



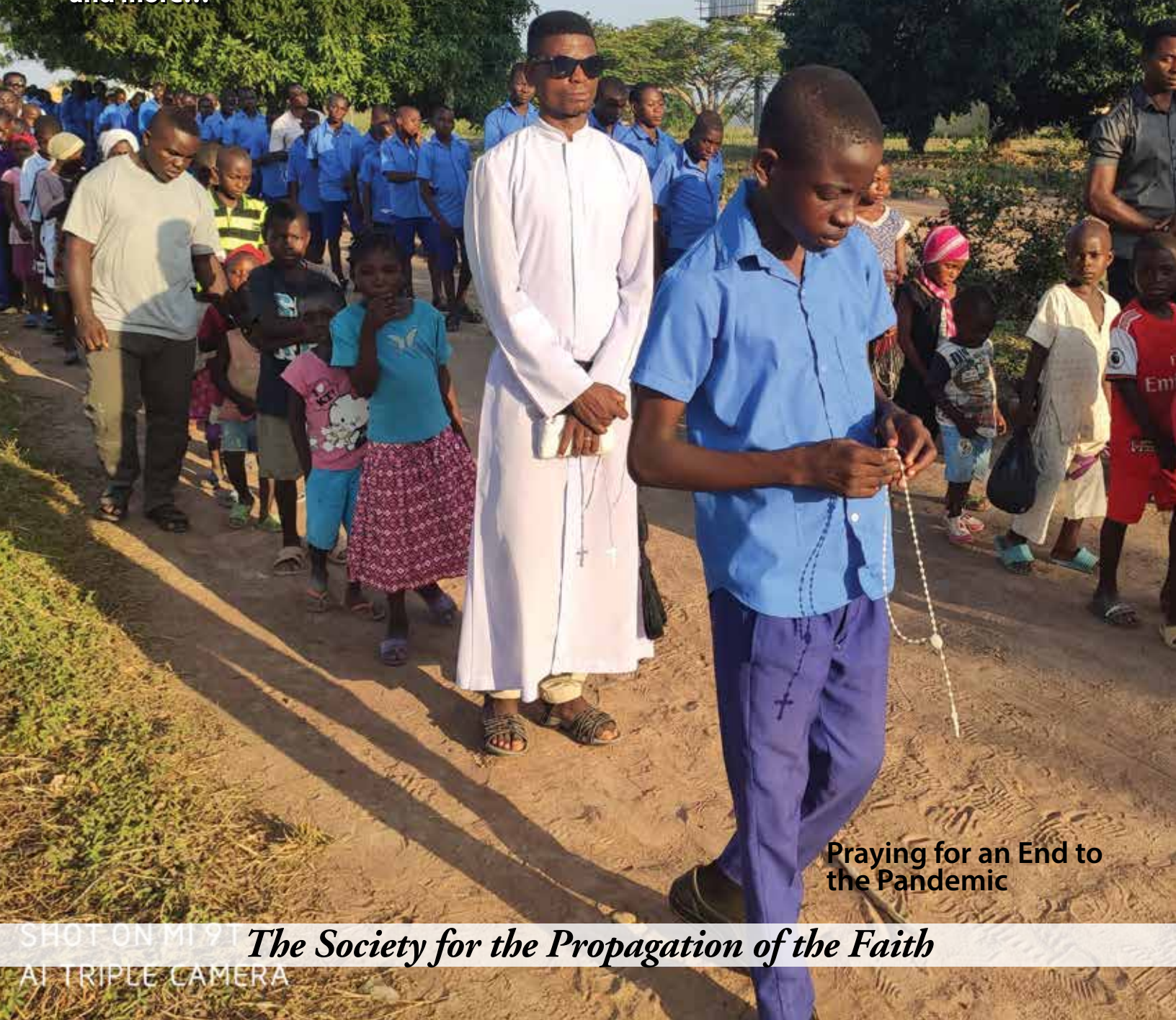
MISSIONS TODAY

VOL 79, NO. 3

SUMMER 2021

Inside this issue

Our Readers Recount Their
Experiences During the Pandemic
and more...



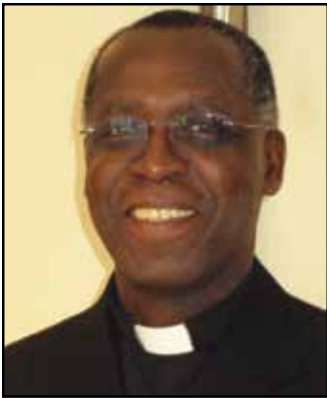
Praying for an End to
the Pandemic

SHOT ON MI 9T
AT TRIPLE CAMERA

The Society for the Propagation of the Faith

National Director's Message

Mission Today magazine 2021



“The Pandemic has not left anyone untouched in its trail of suffering.” (Pope Francis to the conference of Bishops, Brazil)

For many of us, our lives have been affected in so many ways by Covid 19 pandemic. It has been a stunning experience to find ourselves adjusting our daily routines to take safety precautions to protect ourselves

and others. Coronavirus has completely transformed our society and has turned our lives upside down. We have been struggling to find ways to tolerate stay at home orders, to learn new ways within our social isolation and for parents to incorporate the education of their children during the day while schools remain closed. Above all, our stress and anxieties are high by the fear of contracting Covid 19 as we see every day the numbers of confirmed positive cases and death. Our sorrows are deep as we experience the reality of death, the struggling of friends, family members because of this pandemic. Many have lost jobs overnight, jobs that have sustained them and their families.

Furthering these emotions, people of faith are experiencing a great suffering of their spirit through the ongoing inability to worship as church community. We Catholics are finding it hard and painful as we hunger and thirst for the Eucharist, now that our attendance at mass is limited to livestreaming video broadcasts on our TVs, Phones, and computers.

The pandemic which is still raging in many parts of the world has brought untold suffering to many people with the loss of wives, husbands, friends, brothers, and sisters including many bishops, priests and religious of our church. However, it is true that this pandemic has brought out the best of humanity in many acts of kindness, caring and compassion. The Church has experienced suffering and responds with caring and compassion in equal measure.

Pope Francis said “our faith in Christ shows us that we can overcome this difficult moment. Charity he added, urges the church to cry with those most in need, so that a smile might return to their faces.” (address to conference of Bishops, Brazil)

In Jesus we find our foundation, strength, and unity. I pray that this edition of our magazine will show you how important your material and prayerful support is sustaining the lives of our sisters and brothers throughout the world.

I am grateful to all who share their covid experience with us and I invite you to also share your missionary experience from your parish with us.

Rev. Fr. Alexander Osei, C.S.Sp
National Director.

The Pope's Monthly Prayer Intentions:

Each year, the Holy Father asks for our prayers for a specific intention each month. You are invited to answer the Holy Father's request to join with Catholics around the world to pray for the following intentions:

MAY:
Universal intention - The world of finance

Let us pray that those in charge of finance will work with governments to regulate the financial sphere and protect citizens from its dangers.

JUNE:
Intention for evangelization - The beauty of marriage

Let us pray for young people who are preparing for marriage with the support of a Christian community: may they grow in love, with generosity, faithfulness and patience.

JULY:
Universal intention - Social friendship

We pray that, in social, economic and political situations of conflict, we may be courageous and passionate architects of dialogue and friendship.

AUGUST
Intention for evangelization - The Church

Let us pray for the Church, that She may receive from the Holy Spirit the grace and strength to reform herself in the light of the Gospel.

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Mass for Holy Childhood Association in the Diocese of Palghat, India.

Reported in Spring 2021 Issue.



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Across the Globe

*The Pontifical Mission Societies host their own web news service called **agenzia fides**. The news service is updated daily and allows us to keep current about events around the world and within Catholic missions. Below are three articles from the website and other news can be found at fides.org.*



AFRICA/IVORY COAST - Prisoners' Day: Catholic Church expresses closeness to prisoners

Divo (Agenzia Fides) - Every year the Catholic Church of Ivory Coast celebrates the Day of the Prisoners on the Feast of Divine Mercy. This goes back to an initiative of the Episcopal Commission for Justice, Peace and the Environment and the Office for Prison Chaplaincy.

The central celebration took place last Sunday, April 11th, as part of a service chaired by Archbishop Joseph Yapo of Gagnoa in the parish of Saints Peter and Paul of Divo in the Archdiocese of Gagnoa.

However, on behalf of Mgr. Bruno Essoh Yedo, Bishop of Bondoukou, who heads the Justice and Peace Commission as President, Fr. Charles Olidjo Siwa, General Secretary of the Commission and Chaplain for Pastoral Care in Prisons, expressed the recognition of the Church for the efforts made towards the detainees, but also expressed concern about the overcrowding in places of detention. "The Church encourages the authorities to pay special attention to detention centers in view of the largely worrying overcrowding that is prevailing".

"The Abidjan Pre-trial and Correctional Custody Center, which has an actual capacity of 2,000 inmates, now houses more than 7,000 inmates, and this seriously undermines the dignity of the human person, which must be respected at all times and at every

opportunity", reads the message for the National Day of Prisoners.

"The Church asks the authorities for an act of clemency and mercy towards people who are in pre-trial detention and who can benefit from presidential pardon".

The Church notes in its message that "almost all of our pre-trial and correctional detention facilities lack a structure for vocational training and professional development that could help the inmates with social reintegration after their release".

At the end of the Eucharist, a delegation led by Fr. Siwa visited the prisoners in Divo to express the closeness of the Catholic Church. The representatives of the Catholic Church distributed food and hygiene items to the prisoners. This solidarity action is carried out in all 34 prisons in Ivory Coast on the occasion of Prisoners' Day.

A food collection campaign has also been announced for the pastoral year 2020-2021, with the aim of helping to overcome the food shortage in the country's prisons. (S.S.) (Agenzia Fides, 15/4/2021) <http://www.fides.org/en/news/69944>

AMERICA/COSTA RICA - Special Day of prayer for the situation of the pandemic

San José (Agenzia Fides) - Next Thursday, April 22, the bishops of Costa Rica invite its faithful to pray in order to overcome the coronavirus pandemic. During the Holy Mass and the Hours of

Adoration, Catholics of the country should pray for this purpose on that day. This was announced by the Bishops' Conference of Costa Rica in a joint appeal by all bishops.

The Bishops want to express their solidarity with all people for the situation they are experiencing due to the pandemic, and appeal to everyone's responsibility, "because we can only overcome this serious disease together; we will do it if we respect the health measures required by the authorities, if we see in the other a brother to take care of, if we take care of ourselves, and if we become aware of how serious it is not to act to face this moment".

With the significant increase in the number of cases recorded in recent days, the bishops urge "redoubling efforts to avoid the overload and collapse of health systems" and ask for prayers for the victims of the pandemic and for the comfort of their families. Therefore, the priests of all parishes in the country should "organize special moments of prayer and motivate the faithful to do so".

"With faith, trust and perseverance we want to ask the God of Life to help us overcome this pandemic, restore health to the sick and give consolation to those who have lost loved ones. We ask for the grace to be able to act responsibly in this health crisis and to be able to give a testimony of charity and solidarity as a church", concludes the message of the bishops. In Costa Rica, there have been a total of 229,000 infected and 3,071 dead in a population of around 5 million since the pandemic began. (SL) (Agenzia Fides, 19/4/2021)

<http://www.fides.org/en/news/69961>

ASIA/PAKISTAN - The government rewards Catholic nun "mother of the Forgotten"

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) - "We are pleased and proud that the Pakistani government has bestowed Sister Ruth Lewis 'posthumously' with the Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Star of Excellence) for her services to the society of this country. This award is among the highest civil honors in the Pakistani State and is awarded for special service to the nation in the field of culture and public life", said Cardinal Joseph Coutts, Archbishop Emeritus of Karachi, speaking with Agenzia Fides, and expresses appreciation to the Pakistani government for having rewarded a Catholic nun, who passed away in 2020, who dedicated 52 years of her life to the abandoned and marginalized children in Pakistan.

Cardinal Joseph Coutts states: "We thank Sister Ruth Lewis and the Sisters of the Franciscan Missionaries of Christ the King (FMCK) for their great work with children", said Cardinal Joseph Coutts. "In 1959, the FMCK sisters responded to the growing demand in the southern Pakistani port city of Karachi and agreed to accompany and care for children with mental and physical disabilities. After the death of the nursing home's founder, Sister Gertrude Lemmens, Sister Ruth Lewis assumed responsibility for



running the home, which was dependent on donations. Thanks to her patient and constant work, Dar-ul-Sukun, i.e. the 'House of Peace and Love' has become the largest institution of its kind in the city with over 21 million inhabitants".

Recalling her faithful service at a service in memory of Sister Ruth, Cardinal Joseph Coutts remarked: "Sister Ruth Lewis was a very calm and humble person, she developed tremendous strength in serving these mentally and physically challenged children. She was known in civil society and among civil society NGOs in Karachi. The government of Sindh Province (whose capital is Karachi) valued her and the good works she did for 52 years. In the city she was known as the "mother of the Forgotten" and she lived up to her right to the last breath".

Sister Ruth Lewis lost the fight against the consequences of an infection with the coronavirus on July 20, 2020 (see Fides, 22/7/20). She had been on treatment since July 8 after testing positive for Covid-19. She was infected during her tireless services in the home where 21 children were found positive for Covid-19 in June 2020. The Pakistani government awarded her the posthumous award on March 23, 2021 on the occasion of "Pakistan Day". The award was received by Cookie, a former foster child of the home, who is now an employee of Dar-ul-Sukun. Cookie remembered the deceased Catholic nun as "her mother" and said: "Sister Ruth was the mother of all the children of Dar-ul-Sukun. She took care of all of us like a mother takes care of her children".

For her selfless and passionate service to "special children" Ruth Lewis was awarded the "Pride of Karachi" award on January 18, 2014. In 2018 she was awarded the "Hakim Mohammad Saeed" award by the governor of Sindh for her service to humanity. As a sign of gratitude for the social work done, the Sindh government financed the construction of a three-story building on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the founding of Dar-ul-Sukun to meet the growing number of children in need. (AG-PA) (Agenzia Fides, 15/4/2021)

<http://www.fides.org/en/news/69941>

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR WORLD MISSION DAY 2021

**“We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard”
(Acts 4:20)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Once we experience the power of God’s love, and recognize his fatherly presence in our personal and community life, we cannot help but proclaim and share what we have seen and heard. Jesus’ relationship with his disciples and his humanity, as revealed to us in the mystery of his Incarnation, Gospel and Paschal Mystery, shows us the extent to which God loves our humanity and makes his own our joys and sufferings, our hopes and our concerns (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22). Everything about Christ reminds us that he knows well our world and its need for redemption, and calls us to become actively engaged in this mission: “Go therefore to the highways and byways, and invite everyone you find” (Mt 22:9). No one is excluded, no one need feel distant or removed from this compassionate love.

The experience of the Apostles

The history of evangelization began with the Lord’s own passionate desire to call and enter into friendly dialogue with everyone, just as they are (cf. Jn 15:12-17). The Apostles are the first to tell us this; they remembered even the day and the hour when they first met him: “It was about four o’clock in the afternoon” (Jn 1:39). Experiencing the Lord’s friendship, watching him cure the sick, dine with sinners, feed the hungry, draw near to the outcast, touch the unclean, identify with the needy, propose the Beatitudes and teach in a new and authoritative way, left an indelible mark on them, awakening amazement, expansive joy and a profound sense of gratitude. The prophet Jeremiah describes this experience as one of a consuming awareness of the Lord’s active presence in our heart, impelling us to mission, regardless of the sacrifices and misunderstandings it may entail (cf. 20:7-9). Love is always on the move, and inspires us to share a wonderful and hope-filled message: “We have found the Messiah” (Jn 1:41).

With Jesus, we too have seen, heard and experienced that things can be different. Even now, he has inaugurated future times, reminding us of an often forgotten dimension of our humanity, namely, that “we were created for a fulfilment that can only be found in love” (Fratelli Tutti, 68). A future that awakens a faith capable of inspiring new initiatives and shaping communities of



men and women who, by learning to accept their own frailty and that of others, promote fraternity and social friendship (cf. *ibid.*, 67). The ecclesial community reveals its splendour whenever it recalls with gratitude that the Lord loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19). “The loving predilection of the Lord surprises us, and surprise by its very nature cannot be owned or imposed by us... Only in this way can the miracle of gratuitousness, the gratuitous gift of self, blossom. Nor can missionary fervour ever be obtained as a result of reasoning or calculation. To be ‘in a state of mission’ is a reflection of gratitude” (Message to the Pontifical Mission Societies, 21 May 2020).

Even so, things were not always easy. The first Christians began the life of faith amid hostility and hardship. Experiences of marginalization and imprisonment combined with internal and external struggles that seemed to contradict and even negate what they had seen and heard. Yet, rather than a difficulty or an obstacle leading them to step back or close in on themselves, those experiences impelled them to turn problems, conflicts and difficulties into opportunities for mission. Limitations and obstacles became a privileged occasion for anointing everything and everyone with the Spirit of the Lord. Nothing and no one was to be excluded from the message of liberation.

We have a vivid testimony to all this in the Acts of the Apostles, a book which missionary disciples always have within easy reach. There we read how the fragrance of the Gospel spread as it was preached, awakening the joy that the Spirit alone can bestow. The Book of Acts teaches us to endure hardship by clinging firmly to Christ, in order to grow in the “conviction that God is able to act in any circumstance, even amid apparent setbacks” and in the certainty that “all those who entrust themselves to God will bear good fruit” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 279).

The same holds true for us: our own times are not easy. The pandemic has brought to the fore and amplified the pain, the solitude, the poverty and the injustices experienced by so many people. It has unmasked our false sense of security and revealed the brokenness and polarization quietly growing in our midst. Those who are most frail and vulnerable have come to feel even more so. We

have experienced discouragement, disillusionment and fatigue; nor have we been immune from a growing negativity that stifles hope. For our part, however, “we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:5). As a result, in our communities and in our families, we can hear the powerful message of life that echoes in our hearts and proclaims: “He is not here, but has risen (Lk 24:6)! This message of hope shatters every form of determinism and, to those who let themselves be touched by it, bestows the freedom and boldness needed to rise up and seek with creativity every possible way to show compassion, the “sacramental” of God’s closeness to us, a closeness that abandons no one along the side of the road.

In these days of pandemic, when there is a temptation to disguise and justify indifference and apathy in the name of healthy social distancing, there is urgent need for the mission of compassion, which can make that necessary distancing an opportunity for encounter, care and promotion. “What we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), the mercy we have experienced, can thus become a point of reference and a source of credibility, enabling us to recover a shared passion for building “a community of belonging and solidarity worthy of our time, our energy and our resources (Fratelli Tutti, 36). The Lord’s word daily rescues and saves us from the

excuses that can plunge us into the worst kind of skepticism: “Nothing changes, everything stays the same”. To those who wonder why they should give up their security, comforts and pleasures if they can see no important result, our answer will always remain the same: “Jesus Christ has triumphed over sin and death and is now almighty. Jesus Christ is truly alive” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 275) and wants us to be alive, fraternal, and capable of cherishing and sharing this message of hope. In our present circumstances, there is an urgent need for missionaries of hope who, anointed by the Lord, can provide a prophetic reminder that no one is saved by himself.

Like the Apostles and the first Christians, we too can say with complete conviction: “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Everything we have received from the Lord is meant to be put to good use and freely shared with others. Just as the Apostles saw, heard and touched the saving power of Jesus (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-4), we too can daily touch the sorrowful and glorious flesh of Christ. There we can find the courage to share with everyone we meet a destiny of hope, the sure knowledge that the Lord is ever at our side. As Christians, we cannot keep the Lord to ourselves: the Church’s evangelizing mission finds outward fulfilment in the transformation of our world and in the care of creation.

An invitation to each of us

The theme of this year’s World Mission Day – “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), is a sum-

mons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. This mission has always been the hallmark of the Church, for “she exists to evangelize” (SAINT PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14). Our life of faith grows weak, loses its prophetic power and its ability to awaken amazement and gratitude when we become isolated and withdraw into little groups. By its very nature, the life of faith calls for a growing openness to embracing everyone, everywhere. The first Christians, far from yielding to the temptation to become an elite group, were inspired by the Lord and his offer of new life to go out among the nations and to bear witness to what they had seen and heard: the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand. They did so with the generosity, gratitude and nobility typical of those who sow seeds in the knowledge that others will enjoy the fruit of their efforts and sacrifice. I like to think that “even those who are most frail, limited and troubled can be missionaries in their own way, for goodness can always be shared, even if it exists alongside many limitations” (*Christus Vivit*, 239).

On World Mission Day, which we celebrate each year on the penultimate Sunday of October, we recall with gratitude all those men and women who by their testimony of life help us to renew our baptismal commitment to be generous and joyful apostles of

the Gospel. Let us remember especially all those who resolutely set out, leaving home and family behind, to bring the Gospel to all those places and people athirst for its saving message.

Contemplating their missionary witness, we are inspired to

be courageous ourselves and to beg “the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2). We know that the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times. Today too Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion. He addresses this call to everyone, and in different ways. We can think of the peripheries all around us, in the heart of our cities or our own families. Universal openness to love has a dimension that is not geographical but existential. Always, but especially in these times of pandemic, it is important to grow in our daily ability to widen our circle, to reach out to others who, albeit physically close to us, are not immediately part of our “circle of interests” (cf. Fratelli Tutti, 97). To be on mission is to be willing to think as Christ does, to believe with him that those around us are also my brothers and sisters. May his compassionate love touch our hearts and make us all true missionary disciples.

May Mary, the first missionary disciple, increase in all the baptized the desire to be salt and light in our lands (cf. Mt 5:13-14).

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 6 January 2021, Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord.

THE POOR WIDOW'S MITE



It was a Sunday morning and the last day of that particular mission journey in Nigeria. We were to attend Mass, and following that, there would be a special blessing to honor my visit. Per usual I had to wake up at 5 AM, even though the Mass wasn't until 8 AM. Due to the poor road conditions we had to leave earlier, making the ride a long, grueling one. It was dark, already hot, and I had no way of knowing what I looked like, considering I didn't have electricity or even a mirror. I always tried to look at myself in the side mirror of the vehicle, but half of this already small side mirror was missing and every time that I would roll down the window, the dust from the dry, non-paved roads would get on my face and go up my nose, leaving me with the feeling that I had a clay mask on!

This part of Nigeria was very diverse; some people appeared to be well off, and others were living in extreme poverty. Some of the local women wore headdresses that were so large, they appeared to be part of a royal family. Others were lucky to even own one article of clothing. These were the people who counted on the priests and Sisters to provide them with food to survive. After Mass food donated during the collection would be distributed to these children and families in need.

For this particular Mass I was seated next to the altar. It was during the offering that I had this unique experience. As parishioners were approaching the altar with their offerings, one elderly woman approached me and gently put a naira (a penny) at my feet. I found this gesture to be very bizarre, causing me to ponder why she didn't give this offering to the priests. Being unsure as to

what I should do, I smiled and thanked her. Due to the language barrier, I was unsure if she could even understand my expression of gratitude.

After the Mass had ended, we went to visit that same woman at her home, a hut in the local village area. Much to my surprise, I was traveling with a live goat in the back of the car. I didn't know the goat was there until it let out a loud shriek that startled me beyond belief. The goat was to be an offering to the woman, a widow who did not have children of her own and offered up most of her food to women that had children. The priest that I was traveling with knew of her dire need for food and wanted her to have the goat, knowing that it would sustain her for weeks to come.

Our visit was not short lived. Instead, the woman wanted us to stay for dinner in her home. It would take quite a while before dinner was to be served.

The hours that we spent there were filled with conversation between the woman and myself, with the mission priest, Father Obiekwe, translating for us. When dinner was ready, the woman shared with us that she had previously exchanged the food that she had received from the church for medication to bring down her fever. She had to make a decision as to which pain was worse, the pain of hunger or pain from a fever. She felt that she needed to give back to God for giving her the means to access medication. That day at Mass she felt that I was a blessing sent from God, and leaving her only penny at my feet was her way of thanking God for all that He had given to her.

What that woman gave me that day was her "poor widow's mite." This led me to believe that I was living out the biblical story firsthand. I later asked Father Obiekwe if I could keep this woman's offering, and in exchange I would give the church an offering of my own value. He agreed.

To this day, whenever I look at that mite, I think of the valuable lesson that woman had taught me: a lesson of generosity, thankfulness, and love of God. It's a good image to keep in mind as we continue our Lenten journey.

(This inspiring story about the Poor Widow's Mite by Holly Benner originally appeared on our sister Pontifical Mission Societies website, Missio, in the United States on February 24, 2021. Used with permission. <http://blog.missio.org/hollyheadlines/the-poor-widows-mite>)

Deputy Director of Public Engagement for Development and Peace.



I come like a beggar with a gift in my hand. These are the opening lyrics to a song by Sydney Carter that I learned as part of the Toronto Catholic Worker community many years ago. As we enter the season of Lent and its call to prayer, fasting and almsgiving, I find myself quietly singing it to myself. The song continues, "By the hungry I will feed you, by the poor I'll make you rich, by the broken I will mend you, tell me which one is which."

People often, not unjustly, criticize the Church for its wealth. But fundamentally, the Church is a beggar. It cannot survive without the generosity of the faithful community, freely given. There is no dollar cost for entry. No one kicks you out if you do not put any money in the collection basket. When our parish began using Eventbrite to facilitate the Covid19 guidelines on Mass attendance, this stood out for me. Cost of a 'ticket' to Sunday Mass? \$0.00. This is radical economic inclusivity. Instead of telling us the price for entry, we are offered a gift by a beggar.

By virtue of what it means to be a Catholic who belongs to a parish community, we are also therefore beggars ourselves. I do not think we consider this perspective often enough. As the lay faithful we see ourselves as the ones who give money to the Church, and by Church, we think of clergy who are responsible for the economic decisions the Church makes. We complain about how many collections there are on a Sunday. We complain that we are always being asked for money.

My perspective changes though when I become aware that I am not someone who receives a service from the Church and then determines what I should offer in exchange for that service. My perspective changes when I am able to see that I belong to a community of beggars concerned for their salvation and the salvation of the world. The money we give is for the good of OUR community and its mission. In this regard it is worth noting that in a Church hierarchy where the clergy are charged with the responsibility of governance, the parish finance council is the only lay body of a parish that is mandated according to Canon Law (Canon 537). The stewardship of the wealth of the parish must involve its lay members who build it.

We belong to a community seeking to sustain itself without charging a set price for belonging or for the gift of the Lord that it offers. While we have sometimes failed in this ideal (e.g. plenary indulgences run amok in the middle ages), for the most part it has defined the economic model of our Church. The Holy Spirit certainly lay strong economic foundations shortly after Pentecost. In Acts 2:45 we read that, "all who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need." While very few of us among the laity today are as radical as those early Christians, the foundation remains.

One way to broaden your perspective in the way I am suggesting is to participate in any form of begging on behalf of the Church yourself. Rather than focusing on your relationship to the collection basket, participate in the works of the Church that call on us to beg so that she can carry out her mission of salvation. It may be as simple as being an usher or asking a local business to sponsor a parish event. It could be holding the St. Vincent de Paul box after Mass or holding a fundraiser to support your parish's local outreach to those in need.

As someone who is part of the Church in Canada's organized response to the cry of the poor in the Global South, ... I am recognizing that I am a beggar who belongs to a community of beggars who believe we have a gift in our hands to share with the world.

(Luke Stocking is Deputy Director of Public Engagement for Development and Peace. This article first appeared in the Catholic Register on March 7, 2021 and used with permission.)

HOW 2020 IMPACTED MY FAMILY:

“God has been holding us close in His hands.”

I was very pleased when we heard that Pontifical Mission Societies was interested in hearing about “our” 2020 story. Things were happening all over the world and many people were losing sight of God. Our family went through a great deal and I know that God has been holding us close in his hands. Here is my family’s 2020 story that deals with so many challenges that impacted my us through work, health, death, and beautiful Miracle Babies.

We are a faithful, grateful family living in Canada with our six children and their families. I am pleased to be able to share the story of how our lives have been affected by covid and all the chaos of 2020. I pondered where was God. But in my heart, I knew he was there.

We can say that this portion our story began in February 2019 when my husband’s twin brother was diagnosed with brain cancer. On top of this we were trying to support his parents who were

heart broken over the illness of his brother. A few days before Palm Sunday his brother passed away.

In August 2019 we celebrated the wedding of a third child. This brought family from afar and now we look back and realize how lucky we were to share that event with them. At the wedding our oldest married daughter knew she was pregnant with her first child after years of trying but did not tell us until October.

All was going well for our pregnant daughter until November when she was diagnosed with gestational diabetes. As she was learning to adjust her diet to this and also deal with other food allergies, she was scheduled for a 19-week ultrasound on Dec 7th. The very attentive technician saw that her body was preparing to deliver. She was rushed to the Hospital where she was diagnosed with a rare pregnancy condition called incompetent cervix. By that evening she had a high-risk surgery to insert an emergency cerclage where she was already dilated 3cm, membranes bulging, and the doctor could see the baby’s foot.

Our first Grandchild was born on Jan 7th at 23 weeks 6 days and weighing 1 pound 6 ounces. She remained in a level 4 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) until mid April. I was able to be the third person to visit along with her parents and I was so grateful until mid March when Covid changed everything. We had prayers happening all over the world for this little fighter. She was intubated at birth and remained on a ventilator for 3 weeks and then was on various other breathing supports for 18 weeks. In April our grandchild was transferred to a level 2 NICU and stayed there until June 4th. After 149 days what a joyous time it was to bring her home. When she was discharged, she came home with a nasogastric feeding tube to help her meet her nutrition needs and she continued to need this for 6 months at home. She is a God given miracle whose journey was shared by many who told us how they loved the pictures and stories that we posted about her. It was something cheerful



to follow with the loneliness of the covid restrictions.

The day after our first grandchild’s birth my husband’s mother fell and broke her hip which required surgery. For close to 7 weeks, we were running back and forth to see her in one hospital and the grandchild in another. We thanked God she came home before the covid shutdown started. Seeing how his parents were affected mentally and physically by lockdowns and all the restrictions happening at the seniors’ residence where they lived was hard on all of us. By June, with her husband being admitted to the hospital for the third time, this very strong woman crawled into bed and refused to get up and eat. The Covid world was too lonely. After a few days my husband was allowed to go in to be with her in the evening. By the 5th day she was taken to the hospital. The ambulance took her to the same hospital as her husband and by the next day they were in the same room. Their beds were next to each other and the family was allowed to visit in rotation. She passed away a few days later next to her husband. The funeral was held in August with a limit of 50 people. It was not the type of funeral she had planned.

When July came our daughter-in-law was experiencing problems and eventually, she ended up in the hospital with pre-eclampsia. By August she was taken to surgery for a c-section. Our second miracle baby, a grandson was born at 30 weeks weighing 2 pounds 8 ounces. The mother was fortunate to have had 2 steroid shots to strengthen his lungs. We can say 6-1/2 weeks makes a lot of difference in a baby’s development. He did have issues and was placed in a level 3 NICU. He needed oxygen and other support. After 10 days he was transferred to a level 2 NICU. He came home after 2 months by the end of Sept. God is GOOD!

So now we come to the third amazing grandchild. Another granddaughter was born in October at 38 weeks weighing 8 pounds 9 ounces and very healthy. She is the biggest of all three babies currently. This daughter did have a long labor and hemorrhaged but she recovered well. I was ecstatic to be able to help them out the first couple of days. Once again God blessed us.

In the middle of December, my husband slipped on the ice in the church parking lot and broke his hip. He had surgery to place 3 screws to hold his hip together and was off work for three months. Covid restrictions once again prevented us getting together with our family to support each other. We were able to leave behind most of the commercial aspects of the season and focus on the true meaning of Christmas.

After the death of his wife, my father-in-law struggled with a lot of health issues. He was in need of lots of care. At the end of December, he had tested positive for covid asymptomatic. By the grace of God my sisters-in-law were able to spend some time with him after his isolation was completed. His sister & sister-in-law took turns being with his dad and helped him to talk on the phone with some of the family. One day after work my husband went back to be with dad who was still in bed and his speech a little slurred. He got him to video chat with all of our children and he

told them he loved them remembering all 3 of the great grand children’s names. The nurse arrived and my husband went into the next room to talk with her. When he came back his dad had passed away. He wanted to die at home and God granted this wish with a peaceful death.

I walk our dog a couple of times each week at the dog park praying the rosary and divine mercy, contemplating what God and all he has done for us and shown us. So many people to be grateful for like nurses and doctors who cared for all of us and all those praying for us. Listening to spiritual talks and retreats online and reading from good faith sources online gave me Lots of comfort and peace.

It was also difficult that we could not support our other three children as they experienced Covid interruptions. With online university classes and limited interaction with classmates and it was hard to not be able to support our daughter as she finished her degree. Also, a lack of work affected our son and sons-in-law. Currently they are all working, and we are thankful.

Between both of us we lost numerous people that we loved, and a couple were directly covid related. Covid recently has happened in our immediate family and God granted them all a good recovery. We have had two years of challenges, blessings, and sadness. We are thankful for the ability and opportunity to attend masses and adoration since June 2020. Our family’s commitments to each other over video chats, phone calls and porch visits we treasure. We long for the day of normal get togethers. Without Faith I do not know how we could have made it. God has been holding us close in his hands.

Pope urges Catholics to pray in May for end to Covid-19 pandemic

Catholics across the globe are encouraged to dedicate the Marian month of May to praying for an end to the pandemic. The initiative, behind which the Pope has thrown his support, involves 30 Marian Shrines from various parts of the world. It takes place under the theme “The whole Church was fervently praying to God,” which recalls a verse in the Book of Acts (12:5).

“The initiative will involve all the Shrines of the world in a special way, so that they might encourage the faithful, families, and communities to recite the Rosary to pray for an end to the pandemic,” read the statement. ...After more than a year, and with the world still in the grips of the pandemic, the Pope and the Church around the world are once again leading the way in imploring God for an end to the suffering which so many people are forced to bear.

By Devin Watkins

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-04/pope-francis-shrines-may-2021-prayer-end-pandemic.html>

HOW 2020 IMPACTED MY FAMILY: A Story of a Mother and Daughter

The pace of my life has slowed down during this pandemic year, which has resulted in some unforeseen benefits. I abruptly retired from teaching to become my mother's full-time caregiver. I am surprised by how quickly I seem to have left behind the preoccupations of my teaching life as I rarely think about the routines, the students and the marking. Also, I am aware – as is my mother – that my training is definitely reflected in how I deal with the responsibilities of caregiving; I create a lesson plan – a structure for our time together – being mindful of what must be done, such as meal preparation, daily stretches, and fitting in a livestreamed mass several times a week. I rarely think about teaching because my role now is so radically different yet similarly emotionally time-consuming. Despite my self-doubts about my inadequacies – principally my impatience – as the kind of caregiver my mother wants, I console myself by acknowledging that I am a responsible, competent woman.

I am distressingly aware that constant grumbling is unbecoming, emotionally unhealthy and demoralizing, as well as annoying and worrying to others.

In other words, I am trying – small steps – to give her what she needs rather than solely what she wants. Positive results – more physical and emotional stamina and engagement – is satisfying.

I am aware of a shift in priorities. Similarly, to how my mother's world has shrunk, my need to sustain a reasonably positive state of mind is reflected in how selective I have become about what I read, reflect on, and discuss. I am distressingly aware that constant grumbling is unbecoming, emotionally unhealthy and demoralizing, as well as annoying and worrying to others. In order not to be overwhelmed, my mother and I keep our COVID conversations simple and personal; we talk about the progress of the virus – and now the vaccines – here in Ontario and in her native country. Unsurprisingly, we also talk about those who have caught the virus among her family and friends and mourned those who could not win the fight against it.

My mother, who has been house-bound this past year, as many seniors are, makes the effort to maintain her friendships and family relationships by making phone calls, sharing tidbits of family news, her health concerns, and the worrisome progression of the virus and its impact on those who are part of her world. Although the news she receives is sometimes distressing and, occasionally, tragic, remaining connected to others – although she only hears their voices – helps to alleviate her solitude and sense of isolation: her frustrated awareness that her previously busy calendar, filled with volunteering intertwined with her faith-based activities and connections, is now empty except for medical appointments. Her

phone calls reflect her priorities: family, close friends and her strong and abiding faith. They also support my strong belief that most people are kind and want to help; one of my mother's regular callers – a fellow Legion of Mary member – regularly organizes a brief visit by a local parish priest. He brings communion, but he also brings a connection to her life before COVID, and her increasing weakness, effectively ended – at least for now – her frequent visits to her neighbourhood churches for prayer, emotional support and conversations with her fellow parishioners.

Although my mother occasionally enjoys watching masses from Italy, as well as other churches in Toronto such as St. Michael's Cathedral, most of the masses we watch are livestreamed from her local parish. It is interesting to participate in a mass being celebrated in a different setting, but I notice that she only asks me to find them

when it is a specific feast day that is meaningful to her and has a connection to a specific church community. In a time of so much uncertainty and change, I know that it is comforting for her to see mass celebrated in a familiar setting. She knows her parish priests and deacon and recognizes some of the faithful parishioners who have gone to mass in person when that has been permitted.

In summary, the most worthwhile and comforting result of this quiet, mostly solitary time with my mother, which is a novel experience for us, is the gift of time spent learning about and being with each other.



Propagation of the Faith

Project Report: NIGERIA – Building Churches

The Society of the Propagation of the Faith exists because each year the needs of the Catholic Church in the Missions grow as new dioceses are formed and because of the growing number of people seeking to hear the message of Christ. That is why the involvement and commitment of Catholics from around the world is so urgently needed. In the name of the Pope, the mission of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith is to try and meet these many needs in the missions with the support of the donations that it receives through World Mission Sunday and other donations throughout the year. Through this Society, we can be in solidarity with all Catholics throughout the world and we can recommit ourselves to the Church's missionary activity through prayer and sacrifice.

The Canadian Pontifical Mission Societies donated funds to support the building of two churches in the Diocese of Jalingo in Nigeria. One is St. Athanasius's Catholic Church and the other is St. Peter's Catholic Church. On the diocesan website at <https://cathdiocese-jal.org/> the following information and history of the diocese is provided:

1. The first missionaries that took the challenge to open a mission in this part of Nigeria were the Irish Augustinian missionaries. The first three Augustinian missionaries arrived in Nigeria in October 1938.

2. Birth of Jalingo Diocese: February 1994, saw the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to Nigeria, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, came on a Pastoral visit to Yola Diocese. He celebrated the English Mass in St Augustine Jalingo on 13th February 1994. This visit, thanks to the ingenuity of the Bishop P.F. Sheehan of Yola, led to the birth of a new diocese with the name of Jalingo. Jalingo Diocese was officially carved out of former Yola Diocese on 3rd February 1995. This was shortly after Taraba State was created from the then Gongola State (now Adamawa State) on 27th August 1991. The Diocesan boundary of Jalingo falls in place with the state boundary.

3. Geographically, the Diocese of Jalingo and Taraba State are the same area. They are situated in the Northeast region of Nigeria, West Africa. Carved out from the Diocese of Yola in 1995, the Catholic Diocese of Jalingo came four years after the creation of Taraba State in 1991. Its area is approximately 51,000km². Population is about 2.8 million, Catholics number about 293,000. It is surrounded by the dioceses of Yola, Bauchi, KatsinaAla, and Shendam; and also by the Cameroon Republic. The State Capital and Diocesan Headquarters is Jalingo. There are at least forty (40) ethnic-groups, each with its own language and culture. Among

the largest ones are, the Mumuye, Tiv, Jukun, Kuteb, Bansa, Mambihla, Jenjo, Karimjo. Chamba, Bandawa and Fulani.

4. Population: 529,069 Catholics (13.5% of 3,924,000 total) (2018)

Statistics: 45 parishes, 18 missions, 83 priests (75 diocesan, 8 religious), 37 lay religious (8 brothers, 29 sisters), 66 seminarians (2018)

Schools: 19 secondary schools and 30 elementary schools

5. Since its creation, the diocese has had its security challenges and tragedies. On a horrific scale were the feuds of Karim Lamido, Takum and Bali, Gassol and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas. In each case the Parish Priests stood admirably with the suffering masses, giving refuge and ministering to them. Bishop Charles and others in the diocese also assisted with prayers, peace missions and aid raised throughout the diocese and sent by other friends of Jalingo Diocese. Furthermore, Jalingo as a diocese would have grown more than what it is now if not for the fact that series of tribal wars/crises have always retarded its growth. One crisis that constantly come to mind is the Tiv, Jukun/Fulani crises of 2001 which is one of the worst that the diocese has ever experienced, so many of our parish houses, schools and clinics were destroyed and property worth millions of Naira were looted or destroyed. One can understand why talking about the history of this young diocese when at her 10th anniversary in 2005, the former Bishop James N. Daman maintains that "Jalingo Diocese at ten is a story of sweat, tears and toil, success and failure, a story of bishops, priests, religious, teachers, catechists and laity". One can also talk about the lingering crises in the southern part of the diocese which killed so many innocent people including a priest, the late Fr David Tanko who was killed and set ablaze by unknown assailants.





The underlying tensions in Jalingo diocese centered largely on the questions of land-especially farmlands-ownership. There are also the perennial problem of the respective rights of the nomadic herders and the settled farming communities, sometimes paraded as a clash between ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers’.

6. Quotation from The Bishop Charles H. Hammawa:

“We as a Church and Diocese can count Our losses with bleeding hearts and tearful eyes. This is no doubt a test of Our faith. Jalingo, a promising Diocese has been in lots of ways brought to its knees. Priests ordained in Jalingo Diocese Taraba State- have been shepherds over fleeing sheep, overseers of devastated and disillusioned flock and those responsible for the protection and livelihood of the masses have paid more lip service than rise to the occasion”

7. St. Athanasius Church: Fr. Isaac Nyameh’s report states that they are in the process of constructing a dedicated worship space and a presbytery. The construction is not quite completed, and the roof is the last major part of the building that needs to be installed. One difficulty that they have experienced, according to Fr. Isaac, is the delay of materials from suppliers. It has also been difficult to get the funds needed to construct this church because the parishioners are mostly peasant farmers and do not have much to donate to the church. The one thing that the parishioners have been able to donate is their time and labour. They are helping to construct the church and Fr. Isaac suggests that it has been a “wholesome” experience for the parishioners. It is been a bonding experience and it has brought the community closer together. Fr. Isaac states that it will be a great blessing to have a dedicated worship space once the project is completed.

8. St. Peter’s Church: The pastor of St. Peter’s Church is Fr. Jacob Wovoro and he reports that the construction of the church is still on-going. The building of the church is not only a blessing for

providing shelter for the priest and worshipping community. It has also been a benefit for the town in general. The church not only allows for the celebration of the sacraments. It is also providing economic development for the area. The parishioners of St. Peter’s have assisted in the construction of the church who are also poor farmers. The funds that the parish received, reports Fr. Isaac, have not been sufficient to buy all the materials that are needed, particularly because these materials need to come from quite a distance.

Announce pour la Paroisse de la Sainte-Famille, Mississauga

Une petite paroisse francophone dans la région de Toronto est à la recherche d’un ostensor. Notre église est simple et de construction récente. Si vous avez un ostensor en bon état qui n’est plus utilisé, veuillez communiquer avec Monique en écrivant à stefamille.pasto@gmail.com, ou en appelant au 905-826-6316.

Announcement for Paroisse de la Sainte-Famille, Mississauga

A French parish in the Greater Toronto Area is looking for a monstrance. Our small church is simple and was built in the late 90’s. If you have a monstrance that is in beautiful condition, and is no longer being used, please contact Monique at stefamille.pasto@gmail.com or 905-826-6316.

A View from the Pew...

Creating a Culture of Care



Before retiring, Lori Lisi was the Coordinator of Programs for Secondary Schools at the York Catholic District School Board. Lori is a member of St. David’s Church in Maple, ON.

When I was growing up, I lived in a predominantly Christian neighbourhood. We went to Catholic school and learned about who we were as disciples of Jesus and, consequently, how we should live our lives. When we were faced with making any decision, we were encouraged to ask ourselves ‘What would Jesus do?’ In fact, the question was so often repeated that it became the acronym ‘WWJD’. It was so popular that we wore wristbands and beaded bracelets that carried the inscription. We grew to develop our WWJD mindset

The Importance of Almsgiving

...remembering the words of the Lord Jesus,
...he himself said,

‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’

(Acts 20:35)

that continues to emphasize that our actions and deeds should always model those of Jesus. My parents, my priests, my teachers and other adults in my life continually drew attention to how important it was to share with others, especially those less fortunate than ourselves. As the years passed, what ensued beyond elementary school and secondary school ushered me into my role as a Catholic schoolteacher and, as such, I was given the opportunity to bring the WWJD mindset to the students in my class. Our commitment to share and give to others was a focused part of every day, both within the classroom experience and in all aspects of life. For, as the saying goes, ‘Once you know something, you can’t unknow it!’ Knowing that by giving to the ‘least of my brothers’, I am fulfilling my Catholic moral obligation, I cannot ignore my responsibility to share with those in need. Giving is the answer to our baptismal call.

Recently, when I was invited to participate as a member of the stewardship committee at my parish, I was reminded of the WWJD movement that was so pronounced during my formative years. Our committee was tasked with heightening awareness of what stewardship means and developing ways to bring that mes-

sage to our parish community. Stewardship plays a vital part in our Catholic faith. As Christian stewards we:

open our hearts and receive God’s gifts gratefully,

cherish and tend to them in a responsible and accountable manner,

share them, in justice and love, with others,

and return them, with increase, to God.

Stewardship, therefore, fosters our response to the question, ‘What would Jesus do?’ It is the way God expects us to live with, and serve, our brothers and sisters. The gifts that God gives us belong to Him; and so, we are to accept them with gratitude and use them generously to serve others, as well, as ourselves. When we speak of sharing, we speak of sharing our time, our talents and our treasures. By making the needs of others our own and serving others, we give glory to God. On a daily basis we should walk through life responding to the world around us in a way that is pleasing to Him. This will bring us in communion with God and, ultimately, will merit a heavenly reward. For so it is written, “And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (Mt 25:40)

During the penitential season of Lent, we focus on three distinguished pillars: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Pope Francis tells us, “Almsgiving is a gesture of love which directs us toward those we meet. It is a gesture of sincere attention to those who come to us and ask our help.” In his homily, he quotes St. Augustine, who described fasting and almsgiving as “the two wings of prayer,” because they are signs of humility and charity. Almsgiving, which has its origins in love and compassion, is the generous sharing with others, especially those in need, and it is what defines us as disciples of Jesus. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ (Mt 22:37-39)

So, how may we engage deeper in the act almsgiving? Making sacrificial gifts to organizations that care for the most vulnerable among us is one way to engage in the sacrificial act of giving, and thus participating more actively as a Christian steward. Making donations to ShareLife, to the St. Vincent de Paul Society, to Missions Today, to Catholic Relief Services and other Catholic organizations provide opportunities for us to respond to our Christian

calling. Such organizations address the needs of others in ways that we may not be able to do on our own. They operate shelters for women, minister to the sick, propagate the faith, provide housing support, operate recovery programs, provide meals, and run summer camps, just to mention a few. Our attentiveness to these types of organizations, or others like these in our community and in the entire world, is vital to living as true Christian stewards. It is, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “a witness to fraternal charity” and “a work of justice pleasing to God.”

In short, the answer to the question, “Why should we participate in almsgiving?” is that almsgiving puts us in communion with God and others (Lk 16:9; Mt 25); makes us deserving of the rewards of heaven (Mt 6:4); and makes us true disciples of Jesus. (Mt 12:50) Sharing our time, our talents and our treasure, is a true blessing. In fact, it is twice blessed; it blesses him who gives and him who receives.

So, let us give alms always! Let Lent be the springboard for a lifetime of providing for all those in need, being in communion with our brothers and sisters, strengthening our relationship with God and preparing for our eternal life in heaven.

**Above all, love each other deeply,
because love covers over a multitude of sins.**

**Offer hospitality to one another
without grumbling.**

**Each of you should use whatever
gift you have received to serve others,**

**as faithful stewards of God’s grace
in its various forms.**

~1 Pt 4,8-10

THE YEAR OF St. Joseph and Missionary Disciples

At the end of 2020, Pope Francis declared 2021 as the Year of St. Joseph. This special year dedicated to the head of the Holy Family, marks the 150th anniversary of St. Joseph being declared the patron saint of the universal church. Of course, St. Joseph is also the patron saint of Canada. As Canadians, then, we should already have a special attachment to St. Joseph. As supporters of the missionary efforts of our church, we can also use this special year to implore St. Joseph to pray to our heavenly Father for all those engaged in missionary work.

As the patron saint of the universal church, St. Joseph is an important intercessor for all those working in God’s vineyard, spreading the Gospel message. In this year of St. Joseph, we can also learn a great deal from him about what it means to be a missionary disciple.

“St. Joseph reminds us,” writes Pope Francis in his apostolic letter, ‘Patris Corde,’ where he announced this special year, “that those who appear hidden or in the shadows can play an incomparable role in the history of salvation. A word of recognition and of gratitude is due to them all.” Although we too are similarly hidden in the shadows as St. Joseph was, nevertheless, we too can play an important role in the work of the missions by reflecting on the life of St. Joseph.

St. Joseph first appears in the Gospels, after hearing that his fi-

ancé, Mary, is pregnant. (Matthew 1:18-25) Particularly in those days, a woman being pregnant out of wedlock was a great scandal and Joseph, wishing to save Mary from public ridicule, decided to break off the engagement. In a dream, however, an angel appears to Joseph and explains the situation to him. Mary is pregnant by virtue of the Holy Spirit because the child conceived in her is the Messiah, the saviour of the world. The angel directs Joseph to take Mary as his wife and so become the foster father to the Messiah.

This story reminds us of the importance of a dream. Even though Joseph had devised a plan after hearing that Mary was pregnant, he was told that his plan was not God’s will. As many of us discover after making big plans, God has something else in store for us.

This story reminds us, therefore, of the importance of discerning God’s call for our lives. Particularly as missionary disciples, we must ask God what his will is for us and how we can serve the missionary efforts of the church. But more than that, we should remember that our call is also a “dream.” God is our dream coach, who helps us to discern, not only our calling, but also a vision for our lives that is bigger than any that we would have devised for ourselves. God wants us to dream big and to recognize we have much more to offer than we could ever imagine. We should not

only have a vocation, but we should also have a dream for our lives.

Joseph also features prominently in the story of the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2: 1-20) A census is declared across the land and Joseph must make the arduous journey with his pregnant wife from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea. Joseph is a descent of the royal family of David and so must register for the census in David’s town. As they arrive in Bethlehem, Mary is due. But given that there is no room for them to stay, Mary must deliver the child in a manger, in a location where the animals are kept.

As St. Francis emphasized and made popular with the creche scene at Christmas, the poor conditions into which Jesus was born has great significance for us today. The birth of Jesus celebrates the incarnation, that God became human. The birth of Jesus reminds us that God is present in his creation and that there is less distance between divinity and humanity than we might think. Specifically, the places where God can be found is among the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed. Where God is especially present is in our own brokenness and in the brokenness of the world. St. Joseph who witnessed the birth of the saviour in difficult circumstances reminds us that Jesus is being born among those who are struggling in our world all the time. As St. Joseph cared for the Saviour born in the manger, so too Christ’s followers today must support those in our younger Catholic communities who are trying to make Jesus incarnate among them. The manger scene, as St. Francis intended, should always be our reminder that Jesus is born everyday among the poor, an important reason for us to always help them when we can.

One final event in the life of St. Joseph that is significant for missionary disciples is the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. After hearing from the Magi that the Messiah had been born, Herod attempts to kill Jesus by killing all male children under two. To protect his child, Joseph takes his family to safety by fleeing to Egypt and they only return to Nazareth once Herod is dead. (Matthew 2:13-23).

St. Joseph knew what it meant to be persecuted and St. Joseph knew what it meant to be a refugee, a stranger in a strange land. The persecution of Christians has, of course, occurred through history and continues to the present day. Today, Catholic missionaries continue to be persecuted, kidnapped, and killed. As Fides.org reported, for example, just this past Divine Mercy Sunday, 5 priests, 2 nuns, and three lay people were kidnapped in Haiti. It is not safe for so many of our missionaries in the world. It is also not safe for many of our brother and sisters Catholics around the world as well. Like the Holy Family, many Catholics have had to flee their other countries for safety, only to find themselves in horrific conditions in refugee camps. As missionary disciples, our call is clear. We need to support those who are persecuted and refugees, like St. Joseph and his family was, whether by financial assistance and by political action.

In this year of St. Joseph, then, let us pray the official prayer found below:



THE YEAR OF ST. JOSEPH PRAYER: To you, O blessed Joseph

To you, O blessed Joseph, do we come in our afflictions, and having implored the help of your most holy Spouse, we confidently invoke your patronage also.

Through that charity which bound you to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God and through the paternal love with which you embraced the Child Jesus, we humbly beg you graciously to regard the inheritance which Jesus Christ has purchased by his Blood, and with your power and strength to aid us in our necessities.

O most watchful guardian of the Holy Family, defend the chosen children of Jesus Christ; O most loving father, ward off from us every contagion of error and corrupting influence; O our most mighty protector, be kind to us and from heaven assist us in our struggle with the power of darkness.

As once you rescued the Child Jesus from deadly peril, so now protect God’s Holy Church from the snares of the enemy and from all adversity; shield, too, each one of us by your constant protection, so that, supported by your example and your aid, we may be able to live piously, to die in holiness, and to obtain eternal happiness in heaven. Amen.

The Editor's Point of View

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS AND TURNING SIXTY



My birthdays tend to be very quiet affairs. A gift and a cake from my family after dinner. A few phone calls and some Facebook posts, wishing me a happy birthday. And before the night of my birthday is over, it has already been forgotten. Quite honestly, I never did mind that there was no fuss made for my birthday. This year, however, was different. This year was a milestone birthday. I turned sixty this past March. Now, I know what you are all thinking. From my picture on this page, I don't look sixty and you are right. (Insert smiley emoji here). Because this was a milestone birthday, there was definitely much more fanfare. On the day of my birthday, my wife and children, all took the day off to celebrate my birthday. We drove north of where we live to walk in the woods and have a picnic lunch in the snow. My wife had organized a kudo board with many family and friends posting some very special greetings. In the evening, family and friends dropped by for quick porch visits, bringing me many birthday gifts, which are never necessary but always appreciated.

Now not only was the actual day of my birthday livelier than most, but it did not end there. My birthday actually began the weekend before where I joked with my family that it was my birthday weekend, and I should not have to do any housework. But my pastor also announced that weekend that I would have a special birthday that week and so parishioners started congratulating me even before the actual day. I continued the joke that it was my birthday week or the octave of my birthday but much to my surprise it turned into a virtual birthday month. Even after the day of my birthday, friends continued to drop by with gifts. My pastor continued to announce my birthday even the weekend following, which resulted in many more greetings from parishioners and even more gifts from those who had heard the announcement the week before. Friends and family also continue to post warm wishes on the kudo board, even after the day had passed. But not only did people continue to recognize my birthday even weeks after it had passed, other surprise benefits occurred because I turned

sixty. For example, I was able to get the vaccine for Covid-19 and, my favourite, I was now eligible for the senior's discount at Shopper's Drugmart.

But the biggest impact of my birthday this year was, if I did not know it before, I became quite aware of it now, that I was getting old. I was beginning a new chapter of my life. I was entering the last third of my life and I need to come to terms with this new stage of my life. I need to reflect on what it means to get older and how to make a contribution in the world as I advance in age. This is a new time in my life that I need to reflect on its meaning, long after my birthday month is over.

As we came to the celebration of Easter, it struck me that the meaning of the resurrection is very similar to the experience of my birthday for this year. Like any birthday, Easter begins with a special day. Easter begins with a celebration on a special day, Easter Sunday. On Easter Sunday, we do not fast. On Easter Sunday, we have two helpings of our favourite meal. We have a second glass of wine at dinner. Dessert is not optional. The cheesecake is a must because Jesus is risen. Jesus rose from the day and so we celebrate and rejoice. On Easter Sunday, we put aside all our activities and our concerns and we celebrate that first Easter Sunday, when even death itself could not defeat the Messiah of God. Jesus rose from the grave so that all who believe in him will live for ever. So, on Easter Sunday, how can we not celebrate the wonderful gift that we have all received.

But, as we know, Easter is not just one day. As my birthday was a celebration that lasted a few weeks, Easter is also a season that lasts fifty days. Easter is a season, because like a milestone birthday, it is too significant an event to recognize its importance in only one day. In the forty days prior to his Ascension into heaven in which Jesus appeared to his disciples, there are too many important resurrection stories on which we should reflect in order to have only if even only a tiny understanding of the significance of Easter. The tomb in which they laid Jesus is empty, not even his corpse is found there. Thus, the resurrection includes somehow the eternal life of the body. On the first Easter Sunday, when the disciples of Jesus were locked in the upper room, Jesus appears among them

offering them the gift of peace. For those of us who believe in the risen Lord, should we not also be leading a life of peace? The two despondent disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, recognized Jesus in the scriptures and in the breaking of bread. The risen Christ, therefore, removes our worries and fears as we participate in the Eucharist. Jesus continues to eat with his disciples even after his resurrection. This reminds us of the importance of table-fellowship even in eternal life. Indeed, Easter is far too complex a mystery to contain in a one-day celebration.

The resurrection, however, is also so significant that even marking it a few weeks a year does not suffice. Like my milestone birthday that initiated a new stage in my life, similarly the resurrection of Jesus ushered in a new period of human history. We now live in the age of the resurrection. In the good old days, when people my age studied history in school, we designated dates either with B.C. (before Christ) or A.D. (Anno Domini). Now, in the pluralistic society in which we live, we no longer, correctly, mark the passing of time with those two designations. But for us Christians, we should always remember that we are in A.D. time. We live in a time that is in the year of the Lord. We live in an age where Jesus is alive now. Yes, Easter begins in the past, but it continues into the present and will be the state of things even into the future. We will live our whole lives in the year of the Lord, in the age of the resurrection. We live in the age where sin and death has been defeated. We live in the age where the Holy Spirit is present and gives us peace, joy, and love among other fruits of the Spirit. Let us always recognize and appreciate the special time in which we have been so blessed to live.

I know that when we look at the state of the world today, it does not appear that we live in any special time. Even without the Covid-19 pandemic, the world was a mess with climate change, poverty, war, racism, and the list goes on. Given all that some people have endured over the past year, that our stories from our readers in the centre of this magazine exemplify, the world today does not appear to be impacted at all by the resurrection of Jesus. But there is where we need to put on our eyes of faith. Easter does not occur in early spring by coincidence. Easter occurs at this time of the year because what is occurring in nature is a good analogy for the impact of Easter. Early spring, on the exterior, can look very much like winter. The trees are barren, and all plant life seems dead. But we know that underneath it all, nature is getting ready to bloom and blossom. We know that in early spring, we are only a few short weeks until there is an explosion of colour and warmth and new life growing all around us. The resurrection is similar. While nothing seems to be happening on the surface, the impact of Jesus's defeat of brokenness and death is being felt in secret. But before we know it, God's power manifests itself in our life, providing us the love and support we need in this world.

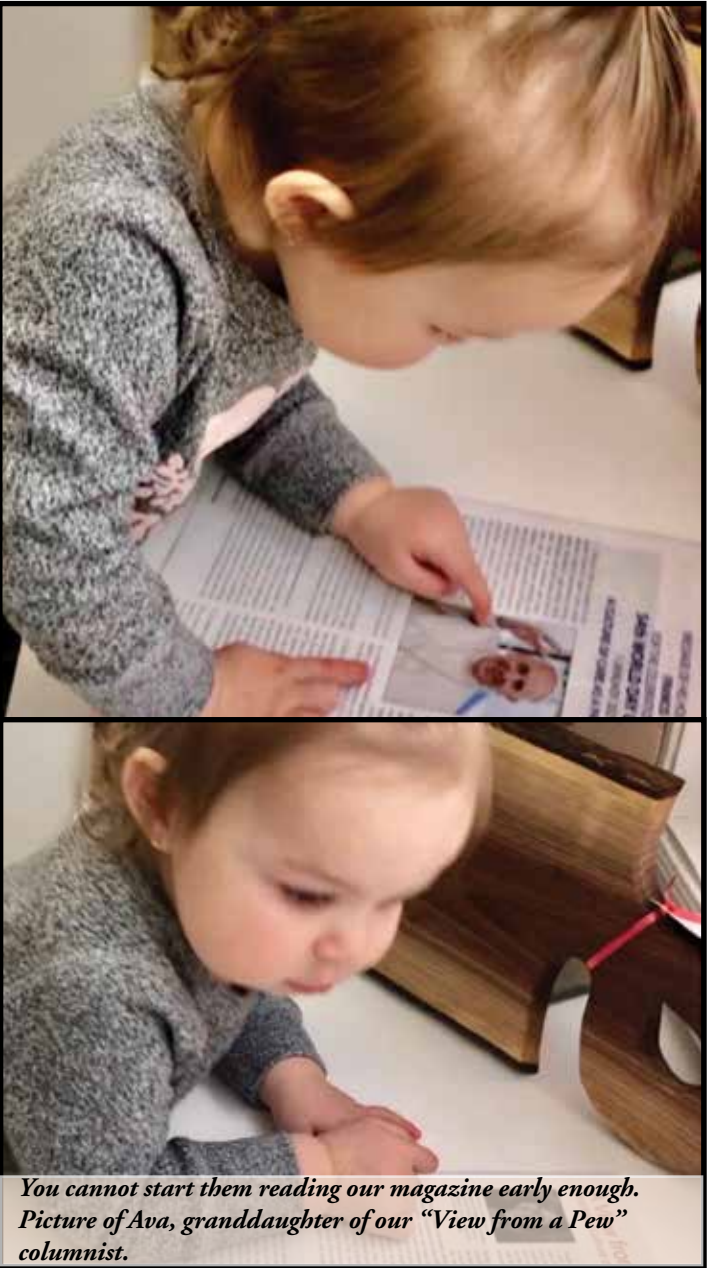
So let us always remember that Easter is more than one day, and even more than an annual season. Easter is the age in which we live and have our being.

In Remembrance

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Please remember in your prayers the recently deceased members of the Pontifical Mission Societies:

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You cannot start them reading our magazine early enough. Picture of Ava, granddaughter of our "View from a Pew" columnist.

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