

FRANCISCAN NETWORK

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Dear Friends,

Once again, the Advent season is upon us – is our Advent, 2017, to be a listless waiting, a meaningless four weeks because, like Martha we are busy about things that don't matter? If Christ is within you, how much time does He take up in your life? Is He someone we think about now and then, someone we try to meet on Sundays and then for the most part for the rest of the week He doesn't figure much in our daily lives? This Advent let us stop and remember that this is a time for us to “get a life” - a life that radiates Christ's love, His compassion, His total forgiveness. If we do this, how wonderful will our Advent waiting become.

Mary is our example – the great woman of Advent. After the Annunciation, after the angel had left her, she set off to visit her cousin, St Elizabeth. She could have sat at home, thinking about what had happened, but the older woman was pregnant and needed her, so she went so willingly, so happily to help her. What a gift she must have been for Elizabeth. We too are called to be gifts to others during this season leading up to Christmas. Christ comes alive in me when I offer myself in love and service to others, especially to those who are unloved, unwanted, who are poor or have lost their way in life. I will get a life only when I give it away!

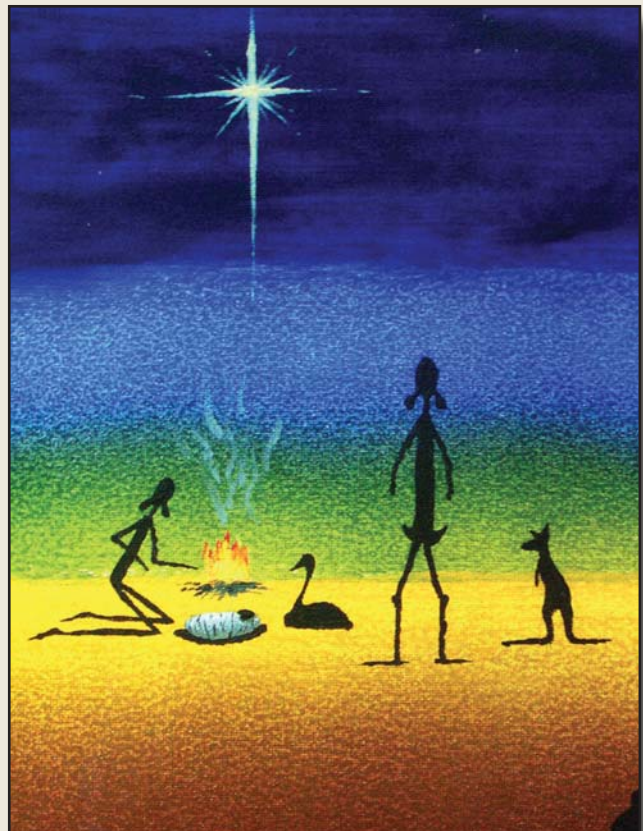
This is at the heart of Christ's message at Christmas to all of us. Time is short, so let us start today to really stir up that longing for God. Let us reach out to help others, to be loving, to be compassionate. Then the song of Mary will rise in our hearts, too, as will the song of all those who longed for the coming of Jesus in their lives, “O come, O come, Emmanuel.”

- Sr Liz

Reflection

“Because it is Christmas, because the Word was made flesh, God is near, and the faintest word in the quiet chamber of our heart, the word of love, reaches His ear and heart.”

- Karl Rahner, SJ



A word from Pauline

Greetings from Rome, the Eternal City! It is hard to believe that I have been here just over 12 months now – a year getting used to a change of life and a change of scenery. It is wonderful to be so close to Assisi, the birth place of Francis and Clare. It is also a privilege to have visited places where our Foundress, Elizabeth Hayes, lived.

Soon after our arrival, our General Leadership Team travelled to Assisi to pray at the Franciscan shrines, and to ask God's blessing on our ministry of service to the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception throughout the world.

My main ministry as spiritual leader of the Institute is to inspire and encourage the sisters as they strive to live the fullness of the Gospel message in the spirit of St. Francis, as well as respond to the needs of the Church according to the example of Elizabeth Hayes. This ministry has taken me across thousands of kilometres - to England, Ireland, Papua New Guinea, Canada, Bolivia and the United States.

I had the privilege of being present at St Peter's Basilica when Archbishop John Ribal,



Sr Pauline (left) with Cardinal John Ribal and Sr Rosella.

MSC, was elevated by Pope Francis to be the first Cardinal of Port Moresby. This week I will attend a special Prayer Liturgy led by Pope Francis for South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Sisters of Charity and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur will accompany me. The members of these three communities reside here - we each have a floor of the Generalate and are made up of sisters from Australia, PNG, Canada, USA, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland, Syria, Portugal, Paraguay, Philippines, Congo, India, Korea, Lebanon and Kenya. With such a multicultural group, you can imagine how much we love to celebrate together all our important National Days and feasts. I find it such an enriching experience.

One of the graces of being the Leader of an International Order is the fact that I have the opportunity to meet every sister at some time or another, and to attend important gatherings and celebrations with them. At the beginning of this year I was in Tenafly, New Jersey celebrating various Jubilees - 50, 40 years of Profession. I was also delighted to celebrate with other Jubilarians in Canada and other parts of the States.

As I begin another year of my Leadership Ministry, please keep me in your prayers, as well as all mfc sisters scattered throughtout the world.

- Sr Pauline Robinson, MFIC

Refectory of San Damiano

One of the most famous episodes that took place in this refectory was the sign of the cross that remained impressed on the blessed bread, while St Clare blessed the refectory as well, in the presence and in obedience to the Pope.

Through the prayers of the saint, the tables were continuously replenished with food for the guests and the community.

Most of all, the refectory acted as a place of safety for the nuns, especially during the attacks by the Saracens. Clare even brought the Tabernacle here for safekeeping. It is said that when she prayed for protection for herself and her sisters, a voice from the Tabernacle assured her that no harm would ever come to her community or to her beloved Assisi.

The words of the dying Clare, where she thanked the Lord for having created her, have made San Damiano a sanctuary of life, joy and gratitude to God.



St Teresa of Calcutta (1910-1997)

Princess Diana died just a few days before Mother Teresa, but on the 20th anniversary of her death this year, dozens of expensive magazines were published displaying her youth, her fashion sense, her jewellery, her beauty - night after night on television we saw hour-long programmes of her life and her charity work. Of Mother Teresa,

one saw hardly any programs or films of her life and selfless work for the poor. Would a stooped and wrinkled little nun bring in big dollars for the media industry? No money, no interest in a materialistic world!



Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was born on the 26th August 1910 at Skopje in Macedonia. She left home at the age of 18 to join the Sisters of Loreto in Ireland, where she received the name Sr Mary Teresa after St Therese of Lisieux. In 1931 she was assigned to the Order's Calcutta house and taught at their school there, where she eventually became headmistress. Here she received a strong calling to help the poor and destitute, and in 1948, obeying this call, she left the convent and took up a new life, caring for them wherever they might be - lying sick in the street or even dying in rubbish bins. Some of her former pupils joined her, one by one, and the new Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity was established in the Diocese of Calcutta in 1950, spreading across India and eventually to every continent, even behind the Iron Curtain.

Many related Orders followed, involving men and women, clergy and laity, both for the active and the contemplative life. Mother Teresa died on September 5th, 1997 and was beatified by Pope John Paul II on 19th October 2003 and canonised by Pope Francis on 4th September, 2016. Mother Teresa's widespread appeal comes from the directness of her inspiration and her direct response to it. She went out and did things where they were needed.

Someone once told Mother Teresa that they wouldn't do what she did – not even for millions of dollars. Her reply was, “neither would I.”

*We are invited to trust,
surrender and believe
that this world can be different,
that justice and forgiveness
are possible for the earth community.*
- Ilia Delio, OSF

Congratulations



PNG Leadership Team – Sisters Pauline, Scholastica (Leader), Rosalia and Lorna.



Congratulations to Sr Joyce Menchallor (left) on her first profession.

Sr Christina Zammit (Sr. M. Colette)

When Sr Christina was diagnosed with lymphoma late in 2015, she gradually let go of her ministry to the community at Bardonia and moved to Kedron, believing that death would come quickly. She faced this possibility with great courage and faith. In late March of this year, when she found great difficulty in walking, she was moved to Palliative Care, and as so often happens, she slipped away when her visitors were out of the room.

Christina was known to us as a deeply spiritual person, a dedicated pastoral minister and an engaged community member and very much an individual. She was a woman who knew herself, and she knew where her faith was leading her.



Christina knew her limitations as well as her aspirations, and could not be deflected from what she set out to do. She began to explore a calling to Religious Life after she had completed her Teacher Training, finally choosing the MFICs. She always yearned for a contemplative life, though she contented herself with the Franciscan style of simple living, contemplation and action.

The Charismatic Renewal provided her with a life-giving spirituality in which she flourished. In preparation for work in the training of our young sisters, Christina undertook a programme at the Spirituality Institute in St. Louis, USA. She used this experience with the young sisters in PNG and later in her ministry as a Pastoral Associate in Bardonia. She lived for a year in Kedron with Sr Josephine Rush when we

hosted two sisters from Iraq while they were studying at the Australian Catholic University. Her gentleness of spirit eased the challenges of navigating the inter-cultural living with the Iraqi sisters.

When Christina was deemed too ill to drive, she saw this as a major diminishment of her illness. She would often say - "The car is my Office, my freedom!" The Christina we knew and loved was a woman of great inner strength and spirituality, shown particularly in the way she accepted her illness after the initial shock of her diagnosis. She was a free woman who followed her heart unconstrained by convention. Christina, we can hear you singing with the Angels as you cry out with joy, "Praise the Lord.

Alleluia! alleluia!" Rest in Peace.

Sr Joyce Fenton **(Sr. M. Roselyn)**

Sr Joyce was born in Newcastle, NSW, the eldest of seven children. On leaving school, Joyce became active in the Grail Movement where she was recognised as a leader and so was sent for training to Melbourne. She soon outgrew the grail and searched for a Missionary Congregation where she could use her vast energy and desire to be of service. She was a woman of simple, but deep faith.

Joyce came to join us in 1950, and after Profession of First Vows in 1953, she was missioned to PNG where she remained for 46 years. Joyce did her teacher training and nursing certification in PNG and served as teacher and Principal until 1974 when expatriates stood aside for local staff. Joyce also ran health clinics, did extensive pastoral visitation, ferried local people to and from the hospital in the mission jeep, trained catechists, oversaw the smooth running of the mission station (boiling sheets in large coppers, baking bread and making sweet potato soup, etc.) She held leadership positions in the Institute as well as assisting in the formation program and travelling the muddy roads by scooter or jeep - doing what Joy did so well - serving others with total commitment and endless energy.



When the tsunami hit the coast of the West Sepik in 1998, Joyce joined the Aitape sisters in providing accommodation and pastoral care for the traumatised survivors. When Joyce returned to Australia, she made the decision not to drive, despite the fact that she had happily driven on the muddy dangerous tracks of the Toricelli Mountains. She just could not face the Brisbane traffic. Thus the decision was made to purchase a scooter - a LARGE one, so the next phase of her life was defined by a shiny red scooter.

She soon found parishioners to visit, as well as the sisters residing in nursing homes. She also expanded her ministry to the asylum seekers' centre for a weekly day of service. In her spare time, she helped out at St Anthony's School, where she assisted children with their reading. Whenever possible, she attended the liturgies at Mt Alvernia College.

In the last three years of her life, Joyce's health deteriorated rapidly. A leg ulcer caused her great pain and refused to heal, despite several tried remedies. Finally, the decision was made to transfer her to Holy Spirit where she soon found a ministry among the residents, visiting our dear Sr Ursula frequently and speaking to her in Pidgin - they had worked together in PNG for several years. The words from the First Reading of her funeral Mass - "How lovely on the mountains are the feet of one who brings Good News" - is so typical of Joyce - a missionary sister leaving home to bring Good News to others. Rest in peace, Joyce - your mission is now complete.

In Conclusion

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

*When the song of the Angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost, to heal the broken,
To feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers and sisters.
Amen*

I wish each and every one all the joys and blessings of this holy season as we sing together, "O come let us adore Him."

Love and peace,

Sr Liz