invited Sr Véronique Margron, French Provincial of the Dominican Sisters of Charity of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, moral theologian and president of the Conference of Religious in France, to speak to us about the challenges of religious life in France today. She identified five of them:

- The need as a Congregation for self-reform, especially in the context of the very low credibility of the Church today. It is an invisible internal work that questions our habit of infantilising in certain areas, at odds with a thirst for freedom and personal responsibility.
- The ability to work with others, to live with debate, to see paradox, because this is the cost of the search for truth. We have a heritage to share: our founders showed inventiveness, determination in the face of adversity, wisdom and risk-taking!
- The issue of freedom. As religious, we come from the charismatic and prophetic dimensions, not the hierarchical dimension. We have no hierarchical place in society. We must defend this and have a clear vision of our identity. We are at the service of

dialogue and we are offering in this a place to lay people.

- Formation at every level is essential in these times in which we live, not only for us but to transmit to others.
- To hold together communion and diversity. Our international congregations are a special place because they embrace different cultures. This permanent tension between unity and singularity is a richness. To promote each culture, each sister in her individuality and at the same time to weave the common good.

Sr Véronique Margron sees clearly that Religious Life in Europe will have an ever-lower profile. More and more, the religious will come from other continents. This is a call to redesign Religious Life. It is both a huge opportunity and a great challenge of inculturation!

Our dear sisters and lay partners, we continue to climb "hills". We acknowledge the difficulties, but we are determined because our undying faith and hope in God who journeys with us, gives us the grace to embrace the light and become light for one another.

SISTER REKHA, SISTER SANDRA, SISTER ISABELLE, SISTER MARTHE AND SISTER IRENE
 General Community
Original in English

Staying strong as a volunteer at the time of pandemic

Fearing the Pandemic

The Enhanced Community Quarantine was imposed on the whole island of Luzon last March 17, 2020. This was a few days before my scheduled Licensure Examination for Teachers which was supposed to be held in March 2020.

The imposition of the lockdown and my board exam's cancellation gave me a feeling of fear for some time. I prepared so much for it, and knew that I was ready to take the exam. When all came to a halt, it gave me a feeling that my dream of becoming a professional teacher was delayed, which put me in a stagnant position for quite some time.

My Consolation

Way before the pandemic started, I have already decided to extend my stay in my mission area, the Maria Assumpta Seminary in Cabanatuan City. Aside from my family in Negros Occidental, priest-formators, fellow teachers, student-seminarians, and friends in my mission area encouraged me to go on with my life and brave the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

Thriving at Work

When my volunteer year with AMA ended in April 2020, I decided to extend my stay in Maria Assumpta Seminary as an employee. I was able to keep my job as a librarian and teacher in the senior high school and college departments. Aside from these roles and the challenges of teaching and learning, I was also assigned as the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Coordinator of the Seminary. I was in-charge of looking for learning management systems that the seminary can use to deliver online classes and formation for the online learning program. Aside from these, I also took charge of the liturgical services for the online masses.

This academic year has given me many learning opportunities to grow in many aspects. I am happy because I contributed and made myself useful for my second home and mission area during these difficult times.

Marie Eugenie Speaks

Saint Marie Eugenie invite us to share your gifts and talents and to enrich the community where we are called to live and act.

This invitation was my guiding principle when I started my volunteer year in 2019, and this pandemic made this saying more relatable. This reminded me that my community needs me at this time. I became an AMA Volunteer because of one thing — to serve my community with all my heart and with all my best.

There were many challenges during this pandemic. There were struggles in implementing the Pandemic Learning Continuity Plan for online classes, online liturgies and formation at home. I had challenges on how to keep myself sane and mentally healthy.

These difficulties made me persevere more. I can say now that I was able to act on the message of St. Marie Eugenie. I am thankful having been able to share my gifts and talents, and enrich the community where I was called to serve.

(Adryan Valiao is Batch 35 of AMA (2019-2020). He hails from Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. He was assigned in Maria Assumpta Seminary, the diocesan seminary of Cabanatuan, Nueva Ecija as a librarian and teacher in the senior high school. He was not able to go home because of the lockdown. He was hired by the seminary as a regular teacher for the school year 2020-2021)

ADRYAN J. VALIAO

Province of Asia Pacific



education

Educating to reach out to the marginalised

“Love never says: it is ‘enough’ ”

It is a great joy for our colleges in Madagascar to share this article with you about the ways in which we educate our students to go towards the marginalised members of our society, and about the educational initiative that has been set up to accompany them.

Saint Marie Eugénie's words greatly inspire us, “Love never says, 'enough' ” (See ME, n°1511). It is love that pushes us to reach out to the marginalised.

During the Church's most fervent liturgical seasons, i.e., Advent and Lent, the educators at Saint Joseph Ambohimahasoa College help the children to understand what it is to have a spirit of solidarity and to love others by making sacrifices to help the poor (especially those children who are not lucky enough to go to school, who sleep in the street, and who become beggars).

There is a box in each class in which pupils put the money they save thanks to their sacrifices. The pupils also try to raise funds during the important aforementioned times in the liturgical calendar. We then put all the money together, buy food and clothes and distribute it. The representatives of the pupils are in charge of the distribution to the poorest people.

It is often the case that, in our social environment, there would be Catholic schools. The parents of the pupils contribute to the teachers' salaries. Nonetheless, poverty often prevents the parents from being able to pay for their children's schooling. With the consequences of COVID-19, parents can no longer pay, and so far, it is the parish which contributes to the income of these educators.

That being so, Sr Emma (Director), together with the educational team, decided to help them. On Friday, January 8, we invited the educators to the Community. This was a good opportunity to wish them a “happy Christmas and



New Year 2021". The students then gifted a hamper to each educator. The educators were very grateful to have received the fruits of the students' sacrifices. We are all supposed to experience mutual aid in communion with the poorest for whom Jesus Christ has a preferential love.

Another aspect of our educational experience is that we always foster a spirit of sharing in our students. With their participation, we bought chalk for schools poorer than ours. At school, many students learn to share their snacks with those who don't have any. In this way, our students have become accustomed to sharing. In regard to spiritual life, each class is accustomed to devoting time to praying together for their friends who are in trying situations or who are in mourning.

And finally, we have made donations to people living on the margins of society, taking it upon ourselves to go out to meet them so we could assess their needs to be better able to help them.

WE CONTINUE OUR JOURNEY TO THE SOUTH OF MADAGASCAR

Our second encounter is in Andohanilakaka where a Sapphire mine is located. It is a new town. The population is almost entirely made up of migrants. People come from the north, east and west of Madagascar. We can say that it is a cosmopolitan population. But the most dominant ethnic groups are the Bar and the Antandroy, and this is the area where our educational practice is concentrated. We love spending our time here in these geographical locations.

It is important to know that religion and Education de la Vie et l'Amour – EVA (Education for Life and Love) are part of the curriculum in Catholic schools. Our school is open to all, provided that parents, children and young people respect the structure and programme set up within it. For middle and high school students, we have devoted a total of four hours per week to transmitting Christian and Malagasy values which are present in each specific objective and adapted to the age of the students. Primary and nursery school children get a maximum of fifteen minutes of each.

Fihavanana is a value that is characteristic of our country. When a family is going through a period of mourning, illness or a time of grace, we share the news. This can be announced by the schoolchildren, the parents of the students, or even the person him/herself. Each time we say 'Hello' or 'Goodbye', we immediately ask for news. That's how we know what's going on in the neighbourhood or in each family. The teachers, in response, try to rally our students, generally belonging to the same class, or those in classes of the same level. For the others, it depends on the relationship they have with the person or persons affected.

How does the process work?

First of all, we inform every one of the news, whether it is good or bad. Then, we raise awareness among the relevant students. We then set a date to visit the corresponding district. We also raise money in the form of an appeal. We let everyone know the amount collected. It is then put in an envelope that we give to the person(s) concerned. What is most important for us is the union of heart and mind through prayer. We train our students to feel they are part of a class and to live that experience with a family spirit. The person in charge of each level is meant to animate it and ensure communion between its members. It is really to give moral support. We encourage each other in difficult moments and we rejoice with the pupil who has had a success or a blessing.

Here is a concrete example: Not so long ago, a delegate from the fifth-grade class became ill. She twisted her right foot during the Physical and Sports Event. She wasn't able to go home in her condition. All the classmates looked for a way to solve this problem, but no real solution was found. Some of them went to meet the Sister in charge to explain the situation to her. The Sports teacher and a few students drove her to the doctor. Then they took her home. Some students bought her medicine. Before or after class, a group of students would visit her and follow up on the state of her health. They would take a copy of the lessons done in class, give it to her and explain to her what they had done and the exercises they still had to do. This student was very moved by the friendly gestures from her fellow students.

It is very striking to see the reaction of our young people. After saying 'Hello', they would sing a prayer for their classmate to recover but also for all the sick and suffering in the world. I like to underline that this young girl is studying in our school; her parents do not live with their daughter. She rents a house that is not far from the school. She stays alone. However, the landlord takes an interest in her studies and her life in general.

We have chosen this example because this young girl is one of the marginalised, alone and far from her parents. Her parents work in the sapphire mine, far from where our school is located. They can't call her because of the isolated place in which they are located. They have to walk a long distance to reach a telephone. This explains why this pupil could not inform her parents about her accident in sports. Only her classmates and the owner of the house knew what had happened. She was in a lot of pain. Her only consolation was the solidarity within the school, the strong friendship with her classmates, and the encouragement of her teachers and of the owner of the house.

Sacred Heart School is located in the District of Antsirabe and in the region of Vakinankaratra on the High Plateau of Madagascar. We are in the village of Manandona. In this village, there are eleven public schools, three middle schools and two high schools. We try to educate our students to be open to others and to always imagine a better future. Every year, during important major Church feasts, we organise a community initiative. Moreover, the children of the district receive annual aid from the Missionary Childhood Association. This is because we consider it important to teach them to not always receive but to also give "as there is more joy in giving than in receiving".

Before the end of the liturgical year 2020, we, the teaching staff, put a lot of thought together into how to live Advent 2020 with our pupils. We sought to help them think broadly and to love others, since it is at school that children and young people learn to live as part of a society. In today's world, we tend to live on the principle of "every man for himself". In order to face the challenges of our time we educate our young people above all to love our time and our Church. This is why, after a long debate, the teachers, as well as the class representatives, decided to make an appeal for L'Enfance Missionnaire (Missionary Childhood), so that our gesture of solidarity and friendship would go beyond our borders, towards children from other countries. Our small contribution will make our friends happy. For this reason, during the month of November, the General Supervisor and the person in charge of the school lobbied every Monday to encourage our pupils to offer the little they have to help others or those who are poorer than they are. Each class leader, then, solicited his or her class to contribute to this project. Each class has its own "kitty" to collect the daily donation from each student. It is moving to see the

little ones occasionally offering their snacks. They feel that the little sacrifice they make contributes to the well-being of others who have nothing to eat. On the 17th of December 2020, the Christmas Mass for the school was organised. We put together the efforts of each class. During the offertory, each class representative danced with joy as they brought the collection box of their class. The faces of the participants were marked by an immense joy. We, the educators, were also delighted to see their gratitude and contentment at giving a part of their lives to the Lord and to others. After thanksgiving, we offered the funds we had raised to the Chaplain of the Catholic school of the district so that he could offer it to the person in charge of L'Enfance Missionnaire (Missionary Childhood). In our country, on New Year's Eve, families visit each other, and have a family meal to wish each other a happy New Year and to wish the parents the best for the coming year. We celebrate together the "ASARAMANITRA" as the Malagasy say. This year, the pupils of 5th class organised a small party at school to mark the 2021 New Year. During the meeting, the pupils suggested that a poor person be chosen so that they wish him/her a happy New Year and bring him/her something. After a lengthy discussion, they decided to visit a person from a nearby neighbourhood. They found a grandmother, aged 93, who lives with her grandchildren. They encouraged each other and rallied together so that each one could bring what they could offer (such as potatoes, manioc, noodles, white rice, soap, money...).

Sister Antoinette, a representative for EVA (Education for Life and Love) and head of the Lycée went with them.

In receiving this donation, the grandmother was truly touched by the gesture of these young people. She had tears in her eyes when presented



with this unexpected gesture from the pupils. She thanked them and wished them a better future. She encouraged the young people to continue their studies with wisdom and courage, to always look at those around them in need, to develop these gestures of solidarity in the society in which they live. She insisted a lot on the fact that today our country needs these young people and their love, as a good example to those who only think of themselves and their own families. Madagascar needs young people with kind hearts like them. The students in turn were all happy to share what they had collected, to receive the blessing and encouragement of an elderly person like her - such a blessing is important for the Malagasy people. They left with light and joyful hearts. We were all delighted to see the joy on their faces as a result of this experience of sharing. We ended the meeting with a prayer.

For us, it is this way of living, through concrete gestures of friendship and fraternity, which makes us belong to the same body - the Body of Christ. We know that the students are sensitive to the realities of the society of which they are members and that they have a taste for helping those who are weaker or poorer than they are.

It is not only students who try to open up to others and to the marginalised; educators are equally concerned with making their contribution to the education of young people. It is a custom for our school to choose each year a day per semester (in January and May) to visit the parents of the students. Each educator visits some of the parents of his or her class. The aim is to seek ways together to improve the student's life and studies. It is a precious moment to meet and talk with the parents about their children's education and conduct, and also to examine what can hinder their development and studies. During the meeting, each leader takes the opportunity to suggest solutions to school problems and to pass on the latest school programme, or the changes made following the monthly teachers' meeting.

It is often the case that problems encountered with education is due to the infrequency of meetings between the parents and school, and to a lack of understanding between young people and their parents in the face of globalisation. Parents are happy with the visits to their homes because they are usually very busy with the daily concerns for their family - finding food or clothes. They often have no available time to go and talk to the educators at the school. After the visits, the school organises an evaluation and appraisal so that the day of the visit is not a waste of time but a constructive experience in which, together, they may look for ways to improve our education and address daily realities. During the appraisal, the council of teachers take the decisions which are meant to strengthen our teaching. It is up to them to point out if there are students or parents who need to meet with the school director. For us, these home visits are very important for the development and support of students and parents.

It also reduces the problems encountered in the school and in the families.

In short, in regard to the education of our young people today, everyone including pupils, parents, and educators alike, has a noble duty to fulfil. Educators, however, have a great responsibility insofar as young people will build the society of tomorrow. We must explore the means appropriate for the individual characters, way of life and possibilities of each young person, to enable them to feel responsible for their neighbours and peers.

SISTER EMMA IGNACETELYNE

Referent Sister for Education of the Province of Madagascar

Original french

Loving our Time: AMA Philippines in the Midst of a Pandemic

Our Response: One Assumption in the Fullness of Charity

The Philippine Lockdown

The unprecedented impact of the Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) on Filipinos left many sick, unemployed, hungry, and afraid. Like the rest of the world, it impacted almost all areas of personal, communal and societal aspect. The Philippine government had to grapple with how to respond effectively to this unknown situation.

Our Response: One Assumption in the Fullness of Charity

Batch 35 of AMA volunteers were scheduled for a year-end evaluation and retreat on April 1-6, 2020. This batch is composed of 27 young men and women assigned in the Luzon and Visayas provinces who were supposed to gather at Assumption, Iloilo.

When the government declared a lockdown on March 17th, the evaluation was postponed as flights from Manila to any part of the country were all cancelled. A few of the volunteers were able to go home and most of the volunteers that had to

remain in the areas continue to help out in any way they can: helping cook meals for the frontlines, sewing masks for Red Cross, assisting in online masses.

With the rapid increase of COVID-19 cases in Metro Manila and other parts of the country, AMA created new ways to respond to the situation.

AMA alumni organized quarterly gathering called Zoomustahan (the term is derived from the platform Zoom and kumustahan is the Filipino term derived from the Spanish language's "como esta?").

The first Zoomustahan was in June 2020 with Sr. Gertrude Borres, R.A. dubbed "Building Community in the Midst of Pandemic." The second was entitled "Revisiting the Teachings of St. Marie Eugenie" with Ms. Luisa "Bubut" Neri, co-director of the Marie Eugenie Institute (MEI) as resource person. The third was Recreating Communities through Fraternal Love: A Christmas Reflection on Pope Francis' Encyclical, Fratelli, Tutti) facilitated by Sr. Gertrude Borres, R.A.



Batch 35 of AMA Volunteers during the Mid Year Evaluation and Retreat, November 1-6, 2019

Also, an Assumption alumna, Dr. Geraldine Mayor conducted a webinar for AMA alumni and friends in October 2020 about taking care of one's well-being during the pandemic.

Alongside these webinars and kumustahan (by batches), AMA alumni formed prayer circles creating a safe space for the alumni to share their experiences, whereabouts, and how they are coping with the situation.

Despite the physical distance among members of these groups, everyone was socially connected defying borders.

The AMA Alumni Community continues to extend help to the Assumption Socio Education Center (ASEC), a mission school of the Religious of the Assumption. Because of the pandemic, many of the mission schools reduced enrollees. These volunteers consist of teachers from the basic education and higher education divisions of the Assumption, AMA alumni from here and abroad.

One of the volunteers, a professor from the Assumption, has been given the chance to tutor a student from Assumption, Iloilo. The objective of the tutorials is to enhance or enrich the practical use of the Filipino language for academic and daily functions. Helping a student with any difficulty is always a mission to fulfill as an educator. On a positive note, the drastic shift to online teaching created frequent opportunities to connect so no matter where the student is, chances of connecting are now more possible with the online modality.

With the efforts of the AMA alumni and friends, the students of the mission schools are able to respond to their academic requirements quite successfully. Indeed, this collaboration with the AMA alumni and volunteers, together with the support of the Assumption sisters and Assumption alumnae, have somehow eased the challenges of the mission school teachers in coping with the demands of the new normal.

Moreover, there is a plan to create an English Conversational Fluency program for teachers. This project will help the teachers of the mission schools improve their confidence to speak the English language functionally and their ability to carry themselves in casual conversations. The program is a 12-hour interactive English language coaching to be facilitated by an Assumption educator. This is tentatively scheduled to take place this summer.

Our Takeaway

What do these experiences mean to us?

First off, during and after a crisis, nothing stays the same. This pandemic either brings out

the best or the worst in a person. The fears brought about by the current challenges can either paralyze or inspire depending on the response to the situation. If one responds proactively, he shall find ways to live

with the situation and continue to pray for God's love and grace to see the pandemic through His majestic eyes. The crisis is an opportunity to be more generous in ways one has not yet imagined. Covid-19 has created the vacuum for human connection and material need so we give as God gives. We love as He loves. After all, everything is grace. The pandemic taught us to reach out to those who are suffering the wages of this situation, and with the power of coming together, all forms of giving and sharing was possible. There is no limit to the capacity of each person to extend help in any way. What we give to others, we give to ourselves.

Secondly, Pope Francis' Encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, on brotherhood (fraternity) is very much experienced by members of the AMA Community. The community reached out to its members and affiliates through a series of Zoomustahan, tutorials, prayer circles, and special events celebrated online.

Thirdly, love our times. Today is the time to love. There is no other opportunity other than today. The challenges and uncertainties of life keep coming and going so we need to focus on God and remain in His love. Let us not miss out on the presence of God in this pandemic. We can face something more serious than Covid-19 so trusting in God's protection, providence, and daily miracles will keep us afloat, fighting this big fight, and surrendering our lives completely to His mercy.

St. Marie Eugenie of Jesus teaches us to embrace the truth of this pandemic: Only Jesus. Always Jesus.

MOTHER MARIA TERESA SOLÍS AND MARIA VIRGINIA REVILLA

Province of the Philippines

Original English

Finances

Who's the Layperson in This Provincial Economat, Anyway?

God has a way of getting your attention by throwing curve balls.

At the Assumption, we're used to dividing our life into "Sisters" and "laity," but really, as I reflect on writing about the Provincial Economat here in the U.S. Province, I have to say that in that room, I'm the layperson. Our Business Manager, Penny Mitchell, isn't a Sister (her husband Richard and their three children -- not to mention her two dogs -- would likely object) but she is an expert, not a "layperson." And every Wednesday morning, as I enter the office and find her there, I thank God that she is.

God has a way of getting your attention by throwing curve balls. (A baseball metaphor -- quite appropriate for an American, I think!) The curve he threw my way was to have me named as Provincial Econome. What was he thinking of? Before I came to the Assumption, I knew how to balance my checkbook and pay my bills on time, and that was about it. For some 30 years of Assumption life, I'd blithely rendered my little monthly account, and left it all in other people's hands. Even as provincial, that's what I would do, more or less. And then -- Boom! Welcome to the Economat, Nuala.

Happily, Penny was already in place -- as provincial, I'd actually helped to get her on board, just after she'd decided to retire from her high-powered job as the Chief Financial Officer of a large grocery supplier. A parishioner in our parish in Lansdale, Penny was interested in helping us move our operation into the 21st century. She began in February 2014, working part-time with Sr. Anne Francoise, our then-treasurer.

Penny would be too discreet to say what she found back then, but suffice it to say that in the intervening six years, she's managed to get all of our community economats onto the same page -- literally. Yes, we're all on Quick Books now. She's also managed to help us learn the necessity of quarterly reports and "leaving breadcrumbs" (meaning adding a memo to explain each item recorded in the digital ledger). Please note, I am not claiming that we now DO ALL of these things, but through a mixture of persistence and expertise as well as a lot of patience and good nature, Penny has succeeded in putting our community accounts into a far more organized state than they may have ever been in before.

Penny's experience has been vital in finding a broker for our health insurance (always a complicated thing here in the United States), taking care of filing whatever taxes we owe, keeping track of bills, managing the monthly allocations to the communities, and a million other details. Recently, for example, we were able to secure a Payroll Protection Plan loan made available by the U.S. government to small businesses because of Covid-19; thanks to her suggestion that we use a professional payroll service which handles all the paperwork, we were able to take advantage of what was being offered. Without Penny shepherding the process forward, I think it would not have happened. It certainly wouldn't have happened as painlessly as it did!

Penny says that she's still learning Assumption language -- her way of pronouncing "Auteuil," for example, has led me to urge her to simply say "Paris" -- but her thoughtful understanding of our needs and our mission strikes me as precious. I'm very grateful for her part in the office of the Provincial Econome, which, as I'm learning more and more, contributes to the well-being of the life of our whole Province.



SISTER NUALA COTTER

Community of Lansdale. Province of the USA.
Original English



In the "chapel" tent

archives treasures

“Small rivers” of sharing in the middle of the desert

The immense territory of Niger (1,287,000 km²) is inhabited by 4 ethnic groups (the Hausas, the Djermas, the Sonraïs, the Peuls). It is a place where Christianity made its appearance in 1931 through Father Faroud of the African Missions of Lyon. The Little Sisters of Jesus arrived there in 1953. In 1961, Father Jean Ploussard (whose travelogue has become famous) settled under a tent, among the Tuaregs, in Tchirozérine ("The little rivers"). The school, small dispensary, dormitory - everything was housed under that tent! He died in February 1962, without completing all his projects, but those who had benefited from his initiatives took over: "Moussa continued to teach the children under the school-tree, Tambo looked after the huts and the pilot garden, Awatay was to crush the millet for all of them". In 1965, Mother Marie Denyse carried out a fact-finding mission: Young sisters studying at the Catholic University of Paris had been "called" by the former spiritual adviser of Father Ploussard; they joined in the Superior-General's call and passion for the missions. Mother Marie Denyse was to discover Niamey, Agadez, Tahoua (her plane being caught in a sandstorm), Tchirozérine, Zinder (following a 950 km trek across the slopes). The starting point for the foundations in Tchirozérine, Tahoua and Zinder, in 1966, stemmed from this first exploration. This Trésor d'Archives (Archive Treasure) presents extracts of an account of the founding of Tchirozérine written by the Canadian Sister Anne-Eugénie Langlois. She died in 2012 at the age of 91. This text was written in 2002 at the request of the sisters of her community. The complete text can be found on the Congregation's website.

Excerpts from the account of the foundation of Tchirozérine

By Sr Anne-Eugénie de la Mère de Dieu

The Foundation

Four sisters have been called to the foundation of Tchirozérine: Anne de Marie Immaculée, French; Sr Anne Eugénie, Canadian; Sr Marie Bosco, Rwandan; and Sr Carmen Luz, Spanish (...). On January 19th, 1966, after the solemn mass of missionary sending, celebrated by Father Rey Mermet, author of the travelogue *Carnet de Route de Jean Ploussard*, three of the foundresses (Anne de Marie Immaculée, Anne Eugénie and Marie Bosco) flew to Niger. At 5.30am on Thursday, January 20th, we were celebrating Lauds and under a sparkling sky, with great emotion we recited the words of the psalm, "He counts the number of stars, and gives each one a name," (Psalm 147). At 6 o'clock, our plane was landing on the runway, and it was a surprise to feel the hot air; it was at least 30°! Mgr Berlier was there, with his fraternal joviality, and he takes us to the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles, neighbours of the bishopric, where we are going to stay while waiting for the arrival of Sr Carmen Luz a few days later. On the same day, the bishop takes us to visit the city of Niamey, with its 60,000 inhabitants, "all of them children of God," he told us. We get to know the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary who preceded us by a few months, since they have been here since September 1965. They are responsible for the various services of the hospital, as well as the training of the nurses. After discussion with Sr Christiane - the person in charge - it is agreed that Anne Eugénie would do a 6-week internship in Niamey at the hospital and in the various dispensaries of the city which are under the responsibility of Dr Caba, a Dahomean doctor.

After Carmen Luz's arrival, Anne de Marie Immaculée

and Marie Bosco leave with her by plane, in the direction of Agadez. There, Father Grenier has rented them a house near the mission. They apply themselves to the study of Tamachek with the Little Sisters of Jesus, especially little Sister Jeanie Marthe who knows all the secrets of this language.

At last, the moment came for the real founding! The sisters all meet in Agadez, and it is on March 25, 1966 that Father Grenier takes them in his old army jeep. It is total joy! Father Monnet and Brother Louis have planned everything: the chapel - *tégira* (tent) has been redone, a beautiful tent has been put up by the women of the valley, since the tent is the business of the women. A small kitchen - *tégira* and a larger one with three iron beds recovered from the military section of Agadez, for the three sisters. As is only to be expected, Anne of Mary Immaculate will live in the tent which will also serve as a refectory and community hall. We will fetch water from the well in the garden for cooking and washing. The new dispensary is under construction and, in the meantime, Anne Eugénie will care for the people and children in the 4th flat of the mansion, since there are still only three of them. The school has about 150 pupils and 5 classes CI (Kindergarden); CP (1st grade); CE1 (2nd grade); CE2 (3rd grade), and CM1 (4th grade). It is the older CM1s who come to act as interpreters for Sr Anne Eugénie before and after school. But Father Yakhia and Brother Louis are also happy to take a turn, since they were the ones who took on this task before our arrival.

The inauguration

Finally, 8th June is the official inauguration day of the beautiful dispensary, that has been fully-equipped thanks to the generosity of the community of Bordeaux, students and friends of this house. As is customary in our mission countries, all the civil authorities are invited, as well as the Father and



« The host is more venerable than the father » (Arabic proverb)

jour de garder Sr Monique pendant quelques jours
 avant de partir sur Tahona et Agadez où elle
 visitera les sœurs de ces 2 postes avant de re-
 gagner la Côte d'Ivoire. * 2
 → Un autre événement important de cette année
 70 sera le commencement de la construction d'une
 chapelle en banco par le frère Bernard, le site
 a été choisi sur la colline à mi-chemin entre
 le campement des Bocors et l'Internat des filles.
 Le frère a mis toute son ingéniosité et son talent
 à fabriquer de jolies fenêtres artistiques et un
~~un~~ beau vitrail avec des verres de couleurs qu'il
 a carrés et enchassés avec goût dans un cadre

Manuscript of sister Anne-Eugénie

the Little Sisters of Agadez, Azzel and Kerboubou.
 Hundreds of camel riders with their festive harnesses,
 women in their finest attire, assembled to strike
 the Tendé to make the camels run in a superb
 fantasia. The entire valley is there. Sheep roasting
 for a méchoui (barbecue) to everyone's delight.
 Speeches, a blessing by Father Yakhia, and a visit of
 the place are called for. The party goes on until the
 evening. It is unforgettable!

Then we visit the camps and begin talking about
 the school for the girls and the boarding school that
 will be in our camp on the banks of the Oued. A
 tégira is built, and from the beginning of the school
 year in October, eight little girls with long braids and
 bright eyes are there. It is the first little nucleus that

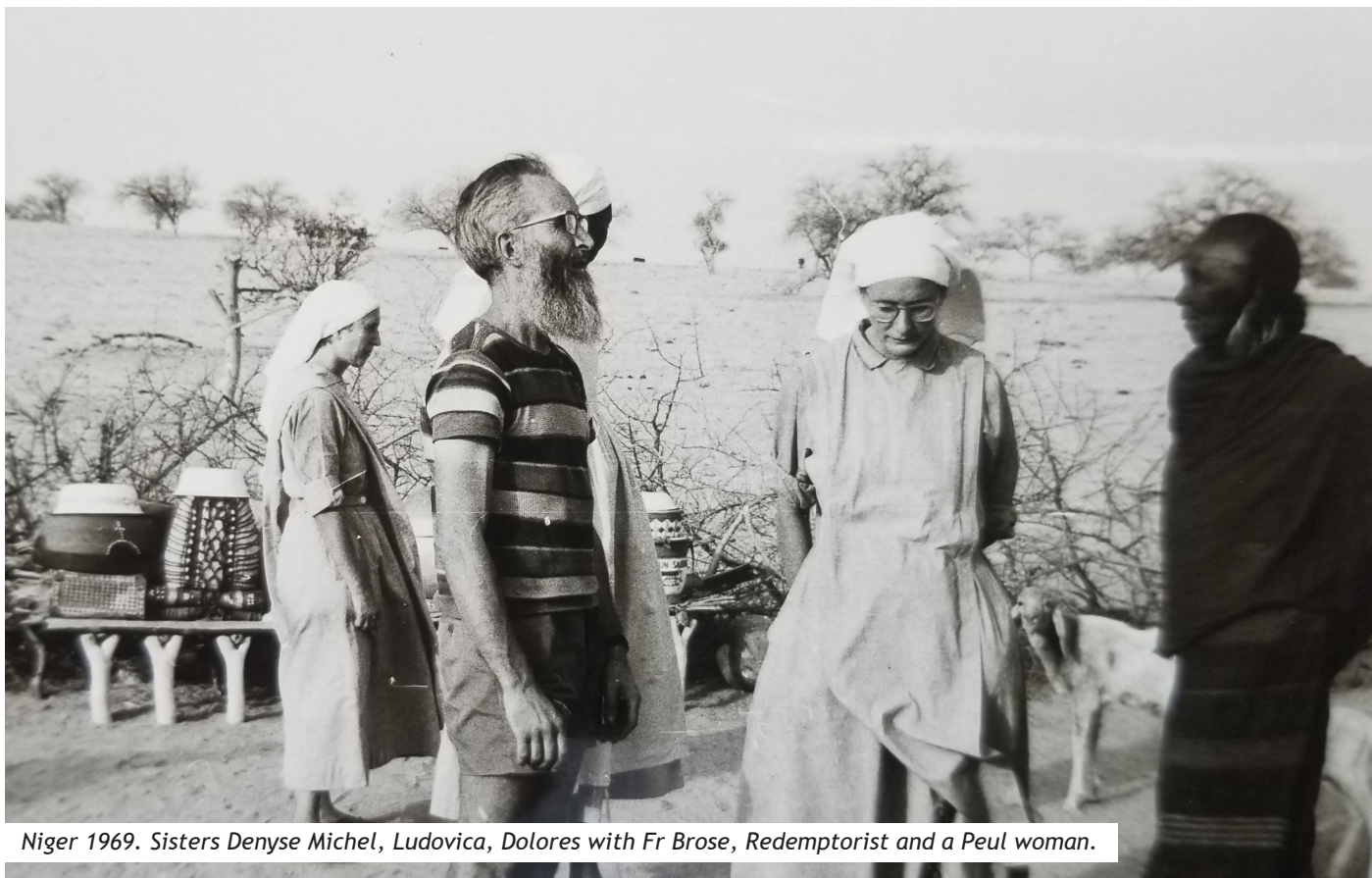
Carmen Luz will be in charge of, while Anne of Mary
 Immaculate will take charge of the CP class. Things
 are moving along quite quickly and the following
 year we counted about twenty pupils; we will now
 have to think about building.

Inculturation

One day, Tambo said to Yakhia, "The sisters should
 take names from our home. For the sister in charge,
 it's easy. Her name is Anne, and at home, the mother
 is Anna. All she has to do is take this name, which
 is still her own. Marie Bosco - there is no problem.
 Her name will be Mariama. It's a name from here.
 Carmen - it's easy; people like it, but the sister of
 the dispensary - her name is too complicated for us.

Yveline-Claude, when she was AMA, in front of the mission tents





Niger 1969. Sisters Denyse Michel, Ludovica, Dolores with Fr Brose, Redemptorist and a Peul woman.

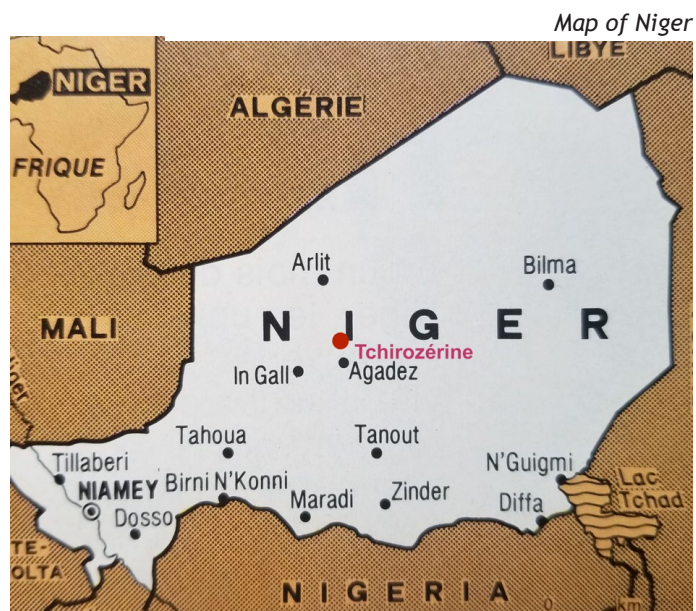
There can't be two with the name of Anna. It's not possible, but if she wanted, we would call her Tan Elher. It's a good name from here, and for the work she does, it would be good: Tan Elher, 'the one of peace', 'the one of good'." After sharing their wish with us, the sisters agreed and we adopted these names in Tchirozérine, and throughout Niger we were always called by these names.

(...) At the end of the 1968 school year, our two youngest sisters left us; Mariama left to pursue secondary studies in our Fatima College in Zinder, and Carmen returned to Europe. We were then only two sisters left. Luckily, Sr Carmen Isabel from Spain was sent to us to help in the dispensary which was always very busy (...) The recruitment of the girls was going well, especially since Brother Jacques had finished the construction of the girls' boarding school: a large dormitory, a work and play room, the room of the boarding school's head, and twelve showers and toilets. Tan Elher was to be in charge of this boarding school, and the holidays would be spent sewing underwear and small corsages for the twenty-five girls expected, as well as underpants and boubous for the boys: 250 were expected, and they will all receive their sturdy, single-colour drill clothes (...)

In 1968, the great famine also began. It would last seven years and decimate a large proportion of the herds, reducing the Tuaregs to abject poverty (...) The school year begins on October 1st and most of the children are present; 250 boys and 25 girls. Anna teaches the little ones, Carmen and Tan Elher share

the dispensary until Carmen has assimilated a few rudimentary notions of Tamacheq and gets to know the population (...)

With so many children, it is inevitable that we sometimes encounter rather difficult times, for example, when Mumps hit about sixty of our boys. We had to isolate them for eight to ten days in a small hollow nearby, which would allow us to keep an eye on the others who would like to visit their classmates and who don't understand why we are preventing them from doing so. Taking food to the sick, doing their laundry on the spot and helping with homework and lessons for those who are less



fired, will be the task of the Sisters. It is the same when Measles too broke out among the boys and girls, as they have to be protected from the sun and cannot be put in isolation in the bush. Fortunately, none of them suffered any after-effects, and they soon returned to their classes and the life of the group with the others.

Commitments

(...) In 1969, we were lucky enough to welcome an AMA (a young person associated with the mission of the sisters of the Assumption), Yveline Claude, who came to help with the school. She adapts very quickly and the children love her very much. They named her, Fatima, and come to talk and play with her freely. She has set up her tent at the other end of the Sisters' concession (...)

1970-1971: construction of the chapel

Another important event in 1970 was the beginning of the construction of a mud-brick chapel by the OPP-Bernard. The site was chosen on the hill halfway between the Sisters' camp and the girls' boarding school. The brother put all his ingenuity and talent into making beautiful artistic windows and a beautiful stained-glass window with coloured glass which he broke and tastefully set in a cement frame. Some Tuaregs have been asked to prepare the mud-bricks and the new chapel will be ready for March 25, 1971 - the 5th anniversary of the arrival of the sisters in Tchirozérine..."

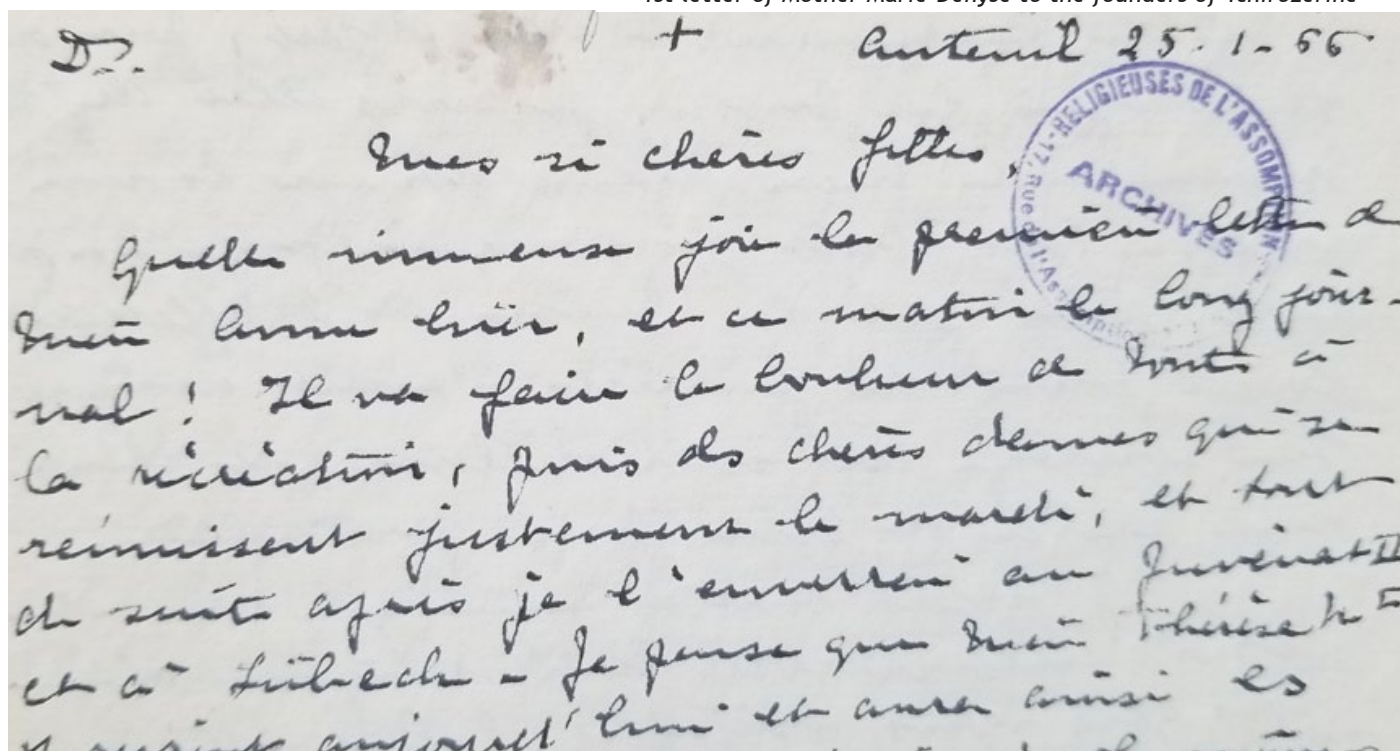
The founding story of other communities in Niger can be read on the Assumpta.org website in the section "Archives of the 21st century", under the title: "Niger - Story of the Foundation.

You will discover other documents using the keyword "NIGER", in particular the account of a desert crossing made by Sr Anne-Eugénie to meet up with her twin sister, Sister of Our Lady of Africa.

May this reading and these moving testimonies encourage the missionary sisters to send their stories to the Archives of the Congregation in the form of testimonies, recollections or bulletins, whether they be handwritten, digitalised, filmed or recorded!"

Document presented by
SISTER VÉRONIQUE THIÉBAUT
Archivist of the Congregation
Original French

1st letter of Mother Marie-Denyse to the founders of Tchirozérine



spirituality

Holy Insecurity: Trust in the Slow Work of God

“Trust in God’s work within us is not passive”

St. Ignatius urges trust in the slow work of God (<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/prayer-of-theilhard-de-chardin/>). The idea seems paradoxical to the urgency and individualism that pervade contemporary culture, and to our sense of worldwide crisis. Personally, I find Ignatius' instruction to trust in the slow work of God easy to hear and challenging to practice. What does it mean to live trust in the slow work of God? Our history as a people of God illustrates the strangeness of this trust. It is also visible in the lives of saints (e.g., Ignatius, Marie Eugenie). In my experience, the RA's are a living example of how to trust that grace and circumstances acting on our own good will grow new spirit within us. While I cannot speak to what is within another's heart, outward signs suggest the nature of trust in the slow work of God.

As a friend of RA's in Worcester, MA for decades, I am close enough to ponder some ways they live this trust. The Sisters have experienced a remarkable metamorphosis since the early '90's. Journeying with them, at times I found it hard to understand their way of proceeding. For example, sometimes the Sisters chose to defer seemingly urgent decisions because they perceived the need for further discernment. Those observations and others rise to awareness in this reflection about trust in the slow work of God in our hearts, suggesting that trust is: (a) risky, daring, and sacrificial; (b) radically counter-cultural; and (c) mutual.

Risky, Daring, and Sacrificial

Trust in God's work within us is not passive. It involves embracing risk and uncertainty, a spiritual stance a mentor called, "holy insecurity." Ignatius suggested this trust involves living with the anxious feeling of not knowing what is unfolding or in what time – perhaps not in our own time. At times, we may understand only that God is at work within us, though we cannot see beyond the present moment. What that trust will mean for us, what it will ask of us personally or as a community, may not be clear. It takes courage to resist making choices for comfort and stability. It takes fortitude to endure the uncertainty and insecurity God's ongoing work in us often involves.



For example, in the '90's, the Sisters in Worcester were primarily faculty and campus ministers at Assumption College. As the result of a discernment, they committed to place themselves in service to some of the city's urban poor a few miles away. At the time, I couldn't see how the mission would develop. The two settings and populations (college students and impoverished families) are worlds apart. Academics would arguably have high learning curves placing themselves in service to people in inner city neighborhoods. Perhaps the Sisters could not see how the mission would unfold either. Still, they gave themselves to this mission they had discerned with open hearts.

Today, it is clear the Sisters were practicing a risky, daring, and sacrificial trust in God. The mission would eventually involve some Sisters letting go of hard-won salaried positions as campus ministers and academics, placing themselves in less formal, unpaid service to families struggling through poverty, immigration, and other suffering. The RA community in Worcester would morph, as well. Some Sisters left for missions elsewhere, and others came to Worcester to support the changing mission. Most often, the Sisters' numbers were small, the challenges daunting, and Sisters' sacrifices remarkable. These choices were hard to fathom at the time. Yet the Sisters called up their courage and made what are surely countless sacrifices demanded by their trust in the slow work of God.

Radically Counter-Cultural

The Sisters' practice of trust is also counter-cultural. Busy as their lives are, the Sisters make time daily for communal and private prayer, to attend to God over whatever time God asks. In turn, in monthly meetings with lay collaborators, the Sisters ultimately approach their work based on their experiences in prayer and only secondarily with respect to spreadsheets or planning documents. Practically and radically, the Sisters' bottom line is their sense of service to God. They decline recognition and actively protest oppressive government policies affecting families they serve. They resist potential constraints on their freedom to serve. For example, they only seek program funds from grantors whose policies do not restrict that freedom. It is a risky way to run a mission; I expect it is the only way the Sisters run a mission. Where many people and organizations choose stability, the Sisters move counter-culturally, choosing the demanding way of "holy insecurity."

Mutual

Trust in the slow work of God is not trust that our specific plans will work out. Instead, it is trust that the God of Love is at work in our hearts while day to day, we serve God, each other, and our world. It means believing that God will use "grace and circumstances acting on our own good will" to guide us lovingly to become fully ourselves. Our trust involves always speaking with God about what is in our hearts, while offering

God what we have – indeed who we understand ourselves to be.

Ignatius's instruction does not include this additional idea per se, but it seems part of God's response to our trust is to entrust others to us, such as to welcome and support those in formation. Consider the volunteers, staff, and lay collaborators who come to the Assumption. Some stay a little while, others much longer. The Sisters invite us into their joyful practice of this risky, countercultural trust that God is at work in all our hearts. I believe God responds by entrusting to us some who need our particular care. For example, young adults come to serve as volunteers or to live in the intentional community at Assumption Center. In their time with us, some discern vocations, others come to decisions to end or affirm important relationships or behaviors. From my perspective, God has entrusted them to the Sisters, to us.

Personal Reflection

Trust in the slow work of God may not come naturally. But God has been at work within us since our beginnings. Looking back over some period of time, we might ask, What is God's ongoing work within me, within us? How am I/we practicing trust in the slow work of God?

ANNE KANE, R.N.

Hudson, Massachusetts
Province of the United States
Original English

solidarity office

25 years at the service of solidarity (2nd part)

“To celebrate the BGSD’s 25 years of existence, we had hoped to “blow a celebratory candle” out on 25 projects”.

Following the presentation made in #Assumpta no. 2 of the origin, the legal dimension and the mission of Assumption Solidarity and the General Office of Solidarity for Development (BGSD), here is a brief presentation of the diversity and specificity of the projects which have been financed. Over the past 25 years, a thousand projects have been carried out thanks to the help received directly from Assumption Solidarity or from other associations and benefactor friends, through the BGSD. These projects have an educational purpose in the broadest sense. They are varied and are related to either works of the Assumption or to those of known local associations and dioceses that are connected with it. They provide a modest “helping hand” to improve living and learning conditions affected by the lack of financial means. They support the development of collective resources, the start-up of new activities that often create employment, and the organisation of specific training courses. People’s involvement in these projects is very important; each project is implemented using a “do with” and not a “do for” approach.

Equipment projects

During the first ten years, Assumption Solidarity took charge of the construction of several schools, social centres and parish halls. Since 2006, it has instead financed the restoration and fitting-out of existing premises or those built by other organisations, as well as the provision of teaching and learning materials: books, textbooks, video projectors, computers, etc. Since computers have become indispensable, they are now in great demand.

Access to drinking water is a major problem in many countries, particularly in Africa. This problem has been aggravated by climate change which lengthens the dry seasons and by the rapid population growth concentrated around large cities. More and more communities and schools are asking for financial assistance to dig wells and install water towers and cisterns. These facilities provide access to drinking water not only for sisters, teachers and students, but also, as much as possible, for the local inhabitants.

There are also projects involving food. Every year, a significant amount of aid is granted for the creation or improvement of chicken coops, pigsties, hutches, vegetable gardens and market gardening. It is mainly schools, girls’ hostels and religious training centres that apply for this aid in order to improve the daily diet and make it more balanced and less expensive. Some livestock and agricultural projects also have another objective: to create a lucrative activity locally, however modest it may be, in order to contribute to financial independence.

Training and focus on the poorest

Since their creation, Assumption Solidarity and the BGSD have favoured the financing of a wide variety of charitable and Christian training programmes: Bible camps and youth forums in Africa, extracurricular activities in several provinces, apprenticeship workshops and trade schools, catechistic and pastoral training for basic Christian communities, particularly in Central America, Cuba, Mexico, the Philippines, West Africa and Rwanda.

The training of women aimed at their “empowerment” by acquiring a certain financial autonomy is one of the most successful projects. Whether they are Adivasi from India or Maya Q’echi from Petén (Guatemala), these women, who realise that they have an important role to play in society, learn how to create lucrative activities to support their families and send their children to school.

Many of these projects involve marginalised minorities and poor social groups: “returnee refugees” from the Gaoui camp in Chad, indigenous tribes in India, fishermen from the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, farmers who are victims of repression



Demonstration against mining exploitation - Argentina



Kpedigni School - Togo



School attached to the school in Vilius - Lithuania



Vidyakiran Girls' Hostel - India

in El Salvador, children and adolescents suffering from drug addictions in Argentina, Pygmies in Cameroon, Batwa in Rwanda, etc.

Ecological commitment in the spirit of 'Laudato si'

The promotion of its environmental commitment has become a prime objective for the BGSD. In 2015, at its request, all the provinces were invited to send projects which focused on the environment. Sixteen "environmental" projects were financed in this way: shared gardens in Awalwadi (India) and Wostercer (USA), tree plantations in Kibouo-Daloo (Ivory Coast) and Kizono (D.R. of Congo), an awareness campaign against highly polluting open-pit mining in La Rioja (Argentina), the creation of green spaces at the school in Vallecas (Spain), the installation of water-saving taps and toilets in Carrasco (Mexico), rainwater collection tanks in Nyangue (Rwanda) and others. We continue to encourage these types of projects, which contribute to the safeguard of our planet and its biodiversity.

2020 Jubilee Year

To celebrate the BGSD's 25 years of existence, we had hoped to "blow a celebratory candle" out on 25 projects – a greater number than usual. The redesigned website of the Congregation would have given us the opportunity to make our proposal known to a wider public and to generate new support. But the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic at the end of January 2020 made us fear that it may backfire and have the opposite effect. Indeed, the pandemic created a health emergency situation. On the one hand, it polarized general solidarity, and on the other, the confinement which started with Lent 2020 froze the school and parish activities that usually enable us to collect money. We no longer dared campaigning for donations to finance projects that could have been considered less urgent. Nonetheless, we were

overlooking how Divine Providence can surprisingly intervene in the course of life. On December 20th we were able to finance the 25th project! Assumption Solidarity financed 11 projects and 14 others were financed through private donations. We would like to share our amazement at the kind of solidarity that transcends the "urgent", knows no borders and is open to everyone, as well as to share in our gratitude and thanks.

Alix de Chaumont
Bureau of Solidarity
French original

echoes from the archives

“For the team,
these projects
offer an
occasion for
great joy and
great hope!”

Transformation and relationships... here are two words that could qualify the work done at the Archives over the last few months through the continued momentum of what had been started.

Implementation of the network “Back to sources”

The link with Assumption trainers (religious and civil) throughout the world has led to several proposals designed to help all those who wish to live a continual return to their roots. For the team, these projects offer an occasion for great joy and great hope!

- In February 2021, the guided visit of the Archives section is available on the Congregation's web page for all those who are interested.

- On the 26th of February, and on the 2nd and 3rd of March, there is a public conference on YouTube, followed by an invitation from the General Chapter 2018 and the CGP 2020 to join in a time of sharing in Visio, for all those who are happy to be stimulated by this return to the sources. This process is called “SOURCES Day”. We plan to organise it twice a year, in English, Spanish and French.

- Work with the trainers online, on themes that are relevant to their mission.

Work with the Archivists of the Province

We have established an efficient working rhythm with the International Team: a 2-hour monthly meeting by video. This gave us the idea of holding three meetings (one per language) in December to convene the Archivists of the Provinces with the aim of: sharing the work in the Provinces, getting to know the web page, and visiting the facilities of Auteuil. Given the enthusiasm of the participants, we have decided to meet once every three months from now on. Between two meetings, Sr. Véronique will meet with the Archivists who wish to be trained or accompanied by her in the implementation of their mission. We are happy to strengthen communion in this way and to enrich each other.

There's no room for boredom at the Archives

Sister Marie-Yvonne began working at the Archives in September. She files the documents covering the foundations during Mother Marie-Denyse's time, but she also helps a lot with the reorganisation of the space. Here is her testimony:

“...Working a few hours at the Archives? Why not?”

I was far from imagining what that could imply! And you, how do you imagine it to be? I imagine that you'd be far from guessing it right, because the archives are undergoing a total transformation! (They too... it's the fashion, isn't it?)

Transformation because of having to move,

Transformation because of a different system of organisation,

Transformation with the archivist's office,

Transformation of the Marie-Eugénie library to be organised,

Transformation of the great hall of the archives that you probably knew, ultimately intended to become a museum,

Alteration through the creation of the small room (at the back of the library) for the intermediate archives,

Transformation of the room on the second floor into a real archive room worthy of the name – equipped to maintain the right temperature, with a multitude of boxes

(archives of course), filled according to a very precise order, listed, labeled, tidy ... It's worth the trip, I assure you!

So, to work at the archives you certainly need to have your mind about you somewhat, but at present you also need strong arms and muscles ... and you don't get bored, believe me ...

And then, there is so much to discover! and I still have everything to learn !!! “

The different collections of the Archives

Did you know that “funds” don't just mean finance? In fact, we also talk about Archives “funds” (all the documents produced by a company, a congregation, a specific person). The reorganisation has led us to distinguish four different funds that constitute the Archives of the Congregation:

- The Funds of Origins (1839-1953): before the creation of the Provinces.

- The Modern Collection (from 1953)

- The Fund of the Guardian Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament

- The Collection of the Augustinian Nuns of Notre Dame de Paris (with two sub-funds: the Augustinian nuns of the Hôtel-Dieu and the Augustinian nuns of the Precious Blood of Arras): this collection will be kept in the rue des Plantes in a room annexed to the General Archives.)

A working stay in Arras made it possible to begin to recover the archives of the Augustines du Précieux Sang. We will offer you the possibility of discovering this collection in future publications.

How about you making a contribution to history?

Through the Archivists, you will receive two requests:

- To put your testimonies in writing and to collect documents that will allow you to write the history of the Assumption with migrants, refugees or displaced persons: either because you have participated in a mission in this field or because you yourself have experienced being a refugee?

- Putting in writing or recording/filming the stories of your foundation: Sisters who have been missionaries are particularly invited to take the time to write or record an oral account that can be sent to the Archives to place it among the many treasures of our history. But also, all those who have been the pioneers of a foundation, of the initiation of a work effort, of the setting-up of an emergency action of solidarity.

The Assumption from Heaven

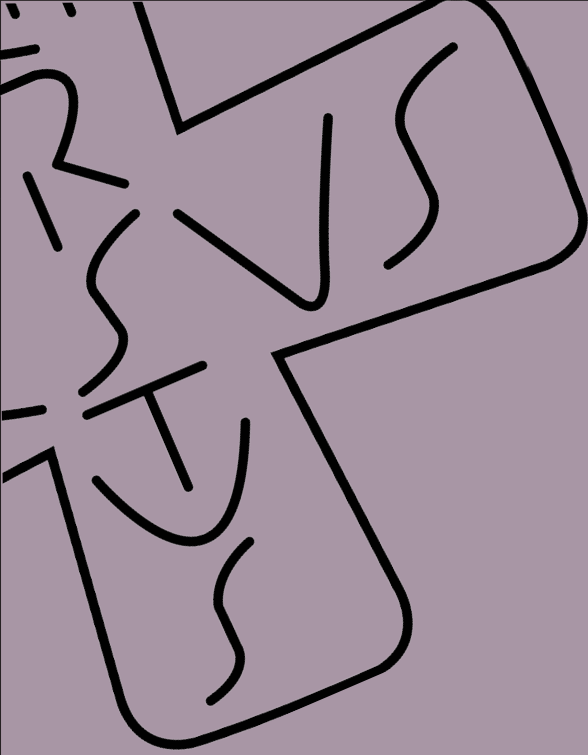
Many wonder if the publication of the “Deceased Sisters” still exists. The last one that arrived in the communities is that of 2017. If you have waited for the following ones, it is due to the delay in the change of Archivist, but it is especially because this publication is also changing! It is now entitled: “L'Assomption du Ciel” (The Assumption of Heaven). And you will be able to read it in three languages! We would like to thank the editors, translators and proofreaders of the 2018 issue, which will be the first in the “new style” series. It will be online on the site in February 2021 before being sent in printed format when the sessions start again in Auteuil. The 2019 edition will also be ready soon.

SISTER VÉRONIQUE THIÉBAUT

Archivist of the Congregation
Original French



The museum's beginnings



Direct their flight, but don't clip their wings



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