

SOCIETY OF HELPERS

VOICES of Hope

Bringing hope to the human journey



Winter 09 Vol:1

Perhaps | it is time



Welcome into our Lives!

Perhaps it is time. Perhaps it is time to introduce the Helpers to a wider audience. The first Helpers who crossed the borders of the US in 1892, quickly took pen in hand and although they did not speak perfect English, invested time and energy into making themselves and their mission known via the printed word to those around the New York area. They firmly believed that they had something very important to communicate to others. News spread by their words and deeds and soon they were invited to other diocese across the country.

Today, we would like to invite you to get to know us again. Maybe you could get to know more of us and what we do, perhaps you could come to understand the spirit of our community a little more deeply, perhaps you might find something of your own spirit deepened or enlivened as you come to know us in a more significant way.

Today, we still believe that who we are, the things we do, the way we think, the dreams and visions we share, our spirituality and our mission are still important and significant for our world and for our time. We want to introduce ourselves to you or maybe re-introduce ourselves because we hope that somehow by knowing us, your world can be enlarged just a little, your "tent can be widened", you can feel more connected to your brothers and sisters across the globe. We want you to know us because somehow in that mutual exchange that is the fruit of good relationship, you can come to know your own spirit, treasure your own spirituality, appreciate the dimensions of your own life better because of your brief time with us.

So perhaps it is time to once again make a concerted effort to extend ourselves to the world around us. Thank you for taking the time to read the following pages which will give you a brief taste of who we are, the shape of our lives and the values we hold together. Welcome into our lives. When you have read this publication please share it with a family member or a friend.

Sister Mary Ellen Moore
Provincial, U.S. Province



Letter | from the Editor

A few months ago, a small group of us gathered at the lower level of our Chicago house to discuss the development of a publication for the Society of Helpers. We wanted a publication that would serve the Helpers community, allow us to have a voice and share our experiences as Helpers amongst ourselves and the outer world. These experiences are a living testament of our mission.

Why did we select "Voices of Hope" for our title? We believe that hope is borne of faith, and it is through faith that we experience the presence of God. As Helpers, it is part of our mission to bring the presence of God and God's everlasting love to the human lives we touch, lives which at times need justice, spiritual healing and compassion throughout their journey.

Our theme for this first issue is "We are Helpers for the Whole World." Inside you will find reflections based on the Helper experience as she travels the world, bringing a message of hope to the human journey. In November 2008, I sent out a request for written or photographic contributions with this theme in mind; the response was immediate and substantial. Though only those which seemed to fit most with the current theme were selected for publication, I would like to thank all of the Sisters who submitted a contribution.

I would also like to thank those who helped me put this first issue together: Ramiro Hernandez, Theresa Viramontes and Nora Gruenberg. It is through everyone's work and creative energy that all of this became possible. I extend my sincerest gratitude on behalf of all Helpers.

God Bless,
Sister Jean Kielty

Lengthen Your Ropes

By Sister Andrée Brosseau
Vice-Province of Quebec

During my novitiate, I could never have foreseen how the Helpers would lengthen my ropes. There was a large map in the community room, which showed all the countries where the m was present and I found this quite impressive. Several years after first commitment, Nicole Jetté, Suzanne Loiselle, and I took part in our first international meeting. For me, this was "the shock of internationality," the title given to the final communication put together by the editorial team.

The cultural differences within the group, comprised of sisters from Belgium, France, Mexico, Switzerland, China, Japan and Canada, revealed themselves through lively exchanges, disagreements and questions. The bonds of friendship created during this meeting still remain today. Without anyone surrendering her particular distinctiveness, a greater understanding came about over time, thanks to my good fortune in being able to attend numerous international meetings in Paris and elsewhere.

When my prayer takes on a universal dimension, I am in touch with all the Helpers around the world, with the men and women thirsting for justice, dignity, peace and solidarity, with those who work to make another world possible. The universal dimension to my prayer allows me to plunge into the communion of saints. Belonging to an international community requires that I embrace the "shock of internationality." While remaining faithful to my deep convictions as a Helper living in an increasingly multi-cultural Quebec, I am called upon to invest my energies with the whole Institute, encouraging our communities in every part of this inequitable world to respond to the Gospel's predilection for the poor and the excluded. I extend my gratitude to the Helpers who have brought about such a widening of my tent.

Isaiah 54:2

"Widen the space of your tent, extend the curtains of your home, do not hold back! Lengthen your ropes, make your tent-pegs firm."

Responding | to Longing

By Sister Edith Zingg
Vice-Province of Switzerland



For many years my experience with faith included struggling, searching, longing. After secretarial and administrative training, I trained as a nurse, worked in a hospital and volunteered in a parish. I then decided to study theology and finished my studies with a doctorate in the New Testament. Although I was content with my life, there was still a longing to bring my faith, my spiritual experiences, my doubts, and my work together.

Although I had known the Helpers for several years, it hadn't occurred to me to become a sister, but the longing continued to grow deeper, and the struggle with God remained.

One day, out of frustration, I said to my spiritual director, "Maybe I should join a community." She answered, "Yes, think about it." I thought it sounded crazy; I never could obey. I was sure the community would suffer with me. But the idea continued to grow and finally after I finished my studies, I joined the Helpers at the age of 36.

Because I had already lived with the Helpers in Switzerland for four years and the vice-province is very small, they offered me the opportunity to make my novitiate in India. I joined the novitiate in Barasat, near Kolkata, and lived there for 14 months. The other novices were Indian and much younger than I. We had completely different backgrounds and came from vastly different cultures.

Sr. Hemma Muschick served as a novice directress during this challenging and very rich experience. As I got in touch with the questions, fears, joys, attitudes, talents, wisdom and life experiences of our Indian sisters, I developed a new perspective on my own background, my own culture and my own life.

During this time, I regularly visited leprosy patients and girls in a home for street children. I learned I was in India not as a secretary, a nurse or a theologian but just as 'Edith.' This deepened my faith, and I discovered: "I carry the treasure in clay jars ..." (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). I still carry this treasure with me, two years after I left the Indian novitiate.

After my stay in India, I lived in France and experienced a taste of the internationality and the history of the Helpers. During the Institute's General Chapter, which gathers Helpers



Responding | to Longing Continued

from every province for an "occasion of a renewal of the spiritual and apostolic life of the Institute," I helped on the communication team. The team kept the whole Institute connected by providing daily communication via the Web. Meeting so many sisters from various countries, witnessing how sisters listen to the whispering of the Spirit and how they pray, share and work together, even in facing the challenges of different cultures, languages and ages, was an enriching experience. I felt proud of our community and was touched by the faithful 'struggle' to live and work in the same charism, even though the challenges and the needs of the people in each country are different.

Back in Switzerland I worked with the Jesuits in pastoral care at the University of Zürich. But at the end of last year, I received an inquiry asking if I would teach New Testament as visiting professor in Morning Star College in Barrackpore, near Kolkata. Never before had a woman taught Scriptures in this seminary. I went back to India for two-and-a-half months but into a

completely different context. Instead of being surrounded by sisters, I was a woman among 200 male seminarians and priests. I was surprised how open many of the students and professors were. I engaged in several interesting discussions and enjoyed the new relationships that grew. This experience challenged me and taught me to be aware of the context in which we speak about God and teach theology. My experiences in India, as a novice and as a visiting professor, are also background and inspiration for my ministry with the students here in Switzerland.

Sometimes I feel like I live between those two worlds. Until now, Switzerland was my 'fatherland' and India was my 'motherland.' Something very deep touches me, becomes whole within me. So to grow increasingly into the international community of the Helpers is, for me, a great chance to discover in the dialog with others, in awareness of others' cultures, my own life. I get a deeper idea of what I am and what I am called to be.



We are | Helpers of the Whole World

By Sister Maria Goretti Mukarubayiza
Vice-Province of Rwanda



From the ages of 19 to 22 years old, I had a hard time choosing my vocation. I felt marriage and religious life were both good ways to be happy in serving God and in serving people. But soon, I became certain that with religious life I would be in touch with more people to love and to help. With that conviction, I happily and freely told my parents and my friends that I renounced marriage. I chose the religious life. Though it was not easy at the time, that internal enlightenment gave me the strength to explain my choice without fear.

At that time, I knew some congregations because I attended schools that belonged to the Sisters, but it was difficult to know in which congregation I would spend my life, the one in which I would be happiest and truly be myself. One day, one of my classmates who was already in the Society of Helpers invited me to visit their community. At the time the community included Sisters from different countries, such as Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Rwanda, and Holland. They talked easily, smiled and were dressed simply, yet uniquely. As they shared, they spoke about youth at school, about poor and sick people. I felt that they were happy. I felt a deep joy in my heart when I saw the diversity amongst them.

After that visit, I wrote to the leadership to ask if they would receive me in their congregation. I was welcomed and soon joined them. During the past 30 years of religious life, I have experienced difficulties, but I think that being in an Institute that has broadened horizons has helped me to find new ways to live and to give life. From that time until now, I have been blessed with opportunities to meet different people from differ-

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ent cultures and countries, people with different beliefs, convictions and values. My last experience in Chicago was so beautiful.

It's a blessing that I could feel so at home while living in a big city with Helpers from different parts of the country.

Today I manage a school of 518 students and 30 teachers. Even if these people have a same objective, they are also unique: students are all different ages, learn at different levels, come from different backgrounds, and possess different gifts. The main goal in my ministry is to create unity within that diversity and to permit everyone to be unique. It is fascinating to see 518 students in the same school uniform while knowing at the same time how they are each so different. Being a Helper of the whole world means staying open to people from diverse realities whose every expression is unique. This unity is a gift, a challenge and a source of continuous learning.

Constitutions 12

of the mysterious solidarity which unites the living and the dead in the hope that God will become all to all.

TO BE A HELPER

A Call to Live the Universality

By Sister Bénédicte Delaby
Province of France

A few years ago as I read an account on the life and works of Mary of Providence, the Foundress of the Society of Helpers, a passage struck my attention: "The intuition upon which the Institute is based is essentially spiritual, none of its works can be exclusive ... Mary of Providence let herself be guided by the events 'to help in all manner of good.'" Helpers are thus in solidarity with those who pass by situations of trial and growth, whether they be on earth or they have already passed through death (Constitutions 18 and 19). It is in that spirit that I was sent two years ago on mission as a hospital chaplain at the service of the Diocese of Lyon, France. Going to the hospital is like going on a trip and finding oneself in a strange world, a world which is very different from the one a person is used to.

This is true for the patients as well as for those who work there. It is a question of going beyond boundaries as I leave behind my world, my daily activities and my concerns. I find myself opening to the worlds of the people I am about to meet, those who will speak to me of their health, their treatments, their families, their joys and their sorrows. Those entering the hospital meet doctors and care givers who are often preoccupied with the pathology of the patients. When I visit people as a chaplain, I ask God for the grace to be a presence of peace. I wish to introduce myself to the patients simply as one human being who meets another without regard to appearance, illness, or even the number of weeks or months they have yet to live. What is important is the present moment which allows us to meet and to share our lives. It is then that the person I meet finds the way to the Source of Life within, which at times is lost in moments of solitude, suffering, or during long and painful treatments.

In certain units, the frontier between life and death becomes very thin: a place of anguish where patients find themselves surrounded by sophisticated equipment and must prepare for the delicate and difficult surgeries that may save their lives. I think especially of a 25 year-old man who had a kidney and liver transplant. He lay on the operating table for 15 hours. When I met him in the recovery unit, he breathed with great difficulty, uncertain whether he would live or die. Four months later, we met again when he came for a follow-up consultation. I watched him as he sat and read the biography of his favorite singer. He got up and we walked together in the hospital garden, revisiting his itinerary "from the depths of purgatory" to the land of the living.

Life and death go side by side. At times their paths cross. One Saturday morning I was finishing the preparation of a funeral celebration when the phone rang. A pre-

mature baby was dying in the neonatal unit and her parents requested an emergency baptism. Since I had a half hour free before the funeral service, I went to baptize the little girl in her incubator, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." I left her with her parents and quickly walked to the chapel for the funeral celebration I had been preparing for earlier. During the funeral service which followed, I blessed the body of the deceased with a little water also, "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Later that morning, I called the neonatal unit and learned that the baby girl had died a little after her baptism. In this way I experienced God's presence at all the stages of life and "of the mysterious solidarity which unites the living and the dead in the hope that God will become all to all" (Constitutions 12).

Communication with Helpers from other continents raises my awareness of the reality of other countries and of other cultures. I have met sisters who have lived and who still live the experience of being on a mission as hospital chaplains, be it in Hong Kong or in Chicago. It is in such a manner, both discrete and dynamic, that the universality of our Helper charism sustains my life and my mission, inviting me to go to the other, whoever he or she may be, "for there are no frontiers to love" (Constitutions 18).

Hiroshima | City of Peace

Sister Teruko Onojima
Province of Japan

A warm greeting from Hiroshima, peace city, Japan! Living in Hiroshima gives me great hope. Working here is a blessing for me. Helpers have been here since the time of the dedication of this Cathedral for World Peace in Hiroshima. The option of the diocese of Hiroshima clearly states, "Let us become apostles for Peace." Our diocesan activities are thusly related to the promotion of peace.

In this context, I was invited 15 years ago to work with the parishioners in order to accompany their apostolic journey in the diocese. fifteen years ago. The parish council appreciates my presence in the parish. As a Helper, I feel privileged to be here. My role is to share my moral support with the council while giving Bible classes and offering service and spiritual companionship for many seekers. About 30,000 people commit suicide every year in Japan, therefore many people come to church to search for the meaning of life in a society where they face irrationality. In order to work and live in peace, we need to heal our wounds so that we can choose active non-violence to change situations with our daily human relationships. I also collaborate with young workers. Sometimes we have reflection time with them so that the young people can begin to recognize their own human dignity and learn to value themselves. Once they recognize their own dignity, they can work together to find creative solutions to change difficult situations in their lives.

Every four years I help the International Council of Young Christian Workers as a translator for the delegates from Japan. Each International Council is held in a different continent. As a Helper, I love our internationality despite the challenges of understanding other cultures' mentalities and value systems. God is quite different from us, and so it is a good exercise to meet a new challenge in our daily lives so that we can prepare ourselves to meet our God face to face. Every day I encounter many people and face challenges that deepen my relationship with our Creator God through the experience of purification in some difficulty. I feel a hope for our future of the world. God bless us all!





Marking a Path

As We Walk

Sr. Amparo Novoa Palacios
Province of Latin America



It is not easy to share one's life through words because life is an experience. Life is more than words, but I will gladly share what is unfolding in my life journey. I will

describe my own experience and how this touches those around me, or at least I will attempt to do so. The mission I now have is to be part of the Xaverian Pontifical University faculty in Bogotá, Colombia. The people I respond to are the youth who are thirsty, searching for new horizons in their formation. They shape the soul of this institution. For without them, the university would not have a reason to exist.

The subject I teach is Theology. More specifically, I teach Theological Anthropology, Theology and the Human Person, Eschatology, Mariology, Theology and Gender, and Methods in Theology. I have taught approximately 400 students within the last two years. The main concern that has stayed within me throughout this time is to foster a relationship with my students that goes beyond academics. This implies a bigger commitment on my part, which transcends the classroom site. I am not interested in filling up the minds of these young people with concepts that translate into sterile knowledge. But instead, I have searched for pedagogical forms so that the knowledge they are acquiring in the different fields is creative,

reflective, leads them to be in solidarity with others, and above all, inspires them to move along with a spirit and a desire to "learn while learning."

I can testify to the fact that intellectual learning becomes an experience when it is constantly connected to the reality in which we live. It is so much so, that to reflect on that reality becomes a priority, and this requires an individual to do personal work that is honest, transparent, and that impels one to move out from a position of indifference before the local and global problems we face. To invite students into a new dawn is what allows me to affirm that my presence in their lives is making a difference. This new dawn is based on three pillars: faith, reason, and love.

Faith is an essential dimension to our existence because through it we find meaning in all the situations that make no sense in life. Reason adds another dimension to our human existence. When reasoning is creative, compassionate and intuitive, it allows one to propose alternatives to the violence we still face. And Love is understood as that inner movement that is always searching to articulate, weave, connect, free, and even protest against everything that threatens life. Using these three elements, we cultivate a creative and loving vision that gives meaning to what we do and germinates in the youth certain signs of hope that yearn to overcome the material abundance or scarcity that many people in our coun-

try experience. Metaphorically, I could say that my presence in their life is like a bridge that allows them to go from one side to the other in order to encounter the Mystery. It is about helping them to become aware that our life only makes sense when it is shared with others in a spirit of discernment and gratitude. I rejoice when I see them restless, searching for the truth. I can attest that God talks to me through each of them, their concerns, their commitments, and their solidarity with others. There is something in them that is transformed and becomes clear in their journey when the need for power and competition with which they arrive is transformed into solidarity and understanding before the neediest.

This same spirit that moves these young students is evident also in the community the faculty forms. I have been describing the responsibility I have before me: the challenge I face to continue building up a community that serves the neediest. One way of making this challenge a reality is by participating in the different gatherings that we organize and program, within a frame of gratitude and trust. This allows us to celebrate hope from the depths of faith while in the midst of the violence our country lives in.

Something that I would like to highlight in this work of dedication and service is the internationality aspect of my mission. I have taught students from Poland, Italy, France, Chile, Ecuador, Kenya, Argentina, Tanzania, Guatemala, and Peru among others. For this reason, I am happy to belong to an international congregation not only of Helpers but also of baptized men and women of faith. In this way, our Helper Charism becomes a way of life in the constant learning and interaction with other cultures because it is there that I discover that God's revelation goes beyond borders, languages, customs, and religious practices in order to continue building a human history with a human face. I would like to finish with the following poem that my own experience inspires me to share with you:

Pretending to reduce God to simple concepts, offends and confuses true knowledge.

Therefore, for Theology to have a deep effect not only do we need to read the presence of God in the horrible tragedies, but rather, my intuition suggests, that God invites us to create a movement, not the kind that tends to speculate, but rather, one that looks for true answers.

True knowledge, speaks to us of critique, of selflessness, of progress.

Therefore, when a youth, an adult, woman or man discovers the darkness of reality, their feeling becomes a word, that is addressed to claim a life with dignity and freedom.

To educate is not an easy task, when such a task is understood as a kindling of a new awakening.



Becoming a Helper

Sister Margaret Ann Minards
Province of Great Britain

When I read the first ten statements of our Constitutions, I find a spirit articulated within them that I was hardly conscious of forty years ago when I felt called to join a religious congregation. In 1965, I was a teacher.

I'd been at school with the Sisters of Mercy and then at college with the Sisters of Notre Dame. I loved and admired many of the Sisters, but I knew that I didn't want to join a teaching order. I somehow imagined spend-

ing each evening talking about school, classes, and pupils.

Through a providential friendship, I met the Helpers at Langside in Glasgow and was immediately attracted to the breadth of the ministry, their mission of "helping in all manner of need," and to their joy and simplicity. Within a year, I'd sadly left my class of seven and eight year-olds, and was in the Novitiate. That time represents a wonderful

experience of new friends, new ways of living, and of being affirmed. My parents, three sisters and my brother witnessed my First Vows at Pentecost in 1970.

I was sent to Edinburgh and after a year or so of parish work, helping in youth groups and in women's and toddler's groups, our Superior, Sister Columba, came back from a Provincial Council meeting saying that we were short of money and if anyone could earn, it would be appreciated. I could earn—I could teach!

Thus began nearly 30 years in St. Thomas High School in Edinburgh, working with teenagers and very happily walking with them in their struggles with faith and in their emotional and physical development during those often turbulent teen years. Through my own struggles in the early days and through experience, I learned essential teaching skills and came to love it. The "regular life" of the school day, week, and year suited my temperament very well. When I was out of school on weekends and during the holidays, I pursued my passions for walking, cycling and climbing the mountains of Scotland. These times away, often in the mode of a pilgrim, restored me, gave me perspective on life and provided times of prayer and reflection. God's Providence took care of all my needs.

The other great gift that came to me through Sister Columba was contact with her retired aunt and uncle who lived at Nunraw Abbey, a Cistercian monastery built in the 1940s, which was 30 miles from Edinburgh. After they died, our community was offered the use of their five bedroom house on the grounds of the Abbey. It became a wonderful resource for the Helpers. For 20 years, I took groups of 15 or so teenagers from the school for weekend retreats, where

Becoming a Helper Continued

they experienced both the rhythm of prayer in the monastery and the wilderness of the surrounding hills and moors. Over the years, I grew to know and love that area well.

Despite my happiness, there was more work to be done, an inner work. Once again Providence called me "out into the wilderness where I will speak to her heart." I was sent to Chicago in 1989 to 1990 for my Third Year, a time in the Ignatian scheme of things for further contemplation and prayer. This was a time of unbelievable healing, a truly enlightening experience. I became part of a loving international community with three Americans, one Mexican, a Japanese, a German and myself, a Scot. What unconditional love and acceptance I experienced with those Sisters, as well as with the other Sisters of the American Province. The painful inner healing process I engaged in profoundly changed my life. Although I came back after that year to the same school, I reduced my teaching days from five to four and was thus able to take on more responsibility within the Province.

The wonderful Providence of God, however, had not finished spoiling me yet! After nearly 30 years of teaching, the school dispersed for rebuilding, and it became clear to me that it was my time to leave. At the same time, our Province was also undergoing great changes as our numerical diminishment forced the closure of our big houses, and we were called into a deep and serious discernment regarding where we were being called to live. After much prayer and many exchanges with the Provincial Council, my community and the monks at Nunraw, I moved to "Pilgrims' Rest," a little cottage on the Abbey grounds.

A new life has opened for me here. I have the time and space to grow my own vegetables, to be a part of the rhythm of the monastic community, to live closely with neighboring families and their children, as well as the opportunity to visit our Sisters at Wishaw regularly. This life, though simple, fills me with joy and calls me to abandon myself more and more to the maternal and paternal Providential love of God.

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