



WHISPERS OF THE SPIRIT

Wishing all our friends & readers a truly blessed

Christmas



THE MISSION CONGREGATION OF THE SERVANTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Across time and space...beyond borders



Reflection by Trish Thornthwaite

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence 'must not be contrived but found, uncovered'.

Laudato Si' – 225

Laudato Si' – On Care for our Common Home

As we prepare to celebrate the great mystery of “God with us”, the recent Encyclical from Pope Francis, *Laudato Si' – On Care for our Common Home*, provides rich insights.

Two contemporary events also provide context for our reflections. The first is the current gathering of world leaders in Paris for the UN Climate Change Conference, which seems to have been specifically targeted by the timing of the Encyclical. And the second is the millions of refugees flooding developed countries the world over which begs us to examine our position towards domination and exclusion – both of which are major themes of the Encyclical.

Perhaps in this season we could take just three aspects from the richness of the Pope’s message – his call to simplicity of life, our use of technology, and the recognition of the connectedness of all creation.

Pope Francis advocates a “return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate small things... and not succumb to sadness for what we lack” (LS 222). Thus we can be part of the change leading to both greater “integrity of ecosystems” and the “integrity of human life” (LS 224). The Encyclical reminds us a number of times of the power and the responsibility we have as consumers.

While acknowledging the great benefits of scientific and technological advances, the Pope also highlights the trap many of us tend to fall into – using technology in ways that remove us from direct contact with creation and from direct experiences with other people.

Our ‘throwaway culture’ and thirst for the latest craze can also have the effects of limiting personal creativity and reducing the richness of cultural diversity. He calls us to broaden our vision, to ‘limit and direct’ our use of technology so that we contribute to genuine progress that is “healthier, more human, more social and more integral” (LS 112).

After an examination of our biblical creation stories, the Encyclical confirms that humans are called to care for and nurture creation. The relationship of ‘domination’ has led to unbridled and unsustainable exploitation, the benefits of which are only available to a minority. Moreover, our current understanding of natural systems leads us to acknowledge that all things are connected, and each of us is a part of the web of creation. Ecosystems provide us with a model that could profitably inform all our social, political and even our economic systems.

Then, in wonderful simplicity, the Pope holds up St Francis of Assisi as the exemplar of a life that “shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (LS 10).

And so our crib scenes can take on a new energy and significance this year in the light of *Laudato Si'* and our reflections on caring for our common home.

He comes, not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours.

Laudato Si' – 236



Understanding mission in Australia



In October 2015, I was visiting Australia after a quarter of a century...

Much water has flowed under the bridge since then. There have been changes in almost every possible area and to such an extent that many places and situations were unrecognisable to me.

Many older sisters whom I had known had passed away, and others have acquired a new meaning and relevance for their religious missionary vocation.

Simultaneously, with the changes in the society and church, there have also been changes in the understanding of mission, religious missionary life and community.

Defending and promoting life in all its forms

Mission is making known the love of God and communicating hope to our brothers and sisters in our collective journey towards the Kingdom. Down the years the SSpS have understood their mission as one of defending and promoting life in all its forms and at all its stages.

This consistent stance for life has taken on diverse forms in different contexts. SSpS mission in Australia embraces two significant ends of life's journey – the youthful formative years, and the older, mature years.

The Province of Spiritus Caritatis has continued to render valuable service of welcoming and educating our young sisters from different parts of the world and providing suitable facilities for their ongoing formation and education.

Mission in Australia

In Australia, mission is increasingly becoming the communication of God's love through inclusion, hospitality, acceptance, integration and the celebration of diversity. It bears testimony, through its multicultural living, to the universality and richness of the Kingdom of God in the diversity of cultures.

Our life-promoting and compassionate mission in Australia finds its truest expression in the care we give to the sick and the elderly by accompanying them in their journey towards the fulfilment of their lives.

We carry out this mission by providing suitable physical and spiritual ambience for a more dignified life, by celebrating together the wisdom and maturity of old age and by facilitating the process of a gradual letting go.

In carrying out this mission, Australia is specially blessed with committed and capable laity who have imbibed our spirituality, charism, and understanding of mission.

This two-fold mission of care and nurture to the young as well as to the older members in collaborative ministry fully resonates with the congregational direction of building communion and widening the circle to embrace life in its manifold expressions.

Sr Mary John SSpS
Assistant Congregational Leader



Mission to spread the fragrance of divine energy



Sr. Cini George has only one mission — to incense the world with positive energy!

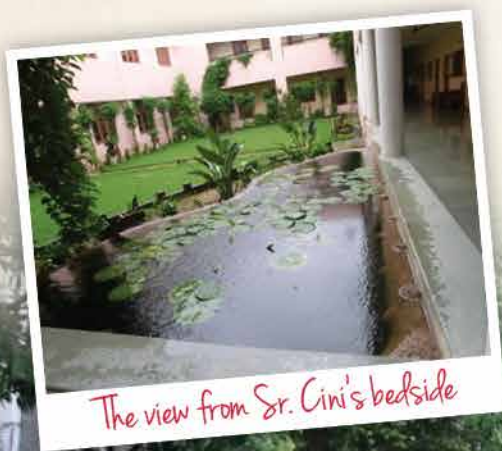
The 38-year-old sister is a member of the Congregation of Missionary Sisters

Servants of the Holy Spirit

and was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age 27.

Later, it dawned on her that cosmic energy can transform and retransform all that is in it. This realisation convinced her about the need to spread positive energy throughout the world.

Confined to bed since April 2013, the ever-smiling nun is working on three books, including two novels. She works on a laptop placed on a small moveable multipurpose flat table. The laptop is her good friend. It acts as a note book, television and spiritual assistant. She is paralysed below her waist but has sensation there. Her hands have gone weak so she uses a speech recognition program to give the final touches to her unfinished books. None of these handicaps can dampen her spirit in living her vocation in its fullness. She is currently staying at the headquarters of the Congregation's Central Indian province at Indore, the commercial capital of the central Indian State of Madhya Pradesh.



The view from Sr. Cini's bedside

Here she shares her struggles and mission...

How can you look so cheerful?

You know there is no reason for me to be unhappy as I understand God wants me to make whatever contribution I have to make. It is the will of God and I have accepted it happily. There is no reason for me to be otherwise. I am a missionary — in bed or on foot. To be a missionary for me is to become a cheerful giver. As for me, I live my call in the firm belief that the one who called me is faithful and all that I need is to remain open to him.

Besides, the knowledge that I am a passing reality on this earth consoles me. Also my disease — it will also pass — either by itself or with my body. It is a fact, a truth. The battle of life continues either with MS or without MS. Awareness of this reality liberates me from the clutches of all unnecessary desires. You know desire is the root cause of all sufferings, even Lord Gautama Buddha has said it.

Have you never felt unhappy after being confined to bed?

No — no, not like that. I had lots of struggles accepting my disease. In the first three months it was very tough for me to accept that I lost my capability to walk. I just could not imagine a life confined to a bed. [Pointing out to a portrait of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the wall facing her], I prayed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and gradually I realised that he suffered more than me, and compared to his suffering [crucifixion], mine is nothing. Once I got this realisation, I was never sick-minded and disappointed. Obviously, my body is sick.

Now, I am happy in whatever position I am. All these struggles helped me to grow more serene. I pray daily to Jesus to help me continue to live my vision, to reflect my Jesus' love and compassion. I know he loves me dearly. When I am alone I talk to Jesus just like friends. My prayer too is simple conversation with him. He is my constant companion. I hear his voice especially through the word of God.

I know there are many more people who suffer much more than I do. The comforts that I enjoy — an air-conditioned room, two women caretakers, a comfortable bed — give me no reason to say that I suffer. It would be a sin if I said so.



What is so special about it, the portrait of the Sacred Heart?

This portrait has been with me since I joined the convent [in June 1994]. It is a constant companion and I used to share all my worries and problems with it. When I am alone I always talk to the Sacred Heart. Jesus is my constant companion.

You say that your mission is to spread positive energy in the world. What motivated you to undertake such a mission?

There are both positive and negative energies in the world. The negativity is a passing phenomenon, but the positivity is permanent, as it is God himself. Therefore, spreading positivity is nothing but reaching the love of Christ to others. I know I will fade away, but the positivity I leave behind will continue to exist even after my death. Jesus, too, did the same thing. He died on a cross, and his message of love and compassion still continue to influence millions of people. Obviously, I cannot do what Jesus did.

You see, today's world is filled with the filth of greed, licentiousness, aggression, religious fanaticism and other evil trends. I believe the whole cosmos is one and we are all interconnected with breath that we breathe. When I send positive energy, someone somewhere might receive grace from it.

How do you carry out your mission?

Yes, it is true I cannot walk anymore and go to people. But I can use technology. I have over 300 friends on Facebook. I am also connected to so many people through my mobile [phone]. People call up and ask me for prayers. I also pray for terrorists and others creating trouble in the world. I have also written three books to convey my messages.

Until my finger movements got restricted I edited our house magazine "Rays," and made small statues with clay and hay and even wrote poems and articles.

Could you talk about finding out you were sick?

It was in April 2005. As a junior nun I was working in one of our schools in Rajkot, Gujarat state [in western India] as an accountant. I gradually developed symptoms of numbness and burning sensation on my legs.



Initially, I did not take it seriously and continued my activities. Further, I began to lose my balance and suffer sleeplessness. I had a fall that tore some ligaments in my right ankle. I was asked to rest for three months. I then developed numbness below the neck and was taken to our own hospital. There, the doctors diagnosed me with MS.

How did you react?

Obviously I was shocked and it took time for me to accept. I was admitted and administered steroids. There I felt loneliness, and the four walls became my friends, though the sisters often visited me. The stillness of the walls began to talk to me, I cried and then I could enter into a deeper self and I surrendered. *In April 2008 I took my final profession.*

What did you do then?

I was transferred to Dharampuri in Madhya Pradesh. It was a village that gave me lot of life and meaning to my missionary life. I used to teach in the school and took tuition for students. I also visited families. As my health deteriorated slowly I returned to Indore.

I did a course on guidance and counselling [from an open university] and was appointed to St Raphael Primary School in Indore as counsellor. After a year I began using a walker.

What is your message for society?

I deeply wish that we all realise that 'we' are not just 'persons' but persons with immense power to create and recreate our own environment. Yes, nothing, not even our vulnerable body, can stop us from living joyfully our commitment except 'we' ourselves. Another factor we ought to remember is – it's not sympathy a patient needs, but empathy.



Sr Sponsa Celebrating my Diamond Jubilee

As I reflect and celebrate 60 years of Consecrated life I am very grateful to God who has journeyed with me over the past years.

After completing my Nursing Training I entered in Steyl in 1953. In 1957 I was appointed to Australia and so my long association with Holy Spirit Hospital.

I am especially grateful for the many years as a nurse at Holy Spirit Hospital and my mission to serve the sick. Over this time I have made many friends with the patients, relatives, doctors and my co-workers.

I have and continue to keep contact with many during these years. I thank God for my many friends.

Sister Sponsa

*Father I thank you
that you have heard me.
Yes, I know you always
hear me.*

John 11:41-42

Messages of gratitude from former patients...

In September 1982, I was operated on in the Holy Spirit Hospital, Wickham Terrace for a fairly serious melanoma cancer.

Sr. Sponsa was in charge of the ward I was in. She was a wonderful, caring and efficient nurse. A couple of days after the surgery, the surgeon examined me and my chart and said: "I think we might let you go home today."

Sr. Sponsa, who accompanied him then said "No, not today and possibly not tomorrow."

"Oh, come on sister, fair go," I said.

"Well... you'll go back to Nudgee (I was principal at the time and we were on term holidays) and there will be nobody there to look after you."

Of course, the doctor remarked – "Well now you know who's boss here!"

What a caring thoughtful person she was!

Vince Connors CFC

My Congratulations to Sister Sponsa on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of her vows as a Holy Spirit Missionary Sister!

I owe a great debt of gratitude to her for caring for me in the 'old' Holy Spirit Hospital on Wickham Terrace in the late 1970s. Matters were serious but with her guidance and the prayers of many I pulled through.

I thank her for her generous caring service for so many over the years. May the good Lord bless her and keep her all her days.

Brother Brian Steele CFC



Sister Donna's journey

At this time of my 60 year Jubilee of vows, I can easily ask – “Where have the years gone?” It is not so hard to recall those days early in the 50s when I came to begin my life with the Sisters at Aspley...

There were many Sisters of different nationalities – some had suffered as prisoners of war in New Guinea, some were expelled from Communist China, some had come from the States to assist the newly formed region in Australia but all had a earnest intent to welcome us young people into their midst. We were given all the help we needed and I am grateful for these many prayerful women who received us so generously.

Journeying to Europe

It was certainly not an easy time (pre-Vatican 2). But I thank God for such people as Sister Florisita in the novitiate, Sister Loraine at Zillmere, Sister Edith and Sister Regine at the hospital for their special care during my early formation and nurses training. With these people behind me I was asked to go with my companion, Sister Bernadette Edgecombe, to our motherhouse in Steyl, the Netherlands to prepare for our final commitment. This certainly widened our horizons of the worldwide community of Missionary Sisters as we came in touch with many more in Rome, Germany and Holland. The pronouncement of our vows for life was sincere, special and in German!

From Australia to Rome – to Africa!

On my return to Australia, I was asked to complete my midwifery certificate and then to take over the nursing school under the tutelage of ailing Sister Edith.

This latter was my task for the next 10 years when a surprise change happened and I found my way to Rome being asked to come on a study tour as there was something in Africa!

This turned out to be a request to go and set up a nursing school in Nkawkaw, Ghana West Africa! Oh how I can thank those who assisted me to prepare, to collect teaching aids etc. before I landed in Ghana in early February 1975.

My next 33 years are a special part of my treasures in my religious journey. The experiences of the wonderful African people, my colleagues, students and the many sisters of different nationalities are indeed very dear to me. These times involved political unrest with many attempted and successful coups with soldiers and guns everywhere; there were times of severe drought and hunger but through it all we were protected and happy.

After gaining a scholarship for my assistant Angelina Amponsah for her Master's Degree, it was time for her to take over the Nursing College – and continue training for the rural people.

To Rome and the USA – then back to Africa!

In 1996, I was able to take a sabbatical with courses in Rome and in the USA and then follow a request to return to Ghana and lead the Institute for Continuing Formation (ICF) which was under the Religious Major Superiors of Ghana for ongoing formation for both religious men and women.

Again, what a special privilege this was to help many young religious people from all over Africa to continue their formation or to refresh themselves by the courses ICF provided.

A successor for me was found when I was 75 (possibly a good time to retire!)... “But please go and help in the novitiate and then move to the new Hostel for students going to the Catholic University in Sunyani.”

After a few years it was time again for home leave and indeed a time to retire.

Looking back I can only be so grateful to God, to my family who supported me, to the Sisters who accompanied me, to my colleagues and students for the love and trust they have shown along the way.

A special memory comes to mind at this time. It was the words of a Bishop when he visited our Nursing College...

“Thank you, Sister! When you are old and can't do anything else there will be hundreds of nurses serving the sick with the dedication you came to offer.”

Hopefully this is so. Thank you Lord and to all who supported me through the entire journey.

Sister Donna



Sr. Rosmina (Patricia) Ellis SSpS

28.05.1931 – 03.05.2015

*May the Holy Triune God live in our hearts
and in the hearts of all people!*

Sr. Rosmina was born on 28th May in 1931, in Richmond, Victoria, the third child of Robert and Kathleen Ellis. She had three Sisters, Moya, Kathleen and Lucille and one brother, Robert. Rosmina's father was an esteemed architect who designed some of the Catholic Churches in Melbourne, Victoria.

As a child of seven she already had a burning desire to go to India and care for the babies. This initial fire of her vocation began to burn when she saw and listened to the St John of God brothers who worked in the Northern Territory among the Aboriginal brothers and sisters. She wanted to be a missionary like them and wanted to live in close union with the Lord and to love Him more. So she joined the Holy Spirit Sisters in 1949 after completing her elementary education and made her first vows in 1952. Those of us who know her can truly testify that she kept alive her initial dream all through her life and even until the last moment.

*As Pope Francis says...
"Mission is at once a passion
for Jesus and a passion
for His people".*

She went to India as a missionary in 1956 and worked there for almost 35 years and loved every minute "in her beloved India". One of the Sisters from India wrote that she knew her as a vibrant missionary who lived and loved life to the full. She was 'always there' for others, especially the sick, the leprosy patients, and all those in any kind

of trouble. She had a big heart for everyone regardless of their background or social status. Having become a Registered Nurse, she had plenty of opportunities to live the dream she had as a 7-year-old, to look after the babies as a missionary. Once on a Christmas Eve she even had the joy of delivering a baby by the road side, helped by the lights of her car.

She was multi-talented. When we needed a carpenter she was there with tools, when we needed a painter she was there with her brushes and paint, when we needed a choir master or a composer she was there with her music notes, either with her guitar or violin and her melodious voice. When we needed a healer she was there with her pranic healing, when we needed someone to lighten up our day she was there with her joke books and unique sense of humour and funny facial expressions. When we needed a photographer, she was there with her camera and when we needed a helper, of course, she was there with her ever ready helping hand and heart.

Rosmina came back to Australia after she was diagnosed with cancer around 20 years ago. Still she continued to help out with the Parish work in East Kew while helping the Sisters with their English lessons. Being a fighter she wanted to prove and did prove that the doctors were wrong and that God was the true healer. So she prayed and continued to use alternative medicine. But around six months ago she suffered a relapse. Even in her last days, she did not stop reaching out to others who were in need of any help.

She was always very caring and compassionate bringing healing, loving presence and hope of the Lord to all by her deep listening and sensitivity to their needs. She also took up a great ministry of accompanying the residents who were dying and were in the palliative care. She had something beautiful to say or do for the other residents, Sisters and staff and all those who came to visit her. She was indeed a very prayerful person and inspired others to do the same.

She did not want anyone to know about her suffering or pain but tried to focus her wholehearted attention on the needs of others. Sadly for us, but happily for her she entered into the heavenly kingdom very peacefully on 3rd May. Today we thank our God for gifting our Congregation especially the Australian and Indian Provinces and each of us with the person of Rosmina for almost 84 years.

Mass of Thanksgiving

Sr. Rosmina's Mass of Thanksgiving was held on 8 May 2015. Many friends from Brisbane and Melbourne remembered her with gratitude as they shared their stories of life, friendship and experiences with Rosmina.

We pray that we may become more aware of the presence of the Holy Triune God in our own hearts and in the hearts of all people as it truly did in hers.

*Sr. Rosmina, we have been
blessed by your life and
presence. We will truly
miss you! Rest in peace.*