



OCTOBER 2021 - N. 9

BULLE IN



PONTIFICIUM OPUS A SANCTA INFANTIA
SECRETARIATUS INTERNATIONALIS



A SPIRITUALITY FOR MISSIONARY
CHILDHOOD, ACCORDING TO SAINT
THERESE OF LISIEUX AND SAINT
JOHN PAUL II

**THE CENTRALITY OF THE
KINGDOM OF GOD**

**THE VOICE OF THE CHILDREN
LITTLE MISSIONARIES IN...
BURUNDI**

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MISSIONARY NEWSLETTER
N.9 - OCTOBER 2021

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Photographs: Archives PSMC, National Office in Sri Lanka, National Office in Malawi, National Office in Pakistan, National Office in Colombia, National Office in Nicaragua, National Office in the Philippines, National Office in Burundi, Apostolic Vicariate of Reyes, Diocese of Shimoga, Archdiocese of Monrovia, Sr. Diana António lalá - Ingoré, Guinea Bissau, Apostolic Vicariate of Requena

Cover picture: Archives PSMC,

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With the feast of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, the month of October has begun, missionary month par excellence during which World Mission Sunday is celebrated every year. It is an important and extraordinary annual event in which greater emphasis is given to prayer, animation, formation and collection in favor of the Missionaries and the mission of the universal Church. This year's theme is *"We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard"* (Acts 4:20). In many local churches, children and young people are the protagonists and animators not only of World Mission Day, but also of the missionary month, as they do not stand by and watch but are available to getting involved in high and demanding ideals.

I believe that this year's theme is more than ever child-friendly, as it highlights two genuine characteristics such as simplicity and spontaneity. They are the same that every Christian, evangelizer, witness, missionary disciple should have in proclaiming the Gospel, taking advantage of every opportune and inopportune occasion, as Saint Paul said. Just like children, in their simple and unpretentious manner. Who better than a child can teach us to proclaim the Gospel and be a missionary? A child does not think or foresee the setbacks, he just moves forward, has faith and that's enough.

As a child we must be confident and trust that the Word we proclaim is the Truth and is for the good and happiness of others. And it is precisely the "how" that makes the difference and brings us back to Jesus' invitation. Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus, patroness of the missions, is also a teacher of spiritual childhood which does not only concern children but every baptized person who wishes to enter the Kingdom of God.

We can speak of a true lifestyle in which we identify with Jesus, the Son.

This childhood spirit was already prefigured in another woman who at the beginning of the 1800s decided she wanted to be completely available to God's love: Pauline Marie Jaricot, foundress of the first missionary society in May 1822, that of Propagation of the faith.

In these days the date of her beatification has been announced: May 22, 2022 in Lyon. We rejoice with the whole Church for this forthcoming new Blessed, a woman of faith who in her sensitivity and simplicity gave life to a Society that has supported missionaries and the mission of the universal Church for 200 years.

And it was precisely following this intuition that Bishop Charles de Forbin Janson began the Society of the Holy Childhood in 1843.

Thus the month of October helps us to remember those who over the centuries have witnessed their faith in Christ and proclaimed the Gospel. This memory nourishes the faith of every baptized person and of today's Christian communities and urges us to continue working for the Kingdom of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



SR. ROBERTA TREMARELLI

Secretary General Pontifical Society Missionary Childhood

THE CENTRALITY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

At that time the disciples approached Jesus and said, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. (Mt 18: 1-6)



FR. LEONARDO RODRIGUEZ
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The central theme of this section of the Gospel of Matthew is the Kingdom, since the question that triggers the scene refers directly to the Kingdom of God. However, at least at first glance, we recognize two different levels between the question asked and the answer given. As for the question, it reveals an understanding of the Kingdom, in its dynamic, as a kingdom of power. On the other hand, the answer offered by Jesus moves away from this understanding and, through his teaching and gestures, proposes a characteristic trait of Christian spirituality.

The Kingdom cannot be understood as a sphere of power, dominance, privilege, arrogance, or dishonest concessions. When Jesus begins his public ministry in Luke's Gospel, when he is invited to proclaim the Law and interpret it in the synagogue, he describes the Kingdom this way:

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom 8 into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, 9 because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to

proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing”. (Lk. 4: 16-21)

Can the Good News for the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind, liberation from oppression be the task of a child? Clearly not, but Jesus does not tell us to become children, he tells us, “you must become like children.”

SOME ASPECTS OF THE RELATIONAL ABILITY AND SILLS OF CHILDREN

Let us now try to identify some of the characteristics of a child's bonding (relational) capacity, and from there, we shall try to identify some related characteristics of Christian spirituality:

- a) The bond with father, mother, and significant adults
- b) The bond with peers
- c) The bond with nature (creation)
- d) The bond with oneself



A child's bond with his or her father, mother, or other adults. Even in the midst of complex realities of abandonment, abuse, and other painful experiences, the child needs a bond with his or her father, mother, or a significant adult. These bonds shape the child's identity, gives the child a sense of belonging, and provides the child with a connection to his or her history. Maternal bonds through the first five years of life establish learning matrices that will determine the child's behaviors, decisions, and personal life's choices.

The bond with peers. A child's bond or relationship adults is as important as his or her bond or relationship with peers in reciprocal recognition where mutual affinity and differences articulate a structural and facilitating dynamic for the meaning of life, which expresses itself in experience and relational styles that make authentic maturing possible in the appropriate stage of life. A child needs to interact with other children, learning, playing, dreaming, laughing, fighting, etc.

The bond with nature (creation). The logic of the child's relationship with creation is marked by gratuitousness, joy and pleasure. In the same way, out of frankness and common sense, the child does not easily immerse himself in the pecuniary



dynamics of the adult world, which often forgets the value of creation in itself, and not only as a source of raw material.

The bond with oneself. Children tend to love themselves and, in their fragility, they seek protection and care. They know they are important and recognize their own value. This is an interesting path because love for oneself is the path to love for God and for others.

Having considered these relational aspects of the child's life, let us now make the effort to transfer this experience to the Christian life.

To become like children is to establish a special bond with God as Father. The Gospel is the bearer of this great news: God is Father, and the salvation offered to us in Jesus brings with it the status of children in the Son, for those of us who believe in Him. It is probable that in affirming the paternity of God different feelings arise, according to the experience, history and relationship of each person with his or her own father and mother; likewise, in these times, it is possible that some ideological questions resist the paternal figure of God, trying to exhaust it in cultural or sociological definitions. To free us from these individual visions or ideological interpretations, the Gospel itself offers us all we need to know about this God the Father, whom we know through the witness of Jesus. It is the Merciful Father who is presented to us in chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel (15:11-32), the Father who makes the sun rise on the good and the bad (Mt 5: 45-48).



BECOMING LIKE CHILDREN AND RECOGNIZING GOD AS FATHER

Becoming like children calls us to establish and nurture our relationship with God from the perspective of his universal fatherhood, to constantly bring to life the experience of God believing in us. This has at least five expressions: listening, obeying, asking, trusting, thanking.

Listening. If we scroll through the pages of the Gospels, we can easily discover a Jesus who from a young age is involved in “the things of his Father” (Lk 2:49), listening is an active attitude; it contains within itself the profound desire to know the will of God the Father. Throughout his life, Jesus himself testifies to the need for constant discernment, because to know the will of the Father is to respond to the meaning of one’s own existence and certainly implies the constant purification of one’s own intentions, as well as knowledge of the lives of others in order to understand one’s own experience of God.

Obedience. The obedience of faith finds its highest expression in Jesus. It is necessary and encouraging for us who believe in Him to come closer and closer to the man Jesus who, belonging to his people, using the religious, cultural and social keys of his context, takes on the constant struggle of obedience, whose maximum expression is manifested in his Passion and Death. In the life of the Church, in our lives, obedience to God runs through the entire ecclesial experience, and not as a secondary aspect. Fidelity to God and fidelity to the Church are inseparable, but nevertheless, in purely human terms, obedience needs the context of respect, dialogue, patience, the willingness to accompany personal processes without arbitrary impositions or in the worst cases abuses of power. The obedience of



faith is inseparable from the experience of charity.

Asking. When Jesus’ disciples, motivated by the personal experience of the Master, ask him to teach them to pray, Jesus tells them to invoke God as “our” common Father. This prayer teaches us for what and how to ask God. The request to God takes us far from the commonplace attitude widespread among the people of our time: self-sufficiency and the quasi

omnipotence and omnipresence of the human person. The Lord’s prayer calls one to recognize oneself as limited, needy, fragile, exposed and poor. Asking God, like a child asks her father, is not simply about seeking the satisfaction of one’s needs. It is the way to learn humility.

Trust. I confess that, personally, when I meditate on the Passion of Jesus, I try to delve into the feelings and emotions of the Master in those hours in which, humanly speaking, the project rapidly crumbled and contradictions took over events: loneliness, betrayal, contempt, condemnation, torture and death... I wonder what could have remained in Jesus’ heart, besides the deep anguish that the Gospel story describes. I am sure that there is something greater: absolute trust in the Father and, consequently, true abandonment into his hands. Trust in God is a path of permanent purification, because as we grow in it, we learn to relativize our certainties, without renouncing our responsibilities. Trust is the fruit of a freedom that surrenders itself.

Giving thanks. Do you remember the episode of the healing of the ten lepers? (Lk. 17:11-19) There were ten healed, but only one returned to give thanks and, at least at first glance, Jesus himself is surprised by the absence of the other nine. Gratitude humanizes our relationships and replaces a form of relationship that imposes obligations with one



that exchanges gifts among equals. Now, when it comes to thanking God, gratitude is the recognition of God's gratuitousness and the unworthiness of the favored one(s). As an attitude and action it has the ability to strip us of any kind of selfish or commercial relationship with God. Thanksgiving, in my humble understanding and experience, becomes the possibility of forgiveness and mercy.

Taking the thought of St. Therese of the Child Jesus as a point of reference, we can say that God rejoices in our littleness, because he knows that in the measure in which we make ourselves small we allow ourselves to be filled with his greatness, so the invitation to become like children is a demanding path, marked by the scar of radicalism but also laced with the velvety texture of the truth of our existence open to the infinity of the Father.

BECOMING CHILDREN OF A COMMON FATHER MAKES US BROTHERS AND SISTERS

We adults are happy to talk about fraternity, acceptance and brotherhood. But, paradoxically, we often display a constant disdain for the different experiences that distinguish us from each other, which we privilege, with accusations, suspicions, intrigues and discrimination no less absurd. The social, cultural, political, religious, sporting world and especially the media and social networks are tinged with this color to such an extent that we adults are gradually losing credibility and reliability in the eyes of young people and children, because inconsistency is usually unacceptable to children.

In the preceding paragraphs, we focused our attention on our relationship with God the Father, which we take as representing the identity of Christian missionary discipleship. Now I propose that we switch gears and reflect on our relationship with our peers. God is the Father of all, not only of those we accept and like, and consequently

from our filial relationship with God flows the relationship of fraternity with our peers.

Recognizing the inconsistency between the discourse of tolerance and fraternity and the separatist and exclusionary practices we develop, we seek to see this vocation to universal brotherhood as a gift and a task for those of us who identify ourselves as followers of Jesus.

"We know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love remains in death." (1 Jn 3,14)

Children seek out their peers because, knowing that they are different from them, they welcome difference through play and shared learning and can, freely and even brazenly, question and demonstrate differences, but with the same freedom, they will recognize the importance of closeness and recognition that lead to solidarity and friendship.

Of course, we cannot avoid looking at the visual, sound and emotional contamination that we adults have produced in the world of children, leading them to acquire adult criteria without being rationally and emotionally equipped to do so. But let us consider the opportunity that history offers us to wager on the construction of healthy and respectful environments that welcome difference as a richness and promote a culture of care, especially towards the most fragile.



It is necessary to recognize our weaknesses and the mistakes we make in order to avoid forcing others to submit to our will. On the contrary, the effect of globalization, vast cultural interaction, and plurality in the daily life in our cities have become a flourishing field in which we are invited to be promoters of encounter, mutual care, dialogue and social friendship. In this sense, I recognize that numbers 1 and 2 of the Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* provide an orientation and a challenge:

1. *“FRATELLI TUTTI”*. With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother “as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him”. In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.

2. This saint of fraternal love, simplicity and joy, who inspired me to write the Encyclical *Laudato Si’*, prompts me once more to devote this new Encyclical to fraternity and social friendship. Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace

and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters.

Knowing that we are children of the same Father and brothers and sisters with everyone is constitutive of our identity, which crushes rigorist and exclusivist positions that transform the Church into a club of chosen members, in order to lead us into the purest truth of Christian discipleship, which sums up what has been expressed up to this point:

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love. In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him. In this is love: not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another. No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love

is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world.





There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God 5 whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." (1 Jn 4,7-21)

BECOMING LIKE CHILDREN; CHILDREN OF THE SAME FATHER, BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO EVERYONE AND LIVING IN OUR COMMON HOME

"Every effort to protect and improve our world entails profound changes in "lifestyles, models of production and consumption, and the established structures of power which today govern societies". (Laudato Si n.5)

Changing lifestyles is a very complex task that requires a willingness to go through articulated learning and slow processes. The slogans proclaiming the great ecological problems seem to interest us, but we recognize a certain inertia that makes us feel powerless to produce real change. Nevertheless, as in other aspects of life, not everything depends on heads of state and organizations. For the most part transformation depends on personal decisions. It is precisely at this point that "childhood" becomes an opportunity. A child is eager to learn, adventurous in experience and thirsty for knowledge. We are thus faced with something that can give meaning to the deepest motivations in a process of true ecological conversion.

The teaching of Pope Francis, expressed especially in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, contains the strength and relevance necessary to motivate us, to



encounter the Church's magisterium with a childlike trust. This means "fleeing" from mere ideological or political interpretations and personalizing the path, allying ourselves with people who come from the same convictions and seek to contribute their grain of sand.

"The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves". (LS84)

BECOMING LIKE CHILDREN, CHILDREN OF THE SAME FATHER, BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ALL, LIVING IN OUR COMMON HOME, RECOGNIZING THE DIGNITY OF OUR UNIQUENESS IN RELATION TO OTHERS

If there is one thing a child enjoys, it is discovering how others can highlight his or her personal characteristics and abilities. How inspiring this experience is! Of course, there will be those who may identify this as a narcissistic need; however, far from an unbalanced narcissism, it is appropriate to consider at this time the importance of moving away from the tendency to consider oneself only a piece of some whole, a statistic, or data for global information. It is a matter of cultivating self-esteem in order to achieve or reinforce an awareness of a dignity that is given to us by the Creator, not to some, but to all.

There is an author who expresses this very clearly:

"Love for others and love for ourselves are not alternatives in opposition. On the contrary: an

attitude of self-love will be found in all those who are capable of loving others."

(E. FROMM)

The satisfaction of a child being recognized for his or her place and importance is the key to shedding false humility and cultivating what psychological pedagogy calls self-esteem.

We all need healthy self-love to develop our true potential personally and in our relationships with others. People who achieve high self-esteem reach levels of physical, mental, and spiritual health.

In order to strengthen this dimension, it is important to cultivate self-knowledge as a constant in life. In other words, to make permanent the exercise of entering into our interiority and contemplating all the elements that make up one's self: ideas, opinions, beliefs, feelings, character, temperament, values, ideals, options, commitments.

Not knowing ourselves or assuming this self-knowledge is a sure way to deceive ourselves by developing a negative self-image or having an "idealized" self-image that does not correspond to reality. The former leads to feeling inferior and the latter to feeling superior.

Self-knowledge must be accompanied by self-acceptance, serenely acknowledging personal skills and abilities as well as limitations, weaknesses, mistakes and failures.

Accepting oneself implies an attitude of understanding towards oneself and feeling at peace



with oneself, with one's history, with one's family, in relation to the place where one lives. Not accepting oneself implies self-evaluation, self-loathing and self-rejection.

Finally, self-esteem requires self-confidence, that is, confidence in one's personal abilities, being able to cope with risks, and not being discouraged by failures or problems.

The serious consideration of self-esteem as an ongoing task, especially in the context of accompaniment, is the basis for the development of the anthropological dimension of Christian spirituality.

By way of evocation of what we are, here is the following text from Sirach (17:1-15):

"The LORD from the earth created man, and in his own image he made him. Limited days of life he gives him and makes him return to earth again. He endows man with a strength of his own, and with power over all things else on earth. He puts the fear of him in all flesh, and gives him rule over beasts and birds. He forms men's tongues and eyes and ears, and imparts to them an understanding heart. With wisdom and knowledge he fills them; good and evil he shows them. He looks with favor upon their hearts, and shows them his glorious works. That they may describe the wonders of his deeds and praise his holy name. He has set before them knowledge, a law of life as their





inheritance; An everlasting covenant he has made with them, his commandments he has revealed to them. His majestic glory their eyes beheld, his glorious voice their ears heard. He says to them, "Avoid all evil"; each of them he gives precepts about his fellow men. Their ways are ever known to him, they cannot be hidden from his eyes. Over every nation he places a ruler, but the LORD'S own portion is Israel. All their actions are clear as the sun to him, his eyes are ever upon their ways."

We pointed out at the beginning of our journey that the center of interest of the verses that motivate our reflection is the Kingdom of God; consequently, the teaching of Jesus orients our relationship with God from the key of spiritual infancy, "become like children". To close this first part of our reflection, it is worth pausing to consider what Jesus' own relationship with the Father is. If we consider only the form of Jesus' expression, we recognize that the name most frequently used by Jesus is Father, which was already present in the Old Testament. The novelty may be in the insistence with which Jesus uses it, in such a way that for him the expression is reserved for God, and no one else has the right to use it (cfr. Mt 23:9).

To this we must add that the vocative form of Father, Abba, used by Jesus does not coincide with the way in which the children of Israel addressed God in the Old Testament. Rather, it expresses a tone of familiarity, closeness, intimacy and trust, which is absolutely new. Jesus does not make any description of the Father. In fact he does not develop any doctrine about God. He simply puts the accent on human beings and their future, starting from the relationship with a God who manifests himself as the Father of Jesus and

the Father of all. The attitude of being like children we learn from Jesus Himself, and in Him we find the only way to the Father, because the Father and Him are one and the same (Jn 14:8-10). Each of the above characteristics of spiritual childhood opens us to the mystery of Jesus, the kingdom of God.

THOSE WHO BECOME LIKE CHILDREN ACCOMPANY CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

It is time to ask ourselves: to what extent does what has been said so far affect the ministry of animators, teachers and companions in the service of the *Pontifical Mission Society of the Holy Childhood* to children and adolescents today?

HEALTHY DISTANCE

The first aspect to consider has to do with the relationship between the animator and the child or adolescent. It is important to focus on this for a moment, because Jesus calls us to "become like children," but not to become childish. That is to say that integrating the elements already mentioned into our spirituality should not be a justification for some childish attitude in the young person or adult animator. We serve children, we accompany, encourage and form children, but we are not children, that is to say, we do not allow ourselves to be childish. Children do not need childish adults accompanying them. On the contrary, what is required of us is an integrating and integral solidity.



Integral, in the sense that we must cultivate a balanced and continuous process in the formation of the animators, covering every dimension of the person so that the animation to be followed with the children is fundamentally accompanied by a witness of faith, a witness capable of leading to a true and constantly renewed

encounter with Jesus, going beyond personal sympathies to reach the heights of an authentic evangelizing experience. Integrating, since we do not choose children on the basis of personal preferences, but from where they come with their stories, desires and searches, with their particularities, and the animator must strengthen the personal dimension and encourage the community experience that consolidates the path of missionary discipleship.

In this same sense, maintaining a healthy distance means fostering the creation and maintenance of respectful relationships and healthy environments that provide children and adolescents with safety and integral care.

THREE KEYS LEADING TO FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD THE FATHER THROUGH JESUS

We have indicated above the dimensions of spiritual childhood that, from our point of view, we consider the most significant, both for adults, who must strive to “become like children,” and for children and adolescents, whom we must accompany so that in



their relationship with God they may achieve the same experience.

For this, we consider three keys that allow us to “ground” the experience of animation, formation and accompaniment of children and adolescents.

1. Promoting the meaning of life

In a global context of threats to life and dignity, the animators of the Holy Childhood must raise and promote in their groups the question about the meaning of life. This is not a theoretical elaboration on

life, but a vital question that we must instill in the heart of our groups and communities: What is the meaning of pain, death, suffering? What is the value of each of our lives?

Sadly, many children and adolescents live in situations of death. Trying to proclaim Christ to them without addressing the question of the meaning of life could turn the proclamation of the Gospel into a mere fantasy story. Not because it has no value in itself, but because it would not touch the reality of children’s and adolescents’ lives.

We quote here an expression of Victor Frankl that guides us in this approach:

“What is important is not so much the meaning of life in the abstract, but the meaning of life in the concrete, that is, of your life.... Each person has his mission to fulfill in life, each one must fulfill his concrete task. Therefore, he cannot be replaced in his function, nor can his life be repeated, his task is unique, just as his opportunity to carry it out is unique. A person is questioned about life and only she can respond to life by being accountable for her life. Only by being responsible can she answer for her life.”





The effort we make in the service of the Holy Childhood demands that children and adolescents discover and assume their missionary vocation as a positive experience to foster and formulate the question of meaning. In fact, we might help young people avoid going through distressing and desperate experiences.

Without condemning it, we must recognize that the current culture, especially in the West, is marked by a conception of life, in which the preponderant value is pleasure for its own sake, and for this reason the privileged channels are consumption and evasion of reality.

To pose the question of the meaning of life is not to subject children to a complex and far-fetched philosophical process, but simply to pose the question with regard to the meaning of experiences that are already part of their history, and this allows us to make a powerful proclamation of Christ who will give us the meaning of life and love.

By having the children meet Jesus with us, and for us to meet Jesus with them, we will discover that Jesus is “the man for others,” capable of “living for others” and of giving himself for everyone.

Isn't this the universal dimension of the mission in which we want children and adolescents to be protagonists?

2. Constructing religious thinking

The plurality of the society in which we live also reaches the religious sphere. In our cities and neighborhoods, we live together with people of different faiths and religions. As the Church, it is up to us to recognize ourselves in the midst of this plural scenario, where we are not the only ones and where religious experience is fused and confused with other elements that are not necessarily religious experience as such. Sometimes they are spaces where the esoteric and the mystical are strongly promoted and God is reduced to a sort of cosmic energy and force that is put at the service of the needs of the individual. Religion becomes in this context a mere tool to achieve well-being.

This is the scenario in which many of the children and adolescents we accompany are born, grow up and live. If we intend to offer them a true service of missionary animation and formation, it is indispensable to rediscover religion as a universal human fact, the human being as a religious being, open to transcendence, tending naturally to a relationship with God. In this sense, it is worth identifying some elements present in religion:

- a) Recognizing of the “divine”. Human beings recognize the existence of a higher being, called God. Religion is precisely the awareness, recognition and acceptance of this presence.
- b) The search for the meaning of life. Through religious experience, human beings recognize that God is the origin, center and goal of their lives. Life has meaning to the extent that it is oriented toward God.
- c) Mystical contact with God. The person communicates with God through rituals or celebrations that provide support for religious experience.
- d) Community affiliation. Relationship with God gives rise to belonging to the community.
- e) The presence of religious leaders. They are part of the mediation between God and people.
- f) The existence of morality. In other words,

faith in God gives rise to the practical consequence that guides personal and community life in living out principles and values in accord with the professed faith.

In short, to children and adolescents, we must be able to offer the experience of an ongoing and renewed encounter with Jesus Christ, so that by experiencing him, personal union with God can take place, and the mission is not reduced to a pleasant membership in the club of the good. Secondly, I would like to insist on the question of the meaning of life; the importance of this theme is reflected in the Second Vatican Council: *“Men expect from the various religions the answer to the hidden enigmas of the human condition, which today, as yesterday, touch their hearts. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of our lives?”* (NE 1)

The Christian religion provides meaning of one's existence: working in union with Christ and his Church, recognizing the growth of the Kingdom of God in society and in time, hoping for its full realization in eternity, encountering God as Father whose face we shall gaze upon forever. The journey of the Christian faith is pragmatic and not alienating. The formation that we offer to children and adolescents cannot be reduced to knowledge of



doctrine, nor to the mere celebration of worship, and even less to the mere fulfillment of moral obligations. Following Jesus means recognizing oneself as children of the same Father, as brothers and sisters of all human beings, living and witnessing to the Gospel, embracing the whole person. This is the importance of an integral formation that fosters the total living of faith.

3. Announcing God, the best good news for everyone

Man is by nature and vocation a religious being. Coming from God, going toward God, man lives a fully human life only if he freely lives by his bond with God.

Man is made to live in communion with God in whom he finds happiness: When I am completely united to you, there will be no more sorrow or trials; entirely full of you, my life will be complete.

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 44-45)

If we could take an X-ray of contemporary society, without being pessimistic, we would find at least three manifestations of a “resistance to God” that we cannot ignore:

a) God is not necessary for living. Materiality is prioritized: work, money, sports, appearance, cars.... God seems to





be absent in the midst of this picture.

b) Faith in God is useless. Since God does not solve the problems we cause (wars, diseases, injustices, etc.) there is no point in even thinking about him.

c) God does not exist. We cannot scientifically prove his existence, so there is no room for the possibility of his existence.

Faced with this reality, no theoretical or abstract debate that will lead us to where we want to be. If what we seek is for God to be known as the best possible good news for human beings, it is up to us to make an intelligent, creative, respectful proclamation, based on the witness of charity.

CONCLUSION

We began our narrative by affirming that the center of the Gospel dialogue is occupied by the Kingdom of God. We sought to understand two dimensions of Jesus' teaching: "Becoming like children," keeping our gaze on the centrality of the Kingdom and wanting to indicate the characteristics that "childhood" has for us as a spiritual journey. Then, we wanted to point out the practical consequences in our work in favor of the animation and missionary formation of children and adolescents.

To conclude, I would like to insist on the universal dimension of the Kingdom of God; the Kingdom

includes the whole person and all people. In the Holy Childhood, we recognize the charismatic responsibility of sowing in the hearts of children and adolescents the true universality that goes beyond existential and geographic frontiers to proclaim the fatherhood of God who with mercy gazes at the life of every person. We are servants and witnesses of this gaze and commitment of the Father because we first experienced his gaze and were healed.



A SPIRITUALITY FOR MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD, ACCORDING TO SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX AND SAINT JOHN PAUL II

St. Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, Patroness of the Missions, proclaimed Doctor of the Church by St. John Paul II on World Mission Sunday 1997, was **enrolled at the age of seven in the Society of the Holy Childhood**, often referred to today as “Missionary Childhood”, which is one of the four Pontifical Mission Societies. This is not a trivial fact. On the one hand, it confirms the wisdom of the Christian/missionary pedagogy found in the original charism of the Society, founded in 1843 by the French Bishop Charles-Auguste de Forbin-Janson. On the other hand, it allows us to understand that the life and spirituality of this saint can illuminate the life and spirituality of our Missionary Childhood today.

It is enough simply to consider Therese’s religious name to understand the value of this pedagogy, which is **for children but does not infantilize the faith**. Rather, it helps to grow in and with it. She who had learned to unite herself to the “Child Jesus” was able to unite herself to the point of heroic love with the suffering and saving Christ of the “Holy Face”. It is not unreasonable to think



that participation in the Holy Infancy did not prevent, but, on the contrary, helped Therese discover that the Child Jesus to whom she entrusted herself as a child was and is the same dead and risen Christ who “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20), and vice versa. This article aims to present this through the scheme offered by *Divini amoris scientia* (which we quote by its numbers, assigning a letter to each paragraph; the italics are always used by us to emphasize certain points). It is with this Apostolic Letter of October 19, 1997, that St. John Paul II declared the Saint of Lisieux Doctor of the Universal Church.



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THE EXAMPLE OF THERESE’S CHILDHOOD

St. John Paul II dedicates three paragraphs (5a-c) to recall the most outstanding facts of Therese’s life up to her entrance into the Carmelite Convent at the age of fifteen (cf. 6b). He offers important indications regarding the **environment that favors** a child’s ability to identify, interpret, and respond to the predisposition that the Holy Spirit grants him or her to seek Jesus. In effect, he highlights the role of the family, with models that accompany the religious orientation of the incipient life through virtue, affection, and the assumption of pedagogical and formative responsibilities.



Likewise, these paragraphs make it clear how the Lord can and does go out (“in first place”) to the child’s encounter. In Therese’s case, these are **profound and transforming experiences**, linked to the sacraments and personal conversion. St. John Paul II underlines “an exceptional experience of the grace of intimate union with Jesus” in her first communion, “a vivid awareness of what the gift of the Holy Spirit involves in her personal sharing in the grace of Pentecost” in her confirmation, and “a profound spiritual experience that she describes as a ‘complete conversion’” by the age of fourteen (5b). It is evident in her that God can give children even his most extraordinary graces.

In another part of his apostolic letter, St. John Paul II recapitulates **the pillars of little Therese’s life of faith**: “From childhood she was taught by her family to participate in prayer and liturgical worship. In preparation for her first Confession, first Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation, she gave evidence of an extraordinary love for the truths of the faith, and she learned the *Catechism* almost word for word (cf. *Ms A*, 37r-37v). [...] // In addition to the words of Scripture and the Church’s doctrine, Therese was nourished as a youth by the teaching of the *Imitation of Christ*, which, as she herself acknowledges, she knew almost by heart (cf. *Ms A*, 47r)” (9c-d). Nourishment (prayer, liturgy, sacraments, Sacred

Scripture, Magisterium, teachers of spirituality) that, as far as we can see, and contrary to today’s unfounded fears, are perfectly accessible (and “affectively” accessible) to the heart, reason, and sensibility of children.

A question might arise: What can make a child aspire to so much? To seek God? What is the disposition that paves the way for a child to receive - and to a similar degree – the divine gifts? St. Therese of the Child Jesus shows us the answer: “Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.... For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown (*Ms B*, 1v; cf. *Prv* 9:4; *Wis* 6:6)” (quoted in 7b). It is precisely this “**littleness**” that is the most characteristic feature of Missionary Childhood and its Christian pedagogy. In this regard, St. John Paul II explains that this littleness serves as preparation to:

- **Receive God’s revelation**: “The Lord has continues to reveal himself to the little and the humble, *enabling* his chosen ones, through the Spirit [...], to *speak* of the gifts ‘bestowed on us by God [...]’ (1 Cor 2:12,13)” (1b; cf. 7b-c).
- **Receive theological charity**: “The science of divine love [...] is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may *know and proclaim* the secrets of the kingdom” (1a).

The underlined verbs emphasize an important

aspect in this revelation of God-love: that which is “gift” for the person is (and must be) “grace” for others through the missionary proclamation. Thus, children, among the “little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way” (1c), are considered privileged agents and recipients of the mission. We see here, moreover, how God, who creates *ex nihilo* and makes fragility his own witness, does not “choose the qualified” according to the criteria of the world, but “qualifies his chosen ones”, the little ones.

“SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD”

Undoubtedly, St. Therese of Lisieux, “the youngest Doctor of the Church” (11e), experienced the essence of the Society of the Holy Childhood: the fraternity of the child with the Son of God who became a Child. St. John Paul II explicitly says that Therese, in whose spiritual experience “Christ is the center and fullness of Revelation”, “penetrated the **mysteries of his infancy**” (8g). Such fraternity immediately refers to a God: 1) who is Jesus’ Father, 2) who is Father of the child united to Jesus, and 3) who is Father of all the children of the world, who are consequently brothers among themselves and called to be united to Jesus in order to live this fraternity in its plenitude in the Mystical Body. Spiritual childhood, which synthesizes the message that God gives to the Church and the

world through St. Therese, is based precisely on this. In this “little way”, we find “the confirmation and renewal of the most basic and most universal truth. What truth of the Gospel message is really more basic and more universal than this: **God is our Father and we are his children?**” (10f, self-citation).

St. John Paul II distinguishes **two characteristics** of this path for those who progress along it, according to what the saint herself experienced; and that is that she

- “*enters more and more deeply into the mystery of the Church* and,
- drawn by the love of Christ, feels growing within her the **apostolic and missionary vocation** which *spurs her to bring everyone with her to meet the divine Spouse*” (5d).

The verbs in italics in the quotations once again underline the aforementioned missionary “gift”/“grace” binomial. In the same way, referring to the “little way”, St. John Paul II speaks of “the knowledge of divine realities which God *granted* to Therese in order to *teach* others the ways of salvation” (10c, quoting Pope Benedict XV). He mentions her “doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher and then imparted to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness (cf. *Ms B, 2v-3*)” (3a). Moreover, he

emphasizes the aspect of **universality**: “Her





person, the Gospel message of the ‘little way’ of trust and spiritual childhood have received and continue to receive a remarkable welcome, which has transcended every border” (10i). Her outreach is both ecumenical and *ad gentes*: “She is also loved and accepted by brothers and sisters of other Christian communities and even by non-Christians” (11e).

What does **spiritual childhood** ultimately consist of? St. John Paul II explains it this way:

— From the point of view (as **agents** of the mission), “At the root is the experience of being the Father’s adoptive children in Jesus; this is the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood, that is, the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit” (8e).

— From the point of view of the **object** (in terms of the recipients of the mission), “At the root again, and standing before us, is our neighbor, others, for whose salvation we must collaborate with and in Jesus, with the same merciful love as his” (8e).

— From the point of view of her **doctrinal and theological message**, in which “everything comes from God, returns to him and abides in him, for the salvation of all, in a mystery of merciful love” (8f).

— From the point of view of her **spiritual and pastoral message**, in “the Gospel way of holiness for all” (2b), “the ‘little way’, which everyone can take, because everyone is called to holiness” (6e).

In short, as St. John Paul II summarizes, “Her teaching not only conforms to Scripture and the Catholic faith, but excels for **the depth and wise**

synthesis it achieved. Her doctrine is at once a confession of the Church’s faith, an experience of the Christian mystery and a way to holiness” (7d).

THE MISSION ACCORDING TO THE PATRONESS OF THE MISSIONS

This Carmelite of Lisieux, who wrote letters to her missionary “brothers” (cf. 6f), and, even though she never left her convent, would have liked to have been assigned to a Carmelite monastery in Indochina, was proclaimed Patroness of the Missions in 1927, together with St. Francis Xavier. This was established by the “Pope of the Missions”, Pius XI, “in response to the petition of many missionary Bishops” (2a). This should not surprise us. In fact, as expressed by St. John Paul II, “By her example of holiness, of perfect fidelity to Mother

Church, of full communion with the See of Peter, as well as by the special graces obtained by her for many missionary brothers and sisters, she has rendered a particular service to the renewed proclamation and experience of Christ’s Gospel and to the **extension of the Catholic faith** in every nation on earth” (10a).

It is easy to perceive the complementarity between

St. Francis Xavier, the missionary “of blood” – forgive the expression – through *personal cooperation*, and St. Therese of Lisieux, the missionary “of desire”, though **effectively missionary**, through *spiritual cooperation*. (The third mode of participation in the mission, material cooperation, has a significant point of reference in the venerable Pauline Jaricot, foundress of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith and important figure in the origin of the Society of the Missionary Childhood). Apart from her contemplative dimension, which we will not go into in depth here, it is significant to note that,



together with the saint from Navarre, a former member of the Holy Childhood has become Patroness of the Missions.

Referring to Manuscript C of Therese's autobiographical texts, St. John Paul II emphasizes that in it "we find the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God's hands, to unity between love of God and love of neighbor, to her missionary vocation in the Church" (6d). Further on, the Pope makes reference to the topics in which the ordinary Magisterium has had recourse to the saint's teaching, "especially when speaking of the contemplative and missionary vocation, of trust in the just and merciful God, of Christian joy and of the call to holiness" (10h). These converging topics – **trust, love, vocation, joy, holiness** – give us an insight into what mission is for her.

Recalling the awareness and commitment that, according to Pope Francis, every Christian must have – "I am a mission on this earth", EG 273 –, we could try to further specify what mission Theresa is within that Mission that is the Church. St. John Paul II essentially expresses it in this way: "she had the mission of making the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, **known and loved**" (8c).

Once again, the question arises: how did young Therese manage to do this? How was she able to

find her "place" within the mission of the Church? Clearly by discovering and living her vocation: "Therese received particular light on the reality of Christ's Mystical Body, on the variety of its charisms, gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the **eminent power of love**, which in a way is the very heart of the Church, where she found her vocation as a contemplative and missionary (cf. *Ms B*, 2r-3v)" (8h).

It is good to reflect on this point. This need to **discern one's own vocation and to respond to it** is a pressing need of our Church and of our children, for the good of society and of the whole world. The Society of Missionary Childhood should offer the appropriate pedagogy to facilitate this.

On the other hand, this refers to an important dimension in the charism of the Holy Childhood, as embraced by Bishop de Forbin-Janson: that of cultivating **missionary vocations**. In fact, the Founder saw the incipient Society as a nursery for future missionaries, not only from Churches of ancient tradition, but also from the young Churches in mission territories. In fact, the latter would contribute to evangelize their own towns, and, as is happening today, other places as well. In this sense, it is significant that, together with her "general" patronage of the missions, St. Therese is also specifically Patroness of another Pontifical Mission Societies (the third of the four mentioned

above): St. Peter the Apostle, which provides support to the often called "native vocations" (cf. 2bc).

A SPIRITUALITY FOR MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD, ACCORDING TO THERESA

"Therese offers a mature synthesis of Christian spirituality," writes St. John Paul II, who then adds an illuminating precision, "**she combines theology and the spiritual life**" (7d). This is a very important point for the care of our children. In fact, this integration





and unification helps us avoid offering them a purely theoretical doctrinal formation that is “detached from life”, or a merely subjective and diffuse spiritualism, which does not guide or channel the incipient religious experience of the child according to the truth of which the Church is the guardian and servant.

Indeed, in the face of these two dangers, “Therese’s teaching expresses with coherence and harmonious unity the dogmas of the Christian faith as a *doctrine of truth* and an *experience of life*” (7e). And just as interesting is the fact that the saint of Lisieux shows us that there is (there must be) a third element equally integrated in this vital unity of the person of faith: **the mission**. She does so with such an overwhelming simplicity that John Paul II needs very few words (echoing her own) to express this triple dimension-direction of her spirituality: “Teresa knew Jesus, loved him and made him loved” (8g).

With the aim of encouraging a deeper understanding of what the relationship between these three “components” entails, and using the apostolic letter as our guide, we will now enumerate some of the important **keys** that this “teacher of spiritual life” (3a), “forged” in the “furnace” of Missionary Childhood, offers us:

1) Doctrinal formation (truth- “I am loved”):

a) Theological content

- “The mystery itself of God-Love, of the Triune God” (8e).
- “God is our Father and we are his children” (10f).
- “To know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel” (4b; cf. 7b).
- “With the light and strength that come from the Holy Spirit” (11e; cf. 1b, 7c).
- “Centrality of love” (5d; cf. 1a, 5e, 8e-f.h).

b) Practical and pedagogical keys

- “The Christian mystery ... with the greatest possible realism” (10j).
- “A doctrine both spiritual and profound” (3a; cf. 8d).
- “A formation both demanding and full of tenderness” (5a).
- “A living, accessible language” (8b).
- “A great ability to persuade and communicate” (7d).

2) Spiritual experience (Life - “I love”):

a) Experiential aspects (“link” with the theological contents)

- “Search for God” (10e).
- “Experience of being the Father’s adoptive children in Jesus” (8e; cf. 10f).
- “Experience of the Christian mystery” (7d; cf. 8e).

b) Disposition

- “Trust in the just and merciful God” (6d; cf. 7f, 8c).
- “To the little and the humble” (1a-b; cf. 7b).
- “Filial boldness” (5c).
- “Extraordinary love for the truths of the faith” (9c; cf. 7d, 10h).

c) Means

- “In the Church, the Bride of Christ and Mother of souls” (6c; cf. 8h, 10a).
- “Meditation on the Word of God” (9b; cf. 9a).

— “Participate in prayer and liturgical worship” (9c).

— “Living faith working through charity” (7g).

d) Proposal of holiness

— “The Gospel way of holiness for all” (2b; cf. 6e, 7d).

— “The way of perfection” (5b; cf. 5d).

— “The Virgin Mary’s journey according to the Gospel” (6g; cf. 8i).

3) Missionary outreach (Mission - “I make him loved”):

— “The unity between love of God and love of neighbor” (6d; cf. 8e, 9b).

— “Our neighbor, others, for whose salvation we must collaborate with and in Jesus” (8e; cf. 8f, 9b, 10c, 11e).

— “Missionary vocation in the Church” (6d; cf. 8c.h).

— “Vocation to love” (9b).

— “A particular service... to the extension of the Catholic faith in every nation on earth” (10a; cf. 10i).

— “Witness and apostle through prayer” (10j; cf. 1d, 11c).

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In St. Therese, faith, life, and mission are comparable to the **three angles of a triangle**: all three are necessary to form a triangle. This teaching is especially important in view of the approach used by the Society of Missionary Childhood and for the formation of children in general. This is because it once again makes it clear that the missionary commitment cannot be seen as an add-on or an ornament (cf. Francis, WDV Message 2017). Such error of approach affects, with serious consequences, catechesis and religion classes. It is clear that if faith does not correspond to a life of faith, Christians become “de-Christianized”; however, if faith and a life of faith are separated from the mission, the effect is similar and perhaps, since it goes somewhat unnoticed, more subtly dangerous. In fact, the



current tendency to separate the mission from one or both of the other “angles” explains why it has been necessary to emphasize that we are “Baptized and sent”, in the Extraordinary Missionary Month. When St. John Paul II refers to the fact that “Therese experienced divine revelation, going so far as to contemplate the fundamental truths of our faith united in the mystery of Trinitarian life,” he goes on to specify, “At the summit, as the *source* and goal, is the merciful love of the three Divine Persons” (8e). The expression is very evocative from the missionary point of view, since it ties in with the “*fount*- like love” of God the Father (AG 2), from which proceed the mission of the Son and that of the Holy Spirit (cf. AG 3-4). The mission of the Son is prolonged in that of the Church, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (cf. AG 5). Here it is important to emphasize that, according to Therese, theology and missiology are not only “knowledge”, but also the foundation of personal **life experience** in the bosom of the Church. We should try to ensure that this is so for our children as well. To this end, it might be helpful to study the distinction and relationship that the apostolic letter establishes between the necessary formation in Christian doctrine and the preparation carried out by the Spirit (cf. 1b, 7c, 11e).

When evaluating the testimony of St. Therese as a whole, the Pope gives another important clue or practical guideline for the missionary animation



her, as to babes (*Ms A*, 49r; cf. Lk 10:21-22) ” (7b). Undoubtedly, among the “little ones” of the Gospel, children are also **called to the summit** of holiness and mission. It is necessary to insist on this. This proposal, which is what the Missionary Childhood should present to children, may seem extraordinary, and it is. However, it is guaranteed by the greatness of the One who makes it and made possible by the humble littleness of the one who welcomes it.

of children: “The power of her message lies in its concrete explanation of how all Jesus’ promises are fulfilled in the believer who knows how confidently to welcome in his own life the saving presence of the Redeemer” (10j). She, “who in approaching the Gospel knew how to grasp its hidden wealth with that practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belong to the feminine genius” (11b), “gives her personal confirmation that the Christian mystery [...] *must be taken literally*” (10j); it must be *lived*, and *lived as mission*.

This “realism” (10j) with respect to God and to the person does not contradict, but on the contrary, affirms and justifies the greatness of the proposal: in the face of supposed pedagogies that renounce to present high ideals to children, condemning them to an unfulfilled life, the Missionary Childhood cannot offer them less than holiness. The Society thus places itself on “its own ground”, since the vocation to holiness and **the vocation to mission** are intimately related, as St. John Paul II explicitly stated, “The call to mission derives, of its nature, from the call to holiness”, to the point that “the true missionary is the saint” (RM 90 and title).

St. Therese of the Child Jesus, Patroness of the Missions, “knows she is being instructed in the science of love, hidden from the wise and prudent, which the divine Teacher deigned to reveal to

In a simple way, Therese shows us what the Missionary Childhood should foster. Its mission is to help children accept *faith in Love*, radiate *love for the faith*, and transform both things into *the mission of extending faith and love* to all, which is a personal mission within the great Mission of the Church (cf. 7f). The awareness that to be a Christian is to be a Christian-for-others is indeed lived from an extraordinary intuition that affects the very center of our Society and the essence of its charism, which is the “mystical intimacy” of the child with Christ the Child. We not only announce Jesus; we not only announce *with Jesus*, but we **announce in Jesus** (cf. 8e, final), and, therefore, in the Church (cf. 8f.).

In short, it is not surprising that St. Paul VI recommended to teachers and educators, among others, the study of the doctrine of this “teacher of prayer and theological virtue of hope, and a model of communion with the Church” (10e). Nor should it surprise us that the “little way” of a former member of the Holy Childhood- suitably adapted to the present, with faithful respect for its essence - can inspire the **spirituality of the Society of the Missionary Childhood** today.

SRI LANKA



The National Office of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Sri Lanka has implemented so many activities for the formation and animation of the Missionary Childhood children in Sri Lanka. The formation and animation of our Holy childhood has got a new face from 2016 onwards. It is because of the introducing of the new “Year plan” for our children as one of the most effective and important means of formation and animation. This is the 6th year that we are continuing the year plan in different ideas and different methods up to date.

The Holy Childhood Year Plan is a guide to our children to have more saintly life, because the year plan is divided into 12, according to the 12 months of the calendar so each month dedicated to one saint and for the year it will be 12 saints. There we introduce to the children the birth and the family background of the saint very short and the main characteristic of his/ her saintly and exemplary life. This will be in very short maximum 3 to 4 points in all the three languages which is

used in Sri Lanka, so it is similar to all 12 months in that way it is very clear that this has become a great platform for them to study the lives of the saints in depth, assimilate the good qualities in their lives, and to construct various nature of God in them.

All these things happens one side of the paper. Similarly the other side of the paper according to the dedicated saint to that particular month, we introduce some practical elements in 3 or 4 points as a monthly activity readily helps the children to become more missionaries. In this way, the year plan includes daily routines and weekly activities with the Saints as one of the exercises for nourishing their souls.

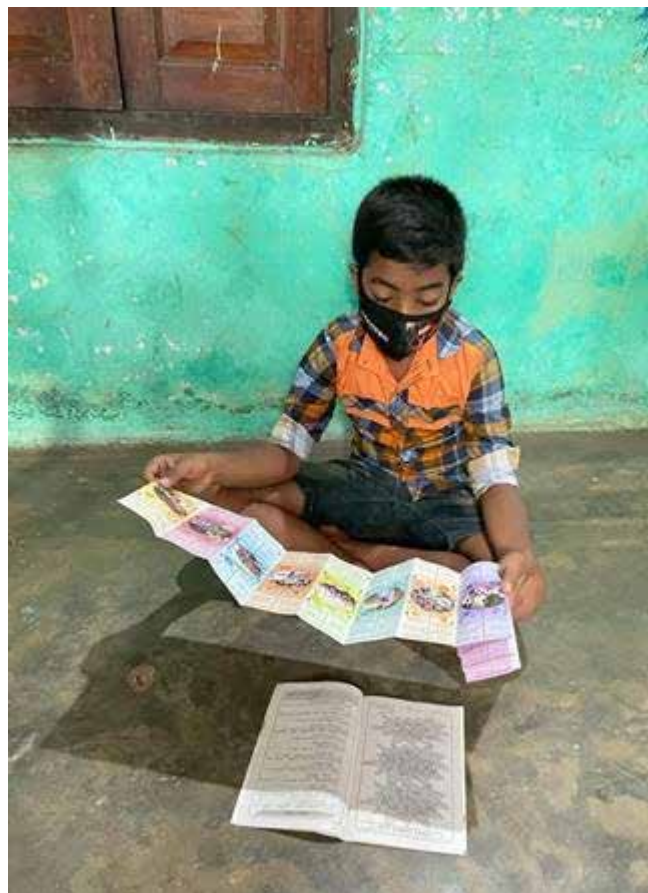
Each year we introduce 12 saints and we are pleased to note that from 2016 – 2021 we have covered 72 saints for our Holy childhood children and now all our children are very familiar with



the colorful year plan and it has become the most demanded printed material for our Holy Childhood children every year. Therefore already we have prepared the year plan for 2022 with another 12 saints giving prominent in the month of October 2022 for Pauline Marie Jaricot, the founders of the Propagation of Faith.

This year plan has become a reawakening the spirit of God as well as the creation of families with children in good behavior and Christian values. Another important point here is, because of this year plan there is a thirst for vocation to become Priest and Religious. Finally I would like to say as a concluding aspect the year plan of the Holy Childhood formation and animation of our children gives higher boost to develop and inculcate in them the christen values as well as physical, mental and social development of our missionary Childhood Children.

*Father Basil Rohan Fernando
National Director PMS Sri Lanka*



PAKISTAN



FORMATION OF ANIMATORS IN PAKISTAN THROUGH THE RENEWAL OF MISSIONARY ANIMATION (SOMA)



The Catholic Church in Pakistan can go back to the times of St. Thomas Christians, as well as to the time of St. Francis Xavier's missionary work in Goa.

However, in recent years there has been the greater need of formation of Children and reawaken the mission zeal. Thought there has been strong wave of mission work and still young volunteers are working whole heartily. With the passage of time, we need to renew their mission commitment. And so, there is a strong need for the renewal of missionary catechism and formation.

The national SOMA (School of Missionary Animation) held in Ayubia from 26th to 30th July 2021. The participants from all over Pakistan came to attend the national SOMA. All diocesan directors and their

coordinators were also present along with their team. His Excellency Bishop Khaild Rehmat, Chairman PMS, was also present and was one of the speakers. His Grace Archbishop Joseph Arshad and His Excellency Indrais Rehmat were also our guest speakers. The both bishops emphasize on mission in Pakistan and how to carry the mission of the Church in current situations as the Church is facing many challenges in Pakistan. All these five days different themes were presented and all participants took an active part in group discussion. Finally, His Grace Archbishop Christophe El-Kassis, Apostolic Nuncio in Pakistan, concluded the national SOMA with Holy Eucharist. It has been a



great opportunity and amazing experience for all the holy childhood animators to reinvigorate their faith and commitment to the Lord and His mission. All the participants were happy to attend the SOMA and rediscovered this fundamental vocation and mandate as missionaries. In the evaluation of the whole workshop, the animators really appreciated all the speakers and their contents. They found all the topics interesting and relevant to their mission which needs to be discussed.

This SOMA was planned in 2020 but due to global pandemic it could not be executed. The Catholic bishops' Conference has extended the year of youth till 2021, so, in the light of it the need for consistent capacity building of the trainers or the training of trainers of Holy Childhood Program is suggested. For a Solid Missionary formation it is a dire need that such ongoing courses help to renew and strengthen the commitment to the courses and assist them in providing well-structured and missionary mobility.

The renewed formation and training is in line with the goal that this plan is being prepared to provide all the animators with a good theology and spiritual and various curriculum or training sessions and to provide them with a solid missionary structure.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To strengthen the spiritual foundation of animator/s to refresh them in their vocation.
2. To further facilitate the animator and Children of globalization taking place all around the world.
3. To teach the background (the historical importance) of Catholic Church in Pakistan.
4. Provide a sound spiritual formation and reinvigorate their missionary zeal.
5. To give them leadership skills.
6. To provide biblical inside in the light of mission of the Church.

*Father Asif John
National Director PMS Pakistan*



Personally reflecting on the new approaches to the proclamation of Faith in contemporary times, the 5-day seminar on Formation of Holy Childhood School of Animators shared great insights, which are indeed significant requirements, needed to be cultivated as a part of formation of Animators.

Having a rich experience of being a Holy Childhood Animator for the past 16 years, I had an opportunity to deepen my renewal of my baptismal promise thus making further animation available to everyone I come across in my Diocese.

The inspirational messages by the Church leaders has helped to progress my personal holiness, intellectual alertness and developed my spiritual and personal efficacy.

The world in dire need of Missionary Animators and I see myself a more committed and matured Animator, moving forward to Evangelize the world for Christ.

I am thankful to Fr. Asif John, National Director – Pontifical Mission Societies – Pakistan to provide constant support in forming animators who in turn will form others in the divine work of God's love.

Theresa D'Souza



MALAWI

I am **JACINTA AMAO**, an animator in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe at Our Lady of Africa Maula Cathedral and from St John Paul II Small Christian Community. I have been an animator since 2005.

CHALLENGES DUE TO COVID 19 AS AN ANIMATOR

Due to the suspension of physical meetings with children has been a challenge for me as an animator. Yes, later, I joined others when PMS started Radio and Televisions lessons. However, teaching without physically seeing who you are relating to, was not easy and not very satisfying at the beginning.

Since children were not physically with me I was not able to ask questions during to them as individuals, as way of accessing if they have understood or not what I was teaching. The lack of physical and emotional interaction has been a big issue with me as an animator.

DISPITE THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC, I AM ABLE TO DO MY MISSIONARY WORK

Through Covid 19 made gathers to stop, the Church found a way of reaching out to children through television.

Though it is not easy due to this pandemic, I realise I could do something for God and for children. I feel if someone truly has a calling from God, serving him isn't such a difficult task even

if there are challenges around you. The strength came from having the drive to do the work of God and for the love I have for children.

DURING MY MISSIONARY WORK IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC, I HAD GOOD EXPERIENCE FROM CHILDREN

The feedback from the children has been one of encouragement, through the phone calls during the programs has shown that it's possible to still teach in a different way. One child called in once and said that she enjoyed the program as she learnt a lot about the faith that she hadn't known before. Thus, I find out that during this difficult time of the pandemic the Church through my missionary work, we have accompanied some children and have given them faith formation and have been changed, for sure.

I REALISE PARENTS TOO HAD A GREAT FEELING BECAUSE THE CHURCH REACHED OUT TO CHILDREN DURING THE PANDEMIC.

Parents were grateful that even during this challenging time their children were still able to continue with learning about their faith. This has been evident by the overwhelming response the children have shown to the programs, by calling in as well as responding to our calls for donations for their fellow children. We know parents gave phones and talk time to children to be able to call us in the studios. Thus, parents have been excited and supportive with the initiative of PMS and the Church.

THE CHALLENGE I SEE AS I DO MISSIONARY WORK IN THIS TIME OF THE PANDEMIC

The only challenge I can cite is not really knowing the actual age group one is reaching out to, due to not having physical contact with children. It makes it a bit difficult to at times to choose the right





words to get the message across.

The other challenge of Television lessons is that as a teacher I am unable to ask children direct questions to assess their level of understanding of what I am to teach or what I have taught.

A WORD OF HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT

The fact that we have been able to still do the work of God and made a positive impact in these difficult circumstances, should give us a drive to continue the missionary work, not to limit ourselves in way of how we can still serve God. We have seen that it's still possible and this should also make us to be more creative even after Covid 19. God is with us and will always lead us on what he wants us to do for his Church.

Jacinta Amao

Animator

Archdiocese of Lilongwe

My name is **Fortune Maseko** and I am 10 years old.

I learn at Marafrique Pvt Primary School am in Standard 4 and in I am in Confirmation class.

Im from St. Bridget Small Christian Community at Holy Ghost Parish in the Archdiocese of Blantyre.

CHALLENGE BROUGHT BY COVID 19

The coming in of Covid 19 has affected me mainly psychologically for I have been living in fear, it has also affected me Spiritually and academically since the Churches and Schools have been closed as one way of preventing measures of Covid 19. I did not learn much at school and I did not go to Church to meet my friends.

Of course, I don't feel that God has abandoned me, no. Covid 19 situation has also helped to strengthen up my faith by continuous prayers we used to have at our family.

ACTIVITIES DONE AT HOME DURING THE TIME OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC

During this pandemic we had daily prayers here at home and academic discussions with

my brothers and sisters at home to keep ourselves updated with our education. I also used to watch Luntha Catholic television programs which was introduced by our Church through PMS to keep us focus on our Spiritual life.

The Church through PMS had helped me by introducing Television and Radio programs of Catechism lessons which has been aired on Saturday and Sundays. Parents have been always supportive by having family prayers, reminding me about the television and radio programs, preventive measures and checking my daily health status.

WHAT SHOULD THE CHURCH DO FOR US CHILDREN?

I want the Church through PMS to continue airing out Television and Radio programs. Also want the Church to introduce a special Mass every month for Children to join our friends praying for parents and priests who died because of Covid 19.

A WORD TO MY FELLOW CHILDREN

My advice to my fellow children is let us keep on praying for God's mercy and work hard in School.

Thank you,

*Fortune Maseko
Holy Ghost Parish
Archdiocese of Blantyre*



I am **SR. AGNES NJIRAYAKONDA** and I belonging to Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary sisters (SBVM).

I currently serving at Chisombezi deafblind school, Nguludi parish in Blantyre Archdiocese of Malawi. I began teaching the children face to face since 2016.

CHALLENGES BROUGHT BY COVID 19

However, COVID 19 has brought challenges in attainment of lessons scheduled for the kids in the sense that the nature of prevention measures for COVID does not entertain gatherings of a large number of people. Due to this all our programs which required gathering of children were modified to be done on line. For example, we had some zoom meetings and the teaching of kids on Radio Maria.

As animators, we taught what we planned but we were not satisfied because not all the children managed to get lessons because other children are from poor families so much so that cannot afford to have a radio at home. Moreover, radio frequencies do not reach some places because of their geographical locations.

MISSIONARY WORK CONTINUED IN A DIFFERENT WAY DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

PMS National Office in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Office, planned to give missionary animation to children and parents and other adults through the Radio and Television.

As an animator, despite, the Covid 19 pandemic, I joined the group of animators from Archdiocese of Blantyre who were giving missionary animation lessons to children and adults on Radio Maria using Blantyre sub-studio. We did this in turns with other animators from Lilongwe Archdiocese (Lilongwe sub-studio) and Mangochi Diocese (Mangochi main studio).

The animations on radio were exciting because there were opportunities for children to ask questions or to comment on the lessons of the day. Thus, children gave us feedback on what we were communicating to them. I personally felt very happy and satisfied that some children were learning much about their catholic faith and how to live missionary life in

this time of the pandemic.

To my surprise other parents were also moved with the content delivered to the children. I remember I once taught something on the miraculous medal when we were encouraging children to pray the rosary and seek the intercession of our Mother Mary in times of challenges like this one of Covid 19 pandemic. This drew attention to many children and parents. I later heard from other animators in some parishes being asked by the children where they can get the miraculous medal. That impressed me as animator because it indicated that despite being in this difficult time due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the word of God is still being shared and faith is being increased and strengthened in the hearts of our children and some adults.

We thank parents who also took part by providing their children with gadgets like radios and phones for their children to participate in the on line lessons.

During the animation on Radio Maria children were encouraged to offer their monetary contributions in money tin or send through money mobile serves like mpamba /Airtel-money to the authorized account which we gave to children. The money helped to keep some activities of charity work active in the dioceses as well as other activities for the kids which demanded money.

Another good thing we did with other animators was the creation of whatsapp group of all teachers in all parishes in the Archdiocese of Blantyre so that whatever was taught on radio, was recorded and later sent to other animators to teach children in their small communities or families using phones.

OTHER CHALLENGES

Although I was doing my missionary work in this time of COVID 19 on radio, apart from the children from poor families who could not access radios, there is another group of children who are not being helped with faith missionary formation lessons: these are children with deafness. These could not hear what was being taught on Radio Maria. We hope the PMS National





Office and Diocese will find other means to help these children such physical challenges.

CONCLUSION

During the Covid 19 pandemic, efforts by the Church through PMS animations on Radio and Tv and social media, I feel has helped plant and take care of the seed of faith. Moreover, we have planted a seed of prayer life in our children and this I am confident, will move the Church forward and change the face of the world. I love being at the service of children especially at this difficult time

*Sr. Agnes Njirayakonda
Animator
Archdiocese of Blantyre*



My name is **COTILDA RETHABILE LIKONGWE**. I am 9 years old and in Standard 5 at Mkwichi Primary School. I pray at Saint Kizito Catholic Parish under Lilongwe Archdiocese and I belong to Saint Paul small Christian community. I am in catechism class 3.

My challenge during the COVID-19 pandemic was that we were not going to church and school. I did not think that God abandoned me because he loves us and he is always there in good or bad moments. The time I was home I was helping my parents with house work.

During the time I was home, I had a prayer that I liked to pray. I like praying the three Hail Mary's every day so that Mother Mary should intercede us. The PMS helped me to be a loving, caring, hopeful and faithful child through the programs in 'Learn Your Faith and Win'. My parents were very helpful and would always help and love me even when COVID-19 pandemic started and would never allow me to go anywhere without a mask.

I would like the church to continue with the 'Learn Your Faith and Win' program and helping the poor. As for me and my family, we will continue to donate money to help the poor. To my fellow friends, my advice is that pray, hope and do not worry.

Thank you.

*Clotilda Rethabile Likongwe
Archdiocese of Lilongwe*



COLOMBIA

IN THE FAMILY LET'S FOLLOW JESUS

Missionary friends! My name is Melani Tatiana Romero Suárez, I am 13 years old and I have been part of Missionary Childhood of the parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus since 2014, invited by some friends of the district that insistently asked my mother to allow me to participate.

At the beginning of 2015 I consecrated myself in Trigo Verde thanks to my animator Claudia Maria Mora, who with love and joy instilled in me a special love for Jesus and Mary, always in the company of my mother Maria Ligia Suárez, who every Saturday committed herself and fell in love with the group and with knowing and loving Jesus, just as I did. My mother already knew several things about the group, to the point that Claudia delegated her duties to her, along with two other mothers, while she was out on an important trip.

My mother loves this task and also teaching children to love Jesus very much, and together with my older sister Aleen Camila Romero, who also fell in love with this Missionary Society while helping my mother in the elaboration of the necessary materials for each meeting, decided with the help of the coordinator Claudia Mora to participate in

the formation for animators of the Missionary Childhood.

With the passing of the months almost all of my family: my mother, my sister and I, were part of this Society.

My father Andrés Fernando Romero, was the only one left, who due to the fact that he always accompanied us to all the activities and missionary outings, since he works in the transport sector, began to commit himself and not only in the parish group but also collaborating in the peregrinations of the diocese and to date he helps us with all the logistics and photographs of the activities when we go out. Now all my family members are missionaries and this fills me with pride and, even more, the fact that I began this process of a missionary family. In the process of creating a missionary family, my teacher and coordinator in the parish, Claudia Maria Mora, falls ill with a long and painful infirmity. At that time, the coordinator delegated my mother, my sister and another mother to take charge of the group under her coordination and so for two years, despite grief, she continued to lead the group until death. After my mother receives the guidance of the group and she forms part of the PMS committee of the diocese of Neiva.

In these moments I feel happy to be able to serve and continue the process that I have done, as I started in Trigo Verde, I arrived in Trigo Maturo, I did my training as a child leader, I received my cross and the missionary banner and now as a missionary teenager I have already done my training as a councilor and I already have a small group of children of whom I am proud to be able to make them fall in love with Jesus as I was thanks to taken my best friend Jesus and my missionary family, who have been present throughout this process and have always helped me.

*Melani Tatiana Romero
Parish of Sagrado Corazón de Jesús
Diocese of Neiva*





“WITH JESUS AND MARY ... MISSIONARIES FOR LIFE”

My name is Libia Cárdenas Castellanos, I am one of the coordinators of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the missionary animation of the Diocese of Cúcuta. I have been serving as a missionary in Holy Childhood (IAM) of the Holy Family Parish for more than 6 years.

Along this path, I fell in love more and more every day with this magnificent Society of Missionary Childhood. The group consists of 30 participants including children and adolescents aged between 4 and 15. They are part of Trigo Verde, Trigo Maduro and Adolescents. This group is called “Jesus and Mary”. It is the school with the living presence of Jesus, for Jesus, in it children find a space of love and fraternal coexistence, which, as they themselves say, is the Spa of Jesus, because with games, dynamics and love for prayer and for their neighbors, they have learned to have a sense of belonging to their parish by participating in the various activities of spiritual development of the Diocese.

Today I want to share with you this joy of being a member of IAM, of feeling part of a big family,

where you can sow the seeds of vocations and, together with the children, I too have grown in my faith and in my love for the Blessed Sacrament. In the Diocese of Cúcuta, there are about 28 parishes with IAM and we continue to struggle to be able to create other groups in the other parishes. It is difficult to be at the service in the Kingdom of God and even more so to be a missionary for children, but, my dear friends, it is gratifying, when you come to the meetings and they receive you with a hug, a kiss, a smile or a simple “Hello prof”. Although I studied

Administration, I feel happy, yes, very happy to be an instrument of God to guide all these children who are willing to be friends of Jesus and Mary.

I am also happy to teach them to take advantage of the spaces where IAM in Colombia promotes the growth of children as missionary leaders, such as the “Singing the Mission: Baptized and Sent” contest. Today we consider ourselves blessed for having participated in the contest and for having won with the unreleased song “Growing in mission”. It is difficult, yes, because there are not so many other people determined to be lay servants of God. Therefore, I invite you to take that first step to help this wonderful Pontifical Society reach everywhere. The children and adolescents of the world will thank you.

*Libia Cárdenas Castellanos
Coordinator of the IAM
Holy Family Parish*

THE PHILIPPINES



The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the different avenues in the lives of the people; this also affected the children. They were introduced to online classes or modular classes resulting to less interaction with their fellow children. Most of their time is spent with their family. The National Office of the Pontifical Mission Societies continuously collaborates with the PMS diocesan directors and the members of the Mission Education Commission (MEC) on how the national office could give missionary formation programs for the members of the Holy Childhood Association, especially that the Philippine Church celebrates the 500 years of the arrival of Christianity in the archipelago.

There are 6,690 members for school year 2020-2021. There was a significant decrease (from 16, 890) in the enrolment of members.

Growing in faith, love and holiness in the time of pandemic:

In this year marked by the suffering and challenges created by the Covid 19 pandemic, the missionary journey of the whole Church continues.

Each HCA member is challenged to see the opportunities of becoming a missionary in his/her little way in this challenging time.

A pandemic is not something one can experience in his lifetime. Before the recent Covid-19 pandemic, the last recorded in the history was the Spanish flu in the early 1930s. It is a scary situation where there is a virus outbreak that affects the entire world. Since the vaccine is not yet found, people encouraged to stay at home, thus, sometimes hindering them to see their friends, family and loved ones from other places to avoid catching the Covid-19 virus. Most people are working from home while to some unfortunately, lost their jobs. Thus, causing a lot of anxiety to many people around the world.

However, despite of the negative effects of the recent pandemic, it also brought a positive impact

to us people. It gave us a lot of time to reflect and realize what are the things that really matter.

To us Christians, this pandemic might be a wake-up call to revisit our faith and relationship with God. It is actually a blessing in disguise, because I believe that this is one of God's mysterious ways to bring us closer to Him. In this time of uncertainty, trusting God is the only thing we can hold on to. Believing that He allows these challenges to happen for a reason, and not losing hope that these too will pass, manifests our faith in Him.

Faith in humanity also demonstrates our faith in God. We should therefore show our love and hope to one another that we will recover and heal as one from





this pandemic. Big and small ways of showing we care does not really matter, the important is we do these things with sincerity and love. Spreading love and positivity is a way of respecting all of God's creation. Hence, each one of us should try to be a catalyst of love and positivity in these trying times we are in now.

To nourish one's faith in God, it is important to have a constant communication with Him. Through praying, one can share and lift to God all his worries and anxieties. Prayer is a very powerful tool in expressing our gratitude for all the blessings, and asking comfort for the pains and sorrows to God. During the recent quarantine period, since people are not allowed to travel and go outside, families gather and pray the rosary and near online mass regularly. The pandemic actually brought families to pray together as one.

Growing in faith, love and holiness in the time of the pandemic is indeed very difficult. However, keeping the faith in Him and believing that nothing is impossible with God makes each day bearable. The pandemic actually taught me a lot and made me realize the importance of being grateful always. And make sure to value more my relationships with my family and friends and treasure every moment with them. And lastly, it helped me discover and know myself better. Thus, enable me to show my love to God, oneself and to others better.

MIA KHRYSSELLE D. PAPAS

11 years

Grade 6 - Manresa School

In the past 7 months my family has been suffering and experiencing difficulties brought by Covid-19. My mom doesn't contact us that much since she is a nurse working hard this time. She's been really busy, sometimes she doesn't get sleep at all. Yes, she might be healthy but the chances of getting infected are never low. How my family and I solved it, is by contacting each other when we have free time. Mom might be busy but she tries to give everything for us. I also overcome it by trusting in God.

Having faith in God is better than sinning, the things I did to grow in faith and love for God is reading the Bible and listening to worship songs. It may sound very much straightforward but it helps. You see if you read the Bible it feels like he's really talking to you. I know you hear nothing but He is actually there sitting next to you. I also pray every morning to night time. It really helps me to stay connected to God. You know why my essay sounds so happy? Well, because it's better being happy than sad. I know these are hard times but it's going to be all right. I know you might be busy, but, give Him at least 5 or 10 minutes, don't worry you can come to him any time.

Walking with Christ might be hard but as long you are with Him, you're protected from evil. All He needs is your love and trust! The devil might get you but God won't give up on you! He's our heavenly father anyways so at least give him a chance. Trust me, He would never leave you.

You think He wouldn't hang out with sinners? Well, lucky us, we're sinners so He would never leave us alone! He won't leave until you accept Him and yourself.

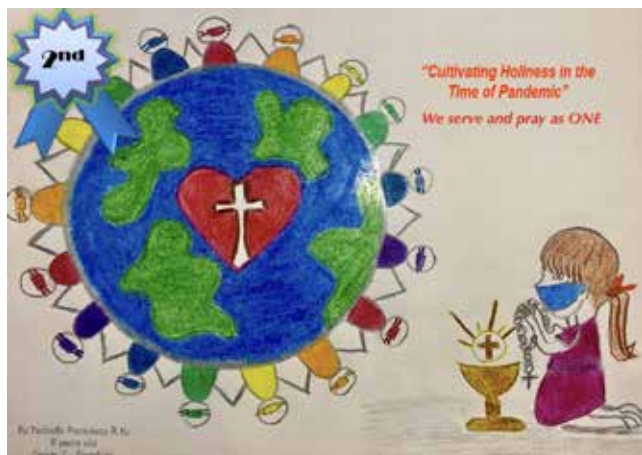
Jesus Christ died for our sins so it's our turn to run towards him with a big smile and-warm hug. You might be depressed, insecure, but God does really love you! Either run towards Him now or never. That's why let's start to have hope, love and trust in God, ok? We can do it together. My faith helped me during this pandemic because I have hope again! God said, with Him there is light, hope and forgiveness- That's why I trust Him today.

My message to my fellow young children, is that, we should never lose hope, love and light. As young missionaries, we can start with small gestures like praying, giving hope, food and mask to poor people. It's a must to keep them safe during this time of pandemic. That's all, again, never lose hope and love for they make the WORLD a better place to live in! May God be with all of you. Thank you!!

ANGELYN L. LLAMOSO

12 years

GRADE 6 - Canossa School





KatoLago



PONTIFICAL MISSION SOCIETIES in cooperation with **KatoLago** present a Webinar on “WITNESSING: GIFTED TO GIVE”



Mr. Jhon C. Carandang, Rpsy
Speaker

**HOLY CHILDHOOD
ASSOCIATION**
(Grade School Level)

February 20, 2021
[8:00 am – 9:00am]



Mr. Vicxen Fernando A. DeRamos
Speaker

**SOCIETY FOR THE
PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH**
(High School Level)

February 27, 2021
[8:00 am -9:00 am]

CELEBRATION OF THE MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD DAY

a webinar entitled “Witnessing: Gifted to Give” was held on February 20, 2021 for helping the HCA members to equip themselves on how they can be missionary disciples to their family and community in these trying times.

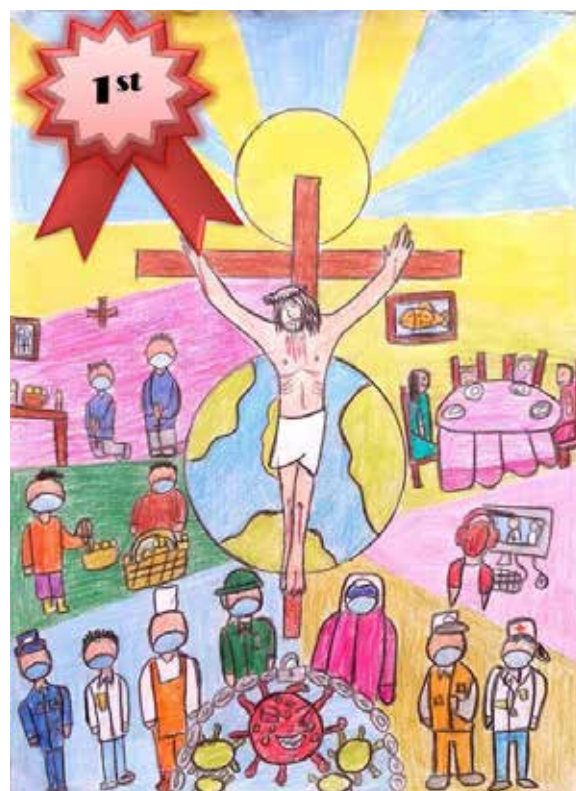
HOW DO YOU WITNESS YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH?

HANNA ISABELA V. BASCON, Canossa School S.Rosa, Laguna, answers in this way:

1. Having a prayer time
2. Reading and reflecting on the gospel
3. Supporting parish activities
4. Helping the needy

ANDRIE DALISAY, , Grade 6 Canossa Academy Calamba says:

1. Daily prayer giving thanks to God
2. Attending mass every Sunday



BOLIVIA

APOSTLIC VICARIATE OF REYES

COVID-19 DID NOT MANAGE TO STOP THE MISSION...

From the Apostolic Vicariate of Reyes - Bolivia I share with you our experience of faith lived during this difficult time because of the pandemic which has not ended and has caused so much pain all over the world.

Since March 2020 in Bolivia we have begun to experience the drama that is being experienced all over the world. In fact, in this period the first positive case of Covid was confirmed in Santa Cruz - Bolivia and that case showed that the virus was wandering everywhere in our country. In view of this situation, our national authorities decided the total closure of all borders, the mandatory quarantine was declared throughout the country, and therefore, this implied the closure of the school year, the closure of all activities, both public and private, the closure of Churches and, in general, of any type of event involving crowds of people. For all of us the question was: What do we do now?

CHILDREN WHAT TIME IS IT? IT'S TIME TO SAVE THE WORLD

With our bishop Msgr. Waldo R. Barrionuevo we started planning again and so we proposed some alternatives to face the situation and not to remain closed waiting for things to resolve. It is honest to recognize that the presence of our committed lay people was fundamental at all times. The laity supported the mission in our Vicariate Church in Reyes every day.

We lived the Holy Week of 2020 in a very different way: closed churches, without the presence of the faithful, everything seemed sad until we had the idea of publishing the liturgical celebrations via the internet, via Facebook. We established an agreement with the various local radio stations and managed to reach as many people as possible, but above all to reach the largest possible number of faithful. We made an appeal to all parishes to



take the initiative and promote similar ones according to their own reality.

The results were amazing, because social networks became the main channel for living and celebrating our faith. Msgr. Waldo had proposed to have an FM radio equipment for each parish and that the signal remain open to share Catholic programs for children, young people and adults.

As our faithful could not come to the parishes, we decided to go out and look for them. With the corresponding permits and respecting the biosecurity measures, we placed the image of Our Lady in a van and visited all the homes, every family, praying for a moment with them and giving the blessing of the Lord. It was at that moment that we saw the need to work much more with families, but above all with children, who suffered from not being able to leave their homes, and much less being able to do activities outside. .

The new idea was to summon all families to elaborate their own family and creative Missionary Rosary and the results were surprising. In fact, children's creativity is impressive and even more so with the help of parents. Missionary Childhood groups have played a very important role. They met virtually, and between themselves and their animators undoubtedly animated one another for the construction of the missionary rosaries, and in general for all activities. As an anecdote, having seen Christmas furnishings in the month of May will remain in my memory forever. This was truly a sight. I refer to the path of the Virgin Mary through the streets of our villages in the Vicariate, but especially in the Cathedral Parish of



the Magi. It is our tradition that during the month of May "altars" are held for the Virgin Mary. Many people make promises to the Virgin and during the month of May these promises are fulfilled by organizing a party in homage to the Virgin, singing, dancing the "machetero" and the "tiritirí", which are decidedly religious music and propitious to the occasion. But, just as it was impossible to organize any type of event, one of the faithful came up with the idea of furnishing an altar for the Virgin at the door of his house whose furnishings were Christmas lights. He was joined by one neighbor, after another, and so in a few days the whole town was illuminated with Christmas lights, which had not even been seen in the same Christmas period. Without wanting to make propaganda, I remember Good Friday and the procession with the Holy Sepulcher, without volunteers to carry the sepulcher on their shoulders, but with the firm hope to bring to Jesus to walk the streets of the parish. Much to my surprise, I saw the streets were full of candles, from start to finish. I think I

have never seen so many candles lit like that on Good Friday. People went out to the doors of their homes to see Jesus, even if only from a distance. That was the greatest demonstration of faith I saw in all this short period of priestly ministry. Candles, faith, tears, devotion, hope. This is the mission.





We, our children, our young people and missionary families: “Did not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope, so as not to allow ourselves to be robbed of faith”, as the Pope asked of us in *Evangelii Gaudium*. I know that mission is not just activity, it is life, but a life of faith, a life full of hope, a life full of love.

In some parishes other initiatives were implemented, such as the opening of solidarity refectories, medical centers, solidarity canteens for the distribution of food, aid with biosecurity materials, etc. And all this with the solidarity aid that we managed to obtain. The Vicariate of Reyes was benefited with \$ 5,000 from the emergency fund for Covid of the Pontifical Mission Societies which was invested in food and medicine to fight the virus.

“DE LOS NIÑOS DEL MUNDO, SIEMPRE AMIGOS”

The most beautiful thing a person can see is the smile of a child. Therefore, we continue to work in the animation and formation of Missionary Childhood. In the Apostolic Vicariate of Reyes in recent months we have been looking for ways to come together while respecting biosecurity measures. Parents feel responsible for their children’s health, but they also see their children’s need to find a safe place where they can have fun and be formed in a Christian way. Therefore, we bought new infant material and made hygiene stations

available to protect the health of our babies. It is always edifying to listen to the children again shouting at the top of their voices the motto: “children of the world, ALWAYS FRIENDS”.

Since January 2021, some parish communities have tried to open their doors to restart their activities. Nothing can stop the mission. The first courageous to resume the meetings were the children, the Missionary Childhood groups that with the passing of the months have started again, slowly, to begin to feel the living presence of the Church in our children. They were joined by young people, who with a little fear but with the confidence that everything will return to normal have decided to go “forward, always forward”.

Since March 2021, parish activities in the Vicariate of Reyes are regular. In some places still with certain restrictions, but in general the situation is slowly returning to normal. It is a blessing from God to have the opportunity to write these lines, because, I too have overcome the virus with the help of God, the doctors and nurses and with the prayers of the faithful who accompanied me. I can say without fear of being wrong that Life is the great opportunity that God gives us to be better people every day, to serve with greater enthusiasm, to love without limits, but above all to thank God, the God of Life. You do not have to waste time, LOVE, do not waste time, LIVE, value your time, FORGIVE and if you want to be grateful, collaborate with the MISSIONS, PRAY, GIVE YOUR CONTRIBUTION, MAKE LITTLE SACRIFICES. Help to help the children of the world.

*Father Justo Pérez Bazán
Priest of the Apostolic Vicariate of
Reyes
and diocesan director of the PMS*



NICARAGUA



TESTIMONIES



My name is Nelson Francisco Moraga Moneada and I am from the parish of St. Thomas the Apostle, Mary Queen of Peace Chapel. I am 13. I started participating in Missionary Childhood (IAM) at the age of 10, currently I am an active member of the "Ripe Wheat" group which has helped me to increase my faith. I grew up in the spiritual life and I participated in the days of evangelization of the parish where I always share with the elders of the chapel (because there are small groups of elders with the children of the IAM) where we put our motto into practice.

This year I am in the confirmation group, to confirm my faith and announce the Good News of the Gospel, make it known to my schoolmates and my closest friends.

I hope to be a missionary in love with God and his word and never separate myself from him and his mother Mary.

¡De los niños del mundo, siempre amigos!

My name is Adriana del Socorro Medal Porras of the Parish of St. Thomas the Apostle, Mary Queen of Peace Chapel, I am 13 years old. I started participating in Missionary Childhood when I was 5 years old, now I am a member of the "Ripe Wheat" group which has helped me to grow spiritually and to participate in the days of evangelization, carried out at a parish level where I make known the great love of God towards us to other people.

Last year I consecrated myself to the ministry of readers in which I announce the word of God and meditate on it. Since starting the ministry, I have had a spiritual transformation in my personal life that has allowed me to bear witness of my faith. This year with the grace of God I will confirm my faith and hope to be a great missionary in sharing the Gospel to others and always continuing hand in hand with my good friend Jesus and our mother Mary.

And of course follow the examples of Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus and Saint Francis Xavier.

From the children of the world, always friends!

NICARAGUA

NIGERIA

ARCHDIOCESE OF ONITSHA



About 25% of the children of the Archdiocese of Onitsha live in riverine areas. Most of them are displaced due to regular flood overflow from August to later part of December every year. They remain without school every first term of the academic year.

Holy Childhood programmes are integrated in the Archdiocesan Pastoral plan. HCA activities organized by the PMS diocesan Director, like HCA celebration, quiz, singing and drama competitions, are very welcomed by the children of the Archdiocese. In schools and parishes HCA unit meeting are held weekly. The school and parish animators meet at the beginning and end of each term for the missionary formation and to plan for the annual programme of the HCA in the Archdiocese.

The children make their own contributions through the use of the Mission Bank and Presentation of the child Jesus in the Families programme. This year children alone collected for the solidarity fund: COVID-19 notwithstanding.

The Archbishop has been very supportive both financially and otherwise. Every year we celebrate the HCA mission day with the Archbishop on Archdiocesan level. On the day for parish celebration, the parish priests celebrate with the children in their parishes.

We print Activity calendar, and poster for the HCA celebration.

HCA enrolment continues. We gave the newly enrolled members the Identity Card and Mission Bank.

Animators meet with the PMS Directors statutorily twice every term and as need may be. Also the Archdiocesan HCA Guardians meet regularly with the PMS Archdiocesan Director to discuss how best they can help the HCA Animators for their animation work in their schools and parishes.



HCA CELEBRATION 2020

THEME: I AM A GIFT TO MY FAMILY

For the year 2020, the above theme was what the Archdiocese of Onitsha had for their annual Mission week and also to carry them for the whole year.

The guidelines we gave the children that helped them to live the theme of the year are in the following questions:

1. What do you understand by gifts?
2. How do you handle a precious gift given to



Many children believe that God gave them many precious gifts, as life, health, sight, friends, parents, intelligence, talents etc. Therefore, in order to show God gratitude they should use his gifts very well. That they must love and respect their parents, friends, elders, and all the friends of Jesus.

For 2020 the children tried as gift to their family, to be very useful to their families. Being a good child, doing the house chores well and regularly, not bringing shame to their parents and siblings by stealing in school, fighting with other children, not being disobedient, not

you by a very important person?

3. Do you share your gifts in your family? How?

4. You are a precious gift in your family, how do you family from the gift of you in the family?

5. Give three reasons why you are happy that you are a gift in your family.

The above are the five major guiding questions the animators used to animate the children to live out the theme for the year 2020

When we met in November 2020, the animators brought the following reports on how the children celebrated the mission week and how the children lived out the theme for the year.

In summary, some children reported that they understood gifts to be what someone gave someone free without asking for it back, like dress, shoes, fruits, bread, money, etc. and if that gift is given by somebody very important maybe by a bishop, a king, a priest, a sister etc, that it should be held very dear. If it is food, as one said, that she will make sure every member of her family has a taste of it and if it is something to wear, may be a dress or shoes, she will be wearing it only on special occasion and make sure it is not used carelessly. Many of them gave similar responses to that.

telling lies, not being late to school. They were encouraged to make their families proud. One of them said he tried to be reminding their family the time for night prayer.

Parents were very happy with the actions of their children during that Pandemic year. Some of them reported that there was really a lot of impact. Some of them noticed some kind of unusual in the actions their children.

*Sr. M. Bennet Azuka Ezeokoli IHM
HCA Coordinator*



INDIA DIOCESE OF SHIMOGA



Children in general are intellectually sharp, gifted with talents, of good character and docile. They participate in all Church activities and are open to faith formation. Most of them grow with their parents until they reach 16.

Most of our children come from either middle class or lower classes. Economic poverty leads them to deprivation of basic facilities. Therefore, they grow shy and timid. Dysfunctional families are on increase. Consequently children, especially boys' dropouts from secondary schools and get into unskilled labour force.

There are 16 Boarding houses and most of the Catholic children are educated in these boarding Houses. Nearly 1128 poor children get board, lodge and education. In addition, 1020 children get partial help for their education by getting school fees, books, uniforms etc. through our Social work Centre (ICDP Integral Child development Programme). The diocesan Director of the Holy Childhood visits every Parish and Mission Centre and gives inputs to the children on the importance of Holy Childhood Day.

The Diocese in all the four deaneries organizes every year Faith formation camps. The children from 9 and 10 standard participate in these camps. The

diocese takes prime importance for Faith formation. Sunday Catechism is made obligatory for all Catholic children in all our Parishes/Mission Centres. Children from standard 1 to standard 12 have to compulsorily attend Sunday Catechism classes in their respective Parishes. From 4 to 12 there are text books for the catechism students and classes are taken based on these books. Classes are made interesting by using media, power point presentations, charts, lives of saints etc. Children take their catechism exams every year so they are serious about the catechism classes and learn for their lives. Diocesan level exams are





TESTIMONIES

conducted to 7th and 10th class students and they are awarded too. As for 1-8 standard, children will have parish level camps conducted by the Parish Priest.

Due to Covid-19 Sunday Catechism classes were cancelled because of the safety of the children. Many Parishes began online Catechism classes, the notes were sent in WhatsApp to the parents so that children could download them and study. The parents took real interest in making children write notes and learn the same. They had exams, quiz and other activities online, they participated well.

Again, due to Covid-19 we cancelled this year the usual diocesan level summer camps, Jeevamrutha and Diksuchi. Nationwide lockdown was imposed so we could not gather the children for this purpose. But through various ways the children were reached out. Online competitions were organized to the various age groups of children like quick reading of Bible Quotations, singing and dancing competitions etc. They participated well in the competitions and won many prizes. It was a great opportunity for them to bring out their talents and perform to the best of their capacity.

Most of the Parishes and Mission Centres have formed the Holy Childhood Association. They are well organized and active. Children are encouraged to enact the stories from the Bible and make them understand their significance to their life. The children contribute their small savings to the association. All the children join together to make the Holy Childhood Association Day a memorable one by conducting games and having cultural programmes. This year due to Covid-19 the associations could not have

any meetings or programmes, and not even the Association Day. Many Parishes have begun online Catechism classes and some information were given to children about the associations that they are part of like Holy Childhood Association, Legion of Mary, YSM and other Parish level associations. This was done so as children do not lose touch with these associations. The Holy Childhood Association has taught children to help others in need with what they have but this Covid-19 situation has helped children to be more responsible, sensitive and generous.





LIBERIA

ARCHDIOCESE OF MONROVIA

The general situation of children in the Archdiocese of Monrovia fully follows that of the country. There is high level of childhood malnutrition, with a third of children under 5 stunted and 6% acutely malnourished. Diarrhea and pneumonia are the leading causes of death. These are linked to unsafe drinking water and poor hygiene habit. Cholera outbreak is common and the Ebola crisis in 2014 demonstrated how dangerous that lack of access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services can be. A third of the children are young- under age five. Over the years much has improved in child survival and development in the country, hence the Archdiocese.

COVID restrictions in our country were relaxed since May, 2020. People are still being cautioned to follow the health protocols and practice safe hygiene. There were series of children's gatherings, retreats/recollections, rallies, workshops (for children on being missionary to children, health protocols and safe hygiene), recreational and religious activities held during

the course of the year with the funds received from the Pontifical Society of Missionary Childhood. Some of the funds were used to pay medical bills and a little amount for tuitions for children whose parents had been challenged financially due to the present health crises. The majority was used for children's missionary activities. Most of our activities were held in smaller groups comprising not more than fifty kids. Our regular World Day of Holy Childhood Mass and recreational activities were celebrated in deaneries instead the normal one diocesan celebration at Don Bosco Youth Center. A Thanksgiving Mass climaxing the children's Lenten observances was celebrated on the 10th April 2021 with the presence of students from 15 schools and parishes respectively.

CHILDREN'S MISSIONARY AWARENESS/ RALLY AND WORKSHOP

Children's Missionary Workshops and "children helping children" promotion in elementary schools- there were four workshops for children



missionaries. One was held in the City of Monrovia (Capital City), one in Paynesville City and two in Kakata (outside the city of Monrovia) on December 12, 14, 18 and 19 respectively. About 200 kids between the ages of 7 to 16 years participated in the workshops, which had mostly focused on the propagation of the faith among kids and teens and how teens could help others live the faith. Most of it pointed to the two greatest commandments: the gospel value of LOVE and personal prayers.

COVID 19 WORKSHOP

Health is our wealth. All our children are precious to us and the responsibility rests on us protect them from the corona virus. On this note, Holy Childhood organized a one-day workshop on December 22nd, 2020 for children's animators and representatives from 10 schools at the Sacred Heart Hall in Monrovia. They were conscientized about the COVID 19 virus and taught basic hygiene protocols. At the end of the workshop we distributed sanitizers and masks for participants and other students who could not attend because of the COVID restriction on mass gathering.



TEENS ENCOUNTER CHRIST (TEC) PROGRAM

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Children's missionary Camp was replaced with a TEC program. TEC is Teens Encounter Christ. The program teaches children about the life and mission of Jesus in the gospel and children's responsibility to their neighbours or other teens. This was done through songs, plays, jokes, bible reflections, games, etc. The program takes 48-50 kids per day. 250 kids from five different parish

communities benefited from the TEC program. The programs were held in five communities- Sacred Heart Cathedral Church, Christ the King School, Paynesville community, Kakata, City (for St. Christopher School/Parish Community) and Banjor community between January to March 2021. They were only held on Saturdays.

RECOLLECTION

In order get children reflect meditatively on the gospel of Christ, rediscover who they are

spiritually and be abreast with teachings of the church - two recollections were held during the seasons of Advent and two during Lent in central Monrovia and upper Margibi respectively. The two main focus among others were "Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate" and the Pope Francis' recent encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', (we are all brothers and sisters). The stressed points were on children seeing other children as brothers and sisters; inter-dependency; unity in diversity; kindness and mercy.

Those from the city/urban area were cautioned to be accommodating to those from the rural area whenever the need arises vice versa.

About 300 children participated the recollections. At the end of the Lenten recollections, a Thanksgiving Mass was held for all the kids in Montserrado and Margibi counties respectively. May I note that during the season of Lent some of the children made material and cash contribution to other children in their local communities. They also put on positive change in their behaviour. The children are all eager for the next recollection and other children's gatherings.

WORLD DAY OF HOLY CHILDHOOD

Celebration of World Mission Sunday for Children missionaries, October, 2020 took place on a low-key. Children were encouraged to attend Mass at the various parishes due to COVID 19 restrictions. All other celebrations (Holy Mass commemorating the day, dramas, praise dance, etc.) took place in December and January, 2020/2021 respectively.



There was a Thanksgiving Mass held on 10th April, 2021 to end the Lenten Work of Mercy we organized for the children (during the season of Lent children were encouraged to carry out Lenten Work of Mercy in response to the needs of children around them). The exercise was climaxed in Montserrado and Margibi counties respectively.

CHILDREN'S MISSIONARY RALLY

Five Children's missionary rallies/gatherings were organized in five areas. This is where children got to know each other, played, shared their missionary experiences especially from the Lenten Works of Mercy and recollections. They dramatized their missionary vocation before their peers.

SOME MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES OF THE CHILDREN TO BE SHARED

- a. Collecting gifts both material and cash offerings and sharing them with other children in

challenging communities/orphanage.

- b. Listening to the life and faith journey stories/experiences of lay missionaries, young people, priests and religious, impressed the children.

- c. Listening to other children sharing the gospel and life experience at TEC programs was spirit filled.

- d. Participating at Mass as lectors, altar servers, ushers, praise dancers; offering prayers at Mass for each other and challenging children and kids in troubled areas and in war zones.

- e. Going on Outreach and attending Teens Encounter with Christ (TEC) programs. The few parishes we worked, most of the children and youth made commitment to bring others with them at rallies, recollection, etc.

- f. The kids built up the faith of others and testified their missionary vocation through dramas, the TEC programs, recollections and the Mass. Children prayed and shared the gospel value of Love and Mercy.

Through TEC, recollections and series of missionary experiences few kids gave their impression. Three of the students from St. Teresa Convent (all-girls school) and Sacred Heart Cathedral, ages 12, 14 and 15, said that before attending any of the Holy Childhood programs, they were shy standing before their peers to share about Jesus and His gospel value of love of God and neighbour. But after listening to their peers' experiences and reflections/sharing at the recollection and TEC programs, they are





moved to being staunch missionaries to others without being shy.

Another student from St. Mary school/St. Mary parish (called Solomon) mentioned “I thought recollection or retreat was only for adults; I was really thinking that all was going to be boring so I was not really interested but as I listened to the Sister Evelina I felt so good and developed interest in the spiritual stuff that went on”. A parishioner (aged 16, Rachel) from Christ the King Church recounted that the games played during the TEC programs taught her how to be a good listener and give her life to Jesus: “I learned that if you want to have JOY, you need to love Jesus, others and yourself- this gives you JOY’.

THE CHILDREN'S RECOLLECTION

Every year during the season of Lent, Catholics renew their commitment and return to God with hearts full of sorrow and repentance. The children missionaries were part of this spiritual journey with the Lord through offering of material sacrifice and recollection as a renewal of their missionary sojourn and metanoia. This year this Children's Recollection with the theme “Be compassionate” took place on March 27th.

Objectives:

1. To help children pray with their peers
2. To share and live the gospel value of “LOVE and MERCY”
3. To help children rediscover their role in the evangelizing work of the church

The two main topics were:

- “Be compassionated as your heavenly Father is compassionate” Luke 6:36-38
- “We are all brothers and sisters – Fratelli tutti”.

The children were very attentive and receptive to the talks, prayers, songs, etc. Their full participation is highly appreciated. This recollection was rewarding because it helped the children to rediscover who they are- children

of one God and their obligation to one another. It provided them the opportunity to see God in the “sinner* and the broken hearted and learn to offer help where necessary.

Fr. Johnny - Clement Kombo
Diocesan Director of Holy Childhood



GUINEA BISSAU

MY EXPERIENCE AS AN ANIMATOR OF MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD

I am **SR. DIANA ANTÓNIO IALÁ**, of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ (A.S.C). I live in Ingoré (Guinea Bissau) and I am an animator of Missionary Childhood (IAM), in Maria de Mattias Holy Parish.

It is with great joy that I speak of my experience as an animator of this group, fortunately in the Community of Ingoré we have many children who actively participate, at the IAM meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In the weekly formation we try to help educators to awaken the spirit of solidarity, as well as the missionary vocation in children and adolescents. At the same time we also propose to the children to imitate the figures of the saints: Msgr. Carlos Forbin-Janson and other saints of their age. We play recreational games and on Sunday afternoon we do sewing, with the girls, where they learn to make lace, pillows, ... instead with the

boys we do other manual work with beads and

thread.

They are cheerful, kind and generous children, with what little they have, and they share it with great joy.

In all the ministries that I have done, I am realizing that working with children is something very important and unique, because they are pure and I see them as angels, full of dreams, which often do not happen, due to the situation in the country.

Indeed, it is urgent to invest in the education of children in order to increase and animate the future missionaries of the Church and to continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. It is also necessary to make children understand that they are missionaries, including them in missionary activities in a universal dimension.

These days I am having an interesting experience - it really is easier for a child to evangelize another child, because in each part of the formation, I ask children to bring other children to the next meeting, and when the day comes, everyone tries to bring as many as possible. How nice to see a lot of children!

The difficulties I sometimes encounter are during the period of the cashew season, few children participate in the activities, almost all of them go to work to help their parents in the collection of cashews. This collection is sometimes the only sustenance of the family itself.

So in this period there are not many activities.

But everything is going well with the grace of God.





I am **JOSEFINA MISSAU**, I am 13 years old and I was born and live in Ingoré (Guinea Bissau).

I would like to tell you a little about my experience in Missionary Childhood (IAM) and how I announce Jesus to my friends and peers in the neighborhood, at school and in other places where I usually go. I announce Jesus at school, through my behavior, by telling the story of some saints who I know well: like Msgr. Charles De Forbin-Janson and others. The formation I receive at IAM helps me a lot and for this reason I invite everyone to be part of the group to which I belong and I say that we are children and we have the right to announce Jesus so that every man can be saved, because Jesus loved us and gave his life for us. At home, I have gathered the children in the neighborhood, especially those who are older than me, I tell them the stories of saints, of some passage of the Old Testament: Cain and Abel, and in the New Testament I like to talk about the birth of Jesus and they like to listen.

Sometimes I am tired too, especially at weekends, and if they come to ask me to tell them a story, I do it with great availability, joy and gratitude, because I know that I am announcing Jesus.

The difficulty I sometimes encounter is that some children do not listen to me, while others have fun with me, they even call me sister and a saint, I feel proud and I am not interested in what they say about me, because all I want is to announce Jesus to my brothers, with the words and with the testimony of my own life. I am happy to belong to Jesus.





PERU

APOSTOLIC VICARIATE OF REQUENA

The reality we are experiencing, even in the most remote places, is similar to that of other territories and, if these are territories of easy mission, it is easy to understand the poverty of means in order to face this circumstance of unexpected life for which no one was prepared.

Although the total population of the Vicariate is not very large (just 170,000, or a little more, inhabitants), the majority are very young, under the age of 20, as shown by the number of children and young people who attend school in the educational centers.

The economic situation can be described, in general, as one of poverty and, in a significant number of cases, extreme poverty, especially in the numerous hamlets where the population is dispersed.

Families tend to be large, with few resources. The houses in which they live, especially in the suburbs of large cities and in the hamlets, are a single room,

where there is everything: bedroom, kitchen, dining room. It is the children who suffer most from these precarious conditions, which affect their education and development. In situations such as those in which we live, there is a lack of resources to be able to follow, for example, educational programs and, consequently, their education is very poor.

We are a Church located in a territory that has many difficulties for communication (the means of communication are rivers: except in two villages there is no electricity 24 hours a day; there is no drinking water or other means at the service of the population) and for the development of the villages itself (lack of stable work and the means that come with progress). Yet with a very high level of population





growth and all that this implies in terms of challenges and needs, we are trying to cope with them with the few means at our disposal.

Furthermore, our main difficulties come from the few men and women religious who live in this Vicariate. Currently they do not reach 30. A situation that worries us a lot, because it is very difficult to find congregations that can or want to share our mission. And the situation this year has been more special and difficult because it has been and continues to be common in almost all parts of the world.

Difficulties have increased due to imprisonment, isolation and lack of means.

Almost on the same day we were about to start school and pastoral activities, we were forced to confinement and to take the recommendations that the government was dictating for the whole country very seriously, and which were getting worse in these Amazonian territories.

So in 2020 it was not possible to carry out Missionary Childhood Day, due to the severe confinement measures to which we were subjected and even as I write (end of March 2021), the conditions are almost identical.

For this reason it was not possible to carry out fundraising activities, as in previous years, to support the campaigns.

The situation in the cities and in the district capitals was very different from that of the hamlets scattered along the rivers of our territory. In the latter, isolation was seriously aggravated by scarcity of resources, even though many thought their own resources would be sufficient.

It may be for a short time, but not for a long, unlimited one. And even more so when the transit of boats (and therefore the transport of food and materials) was practically paralyzed.

In addition, confinement forced people to close themselves in their homes. How? If these houses are very small, without distinct spaces, very crowded, how can grandparents and grandchildren, young and old, resist living together there? It was a difficult time. And we had to face the realities and urgencies that arose with insistence and urgency.

For all these reasons, there was no school activity throughout the year, although some virtual activities



were planned by using the media. But how is this possible if there is no electricity, internet and radio waves in the villages? We can imagine the abandonment that children and young people have experienced!

This year seems to be the same or very similar to last year. What was done then in some of our parishes with children and young people? When it was possible, some activities were resumed, while maintaining the rules of the protocol. Thus, in some places (Orellana, Tierra Blanca and Jenaro), respecting all the rules, they had

meetings and activities.

It is important to emphasize the participation in humanitarian actions, such as the distribution of food to neglected elderly people located in remote areas. In addition, the young people helped with the distribution of medicines. In many places, the Church was present and active at all times. And the young people have been a good support for these actions.

In Tierra Blanca, the members of Missionary Childhood worked by making small religious artifacts that helped them bring the news of the Gospel to many families. They were small actions, but important and full of encouragement from children and adolescents. We must thank the sisters who animated these projects and the life of the communities. The help we receive with the aid of the Holy Childhood is distributed to the communities of Jenaro Herrera, Orellana and Tierra Blanca and is managed by the sisters who work in the parishes. Pastoral activity was very scarce, but all the money received was earmarked for the needs, especially for children, in terms of food and medicine. And even if we did not raise money for Missionary Childhood, the life of our communities (religious men and women, catechists and animators) was the best witness.

Personally, I am very happy and grateful for the work they do in their respective parishes. This year, in a very special way, all the men and women religious have been fundamental in their places to overcome moments of great need, supporting many families and populations.

*Msgr. Juan Bautista Oliver Climent, ofm
Apostolic Vicar*

TIERRA BLANCA

OUR LADY OF LOURDES PARISH

We began our pastoral journey with great enthusiasm. With children and adolescents the first thing we did was to prepare the patio, to start the activities of Missionary Childhood, while we heard about a virus that is changing the world, and we believed that due to our distant residence it would not reach us here. We are preparing for Lent as a privileged time with missionary Childhood groups, where we have noticed a fairly large participation in liturgical celebrations and where the animators made an effort to favor the sacramental experience of our faithful (liturgical preparation, procession, songs, etc.). In the midst of this preparation, the Peruvian government has declared a state of emergency and total immobilization, and for this reason we have suspended all the activities of Missionary Childhood.

Living this period of confinement in our homes, the young animators realized that many families do not have the necessary for adequate nutrition and asked if they could help them with food. Thanks be to God it was possible and we helped 84 families, which they received with great joy and emotion. The animators were of great help both in the preparation of the bags and in the distribution, they gave and give their time to always help, with all the necessary precautions due to the pandemic. Holy Week was lived in a different way: in order not to interrupt this time we used radio stations to carry out the Via Crucis and so everyone could participate, joining new initiatives on how to live the different days of Holy Week. We asked the faithful and members of Missionary Childhood to live these days with intensity in our homes.

At the end of July things calmed down and we also reconsidered starting our activities and meetings in the parish. So in the first week of August we resumed the activity with Missionary Childhood, following the whole protocol with children and adolescents. The meetings took place in the courtyard, thank God we have a large space to

meet outdoors. These meetings were divided into two stages: the first part was dedicated to sport and the second to catechesis, concluding each meeting with a prayer for the end of the pandemic. In October we opened the doors of the Church to pray the Holy Missionary Rosary every day together with the animators and their families in the evening. It was a new experience where we shared the prayer to God for our whole country and for the whole world.

Other activities that have a great impact on our preparation in the life of faith are spiritual retreats with the animators, where they are encouraged and motivated to the sacrament of penance. During this year we have not had a meeting with the parents of the sacramental groups, but their commitment to help the church has always been present. One of the cultural activities carried out this year is the support to some young people to develop their artistic skills, creating some murals in the old hospital, which now functions as a catechesis room and tool deposit for the weekly activities of the participants in Missionary Childhood.

The teen animators engaged in manual work: due to the circumstances mentioned above, it was not possible to carry out fundraising activities for World Mission Day, but the young took advantage of the fruits of the parish garden to sell them in the neighborhoods of our center, and their enthusiasm encourages us to continue and promote this type of activity.





Our methodology is based on the idea that everything must be educational, so we insist on punctuality, order, cleanliness, respect and volunteering. These values are taught and applied in practice through the following actions: the older ones, who are young animators, from the perseverance group, and some who have already received confirmation, and are from the maintenance group, are in charge of caring for the little ones, taking care of them and supervising them in the courtyard, playing games and organizing sports competitions, until the hour of catechesis, when it is time to enter the classrooms. First a prayer is held all together and some indications are given, then each animator goes with his respective group to his catechesis room. After catechesis we meet for a moment of animation and the final prayer, then they are given a snack with biscuits. After all the children have gone home, we meet with the animators for training and/or new programs.

On Sunday afternoons, we make time and premises available to group leaders for spontaneous meetings of conviviality. We have a group of 28 animators, most of whom are teenagers and some adults.

Sr. Leonarda Inés Anchíraico Espinar





BURUNDI NATIONAL OFFICE

In **Burundi**, Missionary Childhood **was born on January 6, 1975** in the current Archdiocese of Bujumbura, on the initiative of His Exc. Bishop Michel NTUYAHAGA.

Ten years later, this initiative was already widespread in all the dioceses of Burundi. Today the Pontifical Society of Missionary Childhood is more and more dynamic than the other Pontifical Mission Societies and the children who join it are constantly increasing. Their animators also increase in the same proportions, which facilitates the missionary activity of children in various areas. Furthermore, the apostolate of Missionary Childhood is appreciated by adult Christians and arouses in them a missionary commitment. Thus in all the parishes of Burundi there are Missionary Childhood groups with their respective animators. These are Christian priests, religious, catechists or lay people who are motivated by the missionary activities of children.

During its activities, Missionary Childhood gave life to the apostolate group attached to this society, that is, the Star Singers. This group animates families by bringing them the joy of Christmas and asking for offers for the aforementioned Society.

The activity is concentrated above all around the Epiphany which is the day of Missionary Childhood. During this period, the children of Missionary Childhood groups in the company of their animators are busy with the Star Singers.

It should be noted that missionary children over the age of 14 enter directly into the missionary youth group which brings together children who wish to continue the journey of Missionary Childhood and other young people with a missionary spirit. And when they reach maturity and start a family, they enter directly into the group of missionary families also in support of vocations.

The ordinary formation activities proposed by the National Direction are:

- Elaboration of an annual catechesis booklet adapted for children on some passages from the Bible that show Jesus' compassion for the sick, the blind, the lame, the hungry in order to encourage children to live their faith by imitating Jesus Christ.

The animators of all the parishes of the Church



of Burundi receive these subsidies.

- The organization of meetings of diocesan directors. These meetings have a twofold objective to achieve: to provide missionary formation to the diocesan directors of the PMS but also to make an evaluation of the activities of the Missionary Childhood planned in the previous meetings.

- Other possible activities:

- The organization of small memories for children in the parishes
- The organization of festivals
- The organization of pilgrimages of children of Missionary Childhood accompanied by priests and group leaders to spiritual places
- Organization of games and drawing competitions for children (e.g. before Christmas or Epiphany, children draw or prepare clay nativity scenes)
- Children's visits to hospitals and orphanages to give hope to sick and abandoned children.
- Intergroup correspondence of Missionary Childhood in order to share the experience of other groups of Missionary Childhood.
- Intensification of meetings with children at a parish level.
- Supervision of children in basic ecclesial communities.



THE "VEILLÉE" OF THE MISSIONARY CHILDREN

In some dioceses, the animators of Missionary Childhood have created groups of children of Missionary Childhood within the basic ecclesial communities. These children gather once a week to pray the rosary and meditate on some Biblical passages. This missionary activity of childhood bears fruit from one year to the next because we notice that all the children of Christian families adhere to it in abundance. And so others join the Missionary Childhood groups. For this reason, the national direction of the Pontifical Mission Societies encourages the dioceses that have already established these groups in the basic ecclesial communities and asks other dioceses to consider this initiative.

To revitalize this activity, the National Direction has prepared a program that all dioceses can use to better follow these children.



CELEBRATION OF MISSIONARY CHILDHOOD DAY

Despite the pandemic, the 2021 missionary childhood day was celebrated in all the Parishes of Burundi on Epiphany Sunday, in compliance with the measures established by the Government and the Conference of Bishops with the aim of preventing the coronavirus pandemic.

The National Direction provided the necessary tools for the animation of the day:

- * The image of the founder of the Missionary Childhood Society, Msgr. Charles de Forbin Janson, with the prayers of the children of Burundi
- * The booklet guides the activity of the Star Singers
- * The stars to put on the doors of the families during the visit of the children in the families.

*Fr. Salvator Ngendabanyikwa
National Director PMS Burundi*



My name is **STEVE NDAYIKEZA**, I am 10 years old, I am in 5th grade and I am a member of the missionary childhood group. As a baptized, son of God and brother of Jesus, I am happy every time we meet, to pray the rosary for unity and peace throughout the world, especially in union with the children of the world on October 18 at 9 am in the morning. Last year it was a Sunday and we met at church. I am also happy when we visit hospitalized children and bring them offerings. In 2020 we visited these sick children and brought them 15 soaps, 15 kg of flour, 10 kg of beans and 6 kg of rice.

We also visited children abandoned by their parents and brought them 6 kg of beans, 5 kg of rice and 10 kg of flour. I feel a lot of joy in carrying out this apostolate in a spirit of love and mercy. I am also happy because as a member of the Missionary Childhood group, I committed myself to the parish apostolate as a minister / altar boy.

It saddens me to see that some children do not participate in our Missionary Childhood group. However, I join with all the children of the world in prayer, sacrifice and collections of funds for the promotion of the mission.





My name is **ERIC MANIRAKIZA** and I am a missionary child. I began my apostolate in missionary childhood at the age of 8, in 2016. I was then an altar boy and the parish priest of my parish had decided that every child involved in the parish, whatever his group of belonging, had to enroll in the Missionary Childhood group. I, like other children of my age, in order not to be excluded from the activities of the parish, decided to join even if reluctantly. Surely the love of Christ pushes us. The first day I participated in Missionary Childhood I was welcomed positively and I was shown the activities that are carried out. I was also told the story of Missionary Childhood and its spirituality. I noticed that missionary spirituality comes first in Missionary Childhood, and this distinguishes the Missionary Childhood group from other groups.

During Missionary Childhood meetings we are taught to help others, to pray for others, to do works of charity and mercy, and to seek out the friends of Jesus- all this in favor of the mission. In our Missionary Childhood group we organize missionary vigils, drawing competitions and missionary dances, inviting our parents to participate. The Missionary Childhood group helped me to become a docile tool of evangelization.

Dear children, you too come in large numbers to the parish, join the Missionary Childhood group. It will help you a lot to positively build your personality, your human and Christian life. All of you members of Missionary Childhood, you are constantly giving advice to children who behave badly, to help them convert.

Let us try to be true missionaries to other children who find themselves in unpleasant situations.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND BASIC ASSISTANCE FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE REMOTE VILLAGES OF BABIKO, MOU AND RAPA

DIOCESE OF BEREINA

PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Babiko, Mou and Rapa are remote villages belonging to Bereina parish, Papua New Guinea. These areas are isolated and roads are dirty and in bad conditions, there is not any health facility to attend to the sick. People have to walk at least two hours to find an aid post during dry season, in the rainy it is much more difficult. There is an elementary school run by the Diocese, but the out of school children are many. Last year, the Sisters of Cavanis Jesus Good Shepherd have started to give some catechism to the children. Until now, the Sisters have been visiting them once in a month when the parish priest usually goes to celebrate Holy Mass.

In the area there are also several disabled children, who need special care and sometimes simple a personal visit to their hut to share a smile and time with them. But, they have been unable to answer to the needs of all the children. They did not have enough medicines, enough power milk, and enough funds for transportation.

Project:

Weekly or fortnightly outreach to the children in the remote villages of Babiko, Mou and Rapa.

Aim:

Give activity about religious education and provide basic care, including medical assistance, food to sick and neglected children.

Activities:

- Gather the children after the Mass/liturgy of



Sr. Maddalena Hoang Ngoc

the Word and have suited interactive activities for children in order for them to know and love Jesus, to know the Gospel, to learn to pray and to help those in need, also poor children in other countries to foster in them missionary attitudes;

- Meanwhile, identify the sick and malnourished children and give them treatment in loco if possible, if not facilitate other responses (bring the child to the general hospital...bring the child to the family house temporarily in order to recover or find safe place/family where to stay).
- Introduce some good hygiene practices as many children are affected by skin diseases.
- By groups go to visit the disabled children nearby in order to bring joy to the child and also to foster in each one the attention for the least and the needy.

For the future, they will identify some volunteers, trustworthy and responsible adults to train and to support in order for them to take up the responsibility of caring for the children. They will provide them some religious material, books, colour pencils...to use with the children.



THE HALFWAY HOUSE NDJIATAR FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

DIOCESE OF DOBA

TCHAD

The halfway house Ndjiatar of Doba takes care of the disabled children. It gives them a formation to allow them social integration, to empower them and to make them feel useful. The formation covers several disciplines. For the girls, needlework (two-year training), embroidery and knitting (creation of decorative tablecloths, children clothes – six-month formation), manufacture of handcrafted soap and other handicrafts (two-month formation). For the boys, carpentry, soldering, needlework and soap manufacture. At present, the centre houses 13 girls and 11 boys. The limited means of the parents do not allow them to meet their formation needs. The children receive also a catechetical formation and of the sacraments, they recite the Rosary daily and pray for their benefactors.

Dear benefactors, my name is Denise Jamadji and I live in a christian family of the village of Kouh-Wété, near Béboto. I am 13 years old. Since 2013, I am suffering from osteomyelitis. The financial difficulties of my parents have sealed my sad fate. Nevertheless, thanks to the grace and mercy of God I had the opportunity to be supported by the Church through the Centre for disabled, which medically cares for me and has saved my life. My right leg was crooked, but



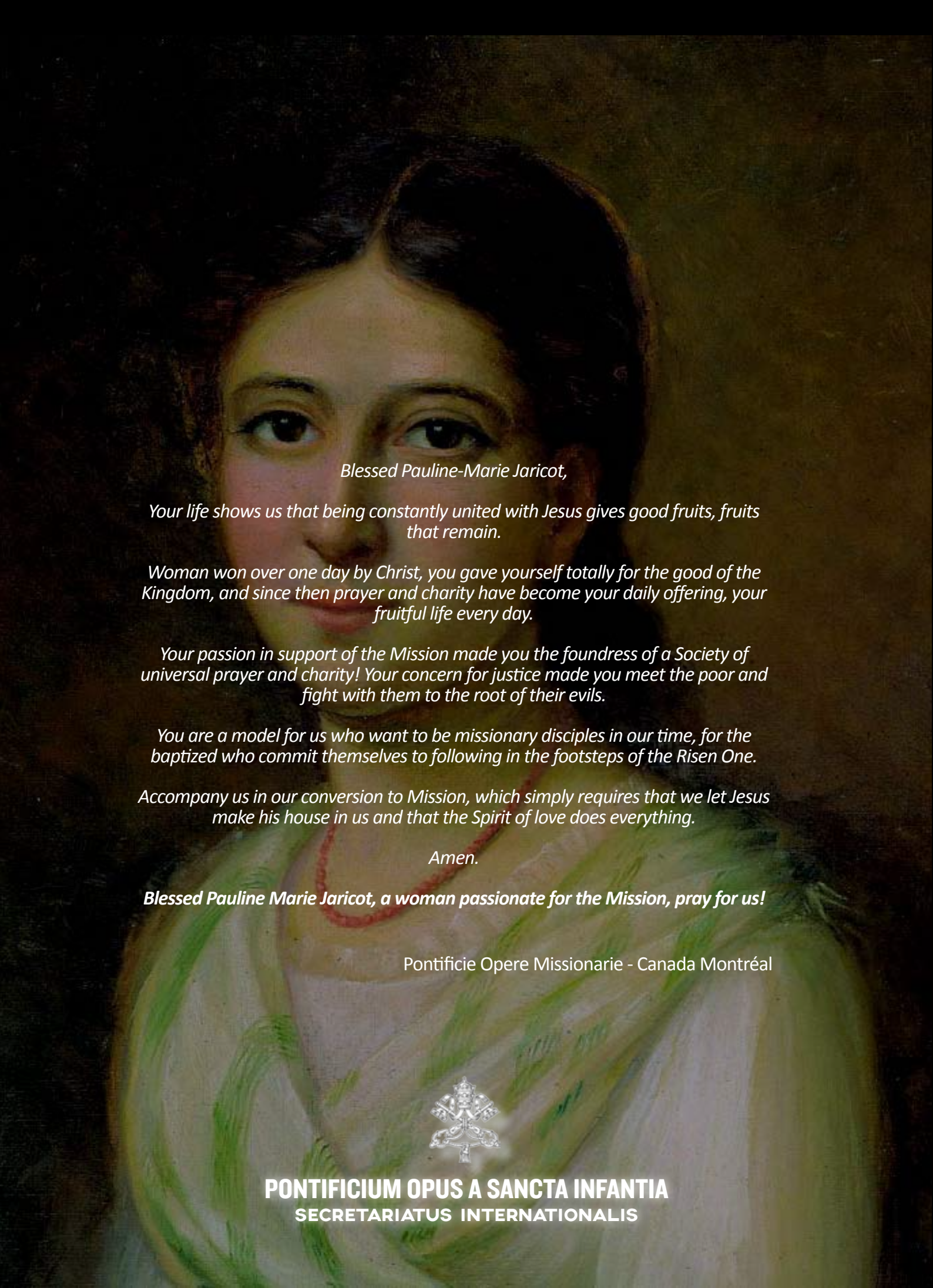
Kathleen Mazio

now it has straightened out a bit. I would like to thank God and you in a special way, who have sustained me for a year to receive an education in knitting and needlework, French language and many other things, allowing me to better fit into society. I am very proud and happy to be back in this normal life at the centre and among my friends and my brothers with disabilities like me.

My dream is to fully integrate into society and I would like to thank you for your generosity to me.

May the Eternal One, the good Lord grant you the grace and guide you in your missions.

Kouh-Wété, 16/08/2020

A portrait of Blessed Pauline-Marie Jaricot, a woman with dark hair, looking slightly to the right with a gentle expression. She is wearing a white garment with green embroidery and a red beaded necklace.

Blessed Pauline-Marie Jaricot,

Your life shows us that being constantly united with Jesus gives good fruits, fruits that remain.

Woman won over one day by Christ, you gave yourself totally for the good of the Kingdom, and since then prayer and charity have become your daily offering, your fruitful life every day.

Your passion in support of the Mission made you the foundress of a Society of universal prayer and charity! Your concern for justice made you meet the poor and fight with them to the root of their evils.

You are a model for us who want to be missionary disciples in our time, for the baptized who commit themselves to following in the footsteps of the Risen One.

Accompany us in our conversion to Mission, which simply requires that we let Jesus make his house in us and that the Spirit of love does everything.

Amen.

Blessed Pauline Marie Jaricot, a woman passionate for the Mission, pray for us!

Pontificie Opere Missionarie - Canada Montréal



**PONTIFICIUM OPUS A SANCTA INFANTIA
SECRETARIATUS INTERNATIONALIS**