



WHISPERS OF THE SPIRIT

CHRISTMAS 2017



THE
CHANGING
FACE OF

Mission

Welcome to this issue of Whispers where we focus on the new Mission response to today's global situation. In the 19th Century, the Christian response to colonisation culminated in the Mission movement where missionaries travelled to the ends of the earth to bring the message of the Gospel. Today's new Mission response brings us challenges that are both global and much closer to home...



Parish of Inala

Today, the 'ends of the earth' are here in our own backyard. Many parishes in Australia are multicultural. This calls for a special understanding of culture and religious practice. The Holy Spirit Sisters are working in the Parish of Inala, one of the most multicultural parishes in Brisbane. It is a challenge to bring so many cultures together as one family of God.

Greek Islands and Uganda

Together with the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Sisters are reaching out to refugees in our two new mission countries of the Greek Islands and Uganda. There are millions of refugees through the world. The Holy Spirit Sisters hope to bring a Christian presence to these desperate people.

Paraguay

Another mission response today is to be a voice for the voiceless. In Paraguay, the Sisters are fighting for the rights of the Indigenous people (Ava Guarani and Ache peoples) where 38 communities have been evicted from their land.

Who will speak for these people if we don't?

Two Holy Spirit Sisters remained in the village to document the military style evacuation of the people of Ava Guarani Paranaenses.

Pope Francis calls on all Christians to be missionary disciples – "What can I do in my part of the world to respond to this call?"



Greece

In love with Jesus' Mission

written by Sr. Michaela Leifgen SSPS, Germany



Within a few months, and accompanied by several signs from heaven, a dream took shape and became a reality...

On 9 May three sisters from three different European countries began their mission at the service of refugees in Greece. In cooperation with the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) they strive to be 'in communion with the marginalised and excluded' at the very edge of the migrant's existence in a country that is crisis-shaken itself.

Located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, Greece appears to be the place where the Spirit is leading our SSPSs at this moment of our common global history.

Preparation and goals

In preparation for their pioneer mission, the three Sisters – Sr. Ada Lick (Austria), Sr. Rastislava Kurajová (Slovakia), and Sr. Clara Silalahi (Spain, native Indonesian) – met for five days of community-building in the Motherhouse in Steyl.

At the same time, a fourth Sister, Sr. Preethi Silva (India North East), was going through Visa processing. She joined the group later in August.

The days in Steyl were prepared and accompanied by Sr. Anna-Maria Kofler (Provincial Leader Germany, Euro Council Chair) and Sr. Maria José Rebello (Regional Leader Spain/Portugal, Euro Councillor). Also, Fr. Jose Ignacio Garcia SJ (Brussels, director of JRS in Europe) was present for two days.

Goals of the days in Steyl were to grow in awareness of the personal call to serve the refugees in Greece, to become familiar with the process of discernment, decision, goals, and objectives of the 'dream' project, and to begin the process of community building through praying, sharing, and enjoying together.

In an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect, the Sisters shared their personal strengths, weaknesses, and coping mechanisms, as well as their motives to offer themselves for the project, or the fears they experience in front of this great endeavour.

Inputs about the last General Chapter Directions and our Founding Generation's attitude towards marginalised were also provided.

As the meeting took place in Steyl, it was a good opportunity to take time for prayer and recharging at the roots of our Congregation and the Founder's tomb.

Jesuit Refugee Service

Thanks to the valued presence of Fr. Jose Ignacio Garcia the Sisters received useful insight into the vision and mission of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), with whom they would be working closely in Athens.

In fact, it is because of the connection with the JRS that the dream of a missionary presence in Greece came to its fulfilment within such a short time.





The JRS is present in 15 European countries. Their main concern is to provide refugees access to protection, to contribute to social inclusion, to assure detention support and visitation, and to assist in communication and advocacy.

In Greece, there are presently around 60,000 migrants, mainly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Nigeria. This number is expected to be halved by the end of 2018 due to relocation to other European countries and illegal moving.

A marginal phenomenon in Greece

The Greek government has little collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the JRS. As Greece is predominantly Orthodox (90% of the population is Orthodox) Catholic religious are a marginal phenomenon in Greece.

Although there were other NGOs and laypeople volunteering alongside the JRS, the whole setting is not yet well coordinated and organised. As Fr. Jose Ignacio put it – “It is a shaky system... and you can be one more bubble in this shaking system, offering support to those in need”.

Our Sisters are living in one floor of a JRS house. Another floor accommodates two Afghan families, with the remaining rooms reserved for offices and activities.

As they make contact with the refugees, our Sisters have encountered many different realities in detention camps, shelters, and illegally-occupied houses.

Within the few months of their presence in Greece so far, they have begun to organise programs for refugees, care for the sick and elderly, arrange work in the kitchen, and accompany young volunteer helpers, most of whom come from France, Spain, and Portugal.

As Fr. Jose Ignacio already predicted during the sending ceremony in Steyl – “There will be times in which your skills are needed, but most of all your love”. Even then he encouraged the Sisters to accept the personal limitations they may feel in front of their mission, as these would make them more humble and closer to the people, who are faced with limitations in so many ways.

A new mission for SSps

Through the mission of these four Sisters – something new has begun for us SSps. Their readiness has an impact on all the provinces and regions involved. Further, the country of Greece takes on a different meaning for us and our understanding of mission, precisely in this time where so much is in question.

It is a sign to the world that there is a future. A future, which ultimately does not depend on our capacities but is rooted in the love of God. Our sisters went on behalf of us all, as a share in our common mission. Let us accompany and support them with our prayers!



Reaching out in Communion

The challenge of Mission today in Multicultural parishes

written by Sr. Philomena SSpS

“To protect creation, to protect every man and every woman, to look upon them with tenderness and love, is to open up a new horizon of hope; it is to let a shaft of light break through the heavy clouds; it is to bring the warmth of hope!”

Pope Francis

From the very beginning of his papacy, Pope Francis – a beacon of hope and mercy for our times, inspires us to cross over the ‘narrow domestic walls’ we build around ourselves which keeps us closed-in and concerned only about what is ours and our own.

He exhorts us to widen the circles of our life, love, and service. He challenges us to reach out to all of creation, to all peoples with care, tenderness and compassion, to create a network of relationships – a ‘world wide web’ of loving communion, where everyone especially the excluded are included.

Rightly, ‘*Toward Communion*’ was chosen as the theme of our last General Chapter. Its priorities included: *Communion with Creation; Communion with the Marginalised and Excluded; and Communion with Others.*

St. Mark’s Parish, Inala

I would like to share some of the small ways we contribute towards nurturing this sense of communion at St. Mark’s Parish, Inala – a very multicultural community in Southwest Brisbane.

St. Mark’s is a Divine Word Missionary Parish, in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. We, the Holy Spirit Sisters of the province of Australia accepted their invitation to collaborate with them and have been present in this Parish since 2015.

The Parish is made up of people from many nationalities – the majority are Vietnamese, Samoan, Filipino, African, Tongan, Indian, and Sri Lankan. Other nationalities also represented include various South American countries, Italian, Australian, British, and European.

The Mission Statement of St. Mark’s Parish reads:

“As a Catholic Christian Community living in an area of cultural diversity, we embrace the Word of God, celebrate the Eucharist and utilise the gifts of our community in caring for all.”

Care and concern

Opportunities are provided for those who are socially isolated to come together by joining *Staying Connected*. This group gathers regularly at a café or restaurant for a meal and conversation. Every second month a bus trip is also organised for outdoor enjoyment and relaxation.

This ministry also involves regular visits to a nursing home and retirement village for the celebration of either Eucharist or Para-liturgical services. On request, special visits are made to individuals living in a nursing home, hospital or to their families.



These simple gestures, reaching out in communion, bear witness to the fact that no matter how old or incapacitated one may be, each person is valued and precious!



Bible study and faith sharing

Members of this group really look forward to our time of coming together each Wednesday. Various resources like inspirational books and videos are used for personal reflection followed by sharing, especially from a faith context.

Sharing our stories and knowing each other at a deeper level, definitely helps to widen our circles of love and communion.

Sacramental preparation

Within four months, through the support and guidance of the Sacramental preparation team, a number of children and adults were prepared to receive the Sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion and Confirmation. We were fortunate to have Bishop Ken Howell and Bishop Joseph Oudemann, attend these celebrations.

This year, 68 individuals received the Sacraments (including adults who went through RCIA program). It was such a joyful and festive celebration!

This is a church where the collaborative efforts of many working together, sharing their gifts and talents personifies the benefits of nurturing and loving communion.

There is an old Jewish tale about a soap maker who did not believe in God...

One day as he was walking with a Rabbi, he said – “There is something I cannot understand. We have had religion for thousands of years. But everywhere you look there is evil, corruption, dishonesty, injustice, pain, hunger, and violence. It appears that religion has not improved the world at all. So I ask you, what good is it?”

The Rabbi did not answer for a time but continued walking with the soap maker. Eventually they approached a playground where children, covered in dust, were playing in the dirt.

“There is something I don’t understand,” the Rabbi said. “Look at those children. We have had soap for thousands of years, and yet those children are filthy. What good is soap?”

The soap maker replied, “But Rabbi, it isn’t fair to blame soap for these dirty children. Soap has to be used before it can accomplish its purpose.”

The Rabbi smiled and said, “Exactly! Exactly!”

Every encounter

As well as these organised programs, there are many opportunities and occasions in our Parish to reach out to others both in formal or spontaneous settings. Sometimes sad events – like when we meet families at funerals. Sometimes joyful times – like when we meet parishioners on special occasions. It can be as simple as a smile, a greeting, a hand shake exchanged when we meet for the Eucharist.

However small and insignificant they may seem, all are a means to manifest the face of a loving and merciful God who in and through each one of us reaches out to one another. Every encounter helps us to continue to widen our circles to include more and more people.

Yes, the Gospel of Jesus is a Gospel of action, extending ourselves and reaching out in communion. Yes, the Jesus of the Gospels demands a lived faith from His disciples – a faith coupled with loving action in the concrete that has the power to touch lives!

So then, let us be doers of the Word – manifest love in action and reach out to others as brothers and sisters in creating a world wide web of Communion!



“The Parana River was our LIFE. It gave us fish, every day we had meat, but it was from the river and from the mountain. On the Parana coast we had more than enough to eat. While we were working in the ranch the women already brought the food to cook from the river in just a few minutes. We never lacked fish. That is the way we lived along the Parana.”

(Carmelita Benítez and Cristóbal Martínez)



Indigenous People

Itaipu, on the Parana River, is the largest dam in the world. On 26 April 1971, two governments both led by dictators, Paraguay and Brazil, made a secret accord regarding Itaipu that changed the course of history for the Ava Guarani and Ache peoples.

Because of the agreement, the Parana River lost its identity and its Guarani caretakers, its ‘Jary kuery’, that is – its protectors. According to the Ava Guarani people, the environment in which they lived along the river was luxurious, extremely beautiful, full of waterfalls that fall from all the streams and rivulets toward the Parana. ‘Nande Ruvusu’ (our Great Father) had given them this sacred place to care for, to enjoy, to live from its fish and the animals of the mountain.

Ava Guarani Paranaenses

They shared their traditional religion, which was still intact, with the other communities which they visited every month for prayer-dancing:

“When we arrived at a community, we men went hunting and saw the work of the ‘oporaia’ (religious leader). Immediately we got a lot of meat. The women stayed to cook and made the chichi. We stayed there praying for a week. They came from everywhere. There was no worry about food or anything else.”

There was an abundance of food, rich in protein and everything that was needed for good eating and good living.

For the Ava Guarani, to dam the Parana River was unthinkable because it was sacred. It would be a crime against creation. They were sure of the protection of Nande Ruvusu.

Na Epifania tells us that when she first heard that they were going to dam the Parana she said:

“They won’t be able to do it because this water was put there by God.”

Some resisted until they saw how the waters rose. Only then did they bow before the inevitable:

“We did not want to die by drowning. When we left the water was already rising and the people from Itaipu did not give us any explanation, otherwise we would have simply stayed by the lake”.

(Crescencio Díaz de Jukyry)

All of this brought on a deep spiritual crisis. The religious leaders were discredited – Nande Ruvusu was less powerful than the white man. The Ava Guarani people were consternated in the face of the imminent rise of the river. There was no way to escape. Sergia Cardozo de Pirai, Pto. Adela said that they were treated worse than the animals. The animals at least were rescued and put in refuges and large reserves.



Above: the dam and Itaipu Hydroelectric Power Plant at present. Left: the beautiful waterfalls that were destroyed in October 1982 by the flooding of the dam.

Who will speak for them if we don't?

Damming the Panama River

When the Panama River was dammed it turned violent and swallowed everything in its path. But the saddest part was the enforced eviction of the 38 Indigenous communities, unattended, treated worse than the animals. They became ill from the stress of abandoning their natural habitat. The whole territory of the Ava Paranaenses was under water or turned into reserves for animals and plants, well-guarded. They were never reimbursed with new lands as compensation for those they lost or for the dispossession of their traditional territory which was legally theirs (according to the Agreement 107 of the International Organisation of Labour (a UN organisation), that Paraguay had signed).

After the efforts to recuperate their lands proved fruitless, the Indigenous communities decided to go into a place near the Biological Reserve of Limoy, which, as they were informed, belonged to the State.

As soon as they arrived in their former habitat, the Ava Paranaenses built a temple of their traditional religion, erected houses and a school. A year later they were judicially evicted.

The evening before the eviction and in the early morning of 30 September they had the heavy work of moving to a place within the zone of the reservoir of the dam in a branch of the Itaimbey River, eight kilometres from where they had been. For the first time in 40 years the Indigenous broke through the fence and returned to their ancient land.

The eviction

On the morning of 30 September 2016, a huge caravan of police cars full of police, a truck with horses for the mounted police, two huge tractor trailers (supposedly to carry the Indigenous), a truck and a car from the Paraguayan Institute for the Indigenous (INDI) with “gifts”, a truck full of police from the GEO (Group of Special Operations), and a group of farmers (to take down the houses and put them on the trucks) arrived. It appeared as if they had to get rid of a very dangerous group. To the great surprise of the authorities, there was not a soul in the place except two Missionary Servants of the Holy Spirit, Sisters. Ángela Balbuena and Mariblanca Barón who had stayed to document the Indigenous movement.

When the destruction of the houses began, a huge tractor arrived immediately and destroyed the crops of the Indigenous. They also carried away, like war trophies, the small animals such as chickens, guinea hens, ducks, and two motorcycles. After tearing down the houses and the school they then set fire to everything.

The camp consists of less than a hectare of the Biological Reserve of Limoy. This reserve has 14,842 hectares, not counting the reservoir which belonged to the Indigenous, where they had buried their dead. Now, the authorities are asking them to vacate this half hectare where they are. The total area of the domain of the Itaipú is 234,619 hectares (134,878 of reservoir and 99,741 of protected areas).



Indigenous People

Who will speak for them if we don't?

The Parana River no longer belongs to the people, not even the protective spirits who care for it. They also remain under the water. But one day they will rise and will bring justice.



Reflection

This story reminds us of certain situations in which many Indigenous peoples of this world are living.

In as much as the event points out the element of social injustice, it also leads us to notice that in the Indigenous peoples or original peoples one finds a strong relationship with the earth, their sense of community, their sense of time, their relationship with their ancestors, and their religiosity.

It shows us certain distinct elements that conform to the identity of the Indigenous peoples: a question that even in the area of anthropology is not easy to define. And then, there is their relationship with the Catholic faith, the institutional Church, theology, etc.

We are confronted with questions, which we probably seldom ask ourselves, but which defines our thoughts and our actions:

- Who is the 'other'?
- How do we see the 'other'?
- What kind of theology is the basis of my missionary service?

It is important to be conscious of one's theological framework because it can either lead one to appreciate the different cultures or to judge them without establishing dialogue of life with the Gospel.

In the mystery of the incarnation, God became man. Jesus was not a generic man. He was born a Jew, formed and moulded by the Jewish culture of the Palestine that was occupied by the Romans in the first century. He spoke Aramaic with a despised accent of the people of the region of Galilee. He did not eat pork or other food that was prohibited by the Torah. He believed that the earth was flat and was the centre of the universe with the sun revolving around it. Jesus was a person of his time and its circumstances, as we are told in *Philippians 2:6-8*.

Jesus is our model

That Jesus was born in a certain culture tells us something very important about God. God makes use of an 'imperfect' culture to reveal himself. S.D. Gordon said one time:

"Jesus is God revealed in a language that we human beings can understand."

This language which human beings can understand is the language of human culture.

"The Word of God, taking flesh in Jesus Christ, also took on history and culture."

(Benedict XVI, opening talk at Congress of Aparecida)



This story is an adaptation of an article written by Sr. Mariblanca Barón SSpS, Paraguay.

Sr. Barón is one of the two Missionary Sisters who stayed back to document the events after the Indigenous people were evicted from their homeland. Today she continues to speak out for these people.

Our Students in Melbourne

For many years Australia has been a host country for our Sisters from other provinces to study here.

English is one of the official languages in the Congregation and it is important that many sisters are able to converse in English.

A new group have arrived this year...



Francis, China

Francis is a Medical Doctor. She hopes to continue studies in Theology.



Bernadeta, West Flores

Bernadeta is here for one year of English studies.



Sr. Pauline Hermama Gea, Indonesia

Sr. Pauline was involved in Youth Ministry in Indonesia. She is in Melbourne for one year to learn English before commencing studies in Anthropology.



Kristina, Indonesia

Kristina is here for English studies before going to the Philippines for a Formators course.

*We wish the sisters
a happy time
here in Australia.*



An experience of encounter ...with God, with people and with creation

written by Sr. Mere Ranuku SSpS

Trained as a nurse in Brisbane, Sr. Mere is a Fijian Sister who now works among the Mangyan people in the Philippines...

The Mangyan people

Mangyan is the general name for the Indigenous tribes who live on the island of Mindoro, south-west of the island of Luzon Philippines. Mangyans make up 10 percent of the total population living on Mindoro. Anthropological studies revealed that the Mangyans have eight tribes that may look the same but have different language, cultures and traditions.

The general plight of the Mangyan people is one of the priorities of the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit in the Philippines. Our calling was in response to the request of Mangyan leaders to enhance awareness and strengthen their people's capabilities into self-directing and viable organisations and communities

Balya

On 24 October 2016, Srs. Jessie Golucino, Mere Ranuku and six of our Mangyan students from Roxas Mangyan Mission, visited the Mangyan community of Balya – a remote village situated on the mountain ridge between Oriental and Occidental Mindoro.

Mere wrote...

The journey took us almost seven hours of walking and climbing. It was an experience of encounter with God, with people and with creation. The following impressions of the Sisters and Mangyan student volunteers tell of our three days of joy in the village...

What really touched me during this journey was the love and joy of the people in the village. For the few days we stayed in the area, my tiredness and body aches disappeared every time I saw the line of people waiting for their small share of food we were to cook. Here, I experienced the Gospel story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Food kept coming! Even when we didn't have much, there was still enough for everyone. Mission is about sharing joy with people. It is about sharing the little that we have with those in need.

In our visit to the community of Balya, I learned the importance of not giving up easily. Perseverance wins over distance and tiredness. Our discomfort and pains were nothing compared to the joy of being able to help others. That joy was waiting for us in the village of our own Mangyan people.

Even when I was so tired from walking, I still wore a smile on my face, full of hope that we were nearing our destination!

Joy and happiness

I was so happy when the village people came out to welcome us. In our three days of stay in Balya, so many gave us vegetables, bananas and other things!

I was happy because we were able to arrive safely together at Balya, even when everyone was really very tired already. It was difficult for me to climb the mountain slopes but the people of Balya were good hearted, helpful and united. I was also very happy to be able to teach the kids to read and write.



#uBelong here

My name is Bassam Maaliki. I am a 14-year-old student at Homebush Boys High School, Sydney.

I am a second generation Australian Muslim from Lebanese background. I am passionate about social justice for all and particularly keen to help refugees. I am the New South Wales Youth Parliament Leader (Member for Strathfield 2016/17), Multicultural Youth Ambassador for MYAN and Youth Member at YAP (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre) in New South Wales. I have also worked and rallied for many other Refugee Organisations and Youth groups.

I decided to start my own campaign after enduring racism and bigotry from playgrounds and sporting grounds, being told that I am a terrorist and to "go back to your own country".

#uBelong

I have funded my own project **#uBelong**. The message is simple – a key to belong, hand-painted with a simple message of embracing diversity.

A badge that can be worn in solidarity of all people – white, black, asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. A badge that we all have the power to be welcoming and spread kindness for the goodness of humanity.

I sell the keys for \$5 each and all funds at the moment go to organisations that are committed to helping refugees settle into Australia.

Bassam's pledge...

*I will be a voice to the voiceless.
I will be a hope for tomorrow.
I will embrace diversity.
I will foster a sense of belonging for all.
I will stand shoulder to shoulder
as the weight of change
is better carried together.*

Raising awareness

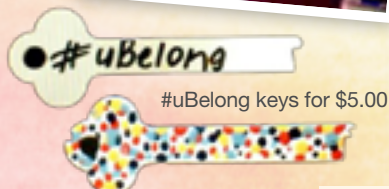
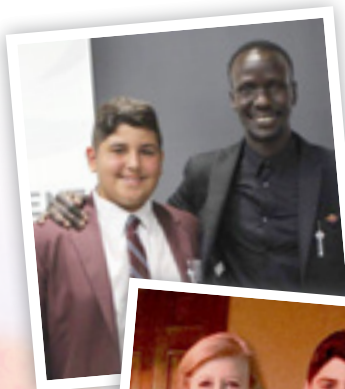
I feel I have been successful advocating for refugees, multiculturalism, inclusivity and diversity in Australia and in the Sydney community. My project is aiming to foster a culture of welcoming.

As a youth, raising awareness in my community, for the current refugee crisis. I aim to foster a sense of belonging for young refugees and migrants and for anybody else that doesn't feel a sense of belonging.

Like the refugees who are seeking a safe home, everyone has a similar story, and our stories are similar in the fact that we are all different.

I urge everyone in my community to embrace our differences with love and not hate.

My message... where I am, uBelong!



Please support my cause on Facebook at [uBelong here](#).



Peace is possible

written by Br. Bill Firman FSC

Peace may sometimes seem a goal too far.
But think back a few centuries or, in some cases, merely a few decades...

Italy was not a united country, but independent and warring states;
America had a civil war in which negro enslavement was a significant issue;
France had a bloody revolution, pitting the people against the aristocracy;
South Africa was governed with apartheid divisions;
In Northern Ireland, peace between Protestants and Catholics
seemed an unattainable goal;
East and West Germany were divided by the Berlin Wall;
and so the list goes on...



At Christmas, we remember Jesus Prince of Peace

*Let us pray for peace
In our world
In our country
In our community and
In our families.*

*May your festive celebrations be a sign of the peace
that fills creation and transforms our lives.*

Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters

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