Activities in the Mother House
September–December 2015
Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

FAREWELL TO SR. LUZ ELENA

On the 13th of September, Sr. Luz Elena returned to Columbia having completed 8 years in the Mother House community. With her usual warmth and creativity, she warmly welcomed the visitors and the groups who came to the aperitif in her honour. Her wonderful singing contributed greatly to the liturgy as well to several social occasions. She will also be fondly remembered for her entertaining acts as a magician. We are grateful to Sr. Cecilia and the Province of Columbia/Venezuela for sharing her with us, and wish her a good transition back to her Province.

VISIT OF BISHOP FROM CONGO

Mgr. Nestor Ngoy Katahwa, Bishop of Kolwezi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who invited Good Shepherd Sisters to his diocese in 2012, visited us during his holiday with family members in Angers. Kolwezi is a mining area where there is extreme poverty and high exploitation by the mining sector with weak government intervention. At present, a community of 4 sisters from the Congo/Kenya Province supports the development of the mission in working intensively with Mission Development Office (MDO) to bring resources or develop the programs.
During his stay at the Mother House, Bishop Nestor Ngoy Katahwa celebrated the Eucharist with Sisters from the International Community, expressing his gratitude for the mission of the Congregation in DRC. (18.9.)

**SR. BIBIANA’S RETURN TO INDIA**

Full of gratitude to Mother Foundress, Sr. Bibiana returned to India on the 10th of November. Over the past 3 years, she devoted herself joyfully and generously to her mission at the Mother House. She hopes to bring her enriching experiences to her new mission in her country. We are grateful to Sr. Sabina and the Province of Central East India/Nepal for Bibiana’s presence with us.

**THE 190TH ANNIVERSARY OF CONTEMPLATIVE SISTERS OF THE GOOD SHEHERD**

190 years ago, on 11th November in 1825, St. Mary Euphrasia established the Magdalene Sisters which became the foundation of the Contemplative Sisters. In memory of the historical day, Contemplative Sisters of the International Community in Garenne/ Angers were warm-heartedely welcomed by apostolic Sisters of the International Community as well our Mission partners in the garden of the Mother House. Following a procession with candles to the chapel, we placed the candles on the countries of the world map, where the Contemplative Sisters were founded and still exist. Then we prayed Vespers together glorifying the Lord. (11.11.)
**SOLIDARITY FOR PEACE**

On the 22nd of November, the Ruhama Community in Angers invited our Sisters and Mission partners to evening prayer in the context of solidarity for Peace. As you are aware, a series of coordinated terrorist attacks took place in Paris on the evening of 13th November. The attackers killed 130 people and there were 368 injuries, among them 80–99 serious, and seven of the attackers also died. France had been on high alert since the January 2015 attacks in Paris that killed 17 people, including civilians and police officers.

Around 40 people including the families and children gathered in a circle in the Ruhama-garden and marched in a silent procession through the darkness with small candles to the Ruhama convent. Praying and Singing for Peace, the children proceeded into the oratory to offer the candles with their intentions for Peace in front of the tabernacle. Five Sisters of International Community also attended and all prayed fervently for peace.

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**CONFERENCE FOR THE 140TH ANNIVERSARY OF CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY IN ANGERS**

Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard, Archbishop of Bordeaux, president of the Council for Catholic Teaching at the Conference of the Bishops of France in Paris, gave a conference at the Catholic University in Angers for its 140th anniversary. The theme was “The mission of education of the Church in the dynamic of Evangelization”. Sr. Noreen participated in the conference with Ms. Sarah Elbisser, the heritage manager in the Spirituality Centre. (8.12.)

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**NEW PARISH PRIEST**

In the afternoon on the 10th of December, Sisters welcomed our new parish priest Fr. Jean-Paul Avrillon, who took up this role in the parish of St. Lazare- St.Nicholas in
September 2015. He was already known to us through his work on Missionary Cooperation in the Diocese of Angers. He presented the Parish Pastoral Plan 2015-2018 which is being implemented under the motto “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” (Lk.5, 4) At the end of his presentation, Fr. Jean-Paul thanked us for the mission of Good Shepherd Sisters and encouraged further involvement through different apostolic activities.

MISSIONARY COOPERATION 2015

Organized by the Diocese Angers, the meeting for international missionaries was held on the 3rd Sunday of Advent in Montreuil-Juigné near Angers. The day began with Mass in the parish church “St. John XXIII” celebrated by Bishop Mgr. Emmanuel Delmas assisted by eight priests. Around 50 missionaries including 5 Sisters from International Community participated. It included time to get to know one another and share experiences, followed by a buffet lunch, sharing the food we brought. In the afternoon, small groups reflected on the question “How do you live mercy in your country?” followed by a plenary sharing. The meeting concluded with vespers and a blessing. We came away encouraged to reflect on the theme of ‘Mercy’ and to live its value in daily life, especially in the ‘Year of Mercy’. (13.12.)

CONGREGATIONAL SPIRITUALITY CENTER

ORIENTATION FOR DEVELOPING A SPIRITUALITY CENTRE IN THE PROVINCE EGYPT/SUDAN

To develop a Spirituality Centre in the Egypt/ Sudan Province, Sr. Nathalie RGS from Egypt spent one month in the Spirituality Centre. She was accompanied by Sr. Denise for the orientation of the various spiritual resources in the Congregation and the mission of the Congregational Spirituality Centre. (31.8.-30.9.)

NEIGHBOURS ARE INVITED TO A PRE-VIEW OF THE MUSEUM BUILDING

On the 2nd September, a visit of the newly renovated Museum building was offered to the neighbours living in the apartments near the Mother House. Organized by the Association of the Friends of the Good Shepherd Museum, it was greatly appreciated. Some of the neighbours already knew the Good Shepherd Sisters, however, it was a whole new discovery for most of them. All of them are looking forward to visiting the Good Shepherd Museum when it opens in 2016 and learning more about the history and mission of the Congregation.
PILGRIMAGE AND RETREAT

Guided by members of the Congregational Spirituality Centre, 31 Good Shepherd Sisters and Mission partners from 11 different countries participated in the pilgrimages to Caen, Angers, Noirmoutier and Tours followed by six day retreat. (1.-11.9.) As for the retreat in May, the theme for the retreat was that of the Congregational Chapter “Energized by the Spirit, we risk together for mission”. The daily input and the spiritual accompaniment were offered in English, French and Spanish. Being in the Mother House added to the retreat experience and helped to deepen their gratitude for their vocations and missions.

NEW OPTIONS FOR PILGRIMAGES

- IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. MARY EUPHRASIA AND ST. THERESE OF LISIEUX

From September 15th-22nd, we were pleased to welcome 41 pilgrims from St. Paul’s Parish, Lisguggan, Waterford, Ireland, accompanied by their parish priest Fr. Pat Fitzgerald. During the week, they deepened their sense of friendship as a parish community and embraced the story and spirituality of St. Mary Euphrasia. The guided experiences at the Motherhouse, the tunnel and the labyrinth together with the visit to Noirmoutier and Eucharist in the birth house of St. Mary Euphrasia were highlights of the visit.

A visit to the Apocalypse Tapestries at the Castle in Angers and a morning with the monks in Solemnies, followed by a visit to Cointreau and a vineyard brought added variety to the pilgrimage.

The group also made a pilgrimage outside Angers to the Museum of St. Therese in Alençon, and the Carmelite Chapel and her family home in Lisieux. Fr. Pat celebrated Mass in English for the pilgrims in the crypt of the Basilica at Lisieux. This pilgrimage took place shortly before the canonization of St. Therese’s parent – Zelie and Louis Martin.

The linking of pilgrimages in the footsteps of St. Mary Euphrasia and St. Therese of Lisieux can be repeated in the future for groups who would like this possibility.

- MISSION PARTNERS FROM AUSTRALIA/AOTEAROA-NZ

Following intense preparation by Trish Carroll, Director, Mission, People & Culture and Gendrie Klein-Breteler, Mission Engagement Coordinator, 13 Mission Partners (including 3 Sisters) from Australia/Aotearoa-NZ spent ten days with us from 1st-11th October. They shared the Story and History of the Congregation, rituals and pauses and different reflective activities to help make links with their personal lives and their service in different areas.

Srs. Anne Josephine Carr and Noreen O’Shea were resource persons for the pilgrimage. Orientations about the childhood of St. Mary Euphrasia were given in the place where she was born in Noirmoutier; her experience of boarding school and her early religious life were evoked in the Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union community house in Tours, which was the former convent where St. Mary Euphrasia entered. Other sessions dealing with the Congregation since the beginning of the Generalate were given in Angers.

One of the most unforgettable experiences was the crossing of the GOIS on foot on the 2nd October. This walk was done in memory of Anne and Julian Pelletier, who were taken under duress with other persons taken prisoner from Soullans in March 1794. It was also the parish’s way of being in solidarity with all the refugees and migrants who at this time are forced to leave their countries and are experiencing so much hardship in the process.
The pilgrims were seen off with a sending ceremony from the Green Door, with the same mission to be a “presence of the Good Shepherd” as was given to the first four Sisters who were missioned to Australia by St. Mary Euphrasia in 1862. The group members made a commitment to continue to grow the charism in their Continent. (1.-11.10.)

**WELCOMING FRENCH YOUTH**

On the evening of 2nd October, we were very happy to welcome to the Mother House 50 young people (12-15 years old) of public schools (Rabelais, Monnet, Janequin, Renoir) and private schools (St Charles, St Jean the Bar) and college chaplaincies of the Deanery of Angers Maine. The Chaplain is Father Emmanuel Bouchaud vicar of Saint Lazare Saint Nicolas parish. These young people were led by 10 animators some of them parents. Brigitte Dubourg, coordinator of public education chaplaincies, had asked the Spiritual Centre, on the occasion of their inter-chaplaincies input, to meet Community Sisters so that they talk with young people. They also wanted to pray through experiencing the Labyrinth. The evening brought us much joy, dynamism, energetic voices, laughter, singing ... etc.

After being warmly welcomed and listening about St. Mary Euphrasia, these young people are sent to three places of the Mother House. They went in these three places in Groups: L’Eau Vive Room, Labyrinth, Chapel.

In L’Eau Vive they met the Sisters of the International Apostolic Community and Sisters of the Contemplative International Community. While conversing, the Sisters shared their experience of religious life and internationality in community.

The Labyrinth enabled them to calm down: "I feel great!" Refocus and enjoy some silence. They enjoyed this experience, and one of them said: "May I do it once more?" "It is not possible, because everyone has to go, but if you want you can come back to do it again later".

In the Chapel, they exercised their voices in singing with a Missionary Sister of the Gospel from the Chaplaincy of St Charles. "

Each one was delighted to get a cartoon book on Mary Euphrasia to complete what has been told them about her. Then they all had a picnic outside in the garden, running, playing, singing. They left full of thanks and pleased with the evening.

**VISIT OF AN AUSTRALIAN MISSION PARTNER**

On the 2nd November Ms. Michelle Crawford, working for Good Shepherd Microfinance in Australia, visited the Spirituality Centre, after having taking part in an international conference for Microfinance in Bordeaux. She shared her experience and the Good
Shepherd Microfinance program with Sarah the Archivist who interviewed her for the section on our International Mission in the Good Shepherd Museum.

**PREPARATION FOR 220TH BIRTHDAY OF ST. MARY EUPHRASIA**

As this year marks the 220th anniversary of Rose Virginie Pelletier's birth, several events are being planned in Noirmoutier to help the people in the island appropriate her historical and spiritual heritage.

For this purpose, Sr. Noreen, Sr. Irma and Ms. Anne-Laure, the new trilingual assistant from the Spirituality Centre, had a meeting on the 5th of December with Mr. Noël Faucher (Mayor of Noirmoutier), Fr. Grégoire Cieutat (Parish priest of St. Philbert’s Church), Ms. Yves Perrocheau (Deputy Mayor), Ms. Marie-Thérèse Reed (Vice President of the association “The Friends of the Island Noirmoutier”), Mr. Gaston Bugeon (Member of the Association), and Mr. Henri Miallhe (Deacon).

During the meeting we realized that all the participants were interested in the project. So we agreed to create several once-off events before 31st July 2016, using various media to communicate. We will work together on an event to take place on the 8th of March, International Women’s Day. This will include a presentation on the Rights of Women", an exhibition of photos depicting "Remarkable Women of Noirmoutier" and the projection of the film: "Maïsha, a life outside the mines". (5.12.)
TWO SPECIAL VISITORS FOR PEACE

On the 1st of October, Mr. Arun Gandhi, an Indian-American socio-political activist, who is a grandson of M.K. Gandhi, visited the Mother House. Arun was warmly welcomed with a lavender garland stringed by three Indian sisters from the International Community. While Sisters and our Mission partners had a talk with him, Ms. Kim Phuc from Vietnam arrived also at the Mother House, and we welcomed her with Arun. Arun stayed for three days and Kim for four days in the Good Shepherd Guesthouse. Both of them were very pleased with the hospitality as well the spirit of the Good Shepherd.

Kim, a living symbol of the Vietnam war, shared the agony she experienced during the errant napalm strike in 1972. With her arms flung away from her shoulders, she ran wailing towards the camera, even naked for she ripped off her burning clothes. She suffered serious burns over a third of her body. At that time, most people who sustained such injuries over 10% of their bodies died, but she miraculously survived.

Her burns were invisible, for the scars were hidden beneath the long sleeves. After more than 40 years, she fortunately got a new chance to be healed. It could be a prospect she once thought possible only in a life after death. “So many years I thought that I would have no more scars, no more pain when I would be in heaven. However, the heaven on earth is now for me!” Kim shared her amazing experience in Miami where she went to see the dermatologist specialized in laser treatments for burn patients.

Kim acknowledged that her Christian faith brought her the deep peace of heart “in the midst of hatred, bitterness, pain, loss, and hopelessness”, when the pain seemed insurmountable. “No operation, no medication, no doctor can help to heal my heart. The only one is the miracle, that God loves me.” She mentioned further with confidence: “I just wish one day I am free from pain.”

On the 2nd of October, on M.K. Gandhi’s birthday, commonly known as Gandhi Jayanthi, also on International Day for Non-Violence, Sisters and our Mission partners gathered together in front of the sapling in the garden near the labyrinth. Arun impressively shared with us his message for Peace.

He was born in Durban, South Africa. Growing up under the discriminatory apartheid laws of South Africa, he was beaten by “white” South Africans for being too black and by “black” South Africans for being too white. He instinctively sought the “eye-for-eye” justice. However, he was taught by his parents and grandparents to go on the way of peace and reconciliation. He is convinced that Justice does not mean revenge, but transforming the opponent through love and suffering. Though following the footsteps of his grandfather, Arun as an activist avoided the ascetic lifestyle of his grandfather.

His grandfather instructed Arun to understand nonviolence through understanding violence. “If we know how often we perpetrate passive violence against one another, we will understand why there is so much physical violence plaguing societies and the world.” It means: Anger itself is not bad. If people learn to use the energy of anger intelligently, it could substantially reduce violence. Arun
warned against labeling others, which would create a “we-and-they” mentality. "When we begin to label people and build a wall between them and us, or to treat them as enemies, we are not helping the situation," "In a non-violence situation, what we need to understand is not to win or lose, but transformation."

Arun used the analogy of a wheat sprout to illustrate the importance of spreading peace and creating transformation. If someone finds personal peace, but keeps it locked up in their heart, it will die with that person. But if that person shares his peace with others, as a farmer might plant a grain of wheat, the peace may sprout and grow a world of peacemakers. He added, "I am here to help you to give you the grain of wheat I got from my grandfather." This grain-of-wheat analogy resonated with Pena, as he said. It made him think about why it is so important to reach out to others and spread peace rather than keeping it to oneself.

Arun emphasized also the peaceful way of practicing various religions: “I think unfortunately today, all the religions of the world have been hijacked. They have distorted the real meaning of religion, and are using it for very negative purposes. And that is a tragedy. ... Religion is supposed to be about love, understanding and respect for all human beings. No religion promotes hate, so people need to stand up to those who misuse religion in hateful ways, even if that means challenging people of one's own religion.”

Full of gratitude for the testimonies of these two special visitors for Peace, each of us in the gathering pondered how to be a peacemaker here and now facing our reality.

**DAY OF ENCOUNTER AND FAITH SHARING**

Organized by the Dioceses of West France, 140 Catholics gathered together on Sunday, November 8th. This year, the group which has been in existence for 20 years, reflected on the theme of “Passion”. In the preceding years, they reflected on the themes of “Confidence” and “Perseverance”. All participants composed of mainly voluntary lay people shared their spiritual experiences in small groups and presented their reports in the plenary session. Sr.
Madeleine Guigue from International Community was invited to present the Charism and Mission of the Good Shepherd Sisters. After the Eucharistic Celebration in the afternoon, they had a concert in the main chapel, led by the vocal band named “GAJ”. Many family members enjoyed singing with their children. United in the same faith, they seemed to be fully stimulated by the entire day.

“MISSIONARY BROTHERS OF ST. THÉRÈSE”

Eleven Brothers of the Congregation “Missionary Brothers of St. Thérèse” had a meeting to prepare for their General Chapter in 2016. We wished them all the wisdom they need to remain open to the Holy Spirit. (10.-12. 11.)

PASTORAL COUNCIL MEETING OF THE DIOCESE ANGERS

On the 14th of November, the Pastoral Council meeting of the Diocese Angers was held for the first time at the Mother House. The 33 participants were made up of Bishop Mgr. Delmas, diocesan priests, religious and lay people. They diagnosed the current pastoral situations of parish churches and shared their vision for the pastoral work in the future. Sr. Annie Golas rgs from Ruhama Community in Angers participated in the meeting as one of the religious.

SWIMMERS AND SWIMMING REFEREES

While the swimming competition on the national level in France was held in Angers, 10 swimmers from the region ‘Montauban’ and 25 swimming referees stayed in the Good Shepherd Guest House. (18.-22.11.) To our surprise, two male swimmers among our guests were awarded a gold medal and a silver medal.

NASCITA

20 trained Montessori educators deepened their knowledge and skills through further education, especially for the Montessori Preschool Program. Montessori education is well-known as an educational approach developed by the Italian physician and educator Ms. Maria Montessori and characterized by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits, and respect for a child’s natural psychological, physical, and social development. Ms. Lydle Brunot from Belgium was invited as animator. (23.-27.11.)
**MONTFORTAINS**

On the first Advent Sunday, 29th November, organized by the Diocese of Angers, 140 people of Monfortains met together to prepare for their pilgrimage to Lourdes in April 2016. Monfortains is an association composed of voluntary lay people as well religious. Every year, they organize a pilgrimage to Lourdes for around 700 patients and 7000 pilgrims.

**CONFERENCE ON INSOMNIA**

Organized by “Health Information 49”, an association of the department “Maine et Loire”, an interesting conference was held on the theme of insomnia. Around 30 people participated and were advised by experts. They became aware that insomnia can occur at any age, but it is particularly common in the elderly. It is typically followed by functional impairment while awake. This can include memory problems, depression, irritability and an increased risk of heart disease and automobile related accidents. Cognitive behavioral therapy is recommended for persistent insomnia. Though sleeping pills may help in the short term, they may lead to addiction if used regularly for an extended period.

**EXIBITION OF INTERNATIONAL CRIBS 2015/2016**

The exhibition of Cribs from 70 countries was held on 14.-24. December 2015 and 4.-10. January 2016. A variety of creative cribs from different cultures were displayed near the reliquary of St. Mary Euphrasia in the external chapel. The uniqueness of the exhibition was very much appreciated by the visitors, especially by families with children, and those who were present for the Final Vows ceremonies.

**CELEBRATION OF FINAL VOWS**

The unprecedented celebration of two final vows ceremonies at the Motherhouse on two consecutive days took place on the weekend before Christmas 2015. On the 19th of December, Sr. Zanga from Cameroon who belongs to Congregation of La Retraite made her final vows in Salle Notre Dame. The Eucharistic Celebration took three and a half hours. Sr. Zanga’s uncle, bishop Jean Mbarga, Archbishop of Yaoundé in Cameroon was the celebrant. The whole ceremony followed by aperitif and dinner helped us appreciate different aspects of her native culture.
On the following day, Sr. Nathalie Champ from the Province Europe BFMN of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd made her final vows in the main chapel. Bishop Luc Crepy (Eudist), Bishop of Puy-en-Velay was chief celebrant with Bishop Delmas from Angers. Sisters and Mission Partners who attended the celebrations were delighted with the faithful decision of a young Sister and shared joy and gratitude with her family and friends. We prayed fervently for more vocations to the religious life in the future.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Organised by the association “Friends of the Organs of the Doutre”, a Christmas concert with the program of “From Advent towards the joy of Christmas” was held on the 4th Sunday of Advent in the main chapel. The organists Ms. Florence Rousseau and Mr. Loïc Georgeault played individually the works of J.S. Bach, Pierre Dandrieu and Dietrich Buxtehude etc. The highlight of the concert was “Hallelujah” of G.F. Händel which was played together by two organists in exquisite harmony. (20.12.)