

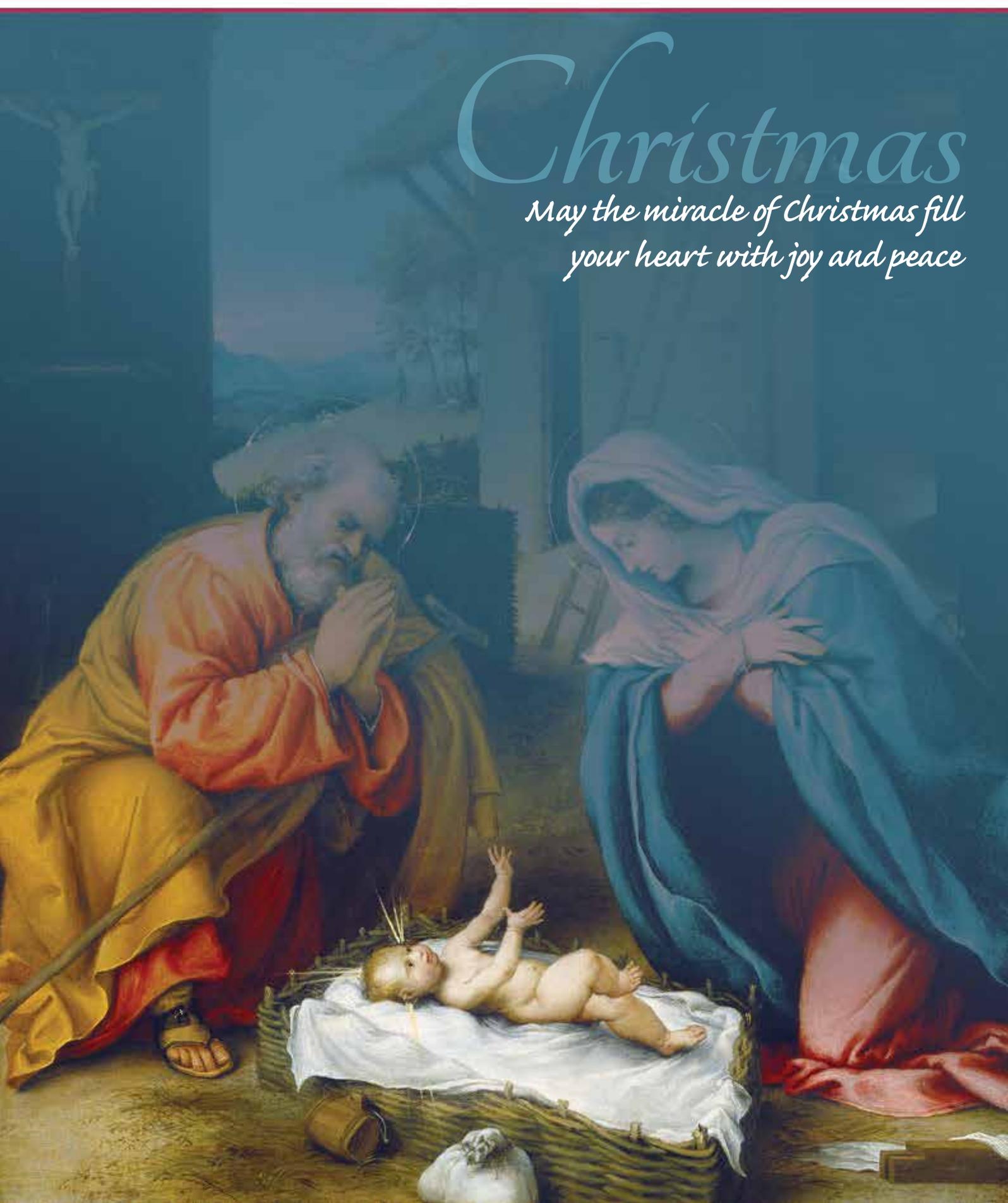


WHISPERS OF THE SPIRIT

CHRISTMAS 2016

Christmas

*May the miracle of Christmas fill
your heart with joy and peace*

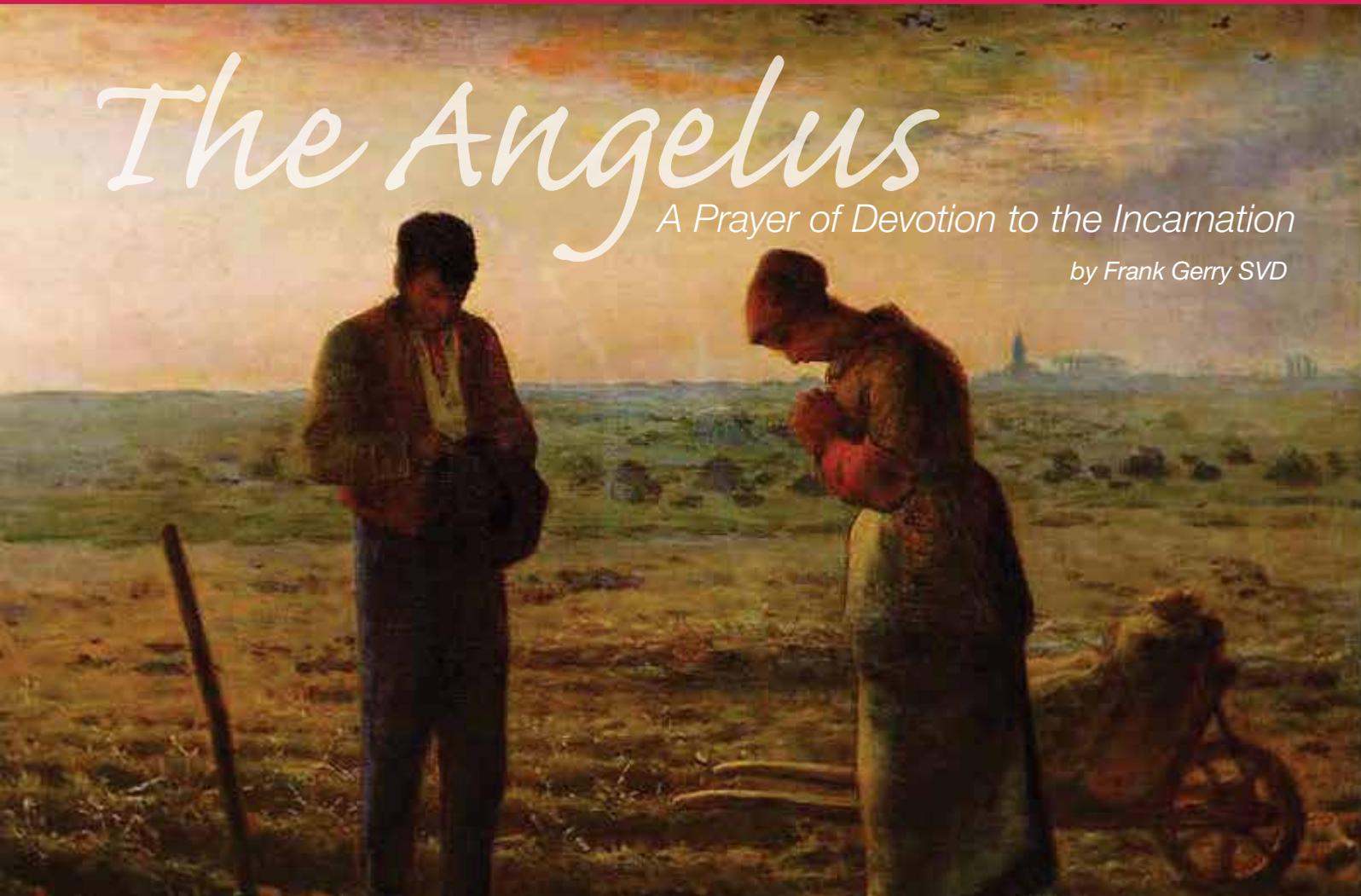




The Angelus

A Prayer of Devotion to the Incarnation

by Frank Gerry SVD



- V. *The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.*
- R. *And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.
Hail Mary, full of grace, The Lord is with Thee;
Blessed art thou among women,
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners,
Now and at the hour of our death.
Amen.*
- V. *Behold the handmaid of the Lord.*
- R. *Be it done unto me according to thy word.
Hail Mary, etc.*
- V. *And the Word was made Flesh.*
- R. *And dwelt among us. Hail Mary, etc.*
- V. *Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.*
- R. *That we may be made worthy of the promises
of Christ.*

Let us pray

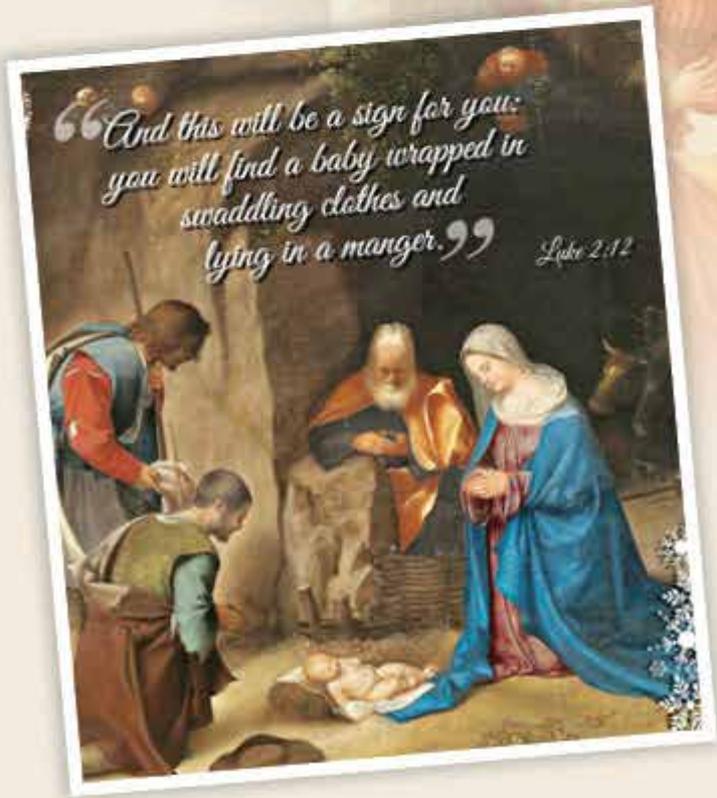
Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

The Angelus (L'Angelus) is a famous oil painting by French painter Jean-François Millet, which was completed in 1859.

From the church spire in the background, *The Angelus* bell rings out, calling the faithful to the prayer. In the field, two humble farmers are bowed over a basket of potatoes, paying homage to our Lord and His Blessed Mother in a meditative prayer that reverently recalls the Mystery of the Incarnation.

The prayer includes verses from the Gospel with the response of the Hail Mary, His Incarnation as the Word entered the World. Its name comes from the opening Latin words *Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariæ*.

This wonderful prayer evolved from a recitation of three Hail Mary's following an evening bell around the 12th Century to its present form (with morning and midday recitations) in the 16th Century.



As we prepare to celebrate the Mystery of the Incarnation this Christmas, this simple but beautiful prayer would foster within us, with the help of Mary, a real openness to the Grace of this Great Feast.

Childhood memories

As a boy, I remember the bells of St. Stephen's Cathedral Brisbane ringing out the call to prayer, morning, noon, and evening. And I remember my father stopping from what he was doing, like the man in the painting, to pray *The Angelus*. As a matter of fact, he learnt that prayer as a twelve-year-old student at St. James Christian Brothers' School, Brisbane, and he was faithful to that practice till the day he died.

Although *The Angelus* has been traditionally said three times daily, at 6.00am, noon and 6.00pm, you can pray it at anytime! The Regina Coeli prayer replaces *The Angelus* during the Easter season.

The relevance *The Angelus* prayer

The Angelus reminds us of the Annunciation (shown in this famous rendition by Fra Angelico), when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary with great if startling news!

As we read Luke's Gospel, 1:26-38, God wished Mary to be the mother of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Angelus pays tribute to a crucial aspect of Mary's role in the Incarnation, when it quotes from Luke's Gospel "be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

This wonderful event could not have happened without her consent, without what is known as her fiat. By saying "yes" to God in allowing herself to become His mother, she showed us the ultimate example of trust in our Creator!

Speaking of God's word, *The Angelus* completes its short summary of the Incarnation with the moving reference to our Lord from John's Gospel:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

St. Bernard noted that our Lord came to show us His love so that He might then experience ours.



“Halo Halo”

I have been 10 months here in the Trinity Province, Philippines South, and my experience is somewhat like “Halo Halo” – a colourful dessert composed of many different ingredients, a delicacy that every Filipino knows and enjoys!



Beginning my travels

Upon arrival in Cebu, where the Provincial House is located, I spent three weeks for my orientation with our Sisters. I was introduced to the country and some of the cultural aspects of the Filipino people.

From Cebu, I transferred to another island (Tacloban), an almost six-hour trip by sea and land. Our community consisted of two Filipinos, an Indian and myself.

I spent almost eight months there and my pastoral outreach involved five days/week working as a volunteer nurse in the Haemodialysis Unit. It was a great opportunity for me to nurse those undergoing Haemodialysis treatment and be part of their journey.

The majority of patients receive treatment 2–3 times each week – costing them around 61000 pesos per month. Some travel for four hours to be dialysed for four hours.

I was touched by the hospitality and generosity of the Filipinos. Every Saturday I joined Sr. Marie Claire to visit 150 children for whom we provide financial assistance and many of whom are survivors of typhoon Yolounda.

We pray the rosary together followed by community work (planting vegetables and cleaning our surroundings).

The beautiful smiles and the simplicity of these children are so contagious that no one will ever know the struggles of each child.

On 20 May, I said goodbye to my friends and Sisters in Tacloban community and was ready to greet new friends and Sisters in Tagbilaran, Bohol, another nine hours of travel by land and sea!

Bohol SSps community

The Bohol SSps community is composed of three students from Africa and China, two novices from PNG and Philippines for exposure, myself and another African as a junior sister for CCME and three local Sisters. One of them is Sr. Mila, who is our community leader, Holy Spirit School Director and Junior Sisters’ Directress. It is the most international community in the whole of the province.



All in all, I can say that I am really grateful for the opportunity to experience our life and mission as an SSpS in the Philippines.

I know from experience that there are different challenges to be faced in life. However, the consolation and peace come when I am deeply aware of my human limitations and entrust all my worries and fears in the mighty hands of God.



My current pastoral outreach involves three days of working with two laity in the JPIC/Wings (Women interacting in New Growth). It is the mission arm of the Holy Spirit School.

The project focuses on advocating and educating children and women about their rights and most importantly, raising awareness on the issues of human trafficking.

We have a Sine Mobile with visual aids inside that we use in our advocacy work in different schools and municipal halls of those who are interested. We trained our Year 8–11 students who are members of the Peer Advocacy Group and also join us in facilitating workshops in our school visits. This is truly an eye opener for me and I feel so blessed to be part of this mission that God has entrusted to us.

Bohol Crisis Intervention Centre

I also spend one day each week in the Bohol Crisis Intervention Centre where we accommodate girls aged 18 years and below who are victims of rape and sexual abuse, mostly incest cases. At present we have a total of 30 young women and girls, the youngest only two years old. While waiting for their court hearing, these women and young girls are helped psychologically and also given education and training in home management skills.

Though bruised and broken, the beauty manifested in their artwork, creativity, smiles and faith always amaze me. We play music and sing together in English, Visayan and even in Fijian. The little guitar skills I learnt in my Novitiate have been an instrument of reaching out and healing to these children through music, thanks to Sr. Elizabeth Hariyanti. I teach them English and in return they teach me the local language. We play volleyball and badminton together and even share a little food we have. At times, I accompany them to their court hearing to offer my support and assurance. For me, it is like the Eucharist come alive (being in communion with the broken body of Christ). The language differences are not a barrier anymore for love is the language spoken and understood by many through actions in the absence of words.

Wednesdays in a orphanage

Every Wednesday I spend at an Orphanage founded by one of our ex-SSpS from this island. We have 22 children of varying ages from two months to 15 years. I love them and sometimes find it difficult to leave them.

My 'spare' time is spent with community commitments and helping our student Sisters with their assignments and English reading, pronunciation and spelling.



All is well through God's grace and mercy. Let us continue to pray for God's mission to flourish through our selfless service and prayers.

In love of the Triune God.

Sr. Iva SSpS



OUR LATEST

Sr. Veronika Theresia Rackova SSpS

08.01.1958 – 20.05.2016

My memories of Sr. Veronika

I met Sister Veronika for the first time when I was 24 and I was discerning my vocation to religious missionary life. She was at that time Provincial of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters in Slovakia.

I still remember that first meeting. I was impressed by her intelligence, her joyful and very energetic personality. Our meeting went well and after a few months I received permission from her to join the Congregation. She had been my Provincial Leader for five years before she left for South Sudan Mission. I will always remember her as a “bundle of energy” and a “sunshine” sister.

I could not believe it when I received the very sad news in May this year about her sudden death. I still think it may be some mistake. Surely this vibrant, loving and committed woman can't be simply shot by someone. Sr. Veronika so loved the South Sudanese people that she risked her own life to journey with them. It seems that this new country needs a martyr like Veronika. She is with us and the loving memory of her will always be in our hearts.

Sr. Veronika's life and mission

Sr. Veronika was born in January 1958 as the youngest sibling of her brother Peter and sister Paula. After she finished her medical studies at the Charles University in Prague she decided to enter Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters in Slovakia – even though it was a time of communist rule. After her first few years of formation she escaped Czechoslovakia and finished her formation years in Germany, Holland and Austria. She professed her final vows in 1994 in Germany.

Her first mission appointment was to Indonesia where she waited for her visa. After she wasn't granted visa to continue in Indonesia her mission mandate was changed to Ghana, Africa. She had worked there for seven years as a doctor. This is where she came to love the African continent and its people.

From Ghana she went to Ireland to update her studies and after two years of studies she was elected as a new Provincial for the Slovak province of the Holy Spirit Sisters. She had served there for six years as a Provincial Leader. After her term was over she was assigned to join two Sisters in our new mission in Yei, South Sudan.



From 2010, she was a pioneer missionary there, working as a doctor. She helped people physically as well as spiritually in their suffering and their uncertainty.

Her life was cut short on Pentecost Sunday night 16 May 2016. She was on the way from an emergency call from the hospital when she was attacked by a group of soldiers. She was shot several times and in spite of the efforts of medical staff in Yei, South Sudan, as well as in Kenya, she passed away a few days later on 20 May 2016.

May her soul rest in eternal repose and that South Sudan will one day be blessed with Peace and Unity.

Sr. Jana SSpS



MARTYR

A Tribute to Sr. Veronika

"This is my body broken for you"

Poem by Sr. Maria Fe Divino, SSps (Ethiopia)

*You share in the mission of the crucified
 "This is my body broken for you"
 As broken loaves did feed a multitude...
 As broken alabaster jar perfumed a crowded room...
 As a broken net did a token of a great catch...
 As a broken roof admits palsied limbs to Christ...
 Then shall not your broken missioned life?
 Have in God's eyes the widest mission yet
 The mission of minting for those who go the purchase price of souls
 In communion you will always be part of the life we consecrate
 A life hidden yet truly blessed!
 Ours maybe a plastic cross but yours like Christ is wood!
 Into Christ's hands we commend your life.
 Help us commend our life too.*





Eat Pray Love

My Indian journey...

Daniele Doyle, CEO of Holy Spirit Northside Private Hospital, recently travelled to India to see first-hand the amazing work of our Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters. Here is her account of her journey...



When I started this extraordinary journey I never imagined I would be given the opportunity to eat some of the finest Indian food in convents throughout India!

The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters (HSMS) embodied the practice of hospitality as I was lovingly welcomed into their lives, learning about their culture, sharing their meals and witnessing their work in the name of the Holy Spirit.



My travelling companion, Sr. Sarita

I was privileged to travel with Sr. Sarita Kurikattil (the Provincial leader of the HSMS), our journey beginning with the flight from Brisbane to India. This was a special time, for as each hour passed I was learning more about this resilient and deeply spiritual woman. I reflected on how we were from very different backgrounds, sharing life stories that have shaped our destiny, firstly as women, and secondly as leaders in Catholic Ministry.

As we travelled into the night, talking, laughing and sharing I realised that Sarita was going to be a lifelong friend. Her ease and gentle manner reminded me of my college days where there were no barriers to exploring friendships, drawing the best strengths from each other was a natural path to deep connection, trust and personal growth.

As we travelled into the night, talking, laughing and sharing I realised that Sarita was going to be a lifelong friend.



First stop – Delhi

Back on route, our first stop was Delhi where we were greeted warmly by Sr. Nirmala and the young Sisters who shared a community for the purpose of studying, either nursing or education.

Whilst in Delhi we took time out to see the marvels of the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Agra, such amazing architecture and so reflective of the complex and rich culture of India!



A family dedicated to our Lord

I learnt of her love and devotion to her late mother, aging father, and how she grew up in a family of seven siblings, five of them in religious life.

I digress from the sequence of our journey to share my stay with Sarita's family in Kerala. I enjoyed overwhelming hospitality from her brothers, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, aunts and uncles; sharing great food, conversation and prayer.

The time spent with this beautiful family was one of my most precious memories.

Sarita's brother, Father Alex, a Claretian Priest working in Kerala, took us into the mountains where he shared his inspiring missionary work – helping the poor and vulnerable suffering mental health issues, people who otherwise would be homeless and totally deprived of human dignity.



Next stop – Haflong and finally meeting Sr. Berndetta

We landed at Guwahati Airport to a heartfelt greeting from Sr. Alphonsa and Sr. Berndetta. At long last, after many years of correspondence I finally met Sr. Berndetta! She is truly an amazing woman with a huge vision – a pocket rocket whose energy, vitality and sense of adventure was palpable.

We travelled from Guwahati to Haflong, a long road trip of approximately six hours, traversing difficult terrain and rugged dirt roads due to the recent monsoon season.



Holy Spirit Hospital Haflong

It was in Haflong I witnessed first-hand the vital work of the Holy Spirit Sisters under the relentless drive of Sr. Berndetta.

Haflong in Assam State is one of the poorest regions in India. A community of rich tribal diversity and culture however troubled for many years by ethnic conflicts. Since 2009, there has been peace, albeit a fragile balance supported by an Army presence, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and Missionary involvement, all with a unified goal to reach healthcare, education and services to the remotest areas in India.

The Haflong Hospital commenced in 2004, in a remodelled Don Bosco (Salesians of Don Bosco) building.

It is important to understand that the Haflong Hospital was not purpose-built and therefore has limitations to what is now needed for a growing community requiring more complex health care.



Collaboration with the Army and other NGOs

The Haflong Hospital serves the local people with a vital secondary care multispecialty service, and in collaboration with the Army and other NGOs delivers primary healthcare clinics in very remote parts of the jungle in north-eastern India. I had the opportunity to visit one of the community clinics and witnessed first-hand this wonderful collaboration of service between the Army and the HSMS.



Empowering women through nursing education

Another important aspect of the Sisters' work is empowering women through nursing education giving opportunities for employment to tribal woman.

The school of nursing was commenced by the Sisters in September 2014. The nursing school is passionately led by Sr. Juliana with the first intake of nurses graduating in September 2016. The approval to commence a nursing school in 2014 came with the condition to have a building exclusively for nursing education by August 2017.



New construction

The existing hospital structure is sufficient for the school of nursing although grossly inadequate and obsolete for a hospital. Therefore a new construction for a 100-bed tertiary care multi-specialty hospital was imperative, and development commenced in October 2015.

Unfortunately there is a need for more funds to complete the new hospital project in order to sustain this vulnerable community with much needed health care.



Travelling in the Holy Spirit Hospital Ambulance

I have fond memories of long days travelling in the jungle along rugged dirt roads in the Holy Spirit Hospital Ambulance, seeing elephants, buffalo and wildlife along the way.

During our travels there were many animated stories told by Sr. Berndetta followed by peals of laughter from all of us! Sr. Berndetta's infectious sense of humour was contagious, and even when there were tough times (like when we got lost looking for the Don Bosco Museum, only to arrive at closing time, after travelling for many long hours) we were all still laughing!

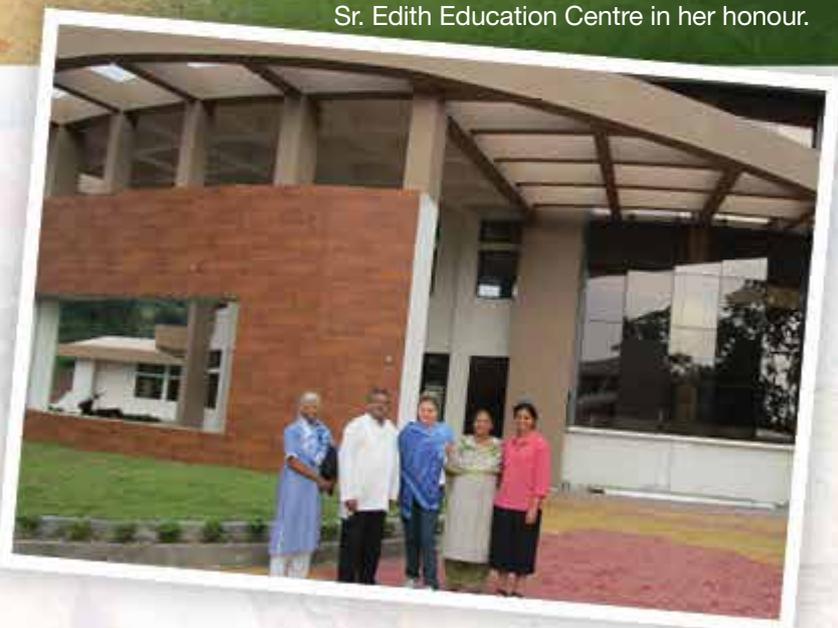
One of the most precious stories was Sr. Berndetta's recount of her training days at the Holy Spirit Hospital, Wickham Terrace Brisbane, where she trained under Sr. Edith. It was very special to hear real life stories about Sr. Edith, a vibrant intelligent Sister whose memory lives on at Holy Spirit Northside Private Hospital, with the naming of the Sr. Edith Education Centre in her honour.



Don Bosco University

Whilst in Haflong I had the pleasure to meet the Reverend Father V.C.Thomas, a Don Bosco priest, and to see the University they have built in the remote Far East. Their goal is to open up opportunities for underprivileged teenagers for university placement which otherwise would be unattainable for them in the city universities.

The Don Bosco University is of an excellent standard in respect to both facility and curriculum. The first course commenced in engineering with an enrolment of 500 students working towards a target to recruit up to 5000 university placements for the underprivileged teenagers in this remote area.





Gunjung Village, Asom

Our next stop was Gunjung Village in Asom, where we visited a school which is a collaboration of ministry between the Missionary Sisters and the Jesuit Priests.

The school provides education for up to 600 tribal children, many of them boarding during the week. The school prides itself on Educational Success Measures monitoring how many children get employment post-graduation. The Sisters are proud to report that many school leavers have secured government jobs; two have become doctors, one a lawyer and seven teachers.

After this stop we made a short visit to the Sisters in the Shillong region and again experienced wonderful hospitality.



Holy Spirit Hospital – Mumbai

From Haflong we flew down to Mumbai to visit the Holy Spirit Hospital, a privately-funded tertiary hospital owned and operated by the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters.

Sr. Sneha, the Hospital's CEO, welcomed us and shared conversation on the challenges she faces running a busy 300-bed hospital located in a poor part of Mumbai.

The Sisters' commitment to the poor and vulnerable was very evident in how they have allocated funding to provide health care services for these people within their health service.



Bengaluru

Our final destination was Bengaluru, where I had the honour of meeting many of the Congregational, Provincial and Regional Leaders gathering for their Assembly. This was an amazing experience to have conversation with these inspirational women, to learn about the missionary work they do in some of the most challenging parts of the world.

The Bengaluru convent is also home to 28 beautiful street children who are cared for by Sr. Savita and her fellow Sisters. These children were found abandoned or have mothers who cannot care for them. They are provided with education up to Year ten, and then assisted with sponsorship for work or further study.



My Indian journey comes to an end

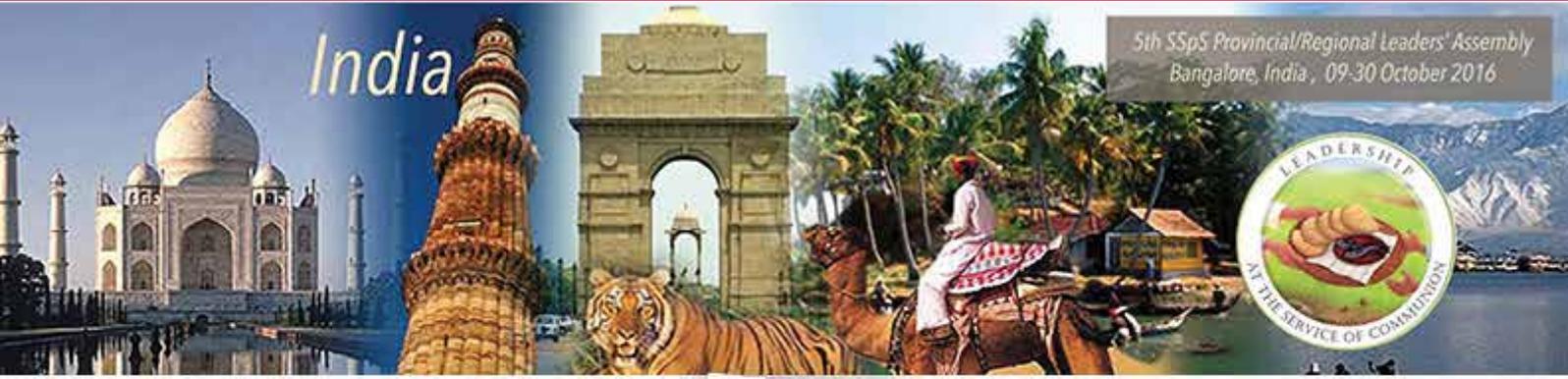
As I headed home I felt privileged to have met so many amazing women who have devoted their whole life to serving God and carrying out work that makes such a difference to the lives of so many people.

I sincerely thank all the Sisters from all the convents I stayed. Everyone made my stay and travel a very special experience. I loved the spicy food, I love India!

It will always hold very special memories for me because of the Sisters I stayed with, and seeing God's work first-hand. I feel deeply moved and changed by this experience.

Sr. Berndetta tells me my trip was just a preview... I very much look forward to returning to India to celebrate the opening of the Haflong Holy Spirit Hospital!





Namastè

I bow to the Divine in you

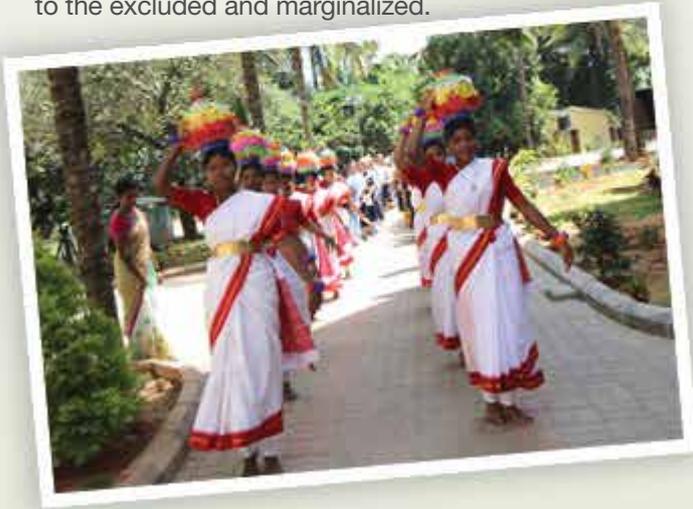


2016 Leaders' Assembly Bangalore, India

On the 7th and 8th October this year, Provincial and Regional Leaders of the Holy Spirit Sisters from around the world, together with our Congregational Leadership Team, began arriving in Bangalore, India, to participate in the 5th Leaders' Assembly.

Focussing on the theme: *Leadership at the Service of Communion*, the participants along with resource speakers, are drawing inspiration from Mark's Gospel where Jesus multiplies five loaves and two fish. (Mark 6:30-44)

The goal of the Assembly is that each of the leaders present will experience a deeper communion with each other in order to better animate and empower the Sisters, so that we can all joyfully respond to the Spirit's invitation to widen the circle, develop a sense of connectedness and reach out to the excluded and marginalized.



Assembly Opening

The Assembly opened with a traditional tribal dance using different symbols that have religious and scientific significance. In the Indian culture, these sacred symbols signify life in its bloom and plenty and as a sign of auspiciousness and celebration. It also indicates the close connection between human beings and nature. Along with the dancers, the participants moved joyfully towards the altar of love, holding in their hearts, their desires and hopes for the assembly and their prayerful longing to experience true communion with God, with humanity and creation.

In the opening Eucharist, the participants were invited to come around the Eucharistic Table with all the joys, struggles, success and failures they experience as leaders. Sr. Maria Theresia Hornemann, Congregational Leader, in her welcoming address, stressed the need for a deeper communion and sense of belonging with one another and with all of creation, where another world is possible, a world where everyone is included, has what he or she needs to live and is invited to give his/her contribution. This was followed by a welcome address by Sr. Lissy Devassy, the Provincial Leader of India South. She greeted the participants with the beautiful traditional Indian gesture of saying *Namaste*, which means *I bow to the Divine in you*.





Jesus' Style of Leadership

Using the text of Mark 6:30-44, Fr. Jacob Parapally MSCS gave an in-depth understanding of Jesus' style of leadership, inviting the participants to expand their vision of Jesus and his leadership style. Jesus was the Bread of Communion breaking the boundaries of religion, culture and family. He gave leadership to his disciples in order to lead others to communion.

Fr. Jacob dealt with the concepts of power and authority and the difference between these two. He cautioned that power is to control and dominate whereas the authority is for self-emptying service. He invited the assembly to ponder the question: "Why are we doing what we are doing? For Christ? For the Church? For the Kingdom? Or for our need?" He said that leadership in a religious congregation is sharing in the leadership of Christ through the Holy Spirit to multiply the Bread of Communion and build up the Community to be at the service of the *Kingdom of God*. He spoke about the greatest hunger of humans – for the bread of communion in which one is recognized, loved, respected, esteemed and empowered to deepen the communion. Stressing our call, he said that our vocation is to be like a sanctuary lamp. It points to the presence of God. In our presence others must experience something of Jesus. That, according to him, is vocation.

Consecrated Life is a Call to Renew

Another resource person was Sr. Shalini Mulackal PBVM, speaking on *Understanding Religious Life and Vows Today*. She emphasized that the Consecrated Life is a Call to Renew, and challenges us to change in our mindset, thought-pattern and ideology. She posed the question: "What is it that God and people today are asking of us?"

With full conviction she said that our vocation is God's answer to the cry of a person.

At the time of writing, the Assembly is continuing, with the love and prayer support of the Sisters across the globe. We look forward to Sr. Sarita sharing her experience and learning with us when she returns.

Provincial Assembly and Chapter

Our own Provincial Assembly and Chapter are planned for the end of November when all the Sisters of the Province who are able, will gather at Carseldine for yet another grace-filled encounter of living and sharing God's love as Religious Missionary Sisters.

Pope's six new beatitudes

Pope Francis proposed six new beatitudes for the modern era on 1 November 2016.

1. *Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by other, and forgive them from their heart*
2. *Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized, and show them their closeness*
3. *Blessed are those who see God in every person, and strive to make others also discover him*
4. *Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home*
5. *Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others*
6. *Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.*

"All those who enact the six items," said the Pope, "are messengers of God's mercy and tenderness, and surely they will receive from him their merited reward."



Christmas greetings

As the season of Advent draws us into the joyful celebration of Christmas – the Incarnation of our God – our thoughts dwell on this Mystery of our gracious God coming among us in the birth of a Baby. To lift up our hearts, to set us and all of humanity on a path of sacred reverence.

The Incarnation has forever changed the way we look at every ordinary experience of life and

creation itself, and discover there the beauty, the Spirit of Wonder and the presence of God in and with God's people.

Because of the revelation that happened at the first Christmas, we are sacraments of each other, carriers of divinity, radiant with God's incarnate being.

The Holy Spirit Sisters wish you and your loved ones the peace and joy of Christmas.

May your festive celebrations be a tangible sign of the love that fills the universe and transforms our lives.



Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters

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