



Connections

Newsletter of the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Experiencing Mercy in Mexico City

by Margarita Basurto

Often, we MSC Sisters are asked why we minister among the poor in Mexico City. The life experience of Margarita Basurto answers that question.

At 67, I am an elderly Mexican woman. I accept my aging with responsibility and a positive attitude. Through the years, I have learned from what I have lived, from both the good and the bad. I have just needed to hold on to the good that I've rescued from the painful and hard. These experiences were my life and formation with the passing of time. And there were many: death, separation, unemployment, illness, loneliness, etc. We all have to go on and turn to the next blank page in the book of memory to record what has been good and uplifting.



Margarita celebrates her Confirmation with Sisters Theresa Molchanow and Mary Saponara.

My parents educated me with good basic principles and values such as healthy morals, respect and honesty. I am eternally grateful to them for their interest in me as a person, in my welfare, and in my education for life.

I want to share a recent, painfully strong experience. It happened to me, unplanned and unexpected, with all of its very real cruelty, bitterness, and brutality. I am still living through it all as I try to put it behind me. Let me explain...

Homeless and helpless were a young mother with her two young children—a small boy and a very little girl. The three had traveled a long distance to Mexico City. They had no money, only the clothes they wore. They were hungry, thirsty and tired and the children were confused. I was profoundly pained to see them suffering so much and, yet, there I was, suffering along with them. Out of concern for them, I almost forgot about my own pain. I wondered, "What is this young mother doing here with her children in this dreadful situation?" I wished I could whisk away all their dread and replace it with what they deserved. I understood, however, that their destiny had brought them to the present for some reason. Maybe they, and I too, would be able to rescue something good from our experience.

We found ourselves together in a dirty and abandoned shelter in Mexico City under the most deplorable and subhuman conditions. Not a single public official had set a foot there. The place offered shelter to drug addicts, prostitutes, *continued on page 3*

Reflecting on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 7, 2013

By Sr. Mary Anne Bigos, MSC, Province Leader

In the Gospel of John 13:34-35, we are presented with a special message from Jesus:

"I give you a new commandment, love one another. As I have loved you, so should you love one another. Then all will know that you are my disciples when you love one another."

I am sure we have read or heard these words of Jesus hundreds of times and surely every one of us has often meditated on God's personal love and has been deeply moved by it. In view of these many graces and the realization that God's love is an awesome gift, we are truly grateful.

Perhaps on the occasion of the feast day of the Sacred Heart we can ask ourselves some reflective questions: To what extent is my love like the love of Jesus? Does my love towards others, the people with whom I live, the people with whom I work, etc. have the same qualities as God's love? In other words, am I a person with a compassionate and forgiving spirit, one who is aware of others and accepts them? Am I truly the Heart of God in the world?

To meditate in a chapel or in the corner of our room is important, but the true test of our love is in our relationships with one another. Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by God's love and overcome anything that prevents *continued on page 11*

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Sharing the Heart Through Stephen's Place

For more than two decades, Sr. Virginia Longcope, MSC, Founder and Executive Director of Stephen's Place in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, has been transforming lives. Sr. Virginia has worked passionately to provide much-needed resources so



Sr. Virginia Longcope, MSC, is pictured here with the late Marlene Linny Fowler, her good friend and a staunch supporter of Stephen's Place.

that men facing uncertain futures can successfully navigate the difficult transition from prison and addiction to lives of meaning and purpose. A former corrections social worker, Sr. Virginia continues to build a structured environment that promotes the basic family values of accountability and responsibility. Stephen's Place creates a sense of belonging, thereby empowering its residents to achieve a responsible lifestyle free of drugs and alcohol.



Approaching its twentieth year celebration, the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus wish to reaffirm the mission of Stephen's Place and to remind us all that Sr. Virginia and her tireless volunteers are doing the work of Christ: reaching out to a disenfranchised community to offer basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter while promoting outpatient treatment, the GED program, job readiness and basic life skills training. Visit Stephen's Place on YouTube and at www.stephens-place.org for information.

Sr. Virginia, Board of Directors and Volunteers, you truly are the Heart of Christ for others! †

Conference Renews Global Mission of the Heart

by Sr. Rosemarie Sommers, MSC

Representatives of the MSC Sisters from around the world gathered in Namibia, Africa, for a General Conference February 27 – March 17, 2013. Sisters Mary Anne Bigos, Rosemarie Sommers, and Deborah Reho attended from the USA Province. Our mission in Namibia began in 1927 when the first Sisters arrived from Germany. Today there are over 50 MSC Sisters (most of whom are native Namibians) who continue that mission to share God's Love with the people of southwest Africa.

The main purpose of the conference was to prepare for our General Chapter in June of 2014. A General Chapter is the highest authority in a religious congregation and is held every six years.

The conference began with a three-day retreat given by Fr. Hans Kwakman, MSC, on the Spirituality of Fr. Jules Chevalier, our Founder, and on our Charism for Today. We were reminded of our call to the Mission of the Heart – to give witness to God's Love, to be the Heart of God on earth. Also during the

conference we listened to reports from our provinces in Germany, Papua New Guinea, USA, Namibia, Australia, Province Latina, and Korea, from the district of India, and from our international community in the Philippines.



During those days of reflection, discernment, and discussion, we felt the importance of "going back to our roots" and of "renewal of heart." This desire and yearning is reflected in the Theme we chose for our General Chapter: Choose Life with Renewed Heart." We believe we are called today to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit in our Church: through servant leadership which rejects every type of self-centeredness, but gives witness to God's care for humanity and the entire

cosmos. It was during our General Conference that Pope Francis was elected. We felt truly encouraged by his election and the attitude of service and option for the marginalized and poor that he brings to the Church. We believe this is our call as Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart and so we hope to respond to that call with "renewed hearts." †

Interested in Sharing Our MSC Charism? We would LOVE to connect with you!

Please contact Sr. Dorothy Fabritze, sistersdandb@hotmail.com, to inquire about a possible vocation.

To inquire about our Lay MSC Program, please contact Sr. Lorraine Molchanow, LorraineMSC@aol.com or 610-372-1753.

To volunteer with the Mission Advancement Office, contact Carrie at cwhitmoyer@mscreading.org.

Mercy in Mexico City *continued from page 1*

orphans, paupers, and, largely, to elderly adults faced with extreme poverty and abandonment.

This particular public shelter was staffed by an inhumane and insensitive social worker. She told the young mother and me that we would be taken to another place where we would be given dinner, a bed for the night and the use of a restroom. At 1:00 a.m., we got into a dirty van that smelled of death. First, however, a male patient was to be taken to a hospital. We traveled to the other side of the city, and when we arrived, the poor man was lowered to the street in his wheelchair, completely naked, covered only by a thick blanket. A doctor came out and, when he saw the patient's leg so seriously wounded, slapped the man's back and said loudly, "I'm sorry, but I will have to amputate your leg." This all happened in the middle of the street, in the middle of the night. With that, the totally dependent man was taken into the hospital.

We set out, once more, in the van. The driver and his companion announced, "We're now going to another shelter." It was, we learned, still a long way away! The children had long since fallen asleep, the girl on her mother's lap and the boy clinging to the grill over the window. I opened his grasp and then held him in my arms until we arrived at the "shelter." Once there, we were promptly rejected for having arrived at 2:00 a.m. There was, you see, no doctor to check us in and accept us. We were refused entry. No one even opened the door. I asked a member of the staff, "Please, open the door to us. We were exhausted, especially the children." The person, however, inhumanely accepted no argument. Unbelievably, we were taken back to the first shelter, clear across the length of Mexico City. Arriving, the social worker there said only, "I am sorry, but you'll have to sleep here." When I asked where, she replied, "On the floor. Here, there are no beds."

To my question, "How can these children sleep on the floor?" she answered, "There is no other option."

With ill humor, she then allowed two small mattresses from along the wall to be offered to the children. There and then, the young mother lay down with her children. The grateful woman hugged her children who slept immediately after giving me a huge, innocent smile that I will always hold in my heart, "Thanks, Señora. Good night."

I offered God my humble gratitude and could feel His protective, comforting presence. Not surprisingly, I did not sleep a wink for the rest of the night, for I sat in a chair along the wall. Lights shone brightly and music blared all night. Through it all, I gleaned these things from my shared experience: faith and trust in God, self-reliance, compassion, the memory of children's innocence and smiles and, later, unconditional, helpful love.

After all this, I found people who offered help. Ironically, there were those in a local government office that gave me their time by listening and offering protection. One, Angelica, took me to the Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Sisters accepted me with love, respect and consideration, and they gave me the personal attention that I will never forget. They shared their home, their prayers, their food, and their daily life with me. After two weeks with the Missionary Sisters, I was offered a room at their shelter for elderly women where I now live, the Posada de San Jose. I am more peaceful now because I have a home and live in a safe, clean place. I am presently looking for a job and have every confidence that God will find something suitable for me. Thank you, Sisters, for practicing mercy: "*Let not mercy and truth forsake you: bind them about your neck; write them upon the table of your heart*" (Proverbs 3:3). †

Dear Sisters Dorothy and Bernard,

I have some exciting news to share with you: I am going to be baptized into the Church! I want you to know that your quiet and steady witness of faith is very powerful. Besides my father, you were the first persons I spent a lot of time around who had such a constant dialogue with God. Your frequent prayers and praises, God's steady flow of small graces, and your recognizing each as it came... this was eye opening for me as a way to live in constant awareness of and faith in God. I had never seen a religious life for myself before, and suddenly it was something that I wanted and that I could envision. My relationship with you was one of the first steps on my journey; nothing more would have happened without your simple and unassuming witness of living in the love of God. I want you to know how you have helped me turn to God in this way. I am grateful to God for our crossing paths and for opening this path before me.

Love, Jonathan

Sisters Dorothy and Bernard minister to circus communities as co-directors of Show People's Evangelization of Catechists (SPEC). Jonathan has been a participant in their ministry.



Diana and David Yost, pioneers of our monthly giving program, joined the Heart of God Society because in Diana's words, "We want to help the MSC Sisters and their missions. We believe it's an important thing to do."

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For information or to join, visit www.mscreading.org, call (610) 929-2802 or email cwhitmoyer@mscreading.org.

Love of music leads to new gig for Sister Chris

by Bruce R. Posten, Reading Eagle

Sister Chris Kotwicki of Laureldale began her music career as a 6-year-old banging pots and pot lids as if they were drums.

“My dad was always messing around with drums, and that’s where I picked up my interest in music,” said the 65-year-old Kotwicki, who recently was named the new director of the 30-member Berks Encore Horizon Singers choral group.

Working as a volunteer with Berks Encore’s Medicare Hotline, Kotwicki heard about the choral director job and opted to apply.

Kotwicki, a Missionary Sister of the Sacred Heart, steps into the shoes of musical veteran Betty Creary, a retired elementary school music teacher, who led the senior citizens chorus for 26 years.

While giving up her directorial duties, the octogenarian Creary plans to continue singing with the group.

Horizon Singers, with members who range in age from their 60s to their 90s, perform regularly for retirement communities, senior centers and churches, and in malls.

“My philosophy is that music should be fun,” Kotwicki said. “It’s the universal language whether you are young or old.”

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PHOTO COURTESY OF READING EAGLE: RYAN MCFADDEN

Sister Chris Kotwicki of Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, new director of the Berks Encore Horizon Singers, loves making music, even in her apartment building, Queen of Angels Apartments in Laureldale. Here she enjoys the company of her friend Valerie Phelps, the apartments’ property manager.

IN MEMORIAM



Sister Catherine Ann Galgoci, MSC
(Sister M. Jane) • 1920 - 2013

In the early 1900’s, Sister Catherine Ann’s parents came from Czechoslovakia and settled among other Slovak immigrants in the coal mining region of Pennsylvania. It was there in Lansford that Sister Catherine Ann first met the Missionary

Sisters of the Sacred Heart as her teachers in elementary school.

Sister Catherine Ann entered the aspirancy in 1934. After her novitiate, she began her long career in the field of health care by receiving her initial training as a nurse in our own Sacred Heart Hospital School of Nursing in Allentown and later her degree in nursing at the University of Dayton. A good number of her years were spent caring for sick children as the supervisor and clinical instructor in the pediatric department in Sacred Heart Hospital, Allentown. She had a special love

for children and some of the young patients that she nursed back to health remembered her each year on her birthday.

Sister Catherine Ann also used her excellent nursing and supervisory skills in Good Samaritan Hospital, Pottsville, Sacred Heart Hospital in Norristown, Mount Trexler Home in Limeport, St. Mary’s Hospital, Athens, Georgia and in our Motherhouse infirmary. In 1980 she became involved in pastoral care and continued to minister to the sick and elderly in our hospitals. From 1991-1997, she worked part time and served as receptionist in the short procedure unit of Sacred Heart Hospital, Allentown. Patients were happy and relieved to experience Sister’s kind and friendly manner as they came to the hospital for their treatments.

Sister Catherine Ann had a warm personality and was very friendly and outgoing. People naturally gravitated to her to be touched by her kindness and love. We are grateful for the many years that she lived among us and for the many people whose lives she touched. †



Sister M. Sophie
(Margaret Shina) • 1918 - 2013

Sister Sophie entered the aspirancy of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Reading, PA in 1937 and made her first profession in 1943. Although Sister Sophie dealt with frail health throughout her life, this did not keep her from being

a dedicated religious and engaging in very productive ministries. She was blessed with many gifts. After her novitiate, she studied dietary management and worked as a very creative dietitian in St. Mary’s Hospital in Athens, GA.

From there, she was transferred to Mt. Trexler in Limeport, PA where she first worked in the office and then did practical nursing in Limeport and in Good Samaritan Hospital in Pottsville. She also spent seven years in St. Joseph Health Resort in Wedron, IL. In 1965, she was asked to take over the kindergarten in St. Henry School in Philadelphia and later at Our Lady of Hungary in Northampton. Here again, she showed

her creative talents and resourcefulness as she worked with the little children in her care. After this assignment, she served as a homemaker in St. John’s in Haycock. During the summer months, Sister Sophie was asked to come to the novitiate to teach the novices the art of cooking and baking which she did superbly.

Sister Sophie has two sisters who are School Sisters of St. Francis. In the 1980s, she alternated with her two sisters in caring for their elderly mother. Their mother lived in Northampton, so Sister Sophie could continue to be a part of the local community at Our Lady of Hungary. Afterwards, Sister returned to the educational scene and served as a library aide at St. Henry’s and Our Lady of Hungary for three years. In 1992, Sister Sophie came to the Motherhouse to retire.

Sister Sophie had an outgoing and friendly nature. Her many talents and great adaptability enabled her to participate in a variety of ministries in which she embraced a broad array of people which included the very young, the sick, and the elderly. We are grateful for the many years that Sister Sophie lived among us and for the many people whose lives she touched. †

2012 MSC Sisters Donor Report

The MSC Sisters express joyful gratitude for all who support our mission. Each of your gifts, whether time, energy, treasure or prayer supports our mission to be God's Heart for others in the United States Province and around the world. Your generosity also enables us to care for ourselves as we age. Thank you for sharing your resources with us. Your gifts make a positive difference every day!

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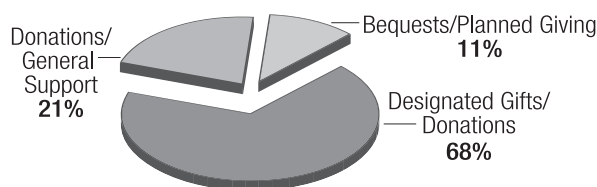
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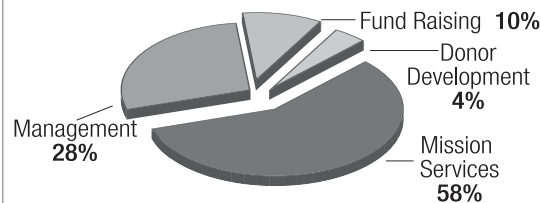
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The Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus wish to thank the Malvern Retreat House in Malvern, Pennsylvania for selecting the MSC Sisters as the recipient of their 2013 Malvern Retreat House Outstanding Service Award. MSC Sisters served a combined 236 years in various capacities at Malvern from 1923 until 1965. James Fitzsimmons, President of the Men of Malvern, states that “without the Sisters’ many years of service to thousands of retreatants, Malvern may not have survived the trying years during the Depression and WW II. According to the Awards Committee, “the contribution of our Sisters is legendary . . . and the men still

speak of the wonderful meals” we prepared. We Sisters are touched by this recognition and wish to thank the men of Malvern and their Laymen’s Retreat League for remembering and honoring us. According to Province Leader Sr. Mary Anne Bigos, “St. Joseph in the Hills, which was Malvern’s original name, was a place where the Sisters could carry out their mission to be the Heart of God for others and could experience the beauty of God’s creation and the desire of men to grow closer to their God.”

Pictured: Sr. Thoma provided hospitality services at Malvern during the 1940’s.



Malvern
 Retreat House

reflect, refresh, rejoice

Celebrating 100 years



“Thank Heaven”

... for little girls who grow up to be Missionary Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

How many of us recognize the first five words of this article's title? Better yet, how many of us know the name of the performer who sang these words in the 1950's and became a musical sensation? Chances are that the one hundred sixty guests at



Michael Pressimone, left, and his children Jon and Joanna perform “Thank Heaven” for the guests of our 2013 Spring into Mission benefit.

our April 7 *Spring into Mission* benefit banquet won't soon forget the name Maurice Chevalier and his song “Thank Heaven for Little Girls.” Why? Because our ever-creative duo of Mike Pressimone and his daughter Joanna performed their own rendition of Chevalier's song after realizing that the artist's last name coincidentally is the same as that of the Founder of the MSC Sisters,



Carol McGrade and Kathleen Casey, long-time teachers at Good Shepherd School, Camp Hill, accept the Founders' Legacy Award from Sr. Marianne Baker, MSC, on behalf of their school community.

Father Jules Chevalier. Mike, our Development Advisory Board Chair and Master of Ceremonies, announced himself to be the Sisters' Founder. He then began singing the familiar tune with new words emphasizing the missions of our MSC Sisters – French accent, top hat and cane included – while Joanna, acting as the voice of reason, informed “Maurice” that Jules

Chevalier was the true Founder. Much to his dismay, “Maurice” accepted the correction and “Jules” smoothly transitioned to the awards portion of the ceremony.

The Founders' Legacy Award, presented by the Sisters to the students, faculty and families of Good Shepherd School of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, recognized them for reflecting the vision and charm of the MSC Sisters. The MSC Sisters' Mission Partner Award, presented to Edward R. Solvibile, acknowledged Ed's loyal commitment to the spirituality and mission of the MSC Sisters. This year marks the third annual presentation of these awards through which the Sisters strive to spread the word about being the Heart of Christ for others by recognizing people and organizations who do so.

As if to emphasize the idea of being present for others, youth musician Jon Pressimone concluded the evening with a live concert featuring original music. Jon's talent wowed the audience and was the perfect ending to a celebration of life, mission and love.

The MSC Sisters express heartfelt appreciation to all who made *Spring into Mission 2013* a great success: attendees, SIM Committee Chair Mary Marino and all committee members, Michael Pressimone, Joanna Pressimone, Jon Pressimone and our various sponsors and in-kind donors. We look forward to *Spring into Mission 2014!* †



Sr. Mary Anne Bigos, MSC, presents Edward R. Solvibile with the Sisters' Mission Partner Award.

Mission Inspires Volunteers



Sr. Marie Janesch, center, enjoys a moment with Development Advisory Board members Regina Rinehimer, Tim Kolasa, Michael Pressimone and Rita Phillips following her “mission moment.” At the outset of each Board meeting, one of our Sisters shares stories of mission which inspire our volunteers to action on behalf of the MSC mission. Sr. Marie spoke of her many years in mission among the people of Namibia and her current ministry as Catholic Chaplain at Country Meadows in Wyomissing, PA. †



To receive Connections in email format only, email cwhitmoyer@mscreading.org with your request.

Sr. Chris *continued from page 4*

Working for nearly 30 years as a nurse in hospice care, Kotwicki began her educational career studying music at Misericordia University, Dallas, Luzerne County. She has a degree in music education and plays the organ, drums, accordion, clarinet and piano.

When she became a nun at the age of 21, Kotwicki said, she taught music for all grades, preschool to eighth, at Holy Guardian Angels parochial school before entering the nursing field.

As a nurse, she worked in a variety of Catholic-based facilities in Philadelphia, Montgomery and Berks counties.

“When I went into nursing, I basically stopped my music, with the exception of directing the sisters choir at Sacred Heart Villa,” Kotwicki said, referring to an assisted-living facility and convent in Laureldale.

An auto accident in 1997, when her car hydroplaned and hit a tree, resulted in injuries to her right foot, leg and arm and affected her fine motor skills.

“I still play the organ a little, but I have limited mobility in using the organ pedals,” she said.

But physical limitations have not dampened her appreciation for all kinds of music, which she described as “a great source of prayer for me.”

“I love working with people,” she said. “The only challenge I really see for myself is working with male voices to harmonize the basses and tenors. I really only ever worked with women and children before.”

Getting everyone to harmonize probably won't be an insurmountable hurdle.

“I love classical music,” she said. “But I'm a child of the 1960s. Elvis, The Beatles, rock 'n' roll and Motown: I like it all.” †



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Feast of the Sacred Heart *continued from page 1*

us from being filled with love. Let that love affect each word and gesture of our everyday lives. In this way, we will be true to our vocation as followers of Christ and lovers of His Sacred Heart.

Our founder, Father Jules Chevalier, once wrote: “To find meaning and happiness in our life, we must learn to believe in God's love for us and let ourselves be transformed by it.” I pray that each of us will be open to this transformation in our lives; only then can we fully experience the depth of love and relationship which Christ emulates for each of us. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be loved everywhere, now and forever. †

***Congratulations to our 2013 Jubilee Sisters...
whose combined years in mission total 435...and still counting!***



From left to right: Sr. Nanette Wisser (60th), Sr. Noreen Quigley (60th), Sr. Mary Anne Bigos (50th), Sr. Angela Tiencken (65th), Sr. Irene Turek (65th), Sr. Bernice Domitrovitz (65th), Sr. Helen Papan (70th).



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