November - December
Issue N° 301

Good Shepherd
NEWSLETTER

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd
Via Raffaello Sardiello, 20 - 00165 Roma, Italia
Tel: (39) 06 6617 9101
Please send your articles on or before 5th of
January, March, May, July, September and November.

JANUARY- FEBRUARY
Central South US
Peru
Eastern Central Africa
(Kenya, Congo, South Sudan, Uganda)
Italy-Malta
North Mexico
Indonesia

MARCH- APRIL
West Africa (Senegal, Burkina Faso)
New York-Toronto
Europe-BFMN
(Belgium, France, Hungary, Netherlands)
Southeast Latin America (Brazil, Paraguay)
Great Britain
Egypt-Sudan
Ecuador
Colombia-Venezuela and Cuba

MAY- JUNE
Montreal, Canada
Philippines-Japan
Angola-Mozambique
Central America
(Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala,
Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico)
Argentina-Uruguay
South Africa

JULY- AUGUST
Mid-North America
Lebanon-Syria
West Mexico
Australia/Aotearoa-NZ
Eudist Family
East Asia
(Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam)

SEPTEMBER- OCTOBER
Bolivia-Chile
Northeast Asia
(China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, South Korea)
Germany-Albania
The Isles (Madagascar, Mauritius, Reunion)
Portugal
Austria-Switzerland-Czech Republic
Singapore-Malaysia
Spain

NOVEMBER- DECEMBER
South West India
Central East India-Nepal
Ireland
Sri Lanka-Pakistan
It is significant that the central festival of the church focuses on a creative act: the birth of Christ. Creativity is a primary characteristic of the evolving universe.

Christmas is a celebration of a particularly radiant birth, and this birthing process defines the very nature of our cosmos. Process philosopher defined evolution as the creative advance into novelty. In science, novelty doesn’t mean the latest, greatest thing. It refers to the emergence of a new form that is not only greater than the sum of its parts but also unpredictably new in a way that advances creation in the direction of increased complexity, consciousness, and unity. The early church felt that something novel had occurred with the birth of Jesus.

Using scientific language, we could say they intuited that the entire universe had coalesced in him, but something radically new had been added: he was, as the prologue of John’s gospel puts it, the Word (or Sacred Creative Process) in human form. The one who was born of Mary would himself give birth to a new creation—a world shaped by God that this child, when fully mature, called the kingdom of God. But with a mystic’s heart and eye, the celebration of Christmas is not merely looking back two thousand years in celebration of Jesus’ birth. At a deeper level, we are invited to joyfully consent to the Word—the creative principle or sacred Wisdom—being born in and through us. We both give birth to, and are the incarnate presence of the same sacred evolutionary wisdom that animated Jesus.

In the words of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, our vocation is to “Christify” the cosmos in and through our very presence. To celebrate Christmas, then, is not only to celebrate the birth of Jesus but also to assume responsibility for this sacred birth happening in and through us.

*The Point of the Process*
LUKE 2:7

Now, O Holy One, we enter sacred time, time suspended, when history surrenders to mystery, and we ourselves are taken in, and taken up, by a love story. For this, the universe bursts into being. For this, the galaxies shine—lights strung upon a Christmas cosmos. For this, supernovas make sacrifice and our sun pours itself out in the service of life. For this, the march of life on Earth makes its exuberant procession—now present in lowing cattle, in a single shining star, in shepherds and angels, and in proud parents— to a Bethlehem stable. And on this holy night, no less does the cosmos coalesce in us as we take our place on the stage of sacred mystery to celebrate the point of it all—that you come to us in self-emptying love the moment we enter the mystery of this Christmas birth. Amen.
The Good Shepherd Lay Mission Partners of Bangalore conducted a “Suicide Prevention Awareness” seminar on September 15, 2018 at St. Patrick’s Church Hall, in collaboration with the Health Commission of the Archdiocese of Bangalore and the Indian Institute of Pastoral Health Theology, Bangalore.

There is an urgent need for this program to address the high suicide rate in India today, especially among young people. We thank the Archbishop of Bangalore, whose support enabled the Good Shepherd lay partners to initiate the project through the Health Commission.

Mr. Jason Furtado, a member of the Asia Pacific International Coordinating Committee and the event’s major sponsor, presented the committee’s July 2018 report to the Mission Partners of the South West India Province. It was Mr. Shaji Mathew, a Bangalore lay mission partner, and Sr. Marina, RGS, who introduced the program to the archdiocese. Esteemed dignitaries and resource persons like our principal guest, Mr. Charles Lobo, Chief Postmaster General of Karnataka and Professor Samuel Rukshan (Indian Institute of Psychology and Research) shared their experience. Their presentations described ways to identify signs of suicidal tendencies and emphasized the importance of timely intervention to help save precious lives. Fr. William Eronimoose, Director of the Indian Institute of Pastoral Health Theology, discussed the role of society in suicide prevention.

The seminar attracted people from all age groups, including professionals, religious, and young people from various colleges and schools. Dr. John Tharakan, Joint Secretary of the Archdiocesan Health Commission, led an interactive session which gave the students further insight and a deeper understanding of suicide. Some participants called on churches, schools, and social organizations to provide many more such awareness programs to all sectors of society in order to foster compassion and empathy for depressed and suffering people.

Mr. Shaji Mathew proposed a vote of thanks and gave the reassurance that many such holistic health awareness programs will be available throughout the archdiocese. The Bangalore mission partners plan similar awareness programs around the state. Based on the overwhelming response from the participants, there is widespread support for future initiatives to reach youth groups, students, working people, and social workers. The Health Commission is eager to extend suicide prevention awareness to all institutions within the Archdiocese of Bangalore. The key message is: Suicide is preventable; there is help, and there is hope.
Sr. Francine, Province Leader, inspired our sisters, teachers and prefects to go on a mission to rural areas during their school vacation. Some sisters, teachers and students from Good Shepherd Government Schools joined them.

Waleboda, Kahawatte, Kokilai, Mihintale and Kandenuwara tea estates were the sites of five camps conducted under the leadership of Good Shepherd Convent, Kotahena, Panadura, Kandy, St. Bridget’s Convent and St. Thomas School, Matale. Our sisters are responsible for community-based child protection services in those rural areas. The program brought about great unity. The sisters, teachers and students gave of themselves selflessly; they shared their resources, provided values education, taught handicrafts, and planned games and other fun activities. The rural mission program also included home visits.

Another significant event occurred in Mankerni, a fishing village made up of diverse religious and ethnic groups. These groups of people face enormous challenges due to illiteracy and underdevelopment. The Good Shepherd Community at Mankerni and the Child Protection Team launched the child protection program which the village received with much enthusiasm. The event highlighted the value of child protection and the importance of education.

On the 5th of March, thirty-five students who had dropped out of school took part in a program designed to meet their specific needs in the areas of reading and writing. Other activities included games, competitions, and religious ceremonies.

RISKING TOGETHER FOR MISSION

The focus today in Sri Lanka is the expansion of child development centers to incorporate child-focused community development projects. The initial project in a coastal area of the North West Province involves the creation of a safety net for children through the establishment of women’s self-help groups. The project aims to mobilize the whole community and make use of the contribution of stakeholders in protecting children through awareness programs and a variety of relevant activities.

“Participatory Rural Appraisal” (PRA) and “Wellbeing Analyses” were the guiding techniques in the formation of self-help groups (SHGs). The process required motivation and collaboration and proved to be challenging initially. In order to form, strengthen and sustain the progress of the SHGs, the participants go through a series of seven modules, including: initiation of the groups, concept and management, savings and loan, gender equality, goal setting and self assessment, leadership and communication, and business promotion.

The theme of this year’s International Women’s Day was “Time is Now.”

Our celebration at the Waleboda and Walawa Estates focused on Women’s Rights, Parenting Skills, Equality and Justice. We organized lively and interesting activities such as presentations by our sisters that challenged and empowered rural and estate women to transform their lives and give birth to a bright future for their children. Realizing the resources and resilience within them, the women are now ready to join hands with the Good Shepherd Sisters to work for their rights and the rights of their children.

With praise and thanksgiving to God, the Sri Lanka/Pakistan Province will joyfully celebrate 150 Years of Good Shepherd Presence in Sri Lanka on 18th May 2019
Wells of Hope is the latest project to be unveiled by Talitha Kum – an international network against trafficking in human persons. In 2009 the International Union of Superiors’ General (UISG) in Rome founded the organization to serve as a platform for collaboration, cooperation and exchange of information. Among the goals of Talitha Kum is the development and improvement of anti-trafficking activities carried out by consecrated persons in the various countries of the world, across the five continents.

Since 2016, the focus has moved towards the Middle East, a region that has become a battlefield for wars, violence, exploitation and human trafficking. These countries have become a breeding ground for this lucrative business, with recruitment, transit and export of trafficked individuals occurring within the region. Unfortunately, the Middle East, the crossroad of civilisations, has become an expert in the civilisation of death and of exploitation. People have become commodities in local, regional and international markets.

Pope Francis says to us: “Human trafficking is an open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ; it is a crime against humanity.” He adds, “It is a form of modern slavery, a clear violation of human rights, a heinous, cruel and brutal crime.” The words of Pope Francis challenged us, made us mindful of our responsibility towards our poorest brothers and sisters, and led to the development of the Wells of Hope project.

Objectives include:

◊ To promote cooperation and alliance between Christian and Muslim women as part of a joint effort against this culture of death, specifically, that of human trafficking.
◊ We will work in collaboration with local, regional and international agents of all religious backgrounds.
◊ To create action plans for the prevention, protection, assistance and rehabilitation of people at risk of trafficking.
◊ We hope to strengthen relationships between Christian and Muslim women in order to encourage joint action and promote mutual trust.
◊ This project is targeted at Middle Eastern countries including: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the Emirates.
◊ The first phase of this project takes place over ten months, where we will work together to identify and collect data, establish action plans and methods for use in each country to provide protection and assistance to victims.
◊ Identify human resources in each country.
◊ Arrange training sessions to develop the skills of those who will work in this fundamental humanitarian camp.
◊ Create a space for dialogue, reflection and action to restore the human dignity of these people and reduce the exploitation of the most vulnerable women and children.

The Women’s Assembly of Major Superiors in Lebanon supports this project. Consecrated persons, civil, and government authorities will collaborate in this undertaking. As consecrated women, we use our skills and abilities to defend and protect victims of this global issue which concerns all religions and nationalities.

We will work tirelessly to allow our Middle East to re-establish its role in connecting civilisations where human and religious values are lived and respected. We entrust our project to the all Merciful God, following in the footsteps of our Mother and the Holy Catholic Church, who seek to embrace God’s children of all races and religions.

We rely heavily on your prayers to ensure that our Middle East becomes a source of hope for the poor, the vulnerable, those who are deprived of love, of hope, and for every individual who lives in exploitation and slavery.
The Rosa Virginia Shelter opened on October 5, 2015 and houses children and adolescent girls who have been rescued from human trafficking and sexual exploitation. It is a project of the Good Shepherd Sisters, Province of South East Latin America, in partnership with the National Secretariat for Children and Adolescents. The shelter used to be the novitiate house and is located within the San Pablo de Asunción neighborhood. The comprehensive program, which requires a great deal of financial and human resources, responds to trafficked children in need of recovery from trauma and opportunities for a future free of violence.

The center provides a specialized transition space that protects, supports, and promotes the rights of children, a safe environment, and an integrated holistic approach oriented to the children’s health and development. The comprehensive program addresses the reality confronting the children and adolescent girls as they rebuild a healthy self-esteem, autonomy, a capacity to trust and experience the joy of living. Aspects of the therapeutic program and skills development include art, dance, computer science, meal preparation, and various crafts. Through occupational therapy, the children acquire skills based on their interests. Vocational and technical training also help to prepare the children for the future. The Rosa Virginia Shelter is the only center with these characteristics in our country, where there is increasing child sex trafficking, a crime that is not easily recognized.

The shelter can accommodate twelve children, ages ten to seventeen years. Many adolescent girls are either pregnant or arrive with their babies. To date, the center has welcomed ninety-five young children and adolescent girls. Among them were three girls between the ages of two months to two years and four boys between the ages of one month to two years. The majority of the children are victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation within Paraguay. So far, six teenagers, one ten-year-old girl and the two-year-old son of a teenaged girl were in situations that involved trafficking in foreign destinations.

Last year, many learned from a Brazilian television newscast about traffickers who abandoned a two-year-old Paraguayan boy in a public square. The infant’s sixteen-year-old mother was a trafficking victim and the traffickers were part of an illegal international adoption scheme. The teenager dropped out of school when she became pregnant and wanted to find work to care for and provide for her son. Her aunt who lived in Brazil promised her work at a commercial house and persuaded the teenaged mother to move to a city in Brazil with her child. No one suspected the aunt and her Brazilian partner of being part of a network of traffickers that recruited and exploited young persons, men, and women. As far as we know, the two perpetrators were eventually imprisoned. In general, however, human trafficking networks are very extensive and criminals escape prosecution. The borders between countries are vulnerable and migratory controls are not effectively enforced. Family members are often unsuspected traffickers recruiting their young relatives.

When the teenaged mother and her child arrived at the Shelter after a long process of repatriation, the child cried incessantly, did not want to eat, and could not tolerate separation.
Province of Southeast Latin America

from his mother. Following their stay at Rosa Virginia Shelter, reunification with family became possible. The teenager resumed her studies and the child has returned to a normal childhood.

Currently there are nine teenagers and two babies staying at the Shelter. The adolescent mothers face many challenges. Their young age and the circumstances of their life have not prepared them and the responsibilities of parenthood exceed their capacity. Often a young mother shows little or no interest in caring for an infant or young child. Many factors enter into determining how long the children stay at Rosa Virginia Shelter. The ongoing assessment includes consideration of the personal situation, health status, the possibility of reintegration with the nuclear or extended family, the safety of the home environment, and risk of further exposure to violence.

We rely on help from private sources as well as the National Secretariat for Children and Adolescents for projects submitted yearly. We have presented countless grant proposals to international organizations. We have received funding from two sources for projects that are now in the implementation stage.

At the end of July, a fire ravaged the entire house. We thank God the house has been fully repaired. On October 5, our three year anniversary, we held a re-inauguration ceremony to celebrate and praise God’s fidelity and mercy!
Woman Arise, Foundation

National Bolivian Women’s Day and International Day of the Girl Child

The celebration of the National Bolivian Women’s Day and the International Day of the Girl Child started with a Mass and with joyful prayers of thanksgiving for God’s goodness and generosity. The event took place at the Catholic English School where participants exchanged hugs and warm wishes, and also played games. In addition, students and their parents brought donations to be distributed to people in need. This was a sign of true solidarity.

Students from the secondary department organized games, dances, and other activities for the younger children, filling the school with laughter and fun. The halls were decorated with positive messages and photographs honoring girls who are part of the school and who represent our future. The brilliant, hardworking, and inspiring women from the teaching staff were honored with a festive breakfast. Another tribute honoring the important contribution of teachers to society was the “Oda a la mujer imperfecta,” (Ode to the imperfect woman). The teachers took the opportunity to commend Sister Myriam Vallejo for her great work and contribution to the school.

My Rights and Yours

By Sayariy Warmi

In the program “Niña, niño y adolescente, nuevas semillas en igualdad” (Girl, Boy and Teenager: New Seeds on Equal Terms), our primary goal is to empower children and to promote the education of society on children’s rights. On the 13th of September, in the Sayariy Warmi Sucre branch, the children from the childcare center and their parents participated in a socialization process to help them understand their rights. The day included welcoming visitors from Mensen met een Missie (People With a Mission, an organization for international cooperation).

The children and parents were grouped separately. The activities of children between the ages of four to six years used resources like videos and pictures. Leonor, the teacher responsible for this group, worked alongside Katerin, Carlos, and Richard (student teachers from San Francisco University, Bolivia), to prepare posters displaying the different rights. On the day of the event, each child gave a presentation of a right assigned to him or her. The boys and girls did so with such confidence that their parents were pleasantly surprised and very proud. One of the mothers said, “I had no idea that my child was capable of giving a presentation in front of an audience. Public speaking frightens me. But it’s good because they need to know their rights.”
Current data in Bolivia suggest that indigenous women in rural areas face severe challenges, one of which is poverty. They are doubly discriminated against— for being women and for their particular ethnicity and culture. Women who wish to take advantage of the services offered by the Levántate Mujer Foundation have insufficient access to economic resources. Women often remain vulnerable and oppressed, with their rights unprotected because of financial dependence on their partners or other family members.

The overall goal of the Foundation’s Economic Justice Project is to bring about financial independence for the women who use our services. The project promotes economic justice to improve the conditions and quality of life of these women. The Foundation develops various initiatives so women can receive training in order to generate an income. Through craft workshops, women develop skills in: knitting, the operation of weaving machines, making ceramics and glass, sewing, dressmaking, baking *salteñas* (Bolivian pies), and making confectionery, chocolate and party favors. The training enables women to create high quality products for local and international markets.

The Foundation operates two stores where products made by the women are sold. The stores are located in the cities of Santa Cruz and Sucre. The training received in the production facilities provides opportunities for the women to ease their suffering. Financial independence also helps to break the cycle of violence in the lives of the women and children.
Another chapter in deepening friendship
with God, others and the universe

By Noreen O’Shea

“The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take
on an intensely personal meaning… going back to these places is a chance
to recover something of our true selves.”

Laudato Si’ 80

It was a wonderful privilege for me to serve the Congregation over the past eight years at the International Community and Spirituality Centre in Angers.

I appreciated being a pilgrim with all the Sisters and Mission Partners who came to the Mother House. Each pilgrimage around Angers, Caen, Noirmoutier and Tour was different because of the diversity and richness of each group. The engagement of so many people helped to refresh my sense of belonging to an amazing congregation and increased my desire to ensure that similar experiences are available for others into the future.

One of the highlights for me was participating in the Journey of Enrichment and being in Caen and Angers on the days of reunification of the two Congregations in June 2014. The image of the rainbow on the tunnel captured in a photograph at that time says everything about hope for change and reconciliation in the world.

I have grown through the stretching involved in living in an international community with all its joys, celebrations and challenges. The witness of a community of members coming from nine or ten different nationalities spoke positively to so many of our guests of the possibility of peace in the midst of diversity and difference.

Naturally I miss Angers, the people and the elegance of the French culture and at the same time I’m happy to be back in Ireland rediscovering the many changes which have taken place over the past eight years.

It has been great having some sabbatical time, during which I had the possibility of going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. I will never forget being at the Sea of Galilee on Good Shepherd Sunday and being asked to preach on the Good Shepherd in the Church at Magdala, on the lakeshore where Christ himself preached.

I also participated in training on “Pastoral Care of LGBTQ community” at Boston College” in July. Subsequently I attended the workshop given by Fr. James Martin S.J., author of “Building a Bridge” on this topic at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin in August. Last month our local parish priest took the brave initiative of inviting LGBTQ members to his house with a view to sharing and building a pastoral bridge with the parish. I participated as an LGBTQ “Ally”.

As I did so I remembered the inspiring stories which Sr. Carmela Rodriguez shared in Angers about a similar initiative which she and sisters in Peru took in Peru several years ago, when there was far less knowledge about the reality and the fact that this orientation is not something of a person’s choosing but part of the unique way in which they are created.
Good Shepherd Ireland - Mission Development Officer

My name is Kate Tobin and I have worked with Good Shepherd Ireland for three years. I am currently the Congregation’s Mission Development Officer with Misean Cara. Misean Cara is an Irish funding agency supporting projects in the developing world. They recognise and promote the contribution made by missionaries working in solidarity with local communities. In 2017 Misean Cara provided over €600,000 in funding to support Good Shepherd projects in 8 countries. This year I was fortunate enough to visit Kenya and Thailand to work with our sisters as they advance their programmes supporting women and girls through livelihood, rights based and empowerment projects. I really look forward to meeting some new faces in the coming year and assist the work that is being done by Good Shepherd in the Global South.

Addiction Services

I have been working in collaboration with the Mercy Sisters in the ministry of addiction services for 12 years. The service offers a 30 day residential programme to people dealing with addiction – alcohol, drugs and gambling. It provides a weekly family module to help families learn about addiction and find meaningful support. Following the 30 days, the client and their partner are offered weekly counselling for two years.

Ireland and Ethiopia - Nolawi Services for Women who have been Trafficked

Ireland continues to support Nolawi Service in Ethiopia. Nolawi supports women who were trafficked to the Middle East and Europe and have returned home to Ethiopia. The project offers a rehabilitation programme which includes medical assistance, counselling and skills training in order to help the women reintegrate into their home environment. Sr. Myriam continues to offer supervision support and assistance in procuring funds.

New Born Babies in Malawi, Africa - Good Shepherd Ecumenical Knitting Group

In 2013, the Ecumenical prayer group I regularly attend was invited to start a group to knit jumpers for new born babies. The babies are affectionately called ‘fish and chips babies’, because when they leave hospital they are wrapped in brown paper to keep them warm, just as fish and chips are when brought home from the chip shop, to keep them warm. Many knitting groups were formed around Northern Ireland and some of these groups are still going today. Similar groups also developed in the South of Ireland and England. We are in awe, for example, of one very industrious knitter who is 80 years old! In addition to the jumpers, we produce crocheted shawls for the babies. We send the knitted garments to Malawi in plastic boxes and to our amazement and delight, these boxes are used as cots for the premature babies. We have very many knitting groups who give generously to the project through producing beautiful garments and or money. The latter helps finance the cost of buying the boxes and posting them directly to the hospital in Malawi. Sixty-six boxes have been sent from the project here in Belfast to Malawi, to: Dr. Lynn Dowds, The David Gordon Memorial Hospital, Livingstone, Malawi, Africa. By Sr Rita Doyle, Belfast.

Family Hub – A Place of Refuge

In 2009 Sarah and her four children fled their home. They did so to escape their father’s violent behaviour. They stayed in a Refuge for six months and then three other rented properties in the city. In February 2018 Sarah had to leave, her home again as the landlord was selling the
property. The family moved into a single room in a hotel. The family consisted of two children at University, and two others at school. Life was extremely difficult. The Good Shepherd Hub opened in Cork in June 2018. Sarah was offered accommodation in the Hub, which consisted of two rooms with a shared kitchen and facilities. She was really pleased to have some freedom and support and viewed it as a step nearer to getting her own home. She recalls having a worker engaging with her, looking constantly at housing options. She experienced great networking with housing agencies and interested parties. Three months later in October, Sarah was offered a house outside the city. Although anxious about the move, she felt supported to take the step and is now settled in her happy home.

Benoît's Story
Benoît loves to actively contribute to his local community, but for the 6 years that he was an asylum seeker he did not have the right to work in Ireland. Benoît used to spend his days volunteering at a homeless service, fixing bicycles at a community centre, supervising homework for schoolchildren and helping students prepare for French oral exams. He was clearly contributing a lot to his community but there is much more Benoît would like to do, and top of the list was getting a job.

“Doing voluntary work is good for the mind, and it helps me to make friends,” he explains. “As an asylum seeker you are by yourself. Your family calls you from home asking you to send some money, but you do not have a job or money. It’s very complicated, very frustrating. I dealt with my frustration by trying to make a contribution.”

Benoît was anxious to keep his mind busy and prepare for the jobs market. He found a suitable computer course, but did not have an income to pay the €400 course fees. It was then that he heard about the Microfinance Programme operated by Good Shepherd Ireland, and applied for a loan under the No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS).

Benoît recently received recognition as a refugee and with that recognition, the right to work. Having completed his course Benoit has found employment that he could not have accessed without his computer skills.

Sharing Fair Ireland 2004-2018
In October 2004 the Irish Province joined the informal but vibrant network of Good Shepherd Sisters assisting women in the developing world to literally work their way out of degrading conditions. Sharing Fair Ireland was launched in October 2004. A special place was converted to house the project – special because it was the altar bread department of our Contemplative Sisters in Belfast. The significance of this was not lost. Where once the sisters had prepared hosts to become the Bread of Life for parishes throughout the diocese, they now gave place to receive, prepare, stock and display goods which arrived from our centres in the developing world. All this would turn into bread for life throughout the Good Shepherd world.

Since its launch in 2004, through the wonderful enthusiasm and commitment of the Good Shepherd Sisters, Good Shepherd Friends volunteer throughout Ireland, to date Sharing Fair has generated over one million pounds sterling (£1,000,000) through sales of the crafts and donations. In addition to returns for cost of crafts from: Ecuador, El Salvador, Kenya, Madagascar, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, donations, on request, have been shared among various projects in these countries. This succeeded in ensuring a steady source of income to thousands of families in the above named countries, enabling them to increase their standard of living, access to healthcare, and education and reduce the risk of forced migration, human trafficking etc. It also enabled us to highlight the plight of many women in the developing world and their efforts to become self-sufficient. Some have even begun to create their own small businesses.

Sharing Fair has already come to an end in many countries and we are preparing to end marketing the crafts from the various countries here in Ireland by the end of 2018. However, we hope to continue supporting the overseas projects albeit in a different form, yet to be finalised. Our desire is to find ways of providing services for those most in need of our support.
Recently, I accompanied Sister Annunciata to Palermo in Sicily, where she was going to animate a day of presentations and activities for lay people on the Good Shepherd congregation. It was for me a great opportunity to discover the mission of the sisters in this wonderful island of colors, sun, olive trees, fruits, where the mountains and the sea compete in beauty. An enchanting site invites one to stay... to contemplate.

Besides the splendor of the landscape, this Sicilian escapade allowed me to discover an extremely lively mission, starting with the community of about ten sisters, not very young, but joyful and remarkably open to the laity. Their dining room door often opens to welcome a person who drops in. They invite the visitor to have a cup of coffee or a meal, depending on the time of day. This way of doing things seems to be a given, thanks to the relationships created as we would in a large family. During the day, everyone had lunch with the community in a relaxed, happy, joyful atmosphere where the participants expressed themselves with warmth.

As soon as we arrived, we had the opportunity to visit a brand new apostolic project, opened three months ago for women and children who come from situations of abuse. The refurbished house, under the blue sky with the sea nearby, provides a welcome with respect for people and safeguards the intimate story of each mother and her children. We were very warmly welcomed and I was touched by the attitude of the staff, full of tenderness with the children, and attentive to each of the mothers, some of whom were visibly shocked. It was joyful, despite the underlying tragedies experienced recently; I felt in their distress a strong solidarity of the women among themselves, teenagers and children, finally safe.

In the afternoon, another visit also deeply struck me. A stone’s throw from Palermo, in the middle of an open expanse of nature, is a reception center for young migrant minors. Most of them traveled from Africa and survived their journey in spite of extremely dangerous travel conditions. In spite of being uprooted from their country and separated from their families, most seem open to another future. The first step for them is to learn Italian and the second is to join a vocational school or university to pursue studies in order to learn a trade. A team of professionals is present to listen to experiences of trauma suffered and to help them to integrate socially through sports, theatre, or other activities in the town nearby. The vibrant life within the environment surrounded by olive trees makes us dream of creating a cooperative, which could produce oil and honey in the future, and subsequently allow young people to have stable employment.

I have made more visits but it is not possible to tell you everything. The vibrant mission in Sicily that allows the spirit of our founders to shine through is admirable. The presence of the sisters and the skills of the laity truly respond to the needs of today’s society, as Saint John Eudes and Saint Mary Euphrasia did in their time.

Congratulations to the fine team, Sister Giuliana and Maria Rita, a consecrated layperson (companion of the Good Shepherd) who is the director of all these projects! Together with eighty employees, they embody the Good Shepherd charism and give witness that LOVE works wonders, and that it is at the heart of this mission and of the whole Universe!
I met Sr Nathalie in France last month and she told me about her mission in Belgium. It made me truly happy to hear her speak with such enthusiasm, so I asked her to write about her experience for the Good Shepherd Newsletter. This is what she wrote:

In Brussels, I am part of a community of 11 sisters who are based in two different locations. Each location has its own mission, one is in the middle of an area of prostitution, the other in a residential area with a welcome centre for 6 women who are alone or with children. The missions compliment each other in that we are all close to suffering women where we live and the presence of Jesus Christ for those who surround us.

I have been living in Brussels for a little more than a year now. I learnt to understand the Belgians, their customs... And yes, even having come from France, some things are still different, for example the ‘frites’!! But more seriously, Brussels a nice cosmopolitan town where you come across all sorts of very welcoming people! Where I live, there are 5 of us, coming from 4 different countries (Sri-Lanka, the Azores, Peru and France). Our 3 dear Belgian sisters live just across from us and we meet several times a week for a meal and prayer. It is a beautiful experience to live internationally within in your community and it is equally a challenge.

Our mission is to care for women with or without children, whom we welcome into the heart of our community. These women come to us because they often have nowhere else to go. Each one of them has a different past: coming from another country, waiting on Belgian identity papers, having suffered violence, leaving prison or prostitution, having experienced homelessness ...

My mission here in Brussels is partly to assist the women in various efforts - such as encouraging them to look for a job, to go and meet with a social assistant, to go to the Red Cross for food aid, etc. It is also about (re)creating relationships with the women, between the women...
and also with their children through recreational activities - such as making Christmas shortbread or hosting children’s birthday parties... This mission is done as a community or by each person using her own talents for the women and children guests.

Upon arrival, I looked for volunteering opportunities in another welcome centre for women with children who were unable to work in Belgium. I go there for “Pompom” workshops for the children and family activities. I assist the teacher when I can make myself available. Relationships have been formed between 2 Welcome Centres, the children can participate in some of their activities, such as a summer camp and we have welcomed a mother and daughter from the other Centre.

This year, I have gone back to study “Specialized Education” in Night Classes so that I can help the women as best as possible. It also ensures that I am up to date with the laws and social issues of Belgium. This opens me to work being done beyond our community and allows me to create important contacts for our apostolate with the women and children.

I am also trying to be present to young people in Brussels through a Bible Study Group. I have found a group of students and young professionals who meet once a week around the Eucharist, followed by a communal meal. These young people also engage in other religious activities eg: Adoration and have fun experiences together such as games and rock’n’roll.

Everything that I do as part of my mission here in Brussels means a lot to me, it’s enriching. What makes me happy are the exchanged smiles, the sharing and seeing the people that you meet blossom.
Good Shepherd Newsletter

Thank you to the translators, and the proofreaders

Adriana Perez  
Province of Europe-BFMN

Karla Bernabé  
West Africa (Senegal, Burkina Faso)

Marie Hélène Halligon  
Province of Europe-BFMN

Mercy de Leon  
Province of Mid-North America

Simone Moubarak  
Mission Partner Lebanon-Syria Province

Yolanda Martinez  
Province of Central South US

Monique Tarabeh  
Communications coordinator
Email: Com@gssweb.org  
Website: http://rgs.gssweb.org/