

Crossian Connect

SISTERS OF THE CROSS OF CHAVANOD

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FROM THE DEPTHS OF MY HEART

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Dear Sisters,

Christ Event is all about GIVING in love and generosity. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son," (Jn 3:16). God gave us the most loved one - His Son. His giving sprang from His very nature, that is, love. Since the beginning of creation, God has been giving, and He keeps giving to all. Jesus proclaimed all through his life the amazing and immense generosity and magnanimity of God toward His creation.

Pope Francis during the Mass in St. Peter's Basilica said, "The meaning of life is found in our response to God's offer of love. And that response is made up of true love, self-giving, and service." (3rd November, 2020).

Total self-giving is the attribute of God. It is not how much one gives, but how one gives, matters. One's attitude of giving reveals how much one is God-like. St. Bede says: "God weighs not the substance, but the conscience of the offerors."

Hope enables us to believe that there is so much goodness in the world even though it is facing political unrest, ecological degradation, economic instability, social separation, decline in physical, mental, and psychological health, etc. It invites us, human beings, the crown of creation as we believe, to be at the service of God's creation - to give love, joy, faith, and hope. When everyone joins in the act of giving - sharing our material, intellectual, social, and spiritual wealth above all our very own self, the world will not lack anything. "Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world," said Howard Zinn.

"Keeping what we have to ourselves will not save us. Giving all in the service of God will enlarge what we have and what we are, beyond measure. I must learn to give what I have, however little it seems. It will be much in God's eyes." (Brian Fahy, 27th November, 2017)

As Sisters of the Cross, we are called to give our best towards the alleviation of pain, despair, sadness, fear, anxiety of the creation and fill it with new hope, new courage, new life, and creativity. It urges us to be daring to accept new challenges, to build bridges, to treat everyone with respect and dignity. Giving from the abundance is insufficient, but giving all one has, is imperative. Let us recognise that we share the very nature of God and therefore, we cannot find happiness but in giving continually, by walking an extra mile to comfort the needy - those on the periphery.

May the Year 2021 that we have ushered into see us transforming into what we originally are and meant to be that is, in God's very Nature "Self-Emptying". Let us do our maximum without keeping anything back, to make the world a better place, with God's all-giving love.

On behalf of Sr. Elizabeth Miranda, our Superior General, and the General Team, I Congratulate the Editorial Team coordinated by Sr. Judy Gomez for bringing out this issue of Crossian Connect that is inspiring and thought-provoking.

Sr. Gracy Sundar
Assistant General





Sr. Judy Gomez
Coordinator

The pandemic has been a time of introspection to know where we are heading. Some of us have turned this pandemic into a rat race. Everyone is busy creating Youtube videos for remaining fit, for staying fashionable, education clippings, tik tok, online courses, webinars, preparing variety of new dishes and posting it on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The inflated ego of the individual blows out of proportion. The naked inhumanity of man beneath the pandemic never seems to change at all. The self-aggrandisement and the selfish nature of the soul, seeking survival and fame, at any cost, remains the sad base of humanity.

The United States is a racially and ethnically diverse nation of 330 million people. But the statistics prove that that majority of them are still white men. Racial equality remains in the book and not in action. We read about child rape and child sexual exploitation in the papers daily. India has the maximum cases of child sexual exploitation. According to a survey, 90% of criminals in these child abuse cases are known to the children or are people whom the children trust. Such a harsh truth!

The Medical researchers note that their October 2020 findings represent

THE EXTRA MILE...

an increase in the second wave of infections in England. Despite the government laying down social distancing protocols and taking non-pharmaceutical interventions to contain the spread of the virus, researchers fear that the current compliance rates are not enough to bring down the R-value to below 1. This means the epidemic will continue to spread. The India-China relationship has been through a crisis in 2020 and has given moments of tension and acceleration in the boards and inside the country. India's farming sector is vast and troubled. It provides a livelihood to nearly 70 percent of the country's 1.3 billion people and accounts for around 15 percent of the \$2.7-trillion economy. In rural areas, where 70 percent of Indians live, there is already a growing perception that the present Indian government supports and develops only the rich business conglomerates.

All these fore mentioned issues exist because of the ego in the individual and it is only the Cross that can shatter the individuals ego. God's vision is to create a big new world. He has promised "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy" (Isaiah 65:17). How we fondly await this new world that God has promised for His children as we anticipate the Second Coming of our Saviour with eager joy.

As a society we are becoming increasingly self-centred, detached from our fellow humans and becoming alienated from each other. Our only concerns are about availing and maintaining a better position in the society and a lifestyle so that we can show-off or brag about ourselves in

the virtual world, in private gatherings and in public.

The Bible tells us that the earth is precious to God and it would be renewed but we are also cognizant of our responsibility towards it. We can be change makers because we have the power to change by the grace of God. Can we really make a difference? Yes. How? By living in obedience to God, by crushing the monster of the individualistic pride within us and inviting the gentle purity of the Holy Spirit and the innocence of the new born baby Jesus in our souls. This alone can bring about the sea of change that we long to witness. If we want to see the change let us not just wait for God to do something but let us live this God given life for Christ and be the change. He died for us, let us live for Him.

In recent times the myth of normality is exposed. We seem to be struck in the present with no way to magically turn back the clock but let us remember that its often during the difficult, deary and depressing times that faith is nurtured. It is an opportunity to help each other and ourselves. The pandemic shows us the delusion of independence and self-sufficiency. As followers of Christ we must realise that our sufficiency and satisfaction comes from the Lord alone.

The pivotal moment in the existence of this world is the connectedness between God and mankind. This connectedness leads us onto meaningful life paths and ultimately helps us to reach the feet of the Supreme. A new phase begins. May our connectedness with God our Father and His children, this festive season scale new heights and touch greater horizons. Have a connected and wonderful new year!



FOUR DECADES OF SERVICE IN EAST AFRICA

Sr. Secilia Polycarp
Province of East Africa



A divine encounter is an event that creates a mark and sets our hearts on fire. We see Moses encountering God in the burning bush, whereas it was a contradicting situation for Moses to understand why the bush was not set ablaze. “*Moses! Moses!*” and he said: “*Here I am.*” Then He said: “*Come no closer, remove your sandals from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground,*” (Exodus 3:4). When we encounter the Divine, there are some tangible experiences, very often unexpected. These experiences might respond to our unanswered questions; thus, in the process, we discover our true self, and the Lord entrusts us with a mission.

“*Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again. But those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again*” (John 4:13-14). The Samaritan woman encountered the Lord at the well of Jacob, and her thirst was fully quenched. Her past life was completely transformed when the gift of the Holy Spirit filled her, and she became a disciple of Christ and ventured to proclaim Christ, leaving the water jar behind. It is clearly seen in the life of Mother Claudine who at Chavanod responded to the call of God to instruct the young girls of the parish who said: “It did us good to see her speak of good God; we were never tired of looking at her. How much gratitude we owe her!” (F.A. Vol. 1, p. 56).

“*I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you*” (Ex. 4:12). Like Moses, our missionary sisters were sent on a mission to East Africa, and we

completed 40 years of our missionary life journey in 2019, since our arrival in Tanzania in 1979. We thank the Almighty for the numerous blessings. Our province comprises of three countries: Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, with diverse cultures and languages. This is the impact of our solidarity in living the Spirit and Charism of the Congregation under the banner of the Cross. The unique call of each one of us, individually, as a community, and as a province, has set a tone in different parts of these countries whereby, we have responded to the call of God in the Church. By our life of consecration, we are sent on a mission. “Assiduous contemplation of the Son as poor, suffering, and humble servant exalted by the Father and participation in his mission, make us enter in His abasement and total self-giving for the life of the world.” (ROL, Article 3).

Health ministries: The sisters reveal the merciful love of the Father in our Health centres namely Kihonda Health Centre and Malolo Dispensary in Tanzania, Good Samaritan Health Centre in Uganda, Our Lady of Perpetual Help Dispensary, St. Francis Catholic Dispensary, and St. Joseph the worker Dispensary in Kenya. We encounter the face of Christ in the suffering humanity



St. Francis Dispensary



through the sick who come to us, who are not only sick physically but also spiritually. This is because some come heartbroken due to social, economic, and family situation. We hear His call to encounter Him in attending to such hearts. It is witnessed and experienced that some of the patients go back healed not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. At times, some patients come from poverty-stricken families and thus, treatment is given freely.

Education: Good education is that which shapes the mind and heart of a person to become a responsible citizen in society. Our sisters from different Institutions, both secondary and primary schools, continue to provide quality and holistic education. Anwarite Girls' School in Moshi, Primary Schools at Mtoni Kijichi, Kihonda and Malolo in Tanzania, St. Cyprian Chavanod College in Uganda, and St. Joseph Catholic Academy in Kenya cater to the needs of the poor spreading the values of compassion and love. The future of these countries is in the hands of this young generation. Keeping this in mind, our students are provided with moral, spiritual, and intellectual knowledge. We attach great importance to the Sacraments such as Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, and

Reconciliation among the Catholic students to strengthen their faith. This is because some of them come from families where parents neglect their duty to take care of their children's faith formation. For our non-Catholic students, classes on moral values are conducted. These young and enthusiastic souls discover and learn the need of God in their lives and their responsibility to serve the Church and the nation.

Family Apostolate: A holy family is the perfect model of peace, love and understanding. Our visit to different families has awakened in us a deep sense of mission: to be a source of hope, peace, and unity. Many families are experiencing crises of divorce,

disunity etc. With the awareness that some of the vocations to priesthood and religious life come from such family backgrounds, we are urged even more to continue this mission with greater commitment and zeal to make the Good God known and loved.

Pastoral Activities: *"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* (John 10:11). Jesus has shown us the way as we take an active part in revealing the merciful love by involving the Lay Associates at the Tailoring centre in Kihonda. Thanks to the government of Tanzania for the support that has enabled many young men and women to be empowered through different skills in our Tailoring centre. We teach

Catechism to children and the youth in order to keep their faith alive. We respond actively during the natural calamities such as floods in some parts of the countries where many families are homeless. Many parts of the East African countries this year have suffered from floods as well as locust invasion. Along with the deadly pandemic (COVID-19), domestic violence in the families and society rose alarmingly especially during lockdown. All these or similar situations of life, raise many questions in us for which there is no obvious answer; we learn to trust in God in such circumstances, hence the call we hear is to encounter the Divine in the suffering humanity.



APPROACHING GOD WITH AN UNDIVIDED HEART

Sr. Arockia Mary
Province of Trichy



On a fine day, while I was in the chapel for my personal prayer, several interrelated questions arose in my mind: "Do I have a single-minded and undivided attachment to God? Do I listen to God's communication with my heart and speak to God honestly in my prayer? Am I a person of spiritual integrity?" Being honest with myself before God, I realised that my life has been far from what I have committed myself to become and what God wants me to become. I believe that every God-oriented honest person will resonate with my sentiment: "My life is far from what I wanted it to be!" Our inordinate attachments block not only our seeking and doing God's will, but also our personal happiness, healthy relationships, and

fruitful apostolic services. This reflection is an attempt to explore ways and means to reorient our hearts undividedly to God for a committed religious life.

We are not only rational but also relational beings. Our human mind propels us to brood over our painful and pleasurable experiences of the past or to hope for happiness in the future. Hence, our mind is either in the past or in the future but hardly in the present. We become attached to our own thinking. Relational beings as we are, we love our parents, our family members, our relatives, and friends. These relationships can be wholesome and growth producing. However when we hold on emotionally to our parents, our family, to a particular person or thing

and believe that they are essential for our happiness, they become counterproductive. Then, we find "good" reasons and arguments to support and justify what we cling onto.

Consequently, our hearts, which are oriented towards God, get divided, scattered, and pulled in different directions. We get distracted in our prayers and make compromises in the demands of our apostolic engagements. We fail in cooperating with God and what God intends us to become.

An undivided heart is a single-minded heart, a heart that is dedicated to God. The Bible says about those whose "hearts are fully committed to him," those who have undivided hearts. "For the eyes of the

Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). The psalmist cried, “Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name” (Psalm 86:11). An undivided heart refers to a heart that has one driving purpose which is to live a life pleasing to God, a heart whose attention is fixed on God alone and does not allow itself to be distracted or influenced by the passing pleasures of the world. An undivided heart is free from fetters of enslaving attachments but is afraid of the Lord, which is freeing.

It is fascinating for me to reflect the way God has created us. We are blessed with two legs to walk along with God and God's people. We are on a journey looking for our better selves. In order to avoid derailing ourselves on the way, God has given us two eyes that we may look through them and consider what is good for us and avoid what is pleasing to us. We are gifted with two ears to listen to the truth and shun all in authenticity, untruthfulness, and hypocrisy. God has given us two open-fisted hands to continue to receive gifts from Him and to give them to our needy brothers and sisters. Above all, God has given us a heart which is capable of loving and being loved. We are oriented towards God through our God-given heart. “I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:2-3). This finds an echo in the words of Augustine of Hippo, “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.” It did not please God to create humans double-minded or double-tongued. God demands an undivided heart. The Lord hates double standards (Prov. 20: 23). It is never too late for us to form, reform and transform ourselves.

Today, more than ever, growth and maturity with an undivided heart are

vital for the religious. We know the heroic lives of a number of religious men and women who do extraordinary work among the poor, serving the neediest with an undivided heart at the cost of great personal sacrifices. But the present globalised culture which, while offering us values and new possibilities, can divide our hearts with glamorous temptations, such as, careerism, competitions for power and positions, selfishness, spiritual laziness, sterile pessimism, and spiritual worldliness. When we yield to these temptations, religious life becomes an irresponsible life of comfortable mediocrity. One does not feel the need for hard work or great sacrifice to survive in religious life. Pope Francis has challenged the religious to wake the world up. To wake the world up, the religious themselves need to be awake and alert. The fear of commitment continues in every sphere of life. A divided heart is a great roadblock on the path of religious life. It corrupts our worship; it weakens and undermines our devotion. It also ruins our spiritual life. A divided heart has multiple loves, and multiple loves are always weak. Jesus has rightly said, “No one can serve two masters” (Mt 6: 24).

The Bible sounds warnings to the lukewarm attitude of the people (Rev 3: 14-21). Hot water can cleanse and purify; cold water can refresh and enliven. But lukewarm water carries no similar values. Why do we have lukewarm attitudes towards the Lord? Why do we grow causal with God? Jesus is so emphatic in his saying: “Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one” (Mt 5: 37). Jesus, the model of an authentic person, is consistently hard on the pharisees, scribes and priests for their hypocrisy (Mt 23:1-12) because their life, words and actions do not

correspond to their hearts. For all of us religious, even if we are not considered to be hypocrites, there is a gap between our ideals and our life, our preaching, and our practices. The Gospel invites us to make sincere efforts to narrow down the gap. We are invited to be perfect as our heavenly Father and to love as our heavenly Father loves (Mt. 5:43 ff; Jn 15:9, 12). Jesus believed that we could do that.

Jesus speaks of losing self as a necessary element of discipleship. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and the sake of the Gospel, will save it” (Mk 8:34-36). But in the Bible, we find Prophet Jonah running away to save his life. Although he confessed that he worshipped the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land (Jona 1: 9) he was fleeing from the Lord. He did not listen to God and preferred to go his own way. Similarly, we may at times be comfortable with our spiritual life faithfully doing our daily prayers, devotional practices, scripture readings and Eucharistic celebrations, but do we approach God with an undivided heart? God is constantly speaking to us. When we approach God with an undivided heart and listen to his communication with obedience, we become dynamic persons. The way we approach God becomes manifest in our day-to-day living. We become free from our non-productive attachments. Our complacency disappears. We become free, alive, and active for God and God's people.

In the Bible, we find a number of personalities who approached God with an undivided heart. St. Paul is a good example for us. After his experience on the road to Damascus,

he claimed that he did not waste his time looking at the past but strained forward to the upward call in Christ Jesus, ever-deepening his relationship with God (Philippians 3:13-14). He proclaimed, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Our Mother Claudine said, "Do like me" (F.A., Vol. 2, p. 329). She felt encouraged to say this because she approached God with an undivided heart and lived her life in accordance with the will of God. She was pure

and righteous in God's mission. She was determined to walk the talk. She not only preached but also lived an exemplary life of holiness, righteousness, honesty, and obedience. She felt she was a model to be followed because her life reflected Christ. Hence, she could dare to say, "Do like me!" Can we dare to invite someone to imitate us because we reflect Christ?

We have not yet reached that stage of life like St. Paul or Mother Claudine. But our life is a vocation, a process.

Hence, it is a journey of becoming. Can we pledge today that, like St. Paul instead of being chained by our past mistakes and failures as well as by our present attachments, we may move forward being rooted in God? Jesus assures us the grace of being blessed and of seeing God: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5: 8). To a God who has given so much, we pray with the psalmist that He may give each one of us an undivided heart to revere his name! (Ps 86: 11)



THE ROCK WITHIN

Sr. Caroline Pereira
Province of Pune



As a child, I grew up close to a rocky shoreline. It was a source of immense pleasure to go there with my friends, to allow the incoming waves to lap at our feet and legs and to leap from one rock to another in merry glee. Then there were times when a sudden, huge incoming wave would alarm us, and we would scamper away to the largest visible rock to be secure. The rocks assured us of our safety, no matter how immense or small the wave might seem to us - the little ones. Whenever an opportunity presents itself, I love to return to that place to recapture those memories. The sand, the pebbles, the little sea creatures that used to be around are now things of the past and are washed away into the sea or long deceased, but those Rocks are still there as large, as firm, and as reassuringly safe! They have remained stable and steadfast across the passage of time, across all the changes that came along, changing tides, changing surroundings, changing visitors and children.

This brings me to the very experience of living and of life itself! Situations, circumstances, relationships, experiences etc. effect a change in our lives. At times, life itself seems to have changed completely. We have seen a bashful child become a confident adult, the mischievous scamp transformed into a mature and responsible young man and the little girl who would flee at the very invitation to write on her slate turn into a prolific writer!!! Yet have they really changed? It could be the influence of certain factors and appropriate opportunities that seem mainly responsible! However, were we to get a glimpse into the very depths of their lives, we would discover a 'core,' the 'real' person! The bashfulness, the mischief, the initial reluctance was, in fact, the externals, but something within stayed alive, anchored them. These were the innate qualities, the values imbibed, the convictions formed as they went along in life.

From where does this stability come

across all the changes that are our constant experience? The answer is found in none other than the reality revealed in Genesis 1: 27, "God created humankind in His own image and likeness; in the image of God, He created them." Our God is the unchanging, immutable, steadfast, everlasting God. Since we are made in His image and likeness, we enjoy the privilege of being the same at the very centre of our being. So, even as circumstances and experiences seem to tarnish and besmirch this image, they can NEVER destroy it!

Legion is the example of people who have weathered every storm, every wind of change. They may have been partly submerged by their trials, sufferings, and the many challenges that life threw across their path, but like the rocks on the shore, they have been swamped but eventually 'came out on top!' We have definitely discovered this resilience within our own lives, at least, at some time or the other.

The present crisis of the pandemic has very forcefully brought into focus this trait of integrity, of steadfast adherence to what is lasting in spite of change. It is an experience that seems to have turned our entire world upside down, shaking down, like leaves in the wind, whatever we may have held indispensable and permanent in life. What remains is what is real, what is true, the lasting tenets of life! So much so, that we need to coin a phrase for it, 'the new normal.' This new normal is amply evident in the way we have surmounted lockdowns, quarantines, the host of norms and recommendations to attempt to conquer COVID 19. Still further, we may have been a part of, or at least heard and read of the 'Covid Warriors,' frontline Samaritans, whether medical personnel, social workers or just ordinary people with larger hearts reaching out with food supplies, a sympathetic ear for the affected

people, kind deeds to the destitute and migrants and many other services. It is the 'humanness' that crosses all barriers and hurdles.

We are created in the image and likeness of God. What is it that keeps the unique gift of ours alive and active? We have two persons who show us the way to face the challenges and changes encountered.

Our dynamic Model, Mother Claudine said: "They can toss us about, but they cannot upset us...let the world torment and agitate itself as much as it likes, it could never separate us from our Spouse if we do not want it, nor deprive us of the happiness and peace which we enjoy in the service of God" (F.A. Vol. 1, p. 305).

St. Paul: In 2 Cor. 3: 8-11, we read about St. Paul's experience, "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;

persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

Yes, they show us the way. What was their compass? We have the beautiful parable of Jesus about "those who build on sand and those who build on rock." Those who built on rock prevailed, 'the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.' Let us then build our lives on the rock, Our Lord Jesus. Amidst the storms of change that may threaten us from time to time, He is and will always be 'the rock of all ages'.



THE POWER OF THE INNER BEING

Sr. Jenifer Sounderarajan
Province of Guwahati



"As we advance in life, it becomes more and more difficult, but in fighting the difficulties, the inmost strength of the heart is developed" (Vincent Van Gogh)

Positive attitude in all our dealings, relationships and perseverance in prayer, will help us keep our inner strength. When God is on our side, we can courageously face all the obstacles in life.

When I went through tough times, I replaced them with calmness. Inner strength gave me the ability to withstand difficulties and hardships. When I found my friends and students discouraged in life, I motivated them

to grow in self-confidence. My connectedness with God gives me the inner strength to reap many benefits. We do not need to fear anything because God takes personal care.

At this moment, I remember Fr. Stan Swami, the hero of this time. His inner strength helps him to go through the difficulties and accept the misconception against him. He is determined to suffer for the people whom he has committed his life. He tolerated all the accusations against him because his commitment to God is so great, and his strength is from God. His life taught me to stand for justice and work faithfully for God.

His compassion for people is remarkable, which inspires me to commit myself totally for the service of God.

People with great inner strength are compassionate, and they take a lot of pain to purify their existence, which makes them conscientious individuals. Deep down, I believe, surely justice will reign the world. I hope there are thousands of people storming heaven for him, and God will show a way for him because he is suffering for the right cause.

As I sit before the Lord in prayer, my heart remains grateful for giving me the inner strength to handle

everything. There were moments I spun like a wheel, and there was no time to think about leisure, work was before me one after the other. I did it for the benefit of others. When I gave room for positive thinking, God allowed me to get through even the roughest times.

The integrity of my soul helps me to take proper decisions in difficult situations and seek guidance from the Lord. The conviction of my call allows me to keep Jesus as my model

and to be a blessing. I did take challenges which yielded increased confidence and inner strength.

As the pebbles keep on moving with the water over time, they lose their original shape. To go to that extend I need inner strength to be moulded without losing my identity. During these ten years of my religious life, I made this contemplation in order to find real meaning in life. It gives me energy, endurance, and self-esteem to carry out my mission. Our inner being

is part and parcel of our life.

I would like to mention the beautiful saying of our beloved Foundress, "They can toss us about but cannot destroy us" (WMCE, p. 21). Her daughters need to imbibe this deep attitude of our Mother.

I always keep my inner being alive, which will enable me to bear much fruit in the vineyard of God.



AT WAR AGAINST THE IDEOLOGY OF ISLAMISM

Sr. Sharmain Fernando
Province of France



France has suffered three terrorist attacks in just over a month. After a knife attack on a staff at a television company in Paris, and the beheading of a history teacher in a nearby suburb, there are three more victims. Dear sisters, you must be wondering what is going on in France. This is what happened on 29th October 2020, around 8.30 in the morning. Two women and the sacristan of *Notre-Dame de l'Assomption* Basilica were attacked inside the Church. Two died inside the Church. One of them, a 60-year-old, was beheaded close to the font. Following the latest attack, the police shot and wounded the suspected knifeman, a 21-year-old Tunisian, who had recently arrived in Europe.

After the attack on the Basilica of Notre-Dame, Mgr. Eric of Moulins-Beaufort, the President of the French Bishops' Conference, called on the Catholics to engage in the Spiritual war against Islamism and to continue dialoguing with the Muslims. This piece of the interview appeared on 2nd November 2020 on the French Catholic newspaper '*La Croix*'. I

thought it was worth sharing with you all as he invited us to build a fraternal relationship with the Muslims who are around us and enter into dialogue with them.

Mr Arnaud Bevilacqua interviewed Mgr. Eric and asked him a few questions based on how the Catholic Church in France was going to respond to this barbarism. Here below, I give a summary of his responses to the queries of the journalist.

Mgr. Eric says, "We need to accept that we are angry and afraid. These are human reactions. On the feast of All Saints Day, we providentially heard the Beatitudes of Jesus: it was a call to plead God for the grace to transform our anger and fear into energy for a better living. We should not remain locked in fear or despair and become prisoners of anger that can turn into hatred. The Beatitudes open the way, and Christ sets the example.

Like the politicians, journalists, as well as the Muslim leaders in our country, we must dare to point out where evil originates, with certain firmness and courage. We must be able to point out the pathology of Islam that

Islamism represents. This globalised ideology, nourished by individuals and fueled by the speeches of certain foreign political leaders has considerable influence, particularly through the internet. It is sad to see young people caught up in this ideology and becoming its executors. We need to go towards the other: not to make war on him, but to anticipate eternal communion, though there are some elements of risk. We believe that neither hatred nor oppression will prevail. It is necessary and possible to know the Muslims and value them without sharing the same faith.

He says that we are at war against this ideology of Islamism. It is a worldwide struggle in which the Muslims are also involved. This causes great danger to those who want to live their Muslim faith. Perhaps more Muslims, in our country and elsewhere should be able to say this firmly. Violence is in the heart of all people, including my own. It has also happened that violent Christians use their faith to justify domination and destruction. Transformation of violence is something we all have to

do on ourselves. In this war, which is above all a spiritual war, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be absorbed by the enemy's weapon. It is not by opposing one violence to another we will win. Our act of faith, as Christians, is to believe that the power of love and forgiveness can overcome violence. In this war, care should be taken to live and bear witness to the values of the Gospel. The Church must make the Word of God heard, help the faithful to live a living relationship with Christ, whose

nature is to die on the cross in order to rise again, this is her way of facing the mystery of evil. Living alongside the Muslims is not enough, we need to enter into a relationship with them."

Some good Muslims in Nice and somewhere in France pledged to protect the churches and the faithful on the feast of All Souls Day during the ceremony as a sign of reconciliation. Is it not a concrete act of brotherhood that our Pope dreams of our Church? Already this scenario of fellowship

and solidarity with the afflicted heralds the birth of Christ in our society.

Wishing you dear sisters, a meaningful celebration of the birth of Christ amid multiple uncertainties. Merry Christmas and a hope-filled New Year.

"Joy, prayer, and gratitude are the three attitudes that prepare us to live Christmas authentically." Pope Francis.



THE WORD OF GOD, A POWERFUL WEAPON

Sr. Shanthi Joseph
Province of Angamaly



Having my rosary beads rolling between my fingers, I was all alone in the seat on a short train journey. There came a gentleman taking his seat just in front of me. I could feel him observing me, on and off. For a while, I stopped praying and just remained open to him in my poise and sooner we got acquainted with each other. After learning my essential whereabouts, he commenced pouring out the pain and agony, the anguish and anxiety that he contained.

This is what he shared in a nutshell. He was a millionaire running a flourishing and enterprising business. He ran into a catastrophe abruptly and a great loss in his deals. The entire efforts to recover the business turned out to be futile and pointless. Besides, the continuous annoyance from the creditors bothered and troubled him. It seemed to him as though all the doors were shut before him. The only solution he found was to put an end to his life. He envisaged committing suicide with a crash of his luxurious car, for the family may get the insurance of the vehicle and be able to survive further.

Jesus on the Cross was in front of me as I looked at this man in agony. I stormed the heavens to help me deal with him. The Word of God came to my assistance. "Don't be jealous of what sinners achieve; just stick to your own work and trust in the Lord. It is easy for the Lord to make a poor person suddenly rich." (Sir. 11: 21). Filled with the Spirit of God, I repeated it to him. Yes, there came some light in his eyes, and it welled up as he could hardly hold back his tears. He repeated this life-giving Word with much more intensity and deeper faith. Meanwhile, the Spirit put into my heart the verses from Galatians (5:16-18). "So, I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh." This he read from my mobile, and it threw light in his heart, enlightened him on the need for conversion, a change of heart. Yes, he left me as an enlightened person. The God who touched Him through His words took the whole family through a process of conversion as together they started

praying the Word of God (Sir. 11: 21). The Omnipotent God made it possible that they got out of debts and started to live a happy and fuller life free from all bondages.

In our life and mission, we encounter this sort of people who need to see us as praying persons and attentive listeners. In the words of Pope Francis: "We are called to go to the peripheries which include the vulnerable of the community, the young, the aged, the sick, the bedridden, the addicts and the antisocial as well as the poor and the needy in our parishes, schools and workplaces. Let us examine our lives now and then in the context of the following:

Don't our hearts burn with love to help them?

Does the glow of Christ in our faces attract people to come and share with us?

Are we filled with Jesus and His Word, which suit for various problem situations?

I conclude praying with the psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Psalm (119:105)



JOYFUL WITNESS OF CHRIST'S MISSION

Sr. Elena-Monica Luzinschi
Province of France



Over the past few months, our humanity has been experiencing a milestone of events in its history. Keeping in memory the stage we just went through and in line with the theme of our 17th General Chapter, “To be Joyful Witnesses of Christ's Mission”, I wanted to really know if I was a joyful witness during lockdown while many were suffering due to illness or due to the loss of a loved one or being not able to organise a funeral service. In fact, all along this period, we have been living in a situation deprived of meeting one another, deprived of the Holy Eucharistic celebration and the possibility of moving around freely!

I would be lying if I were to say I was happy, for, at times, I used to be assailed my fears. In my department (Covid Ward, in the hospital where I work) which became a 'Covid buffer,' I used to receive patients suspected of Covid 19, and once the results of the tests were known, these same patients



were transferred to other hospitals or other specially equipped services.

For us, as nursing staff, we had to go through physical and psychological exertion. New health protocol was implemented to protect each patient and us. Every day we used to receive added information and updates on symptoms of the virus.

Where to find joy in these circumstances? I was unable to bring relief and consolation to the patients because anguish made them sicker. I could read the fear of illness and death in their eyes.

Offering a smile? Easy to say! But how to offer one, when it is hidden 24 hours behind the mask? I used to sit every day in front of the Blessed Sacrament and place my everyday experience at His feet. I used to entrust my colleagues, the patients, and the world to Him. Many days later, I realised that I should take risks. Therefore, I started spending more time with each patient, listening to

them, and assuring them of my presence.

It was a grace I received! One day, a patient was groaning in anguish; he was finding difficult to breathe. We knew that the more we increase the level of oxygen, the worse the patient's condition gets. I stayed with him, our eyes met from time to time, but words failed. The only gesture through which I could assure him that he was not alone in his suffering was holding his hands tight. The acceptance of such a gesture gave me the occasion to bless him in my heart and pray for him. I could feel his desire to live long and cling on to life; it was evident that he wanted to survive his illness... A tight holding of hands for a long while in silence... It is in such circumstances I find myself as an instrument of God.

I implore His grace every morning to be clothed with His goodness so that I might reveal Him all day long, that I be benevolent and joyful so that all those who approach me may feel His presence.

Reaching the end alone is impossible. The Lord has been and is always at my side. My sisters, friends and family have constantly shown their interest and have encouraged me in my work. I also do not forget to acknowledge the applause of the crowd every evening at 8 P.M.

Every day opens new occasions to be a witness of God's love and mercy, for we need one another! Let us not hesitate to reveal what the Lord calls us for: To love Him and love our neighbour.



LIFE IN CLAUDINE ECHERNIER CENTRE EHPAD AT CHAVANOD

Sr. Madeleine Giguet
Sr. Monique Sonnier
Province of France



On 1st July 2009, Ephad (Home for the elderly dependent persons) a nursing home of 103 beds was opened in Chavanod where our convent is situated. The first residents of this centre were the 25 sisters who left their beloved Mother House, the convent at Chavanod.

And now, ten years have passed! On 3rd July 2019, we celebrated, in simplicity and joy, the tenth anniversary of its opening. Innumerable were the encounters! And fraternal bonds have been forged between the management, the staff, the residents, and their families. Since then, 36 sisters have died during these years. Currently, 15 sisters aged between 80 to 101 years old, are residing over there along with the other lay residents and priests.

Madame Musy, an unassuming and competent lady, has taken the role of director ever since its inauguration. Sr. Inès D'Souza is the local animator of our community. She gives herself unstintingly in all our needs, both material, and spiritual; she

accompanies us in our religious life. Given the health conditions of each one of the inmates, this is no easy task.

The staff are very attentive to the needs of all the residents affected by illness and old age. The greatest regret is that very often we see new nursing staff, though competent enough. Most of them are attracted to the nearby Switzerland where they are offered good rates of payment.

Ehpad has two animators who are very dynamic and creative. On our daily schedule, we have indoor games, memory workshop, a meeting called 'Rencontre citoyenne' organised to help us participate in the smooth running of the house, slide shows etc. quite enough to entertain and keep us awake. We equally appreciate and thank the presence of the volunteers.

Every day, morning and evening, we gather in our community hall, on the third floor, to pray the Lauds and Vespers along with some laypeople. The following activities constitute

our community life: spiritual reading, weekly Gospel sharing, adoration, praying the Rosary in groups or individually and recollections, ensuring the availability of the priests. We continue to work on the Orientations of the General Chapter according to the programme drafted by the province. We come together to celebrate birthdays and feast days, once a month, followed by some refreshments. As far as possible, we make ourselves available to each other and to the residents in order to listen and dialogue, especially with the most isolated.

Currently, two priests are residing at the centre (three died during the second wave), but only one who arrived three months ago, aged 93, is able to celebrate the Holy Eucharist thrice a week. It has been a benevolent grace during the pandemic. Fr. Scaria Joseph, MSFS, our new Parish Priest, due to the sanitary crisis, finds it difficult to contact the Chaplaincy team to be present/available to the residents.

During the first wave of the pandemic, from March till the middle of November, the Covid-19 could not make its way to our Ehpad owing to the drastic preventive measures. We are grateful to all the staff for all that has been implemented to contain this pandemic. (Nevertheless, there were a few affected by the pandemic during the second wave). The lockdown period was difficult because visits were forbidden, and for three months, we could not meet even among ourselves. We were still able to communicate and support each other by staying connected through interphone facilities, phone calls and slipping small notes under the doors.



TV and radio made it possible for us to participate in the daily Eucharist, to remain open to the news from around the world and to be united with all of you, dear sisters live through the same pandemic. There came the lifting of the lockdown period, unfortunately

very short, because new restrictive measures were gradually coming back. In faith, we continue to live the uncertainty and its constraints, keeping our hope firm.

Thus, present at the heart of Ehpada, we continue our apostolic religious

life in the footsteps of Mother Claudine and according to the Rule of Life: "The sick and the aged sisters are an apostolic force in the Congregation, the Church and the world," (ROL 8/3).



TOWARDS DIGNITY AND WHOLENESS



In response to the call of the Provincial Chapter and the 17th General Chapter 2019, the sisters of Tenali Province resolved to commit themselves for the cause of the girl children being trafficked for sexual exploitation across the state of Andhra Pradesh. The centre SAKALYA in Visakhapatnam, is an initiative of the Society of the Sisters of the Cross, as a response to the cry of girl children and young women who are trafficked and abused. SAKALYA means wholeness. It aims at protecting trafficked children, placing them in a safe environment, providing them with services like education, health care, psycho-social support and reintegrating with family and community. Thus, SAKALYA works towards wholeness. As I began my journey to work for the trafficked children, I encountered a girl who challenged and motivated me to go an extra mile and instil hope in her. She is the voice of God, and it is she who motivates me to share with you my unique experience.

It was an unforgettable day for me to meet Neelu, an adolescent girl aged

15. Neelu is an adopted daughter to her parents Baskar and Bhavani. Her family lives in a small hut near the highway of a big city. Economically poor, the family was left with no source of regular income. She lost her mother at the age of 12 due to sickness. Her father, an irresponsible person, was addicted to alcohol.

After the death of her mother, Neelu was taken to her maternal aunt's family. Her aunt Divi was taking good care of her for few weeks, but soon she started ill-treating her. Neelu could not comprehend what was happening to her; she went through pain and suffered physical wounds. Her own maternal aunt Divi regularly gave her drugs in the form of drinks



and food. As soon as Neelu loses her consciousness, her aunt used to take her to different lodges, homes, highways etc. Her aunt practically sold her to abusers for money. Very many times, she was given pills (contraceptives) to control pregnancy.

At the age of 12, Neelu was four months pregnant, but she was not aware. She was not even aware of the process of a menstrual cycle. Her aunt Divi found symptoms of pregnancy and gave pills to effect an abortion, which did not happen, so she was taken to hospital for abortion. Neelu was again not aware of what was happening to her.

Weeks later, sexual abuses kept multiplying. Neelu was losing her strength, and she was getting weakened by abuses. At the age of 15, she was again seven months pregnant. Noticing her stomach growing bigger, Neelu guessed that something was wrong in her body. She no longer wanted to stay with her aunt. She fled to her hometown in order to escape from potential danger. Fortunately, a stranger rang up to ChildLine 1098 and explained Neelu's situation.

As a childcare personnel, I was invited by Childline service to meet the child. As soon as I looked at the child, I was shocked, my heart was



Sr. Shakila Yesudoss
Province of Tenali

heavy and troubled, my eyes were filled with tears, and I had no words to speak to the child at that moment. The childline team was having a dialogue with the children, after which the process of rehabilitation began. Till then, I remained in a state of shock and grief, unable to utter a word. After completing the initial registration, I accompanied the child to the government shelter home for children and women.

I had to leave her in that home and part with her. I saw sadness, hurt, shame, lack of self-worth, fear, shock, hopelessness on her countenance. Did she not resemble the same Christ on the Cross?

Once I left the shelter home, my eyes

were filled with tears; I was disturbed and confused. I had mixed feelings of anger and sadness. As I sat there on the bus, I just closed my eyes and kept myself calm for a few minutes and I raised a question to the Lord: "Lord, was she not created by you? Did you not make her in your own image and likeness? Lord, what am I going to do for this innocent victimised child? Why did you bring me here? And what do you want me to be? Tell me Lord..."

The same questions were haunting me. With these mixed feelings plunged in deep silence, I gazed at the Lord, and I could hear the silent whisper, "Be compassionate and a promoter of hope and love." This

enlightenment deepened in me the love for Neelu, who is broken and disfigured, and the many more like her.

The next day when I started to counsel her, I could see the disposition of my heart to listen to her pain and agony with love and compassion. However there are millions of girls around the world who face sexual abuse and exploitation. Sexual violence occurs everywhere in every country and across all segments of society. My journey commenced with full conviction and faith to help the victimised children towards the process of change.

Everyone has the right to feel safe and have a quality life!



RUMBLINGS FROM FEBRUARY 2020 ONWARDS

Sr. Anne Mary Ollukaran
Delegation of Latin America



When I heard that there was a virus infection in some parts of the world and people were dying, I did not take it very seriously. Feelings of compassion for those people were not lost, therefore, I started praying for them daily. Soon it had reached our place. Certainly, it brought lots of anxiety and fear. We were also in lockdown like the other parts of the world. The police could be seen patrolling everywhere. Being all alone, deprived of contact with the outside world, brought me closer to God.

There was no celebration of the Holy Mass since the church was closed. A feeling of utter darkness prevailed. The church which was left without the celebration of the sacraments and without people around created a sort of vacuum in me. Our parish priest, Fr. Jose Leonie, is very kind to us; he

stays in his community in Pedernales, about 38 kilometres away from our place. Now and then, he calls and enquires about us, asking us if we need anything. We asked him to bring some consecrated Hosts. He did it. He also used to bring, now and then, fruits, vegetables and other food materials. God was and is our protector, providing all our needs. Definitely, it was a wonderful experience of God's Divine Providence. We were not deprived of receiving the Holy Communion every day, and we participated in the Holy Eucharist celebrated through the transmission of Vatican channel at 7 a.m. Undoubtedly, this brought us renewed strength and joy. Participation in the daily Rosary transmitted directly from the grotto of Lourdes added to our joy and increased our love for our Mother Mary.

During the pandemic, we could not meet any people, all shops were closed, no people were on the road and no noise around. Despite the feeling of emptiness created by the situation around, the strong conviction that nothing will happen without the knowledge of God, deepened my attachment to the Lord. There were deaths in our village. About thirty people died of Covid-19, and few of them were our close acquaintances. Our prayers for them and all the pandemic stricken were offered to the Lord.

The Divine Providence of God is marvellous. The people in our village, both poor and rich, had compassion on us, and they brought fruits, vegetables, fish and other things which provided for our sustenance every day. They were very generous, kind, and concerned about us. It was

the Lord Himself providing for us through these people. When our commodities were surplus, we shared with our needy neighbours. It brought great joy to us and our neighbours. They said that they were missing our visit to the families, and our presence in public. Slowly we resumed marketing and shopping. The people were very happy to see us and they greeted us on the road. Since all were with masks, sometimes we struggled

to identify them.

In August, the celebration of Holy Mass in the church resumed. From October onwards we started the Catechism classes on Saturdays and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. Now life has resumed its normalcy.

On 4th October, we celebrated the feast of our patron St. Francis of Assisi. We had nine days novena and Mass in the village in different streets.

Each day was a feast in the village. Many people participated in the Mass and novena in all the villages. As St. Francis of Assisi is very much connected with the creation and nature, it was a good opportunity to participate meaningfully in the celebration of the Jubilee year of the Earth. Being a lover of nature, the celebration was much more meaningful to me.



OBEDIENCE IN VIEW OF THE KINGDOM

Sr. Priscah Muthoni Mbuko
Province of East Africa



The Bible is full of stories of our ancestors encountering God, sometimes through conversation, and sometimes “face to face,” sometimes through revelation and sometimes in prophecy. We learn these stories as children at school and quickly come to accept the magic in them.

After all, how are we to understand the nature of the Divine, if we cannot understand God in human terms, particularly from a young age? So, we have in our tradition a God who speaks, and through that speech, the world is created. Through that speech, waters pour from the heavens, flooding and destroying that very creation. Through that speech, people are put to the ultimate test. Through that speech, we receive rules, laws, and guidelines to help us live a holy life. (Hazzan Ben Tisser)

As I was reading a certain book, I was inspired and enlightened by the writer's words, and I realised that we could encounter the Divine when we forget 'self'. It is only when we forget ourselves do we become truly open to the opportunities which lie ahead of

us. God has given us opportunities and chances to encounter Him in our daily lives. In Genesis (28: 10-19), we read about Jacob's ladder story. He was able to encounter God because he was able to stop thinking about himself and started thinking about God and the world around him.

I would like to share with you my personal encounter with God. In the year 2018, my Provincial transferred me to Kenya to be in charge of the school. She told me that she had sent me there so that I can upgrade myself through online studies. Though studying online was not my interest, I did not tell her anything. I kept it to myself and decided not to enroll myself for the studies. Whenever she visited the community, she would enquire about my registration. I would give her many excuses, and I told her that I could not get enrolled in the university since the system of education has changed. According to the Kenyan system, I must spend nine years to complete the degree online. In the year 2019, she insisted again that I do my studies online irrespective of its duration. I was not

very comfortable with it. Over the years, the minister of education was changed, and the years were reduced to four.

Still, at the beginning of the year, I did not enroll. I enquired at the university, and I was told that those studying online were required to appear for tutorial classes and take exams in person. I enquired about the accommodation, and I was told that there was no accommodation for E-learning students. They must look for their accommodation outside the university. In my own understanding, this was a very genuine excuse to give to my Provincial so that I may not continue with online studies.

It happened that one day I was reading our Rule of Life article 11 which states: “By our vow of obedience, we bind ourselves to obey the decision of our lawful superiors in all things referring directly or indirectly to the life of the Congregation”. This article was a turning point in my life. I decided to obey the decision of my Provincial, and I registered myself at the university in September 2019. I enrolled in the digital school of virtual

and open learning at Kenyatta University, Kenya. A family known to me, which is closer to the university during exam days and tutorials, sheltered me. This happened only for the first semester. I was not very comfortable to stay with the family because they treated me in a very special way and I found it very difficult.

This difficult circumstance provided an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power through His

own Divine Providence. He displayed His glory and power at the right moment. Little did I know that on 8th January 2020, the new community for the Sisters of the Cross would be opened some kilometres away from the place where I studied. The sisters run a dispensary, which is under the Archdiocese of Nairobi.

Now, whenever I go for my exams, I stay with our sisters in the new community, and I am comfortable. Through this experience, I have learnt

that to see God's Divine Providence at work, the first step is always to obey. By obeying my lawful superior, God opened the way for me. At times, God allows us to face a dilemma in order to reveal the greatness of His power in our life. The moment I understood that challenges are a reflection of the corresponding opportunities, things started to fall in place. My question marks turned to exclamatory marks, and my test became my testimony.



SEASON OF CREATION



Amid the crises that have shaken our world, the global Christian family was awakened to the urgent need to heal our relationships with the creation and with each other during the ecumenical Season of Creation. From 1st September to 4th October, thousands of Christians on six continents united themselves for a time of restoration and hope, a jubilee for our Earth, and discovered radically new ways of living with the creation. More than ever before, the global Christian family united in praying and acting for our common home. Thousands of people and communities participated in life-giving events, lighting the way for our most vulnerable sisters and brothers, who are searching for hope amidst the pandemic and the worsening climate crisis, among other crises affecting our world.

Throughout the month-long celebration, signs of such crises were all around us. Fires made worse by the climate crisis raged in North America,

destroying entire communities, and leaving families to mourn the dear departed ones, and the worrisome flames in Brazil reached the virgin parts of the Amazon. In the far North, a recent study reported the rapid crumbling of two crucial glaciers, which, if melted, could raise the global sea levels by four feet (1.2 meters).

“Creation belongs to God; it is not ours. We are not God. The earth was here before us and has been given to us” (Laudato Si, no. 67). The need for humanity to be humble and the dignity of creation are the central themes of Laudato Si. Our relationship with God is not only intimately connected with that of our neighbours' but also with that of nature. One cannot be in right relationship with God if one is not in right relationship with one's neighbour and nature. Failure to care for both, “ruins the relationship with one's own self, with others, with God and with the earth” (70). Pope Francis implores us to remember the dignity and fragility of nature; “A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise

intelligent ways of directing, developing, and limiting our power” (78).



Pope Francis invites us to work together, challenges us to take a long hard look in the mirror at our relationship with the Earth, and reminds us that the Lord hears the cries of the Earth and the cries of the poor. Today, the nature that surrounds us is no longer admired but devoured. We must return to contemplation; so as not to be distracted by a thousand useless things, we must find silence; for the heart not to become sick, we must be still.

At this juncture, it was fitting that we as a family of the Sisters of the Cross ventured to be part of the celebration of the 'Season of Creation.' The



Sr. Liza Thomas
Province of Kolkata

CCROP members initiated us to be ready for a three-day webinar session; immediate action was taken by inviting every community to make an action plan. We, the sisters of Kolkata province, promptly drew up our action plan and were ready to implement.

On 1st September, we were glad to start our day by thanking God for the fruits of the Earth, a time to reflect on the gracious gift of creation to us. Every community participated very creatively. It was a time when all of us realised how great is our God who made heaven and Earth. The day's prayer helped us to realise how ungrateful we are at times and how we take things for granted. As we offered varieties of fruits, vegetables, flowers etc. we raised our hearts in gratitude to God, moreover, we felt how fruitful and colourful nature is. It was indeed a day of gratitude to God and nature.

The first Sunday was Forest Sunday. Some of our houses in Odisha are surrounded by mountains and forests, and I am lucky that I am in Bamunigam; we were thrilled to go to the nearby forest to spend some time in meditation amidst the tall trees and other plants. At the same time, I was afraid of snakes. But it was providential that we had a peaceful experience of God. We could feel him in the silence of our heart. Those who could not go to the forest created an atmosphere of being in the forest through fantasy meditation and all the communities were filled with joy to have such an experience in the open air. The Lord spoke to us through trees and plants and drew us closer to the beauty of nature.

The second Sunday was Land Sunday. One-third of the Earth is made of land.



Every part of the Earth is important, but the land is much more because it is in the land we reside and cultivate. We call it motherland because like a mother it provides everything for us. Yet what is our response to her. We use and misuse it. She produces fruits according to the season, and we destroy this beautiful land by using things that are not good for further use. She provides things for our needs, but we destroy it by our greed. As we used different kinds of soil for our prayer, it reminded us first of all that we are dust, and we will return to dust and become one with it at the end. As we touched it, we could feel the connection between us and the Mother Earth. All felt how soothing and healing the Mother Earth was. We felt sorry for our negligence and we also took a resolution to make our common home a bit beautiful, productive, and fruitful; we pledged to stop using anything harmful for the Earth, especially plastic.



The third Sunday was Mountain Sunday. Mountains are a wonderful place for solitude. It is a symbol of our journey towards God. When we go through the Bible, we find remarkable things that occurred on the mountain top. Yahweh revealed Himself to Moses, Abraham, Noah etc. on the mountain top. Jesus was transfigured on the mountain top; His sermon on the mountain was a lesson telling us how to live a life pleasing to God. Gen. 8:4 Noah's ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. Ps. 72:3 'The Mountains shall bring peace to the people and the little hills, by righteousness.' Elijah challenged the false prophets on Mount Carmel. Prayer on the mountains continues to fuel our desire to escape the hustle and bustle of our day, allowing us to retreat

where nature runs supreme. The effort of going up any mountain is refreshing. So, the Mountain Sunday gave us the prayer experience of Jesus who at the end of the day always went up alone to pray. We realised that we need to create our own spiritual mountain where we live alone and get the Abba experience of our Lord. 'Every mountain top is within reach if you just keep climbing.'

Ps. 65:9: 'The River of God is full of water.' Rivers are the lifeblood of the Earth. The fourth Sunday was celebrated as River Sunday. Jesus is our life-giving water. Every drop of water is precious, and the prayer service for the day invited us to reflect how we use and fritter away the running water that gives life to many. Our motherland has so many beautiful rivers running from the Himalayas [Ganga] in the north to Kavery in the south. Yet there are a lot of political issues which block the flow of the rivers and create antagonism between states and people. All because we are selfish and avaricious. The celebration of River Sunday invited us to celebrate the gift of God and become aware of our careless attitude towards our common home. This attitude has led us to pollute our rivers with poison, treat our streams as waste dumps, and turn living waters into death traps. Rev. 22:1-5 "God's healing for Earth". When creation is restored, a river will flow directly from God with trees of life growing on either side to bring healing to all nations on Earth. The whole province chanted the same Nadhi Stuti that soothed our hearts. It made us sensitive to the cries of creation and the groans of the creatures in the water.

Finally, it was 4th October the feast of St Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecology. Everything on Earth will worship you and will sing your praises. He can be called as the second Noah who cherished nature and its living creatures. He was able to preach to the birds and animals admiring the God-given gifts. He could address them as his sweet brothers, sisters, and

friends. The special prayer service helped us to be thankful to our Lord for the gift of all the animals, birds, and the whole creation. We were able to join them in praising the Lord. As a community, we all implored God's blessings upon all the animals, birds, insects, reptiles, and plants. It was really an amazing day to reflect how everything that God created helps us in one way or the other to make our lives more comfortable and significant.

The closing ceremony on 8th October organised by Sr. Beena Das was superb. We really appreciate her creativity which was seen in the colourful webinar that we attended.

Planting a tree in every community was a memorable one.

The one-month long reflection and meditation on the various topics on Season of Creation has helped our sisters in the province to be attuned and sensitive to the creation of God. We realised how much we depend on creation. Yes, we cannot live without creation, but creation can live without us. Therefore, we need to protect, nurture and care for all the elements in nature. God has created not only human beings but everything in His likeness and the whole creation manifests in various ways God's unfathomable love. Our Earth has been a mother to all of us by being so



enduring, loving, considerate, kind, generous and productive. It is time that we also turn to God in repentance and contrition for atrocities done to creation. All of us felt proud of our Congregation. This celebration has brought us together on a single platform as a Congregation.



THE PLIGHT OF RURAL POOR IN PANDEMIC: AN EXPERIENCE OF PASCHAL MYSTERY

Sr. Hilaria Soundari
Province of Madurai



The COVID -19 pandemic has made the entire globe struggle over the past one year. While the world entered into the locked-down, there had been thousands of people in the poor huts remained hungry and helpless. Recognizing Jesus in the poor and listening to the silent cry of marginalized during the pandemic, the Sisters of the Cross begun to reach out to the people in need in their respective milieu. Here is an experiential sharing of the Sisters of Batlagundu community of Madurai Province. Some of the target people reached out were rural Dalit children, deserted women and disadvantaged youth.

Virulent Virus

Batlagundu, where the Sisters of the Cross live is one of the town panchayats of Dindigul District of Tamil Nadu. This District was

reported one of the highest covid-19 cases (6th among 38 districts of TN). The sisters are reaching out through the social centre, DEEPAM the marginalized of the milieu and through Leonard Hospital taking care of the sick and infirm. People of this area, earn their livelihood mostly as agricultural labourers especially the Dalits. During the pandemic, some of the villages, namely Kodaginayakanpatty, K.Puthur, Algarnayakanpatty, Chittor and Sithayankottai were also declared as containment areas. Thus, they were posed with stringent rules, challenging their mobility and livelihood. The provision provided by the Public Distribution System (PDS) did not adequately serve a family even for a week. As these poor villagers had been living a hand to mouth existence, facing the lockdown had become a threat for them.

Voiceless Women

The number of households in the rural areas headed by widows, deserted women, destitute women, single mothers faced increased distress at this point of pandemic flight. Initial three weeks, they were able to cope up with remaining, then begun the great struggle of managing their socio-economic needs. These families headed by these women were highly helpless. The sisters remained connected with them, searched for the ways and means to help them out. The Great God came to their rescue with the generous benefactors across the globe from Germany, United Kingdom, The Netherlands and India. Hence, they were able to reach out to 333 women-headed households in 51 villages.

Most of these women, while receiving the relief kit was in tears (of

joy and gratitude). One of them from Kannapatty said that for the past 15 days she was able to give only one meal a day to her children and she would be able to provide them with a better meal this week. Another elderly widow from Sevugampatty shedding tears said that she did not know how to thank because her children did not bother to care her, but... Among the beneficiaries, the number of young widows was alarming. The pain and sorrow witnessed in their eyes were painful. The responsibility of heading a household is terrible at this point of time for these women. For those of us involved in the process of distributing relief kit, it was a soul comforting experience that we, the Sisters of the Cross were able to take part in the paschal path of these women.

Vibrant Youth and Children

As reported (The Hindu, 12 May 2020), India has the highest rates of

domestic inequalities in malnutrition. During the locked down, as the school remained closed, the rural children were missing their noon meals offered in the schools. However, having been locked down inside the house, they wanted to eat more. Taking into account the needs of the children, a nutritional bag with different types of grams were given. In which, 1505 children from 75 villages were being reached out.

The youth groups with which the sisters are working came forward to do with the local gram panchayats. They served *kabusuba kudineer* (a herbal drink) to the villagers for promoting their immune system. They were engaged in monitoring the cleanliness of the villages and disinfecting the streets. Moreover, these youth involved with health workers in identifying the affected cases in 62 service villages. It was a

significant venture in keeping the pandemic in most of the villages. Indeed, it was inspiring to see the sacrificing spirit of youth in reaching out to the people at the risk of their lives.

View of Paschal Mystery

While humanity was panic with coronavirus, the commitment of the Sisters to reach out to the people in need of medical, social and economic conditions revealed their constant search to find meaning in the Paschal Mystery. In empathizing with the victims of COVID 19 and extending helping hand to the economically deprived was a challenge. Yet, the Sisters of the Cross found meaning in sharing the merciful love of the Father in the pandemic. Not in safeguarding oneself, instead generously giving oneself to the suffering humanity, we continue to march forward in finding the meaning of the Paschal Mystery.



CROSSIAN CONSORTIUM TO REACH OUT TO THE PERIPHERY (CCROP)

Sr. Prema Chowallur
Coordinator of CCROP



One of the incredible dreams of the Congregation - networking and collaborating among the Provinces/ Delegations and the outside world - is taking shape, giving voice, and executing its plans. The 2019 General Chapter Orientation on "Mission Consciousness to be Joyful Witnesses", in one of its directives (pgs. 12-13) underlines the need to collaborate with UISG and JPIC Commission in Geneva and it produced such a seductive idea of addressing the burning issues of those on the peripheries.

The Genesis: The General team decided to take a giant step forward

by choosing members from different Provinces/Delegations to form a team to execute the directives of the 2019 GC. After choosing the members with the consent of their respective Provincial/Delegation Superiors, the first Brain Storming Webinar was held on 3rd June 2020, and we can proudly say that it is the birthday of the group formed by the General Team to reach out to the people living on the periphery. The same members are also responsible for Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC).

The name 'Crossian Network to Reach Out to the Periphery' was suggested to the General team, and it

was rehashed and modified. After a lengthy process, we named the team as 'Crossian Consortium to Reach Out to the Periphery' (CCROP) eventually approved by the General Team. Now we can proudly say that CCROP is the flagship outcome of the 2019 GC.

Mode of Function: Consultation, report making, evaluation, suggestions for improvement and efficacy of our work are the mode and pattern of CCROP. It has a very democratic decision-making process as the members are ready, open, receptive, resourceful, and dynamic. Communication is one of the backbones of this group and the

members exchange the common concerns of the region be it political, economic, social, or religious.

Major Activities Taken Up: CCROP organised several webinars for the members in order to plan, decide and execute. The first activity of CCROP was to support the migrants through networking during lockdown and encourage the sisters to extend a helping hand to them. The second activity was the Celebration of Season of Creation by the entire Congregation. CCROP also organised three webinars for the entire Congregation on different approaches to Eco-spirituality such as a) Eco-Spirituality of our Times, b) Eco-Spirituality inherent to the Sisters of the Cross, and 3) Eco-spirituality a New Normal. Formulation of its vision, mission, values, objectives, roles, and responsibilities are on the anvil.

Outcome of the Celebration of Season of Creation: Sisters were grateful to CCROP for organising a webinar so rich as it revealed to them the Spirit of God active and alive in every creation. The stark fact is the discovery of the mention of eco-spirituality concealed in the teachings of our Founders, Rule of Life, and the most recent GCs; they were amazed. This enlightened them to live in Earth consciousness which in turn led to God-consciousness. The study of Laudato Si and the insights on eco-spirituality created in us a sense of repentance for our insensitivity to the Earth in the past and we acknowledged that the “Earth is our Common Home.”

Sisters became more conscious of their superfluous use of energy, water, and other materials that would cause an environmental disaster, and this awakened in them the need to protect, promote, preserve, and sustain God's Creation. They were instrumental in

giving the same message to the students and inculcated in them a love for nature, animals, and better relationship with the Mother Earth.



The Way Forward: The Celebration of Season of Creation in the Provinces/Delegations was not restricted to a stipulated period, so its spirit pursued. So many of them decided to continue the plantation programme, make seed bombs by planting more trees, maintain a kitchen, herbal garden, organic compost and say no to chemical fertilisers and plastic to make campuses plastic-free. Besides, some decided to opt for rainwater harvesting and installation of solar panels to save water and electricity. Some others decided to make a deeper study of Laudato Si and to make it a way of living. Mass media will continue to be a source of awareness dissemination on restoration, preservation, and protection of nature.

In schools, they would continue various programmes with students to teach the future generation a sense of responsibility to preserve and protect nature, and so a few schools decided to implement in the school



'Paryavaran Programme' of the Central Government.

Watchful Over Common Issues: CCROP had been vigilant to the major events like Hathras rape of a Dalit girl in India which unveils the truth that in every 16 minutes a Dalit girl or woman is raped in India. Many of us participated in the webinars, prayer services and protest march organised through social media condemning this issue.

The team encouraged the sisters to participate in the protest march carrying placards and banners to set free Fr. Stan Swami S.J., Jharkhand, India and others who are accused of having supported the Bhima Koragaon issue of Maoist. Many others signed the online petition to release Fr. Stan Swami and participated in webinars and prayers associated with the same issue to express their solidarity.

France had been rocked and shocked when a gunman shot a Greek Orthodox priest at Lyon at the beginning of November, which came two days after a terrorist killed three people in a church in Nice and two weeks before the beheading of a high school teacher.

Lima in Peru traumatised by the shooting and killing over the dissatisfaction of the president-elect in mid-November was also brought to the knowledge of CCROP, and the members assured and offered them concern, sympathy, and prayers.

Conclusion: The CCROP makes use of social media to address the local as well as global issues. We, the members of the CCROP, encourage and appreciate one another for the courageous initiative each takes in their own milieu. Though CCROP is in its chrysalis, we shall still be the voice of the voiceless to continue the mission of Jesus here on Earth.



AT THE SERVICE OF THE YOUTH

Sr. Brigitte Sylvie Mayo

Delegation of Congo - Cameroun



Our reverent Mother Claudine, by opening her kitchen to the children, also opened her heart to welcome them and teach Catechism with joy and dedication. Youth, a major part of our society, as it is well said here in Cameroon the “spearhead of the nation,” is considered sometimes marginalised, left alone and without reference. Today, all they need to feel is that we can count on them, and we have confidence in them. Unfortunately, in schools, there is an increase in violence every day, the students come with knives or daggers in bags, and some at a very young age use drugs. Given these facts, it is undoubtedly urgent and even absolutely necessary to actively involve ourselves with the youth which is a forgotten part of our society

I am Sr. Brigitte. This year, I was sent



to Elig-Mfomo, a small village located 73 km from Yaoundé, in the diocese of Obala. I teach English in a Higher Secondary School. It is a great joy and opportunity for me to be with the young people. With delight, I give my time to them. Apart from the courses that are on the regular programme, I take time to listen to them. There are some, who live in difficult situations in their own families with their parents, others who are abandoned to their own miserable destiny and often incapable of handling such a high level of problems in life.

It is said that speaking sets us free and reduces the burden of our sorrow. Therefore, whenever I see them, I often approach them freely to make them feel at home with me. At the same time, I take the opportunity to give them advice and speak to them about the Lord who loves them as they are. It has helped some who could no longer take courage and hope and some to get back in touch with their parents. Very often, after class, we organise discussion sessions to warn them about all the dangers that await them in society. And I often come back home with some of them, as for the courses that are on the programme, they know that they can come to see me even at home when they have certain difficulties. With this experience, I realised how much young people need to be listened to, and that one little bit of advice could save a life.

In the parish, I work with young people in the Youth Eucharistic

Movement (YEM). In this group, we share our experience of Ignatian spirituality. We teach them to pray with the Word of God and examine their lives in the light of the Gospel. We organise our meetings every Sunday after Mass, where we take time for either meditation on the Word of God, or contemplation or sharing of the Word of God. These are beautiful moments that allow young people not only to be in constant contact with the Word of God but also make a unique and extraordinary transformative experience in their daily life.



The experiences that I have with young people give me a lot of joy and make me see the hand of God at work. There is not only the negative aspect in youth, but also there is a desire to live, to study well, to get a respectable job, and to have several new experiences. And for me, it is a great joy to share with you about my experience with young people.



CHRISTMAS IS A SEASON OF HOPE AND JOY

Sr. Swarnarani Rayen
Province of Sri Lanka



Christmas over the years had been transformed into a well famous commercial festival all over the world. And the new hero of Christmas has decentralized from Christ to Santa Claus. Though Sri Lanka consist of Bhuddhist majority and in the constitutions Bhuddhism is stated as the state religion, I have no doubt because of the commercial activities in the commercial capital Colombo and all around the island, Santa has become the well-known person for commerce and media. The year end sale makes Christmas a common festival to all walks of life irrespective of their religion.

On the other side the churches and Christian schools and sectors become extremely busy organising carols, making cribs, decorative and having annual get-together. We religious too get caught up with these excessive activities and till Christmas Eve, we don't know how the days fly. Both the Lay people and the religious are caught in this external and material preparation. There is rarely any meaningful spiritual preparation that takes place in this hustle and bustle of life.

But last year while people believed

of a fake peace in our country, after so many years of war, on the day of Easter that was on 21st April 2019, bombs exploded in the churches throwing away the people into pieces, while they were celebrating the resurrection of our Lord. And the media was thrilled to name that day, BLACK EASTER. Therefore that year Christmas was not celebrated so enthusiastically among the faithful, as the threat of life continues to prevail for Christians in this country. But as usual the commercial festival remains the same. 30 years of war has brain washed our people to take this disaster as a normalcy of life, except for a very few who are still humane.

Thanks to the Covid 19 virus the hero of 2020, a non-partial friend who is still trying to bring some sense into the whole humanity, to recover the lost values of love, joy and hope to make everybody feel as one human family. This Corona virus is an invisible John the Baptist who is preparing us to welcome the Lord worthily in this year 2020. It made us to realize that, Nobody can say, "I am safe" until everybody is safe in the universe. Willingly or unwillingly

we are stripped off of the worldly and outward enjoyments for this Christmas. More doors are open to be closer to our Saviour. It has challenged us to be sensitive towards who are needy, to be in union with the entire world in prayer, to be aware of where we stand in our spiritual journey and to choose between wants and needs.

I personally feel after so many years of lapse, we are guided by the star or the virus (the modern unseen star) to find the Saviour in His original place, that is in the stable and are led to realize His purpose for incarnation, so that we allow Him to re-incarnate into our lives to bring that same blessing, healing, miracle and resurrection in the new year 2021, to all our sisters and brothers who are in need, thus to bring back love, joy, peace and hope which is the original messages of Christmas to our world.

Wishing you all on behalf of all our dear sisters in Sri Lanka, for a blessed Christmas! and for a New Year 2021 with a new era to the humanity!



FORTIFICATION OF MY INNER BEING

Sr. Teresa Kerketta
Province of Amaravati



Inner being is the strength of the soul. It is the core strength of a person, while mental strength is simply the strength of the mind, which we use for feeling and thinking. Inner strength gives us immense benefits. “Go within every day and find your inner strength so that the world will not blow your candle out.” (Katherine Dunham). Being inspired by this quotation, I decided to take conscious effort to cultivate my inner strength by taking a journey deep into myself. I firmly believe that this inner journey will be a boost to live my life meaningfully. Without inner strength, it is impossible to live the daily life, which entails challenges, difficulties, and problems especially during these days of pandemic when the whole world is disturbed and shaken up by a small-unseen virus. Why are we so frightened of this unseen virus? This is because we have developed a belief as big as a mountain, that this virus can destroy us. The question arises after one year of the appearance of this virus, “How big is our faith in our God who is the Alpha and the Omega?” Jesus said, “If you have faith as small as the size of a mustard seed and you will say to this mountain to move from here to there, it will move.” (Mt. 17: 20). Is our faith built on the power of God? The question is where our inner strength

is. Where is our faith in the strength within or in Christ Jesus? Let us turn to God, the strength within and the strength of our inner being.

Let me share my experience of inner strength with you. Most of the time, when I am faced with difficulties and problems of daily life, I begin to question life. Can I not even live and breathe freely? But when I give time to myself, when I sit and reflect on the movement within and the disturbing situation around, I am surprised that I hear a whisper encouraging me positively and I can come out of my predicament though it may take time. The God, who is the strength of my soul, knows about me and gently speaks to me.

I heard the whisper of God clearly during my annual retreat this year. Just before the retreat, I had some misunderstanding and difficulty with someone. I was fully disturbed. When I started my retreat, I was unable to pray at all for two days. I could only see her face and hear her words repeatedly. As I started to surrender myself to God, I realised that God could work miracles in my life. Fr. Joy OCD, was the retreat preacher who told us to take the disposition, “I will not go back until God blesses me.” I started to repeat this sentence. To my great surprise, God whispered to me that His blessing is upon me. I was delighted

that God answered my prayer. I could pray well and experience God personally. He knows what is best for me, and He grants me my heart's desires. During the retreat, I felt that God was always with me. God gave me the strength to face challenges, and I overcame all difficulties. I felt that I am a free person, a free child of God.

You really must look inside yourself and find your own inner strength and say: “I am proud of what I am and who I am.” It is only when we look inside us that we will be able to face everything with love. We cannot change others and the world, but we can change our attitude towards others and the world, even the unseen virus. Our God is there to protect us. Let us discover and rediscover the strength within and cultivate our inner strength daily and live our lives proudly as beloved children of God. Our inner strength and inner voice can never be wrong. Hence, let us trust in our inner self and the Master and Creator of our inner being. He who created us in His own image and likeness will be the Master of our inner self. So, let us be with Him, love Him and surrender everything to Him because He creates and recreates us every moment to live our life to the full.

