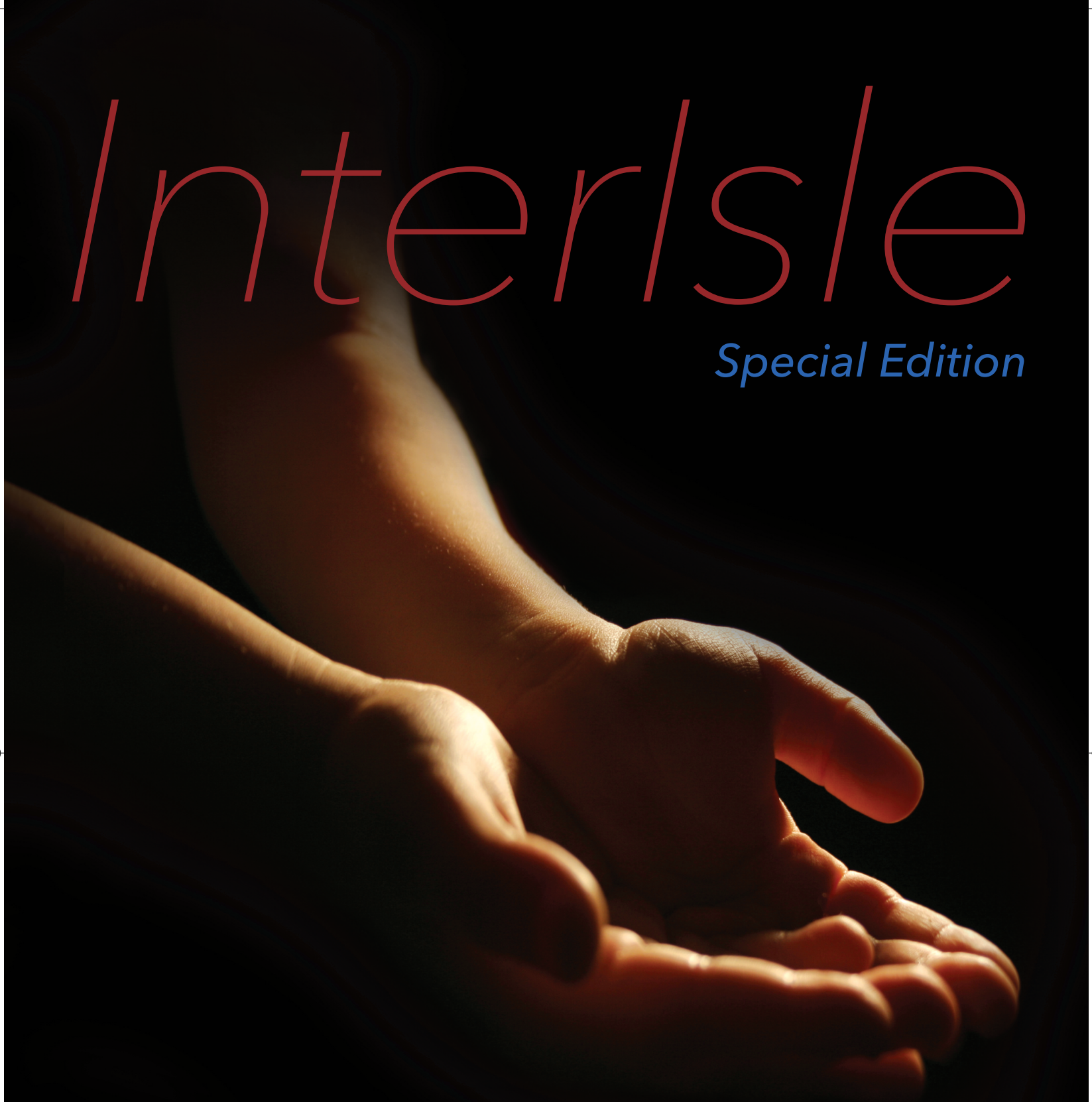


InterIsle

Special Edition



God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones (cf. Ez 37:1-14). ... Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish.

- Pope Francis, Easter Urbi et Orbi message on March 31, 2013

Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

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Province of England, Ireland, Scotland, Malta

Provincial House: FMM, 5 Vaughan Ave, London, W6 OXS Tel: 020 8748 4077

Province Communications office: Flat 0-1, 29 Levenside Crescent, Glasgow, G53 5LA Tel: 0141 882 4048

FMM Castleview Gardens, Clancy Strand, Limerick, Ireland Tel: 061 455320

FMM 82 St. Francis Street, Balzan, BZN 1422, Malta Tel: 21 482 896

Province web page: www.fmmii.org

International web page: www.fmm.org

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Helene de Chappotin (Blessed Mary of the Passion)

Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary

Helene de Chappotin was born in Nantes, France on May 21 1839. She spent most of her childhood very happily with her parents, her two brothers, her two sisters, her uncle and aunt and her six cousins. But the early death of one of her cousins followed by that of her two older sisters influenced her young life profoundly.



In 1856, Helene had a spiritual experience which coloured her whole life – God revealed to her his love and his beauty. She became convinced that she was called to the religious life. But then came the sudden death of her mother, who could not resign herself to her daughter's vocation, and Helene's plans were put on hold.

In 1860, a change in family circumstances permitted Helene to enter the Poor Clares in Nantes, but just a year later ill health forced her to leave. She was heartbroken but continued to pray and to seek guidance and finally, in 1864, she was advised to enter with the Sisters of Marie Reparatrice in Paris. Here she received the name of Mary of the Passion and was sent on mission to India where she spent eleven years engaged in fruitful missionary activity and was entrusted with positions of responsibility.

However, in 1876, a series of painful circumstances led her to leave the Congregation of Marie Reparatrice together with twenty other sisters. She went to Rome to present the situation to the judgement of the Church

and on January 6, 1877 Pope Pius IX authorised the foundation of the Missionaries of Mary. In 1882, the sisters of the new Institute were adopted into the Franciscan Order, thus realising the original dream of the young Helene. Vocations came in great numbers and soon Mary of the Passion was able to send her sisters to all the corners of the earth. She opened new communities in

Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Some were situated in rural areas, others in the poorest quarters of the big cities, for Mary of the Passion's preference was for the sisters to live and work among the poor. Seeing the

need for the emancipation and advancement of women, besides opening schools and domestic science and agricultural training centres, she also set up workrooms where, while learning special skills and receiving a basic education, the trainees could earn a living wage. In the field of health care, she not only opened hospitals and community health clinics but, seeing the needs of lepers in her day, she appealed to the courage and generosity of her sisters to accept the risk of caring for them.

As the years went by, in spite of her declining health, there was never any lessening of Mary of the Passion's burning desire to make God known and loved. She died peacefully in San Remo, Italy on November 15, 1904. She was beatified by Pope John Paul II on October 20, 2002.



Presenting Our Special Edition of Inter Isle

When Pope Francis said, ***'I have decided to announce an Extraordinary Jubilee which has at its centre the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: "Be merciful even as your Father is merciful" Lk6:36, he was challenging us to make mercy figure in our daily lives. In a subsequent address he said, 'What makes mercy come alive is its constant dynamism in order to go and meet those in need and the necessities of those in spiritual and material hardship. Mercy has eyes to see, ears to hear, hands to lift up again....***

I see this special edition of Inter Isle, which we are publishing towards the end of the Year of Mercy, as an invitation from our Province to carry the blessings of Mercy into our to-morrows. The reflections, articles and presentations uncover some of the mysteries of God's Mercy and we are deeply indebted to all our contributors.

This year we have witnessed extraordinary violence, watching from the safety of our shores as thousands clamber aboard fragile vessels desperate to escape, pleading for help, anything rather than stay put amidst the wreckage of their lives. Courtesy of excellent reporting, courageous journalists penetrating the heat of conflicts; our merciless world is on our screens right here in our own homes. Conversations which revolve around the question 'what can we do?' tend to produce limited results and in the long run end up blaming the politicians! Can we instead talk through what Pope Francis means when he speaks about the constant dynamism which keeps mercy alive. To be dynamic mercy must have the right qualities.

'The quality of mercy is not strained;

It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven

Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;

It blesseth him that gives and him that takes'

William Shakespeare

Shakespeare captures here the gentleness we need if we are truly merciful. I wonder if he was thinking of

Psalm 145

'Yahweh is tenderness and pity,

Slow to anger, full of faithful love.

Yahweh is generous to all,

His tenderness embraces all his creatures'

Psalm 145 8-9

The poet Mary Oliver was definitely thinking of Psalm 145 when she wrote the poem

'On Thy Wondrous Works I will Meditate' (Psalm 145)

'I know a man of such

mildness and kindness it is trying to

change my life. He does not

preach, teach, but simply is. It is

astonishing, for he is Christ's ambassador

truly, by rule and act. But more,

he is kind with the sort of kindness that shines

out, but is resolute not fooled'.

Mary Oliver, *Thirst Bloodaxe Books*

In the years ahead may we meet one another ***'with the sort of kindness that shines***

out, but is resolute not fooled'.

Marie Therese Chambers FMM

Provincial of the UK, Ireland and Malta

Mission and Mercy

Introduction

On the 15th December 2015 Pope Francis officially launched the 'Jubilee Year of Mercy' and made the point that he is "...convinced that the whole Church will find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time."

It is this rediscovery and sharing of God's mercy that I would like to explore here because I truly believe that our mission today is all about this gift of God.

Let's look closely at a few words of Pope Francis' address at the Jubilee Audience in January 2016:-

"There is a wonderful interplay between mercy and mission. Experiencing mercy renders us missionaries of mercy, and to be missionaries allows us to grow ever more in the mercy of God."

Notice how the Holy Father uses the word 'us' ... This little word is key to the deeper message of the calling that each one of us respond to in our own individual and personal way, because... we are all called to be missionaries of mercy! So, in order for us to see this point more clearly, let's first take a brief look at Our God, the source of mission; Who or What is the Church; and The mission of the Church - Our Mission.

Our God, the Source of Mission

It is true to say that Our Trinitarian God can be seen as a missionary community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As David Bosch puts it:- "Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love. This is the deepest source of mission. ...mission exists simply because God loves people."¹ And God wants us "... to participate in the movement of God's love toward people..."² We see a similar description of our God written over 50 years ago in Vatican II's document on

Missionary Activity: God "generously pours out and never ceases to pour out, the divine goodness, so that the one who is creator of all things might at last become 'all in all' (1Cor 15:28), thus simultaneously assuring God's own glory and our happiness."³

The more we reflect on the missionary nature of God; the true source of Christian mission, the clearer it becomes that it is little to do with our own strength and determination to love our neighbour and do good to all, rather it is, as Pope Francis puts it "... part of the "grammar" of faith, something essential for those who listen to the voice of the Spirit who whispers "Come" and "Go forth". Those who follow Christ cannot fail to be missionaries..."⁴

Who or what is 'the Church'?

So, if "those who follow Christ cannot fail to be missionaries" I propose that those who are members of the Church cannot fail to follow Christ. Our Catechism reads:-

"...'The Church' is the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the Word and the Body of Christ and so she herself becomes Christ's Body."⁵

When we speak of the Church as the People of God, we refer to the whole community of the baptized; a community that holds a rich diversity of gender, class, education, social status - saints and sinners alike. There's room for us all! "Each one insofar as he or she creates community and becomes part of that communion, represents the Blessed Trinity."⁶ *We need each other* and it is through our relationships with one another that we can truly be living witnesses of the healing and merciful Body of Christ of which we are part. However, if we're to get the courage to do this, we need above all to bear in mind that "the most

¹ BOSCH, David, Transforming Mission, Orbis Books, New York, p.392.

² Ibid. p.390

³ Vatican Council II, Decree on Missionary Activity, Ad Gentes, 2

⁴ Pope Francis, message for the 89th World Mission Sunday from www.Vatican.va

⁵ Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph 1. The Church in God's Plan, Names and Images of the Church, art 752.

⁶ Boff, Leonardo, Holy Trinity, Perfect Community, Orbis Books, New York, 2000, p.66

important thing about the church is the presence in it of God who calls the members to himself, sustains them by his grace and works through them as they carry out the mission of the Church.”⁷

The Mission of the Church - Our Mission

It was not until I was sent on mission to Kenya that I truly realised the need to hold these two truths together (i.e. the active presence of God with us and the need we have for one another) At the time, I found a lot of inspiration from a line in our FMM constitutions which helped me a lot. It says: - “Like Christ, we want to approach everyone with a humble heart, ready to learn and to receive as much as to give, with his attitude of respect, acceptance of persons, openness and service.”⁸ It was from this starting point that I began to find where I fit into the mission of the Church as I gradually ‘touched into’ the sense that I cannot do it on my own and I’m only a tiny part of the Body of Christ along with all my brothers and sisters throughout the world. This conviction became very clear to me as I ventured out to take the plane to this exotic and wonderful country, I didn’t really know what to expect and felt very alone and inadequate. I remember vividly when I finally reached my mission being struck by the simplicity of life there and the poverty around me. It all seemed to be too big for me! After a day or two, I was teaching in a little school for street children and felt a bit nervous about how I’d communicate with them or what I could really do to help in any way. Finally, I realised that I was not alone. My sisters in community were with me and supporting me, the children were very welcoming and happy to help me when I got stuck for a word in their language and most of all I just knew that the Lord was there helping me and giving me the strength I needed. I found exactly what I was experiencing beautifully expressed in the Constitutions of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary where it says “The Christ whom we contemplate sends us out to our brothers and sisters in whom we discover his hidden presence. And

our brothers and sisters send us back to the contemplation of Christ.”⁸

So the point is, I didn’t need to ‘have it all together’ so as to be a missionary. In fact, the lesson I learned was that all I need to do is to realise that I really ‘don’t have it all together’, and I stand in need of God’s help and the help of those around me if I’m to truly find my place in the mission of the Church and the building up of God’s kingdom.

So, on one hand we know that each and every one of us stand in need of the loving, healing mercy of God, yet on the other, we also know that we are already the people of God by His grace and have the potential through His presence with us to be instruments of that mercy.

Conclusion

The Foundress of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Helene de Chappotin, had a great understanding of this dynamic. She lets us know that we shouldn’t get too disheartened when we see great need but have no idea where to start! I think she put all this in a nutshell when she said: “To perform a great work in the Church when there is a need for resurrection, begin by forgetting yourself.” She also invited us to “...open our hearts to the mercy which helps, excuses and above all, forgives.”

Surely it is in this way that we can truly find freedom to become partakers in the Mission of God through the community of His Church and, as Pope Francis said “... find the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God...”



Róisín Hickey FMM

⁷ Dulles SJ, Avery, Models of the Church – A Critical Assessment of the Church in all its Aspects, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1976, p. 15.

⁸ FMM Constitutions no. 39

Syria - Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Living in Aleppo

The FMM community in Aleppo is made up of five sisters of five different nationalities: Bernadette – French, Mariam – Pakistani, Urszula – Polish, Antoinette – Syrian, and Siham – Lebanese.

Up until now, their neighbourhood has remained calm and they have everything. The only difficulty has been to get enough fuel for heating, especially in the winter. However, the exodus of families and in particular youth fleeing from the area is a great worry...

Aleppo's population decreases more and more, especially its Christians. Five years of war has weakened the determination of the people to stay.

Many families have left to start a new life elsewhere. There are now probably 30, 000 Christians left out of a population of 130,000 before the war. Those who opt to stay continuously face the heart-breaking question of whether to continue in Aleppo or to exile themselves. They are torn, as the answer they receive from those already in exile is about the deceptions and disappointments they experience in their new country.

The remaining Aleppo population, fighting to survive, show great resilience. Some have learnt to adapt as others accept their fate and yet others have become fatalistic in their views.



They continue their daily business, going out in the street even when there is shelling. "Whether in my home or on the streets, if I am meant to be hit, I will be".

In these trying times our sisters ask: "what is our mission?" We are called to live in solidarity with the victims. We must try to help to relieve their sufferings a little, and rekindle their hope through this very dark tunnel of five years of war.

Our sisters try to accompany, console, smile, give hope, and comfort to people who have such massive needs. As Sister Siham puts it: "this is about all we can do. At times, it is far from easy! The sheer volume of ever-increasing needs is such that we feel so helpless".

Our FMM house is an interfaith gathering; an oasis of peace, and a joyful encouraging resting place. We welcome all groups whether families, primary schools, high schools, universities, scouts from various churches, and Muslim scouts. They come for the day trip, a camp or sessions.

Sr. Siham goes on to tell us: - "We have the delight of being able to offer our large chapel to the Maronite diocese for the Holy Week celebrations as their church is in a very dangerous area of the city.



It is quite damaged and difficult to reach with the shelling. So many people filled the chapel and hall. What a joy to be able to share our space with the



Church and its people who have not had the chance to celebrate a peaceful Easter during these last five years.

Thanks to the Grace of the loving, infinitely merciful presence of the One who became poor, naked, and crucified on a cross for us in the desperate raging

human folly, our sisters continue with love and enthusiasm the mission He shares with them. We end with a heartfelt thank you to everyone who supports our sisters in prayer which helps them to live and keep this presence alive as they try to be signs of hope.

Reaching Out To Those Wounded By Abortion

Back in 2001, I began to read about an organizations called, "Silent No More" in pro-life literature. Later I heard the name, "Rachel's Vineyard", and began to learn about post-abortion trauma.



Rachel's Vineyard is an international organization founded by psychologist and psychotherapist, Dr. Theresa Burke, in the 1980s to provide help and healing for women and men suffering post-

abortion trauma: <http://www.rachelsvineyard.org/>



Gradually, I also began praying for post-abortive women and men on the Faroes where surgical abortions are available up to 16 weeks into pregnancy. As I did so, I experienced various people confiding to me about family members, neighbours and friends who were suffering

from abortion.

In 2002, I read an article by an FMM sister involved in RV. On establishing contact with her, I received a copy of the book, "Forbidden Grief - the unspoken pain of abortion" by Dr. Theresa Burke, which I highly recommend. I was also able to establish contact with Bernadette Goulding, the co-ordinator for Rachel's Vineyard in Ireland. She expressed an interest in coming to the Faroes. I had no contacts and no resources. Finally there was a breakthrough in 2009 when I went to the annual general meeting of the Faroese pro-life organization, Føroyar Pro Vita, and spoke about RV. Hilda Viderø, one of the committee

members, expressed her interest and promised to do something!

In October 2010, Bernadette came to the Faroe Islands at the invitation of FPV to speak about post-abortion trauma and Rachel's Vineyard in several public locations. Bernadette had an abortion at nineteen, received help and healing through Rachel's Vineyard and later became involved in RV. To date, she has led over 90 weekends in about ten countries around the world.



Maria, Hilda and Bernadette

October 2010

Hilda and myself participated in separate RV weekends in Cork, Ireland, in 2011. The first RV weekend was held on the Faroe Islands in October 2012 with a team led by Bernadette Goulding of which Hilda and I were part. Several weekends followed led by Hilda and myself as registered representatives for Rachel's Vineyard on the Faroes. Follow-up evenings are also organized after the weekends. The generous support of Føroyar Pro Vita helped make all these retreats a reality.

In addition to leading the retreat team, we also raise awareness about post abortion trauma and healing. We have a Rachel's Vineyard homepage on Facebook and speak about post-abortion grief and healing in local media outlets and in various locations around the Faroe Islands. Videos of our talks have been made available on YouTube. We also run day long seminars which provide information about post abortion trauma and healing through a variety of mediums. Participants to date have included pastors, priests, nurses, psychotherapists and youth workers.

It is marvellous to experience how women and men deeply wounded by abortion find hope and healing during our RV weekends. They truly experience God's forgiveness and mercy and they get the opportunity to grieve and honour their aborted children. One of the participants of the first RV weekend has since spoken publicly several times about her abortion experience, others have done so anonymously, or by privately sharing their experiences with women considering abortion or suffering after abortion. Two of the first participants, a man and a woman, are also on our RV team.

I have the deepest respect for all these women and men. I continue to pray for the many others who have not yet been able to share their experiences and/or seek healing. Please pray for them and for our ministry that we may reach many other burdened and wounded souls. Thank you.

Maria Forrestal FMM

Tórshavn, Faroe Islands

My mission experiences in Syracuse, Sicily



Hello my name is Sr. Azusa Tokuda. I am a Japanese sister and a Franciscan Missionary of Mary. I was sent to the Province of Italy last September after my final vows in Japan. I was living in Italy for nine years before my entry into Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and I lived there again for four years during my novitiate and as a young religious. Now I live in Syracuse on the island of Sicily. I live in a community of five sisters with one in her late seventies, two in their fifties and two in their forties.

We celebrate fifty years this year since the foundation of the community in Syracuse. When we founded the community we shared the building with a nursery school. The people appreciated the sister's ministry in the nursery because they willingly helped the people when they needed their help. We closed the nursery in 2000 and the building was renovated as a shelter for those who needed assistance. The new building is called the Guest House for the Needy. Some of the

rooms on the ground floor are available for letting. There are also rooms available for family counselling. They also have a shop for dairy foods and organic vegetables and they also have an area set aside for the distribution of second hand clothes twice a week.

Besides all these groups, the place is well used by the Church often for group meetings, a prayer group, Scouts, retreats etc. There have been times when the police have brought women who are living in dangerous circumstances to the Guest House for the Needy so that they would be safe overnight. I shall never forget one particular woman who realised she was safe with us when she stayed overnight in a room in the basement of the Guest House. I am sure she received God's love through us. Since I arrived here have already met three cases like this within eight months.

There are many different ethnic groups living in Syracuse. We are always



ready to receive people who are seeking security. Initially I was a bit scared in dealing with the police cases but I am now getting used to it. We have received many people in need of shelter in our Guest House up until 2015. But since then, we decided to receive only families. In Syracuse there are many associations who look after needy individuals but we realised that there are less opportunities for families. They can stay for nine months in the Guest House and

they attend various projects during their stay in order to get some skills when they return to the society. This project is supported financially by other institutions as well as our FMM province fund. Fortunately there are many teachers and volunteers who support this project. The projects we have are: a synergetic farm, making accessories and boxes using recycled materials, and making home-made lemon jams and syrups for sale. Our sisters and families are working together to produce these items.

Today there are two families in the Guest House, one is an Italian family and the other is African, who are refugees from West Africa. They had undergone many hardships in North Africa so they had to run away from that situation in order to save themselves. I do not ask for the details of their situation until they want to talk to me freely. They share the kitchen and dining room in the Guest House. Both the Fathers of these families now have part time employment in the town. The other members of the families are attending projects and meetings. Both families seem to be getting on well together despite the difficulties they have gone through.

My role in this project is to relate with the families through the distribution of foodstuffs every morning. Through conversation with them at the beginning of each day, I get to know how they are. Once a week I go to the market and keep food in the pantry. I also go to

the big supermarket three times per week to collect articles of food that have just passed their sell-by date and cannot be sold by them. I distribute it to our neighbours who are in need as well. We receive quite a large amount every time. Although it is hard work it is work worth doing.

When I received this mission in Syracuse I thought I could work for refugees with enthusiasm, but I did not see many refugees in the town at all. Sometime ago we received a Muslim woman who had escaped from North Africa. She remained with us for four months. She went to the Italian language school and now she lives with some women who are in a similar situation.

Some people might say we should take care of refugees who have to leave their countries rather than the other poor people in Italy. But I feel that we should take care of any people who need our help because each person is a gift from God. When I arrived at Syracuse I wanted to take care of refugees from other countries but now I realise that whoever knock on our door are our guests. I am privileged to work for and with them in the Guest House. I thank God who has given me this opportunity to be with them. I am learning from them every day and relating to them more than helping them. This is our richness as Franciscan Missionaries of Mary.

Azusa Tokuda FMM

Samaritan Purse – Christmas Child!

No doubt you have heard about a project called, "Christmas Child" which is run by the international Christian organization, "Samaritan's Purse". It is a project in which I am involved and which means a great deal to me. I also know that it means so much more to thousands of children who receive shoe boxes covered in Christmas wrapping paper and full of lovely things.

Towards the end of September every year, I start going from shop to shop collecting empty shoe boxes which the people in the shops have kept for me. Why all these shoe boxes, you may ask? Well, I put a box and a leaflet in plastic bags for people to take home and bring back again a few weeks later, filled with small items of clothing, toothpaste, soap, colouring pencils, small toys, etc. There should also be KR.30- in every box to cover postage. I am a contact person for "Christmas

Child", so it is my duty to check the contents of every box that comes back, to see that they contain nothing which should not be there, e.g. shampoo, chocolate,



plastic revolvers or toy soldiers. These boxes go to war countries so war toys could be traumatic; a shampoo

bottle might break in the box and destroy the rest of the articles; chocolate melts!

I place boxes in the church entrance and in the kindergarten where I work, notifying people that they are free to take home as many as they want! One week before the actual date for embarkation, I announce that the boxes should be returned to our parish church. During Mass that Sunday, they are placed at the front of the church and the priest bless them and prays for the children who will receive them. Our boxes always go to Romania.

Last year a Faroese family went to Romania to help distribute the shoe boxes. Every time I see the little videos which they shared with us, I see the joy of the children opening the boxes and I have to dry my eyes. It is so touching. It is really worth all the work and preparation. Three other ladies from the parish help me to check the boxes. Last year, we collected 117!

Every year, thousands of boxes are collected from centres all over the country, packed together and sent by ship to England – courtesy of a Faroese company called, "Faroe Ship", which does not charge the organisers for the freight. Very generous indeed! Before the boxes leave the port, they are placed on

large wooden pallets which are then wrapped in plastic so that nothing gets damaged or destroyed. If possible, I usually give a helping hand at the warehouse near the port, alongside several other volunteers. Last year, a record 5489 boxes were sent from the Faroes to Romania.



After sharing the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said "Go and do likewise." That is the mission of Samaritan's Purse and also my mission—to follow the example of Christ by helping those in need and proclaiming the hope of the Gospel.

Marisa Spiteri Cremona FMM

Tórshavn, Faroe Islands

Mission: a verb or a noun?



MISSION is a word most of us are familiar with and a concept that the world of politics, business, the humanities and religion all share. We speak of space missions, UN missions, School mission statements and so on.

In Europe mission has had a particular significance throughout history. Right from the beginning of Christianity in Europe many great saints left all behind to travel throughout Europe and to the New World carrying the mission of Christ:

Today we still continue this mission to the world, many young people give their time and energy to improve the quality of life for others living in more challenging conditions, this is the gift they bring, and what a beautiful gift it is!

From a Christian perspective mission has been at the heart of our lives. Christ's great commission to 'go into all the world and proclaim the good news' (Mk. 16:15) has resonated in the hearts of men and women who have given their lives generously in the service of their brothers and sisters. We know these people, some of them are family members, or friends, or people we admire... Indeed maybe one day we will be those people?

For us as Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, mission is 'what we do' and 'who we are'— it is the 'verb' and the 'noun'. The essence of mission has remained unchanged from that great commission of Christ, but the way of mission has not. Today we understand that mission is first and foremost about relationship.

In the words of Donal Dorr 'there is a two way exchange of gifts between missionaries and the people among whom they work...that mission is not just a matter of

doing things for people. It is first of all a matter of being with people, of listening and sharing with them.ⁱ

As FMM, part of our 'being with people' is through our work and our presence: in parishes, as hospital and prison chaplains, in youth ministry, with refugees/asylum seekers and in sharing prayer and spirituality. Our communities are places of welcome for all people and for our sisters coming from around the world for language studies, some of whom are now on mission here. They bring a richness of culture and diversity, an awareness of our universality and a strengthening of our relationship with our sisters

throughout the world; from Syria to Senegal and from Argentina to Russia, where they too live out the mission of Christ among his people, some through the difficulties of war and famine, others reaching out to people of all faiths and none, being 'SISTER' to our world.

So is mission a verb or a noun? It is both and in the words of Pope Francis "part of the 'grammar' of faith, something essential for those who listen to the voice of the Spirit...[for] those who follow Christ cannot fail to be missionaries...."

ⁱ Bevens Stephen B, Schroeder Roger P,
Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today,
Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 2011, p20.

For Further Information about the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary Please contact us on:

Email: fmmimesvoc@yahoo.co.uk or visit www.fmmvocations.org

36-38 Gwendolen Avenue, Putney, London, SW5 6EJ Tel: - 0044-7470-386805

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Email: enquiries@coldashcentre.org



Healing and Mercy in the Ministry of Personal Accompaniment and Human/Spiritual Development

I have been asked to share a little of the ministry I am involved in but I feel I can only do this from my own experience. In the light of this, I share a few thoughts with you... so here goes!

In the ministry of personal accompaniment and human/spiritual development workshops, I have become more aware of the “wounded healer’s” presence which we bring to this ministry. A presence that I believe arises from experiencing God’s bountiful compassion through inner healing. Reflecting on the latter, I ask myself “how has God in prayer or through others walked with me?” Although, in so many ways impoverished, I am also aware that I have experienced love in my life as well as liberation from illusions, especially of my false-self, enabling me to be a life-giver and lover. Memories also arose from early years in religious life when I was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis, and felt isolated from community. I thought my dream of being a missionary had ended, only later to realise that time spent apart with this illness influenced the direction of my life.

Later, as a health visitor I was plunged into ‘family primary health care’, opening me into another world, other families and other values. Later, serving in the healing ministry in different parts of the world, and working with younger sisters in religious formation, I became aware of my own limitations, my own struggles of loneliness, my hunger for compassion and love. Mercifully, as unearned income during a retreat, God showed me compassion while I was meditating on the Annunciation (Lk, 2). It was then that I experienced an inner power; freeing me and giving me courage to face my fears and feelings of barrenness. I then perceived that for life to be lived meaningfully, I had to give birth to Jesus, first in my own life and then become a midwife to others. Jung, tells us “He alone has a genuine claim to self-confidence, for he has faced the dark ground of his self and thereby has gained himself. This inner experience gives him faith and trust, an inner certainty which makes him capable of overcoming future threats by the same means”.¹

In spite of being vulnerable and flawed I encountered God’s compassion and understood that we live in a state of anxiety when we are not true to the person God has created us to be. Basically, a life-long journey of individuation, where trauma when faced, plays its part freeing us to live the gifts received in darkness and offers the opportunity to ‘let go’ of what stops us being truly alive. Consequently, as wounded healers in the ministry of healing and reconciliation, compassion calls forth God’s healing spirit, unbinds personal wounds, and so lessens the violence in our world. Living the Paschal Mystery and choosing life over death as we walk with each other, transforming our pain instead of ignoring it, putting on a brave face. Nevertheless, I find myself in constant admiration, perceiving great courage, as I accompany people facing painful stumbling blocks such as low self-esteem or feeling trapped by anxiety or fear in their lives. If we avoid what T.S. Elliot called “primitive terror” at the heart of our life, we miss our connection to life’s intensity and mystery. People who in life have experienced alienation, abandonment, abuse; who then live with feelings of shame, stress, sickness, loneliness; find in compassion, a door which opens up new life.

Margaret Taylor FMM



Jung C.G, Myth of Meaning. Page 58-59

¹ Eliot T.S. Four Quarters

¹ Pearson Carol, Hero’s Journey

Be Merciful as your heavenly Father is Merciful



When we heard of the inauguration of a year of mercy by Pope Francis I'm sure the initial reaction of most people was to see it as quite unproblematic. Who could argue with the promotion of the great works of mercy – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those sick or in prison?

There is however a deeper truth. A call to reflect on the mercy of God is a call to explore again the very nature of who God is.

Voices have, over time, spoken out to remind us that our understanding of the nature Of God, the nature of our relationship to Him and the interplay of both in Church and society are not without difficulty and so need to be explained and proclaimed with sensitivity to the listener. The words, the symbols, we use when we speak of the Divine are powerful. They can lead to God or stand in the way of understanding.

Theologians reflect on the truths of faith, on biblical revelation and on doctrine. They do not do so in a vacuum but in the concreteness of history. It is in a specific moment of time and space that the human person works towards his or her salvation. This must surely be the driver, the bringing of people to God and it is the people of today with whom we are concerned. Yet it seems that when they speak of the mercy of God Christians are perceived as presenting an image of God the Lawgiver ruling His people, demanding their obedient submission. Part of the reason for this is that Western Christianity has for centuries seemed to emphasise the justice of a God who demanded satisfaction for sin; His mercy, His forgiveness merely a concession to human weakness.

Such an understanding is not acceptable to a generation, raised to approve of justice certainly but also to mount a vigorous defence of the rights and liberty of the individual, a generation that looks askance at political dictatorship, considers the use of the term 'judgemental' pejorative. It should not be acceptable to any of us.

The vision of God presented to us in Scripture is of a personal God who acts in history, through events, through representatives, prophets and leaders, through the law, and finally through His Son and His Spirit but always to the end of saving His people, drawing them into the divine life itself.

It is within the context of a relationship of love and care for His people that the judgement and the mercy of God are to be understood. To see God as tyrannical parent bent on restricting the liberty of His creation is to misunderstand the nature of God. The patriarchal ideal in Scripture is not to be understood in terms of exploitative dominance. The Fatherhood of God is not a power but a love relationship. Sin must be judged - the human person is created with the freedom to accept or reject the good - but within an understanding of the nature of God as infinite love and compassion. Mercy is an aspect of love. It is not a patronising gesture from a distant, judgemental tyrant. It is not an affront to justice. It is not an expression of pity. It is a call from the heart of the God who longs to be 'God with us.' God does not dispense mercy, forgiveness, compassion. God *is* Mercy, Love, Compassion. How does a meditation on the nature of God affect our lives today?

The New Testament reveals to us a God who is relational in His very being. It is in the image of a God who is communion that we are made. We are truly human, images of the Divine, when we live in harmonious inter-relationship with our fellow beings. This is our destiny.

Salvation is not some fairy tale promise of a perfect land beyond the rainbow but a work in progress. We are called to work with the Spirit to realise the plan that God has for His creation. The Spirit, the very bond of love between the Father and the Son, is God reaching out to us, calling us to work to build the Kingdom, a community reflecting the relationship that is Trinity.

Of course each human person is uniquely significant but in a society where individualism in its most unattractive form seems to be everywhere, we must take up that challenge. God really does ask us to be "all in this together."

Often are 'freedom' and 'rights' used without considering the purpose of freedom, the nature of rights, the responsibilities that balance them.

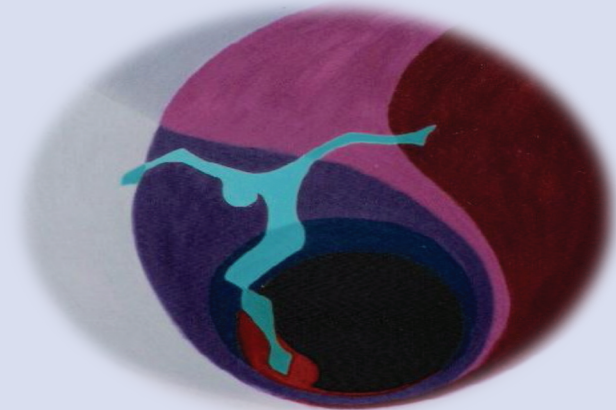
My rights are not more important than the rights of others, my freedom must not forge another's chains. Freedom is to be used to build community.

When the father of a victim of a terrorist act said that he forgave the bombers the world seemed startled. We are not today a forgiving people. We are quick to judge, to condemn.

How do we present a God of mercy to an unmerciful world? The first exemplar of this God must be the church. At all levels this has not always been the case. There have been both structural and personal failures. Pope Francis, therefore, has set out his views on the problems facing the family

It is not for us to condemn but to support those whom we may see as outside the norms of the Christian family. This might simply take the form of a friendly word, an offer to babysit, but that, to the recipient, is the face of a merciful God.

The migrant crisis has stirred up feelings of both compassion and resentment. Fear draws us inwards whereas the Spirit of God inspires openness, reaching out.



Listen to that prophetic call to be counter cultural, to turn towards the 'other' in whatever place, in whatever form we encounter it, reflecting the love, the compassion of a God who is mercy. A smile is a good place to start.

Dr. Elizabeth Kearney



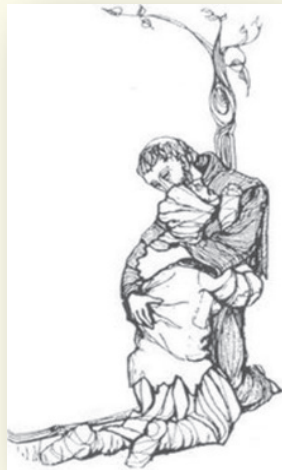
*"To be faithful, to be creative, we need to be able to change.
To change!
And why must I change?
So that I can adapt to the situations in which I must
proclaim the Gospel. To stay close to God,
we need to know how to set out;
we must not be afraid to set out."*

Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

Mercy and Compassion in the Life and Writings of Francis and Clare

Given who you are today, where did *that* story begin? As Francis lay dying, he reflected upon his life story. In the opening lines of his Testament he says: *The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.*¹

What is striking about Francis' words is where he begins his story. Thomas of Celano, his first biographer, talks about long periods of prayer. Other early biographers describe Francis' disillusionment with the business and military worlds. But for Francis, his conversion did not occur according to any well-tryed plan or in any specific place. Given who he was on his deathbed, his story began with an encounter with a human being, one who was looked upon with horror and disgust: the leper. Lepers were excluded from society and were abhorred by people. Francis says that he feared them and then came to love them, to the point where he could "*show mercy to them.*" With this as the starting point of his story, Francis gives us a key to his spiritual outlook: if you are looking to discover God, look for the leper in your life, the person who is most troubling or abhorrent to you.



Francis tells us what he did in that encounter with the leper: he acted with mercy, or more accurately translated, with a heart sensitive to misery

(*misericordia*). James Keenan² defines mercy as the willingness to enter into the chaos of others to answer them in their need. In acting with mercy, this is exactly what Francis does, he enters into the chaos of the lepers' lives. Not only are their lives changed, but Francis' life takes on a new direction. A new story begins.

Mercy is a theme of Pope Francis' pontificate, especially this Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, but evidenced also in his prayer on Easter Sunday 2013: "*Let us be renewed by God's mercy, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives too; and let us become agents of this mercy, channels through which God can water the earth, protect all creation and make justice and peace flourish*"

Francis' encounter with the leper is not a one-off meeting. *Showing mercy* is a way of life. Entering into the chaos of their lives and answering their needs, acting with a heart sensitive to those in misery, is essential to Francis' understanding of the spiritual life. He wished that all who joined him, share this compassion towards the poor, and that they first serve the lepers.³ Very quickly, however, compassion for the poor turned into identification with the poor and the marginalised. The mercy that Francis was so eager to show, taught him the need of personally experiencing misery before being able to reach out to another.

Francis had a deep love of Christ. Not the Christ of many of the late medieval paintings – the *Pantocrator*, the judge at the last judgement. It was the Christ of Bethlehem who became one of us because He loved us; the Christ of the Last Supper who gave Himself as food for spiritually starving humanity, and the Christ of Calvary, who died as a sacrifice so that we would be raised up from our own humanity. Overwhelmed at discovering such a Brother, Francis' response was: "*Hold back nothing of*

¹ Testament 1-3. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.1 eds R. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellmann, W. Short, New City Press, New York 1999.

² James F. Keenan SJ, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, Rowman & Littlefield: Maryland, 2008. Introduction p.xv.

³ *The Assisi Compilation* 9. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.2 eds R. Armstrong, J.A.W. Hellmann, W. Short, New City Press, New York 2000.

yourselves for yourselves, that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally!"⁴ Francis' conversion was a rejection of his former life in order to give himself totally to God. He wrote *"That which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body."*⁵

Francis' Letter to a Minister⁶ is written to a brother called to minister to his brothers. Those called to exercise authority were to be *"ministers & servants."*⁷ This particular brother seems to have found the burden a demanding one and wished to be relieved of the responsibility and become a hermit. Francis reminds the minister of the reason for Jesus' coming among us: to reveal the mercy of God. The one causing the minister such pain, seems to be a brother who has not simply fallen once or twice or who has committed a grave sin, but someone whose habitual state seems to be that of sin. This brother might be touched by the grace of conversion i.e. looking for mercy; but he might also be so hardened that he is not. Whatever the case, Francis' advice is the same: *do not allow such a person to leave your presence without your mercy.*⁸

Not only does Francis encourage the minister to love those brothers who make life difficult, he adds: *"Do not wish that they be better Christians."*⁹ We are not to judge or see ourselves as better than others, but always keep in mind that, out of love for us, the Son of God entered our history and endured suffering and death. The misery and abuse we may have to endure in the fulfilment of our responsibilities offer opportunities for identifying with the Suffering Servant and are expressions of the humanity we share with all who have been redeemed by Christ's blood. In this light, who could deny that such indignities are *"more than a hermitage"*?¹⁰

⁴ *A Letter to the Entire Order* 29. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.1

⁵ *Testament* 3.

⁶ *Letter to a Minister*. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.1

⁷ *The Later Rule* X:1. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.1

⁸ *Letter to a Minister*. 9.

⁹ *Letter to a Minister*. 7.

¹⁰ *Letter to a Minister*. 8.

Francis experienced how difficult the brothers could be. His near despair is apparent in his words to Brother Leo describing their rejection of him: *"An uneducated and despicable man is not right for us, we do not want you to rule over us. You cannot speak; you are simple and ignorant."*¹¹ Thus Francis came to experience the greatest act of inner poverty: the letting go of his life's work, the work he believed God had called him to accomplish. Thus he entered more deeply into the Passion of Christ who died stripped of everything and abandoned by all but his closest followers.

Francis received the stigmata on La Verna in September 1224. It was a sign of Francis' love for God and God's love for Francis. Following this mystical experience, he wrote *The Praises of God*. Leo noted that Francis wrote it *"giving thanks to God for the kindness bestowed on him."* This loving kindness of God elicits from Francis a response of trust and confidence in the final praise of God whom he calls *"merciful Saviour"*. Jesus, the merciful Saviour, took on our fragility in order to reveal the depths of the Father's love for us. Francis, in response, cries out *"Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing."*¹² His eagerness to begin again, is so that he might not miss one opportunity of experiencing God's loving mercy.

We have an even smaller collection of writings from Clare. In a letter to Ermentrude of Bruges (a Flemish founder trying to live in the spirit of Clare), she writes: *"Love God and Jesus, His Son, Who was crucified for us sinners, from the depths of your heart, and never let the thought of Him leave your mind. Meditate constantly on the mysteries of the cross... Do not be afraid, daughter. God, Who is faithful in all His words and holy in all His deeds, will pour His blessings upon you and your sisters."*¹³

Suffering is a part of life. No one can escape it, but how suffering is understood informs and influences how one handles it. Clare focused her sisters on Christ crucified. She prayed before the image of the crucified Jesus that spoke to Francis and contemplated the Gospel accounts of the Passion. This may seem an unhealthy stress on pain or a glorification of suffering.

¹¹ Thomas of Celano, *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul*, 145. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.2.

¹² Thomas of Celano, *The Life of St. Francis* 103. Cf. *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* Vol.1.

¹³ *Letter to Ermentrude of Bruges* 11-12, 15. Cf. *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, ed. R. Armstrong, Franciscan Institute Publications: St. Bonaventure, New York 1993

That was not Clare's intention. She knew that staying with Jesus in the Passion accounts would move her beyond suffering to a deep realization of Jesus' love. Recognizing such love creates a burning desire to be one with the crucified.

There is no embracing the cross that does not lead to at least hints of resurrection!



Clare was no victim-martyr. She did not go looking for suffering, but was open to facing the suffering that came her way. She knew grace would be present and this grace would give her the strength and courage she needed. It would also give her the vision to see beyond herself and grasp the insights that only God could teach. Clare learned that embracing the cross opens one totally to God,

who keeps teaching the depths of love. Our suffering can become one with that of others. Together, we learn the compassion and love mirrored by Jesus.

In the third of four letters to Agnes of Prague, the queen of Bohemia who became a Poor Clare, Clare writes, *"The soul of a faithful person...is greater than heaven itself, since the heavens and the rest of creation cannot contain their Creator and only the faithful soul is His dwelling place and throne... As the glorious Virgin of virgins carried [Jesus] materially, so you, too, by following in her footprints, especially those of poverty and humility, can without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body, holding Him by whom you and all things are held together, possessing that which in comparison with the other transitory possessions of the world, you will possess more securely."*¹⁴

Clare challenges us to change the way we look at ourselves and others. This "indwelling of God" calls for a respect and appreciation for who we are. Clare taught her sisters to see themselves as temples of God, mirrors of Christ and revelations of the Holy Spirit.

Such servanthood holds none of the unhealthy implications of being slaves or doormats. It calls us to mirror the self-emptying *misericordia* we see mirrored

in Jesus.¹⁵ The same Jesus dwells in our neighbours who are also temples of God, mirrors of Christ and revelations of the Spirit. God dwells in each of us and each of us uniquely manifests God.

Service goes beyond merely doing for one another. Service, in Clare's view, is a calling to be reflections of God for one another. Many of the sisters¹⁶ speak of Clare's compassion and how she consoled sisters by crying out their tears with them – entering into their chaos to meet them in their need. We cannot take away all the pain that we witness. Life is messy; even Jesus did not clean up all the messiness in the lives of the people he encountered. Clare teaches us to bring our messiness to God who will teach us what we need to know.



Within each person, Clare saw a seed awaiting birth. She encourages us to endure life's labour pains and bring forth life. This is the vision she held with Francis, one they gleaned from the gospel. The vision of the Father of Mercies revealed in Christ, the merciful Saviour.

Dr. Brian Purfield

Brian Purfield is a member of the Mount Street Jesuit Team since 2004. He organises and leads courses in Adult Formation. He has a particular interest in deepening an awareness and love of scriptures. He has given retreats in and courses in many parts of the world. He studied theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and St Bonaventure's University in New York.

¹⁴ Third Letter to Agnes of Prague, 21-22, 24-26.

¹⁵ Fourth Letter to Agnes of Prague, 15-25.

¹⁶ The Acts of the Process of Canonization.

Conversion in Relationship

"Nothing is permanent except change". Human beings change in observing and relating to others as this requires growth in the fundamental aspects of their physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, cultural, linguistic, educational, sexual and psychological maturity. The old saying goes: "no one is an island". Therefore, to be a fully functioning human organism, man cannot live alone, but must relate to self by self-acknowledgement, self-acceptance, responsibility, balance etc., and also relate to others by the ability to communicate, co-operate, be flexible, etc., (cf. O'Conner, 1984- 1996, p. P.94). Human spirituality concerns the way of being in the world and the experience of a human person in relationship to self, others and the world. The "I" is individual, unique, but "I" is not an island on its own planet. "I" relates to self and others. Martin Buber wrote the book with the title "I and Thou" which is a pair of words that cannot be separated. He explains that humans are defined by the word pairs: "I-It" and "I-Thou" (cf. Buber, 1970, p.53). The "I" relates to the world and others. When someone speaks "You" it then becomes "I". In other words, without "You", "I" will not exist as a fully functioning person. Therefore, we have made the "I" towards "Thou", in which we move into existence in a relationship without bounds (cf. Buber, 1970, p.117). This relationship with others leads to a relationship with God, as St. John the disciple said, "If you do not love the brothers that you can see, you cannot love God, whom you have never seen" (1Jn 4:20). Buber also said human life finds its meaning in relationships and all of our relationships bring us ultimately into relationship with God, who is the Eternal Thou (cf. Buber, 1970, p.128).

In the Gospel of John the meeting with the Samaritan woman at the Well of Jacob is a wonderful story. Jesus began his conversation with the basic need of a human being - asking for water. From that point, he breaks down the cultural barriers between Jews and Samaritans, between man and woman, to create a relationship with her and then he led her to be herself and the conversion happened naturally. Beginning from the human point of view, He led her to a relationship with God and others and then she created a relationship between other people and Jesus (Jn 4: 1-30).

For Saint Francis of Assisi the dynamic process of conversion begins at the human level as recounted in the Testament. His conversion started by an encounter with human beings - the lepers whom he treated with mercy, with a heart sensitive to misery (cf. Armstrong, 1994, p. 229). Through them he discovered the hidden presence of God. The way that Francis treated his brothers was very human. He asked his brothers to receive newcomers with kindness and to love each other as a mother loves her children and to take care of the sick brothers. In the letter to Brother Leo, he called him "my son", like the love of a mother for her child, and talked with him in a friendly way. He asked him to come anytime, not only for the sake of his soul but also for some consolation (cf. Armstrong et al, 1999, p.122). This proved that Francis was a very human and sensitive person. He cared for his brothers with love which is the basic need of human beings (Maslow, 1970, p.20). It is through very human actions that he leads his brothers to the love of each other and God.

Franciscan conversion is a dynamic process until death, beginning with human and Christian growth, in which each has a personal encounter with the Lord and responds to His call individually under the direction of the Holy Spirit and following the Franciscan rule and Constitutions. Therefore the Franciscan way of living is to let every day of our life be a day of conversion engaging the whole being in a process from good to better. As Francis said: "let us begin for up to now we have done nothing" (cf. Armstrong et al, 2000, P. 640). This progression develops on the basis of human growth, by way of being in the world, and Christian development by committing oneself faithfully to the Church through apostolic mission and service and participating in the Sacraments of the Church.

Each is trained personally to become an individual Franciscan who is living and working with others for the greater good of all, an instrument of the Gospel of reconciliation and peace for all in which people can be brought together in one nation in God.

Thuy Tien Nguyen FMM

FMM Spirituality as lived in the Institute and with lay people

"Ah, if only you knew the gift of God!

May you know this gift and may you correspond with it

and may you live it in all its fullness."

Bl. Mary of the Passion. Dec 20th 1901

As Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, from the Noviciate onwards we strive to make the Charism we learn about, our own. This Charism, rooted as it is in Scripture, Theology, the Fathers of the Church and Church teaching, is so rich that it takes a lifetime to begin to really appreciate this, "Gift of God," for it to really take root in us.

Through our prayer and reflection, opening ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit, we ingest and absorb the elements of our Charism into our very being, so that it becomes an integral part of who we are. From there it informs our beliefs, prayer, attitudes, values and choices. In this way each FMM re-births the charism and expresses it in her life and times

For the most part we share our Charism informally and unconsciously. Inevitably when we are in our various ministries, our mission throughout the world, we bear witness and give life to the Charism by word, expression and action in these varied situations.

Our Charism is a living organism; it can never be static or fixed. In my own life time as an fmm I have experienced the enriching of our Charism by the Documents of Vatican 11; deeper theological reflection on Eucharist; Living the Paschal Mystery; Mariology; Community Life; new ways of Mission; Religious Life etc.

Some of us have the challenge, the joy and the privilege of being able to share the Spirit of the Institute, our Charism and our Franciscan Spirit, in a more direct way, by facilitating sessions and retreats based on the Charism for our own fmm sisters; working as spiritual directors for our secular Franciscan brothers and sisters; leading sessions in Parishes; gathering Associates and Friends for input prayer and sharing. Many join us for Eucharistic Adoration and other moments of prayer.

One way which I found very enriching was to share some of the themes of our General Chapters in our Parishes. These included Parish Days on Eucharist; The Emmaus Journey; Establishing the Reign of God; A Kingdom of Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation; Francis and Clare; our humble God; our call to Mission; living Community;

building up the Body of Christ: Following Pope Francis' lead we included in our themes the loving forgiveness, compassion and mercy of our God. Surely our next theme could be "Transformation."

We learn to know Blessed Mary of the Passion through her life and writings. Her Spiritual Notes are a very rich treasure indeed. However patience and perseverance are needed because of the language of her time and difficulty in translation. Since we are called to live the Charism by our very vocation, I believe that if we read prayerfully; open to the Holy Spirit we can discover the "treasures within." More recently further spiritual writings of B. Mary of the Passion have been uncovered and a more modern translation is being prepared. This is indeed exciting news for all of us.

WHAT OUR FRIENDS HAVE SAID:-

"I knew St. Francis loved animals, and then sister told us about his life and gave me a book. I saw him very differently after that."

"I never prayed to Our Lady. I didn't think much about her really. Then sister started speaking to us about Mary, something changed. I see her always with me now... as guide as it were."

"Mary became for me a real Mother. My own Mother died when I was young and so I had never known her. Mary gives me the tenderness and love of a Mother."

"I realised how difficult Mary's life had been and how she had to keep repeating her "Yes" to God."

"I read the short life of B. Mary of the Passion which the sisters had given to me. I could not put it down. What a fantastic woman!"

"When the sisters came to our parish to lead prayer and reflections it was different from the other days we had experienced. They shared their life with us. They did not just tell us about it. They always gave time for silence and prayer and sharing afterwards."

"I love the fact that we have exposition of the Blessed Sacrament when we meet."

“When we first came to the sisters as Friends of the FMM we felt like we were one family united as brothers and sisters, not just friends.”

“We have such unity among us. When we do fundraising events together, there is such joy.”

Philomena Wright FMM

“My journey with the FMM as a lay person”



When I was asked to write about my journey with the FMM as a lay person, I did not hesitate to say “Yes”. Thank God that I have so much to share! Perhaps I had

better start with how the journey began. After a long period of ‘wondering and wandering’ concerning my vocation, I went to the UK to study, in 2003. At that time, SARS was spreading around the world and every passenger arriving at London’s Heathrow airport had to wait in a line for quarantine inspection. A Korean sister was sitting next to me, waiting for her own turn. I wanted to talk to her, but at the same time I was hesitant because I was afraid of facing the possibility that I might need to reconsider my religious vocation. I kept saying to myself, “Don’t talk to the sister”, but I was already introducing myself to her. She invited me to an FMM community in London, and I came to meet her, Sr. Leontine, and Sr. Sabine, another Korean sister, who have both been wonderful spiritual mentors since then. I stayed in the UK for five and a half years, and through FMM sisters, Jesus freed me from being stuck in my relationship with God, and I learned to experience His unconditional love more deeply. Through their kindness, sharing their space, food, time, and most of all, their love, I experienced Jesus’ love that is present in His people, and witnessed how that love can be revealed in our daily lives. All these experiences changed me.

In particular, the FMM in Korea was considering starting an FMM community for lay people, which was something that I always thought should be encouraged more in the church. Having been brought up as a Catholic, I was fortunate to meet several religious people who were committed to their gospel vocations, and they had a great influence on shaping my faith and on determining the direction of my life. I felt that

greater interactions between religious communities and lay people would be important to help both parties to live fully in Jesus and to enable the church to be livelier in the Holy Spirit. In 2009, the 50th anniversary of the Korean FMM, the first lay group of FMM started, and I was happy with, and grateful for, their invitation. For the last seven years, we have been truly nourished by the teaching from the Gospel and the FMM spirituality. I cannot fully express in words how much the sisters have done for us. Through them, we truly experience that God nourishes His people entirely for free. What the FMM lay family now find amazing, is that we genuinely feel that we are a family! The word, ‘family’ is what we chose together to describe our identity. Of course, there are conflicts and disagreements among us (as there are in any family) but we value our bond and relationship more, and work together to deal with them in Jesus. In this hectic and materialistic society, we encourage each other to remember the essence of our lives and to live according to the teachings of the Gospel and FMM spirituality. When meeting once a month, we often arrive quite exhausted with all kinds of burdens in our daily lives, but go back to our own situations having been refreshed by the Holy Spirit within each of us. We commonly confess that we get more and more conscious of JPIC (Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation) too. This September, we are expecting to welcome the seventh group. We don’t know how our community will develop, but we search together and are trying to trust the Holy Spirit to lead us and to make us open to His guidance.



Despite all our shortcomings and selfishness, we hope, Pray, and encourage one another, so that we can be a Witness of Jesus, and His joy and peace can grow and be shared in our daily lives. Thank God that we are an FMM family!

Dr. Rosa Park

Mary of the Passion - her charism -

Who is she for me? -

and what is her message for us today?



Let me begin this sharing by asking myself what does this year of Mercy mean to me, an FMM sister who is trying to live out our charism in this troubled time in the world.

In this jubilee of Mercy Pope Francis hopes to change the image of God, and by doing so, change the face of the Church. There has never before been a Jubilee year dedicated to this characteristic of God, and it seems to be clear that our Pope wishes for all Christians to recognize God's mercy and to place the word "Mercy" at the center of their attention and their lives. Only then can Christians speak words of mercy and peace by their lives to the world. In fact, the homilies, the talks, the prayers have been focused on the God of mercy and special apostolic attention has been given by the Church to areas "where disasters, violence of all kinds and human exploitation tear apart the fibre of creation; and where there are tears, pain and fears of children, women, and men."¹

I find the orientations of the Institute, expressed in the chapter documents very much in line with this guidance of the Church. The 2008 Chapter sent us back

to God who is "humble and a servant, who comes in the weakness and powerlessness of human limitations"², we've been trying "to accept first of all this image of God and welcome his love" walking a journey of transformation "to be with the poorest, a presence of compassion, joy and hope."³, St. Francis and Bl. Mary of the Passion always remain special sources of inspiration for us FMMs on this way of living the Gospel today

Who is Mary of Passion for me? And what do I think the message of her life is for the world and for the Church? Actually this is a question that each of us,

FMMs should strive to find an answer for both in this context of the Church and the journey of the Institute; but also in different ways according to their own situations. Of course, I have also, like each one of us, something to tell you about Mary of the Passion in my own journey of living out my vocation as a Christian and as an FMM.

1. Mary of the Passion : a story

Mary of the Passion is first of all, a story! Even before I entered the Institute, I wonder how often I have heard about her story! At the first meeting with an FMM sister,

she gave me her biography. What a amazing life she had! A bit naive, I was afraid of the God who had led her in such a difficult way. It was not only through her biography but also through the sisters that I got to know Mary of the passion. She was present among the lives of the sisters, their deeds and words. There were sisters who confessed to get over doubts about their vocation finding light from Mary of the Passion who said "I will not change at the time of darkness what was decided at the moment of light." How many of us found the inspiration in Mary of the Passion who asked her companions to keep the silence about all that had happened in India! How about her suffering she must have had, and her spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness during her deposition! It has not been rare to meet the sisters who enjoyed sharing many anecdotes of "petite Helene" as if they actually met her. Yet, isn't it true that I have grown in my affection for Mary of the Passion and for the Institute through the stories of her life?

2. Mary of the Passion : a journey

Every life, especially the Christian life, is a journey. To be the children of God by the consecration of baptism is our essential identity, but it's also the beginning of the journey where we are becoming day by day the daughters and sons of God. My identity is in this "becoming" and one day, at the end of journey, I hope, I will know who I really am in the plan of the Father. Of

¹ Chapter document 2008 introduction

² Chapter document 2008

³ Chapter document 2014 introduction

course, it's not always easy to remain faithful but it is on this journey where I have experienced the presence of God whose love never leaves me alone in the ups and downs of life. I have realized that religious life refers only to the deepening of our relationship with God and being transformed into the likeness of God.

Mary of the Passion is a companion on this journey. It was she who helped me to name what is the end of this journey, where to orient in different situations of life since she had herself searched till the end of her life. It was in 1903, a year before her departure to her heavenly Father's dwelling that she set out again. ; "I am leaving for a country which I have never wanted to dwell in completely: that of the cherubim. ... I am going where Mary leads me." (NS. 406 29 May 1903)

To be honest, I had not been really touched by her spiritual journals before I gave myself almost a year in 2007 for a thorough reading of her writings. It allowed me to discover how the Holy Spirit had led her to encounter God by broadening her horizon so that this encounter would "change our (her) way of seeing, our (her) way of contemplation, and our (her) way of being in the world."⁴ What a wonderful work God was accomplished throughout her entire life, and what a wonderful work God wants to carry out in my proper life! I was amazed at the treasure hidden in her spiritual journals. It seems I know Mary of the Passion from the depth of her heart and she is generous enough to let me in her most sacred place just because I am her daughter as an FMM. Since then I feel I understand her; and she in turn understands my daily struggle. Of course I am so different from her in every sense, but at least I have confidence that Mary of the Passion accompanies me so that I may be a little more attentive to the action of the Holy Spirit both when everything seems to be going well and even at the times when the roads appears like an impasse and seem blocked. I hope and pray also through her intercession to go on this journey with courage, faithfulness and passion just like her.

3. Mary of the Passion : a contemplation

⁴ Chapter document 2008, OUR FRANCISCAN IDENTITY LIVED TODAY

⁵ Constitutions Art. 1.

⁶ NS 48. : "the Word Who knows that outside the Father and Himself and Love, nothing exists. He sees that which opposes love: sin. Perfect love, He at once wills and begins His inexplicable self-abasement.

⁷ NS 167. : "Whom should I send? I see the deep order of love which is the cause of the Word's "Behold I come!" not being spoken but exists in

I often find myself being drawn by the same face of God that Mary of the Passion was contemplating. There are some moments she inspired me. Contemplation of Mary of the Passion is very much centred on the Blessed Trinity. When she contemplates the mysteries of the Incarnation and Eucharist she is drawn up to the "divine movement within itself, as it were: Being from whom all proceeds, Wisdom contemplating the power of Being and manifesting this power, and Love issuing from the gaze of Being and the Word (NS 146, March 27, 1884). God is in this mutual regard of Love,⁵ forming the unity in diversity and is the model of all our relationships as it says in our Chapter Document 2014. ; "... we contemplate the mystery of Jesus Incarnate who brings us to the wider community with our sisters and brothers and with the whole of creation, and invites us to enter into a movement of interdependence and collaboration, care and respect."

This divine movement is like an overflowing river. "Then, from there, God seemed to fall into my soul, ... I saw it as a kind of merging of my soul and God, having it in Himself, this same movement of love within Himself from all eternity toward humanity (NS 146)." Drawn into "the presence and in the shadow of God (NS 40)", she contemplates sometimes the Word, knowing and seeing the reality of the world, wills and begins His movement of kenosis⁶ or sometimes the Father, before the same reality, who says "Whom should I send?"⁷ Finally, she is called to say "Behold I come"⁸ united with the Verb, like Mary. Because she was aflame with the thirst of God for humanity.⁹ She shares the compassion of God before the suffering of the world; "I see in such a painful way the actual absence of love (NS 48)." After this contemplation, taken by the "river bursting forth from the Holy Trinity (NS 167)", I feel also invited to say "Behold I come" for a wider fraternity of whole creation and "to be with the poorest, a presence of compassion, joy and hope" wherever I am, whatever I do. I pray that in and with Mary, Mary of the Passion "journeys with us and teaches us how to be transformed into the One whom we contemplate."¹⁰

Sabina Heong FMM

Himself. Love is driven out by sin, the adoration due to God is stolen from Him! Love, no longer found in humanity!"

⁸ NS 167. : "It seems that the Holy Trinity bends towards Mary Victim and says: "It is you". It is this little child, this poor wretched one who will be the woman with the true power."

⁹ NS 40 : "I thirst! But how she(her soul) thirsts for God, truth and charity, not only for herself but for the whole earth".

¹⁰ Chapter document 2014, our vision

Lord Jesus Christ,

You have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,

And have told us that whoever sees you sees Him...

- Pope Francis' prayer for the Jubilee Year of Mercy