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# MIC

**MISSION NEWS**



**THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**

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Laval-des-Rapides  
Laval, P.Q., Canada  
H7N 4Z4  
Tel.: (514) 663-6460

**Directress**  
Micheline Marcoux, m.i.c.

**Editor**  
Ma. Anthea Raso, m.i.c.

**Assisting Staff**  
Helene Labelle, m.i.c.  
Christine Desrochers

**Circulation**  
Lucille La Salle, m.i.c.  
and MIC team  
René Cournoyer

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Back: MIC Photo (Japan)



## Your Kingdom come!

*Your kingdom come! A prayerful wish for a kingdom to come! Is this expression realistic for our modern times? Today, it seems that democracy makes the headlines more often than royalty. And again, if only the royalty presented in the Gospel resembled a bit our royalties. On the contrary!*

*The shepherds, upon the angels' invitation, searched for their Savior! (Lk 2,11) The wise men asked, "Where is the king of the Jews who has just been born to you? We saw his star as it rose." (Mt 2,2) And Luke adds, "So they hurried and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger." (Lk 2,16) The magi, ever faithful to the star, bowed down before the Child and his mother and then fled from Herod.*

*What an astonishing kingship!*

*A royal one born in the midst of the poor, one who reunites around his humble parents, the small and the great of this world. Surely, God uses a peculiar language. To understand it, need we not contemplate the Child, and also take part in the search made by the shepherds and the magi?*



Sr. Evangéline Plamondon, during a visit to Malawi, Africa.

*How often we, too, search to find meaning to new commitments, justice for the whole world, true liberty, lasting peace, love without limits... With such desires, royal wishes are called for in the coming year: that through the days, we may learn to recognize and welcome God's love for humanity! His blessings will eventually transform us into witnesses of the kingdom and thus we will be aware that God has reasons to offer us such a sovereignty.*

*Allow me to offer you this wish wrapped in prayers and thanksgiving for your solidarity in our missionary commitment. On behalf of my Sisters, our Associates (ASMIC), the lay missionaries who work with us, and in my own name, - yes, thank you!*

*A Happy and Holy New Year!*

***Evangéline Plamondon, m.i.c.  
Superior General***



## Christmas in a spirit of Pentecost

Is Christmas celebrated in Cuba? The traditions and special elements of a culture expressing this mystery of faith in a popular way, are dying out little by little. I don't mean to say they have disappeared, for there exists a tradition which passes on from heart to heart, a heritage which is transmitted like embers which remain hidden, yet are still alive, under the ashes.

Yes, Cubans do celebrate Christmas in the midst of their social reality. The people of God in Cuba - the Church - celebrate Christmas in a spirit of Pentecost - in a missionary spirit. They wish to be 'angels' and 'stars', announcers of the Good News for those who seek and hope.

What is done in a society where the word 'Christmas' lacks meaning for the new generation?

Cuban people love music and thus, it is easy to meet those who have wandered away from the Church. I recall a Christmas concert, with an audience listening attentively, not only to the melody but especially to the meaning of the words. Each song is preceded by a brief explanation - a

message of fraternity, of hope and of joy, dedicated particularly to those who most need it.

Such is the work of a planter - to scatter seeds throughout the field. It is very meaningful for ears so familiar with the word 'war', to hear of peace; for a heart filled with grudge, to discover the face of a loving God; for one burdened with anxieties, to hear the words: "Be not afraid". Through song and music, seeds of the Good News are scattered with joy: "God so loved the world that He sent His only Son".

In a small village church, a large crib, made of wood and palm leaves, is built so it can be seen from the road. At noon time, a villager is there to open the church to welcome those who wish to enter and admire the crib. The first comers are school children of the neighborhood who, like the disciples in the Gospel, call others and inform them of "what they have seen and heard".

Then comes the time to present the whole christian message from the Incarnation to the Resurrection. An opportunity is

also provided to live evangelical values - unconditional welcome of these children. Indeed, an opportune time to realize the words of Jesus: "Let these little ones come to me".

In the same way, the Christian in his hometown or at work, is transformed into a 'star'. A pole of influence in relation to God, he listens and helps resolve the questions of his neighbor and friend, thus helping others to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas - which is a faith experience. As expressed in a Cuban song:

*Perhaps you have no bread,  
no grapes on your table...  
but if your love forgives,  
today you have Christmas  
in your heart!*

Whatever more examples I could give would have the same missionary savor, the desire to reach out to others, who very close, seem so far away.

I wonder if you come to the same conclusion as I? The Church in Cuba celebrates its Christmas in such a way that the flash of light, the bonds of love, the breeze of peace embrace and encircle men and women living close to one another - brothers and sisters journeying towards the same Father.

Christmas in Cuba... a small pebble thrown into the water... which makes ripples endlessly! And how about yours? \*

**Gloria Perez, m.i.c.**

A youth choir preparing for a concert.



## People caring for people

For the Sisters and personnel of Mount Saint Joseph Hospital, the 26th of May, 1991, marked the celebration of two significant milestones - the 70th anniversary of the arrival in Vancouver of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the 45th anniversary of Mount Saint Joseph Hospital.

It was a special day to celebrate and to thank all who collaborated with the Sisters in their mission and allowed Mount Saint Joseph Hospital to be a community of service, healing and caring. The Executive Director, Sr. Louise Denis, m.i.c., sums up the reasons for this double event: Mount Saint Joseph Hospital has a history, a tradition, a mission to celebrate!

### A humble beginning

In May 1921, four MIC Sisters, responding to an urgent request from Archbishop Timothy Casey, arrived in Vancouver with the mandate of establishing a mission and ministering to the needs of the oriental population, especially the city's Chinese immigrants.

The Sisters opened the doors of their modest Keefer Street home



Sr. Louise Denis, m.i.c.

to provide health and education services. Home visits soon convinced them that a shelter for these people was badly needed. A 4-bed infirmary was set up in their residence. The house of Keefer Street became a refuge for the sick and poor immigrants. With language and cultural barriers to overcome, and limited financial resources, it was a difficult beginning.

For nearly 50 years, the Sisters operated what had become the 'Oriental Home'. There, hundreds of aged persons found shelter, care, compassion and love. As the oriental community grew, the facility was not large enough to meet the ever-increasing demand for health care services.

In 1946, the Sisters opened an 87-bed hospital at Prince Edward Street. Two years later, Mount Saint Joseph Hospital was officially established as a public general hospital in place to serve the community. It was staffed by 18 Sisters, six doctors and several service workers.

### **A tradition of commitment and service**

There were many challenges to meet and difficulties to overcome in the provision of necessary health care services. From humble beginnings, through several decades of growth and transition, the hospital has undergone several changes to give proper

health care. Special attention was constantly given to the needs of the various ethnic groups it serves.

The personnel appreciate the wealth of missionary and multi-cultural experiences acquired over the years. Favored by good relationships among different cultural groups, Mount Saint Joseph Hospital has earned an enviable reputation for competence, dedication and service.

Today, the hospital is a 300-bed facility. The Sisters and personnel continue to orient their efforts toward overcoming language barriers and maintaining



Pastoral care in a milieu of welcoming and caring.

Left: Sr. Céline Cloutier, m.i.c.

Center: Sr. Françoise Royer, m.i.c.



a tradition of healing and caring. Throughout the hospital's history, more than 200 MIC Sisters have served Vancouver's multicultural community.

### **A shared mission**

During the past years, a good number of religious communities who owned hospitals, withdrew from these institutions they had founded and directed for many years. In other instances, radical changes in health services and the lessening of religious personnel brought about a renewal.

New forms of presence and apostolate are being created. All this is in view of sharing with the hospital staff the healing ministry handed down by Christ as well as the mission and charism of the religious congregation.

In line with the missionary charism of the Institute, the MIC Sisters who provide religious leadership of Mount Saint Joseph Hospital encourage the personnel to be progressive and sensitive to the needs of the growing community. Staff members are asked to develop programs and initiatives which would improve the hospital's effectiveness in caring for patients from various ethnic backgrounds.

The Sisters expressly encourage the development of collaborative ways of operation, enabling everyone associated with the hospital to become partners and co-workers in a shared mission of continuing the healing ministry of Christ. In their day to day

relationships and functions, the Sisters, personnel and residents are called to form a community of compassion and healing.

Since August, 1987, a Mission Effectiveness Program was implemented at the hospital, to involve the personnel in its christian mission. Everyone concerned is being made aware that a service in this Catholic milieu is not only an employment but an engagement, a vocation, a ministry.

Personnel and volunteer workers alike are enjoined to keep in mind the supreme importance of person-centered care and to respect the preciousness of each human person in the experience of sickness and death. Gospel values of reverence for life and respect for human dignity are to be reflected in their tireless efforts to provide the best possible care.

"People caring for people"... is the spirit that has characterized Mount Saint Joseph Hospital since its foundation and still is the source of its activities today. This, too, is what motivates and sustains its benefactors, personnel and volunteers to share in the mission of Christ, the Healer, and to collaborate in the MIC project: "Keep the mission alive."

To keep alive in the hospital milieu the values of love, compassion and welcoming - such is our challenge! \*

**Louise Denis, m.i.c.**



Sr. Sara Olga  
Perez, m.i.c., and  
a neighbor. (Cuba)

## Only One

*My child,  
I've often heard your question,  
and this is my answer...  
hear Me well:*

*You weep for those who suffer pain,  
disease and hopelessness,  
and you ask,  
"What can only one do?"  
Comfort one...*

*Your heart aches for the lonely,  
the imprisoned, the abused...  
and you ask,  
"What can only one do?"  
Love one...*

*Remember this my child...  
two thousand years ago,  
the world was filled,  
just as it is today,  
with those in need...  
and when the helpless and the  
hopeless cried out to Me for  
mercy,  
I sent a Saviour.  
Hope began...  
With Only One. \**

B. Hoff  
(Excerpts, The Angelus)

## The challenge of Christmas



Sr. Estela del Bando joins families visiting a Buddhist temple.

Celebrating the Christmas season in a foreign land, far from one's family and friends, is a unique and challenging experience. I could not help but remember previous Christmas celebrations in my own country, the Philippines. As a missionary in Japan, I had opportunities to see Christmas in a newer light.

On Christmas eve, families at our parish church in Koriyama gathered to celebrate the event. I was amazed to find the church filled with people. A good number of those present were non-christian relatives or neighbours of the parishioners. Others were there who just wanted to attend a christian celebration on this occasion. I pray and hope that one day, these persons would want to know more about Christ and to recognize His active presence in their own lives.

This led me to reflect more on the First Nativity and on the true meaning of Christ's birth. The blessed event then was known only to a few and the people did not know nor understand the significance of the happening taking place in their very midst. In Japan, Christmas is celebrated but the majority of the people are not aware of its true meaning.

For most Japanese, Christmas day is an ordinary working day. Seeing crowds of commuters travel to and from work as on any regular weekday made me face the reality of my mission land and the fact that less than one

per cent of the population is Christian.

My attention was likewise caught by the contrast between all the holiday decorations in the stores and the true meaning of Christmas as a religious feast. From the first day of December, Christmas carols could be heard in almost every shopping center and the face of Santa Claus looked out from department store windows and counters.

At our parish, the mass on Christmas day was focused on children. Selected participants presented a skit on the Nativity. The Xaverio School children's choir sang Christmas songs. Most of these children, though non-christian, received religious instruction and were somehow familiar with the meaning of Christmas. Parents joined their children at this celebration.

I was glad to find out that the Japanese people celebrate the New Year as a very special

event. I recall my joy and surprise to hear Buddhist temple bells ring out loudly and clearly on New Year's eve. People from all walks of life visit the temples and ancestral shrines, asking for health, long life and prosperity. At our parish church, mass on New Year's eve was a graced event as well. People again gathered, this time to begin the New Year by asking for God's blessings.

In Japan, Christmas seems to be a privileged time of the year when one can speak freely about Christ and the meaning of Christmas. I realize that the presentation of the story of Christ's birth to non-christians is a hopeful way to sow seeds of faith. At the same time, my own faith is strengthened. Moreover, it presents a missionary challenge - that I be creative in finding ways to bring the 'Good News of great joy' to my brothers and sisters in Japan.\*

**Estela del Bando, m.i.c.**

### *Missionary Intentions 1991*

#### *November*

*That Christians who live in war torn lands be workers for peace.*

#### *December*

*That the family be a solid support for missionary evangelization.*



Sr. Leticia Dotollo, m.i.c.

The Philippines is noted for its many festivals and religious celebrations. Never wanting in color and gaiety, they evoke local folk arts and synthesize the various aspects of Filipino culture.

Nowhere in the world is there perhaps a longer Christmas celebration than in my country. It lasts 22 days: from December 16 when the "Misa de gallo" (Dawn mass) begins until January 6, when the feast of the Wise Men is celebrated.

Christmas season in the Philippines is rooted firmly in Catholic tradition, with the focus always on the *belen* (the crib). It is a family tradition of music, song and festivity with the Christ Child, the 'Word-made-Flesh', the center of it all.

Our Christmas motifs are colorful and varied, and the holiday mood catches on with their appearance. By late November, ornate 'parols' - star lanterns symbolic of the guiding star fol-

## Christmas... a 22-day festival

lowed by the Wise Men - are displayed.

Creative designs and symbols enhance the beauty and originality of these decorations for homes, churches and stores. Lantern contests are thus held everywhere, evoking the Filipino creativity in making use of native materials to portray a Christmas theme.

Christmas trees, with colorful ornaments, are also among our favored holiday decors. The crib is the most important feature in every church setting, reminding the faithful of the event of Christ's birth.

Other features of the season include carollers who make their rounds of cheer with Christmas songs. Carollers standing under the light of a Christmas lantern never fail to generate the warmth of Yuletide festivities. House-to-house carolling is a time of enjoyment as well as a pleasant way to raise funds for



many worthy church and community projects.

The best preparation we have for the celebration of Christ's birth is the *Misa de gallo*, also known as *Simbang gabi*, a nine-day novena of masses. This is a beautiful tradition which is indigenously Filipino, one we faithfully keep to this day.

Just as the first cockcrows are heard at around 4:00 a.m. of December 16, church bells ring with great exultation, to signal

the 'official' start of Christmastide. In some towns, brass bands parade around the streets. The joyful tumult is meant to awaken the people for the dawn mass. For us Filipinos, the novena of masses provides a beautiful prelude to the feast of the birth of Christ - an expression of patient waiting and eager expectation for His coming.

Dawn masses being avidly attended by people as a spiritual preparation for the feast of the Nativity, churches everywhere are always filled, even to overflowing!

After the Mass, people gather in makeshift food-stalls put up around the church patio. Here they enjoy a breakfast of rice cakes and other delicacies, usually served with hot chocolate or ginger tea.

On Christmas Eve, families attend midnight Mass which marks the 9th day of the novena. This is the peak of our Christmas celebration, followed by the *Noche buena*, another uniquely Philippine tradition. During the *Noche buena*, families get together for a reunion while partaking of a midnight meal and exchanging gifts. This feast of bounty ends our religious observance of Christmas... the rituals are now over, Christmas becomes a festival!

As in other parts of the world, children in the Philippines get the most attention on Christmas day. We call the feast *Pasko ng mga bata* (children's Christmas).



Making the rounds of relatives and kissing the hands of their elders, the children receive blessings and are showered with presents. They make special visits to greet their godparents, who in turn give them gifts.

Another wave of festivity surges as New Year approaches. On New Year's Eve, Christmas lanterns are lighted again; so are the Christmas trees and votive candles beside the crib. Midnight Masses are held in churches for parishioners who wish to greet the New Year with devotion and thanksgiving.

At the stroke of midnight, the noise becomes deafening. Everyone makes as much noise as one can (in the belief that this drives the evil spirit away), thereby making the coming year more blessed and peaceful.

In Manila and other large cities, New Year's Eve is celebrated with merrymaking - with explosions of firecrackers and firework displays. In rural areas, people go out into the streets and make noise with gongs, tin cans, and other noisemakers.

Our Christmas celebration is thus extended into the new calendar year, and ends solemnly on the Epiphany. This day is known as *Pasko ng matanda* (Christmas of the elderly). Like the twilight years, the feast is tranquil and does not have the joyous tumult and gaiety of other events during the holidays.

Christmas season in the Philippines... one filled with joy and replete with religious symbols and meaning. Yet, after the festivities and gift-giving have ended, the spirit of Christmas is kept alive... in the warmth and hospitality of the people and most especially, in steadfastness to their Christian faith! \*

Leticia Dotollo, m.i.c.



Illustrations:  
Paskuhan Village  
Pampanga,  
Philippines

## Christmas is a time for sharing



Sr. Francine Ravaoarilala, m.i.c., shares her gifts of time and friendship with her people in Madagascar.

*Dear Friends,*

*Warmest greetings for a Blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with God's love!*

*Thank you for being one with us in mission. Without you, we would be unable to "spread the Good News to all nations".*

*May Our Lady of Bethlehem watch over you and all your loved ones through the New Year 1992!*

*The Editing Staff*

**This Christmas, we invite you to subscribe a friend to  
MIC MISSION NEWS!**



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I bring you news of great joy to be shared by all people! Lk 2,10.

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**The Generalate**  
121 Maplewood Avenue  
Outremont, Quebec  
Canada H2V 2M2

**MIC Sisters**  
236 Glynn Avenue  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada K1K 1S3

**MIC Sisters**  
2950 Prince Edward Street  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
Canada V5T 3N3

**Provincial House**  
P.O. Box 47  
Mzimba, Malawi  
Central Africa

**MIC Sisters**  
P.O. Box 510107  
Chipata, Zambia  
Central Africa

**Provincial House**  
P.O. Box 468  
1502 Greenhills  
Metro Manila, Philippines

**Provincial House**  
Tak Oi Convent  
8 Tsz Wan Shan Road  
Kowloon, Hong Kong

**Provincial House**  
13-16 Fukazawa 8  
Chome Setagaya-ku  
Tokyo 158, Japan

**MIC Sisters**  
30, Lane 148  
Fu-Hsing South Road,  
Section 2  
Taipei 10641, Taiwan