In January Sr. Mirjam Beike joined the Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office, beginning with a six-month hands-on training period in New York before she moves to Geneva to serve as the Main NGO Representative to the UN in Geneva.

“I joined the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in 1988. I am a social worker. After noviciate I worked 13 years at several places in shelters for trafficked women and women who experienced violence in their marriage or partnership. Five years I worked for Caritas, leading a reintegration program for girls, living on the streets. From 2009 to 2017 I was missioned to Albania, where we supported a shelter for trafficked women and girls with the help of RENOVABIS (a charitable organization of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany to help people in Eastern and Central Europe.)

When the time in Albania was coming to an end I wanted to get more involved in our justice and peace office, and here you find me now. At the moment I am doing an internship at our justice and peace office in New York, being introduced to the work mainly by Winifred Doherty RGS. This year in autumn I will move forward to Geneva, where 2019 I will take the responsibility to be the main representative for our Congregation.”

Sr Donatus Lili, the NGO Regional Representative for Good Shepherd in Africa, attended the 68th Session of CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) in Geneva from October 23, 2017 - November 17, 2017. Among the 12 countries presenting during this session, Good Shepherd is present in Burkina Faso, Guatemala, Kenya, Paraguay and Singapore. Donatus prepared a report on behalf of Good Shepherd in Kenya on Fistula, which you can read here, and prepared a statement which you can read here.
As 2017 came to a close and 2018 has begun, the Good Shepherd International Justice Peace Office has continued to engage in the process to develop a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. In late 2017, the Congregation and 16 Units (Portugal, Brazil, Mexico, Burkina Faso, Kenya, US and Toronto Province, Malta, Myanmar, National Advocacy Office (USA) Uganda, Philippines (RGS-COW), Australia, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Lebanon and Singapore-Malaysia) signed on to the Migration and Development Civil Society Network (MADE Network)’s document ‘Now and How – 10 ACTS for the Global Compacts,’ which outlines the policy formulations that global civil society urges governments to adopt, including ten areas for action and two cross-cutting issues: gender-responsive policies and the rights of children. You can find the document here, as well as instructions for sign on, and a letter template to help with advocacy at the national level.

At the beginning of December, Cecilie Kern represented Good Shepherd and the NGO Committee on Migration at the Stocktaking Meeting in Puerto Vallarta, as well as the accompanying civil society strategy meeting, co-leading the civil society strategy and engagement with governments on the protection of migrants. Read her report here. The meeting aimed to consolidate the outcomes of the various thematic and regional consultations during the first phase of the Global Compact for Migration. There was a spirit of determination, a strong endorsement of international cooperation, and a focus on rights & dignity of all migrants. The summary of this meeting, as well as the Secretary-General’s report ‘Making Migration Work for All’ were the two main documents which informed the co-facilitators as they prepared the zero-draft of the Global Compact for Migration.

The third and final phase of the process began in February 2018 with the publication of the zero-draft and the commencement of negotiations. The negotiations will continue for one week each month in New York, and Cecilie will follow the negotiations intently. The discussion during the first round of negotiations revealed worrisome fault lines among governments, particularly with respect to around human rights protections for irregular or undocumented migrants. The March round of negotiations featured more in-depth discussion about differentiation between irregular and regular migrants, differentiation between migrants and refugees, implementation and capacity-building, as well as follow-up and review.

There is also a Global Compact for Refugees, which has its own zero-draft, but no negotiation process. Rather, UNHCR is conducting a series of formal consultations with Member States and other stakeholders. See for details.

In Lebanon, the number of refugees far exceeds half of the local population. Needless to say, it is the children who pay the most for the lack of peace in the region. The Lebanese government has set up a school system for Syrian children, but while there are large numbers of Iraqi children, nothing is done for them. Most Iraqi children in Lebanon do not attend school for several reasons (they cannot attend because they are not at the right level, or they never went to school before leaving Iraq...)

To do justice to these children, we have established a program adapted to their level and engaged 3 ladies who have good experience in teaching, rented a suitable place, and hired a driver whose bus is insured to pick up the children in the morning and bring them home in the afternoon.

This year, there are 64 children (boys and girls) aged from 6 to 14 years old. Their parents are relieved to see their children go to school. As in other projects, we try to involve other organizations and associations for this work. For example, the Capuchin Fathers send their young people in training for activities with these children. Nowadays, these children are so happy to be educated as all children of their age. This is their legitimate right.

Also, during the Christmas break, the staff took the children for a 3-day camp. The children were so happy that they still are talking about it. An 11-year-old boy told me: "These 3 days were the best days of my life." A partner organization gave them personal gifts for Christmas, and another association offered them warm coats. The work for Justice and Peace is done even better when we work together.
The 56th session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD 56) took place at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 29 January to 7 February 2018, and focused on the theme “Strategies for eradicating poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.” Good Shepherd submitted a joint written statement, calling for governments to have the political will to address multidimensional poverty. You can read the statement here.

This year, the Commission concluded with the adoption of an outcome document by government officials that highlighted social protection systems as a key tool to help lift up the millions of people still living in poverty, especially those in vulnerable situations. “At the global level, we have experienced impressive reductions in extreme poverty. Significant progress has also been made in improving access to schooling and healthcare, promoting the empowerment of women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous populations,” said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed at the opening of the Commission. “However, the drop in extreme poverty remains uneven across regions, within countries and between various social groups,” she noted.

This year, the Civil Society Forum took place on 2 February 2018 under the theme “Social Protection, Including Floors.” Good Shepherd Main Representative Winifred Doherty moderated the main panel and interactive dialogue. Panelists from civil society, governments, the UN and the private sector and other participants engaged in discussion on practices, examples and lessons learned from the field, linking social development with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable, especially its call to ‘Leave no one behind.’ The Civil Society Forum also discussed the Civil Society Declaration, a joint document which again highlighted Social Protection as a strategy for poverty eradication.

Many side events were also organized to highlight good practices and further strategies to eradicate poverty. Good Shepherd helped to organize an event entitled “Youth Employment: An Essential Component in the Fight to Eradicate Poverty.” The interactive panel addressed youth employment as a key factor in achieving the ambitious agenda set forth in the 2030 Agenda with an emphasis on Sustainable Development Goal 8 which addresses decent work for all, with Objective 8a explicitly promoting youth employment. One of the panelists was Cristal Cruz, a former participant at Good Shepherd Services NYC who has overcome tremendous hardship and is now on the path to higher education and is working at Good Shepherd Services to support students in the same way she was supported. Cristal spoke about her positive experiences as an intern, and recommended that to assist young workers to find their way to long term sustainability, ongoing mentorship, skills training and counseling services are essential. With these supports in place, young people have been more equipped to develop a sense of purpose and a sense of a future. She noted that this helped her develop social and networking skills that, she said, “I didn’t know I was capable of.”

Winifred was a panelist of another side event, “Legal Mechanisms to Eradicate Poverty & Achieve Sustainable Development”. She eloquently highlighted the international legal basis for the right to social security for all and social protection- in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and ILO conventions, including ILO Recommendation 202. Watch part of her presentation here. In 2019 the discussion of social protection will continue, as the Commission’s priority theme will be “Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies.”

Winifred Doherty, Main NGO Representative to the United Nations, Donatus Lili, NGO Regional Designate for RMoa and Michael Owino, Coordinator of the Mission Development Office East Central Africa conducted a three-day Justice Peace workshop in Ngong, Kenya from January 11-13, 2018. The workshop was attended by 12 sisters in Temporary Profession, 4 Novices, together with Sr Teresa, Formator with the Temporary Professed, and Sr Catherine, the community leader in Ngong. It was an experience of teamwork and integration of justice peace with ministry against a backdrop of spirituality.

The workshop began with introductions and sharing by each participant of experiences and the meaning of justice peace in her life, and continued with sessions on the GSJP Office, including its vision and mission, the Sustainable Development Goals, CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women), the United Nations, social protection floors, and the Mission Development Office. More information, including relevant documents and the PowerPoint presentations prepared for each session can be found on Winifred’s blog.
A lived experience of 12 years with foreign girls coming out of the streets. – Sr. Lorenza Micoli

I am Sr. Lorenza, and I am sharing my experience working in a welcome house at Limido Pioltello in the province of Milan. Our ministry welcomes foreign girls coming out of the streets. This is a house that began its work in 1997 through Caritas Ambriana and later by “Cooperativa Farsi Prossimo” (Social Cooperative Become a Neighbor). The Good Shepherd began this work with 3 sisters and also with lay mission partners. I began this work in 2004 and ended in June 2017.

I must say that it was not simple or easy to live together with these young women, but for me it was a way and a grace that helped me feel that we are members of the same family. They were my children, my sisters. This is the beauty of living with them. We know that we are the receivers of their frustrations, their moments of crises and that we have to accept their personal violence. The trust is not immediate in our relationship - it needs time, patience and love.

What are the frustrations of these young women? They were deceived, with promises of work that would give them the possibility to help their families and children back home, with the possibility of a better life... What a delusion!

What is the violence they suffer? At the beginning of their voyage the first violence is that they are deprived of their documents “Now I am nobody!” Violence, rape, abortions, etc. during their journey, the waiting in some places (especially in Libya, to cross the desert). They say “We cannot go back!” This trip is no longer a hope for a better future but a nightmare every moment.

And to crown their heads... with thorns... Our streets! With all the violence their bodies endure – victims to those who want to satisfy their carnal instincts on fragile women with no defense. These persons want to give more to organized crime that does their best to recruit human beings from poor counties for the dirty market.

Do they have a right to rebel against this violence? I say yes! Of course there is a need to teach them the way of doing it, to “throw away” what they had to endure without saying anything, otherwise they would be threatened with physical harm and even with death - yes with death! When they managed to escape, some without paying their debts, their families are subject to oppression, threats of death and beatings.

Life in this welcome community can be, for those who accept help, an opportunity to regain dignity, to get rid of fears, and to gain control of one’s own life and body as a unique person who is free, and for those who believe in God, to feel for ever that they are a “child of God,” loved with a preferential love.

One of the Nigerian girls, who did not dare to lift her head, told me one day: “I feel dirty from the inside” ... I told her “It is not you who are dirty but those who put you on the streets! They yes are dirty!”

Life in a house like this serves to:

- See if the girl is ready to report the perpetrators or not, in this case she has to begin with her residency permit for humanitarian reasons. If the girl is afraid to do this because of the repercussions on her family, she will do this just the same and ask for protection. To obtain these documents it takes time, and they need patience. Believe me, this is sometimes very difficult to accept, and this process creates conflicts. The police have to verify the truth of what the girl is saying, so even in this safe place, the girls relive the most terrible moments of her life.

- At the same time, we have to take care of the health of the girl: they arrive with sickness, AIDS, beginning of tuberculosis, infections and also pregnancy. Everything is programmed to help the girl to be treated during the months she is with us.

- The immediate desires of these girls are documents and work. For this reason, volunteers from the Parish come to give them lessons in Italian. When they receive their residency documents they go to Milan for courses for foreigners at “St. Charles Foundation” and to get work authorization. For some there is also a possibility of work contract.

- Life in community is lived with all kind of experiences: domestic work, cooking, learning Italian, time to work together, and more. They have personal time... especially in the morning, and until 11.00pm. We have some recreation together, or some rest. Community living is an experience of socialization - it calls for patience and understanding from our side, because living with different cultures and different languages, and the challenges of living in an environment one has not chosen is very difficult! What helped me during all these years is: prayer, the sisters who worked with me in the mission for some years, the charism of the Congregation, and collaboration with mission partners working as a team. The Parish, including priests, auxiliary sisters, friends, volunteers, and benefactors, all were part of the big family of support. The girls took part in the parish life, and they also felt appreciated. The young women themselves organize feasts, and go to see beautiful places in order to find the beauty around them.

We had to leave this mission because we have no sisters, but our joy is that the mission continues, in different ways. The 20 years of ministry from the Good Shepherd Sisters were, so to say, on a “voluntary” basis. Living with the women, helped me to feel the greatness of our Charism inside of me. “Merciful love, and the fourth Vow Salvation for souls” given to us by St. John Eudes and St. Mary Euphrasia. (Today we say Zeal for the salvation of the person.) Also... I do not say anymore that I am French, Italian, etc. I belong to all the places where there are souls to be saved.

I think I have shared a bit of my strong but beautiful experience, that leaves me with great homesickness! It still gives me the wish to continue the battle for all these young women that are still on the streets.
In response to this situation, on 10th December on the Human Rights day, the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Nagpur and National Domestic Workers Unit staff, along with the representatives of the domestic workers participated in the press conference. 24 reporters from Various News Papers were present like Hitwada, Times of India, Indian Express, The Hindu etc. The consultation was called on 13th December, 2017 at Chitnavis Center, Sadar Road, Nagpur between 5.30 to 7pm

The Maharashtra State Assembly winter session was held from 10th December to 20th December 2017 in Nagpur. The Good Shepherd Working in National Domestic Workers Nagpur Unit had the Convention on 13th December 2017 and invited the stakeholders like Judges, labour Law Advocates, Human right Activists, Media Personnel, Labour Minister, Members of Legislative Assembly, Union Leaders and like-minded NGO’s The domestic workers proposed amendments in domestic workers Legislation under National Policy for domestic workers.

During the Convention and press release the Maharashtra welfare act for domestic workers and the plight of the domestic workers were highlighted to the Ministers. They assured us that they would take up the issue in the Assembly during the session and include the provisions and welfare measures that are demanded by the domestic workers and the stakeholders.

Our appeal to Government is:

1. The Govt. of India protects the rights of domestic workers through a Comprehensive National Legislation for Domestic Workers.

2. The Govt. of India ratifies the ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers.
Laura Vidal has recently joined Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand in the role of Policy and Research Specialist in the Women’s Research, Advocacy and Policy (WRAP) Centre. Laura has extensive expertise in the area of human trafficking and slavery prevention and protection. Over the last 9 years Laura has worked in both service delivery and policy advocacy supporting and representing the needs of individuals who have experienced human trafficking and slavery, including early and forced marriage. Laura received a Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship, which took her on a study tour in 2017 to 6 countries (Sri Lanka, United Kingdom, Denmark, United States, Canada and Kenya) with the aim of developing innovative and best practice solutions to early and forced marriage. The findings of this research are the foundations of a model that will see Australia reshape its approach to this issue—increasing opportunities for safety and freedom.

Laura shares with us what she learned through her fellowship and how this work will be part of advancing the policy agenda to address early and forced marriage in Australia, with possible implications for other places to consider.

Forced marriage was introduced into Australia’s Commonwealth slavery offences in 2013. The practice is defined and understood by this legislation as a practice of slavery—a forced marriage is ‘a marriage entered into without the free and full consent of one or both of the parties involved, as a result of coercion, threat or deception’.

Whilst awareness and reporting has increased since criminalisation, the practice is not a new phenomenon; the earliest report of forced marriage in Australia dates back to 1994. The true extent of the issue remains unknown as there is little available comprehensive data and, because it takes place within the context of the family unit, is likely underreported. The National Children’s and Youth Law Centre, in their study on child marriage, reported that between 2011 and 2013, 250 cases were identified by research respondents. In 2016-2017, the Australian Federal Police Human Trafficking Team received 70 referrals of early and forced marriage bringing the total since criminalisation to 174.

Momentum and growing evidence suggests a need to change the way in which Australia responds to the practice of early and forced marriage. There is a greater realisation that Australia’s current approach, one which is defined and rooted in a criminal justice paradigm, is falling short of both preventing the practice and ensuring that individuals have adequate and appropriate support. The current framework requires that individuals who wish to access a government-funded support program must engage with federal law enforcement, which many victims are reluctant to do. The findings of this research also support earlier work carried out by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, in the report ‘The Right to Refuse,’ noting that this approach is inadequate and often not appropriate or in the best interests of the individual at risk. It can also be said that the current framework is limiting people from coming forward and reporting early and forced marriage and therefore contributing to the lack of available data about the size and scope of the issue.

Four key gaps in prevention and support that were identified through field work and experiences of government and non-government stakeholders were the impetus for the research and shaped the exploratory framework:

1. Link between support and participation in a criminal justice process;
2. Available and appropriate accommodation;
3. Centralised and coordinated approach;
4. Engaging communities in behaviour change.

These gaps linked with four corresponding aims which guided interviews with 45 research participants, including:

1. Explore intervention and practice frameworks implemented internationally, that have proven to prevent forced marriage from occurring and enhance the wellbeing of individuals;
2. Assess learning and opportunities from others to strengthen practice in Australia;
3. Seeks answers to questions from Government and Non-Government partners, including how changes can be implemented within the Australian context;
4. Develop a model of best practice that prevents early and forced marriage from occurring and provide support to individuals at risk.

The research participants were a combination of survivors, practitioners, government representatives, non-government representatives and policy experts. The selection of participants also contributed to an intentional emphasis on non-legislative responses and models that employ an inter-disciplinary and cross-agency approach. This approach was adopted to support the notion that criminalisation alone will not end the practice, and that criminal justice outcomes are enhanced when people feel adequately supported and safe.

The data gathered through the research concludes that Australia does not have the most effective framework to ensure prevention and protection of individuals at risk of early and forced marriage. Additionally, it finds that to address the practice effectively, governments and community responders must approach intervention as more than a legal problem to be solved.
Doing so would account for the intersections between early and forced marriage and the complex nature of familial relationships that are often at the centre of the practice. Evidence has shown that approaches which offer alternatives to that of legal recourse lead to higher levels of community engagement and comprehensive victim-led interventions. Legislation cannot be introduced in isolation and if the aim is to change attitudes and behaviours, engagement with the community cannot lead with conversations of prosecution. Leading with the law has not achieved any measurable change in knowledge, attitudes or behaviours. In contrast, the research finds that effective interventions to both prevent the practice and provide adequate protections for individuals at risk of forced marriage are built on partnership and establishing shared value.

Five recommendations summarise the key findings of the research and it is these recommendations that outline a roadmap for future advocacy and policy development. If adopted, the recommendations go a long way to prevent the practice of early and forced marriage from occurring and protecting individuals at risk. Based on the experiences of others, the recommended approaches will also result in increased participation in legal pathways and the achievement of optimal victim outcomes.

The first recommendation will be a key focus for Laura in her role with Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand. Without recognising the intersections and challenging the practice of early and forced marriage as solely a practice of slavery ignores the inherently gendered nature of the issue and how it disproportionately impacts on women and girls. Full recognition of the complexity of the issue will ensure that more appropriate interventions are in place, ensuring that women and girls can enjoy the full freedom of their human rights.

Recommendations:

1. Expand the definition of child, early and forced marriage to include intersections with gender-based violence, family violence and child protection. This will improve community engagement and ensure comprehensive service delivery frameworks are developed.

2. Develop and implement access to informed and coordinated support.

3. Create pathways that ensure victims and survivors have access to appropriate and targeted support services that prioritises their safety and wellbeing over participation in a criminal justice process.

4. Implement a national policy framework that provides access to safety and support regardless of willingness and capacity to engage with law enforcement.

5. Engage communities in an approach founded on partnership and inclusion. 

Laura Vidal with Farwha Neilsen, Danish State Specialist & Founder of the Cross Cultural Meditation Method

Laura Vidal with Aruna Boodram, Community Legal Worker, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario

Laura Vidal with Anup Manota, Operations Manager, Karma Nirvana
Background: Talitha Kum is an international network of Consecrated Life against trafficking in persons. The members of consecrated men and women work together to strengthen initiatives against trafficking in persons by promoting preventative actions, awareness raising, protection and assistance to victims.

Talitha Kum, South East and East Asia: Two years ago, the two regions of South East and East Asia network combined to meet at the end of 2015 in Vietnam. In this conference the network was strengthened with a renewed commitment to empower more advocates against trafficking in persons, especially the consecrated and lay persons, to respond to the challenge to end trafficking.

The network is a combination of "sending" and "receiving" countries and thus all the countries who attended were able to learn of the resources for rescued victims and programs for repatriation and reintegration.

Talitha Kum Conference 2017: The conference in Hua Hin, Thailand took place from the 13th to 15th November with participation from 11 countries. The main objective was to continue and strengthen the network as there were many who were attending the conference for the first time. It was heartening to note that the various congregations in Thailand were taking the time to build capacity within their congregations to address the challenges faced by advocates working on anti-trafficking issues.

In this meeting the Good Shepherd Congregation was represented by five countries comprising six sisters and one lay person.

There were opportunities for Good Shepherd to connect with other congregations where we did not have a geographical reach and to learn what each was doing in areas of prevention and protection.

Sr Laurina gave a presentation on the activities and programmes in Malaysia. The presentation explained how the four Ps in the TIP report are addressed and the collaborative efforts of Good Shepherd’s welfare organisation with the government for the protection of the women victims in the government shelters.

We also put forward to Talitha Kum our expectations from the network which is to build on a directory of congregations that offer services to survivors of trafficking. We also felt that it was important for a "link person" to be appointed for each congregation for easier communication.

As we listened to the country reports we were made aware of what each country could offer to the others in terms of their experiences and resources to be shared. There was a richness of sharing amongst the participants and there were also exposure visits to migrant works managed by other congregations in Hua Hin, Thailand.

The conference ended with a handover of the secretariat for South East Asia from Talitha Kum, Thailand to Talitha Kum, Indonesia. There was also an agreement by Japan to coordinate the East Asia network and strengthen the other countries in their network namely Taiwan, S Korea and Japan.

From left to right - Sr Chatarina Supatmiyat RGS, Sr Sutisa Utalun RGS, Sr Rebecca Kay Thi Oo RGS, Sr Laurina Loh RGS, Sr Stephanie Kong RGS, Sr Joan of Arc Song RGS, Ms Wilhelmina Mowe

Country report by Sr Laurina for Malaysia, assisted by Ms Connie Fong (lay partner for FMM)
Chalchihuitan Chiapas, Mexico: Land of the Others? By Maria Juana Urbina Guerrero

Chalchihuitan is one of the poorest municipalities in Chiapas, adjacent to Chenalhó. For 40 years the government has given land to these two municipalities along with their agricultural papers, and since then each municipality disputes the ownership of their land. Chalchihuitan is a land of gentle men and women who have not opted for weapons to defend their lands, but by peaceful and legal means, however this has not been recognized by the government.

On October 18, the inhabitants of Chenalhó increased tensions among the inhabitants of the disputed lands. They killed Samuel, a brave, strong man and defender of the land, leaving 26-year-old Lucia alone with 4 children. The rest of the population was threatened with shots in the air and the destroying and burning of houses. The memory of the Acteal massacre came to the memory of these farmers and they took shelter in the mountains for three days without water, without food, in the wet and cold, but little by little they relocated to camps near the border with Chenalhó - 5023 men, women, and children, among them pregnant women, blind persons, people with different capacities and sick persons. This conflict has already claimed the lives of 12 people due to hunger, cold, illness and fear.

The news of suffering and food emergency feed my compassion by encouraging my heart to collaborate in some way among the affected population. On December 16, I signed up as a volunteer to go and they received me in a medical brigade. We managed to go through all 9 camps offering natural medicine services, autohemotherapy-vaccines, de-stressing massages and chiropractic therapy, and from my heart as a shepherd: a hug for the children, a smile for the women, an encouragement for the men, warmth for the elderly and prayer for those depressed in mourning.

The camps are rustic, only four sticks and a plastic tarp, and some cottages. I lived there for 14 days, only a little time for this population in need, only 500 consultations and vaccines accompanied by moments of warmth and closeness to the heart that suffers, time to listen to their anguish, their impotence, their fear, their courage and they said: "My little animals are left behind," "my harvest was left," "my house stayed," "my things stayed," "my school books were left." There is another population farther from the border that can go to their homes every day to take care of and see their belongings but they know they cannot stay because of the intimidation of the shots that make them return every day to the camps.

It is time to look at the inequality and prominence of government services that would commonly come to take photographs to show their solidarity with the Church and the civilian population to render their reports of assistance in the conflict.