

Crossian Connect

SISTERS OF THE CROSS OF CHAVANOD

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THE LORD'S OVERWHELMING DOMAIN

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- ▶ Sr. Jiji Mathew

In this issue ...

- ▶ The Lord's overwhelming domain ... 1
- ▶ From the Editor's Desk ... 2
- ▶ Walking along with families in their faith journey ... 3
- ▶ Behold the heart! ... 4
- ▶ Caught up in the plan of the Father ... 6
- ▶ Towards the periphery ... 8
- ▶ Disseminating the love of Jesus to humanity ... 10
- ▶ Meekly surrendering to the will of God ... 11
- ▶ When the pandemic hit our door step.... ... 12
- ▶ Joy of serving the children of the good God ... 13
- ▶ My life is in your hands ... 14
- ▶ Holy Cross Safe Home a home away from home ... 15
- ▶ The joy of being missionary disciples ... 17
- ▶ Radiating the love of Christ at New Life Centre ... 18
- ▶ Echoes from Ecuador ... 20
- ▶ Tribute to Sr. Marie - Therese Accambray ... 21
- ▶ An awesome God who walks with me ... 22

Mother Claudine Echernier, our Foundress, heard the whisper of Jesus, "In your milieu, millions of poor are exploited, ignorance and misery prevail among the people, and the situation of girls is pathetic and brutal... amidst these deadliest realities of your time, do you hear the cry of the less privileged as I do? Can you be my instrument to reveal my Father's merciful love to them?" At this sacred moment of discernment, Fr. Peter Marie Mermier, who was also searching to remedy the existing social evil, encountered Claudine Echernier at Chavanod. This blessed encounter led to the foundation of our Congregation, the Lord's overwhelming domain.



Sr. Daisy Thankiah
General Secretary

This Congregation, which emerged in extreme poverty and great simplicity in 1838, now moves forward with the dynamism of diverse ministries to make the good God known and loved. We, the privileged members of our Congregation, are in the current pandemic 'Covid-19' with varied inexplicable experiences. We have been affected by reading, hearing, and witnessing dramatic events about people's lives and the global economy in deep recession.

Lockdowns and mobility restrictions have created the new poor and accelerated the economic downturn. Digital connectivity becomes a necessity, but accessibility to digital infrastructure remains an impossibility to the poor, especially in the world's poorest countries. Women have lost their jobs at a rapid rate than men. Food insecurity affects people invariably in both rural and urban areas. Medical care is unthinkable and unreachable to a large sector of people. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has projected that 11 million girls will be denied education worldwide.

Several other challenges as well topple down the normalcy of human existence. Climate change, a threat multiplier, challenges everyone and everything. Political uncertainties in the nations and conflicts worldwide, to mention a few, Colombian conflict, Insurgency in Kashmir, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Myanmar conflict, Syrian Civil War, etc., have a devastating effect. Yet, the full scale of the disaster may be unpredictable and unimaginable.

During these alarming, unprecedented crises, do we hear the whisper of Jesus, as Mother Claudine Echernier did? Certainly, yes. Our Sisters are creative and respond with the existing infrastructure to reach the vulnerable and most affected. These innovative initiatives manifest their readiness to be the comforting presence of the Risen Lord and His unfathomable love amidst this challenging environment.

Let us uphold our Congregation by constantly connecting ourselves with our Master Jesus, adorning ourselves with His convictions, creativity, effectiveness, and fruitfulness, and sharpening our vision with His vision - the new earth and the new heaven. May we be the smart and heroic witnesses of Jesus by becoming little Claudines in this digital era!

On behalf of Sr. Elizabeth Miranda, Superior General and the General Team, I appreciate the collaborative and meticulous work done by Sr. Judy Gomez and the editorial team to release this issue - **Crossian Connect**, August 2021.

God Bless!

A YES! TO HIS DEFINITE AND MYSTERIOUS PLANS...



Sr. Jiji Mathew
For Crossian Connect Team

A young husband in the waiting shed of the hospital round the clock for seventeen long days was shattered when he faced the grim reality of the demise of his 32-year-old wife due to Covid 19, leaving him with the care of their two kids. In an encounter with him, I realised how distressed and depressed he was. His questions deep and sharp left me dumbfounded: why does God take away young mothers and breadwinners of families? Why do many good people die? What is this human life all about? Though confused, subsequently, these questions led me to a deeper reflection. My contemplation ended with the words of St. Paul, “Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:20).

Yes, our belief in life after death and that God has a definite and mysterious plan for every person is intensified now, as we too, the family of the Sisters of the Cross of Chavanod, share in the agony of

humanity with the premature departure of some of our very dear sisters and family members.

“Lord, teach us to number our days” (Ps 90:12). Through this prayer, the Psalmist exhorts the pursuit of wisdom and viewing life through the perspective of God, with candid expressions about life and its challenging circumstances. The demands of the present unprecedented state of affairs, sudden changes in our daily routines, and the necessity of developing new skills require insightful reflection about the plans and purposes of God in our lives and the creative realignment of our plans and projects in accordance with His will.

People begin to slow down and look at their neighbours from a different perspective all over the world. Here, there, and everywhere, we are waking up to a new reality, the hard-core truths on how big or small we really are, how little control we have and what really matters. The global health crisis has brought about some personal transformation in you and me and has paved the way to build up our resilience to remain ever open to the plans of God.

Many of us must have shed tears and had goosebumps while reading the book 'Mother Veronica Pollien,' the book that recounts the interventions and involvement of our first missionaries to India at the outbreak of cholera, famine, and drought,

finally, some even having succumbed to death. Let us spare no effort to contribute to our might personally and collectively to alleviate human suffering. At this moment of history, as Pope Francis proposes through His message on the World Day of Peace 2021, the necessity to cultivate a Culture of Care is very pertinent and significant.

May the personal sharing and reflections of this issue of **Crossian Connect** fill us with a ray of hope, deepen our family bond and enlighten and inspire each other! Your contributions to society and **Crossian Connect**, despite the ill effects of Covid 19, are highly valued. A special note of thanks to our Superior General, Sr. Elizabeth Miranda, and her team for their constant support, to Sr. Daisy, the link person, for her promptness, to Sr. Judy Gomez and to Sr. Elsy John and other members of the Communication team for their willingness to collaborate for this issue.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Rom 8:35)” May these words St. Paul uttered with conviction fill us with a greater passion and thirst to serve our Saviour Crucified and thus transform our identity as Sisters of the Cross into a tangible reality now and always!



WALKING ALONG WITH FAMILIES IN THEIR FAITH JOURNEY

Sr. Gnana Sundari
Province of Tenali

In response to the 2019 General Chapter, the Sisters of the Cross were invited to work for the integral well-being of families through family apostolate in the light of New Evangelisation. The invitation to work in this field is not something new. Earlier, the report of the First Provincial Chapter, July 2018, invited the Sisters of the Province of Tenali to reach out to families, share in their brokenness, listen, accompany them in their struggle for unity and reconciliation, and nurture their faith and trust in God. It was a call for the consecrated to accompany families in their faith journey.

Jesus, during his lifetime, reached out with compassion and love to families that were overburdened with their daily crosses. He has already set a model for the family apostolate in the gospels. Further, Pope Francis urges all the families to look to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph for sure inspiration in our context. He says, "No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families constantly need to grow and mature in the ability to love." In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on 'Amoris Laetitia' (The joy of love in the family) published on 8th April 2016, the Pope speaks about family in depth. He points out that if God's love lacks in the family, the family loses its harmony. Self-centeredness overpowers, and joy fades.

A family that experiences faith communicates peace and harmony naturally. Thus, it becomes the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the leaven of society. Being captivated by Pope Francis's words on the role of



family, I was challenged to venture into this apostolate in my ministry. And therefore, I assumed the challenge of the 2019 General Chapter. I started family ministry in G.B. Palem, a substation of Kollipara parish. About 100 families come to church from this locality. Initially, I was afraid to go out of myself to meet the families where they are. But later, it was a rewarding and spiritually enriching experience for me. The simple faith of the people confronted me to encounter the God within. During the visits, I came across different types of families at G.B. Palem. Each family had its unique faith story to tell. Their faith stories flowed from their lived experiences of God's salvation. They may often not fit into our expectations. Therefore, the call for me was to listen to the story of God's work in their lives as they shared.



What I observed in this apostolate is their openness to encounter God in the

families. Their way of living Christian faith in the family is a mystery: some are wounded by their bitter past, some are joyful, and some are still struggling to find a stronghold. From the rich experiences I have had by visiting the families, I would like to share a couple of personal stories here below:

I was amazed at the simple life of Mrs. Rani, who wasted many years going after possessions, thinking that they would give her lasting joy, but they gave her only sadness and a kind of emptiness within. This void led her to seek God. Listening to her further, I helped her understand the mystery of God's love as I narrated the story of Abraham, who accepted to go to the unknown land and was ever ready to sacrifice his only son to God as a result of his faith in Him. My spiritual talk on the mystery of God's love brought her transformation and enabled her to be regular for church. I experienced joy at heart seeing her coming to church with spiritual thirst.

Further, I met another woman in tears for her drunkard husband, who neither went to church nor was a responsible father. His sheer appearance was a dreadful thing to his children. The whole family lived in utter poverty because of his irresponsible behaviour. I was amazed at the faith of this woman. Even in such a condition, she strongly believed in the grace of God. She invited me to visit her family and conduct family prayers to bring about spiritual transformation in him. I admired her faith and I spoke of Jesus' love towards the sinners, the

prostitutes, the oppressed and the downtrodden in society. Jesus always stood at the side of the people who had no dignity and identity in society. Jesus has a compassionate heart to go after the lost sheep. I helped the family to understand the love of Jesus, who goes after the lost and the least. The sharing on the Word of God enabled the family to experience Jesus as a tonic for a wounded heart. This sharing brought some change in the life of her husband. This same experience helped me to continue to have trust in the Divine Providence.

There are many more experiences during my visit to the families, which disturbed and inspired me to realise



the importance of family ministry. This ministry requires conscious effort from a religious to be part of them. I gather the family members and share the importance of family life and their role in the Church. People like me conducting family prayers, and they invite me to each family to do the same. I realise from my experience that there are five

essential elements to the family ministry, namely prayer, presence, compassionate listening, loving accompaniment, and acts of charity. We must be well aware of these elements because we go to the families as messengers of Lord's love and mercy. These five elements helped me to bring transformation in the hearts of the affected family members during my visit.

I strive to help the families take the model of the holy family of Nazareth. Family ministry is a channel to create reciprocal love among the couples and help them to be faithful to God, to one another and to their commitment.

BEHOLD THE HEART!

Sr. Diana Mathew
Province of Trichy



My heart refuses to believe all that happened in the recent past, in which the hours of darkness seemed to have prevailed over light. My heart stood still as I heard the sad news that a heart loved by all of us stopped beating on 17th May 2021. The echoes of the voice of Sr. Jyothi Selvaraj are still heard in our houses; her innocent smile is still fresh in our memory; the positivity which she breathed into us is still vibrant. Today, we have yet another chance to thank her for the way she brightened our lives through her impeccable heart.

At this juncture, I am reminded of the words of Buddha, “A pretty face gets old, a nice body will change, but a good heart will always be good”. A human Heart! How can I define it? A mere organ? The faculty of love or feeling and emotion? A symbol of compassion? No explanation would suffice. The heart is something incredibly special, unfathomable, and

undisclosed. No beauty shines brighter than that of a good heart. In medical terms, heart is a vital muscular organ at the centre of the body that pumps blood into all the organs providing oxygen and nutrients. Unlike the other organs of the body, the heart has various dimensions. We all agree that the heart is not only a physical entity but also a spiritual, relational, and emotional one.

We have experienced these dimensions in the heart of Sr. Jyothi. Her heart spoke volumes of spiritual and emotional well-being. It was the epitome of love and compassion; it spread the aroma of kindness and gentleness all around.

A heart that was overflowing with love

“God is love, whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.” (1 Jn 4:16)

The heart embodies love, and love symbolises Sr. Jyothi. She had an exceptional memory, and she made use of it only to spread the fragrance of love. She encompassed everyone in her heart without any discrimination. Those who knew her closely might have heard her heartbeat, which resounded, “Love God and love people.” Her heart expressed her love through her evergreen smile and shining eyes. I have heard several people say, both from the province and outside, that Sr. Jyothi is motherly. None would deny this fact, for her motherly love overflowed with joy from her heart. The sisters who had her as their Superior would speak volumes about her maternal nature. All the sisters felt free to share everything with her as confidentiality was the hallmark of her heart.

A heart that was brimming with compassion and forgiveness

“As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.” (Col 3:12)

Sr. Jyothi's heart was the essence of compassion and forgiveness. She never failed to share it with anyone who needed it. She had preferential compassion for the poor and the underprivileged, which was known through her charitable works. She always had a special love for the supportive staff and domestic workers. Often, she used to say, “Sisters, come on time for meals so that the workers need not wait long to have their meals.” Her heart melted when people came to her for consolation. Her heart was ever ready to forgive and accept those who hurt her. Her heart never held any contempt and revenge despite the hurts and coldness it received. Like the prodigal Father, her heart often longed to be reconciled with others when misunderstood.

A heart that was of a good shepherd

“I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (Jn 10:11)

Permit me to call Sr. Jyothi “a Good Shepherdess,” as her heart was so magnanimous to accommodate everyone into it. She had a unique style of animating the province. Every sister was so precious to her, and she approached everyone with love and mercy. She took care of the sick and the weak. She was fond of the senior sisters and often visited them. She always addressed everyone, including the juniors, respectfully. Each sister was so special to her, and she loved them with all her strengths and limitations. Like the good shepherdess, she knew very well the smell of her sheep, was willing to suffer for the sake of the sheep and strived to promote unity and oneness.



A heart that was vibrating with positivity

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the Will of God for you in Jesus Christ.” (1 Thess 5:16)

“Think positive, be positive and speak positively. Do it every day and make it a habit” was the motto of Sr. Jyothi. Her heart always vibrated with positive energy, which resonated in our lives too. She firmly believed that when one is optimistic, it makes one better and makes those around better. On several occasions, she used to say, “Never look at the shadow of a person, but look at their brighter side.” Neither a complaint nor a word of pessimism came out of her mouth. She could even face humiliations and insults with a broad smile. Her presence created ripples of positivity and offered positive strokes to the disappointed and the discouraged ones.

A heart that was in communion with God

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me bear much fruit.” (Jn 15:5)

Staying close to the fire keeps us warm; walking through the fresh breeze makes us feel refreshed; being in the rose garden for a long time lets us smell like roses. No doubt, we inherit the traits of what we are connected to. Sr. Jyothi was always connected to God. Thus she was able to inherit the characters of the Divine.

This connectivity enabled her to be closely related to people of all social classes. Anyone could easily get connected to her because she was a woman of God. Her spirituality is remarkably simple but deep and high, i.e., love God and love people. Even in her agonising pain, she was found united with her beloved Lord.

A heart that was resonating respect and reverence

“Love one another with mutual affection, outdo one another in showing honour.” (Rom 12:10)

Sr. Jyothi's heart communicated tremendous respect and reverence to everyone, be it a formee or a senior sister. She was a person of self-respect and confidence. This, in turn, enabled her to treat others with the same respect and dignity. She treated even the small children with respect, reminding us of Jesus Christ and His words (cf. Mt 18:3; 19:14). As the famous scientist Albert Einstein said, “Everyone should be respected as an individual, but no one idolised,” Sr. Jyothi esteemed the individuality of every person. For her, a domestic worker or a principal, a novice or a sister, everyone was a child of God.

A heart that was truly committed

“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.” (Prov 16:3)

As a consecrated person, Sr. Jyothi was incredibly committed to the core and faithfully lived her vocation to the full. As an ardent but straightforward teacher, she was more pleased to instruct the poor children in the villages. As a Novice Mistress, gentle and firm, she dedicated herself to form her novices with tender love and care. As a spiritual guide, she accompanied many sisters in their life's journey. She helped them to be open to the Spirit and discern their way of life. As an animator of the community and the province, she revealed to everyone her spiritual

motherhood. She was committed to her responsibility as Provincial till her last breath.

A heart that was surrendering

“My Father, let your will be done.”
(Mt 26:42)

The heart of Sr. Jyothi was always at the disposal of God's Will. She was docile to the Spirit that led her throughout her life. With a spirit of surrender, she faced the fluctuations of life: joys and sorrows and the bright and dark sides. Like clay in the potter's hands, she abandoned herself into her master's hands right from the

first day of her commitment till her last breath. It is true in the life of Sr. Jyothi. In her pains, both physical and mental, she surrendered herself to God. Though a person of endurance, towards the end of her life while being in the hospital, she cried out often the name of Jesus, yelling with pain and agony. At last, in her helplessness and complete abandonment, she surrendered herself to the one who called her, saying 'It is finished,' and commended her spirit to the Lord and rested in peace, leaving behind a vacuum in our hearts.

We have indeed lost a beautiful soul that left our hearts in grief. We are united by paying homage to her and carrying her dream of evolving as a province, remarkable in loving God and neighbour. Whenever we remember her heart that cherished only the goodness of others, we would be inspired to take another step towards our goal in religious life. God has chosen the best and has taken away the best. She has vanished from our sight but not from our hearts. Adieu, dear Sr. Jyothi!

CAUGHT UP IN THE PLAN OF THE FATHER

Sr. Veronica Fernandes
Province of Pune



“Caught up in the plan of the Father...” (ROL 2, p. 4) has always fascinated me. Today, it makes more sense as I look back at my life and see how the Lord has been leading and guiding me sometimes through turbulent waters, rocky mountainous roads, steep cliffs, thorny paths, thick jungles, and at other times through peaceful waters, even paths, verdant meadows, broad valleys, clear avenues. Of course, this must be the experience of all people as it has also been the experience of Jesus Himself, and of Mary and Joseph, and our beloved Founders. Though some things are common, yet each one's experience is so unique and special.

Having been actively involved in the education ministry from the age of sixteen, when learned and learned right till I quit at the age of 64, I felt so fulfilled because I

enjoyed a close bonding with my students, teachers, and parents. Teaching has been my passion. Over the past two years, God has given me opportunities to be in touch with this ministry through counselling students in school and helping candidates in their studies.

But there comes a time in one's life when the words of the English poet, John Milton, come to mind: “They also serve who only stand and wait.” Life's experiences have taught me the beautiful lesson of 'waiting on the Lord.' Isaiah 40: 31 reads thus: “They who wait for the Lord renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint”. How consoling!

Whenever I am at crossroads, struggling and confused, trying to crack the puzzle of life, it is the plan

of the Father that enfolds me and unfolds itself in His time, and soon all the struggle vanishes, and the calm follows.

When everything goes on well in my life, I praise God and say, “Lord, may your will be done,” but when things do not go my way, why do I fail to praise God and say, “Lord, may your will be done? That means I am not caught up in the plan of the Father. The study of the Rule of Life has been an immense help to me in understanding the ways and plan of God.

Allowing myself to be 'caught up in the plan of the Father' means to me:

- Being available for Mission: Sometimes, I was asked to accept complex tasks outside my area of competence. After representing my case, if the Major Superior still insisted on me taking up the ministry, I

assumed it as God's will, and I found myself blessed. "Lord, I come to do your will."

- Being ready for a 'NO': When I ask for permissions, and I get a categorical 'NO' for an answer even after explaining my difficulty or point of view, I accept it cheerfully and feel relaxed and peaceful. "Lord, give me the peace that the world cannot give."
- Meeting the Cross of Christ: When I am faced with rejection, misunderstanding, unfair criticism, injustice, humiliations all that mars my image I reflect on what Jesus confronted and bore for me, and that gives me consolation and strength. "Passion of Christ strengthen me."
- Finding the Father's love always at work: When I look upon the whole of humanity and the entire creation as a beautiful gift of God, I begin to relate to them with love, respect and hope and appreciate the Lord's hand leading me to deepen my life in Him. "All things are Thine, O Lord, I offer Thee what I receive from Thy hands."
- Living joyfully a life of humility, abnegation, and detachment from self: Right from my novitiate days, I learnt that 'Humility is Truth.' In my younger days, I had traits of pride and arrogance that hampered my spiritual growth. Once I became aware of these characteristics, I started working on them with my

spiritual guides and discovered that true joy comes from a life of humility and the renouncement of one's ego. "Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto Thine."

- Living the Paschal attitude: Christ not only suffered and died for us but also won heaven for us through His resurrection. Earlier I asked questions, like, 'Is suffering a punishment for sin?' But after reflecting on the Paschal Mystery of Jesus and identifying myself with Him, I became convinced that suffering has redemptive value. So, whenever I encountered suffering, I knew deep within that it would soon be followed by a 'resurrection moment.' "Lord, help me be an Easter person."
- Being attentive to the movements of the Spirit: It is the Holy Spirit that enables us to experience the saving love of Christ and share it with others. When confronted with varied options, calling on the Holy Spirit helped me discern what the Lord expected of me. "Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me."
- Fulfilling our unique Mission: Our founders have eloquently expressed our unique Mission in our Rule of Life. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that as a Sister of the Cross, there is no better way of living authentically than by revealing to all those who are good to me and those who have

hurt me, those to whom I am good and those whom I have hurt, - the merciful love of the Father and the liberating power of the Paschal Mystery. What a liberating thought! "Mercy Lord, I have sinned. Answer now my prayer."

- Getting into quarantine with the Father: One of the keywords, after Covid-19 has hit the world, is 'quarantine'. This word has looked at me in the face on many occasions. At every turn of my life, I have got into quarantine with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and found answers to my many doubts and questions. Yes, sometimes, I have been impatient. But these quarantine periods of my life have taught me to be patient with myself. "Lord, enkindle me with your love and fill me with the fruits of the Spirit."

As a result of being caught up in the plan of the Father, I have received these blessings:

- My faith and trust in the Lord has increased.
- I have become more hopeful.
- I enjoy deep peace and serenity.
- I give love and am ready to receive love.
- I feel secure in the plan of the Father.

I thank my God repeatedly for this soul-soothing experience of 'being caught up in the plan of the Father' and pray that it may live on in my life.

TOWARDS THE PERIPHERY



Sr. Alphonse Raj, SCC
Province of Trichy



“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (Jn 10:10)

The vision of our ministry is 'to give life in abundance to those deprived of life.' Our life-giving force is to radiate the joy of the liberating power of the Paschal Mystery and reveal the merciful love of God, our common Father. We thus attribute meaning to the suffering of the most vulnerable groups by becoming a source of joy and cause of liberation.

People infected with HIV/AIDS (PLHAs) are the most socially marginalised, morally stigmatised, and labelled as 'untouchable and sinful.' Even knowledgeable people are afraid to associate with them. Some believe, “Why should we help people who voluntarily invite something harmful for life and are morally stigmatised?” Contrary to this belief, we are even more convinced to deepen our involvement joyfully because Jesus came not for the righteous but the sinners.

Though the death rates of HIV/AIDS patients have dropped considerably, the agony of the infected persons is intense and long-standing. Strict adherence to continuous medication cripples their entire health system, with side effects affecting even the vital organs. Not only their life span is reduced but also the whole life pattern is damaged with the denial of basic rights. They struggle to relate with the public to overcome the social stigma attached. They strive to fulfil their daily commitments. Most of them are drivers, textile workers, and some are farmers on a daily wage. The demanding work and the hot climate affect them much. They need support. The New Dawn Social Centre, one of the units of Claudine Society for Development Action, started the project for HIV/AIDS infected and affected persons in June 2003, in Holy Cross Convent Namakkal and was later transferred to Paramathy in the same district.

The project has a comprehensive

approach to respond to their physical, psychological, and spiritual needs. We have adopted a firm policy on being people-oriented rather than project-oriented. We aim at not merely relief or rehabilitation but focus on social justice-oriented holistic development.

We look forward to a progressive control of the viral attack and a positive approach to life, instilling in them hope and optimism that they may enter the mainstream of life as a dignified, responsible citizen who can not only receive but also contribute to society potentially. We encourage peer group support and peer group counselling. A good number of our PLHAs have volunteered to render service to their fellow PLHAs.

Mission of the New Dawn Social Centre

The Namakkal district of Tamilnadu is the most affected region of HIV infection, ranging from 15,000 to 16,000 out of 117,000 inhabitants. We cover the whole district by dividing our units into six blocks. We cater to 400 PLHAs and 200 children; among them, 75 children are infected.

Involvement of the New Dawn Social Centre

Medical Camps



Monthly medical camps are conducted in six places in the district. We provide health and medical services to the PLHAs. Besides this, we also arrange for health education through periodical sessions on nutrition, ayurveda, naturopathy, yoga, etc. Regular health monitoring is assured.



Village Visits

As a follow up to the camp, the field staff visits them in their houses. Each block has its own field staff. We take care of the patient and the entire family. During the family visit, the staff assess the family situation to offer economic support, education of the children, home counselling, and many more.

Economic Support

We also support the PLHAs, providing a monthly ration of rice, grocery, medicines, sponsorship/scholarships for children, free housing with the government's help, and employment arrangements. To make them self-reliant, life skill-trainings are given in goat rearing, textiles, poultry etc. We rear goats and give them at a subsidised rate.

Counselling



The PLHAs easily give in to depression; hence suicidal tendency is common among them. Psychological support is given through counselling on positive living and safe sex practices, regular adherence to treatment, family disputes, self and social acceptance to overcome stigma discrimination.

Drop-in Centre

Whenever they feel low, they visit the New Dawn Center for treatment, counselling, relaxation, and spiritual support.

Referral Work

The destitute and the orphans are referred to other institutions (Hospices and centres). The infected boys and girls are also sent to different homes. Seriously ill patients are supported to reach specialised hospitals.

Free Legal Aid Cell

Free legal aid cell is organised with the support of the District Court of Namakkal to help settle the legal issues. Weekly sessions on legal counselling are conducted, and the lawyer assigned by the court does alternative court hearings.

Home-Based Care

Persons who are terminally ill are taken care of in their own houses. A trained nurse visits them, and the relatives are motivated to take care of them.

Child Welfare

We have a home for HIV patients and other vulnerable children, and nearly 40-59 children benefit from it. We have maintained close contact with the children who left the institute. All of them are well settled. Some of them receive support for their higher education, a few have settled in other states and even abroad.

Outreach Programme

Through our outreach programme, we are in close contact with nearly 200 children. Periodical meetings on education, personality development, sports, carrier guidance and the like are conducted.

During Lockdown and the Coronavirus Pandemic

We continue offering online services during the lockdown and the coronavirus pandemic. Since we cannot gather them for medical camps and house visits, we call them daily to know their needs. The field staff arrange for door delivery of food items, medicine etc.

Due to the pandemic, we had to close the Children's home temporarily. But they are offered home-based care. We call them daily to assess their online classes. All their needs are taken care of. Periodically, they visit the New Dawn Centre just for a change and relaxation, in small groups. We use this opportunity for a health checkup, counselling, and assessment of their progress in studies.



As we engage in evangelising this most vulnerable section of society, we get evangelised. We meet the Cross of Christ in the heart of our apostolic life. Stress and tension are part of this noble initiative. This experience enables us to turn our difficult moments into joy with paschal optimism. As they are helped to transcend pain and suffering into a life-giving, liberating force, we too get transformed in Christ, the source of life in abundance.

DISSEMINATING THE LOVE OF JESUS TO HUMANITY

Sr. Sangeeta Pereira
Province of Amravati



In March 2020, the pandemic set off an unforeseen misery, and the whole world stood helpless. No race or religion was spared; neither the rich nor the poor, neither the educated nor the illiterate.

The priests and religious in India, as customary, rose to the occasion. When faced with challenges that others dare not step in, the Church comes with an inspiring outreach to display the grandness of compassion to the needy: jobless poor, slum dwellers, rickshaw pullers, scavengers, domestic workers, street children, mentally retarded, prisoners, physically challenged, police personnel, doctors, nurses all becoming beneficiaries.



In April 2021, I was also called to write a new chapter of my ministry in the Bhandaraj Social Centre of Amravati Province, where I am placed to run the Social Centre. Over the past fifty years and more, we have been working among the tribal community, organising several programmes in education, women empowerment, youth development, farm activities, family counselling, etc., for the illiterate and the underdeveloped tribal communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic beckoned me to offer my service in my capacity. Not knowing where to begin or how

to get into it, I turned to my community and sat down with them for a brainstorming session where all the members threw in their ideas and explored a wide range of possibilities.



As 'One body and one Mission', we decided to start packing food kits for distribution as the immediate step. The discussions went on late at night with all staff members at the Social Centre, Health Centre, Counseling Centre, volunteers, and lay associates. The next worrisome thought was who would provide the necessary items? I sought permission from all the funding arms of the Social Centre. With one mind and heart, each of them allowed me to reallocate the budget provisions towards this humanitarian service to express our compassion by forsaking our comfort. Pulses, grains, oil, ingredients, tea leaves, salt, etc., were ordered in quintals. Over a month, it continued.

As the kits were getting ready, the distribution committee rolled out their duties to distant villages. Bulk mask stitching was also undertaken. Sanitiser kits were simultaneously added to the distribution programme. We educated the villagers, especially the womenfolk, not to fall prey to the Coronavirus. We could proudly but with grateful hearts say that we could

reach out to 3744 families. It did not stop there, but our concern is expressed to wherever it is required even today.

Health became another chapter in this whirlwind. The lockdown sealed all boundaries and blocked access to the medical facilities for the remote villagers. With over 1000 sister doctors, 25,000 sister nurses, and more than 10,000 doing paramedical service, I could not shut my eyes or mind and resort to comfort. I took the initiative by joining hands with the health centre personnel to sort out a remedy to reach the remote villagers. Extension service of the mobile clinic was arranged with medical staff to serve the villagers for common illnesses like cold, cough, fever, stomach ailments and so on. Anything beyond their capability was referred to accessible hospitals. The staff risked their lives to serve humanity. Our persistent thought was to help people affected due to lockdown. We did not have a second thought to surrender our hospital to Covid Care Centre for the required period.



The pandemic has created an environment of uncertainties. Children are at home with schools closed; the aged are afraid of being quick victims and are vulnerable to

financial constraints. Therefore it was important for me to join hands with all the local resources. The visit of the district officer, Mrs. Mane, helped us in many ways like recognition for any further activities, permissions to move around in lockdowns.

The relaxation of the lockdown gave some relief to everybody during the latter part of the year. But now, all over again, the second wave of Covid-19 is an adverse situation from being comfortable. The real and long-term answer will be in moving completely with the norms and apply preventive measures from a human

point of view. It is also compelling us to have a sound human-nature relationship with the planet with the combination of social, economic, and environmental equity.

We started the mission by the mid of March, it continued till April, May and June, and we did our best. We help because people need help, irrespective of creed, caste, language, or place. This reaching out to the needy with no ulterior motive is, after all, the characteristics of our beloved Mother Claudine, which I learnt from the Family Annals and the early sisters of my Holy Cross family.

My mission and consecration invite me to a life of prayer. Full and absolute assent of the supreme will of God in adoration and worship is my call today. The pandemic world is a real-time to participate in the mystery of my beloved spouse Jesus, dead and risen in His mission in the world. It is time for me to reveal to the suffering humanity the merciful love of the Father and the liberating power of the Paschal mystery. Therefore, I join my hands to pray to the Almighty every morning to seek the wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all my actions.



MEEKLY SURRENDERING TO THE WILL OF GOD

Sr. Soma Jose SCC
Province of Amravati

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought life to a standstill and ended up affecting our lives in unimaginable ways. Though these have been difficult times for us, we can see the hand of God leading and directing us. I would like to share an experience of mine. We have been praying for our sisters and many others to be healed from the virus and its related complications. But God had different plans for them. Every person admitted to the hospital or battling the virus at home returned either to their communities or families or to their heavenly abode.

I found it extremely hard to accept the death of Sr. Augusta Lakra, Fr. Rijo Francis MSFS and Sr. Mary John OSU (my maternal grand-aunt). Along with everyone else, I, too, was praying for their healing. During Lauds one day, something prompted me to pray for the will of God for these three and many others who were suffering from Covid-19. For the first time in my life, I did not want to pray

for the will of God, so I ignored that voice and continued to pray the way I wished to pray, for their recovery. Previous experiences in life have taught me that God's will, in most cases, is hard to accept when there is a life-threatening situation as it might entail a physical separation from our loved ones forever.

When I received the sad news of their deaths on three consecutive days (Sr. Augusta on 11th May, Fr. Rijo MSFS on 12th May, and my Aunt Sr. Mary John on 13th May), I found myself shaken up in disbelief. I started questioning my faith because all my prayers went to waste and were ignored. I found it hard to accept this painful reality. At that moment, I felt I was to be blamed for the situation. Perhaps if I had paid heed to the voice and prayed for the will of God for them, it most probably would have lessened the pain of loss. I was disturbed deep within and shared this with my spiritual guide. He began by asking me, "Sister, where is your

faith?" and continued saying, "Our prayers are always answered, either in this life or in the life to come." One day, I shared this disturbing feeling, while at the table, that our prayers are unanswered. At that time, two of our sisters, Sr. Sabina and Sr. Gloria, reminded me of the same thing, differently. They assured me that God has a plan for everyone, and even if we do not get the expected results, our prayers are answered.

Then I began to reflect and realise that my ego was prohibiting me from praying for the will of God, especially regarding those three departed souls. As I kept on reflecting, I realised that the more I surrender and pray for the will of God, the easier it is for me to accept the heartbreaking news. It brought me back to the conclusion that God knows the best, does the best for the entire universe.

The news of death, especially that of the consecrated men and women, continues to give me pain deep

within, but I can see it in the light of faith. This experience has also made me consciously and mindfully pray for those in their last agony that God may give them the grace of a happy and peaceful death.

Looking back, though this pandemic and lockdown had brought in a lot of pain, sorrow, and misery, it has also been a period of grace, of bonding in our communities and families like never before. If we take time to reflect, we will be able to see the

numerous ways in which God has been merciful to all of us.

As we continue to face and fight this pandemic, knowing well how fragile life has become, let us strive to spread love, joy, laughter, forgiveness and empathy the rest remove as we journey on. As we are all human, we might end up failing in the process but let us continue to radiate, reflect on these and many other beautiful virtues.

I especially pray for grace, strength, and healing to all of us going through the pain of losing a loved one.

May Abba Father bring to completion the good he has started in us and whenever it is time for us to go, may we and those dear to our hearts gracefully accept it saying Amen!

May we stay safe, stay blessed while striving to be a blessing wherever we are.

WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT OUR DOOR STEP....



Sr. Valsa Joseph
Province of Angamaly



Just as it is impossible to predict the origin of the pandemic, the virulence of the strain, and the number of waves, it is impossible to pinpoint the precise moment when the health facilities began to enact their pandemic preparedness plans. Suddenly we realised that the second surge of Covid-19 was at our doorstep. *Malur* hospital, which works on very thin profit margins with minimum facilities, was certainly panic-stricken when it was declared as a Covid Care Centre by the office of the deputy commissioner of the district of Kolar, Karnataka. The shortage of staff, the inadequacy of space, the insufficiency of supplies and equipment, and shortage of facilities were a test and threat before us. There was no time left to discuss

the questions like how, who, where, and when of things as they stood and a quick overall planning was carried out in an emergency meeting of the sisters on staff working in the hospital.

Improvising physical facilities was an arduous task that demanded astute planning to contain the virus and shift and rearrange equipment and supplies. There was pressure from the government authorities for 50 percentage of the beds to be reserved for patients referred by them, covered by an insurance scheme that brought in much obligatory onerous paperwork with uncertain outcomes. The reluctance and indisposition of the lay nursing staff put the onus of care for the positive patients on the sister nurses. The sudden resignation

of a few other non-medical staff and not having a physician round-the-clock to evaluate and decide regarding the ailing patients and not having enough ventilators to manage the patients who took bad added to our burning concerns.

When we encounter setbacks and failure and the consequent agony, God will heal the pain in our hearts and guide us to deal with hardships. Standing on the promises of the Lord beyond all our inadequacies, we were set to receive the patients on 25th April 2021, 10 beds with oxygen and eight beds without oxygen, of which 50% was reserved for referrals from Government. Setting up a triage to categorise the patients at the OPD, pooling resources, and coordinating the whole situation was very cumbersome in the initial days. But the anguish of the patients panting for breath and the anxious tear-filled eyes of their dear ones made every staff from the counter to the wards completely forget about their difficulties spurring them to act with compassion.

The Lord our Shepherd, who





CHAI, Caritas India, and the like also lent their helping hand.

It is a God-given opportunity that, on behalf of the Province and the Congregation, with the little that we have, we continue to wage war against the Covid-19. It brings immense joy to our hearts when a patient is healed and discharged despite the mental stress and strain we go through at the sight of their suffering, trying to save them from the clutches of death. To date, we have cared for more than 150 Covid patients, which included a few surgeries and about 15 deaths. Though the number of cases has reduced remarkably, we continue to have few inpatients, and we are now set to face another surge.



promised that there is nothing that we shall want when we are under His care, began working miracles at our initiatives. A physician and a resident medical officer joined us on their own accord, and we were ready to go about our Covid duty. Sr. Elsy George, our Provincial, arranged personnel to help us out from the province. The local medical institutions like CRI,

May the words of St. Paul to Timothy, “For God has not given us the Spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7) resonate in our hearts, enhancing our spiritual, physical, and mental well-being, as we continue our journey to reflect the healing love of Jesus to humanity.



JOY OF SERVING THE CHILDREN OF THE GOOD GOD

Sr. Christine Leonard
Province of East Africa

Greetings from the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, the crown of Africa! Our founders have left us a legacy of breaking new grounds and setting new trends. Father Mermier exclaimed, “I want the Missions”, and Mother Claudine's vision was “To make the Good God Known and loved.” Walking closely in their footsteps, I find fulfilment in serving the good God in the poor and the needy of our milieu.

My motto is 'Find joy in all that I do.' The quantum of joy that I experience in my mission is the yardstick of my consecrated life. With a burning ardour to serve the good God, I consecrated myself entirely to Him through the task entrusted to me as the Province Bursar cum teacher in our Girls' Secondary School.

According to our education system in Tanzania, we have two mediums of

instruction - Swahili from nursery to Class VII and English from Class I onwards. This system is followed in government schools. We also have private schools where the English language is taught from nursery to university. In our school for 'O' level (form one to form four), we enrol students from both categories - Swahili and English speaking. Those from Swahili medium find it very hard to mingle with others due to culture shock, poor self-image, and the underprivileged background. They feel like a fish out of water and regret not having had access to the English language earlier.

As a teacher, I need to understand, initiate, and accommodate them to this new education environment through constant encouragement, positive affirmations, and persistent effort. I walk the extra mile to give

them special coaching in this foreign language, which is hard for them to acquire. They even dread to pronounce this language. I help them to accept as they are and to stay positive to achieve their goals. Sharing my life experiences brightens up their faces with radiant joy, which is so encouraging and promising. I instruct other students to help them and avoid negative criticism while learning the English language. Above all, I try to impart to them the important lesson that God loves a cheerful giver and thus, by helping others, one is blessed. This simple message is well understood; many are persuaded and ready to reach out to help. I find them competing to reach out to the other, thus grabbing the opportunity to be a blessing.

The continuous help given to these weaker students in my class has

brought a tremendous change in them: their sad and fearful demeanour is replaced with joy; their tied tongues which couldn't pronounce a word in English can now sing melodiously in the same language which once intimidated them; their bodies that experienced stiffness when reading in English is now flexible and light; the English book which was seen as a monster is now embraced as life promoting and as a stepping stone for their success. With this great progress they have made, I am confident that they will build a strong future. For, the



students who once cried when queried about their plans at their initial stage can now articulate their goal in life with ease and great confidence. It is so soul-lifting to hear them say that they

want to be doctors, engineers, pilots, teachers and so on. I feel overwhelmed, and there breaks forth a pure bliss in my heart to fulfil my mission for the Glory of God and salvation of souls.

Drawn by the words of Jesus, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these' (Mt 19.14), I am thankful to God who has allowed me to mould these young souls. The joy of seeing these little ones blooming and growing happily is my greatest reward.

MY LIFE IS IN YOUR HANDS



Sr. Shirani Fonseka
Province of Sri Lanka

The year 2000 was a turning point in my life as I was diagnosed with kidney disease. Though I found it hard to accept initially, the grace of God enabled me to surrender and live with it, of course, while taking the necessary treatment. I now lead my life as usual and am engaged in various ministries.

In the year 2018, I was at Hingurakgoda Community, taking care of the children's home. Towards the end of the year, I fell seriously ill. My legs were swollen, and I used to feel tired and lifeless. I was unable to carry out my ministry, so, in the year 2019, I was transferred to Padiwatte Community. A dark cloud of thoughts lingered on me. I sadly concluded that my active life was over and that I would never be able to work actively again. So, I packed up all the reference books that I used for my Catechetical work.

After coming to Padiwatte, Kandy, I started my treatments at Kandy Kidney Hospital. Looking at my

medical reports, the very first day itself, the doctor advised me to go for dialysis without any delay, and this deeply distressed me. The doctor discussed my condition with my sisters. I was advised to go for counselling. The doctor also prescribed the hepatitis injection, which was so painful and an erythropoietin injection to increase the rate of haemoglobin in my body. I went for counselling to a nurse accompanied by Sr. Philomina and Sr. Ruth. During the counselling session, she explained the two dialysis methods, and I was asked to choose one among them. Although I was not too happy to go for any dialysis, I preferred peritoneal dialysis to hemodialysis because I could do it myself in the convent with the hope of being active in my community. The counsellor counselled my sisters regarding my care. Words are inadequate to articulate the amount of tension, confusion, turmoil, and emotional upheaval I underwent during those days.

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak” (Is 40:29). I trusted in these words of the prophet. I felt strengthened by the sisters and their fervent prayers. They too encouraged me, saying, “Shirani, you need not go for dialysis at all.” I felt so comforted to hear these words that acted as a balm to my angst-ridden mind. My Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR) level was very low, and my creatinine level was high. Whenever I went to the clinic, the doctor suggested dialysis as an option. I used to give excuses to postpone it to the following month. Each time the doctors scribbled in my clinic book, “Sister is not willing.”

But the all-powerful God was so good to me, and He helped me live through the past two years without going for any dialysis. Praise the Lord! It is a mystery beyond my understanding and nothing short of a miracle! I can experience the power of God in me. He holds my hand and walks with me. Sometimes I wonder why God loves

me so much. What good have I done that He showers so many blessings on me? The ardent prayers of my sisters and others have contributed much to this remarkable recovery. I hear the words of Jesus, “Daughter, your faith has healed you” (Mk. 5:34).

In May 2021, when the pandemic situation in the country was at its peak, I had some health complications and was hospitalised. I

was asked to wear a mask round the clock, even during my sleep. The doctors and nurses were so good, and despite all the challenges they faced, they took good care of me. As a wounded healer, I could console some of the patients who were depressed with their ailments. God, who is so good, protected my life throughout this pandemic too. Now once again, my health is improving slowly but

steadily. Every moment of my life, I can see the Lord's goodness and His power working in me. He is so kind to me, and so I shout aloud with great trust these verses of the Bible “Rejoice in the Lord always. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything. The power of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ.” (Phil 4:4)



HOLY CROSS SAFE HOME: A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Sr. Elsy John
Province of Kolkata



After the first wave of COVID-19, the schools reopened for classes 9 to 12 across the country. Students and their parents, staff, and management of the schools were extremely happy about it. Holy Cross School, Baruiपुर, West Bengal, also opened its gates and welcomed the students with great pleasure. We could see the excitement in the students' eyes while meeting their classmates and teachers after a gap of a year or more. The management ensured that all conformed diligently to the protocol of COVID-19. Soon all of us began to work to a tight schedule for the Board Examinations.

The nationwide rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination drive launched on 16th January 2021 boosted people's immunity and fanned their courage and confidence. 8th February 2021 marked the lowest new cases (119) in the state. Everyone

celebrated victory over Coronavirus by reducing physical distancing, lowering their masks, visiting malls, parks, and theatres! Worship places resounded with the peal of bells, blowing of conches and chants of '*ṣalāt.*' This delight did not last long. Over a short span, the virus unveiled its ugly face. The statistic graph of the positivity spiked unbelievably, and the high death rate spread fear and anxiety. The centre and states alarmed the public with the outburst of the second wave of COVID-19 and began to announce lockdowns and even triple lockdowns! The West Bengal Government announced the closure of schools from 17th March and a strict lockdown from 23rd March 2021. Once again, everything was brought to a standstill!

Social media in India, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Telegram, were

flooded with messages from people desperately seeking Covid tests, medicines, hospital beds, quarantine corners and even food for the aged and the sick. Before long, the sirens from ambulances filled the air. The woe and grief some distance away could be heard in our neighbourhood. I began to receive frantic calls from students contracting Coronavirus and losing their parents and loved ones in the battle. The Young Christian Student's Movement of our school was directed to organise a Holy Rosary Crusade to pray for the whole country to be released from the grip of this pandemic. Students with their parents and staff joined the Crusade on the virtual platform.

I was nervous when I learned that my staff and their families were also affected and queued up in the hospital for beds, oxygen support and even for the burial of the dead at crematoriums. I knew I needed to act. My eyes fell on the picture of Mother Claudine on my table and remembered the sentence “It is the good Lord who directs my path”, and so I turned to the Lord waited for His direction. I randomly turned the pages



of the Bible and found the verses “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it” (Is 20:31). I knew the Lord had opened the door for me to respond to the situation, but I did not know which one it was.

I mustered enough courage and texted Mr. Biman Banerjee, the MLA of the place and the Speaker of West Bengal, explaining the pathetic sight of the people in and around Baruipur. Being concerned about the welfare of the people and a well-wisher of HCS, I took this freedom. Without delay, he responded that the pandemic surge was so high, and hospitals were all filled with patients, and they are working very hard to reach out to the people in need. I called him immediately and enquired if HCS could be of any help. I said “Sir, let no persons die in our neighbourhood and the HCS family is in want of beds, oxygen or quarantine centres. The gates of HCS are always open and ready to serve even to the extent of giving the entire building for a safe home.” He was extremely happy with this offer and assured me that he would get back soon.

Although the offer I made was a hasty one without any prior discussion with Sr. Lincy Joseph, the secretary of the school and Sr. Leema Rose, the Provincial, they appreciated my proactive response and assured their full support. Their consent was an affirmation that I have walked into the right door. The community members were also delighted and ever ready to extend their helping hand.

The authorities hastened to convert the school into a safe home. The officials - SDM, BDO, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, etc. had a round of meetings with us. They inspected the classrooms and other available facilities and were pleased with the offer. The CMOH assessed the capacity of the building and intended to accommodate around 125 beds. Within a week, all the necessary arrangements were made.

06/06/2021 was an important day in the history of HCS! An inaugural



function of the SAFE HOME was organised. In the presence of the dignitaries like SDM, BDO, CMOH, doctors, nurses, other medical staff, sisters of the community, HCS staff, media persons and neighbours, Mr. Biman Banerjee the MLA and Speaker of WB cut the ribbon and inaugurated HOLY CROSS SAFE HOME and Rt. Rev. Bishop Shyamal Bose blessed the Male and Female wards for COVID-19 patients.



During the felicitation, the Chief Guest, Bp. Shyamal, and other civil authorities who were present for the function praised HCS for its courage to be different. The words of the Chief Guest in his interview with the media was remarkable. The interviewers asked him about the facilities to be provided. He said that Holy Cross Safe Home would be a quarantine home and an extension of the Baruipur Government Hospital. Fifty beds are ready with all the needed facilities and types of equipment, accommodating up to 125 patients. It will have round the clock doctors, nurses and other staff stationed. When the media questioned him further on



the scarcity of oxygen cylinders, he replied that the HCS ambience was so clean, the atmosphere was filled with fresh air, the trees standing tall and high produced plenty of oxygen, and their holy ground would accelerate healing. Now the Covid cases are considerably low, but the Government is working hard towards the preparedness for the third wave. We will do all that is possible to protect the life of people. When we

have a charitable institution like Holy Cross to serve the people, we can overcome life-threatening situations. Standing by his side silently, I raised my heart in gratitude to the Lord for making the Holy Cross His fitting instrument to serve the people in the peripheries. The whole community was happy and contented.

I sat at my table and conversed with Mother Claudine: 'Mother, with

courage and valour, you responded to the situation of those times and thus was born the Congregation of the Sisters of the Cross. It has now grown into a huge tree branching out far and wide. Innumerable are those who take shelter under it. Incalculable is the service that your daughters render. At this time of the pandemic, give us health, strength and strong willpower to be frontline warriors. Amen!'



THE JOY OF BEING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

Sr. Stevie Itoua

Delegation of Congo Cameroon

It is a joy to experience Christ through the people we meet every day, but it is also a daunting challenge. We can ask ourselves, 'How can we be a joyful witness of Christ's mission in the face of failure, human misery and the raging pandemic in the world? In our Claudine Echernier hospital, we try to answer this question every day.

In this hospital, we are four sisters working in collaboration with a dynamic team of lay people from different religious backgrounds. When I leave the community for work every morning, I have just one desire in my heart: to smile graciously at all the people I meet in my place of service. However, this is not always easy.

I would like to talk about a chance encounter with a woman and her children who used to come to us in times of illness; this changed the course of perception of things in me. We were so used to the presence of her children in our building that we felt they were part of our healthcare team.

However, one morning, little Tony had a vaso-occlusive attack, and his mother was out of town, so he was brought to our premises for treatment

by the nanny. This attack seemed trivial to us, as he and his little brother were used to such attacks almost every two months. Initial treatment was given, and the tests began. Strangely enough, this time, the 12-year-old Tony cried non-stop all day, and the painkillers refused to calm him down. Hardly we thought there was an improvement and a lull, as he was no longer screaming and writhing in pain than we learnt that the little angel breathed his last.

It is a harrowing experience to tell a family who has trusted you that their patient died despite all the care you provided. Tony's death affected us a lot and made us realise that we still need to discover a lot about his mystery illness. Each episode of illness, even if the clinical picture seems the same as in previous episodes, is a new thing, and we do not always master the outcome. Therefore, this experience supports the view that patients with chronic pathologies are no longer the same.

By God's grace and through our humanity, we try to bring joy and comfort to all the centre users, with a particular regard for those who suffer and fear the fatality of certain

diseases. Finding the right words without deceiving the patients opens new challenges day by day; thus, we testify to being joyful and authentic. Experiencing human suffering in the hospital environment enabled me to understand that all our lives seem to hang by a thread and that at any moment, anything can come about. So, this is an opportunity to stay alert and not put on the back burner the good we can do right now.



RADIATING THE LOVE OF CHRIST AT NEW LIFE CENTRE

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

Sr. Mary Glory Stanislas
Province of Madurai



With a deep sense of gratitude and joy, I would like to share my enriching experiences while caring for Alcoholic and Drug Abuse patients. When I began my journey, I felt within me a unique call to respond to the cry of the neglected people, particularly women and children who were afflicted by the anguish of having alcoholic husbands and fathers. I was inspired by the courage and commitment of Mother Claudine Echernier to respond to the signs of the times. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I responded positively to the socio-political situation of Tamil Nadu and its consequences on society.

At one time, I was on an endless quest for service to Alcoholic and Drug Abuse patients, and I expressed it to the then Provincial Superior, Sr. Pushpam Irudayam. I also consulted Sr. Josephine Alex, my formator, Fr. Jerry Rosario S.J, the Pastoral Social Activist, and Fr. Jeyapathy S.J, the founder of JMADD (Jesuit Ministry for Alcohol and Drug Dependence). It was like a spiritual conversation with all these people. Dr. Sr. Jacqueline Pragasam M.S, a friend of mine, accompanied me in my search for the victims who needed help, with a genuine concern for the suffering women and children. Many God sent angels helped me refine my intention and expand my heart to recognise the will of God.

It was a call within a call, and I marvel at the way God prepared me for this ministry. In 2004, I attended a

training programme for Alcoholics, which helped me offer my service to the families affected by Tsunami. In 2009, I had a yearlong course at a Training and Research Centre for Alcoholics and Drug Abusers in Kottayam district, Kerala. I was placed in a psychiatric ward and a de-addiction centre for internship training. At this centre, I went through a personal crisis, and this experience helped me comprehend my identity and affirm my call. Yes, I, as a wounded healer, was ready to be involved in healing God's wounded world. This experience kept me getting strong and enthusiastic in this ministry.

Birth of the New Life Centre: Cognizant of the pressing needs of the alcoholics and drug abusers in society, our province began the New Life Centre on 23rd October 2010, at Leonard Hospital in Batlagundu. The hospital helped to get a big boost in infrastructure and financial spending. In February 2011, we admitted the first patient, encouraged and supported by Dr. Ganesh, the Psychiatrist. Dr. Sr. Vasantha Alphonse generously accepted to be the Consultant for its functioning within Leonard Hospital for the New Life Centre. I am very grateful to Sr. Pushpa Kumari, the administrator of the hospital, who encouraged me to respond to the suffering humanity, together with the Sisters in the hospital and community.

To begin with, we surveyed the surrounding villages, visited the

families of the alcoholics, created awareness to the concerned persons that alcoholism or drug addiction is a disease and that they can be treated and be cured. Information regarding this Centre spread gradually, and patients were brought to the centre for counselling and treatment. Soon this new venture gained momentum, and the results were positive; patients began to pour in from far and wide.

Growth and Development: After a year, the New Life Centre was shifted to the staff quarters of Leonard Hospital. Since the number of patients increased considerably, we felt the necessity of an extension. Sr. Hilda Mathias, the Provincial, and her team responded to this need and constructed a building over the staff quarters. Sr. Rosalie Joseph and her team took the initiative to build a separate building for this purpose. It was blessed on 23rd June 2018, and now it is a 30-bed Rehabilitation Centre.

Awareness programme: We organised awareness programmes in the surrounding villages of Batlagundu to help the families and youth. We focused chiefly on schools, colleges, industries, and the villages in Theni and Dindigul District. Consequently, the students in the schools, colleges, and villages were motivated to safeguard themselves from the destructive effects of alcohol and drugs and promote peace in families. We witnessed positive changes among the students and families. Our staff,

too, found delight and fulfilment in serving such people in our society. The residential multi-disciplinary therapeutic programme is a treatment given by a team of psychiatrists, physicians, psychologists, social workers, counsellors, nursing staff, and spiritual guides.

Our achievements: During the last ten years, we have treated 3,258 cases and 389 relapse cases. This effort has brought revival and new life to alcoholic families. About 12,300 follow up cases reaped the benefits of this project. We raised awareness among 25,000 students in schools and colleges and 1265 villages, and we covered around 15,000 villagers. More than 2000 Catholic families benefitted from our centre. About 37 clients were assisted in getting a decent job to sustain themselves.

Challenges

- Alcoholism as a disease is not appropriately understood by society.
- Alcoholism is considered a social stigma. Therefore, the family members deny its existence as a disease and are unwilling to bring the affected individuals for treatment.
- Unwillingness on the part of the patients and the inferiority complex of the affected individuals.
- Difficulty of finding eligible staff to work in this centre. Since it is the centre for substance abusers, it is difficult to find female staff.

Follow-up programme: Follow-up programmes are an essential part of the treatment, and they are offered for a span of 3 to 5 years. Patients are encouraged to regularly meet the doctors and their counsellors to seek

medical assistance and state their progress. For 2-3 years, we stay connected with them through house visits and phone calls. They also come to our centre to get medicines and meet the expert counsels. Our dispensary at Thangachimadam is a great help in rendering the follow-up treatment to the ex-patients of the New life Centre of Rameswaram Island.

Future Plans

- Since alcoholism, the greatest evil in the present society, is prevalent among men and women, we plan to conduct the same programme for women to help them come out of the clutches of alcoholism's sister predicaments like isolation and depression.
- Continue providing medical assistance and organise awareness programmes.
- Establish New Life Centre in other places and train a few more interested sisters to take up this ministry.

Christ's Presence: Working in this ministry has filled my heart with

Christ's love, tenderness, and compassion that overflows. This enthusiasm has a ripple effect on my staff, and they become more sympathetic with the patients and their families. "Abide in me as I abide in you. Apart from me, you can do nothing." (Jn: 15: 4, 5) every day, there is a spiritual stimulus within me to incarnate these words. With Him, I try to live the gentleness and empathy of Jesus to console and give joy to the broken families. The tender love of Jesus prevails in this centre as it brings wholeness, joy, and new life to the substance abusers' families as they find God's spirit within them. We experience the Paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. I am grateful to God and our congregation for the opportunity to serve in this centre. I am very grateful to Sr. Fatima Kattar, a source of motivation and who always appreciates and goads me on to contribute fruitfully to this ministry. Through this ministry, we reach out to those in the periphery, fulfilling the dream of Jesus Christ, "That they may have life, life in all its fullness." (John 10:10)



ECHOES FROM ECUADOR

Sr. Michealine Masilamani
Delegation of Latin America



“I lift my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
Who made heaven and earth.”
(Psalm 121:1)

I am happy indeed to reconnect with all our sisters through this article. As I live in the mission country of Ecuador, joyfully facing all the ups and downs, a day came when I got to deepen my faith in the person of my beloved Jesus Christ. In April 2021, we were three sisters in our community at Cojimies. Knowing fully well the present precarious situation in the world around, fighting against the Coronavirus, three of us were very cautious in taking all the precautions to keep each other safe.

The dreadful day came when I had a high fever, headache, and severe throat pain. Though I did not pay much attention to it, the shocking news about my father's death that I learnt after two days caused me considerable distress. I was going through the pain of losing my beloved father, and it was at this time, Sr. Anne Mary, one of the community members, fell seriously ill with fever and severe body pain. And slowly, Sr. Anne Mary and I started losing our sense of smell, and until then, we had not

considered the possibility that we could have contracted the virus. Sr. Molly, our delegation Superior, immediately directed us to go to the hospital for further treatment and informed our parish priest.

We are so grateful to God whose fatherly care we experienced through the Parish Priest Fr. Giovanni Mera, who right away came with Coronavirus Disease 2019 Antibody (IgM/IgG) Combined Test Kit and did the blood test. To our surprise, the result for both of us showed negative. Since the symptoms continued and subsequently Sr. Jessy Kottar, our third community member, also had developed the fever, we went to the Health Centre in Cojimies. God helped us through Dr. Yunaita, and we gradually recuperated. Together with my community, I thank Sr. Molly Jacob, Delegation Superior, Sister Elizabeth Miranda, Superior General, and the General team, especially our Provincial, Sister Fatima Kattar, for their love, affection, and sincere prayers. It was the merciful love of Abba Father which cradled us all back to health and helped us experience the liberating power of Jesus Christ our Lord.

An agonising experience was the unexpected demise of Sister Jeyaseeli Ignacimuthu, my spiritual guide. I was deeply affected as I had shared a deep bond with her, and she had exhibited a great understanding of my nature. She was instrumental in motivating me in my spiritual expedition with genuine concern. I remain very grateful to God for Sr. Jeyaseeli's guidance, especially when she helped me vent out my emotions after losing my father. She brought me closer to Jesus in those moments of suffering.

The death of many people, including our sisters and family members, made me sink into a deeper reflection igniting in me an intense search concerning the plan of God in my life. I am very grateful to Him for His absolute love for me and ask for the extra vigour to follow Him more faithfully to make Him known and loved. Resonating our Mother Claudine's sentiments, I want to say,

“Long live Jesus! I give myself to Jesus. I consecrate myself to Jesus. I abandon myself to Jesus. I wish to live and die for the love of Jesus.”

TRIBUTE TO SR. MARIE-THERESE ACCAMBRAY DEPARTURE TO AFRICA AS A MISSIONARY IN 1976

Testimony of the Sisters from the delegation of Congo-Cameroon read during the funeral held in Brazzaville



Dear Sr Marie Thérèse,

On this occasion today, we feel free like a child to call you by your first name, which is not the case in our Congolese culture: *Ya Marie T/ ya Maté* as we would fondly call you!

This Congolese way of addressing you with the prefix 'Ya' embodied the close relationship between you and us. A French by origin, you became an African Congolese by adoption the land you so loved and served. It will remain yours forever.

We learned of your departure to our heavenly Father's abode on Friday 25 June, with great sorrow and emotion. With the Sisters of the delegation of Congo-Cameroon, we would have loved to bid you our final farewell, but alas! You are in a better position to remind us of the constraints of missionary life. We are unable to share our griefs, being spread out in different countries of Africa, be that as it may, we are united with you and with all the Sisters around you in faith.

We give thanks to God for your witnessing life, a life entirely given to God in humble service to others, especially the most vulnerable.

Yes, dear Sr Marie Thérèse, as a postulant mistress, you taught us to take the first steps in our love adventure with Christ in the

Congregation of the Sisters of the Cross. As a junior mistress, you enlightened us with your advice, and as an older person, you taught us to swim against the tide, stand the test of time, and launch out into the deep to reach the other shore with Christ.

Like a mother, you taught us everything a mother would want to teach her daughter, in all aspects of life, to bring about happiness and fulfilment. With you *yaya*, there were no barriers. Your simplicity, broad and open-mindedness were clear signs of affability; this enabled us to share our joys and difficulties with you without embarrassment and in complete confidence. You comforted us with your uplifting, soothing, and stimulating words.

Dear *Ya Maté*, what God has sown in us by the example of your life, will thrive and blossom. We will never forget you; you will be present in our hearts. Go in peace and intercede for the delegation of Congo-Cameroon and for those who work in this country.

Testimony of the Sisters of Cameroon

Friday 2 July 2021

"If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Rom 14:8 NRSV BIBLE)

With these words of St. Paul, we say goodbye to you *Ya Maté*.

Sometimes the quality of silence prevails over the quality of words. But we, *Ya Maté*, your Sisters, want to say thank you for everything before your remains lie at rest in this Congolese land you loved and served immensely.

We are not there physically to address our eternal farewell to you, but our hearts have already journeyed to Brazzaville ever since we learned of your return to the heavenly Father's abode. We are united in spirit with our sisters over there, along with all the Congolese people who adopted, loved, and cherished you. *Ya Maté*, you knew how to love people, how to accommodate everyone in the tender corner of your heart, so gentle and which sometimes could not hide the overflowing affectivity, but which only knew to do good.

Thank you, dear *Ya Maté*, for staying with us: yes, you did indeed stay with us. We still remember the events of 1997 that plunged Congo into deep mourning. As a French citizen, you had the privilege of repatriating to France and being protected from all troubles of the war. But you chose to stay with us, your little African sisters. This magnificent gesture that you made at that time simply expressed the deep love that you had for each of us.

As a Sister of the Cross and our eldest sister, you initiated our first steps into the Congregation and communicated

the spirit of Mother Claudine. You were a pre-novice mistress for some, a sewing teacher for others. Yes, *Ya Maté*, your agile and delicate fingers knew how to touch our African fabrics and give them a beautiful shape. A work well done and well finished was the key characteristic of your professionalism. You initiated, accompanied and comforted us patiently. You taught us how to iron our clothes perfectly. You also introduced some of us to the art of cooking. You prepared good things with great simplicity, skill and love. In Talangai and Vouela where you stayed

for many years, the memory of your hospitality will always be cherished.

Thank you *Ya Maté*, for all that you have been for us. You stayed with us, you walked with us, you held us by the hand, and when your time came to join God the Father, you offered your body to this Africa that was so dear to you. We are proud of you *Ya Maté*; it is our great honour. We, the African Sisters of the Cross, are proud to have known you and loved you.

At the news of your departure, tears welled up in our eyes, because humanly speaking, we already miss

you. But *Ya Maté*, we are all happy for you because you have passed through the door. You can already see God face to face, contemplate his face and mingle your magnificent voice with those of the angels who are already contemplating and praising Him endlessly. We, too, from here below, join the choirs of heaven and sing Handel's great hallelujah so that when all things are loved and served, God will be loved and served everywhere.

We thank your family that gave you to us, your adopted children. Rest in peace *Ya Maté*.

AN AWESOME GOD WHO WALKS WITH ME

Sr. Dorothy Hajoary
Province of Guwahati



This little poem of mine is an unleashing of my heart when I walked miles and miles through the valleys and mountains, crossed dangerous rivers and hills on fragile bamboo and bailey bridges, walked through the untrodden path in the thick forests, faced mild and wild animals, just to make the good God Known and Loved! I am not a poet who can put down these outpouring in right meters and rhyme schemes yet I try to give expression to my feelings and experiences of my Lord in my evangelization in Arunachal Pradesh. I am sure you too will be drawn naturally to the creator of this beauty and grandeur. The lush green dense forest and ever flowing fountain

Gushing forth from the criss - crossed mountain ranges
The West Siang, Subansiri, Kameng, Lohit and the Tirap
The treasure trove of nature's divine beauty,
Arunachal, the most splendid handiwork, Oh God!



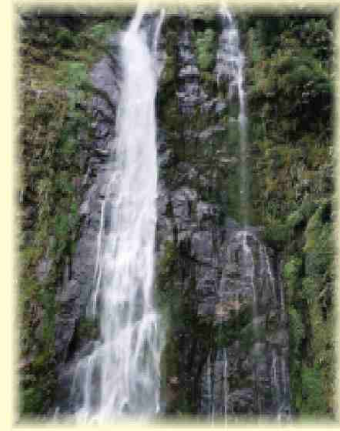
How spectacular is this land, a piece of heaven?
The gorgeous Orchids and the Dawn-Lit Mountains,
The Hornbills, the mithuns and the Shangri La valley
The white high Peaks and the life teeming jungles
An incredible land, a paradise unexplored, Oh God!

The varied tongues and multi-cultured Tribes-
The Gallos the Nishis, the Adis, the Appathanis,
The women in distinctive garments dance in unison
The Mopin, Solung, Nyokum Rikham Pada, Losar,
and adding spices, thrill and excitement to life, Oh God!



I saw this beautiful land in the prime of my age!
With the zeal of Claudine walked through the valleys,
Climbed the mountains with Bible in my hand,
Crossed the turbulent rivers with rosaries on lips
Proclaimed, Thy Word with passion like Mermier, Oh God!

In every forest, valley, village, streets, towns and cities,
Crossing of the hanging bridge with a childlike trust,
Showing the way and protecting me from adversaries,
Challenging and leading me to the land of Donyi polo.
To make you known and loved in this forbidden land, Oh God!



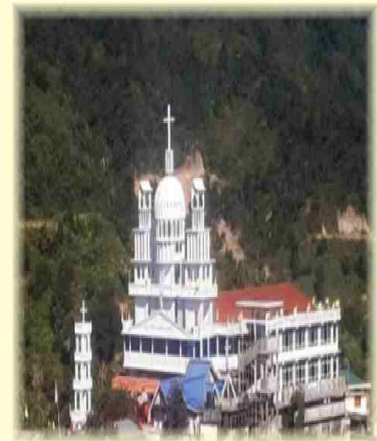
East to West, North to South, length to breadth, height to depth,
Sun to Moon, rain to clouds, hills to rocks, mountains to hills,
West Siang to East Siang, Upper Subensiri to Lower Subensiri
Papum Pare to the People and proclaim your Name.
Radiated, Your Sovereign love in this ever green land, Oh God!



Men and women in bright colours singing your praises,
The chimes of Good News echoing on the mountain tops
Twinkling Christmas Stars on all roofs top in advent
Celebrating Christmas and Easter by one and all
The power of Your Holy Spirit at work here, Oh God!

I saw you at the check posts, in jails, in house arrests,
I encountered you in the poor, in the lonely, in the ignorant,
I met you in the young and old, in the unloved and in the lost,
I embraced all with the seed of love and compassion.
I thank you for all hurdles and adventures of life, Oh God!

A spark of God's love and peace in this awesome land,
Delighted to see the light of Christ illumining in most villages
The newly erected churches and echoing sound of the Church bells
The freedom to bear a joyful witness to the Gospel Values
Unfathomable is your power in this land of the Rising Sun, Oh God!



I thank you for the zeal and enthusiasm you put in me,
I thank you for your immense love, guidance and care,
I thank you for the special spiritual energy and grace,
I thank you for my Guru and my spiritual guides,
I thank you above all for the company of my Sisters, Oh God!
I thank you because you are God who walks with me!

