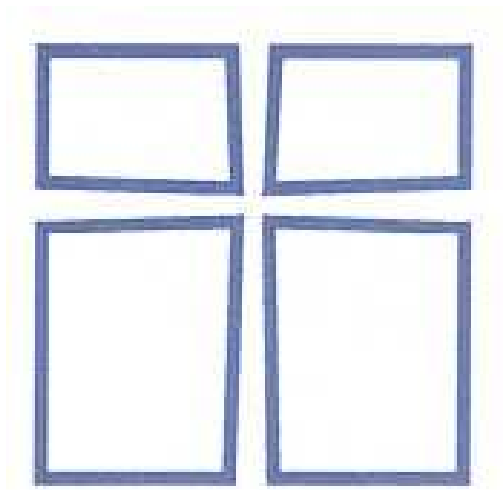


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# *Theodosia*

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Quarterly  
of the Sisters of Mercy  
of the Holy Cross  
Institute Ingenbohl  
CH-6440 Brunnen

Editorial Team:

Sister Christiane Jungo  
Sister Edelgund Kuhn  
Sister Anna Affolter  
Sister Elsit J. Ampattu  
Sister Dorothee Halbach

English version:

Sr. Roseline Kujur, India

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I go one step with you

## Editorial

The contributions to the present "Theodosia" have a common denominator: They report about journeys with other people: with migrants, with the descendants of an immigrant population, with pupils, with youth on a pilgrimage.

According to the UNO, more than 200 million people are now travelling around the world as migrants. Migration has many causes: job hunting, famine, war, persecution, family reunion, etc.

Flight is not a new problem of our times. In the Bible, we read about men, women, and groups of people, who left or had to leave their homeland. Some went voluntarily; others received instructions, still others were forced to move away or flee. We read in the Bible about leaving and being on the move, about hopes, disappointments and surprises. We encounter conflicts between already settled residents and new arrivals. We will see how hard it is to get a foothold in a foreign country. We get an idea how difficult the search is, how one's native culture and religion can be lived in the foreign country.

A selection from the Bible shows "Well-Known Refugees of the Bible" and "The theme 'Stranger' in the Old Testament."

A poem by P. Klemens Nodewald, the Redemptorist, introduces us to the "Heaven – a country of Immigration."

Sr. Veera Bara in Caltanissetta, Sicily, keeps us informed about the state of the international project for migrants in Sicily under the title "The Sisters of the World in Sicily."

From Marianum Hegne, there are two contributions to our topic, namely: "Classes for refugees in Marianum" by Sr. Susanne Bader, Hegne, Province Baden-Württemberg, and an experiential report by an affected young man, Ghazal Kholani: "Suddenly in Germany."

Sr. Verena Maria Tschümperlin from the Motherprovince has eight years' experience of teaching German to Eritrean families. "She gives us a brief glimpse into her loving ministry.

The Holy Cross Sisters in Graz have rented an adjoining building to the Caritas, where refugees live. This closeness gives the sisters many opportunities for meetings, and for Sr. M. Bosco Zechner, the opportunity to tell us about: "Refugees in convent, Graz."

Sr. M. Thomas Reichl from the USA introduces an organization for immigration rights and community development, in which she is fully involved: "Comunidad Hispana" is an organisation for people of Latin American or Spanish origin in America.

The sisters of Perm, Russia tell us about a different kind of journey. They look back on their work in a parish, which was officially closed in 1937, but since 1993 is alive again: "15 years together with the people on the way."

Making a pilgrimage is a special and popular way of travelling on the road. Michaela Schwert takes us on a great pilgrimage: "There goes something!", 230 youth from the Archdiocese go to Hegne. "

Sr. Christiane Jungo

## Well-known Refugees of the Bible

### A selection



Guido da Siena, 13<sup>th</sup> century, flight to Egypt

It begins with Adam and Eve. They were expelled from paradise. Gen 3:24

Abraham and Sarah set out with a promise of God, left the hometown and sought the Promised Land. Gen 12:1ff

When later a famine came over the country, they moved to Egypt. Gen 12: 10ff

Isaac experienced a famine again. Therefore he went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, to Gerar. Gen 26:1-3

Jacob escaped before his brother Esau, whom he had betrayed. Gen 27:43

Joseph was sold and enslaved by his brothers. He had to integrate himself into Egypt. Gen 37: 27ff

Later, his brothers became "economic migrants," because hunger drove them to Egypt so their families would not starve. Gen 42; 43; 44; 45; 46

Moses fled before Pharaoh, when it was known that he had killed an Egyptian. So he came to Midian. Ex 2:11ff

Later Moses led the whole nation of Israel out of Egypt into the desert to the border of the Promised Land. There, the Israelites fought for places, because some areas were already populated. Later they had to deal with the question whether and how they wanted to maintain their previous culture against the existing culture of the country of



Canaan. Many chapters of the books of Genesis, of Numbers and Deuteronomy tell of it.

David was persecuted by his own father-in-law Saul and fled. 1 Sam 21:11

Elimelech and his wife Naomi and their two sons moved from Bethlehem to the land of Moabites because there was famine in the whole country. Ruth1:1f

The prisoners in Babylon were homesick for Jerusalem. Prophet

Jeremiah advised them in a letter of consolation not too long for return, but rather, they were to found families and build houses in their exilic locations. Jer: 29

Matthew tells how Joseph, Mary, and the little Jesus had to flee from Herod to Egypt. Mt 2:13f

The first Christians, the followers of the new road, fled from the persecution of Saul to Damascus. Acts 9:1ff

## The Theme "Stranger" in the Old Testament

### A selection



Picture: WordPress.com

Exodus 20: 9-10: Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourners who is within your gates.

Exodus 23:12: Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox

and your ass may have rest, and the son of your bondmaid, and the alien, may be refreshed.

Exodus 22:21: You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9: You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19: 33f: When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 10: 17ff: For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve him and cleave to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and terrible things which your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as the stars of heaven for multitude.

Deuteronomy 24:17-18: You shall not pervert the justice due to the

sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge; but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; and therefore I command you to do this.

Isaiah 58: 6f. Is not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the necked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

Zechariah 7: 8-10: And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgment, show kindness and mercy each to his brother, do not oppress the widows, the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your heart.

Proverbs 31: 8-9: Open your mouth for the dumb, for the rights of all who are left desolate. Open your mouth, judge righteously; maintain the rights of the poor and needy.

## Heaven – Country of Immigrants

Heaven – country of immigrants  
for people of all tribes, races,  
languages and nations

Heaven – country of immigrants  
with explicit and cordial invitation  
to one and all

Heaven – country of immigrants  
for hungry and thirsty for peace,  
truth, justice and happiness for all

Heaven – country of immigrants  
for saints and sinners,  
believers and doubters,  
poor and rich

Heaven – country of immigrants  
for all those who seek a new heaven  
and a new earth -  
where love determines what happens

Heaven – country of immigrants  
one who once has immigrated,  
will never be deported again.

From: Klemens Nodewald, applause for the Zitronenfalter. From the wisdom of small things, publisher Herder 2002

## **The Sisters of the World in Sicily Development of the Projects for Migrants in Sicily**

Sr. Veera Bara, Caltanissetta, Sicily, Italy

Migranti, TraMigranti: Le Suore del Mondo In Sicilia, Meaning-Migrants among the migrants: The Sisters of the World in Sicilia. This is our official name of the little international community founded with different charisms. We are from different countries with unique cultural backgrounds and official languages. The main aim of the mission is to be a Bridge between the local people of Sicilia and the migrants coming from

different parts of the world.

This time I am going to share about how the development has taken place in our mission from December 2015. By now we are in three communities, Agrigento has three sisters, Ramacca has four sisters and Caltanissetta has two sisters. We are involved in different activities like, meeting the migrants in the centers called Cara, Sparar, in the



African migrants with Sr. Veera Bara



In the camp

hospitals, on the streets, in the prisons, in the centers for minors, centers for Caritas where basic needs are provided, in the parish churches, and in the language centers.

Now I am in a place called Caltanissetta which is situated in the Western interior part of Sicily. It is 122 kilometers from Palermo the capital of Sicilia, the river Salso is the main river of the province. We opened this little community of two sisters on 25th of October 2016 in a parish called St Pius X with the requests of the Bishop of Caltanissetta, Bishop Mario Russotto. I stay with Sr.

Francesca who is an Italian capuchin sister who speaks also a bit of Spanish.

The Province of Caltanissetta accommodates thousands of migrants in 7 different centers, but one of them is Cara which has three total centers inside. The Cara, the other is welcoming center, and the third one is Identification center. Around 550 migrants live inside these centers. The other three hosts around 130 to 140 migrants from different parts of Africa, -Like Nigeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, Mali, Congo and Chad. There are also some

centers for minors where less than 18 years stay. According to what I have heard from their life journey it is very touching and dangerous. Each of the African migrant who have arrived Italy have made a very painful journey in the desert, to the extent of drinking their own Urine in time of thirst and hunger. Once they arrived in Libya "life was equal to hell", they say, since they have suffered physical, mental and psychological torture. The little work they were never paid for the little work they did or if at all they paid a little it was taken back on gun shot in the open air by the Libyans. If not they were to be put in the underground prison, where they were demanded for certain amount of money, if they refused they were beaten or starved them to the death. The women in turn are left wounded and broken. The journey in the sea was another terrible experience where they have seen body floating, and yet had the courage to cross the rough sea to the safe land.

There are also Refugees from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and a big number from Pakistan. Majority of them are asylum

seekers who were trafficked from their country of origin and were taken into different countries, e.g. the Pakistanis were at first taken from Pakistan to Iran, then to Turkey, then to Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Ukraine and in Austria and many of the Eastern countries like Germany, Spain and finally they have landed in Italy since they were left without documents in their hands. As per their narration they had to sell all their properties, houses, lands and animals in their countries, for the promise of better future and had to hand over their possession to those traffickers. They were to cover all these distances on foot, from one country to another, and from one person to another. They had to spend days and months walking with their swollen legs or feet without nails irrespective of the climate. Those who were not able to walk were left behind dead or alive. The country in which they stayed for longer times, like 6 months to 2 years, had to give their finger prints and stay in the camps, but they could not get their documents or residential permit in those countries which led them to Italy.



Language classes for Afghan refugees

In Caltanissetta most of them are to receive their documents of residents, and to look for some jobs. The Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are in different centers or in some rented houses. At the same time, there are who stay in open air by putting small tents under the bridge or under the tree as they wait either to enter the centers or to get documents and jobs. It is very painful to see those living in tents, because they stay without any security, face extreme cold and heat, hunger and thirsts, and with a lot of tropical sicknesses. Many

are also with heart problems and psychiatric problems due to the dangerous journeys they have made and unfavourable condition in which they lived. Our focus of mission is to give medical service, and give some materials for their basic needs when it is available.

In our parish, there is a kitchen for poor Sicilians called Casa di Jerico started on 8th December 2015, where daily 25 to 30 come for food. In fact, volunteers are there to prepare the food but we are expected to take the responsibility of the kitchen.



Besides this I am happy to give catechism classes to the African boys of about 15 to 20 in view of receiving the sacraments. I also make arrangement for English mass for the migrants once in two months. I take Italian Class daily for two hours for the Pakistani boys, of some 17 to 25 boys.

We also go to the hospitals occasionally if there is a need to take the migrants or visit them. We have started family visit of the poor and the needy particularly those of migrants either on the streets or in the families or in the centers, listening and giving counselling is very important part of the mission. Each migrant has a unique story to tell and to share their brokenness. More often the frustration in life being away from the families without money, without job, without house and food, lead them to one or the other addiction and become pessimistic in life.

We are invited very often to the schools, or to catholic associations to give testimonies of

our being as inter-congregational and international religious communities, forming a bridge between the migrants and the residents of Italy.

We are fully part of the parish to which we belong to by participating in the parish council meetings, in Bible sharing, or praying with them in different events of life.

We do participate in the regional or diocesan religious gatherings or recollections organized once in a month or once in three months.

We look forward to attend any type of Conventions for migrants in regional, or parish level to be updated.

All in all, I am happy to share the mission of the Church and of UISG, as I represent our congregation in the circle of Inter - congregational community. I am very grateful to our Superior General Sr. Marija Brizar and the General Team for allowing me to share this mission of love among the poorest of the poor.

## Classes for Refugees in Marianum

Sr. Susanne Bader, Marianum Hegne, Province Baden-Württemberg



In the autumn of 2015, Dr. Pudzich asked the staff whether they would be prepared to meet the need of the time as well as support the establishment of a refugee class both ideally and energetically. There was a unanimous "yes", "we have to make our contribution absolutely". After a brief and intensive conceptual phase, we started with 14 young people between the ages of 15 and 19 years in February 2016. The majority were

from Syria, the other larger group came from Afghanistan and a few from Eastern Europe and Africa.

Since the new school year, we have been able to accommodate two so-called VABO classes (preparatory year for work and career for pupils without knowledge of German) in two new classrooms, remodelled from earlier stores, with a total of 38 pupils. The heterogeneity in all areas is growing with the larger



Sr. Susanne Bader with refugees

number of pupils: the age span now ranges from 16 to 24 years, the countries of origin are expanding, the level of education ranges from unskilled adolescents to high school and above all personal life stories are very colorful: some came to Germany with their families, but most of them were alone. Of these, the minors live in youth welfare sectors or a few in German families. The adult learners live in community quarters.

The two classes allow us to share with the pupils according to their level of performance, which does not do justice to the colorful variety. Thus, a differentiated offer

is required in all classes, in which the fitter pupils are not bored and the weaker ones are not overwhelmed. This is not an easy task. Another possibility to meet the very different needs of our pupils is individual learning guidance, as our German pupils receive in all schools. In these individual conversations, personal experiences and problems can also be discussed and further school or training courses can be decided upon. Collaboration with institutions and social workers is much more intense than with our local pupils, especially if the language skills of the pupils are still inadequate.

Contact with the German pupils was very difficult at first. Although they met them openly, it was a hurdle for the young refugees to establish a relationship. Two projects that help to improve integration are: the weekly learning guidance provided by the prospective teachers who are involved in the course for a limited period of time. In a 1 to 1 mentoring, German skills can be improved and personal contacts can be established. Similarly, conducting the voluntary

coaching: German pupils, especially from the SG and the upper classes of the Secondary School offer tuition mostly in German but also in maths and English and regularly meet with their "VABO" pupils according to their own agreements. The idea of "running" VABO pupils in German classes, on the other hand, proved to be a little profitable. A very nice experience was the sports festival in May, where the adult refugees of course mixed themselves with all pupils, fought together in tournaments and confidently sold the Syrian specialties. Until now, however, it is a long way.

Different value systems pose a quite another hurdle on the way to

integration: while these young people from all over the world meet us very openly, warmly and helpfully, we Germans act often reservedly and strictly. This also expresses itself in our everyday life: reliability, punctuality and orderliness are always stones of offense and the occasion for discussions and unfortunately also warnings up to school exclusion. Every society has grown into structures that the newly arrived-ones have to integrate themselves to, and yet I also hope that we take the opportunity to learn from those who come to us seeking protection. They bring something with in their approachable and friendly nature which threatens to deprive us of our prosperity.

## Suddenly in Germany

Ghazal Kholani, Marianum, Hegne

Two years, and what now?

Two years ago I came to Germany. I never thought of travelling to Germany or Europe. Everything was so sudden and very fast. Within a week, we finished everything in Syria. I could not even say "good bye" to my friends. Ten days later we arrived in Germany. After a long and clear way, we were finally there. In these ten days, my life has totally changed. At the beginning it was difficult to understand the German language.

We first spoke only English but not all the people here could understand us. That was hard, yes, but after 6 months I got a place in the school in Marianum and began my studies. Marianum is a good school. The teachers and students are very nice and they helped me learn the language quickly.

It was also difficult for us to find an apartment. For 18 months we stayed in a shared apartment and had only one room for 5 people.

That was very bad. Since 3 months we finally have our own apartment in Stockach.

It is not difficult for me to associate myself with German culture and tradition as I come from an open family and have already learned at home what "Western society" means.

All have freedom here, that's simply great. Although I miss my home country and my friends, I know I have a better future here in Germany. It is important for me to take my High School Diploma and continue my studies at university. Thus, I have started to live my new life, to make my future better and to realize my dreams. Germany has given me this opportunity and I continue!

## Teaching German to Eritrean Families

Sr. Verena Maria Tschümperlin, Ingenbohl, Motherprovince Switzerland



Since 2009, I have been teaching German to Eritrean families. I got to do this work by a happy coincidence. The Comin (communication for integration) was looking for someone for a refugee family. Following a request to the convent, Ingenbohl, I accompanied this family.

I was invited to a baptism where two women asked me for accompaniment and German classes. Gradually the number of families increased. When a family moves away, another family usually asks for me. From Tuesday to Friday every afternoon, I go to two families. In the meantime, I no longer belong



to the office for Integration, but am independent. The community has made me free for this ministry. Above all, I help the women with German classes. I also give private coaching to a group of children.

The greatest difficulty is language itself. But the script also is different. They have to learn our alphabet too. After they were able to go out for the German courses, they could not cope with homework because they were too complicated. This was the beginning of vocabulary exercises in various formats: naming concrete objects with pictures, with play, with handicrafts and display verbs in body language. We spoke with hands and feet.

The children who are already 9-10 years, or older, have great

difficulty in school, if they are graded according to age. Even if they speak German quite well, they lack the contents of our school program from their homeland. The smaller children will find it easier when they go to kindergarten or 1st standard.

For women, it is more difficult than men. Men go out to work if they find one. The women stay at home, look after the children and take care of the household. They have little opportunity to speak to someone in German. That is why my role in this as I see it, is particularly of value as I fill that role for women and support them individually.

There are some young women who go out to work and share the upbringing of children and household tasks between the husband and wife. But these are exceptions.

Another difficulty is the completely different cultures. The food is quite different. The Eritreans are not used to sweet things. For dessert at a party, there is popcorn and maybe a few sweets. There was an occasion when I

tasted a traditional dessert served after childbirth. It looked like pudding with raspberry sauce, but it was cayenne pepper. Today - after a few years - the women bake cakes, and some even Christmas biscuits.

The Eritreans eat with their hands, not with knives and forks. When I am invited, they give me a spoon and a towel.

Nowadays, I am able to communicate with everyone in

German. Sometimes there are also confidential conversations. I come to know some things about their home and about their flight. We also talk about the hardships and difficulties that they face. It's simply good that someone comes to them, listens to them and talks to them.

The Eritreans are loving and friendly people. I really like the people. That is why I hope to be able to continue this work in the days ahead. I love them.



## Refugees in the Convent, Graz

Sr. Maria Bosco Zechner, Graz, province Europa Mitte

### 2015

After a visit to asylum seekers in our former school in Bruck / Mur, we decided to take refugees in House 32, an adjacent building to our convent. Caritas accepted our offer gladly because there isn't much available in the city favourably disposed to medical care, school and German lessons etc. In summer, many refugees were expected, but the current rate of flow was unforeseen.

On 20th July, 2015, the first family, a mother from Iraq came with 3 children, 6, 12 and 14 years old, who used to sleep "on the meadow" in Traiskirchen . After successfully fleeing, they finally felt safe and secure, having proper accommodation and being welcomed. Gradually the house took its final form with the additions of a woman from Somalia with her four-year-old son, a mother from Nigeria with her five-year-old boy. A woman with her 18 year old son from Syria and finally two young women, 19 and 30 years old from Iraq and Syria.



Dance for the sisters

It is a house full of problems but also full of hope for a good future, especially for the children and young people who have been attending school and kindergarten for over a week. The group is very well cared for by Caritas, social workers are available for consultations, and visiting a doctor. They organize a German course in the house as well as arrange for city tours. A lot of conversations would be necessary to deal with the trauma of their experiences during the flight, but what was possible became difficult due to language barriers.

What is our contribution to these people who have found asylum here and hopefully a little homeland?

Some sisters keep in touch, coach them in the German language, play with the children, distribute clothes and other goods brought by people, fulfil small needs, for example, children's toys, bicycles, or for a Christian woman a cross, which she likes to wear, "I love the cross "she said.

Donations of vegetables and fruit from our garden are always welcome because the help they receive is just for the essentials. In a garden party, we were able to get to know each other better - beyond all linguistic, religious and cultural barriers.

With this contribution, which was proposed to us by the Sr. Marija, the Superior General, we wanted to set an example with our limited resources and personnel capacities in the Theodosian year.

## 2017

Much has been done in two years, which could be called positive integration. Some people have moved out after positive decisions on applications for asylum, the reason was the family reunion. A young man has become independent, and doing his studies. The children speak excellent German and obtain very good results at school, thanks to



Sr. Jacqueline with little boys

the extra German teacher, who was privately organized and paid.

Integrating into a big city is not as easy as it may be in the countryside. It is more successful through the mediation of organizations like parish and organized meetings in the district. The asylum seekers frequently search for their fellow countrymen in other asylum quarters, establish connections and help each other.

We remain in close contact with them. There are invitations to solemn Holy Mass and to dinner with the sisters. The adults are given tuition in German language, additional food is supplied if a little African comes into the kitchen and says: "We are hungry" and as an extra expects an ice-cream too.

A group of catechumens from the city was with us on a visit to the convent. Their conversations were

interesting, despite all language barriers. They were intrigued by the question of a young man: "How can you be perfect Christian women if you are not married? This is not possible in Islam." This was a good starting point to convey the essence of our Christian faith. How far it could be taken is another question.

This year, we also witnessed two deportations that were special as it was not to their countries of origin they were sent, but to the Netherlands and Belgium. We had allowed the two women for some time, as it were, church asylum in the convent, in the hope that the attorney who had been brought in could find a way to keep them in Austria.

Dealing with people who are picked up and brought to another country is heartrending. Often they were rounded up in the night or in the early morning hours, woken out of deep sleep. The first action of the judicial officers was to take away their personal documents and their mobile phones. This happened in a

manner as if it they were about to be arrested as criminals. The sister, who wanted to say good-bye, was denied access to the room. The woman was taken to the police station for two days, then to the airport in Vienna and then on to a new quarter. These people are completely deprived of their rights, and are treated with lack of respect and dignity of the person, something that made us concerned about this action.

In the meantime, we have signed an agreement with Caritas for another year of rental on House 32. The quality of the living in this house is not quite on par compared to today's standard, but nevertheless, one appreciates what is available in this quarter. Perhaps we can do something to make a new life possible for these asylum seekers, perhaps give some shelter in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ:

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Mt 25:35

## Comunidad Hispana

### Immigration rights and community development organization

Sr. M. Thomas Reichl, Merrill, USA Province

I became acquainted with the Hispanic community about 14 years ago. A factory owner asked the sisters to teach English to some of his Hispanic employees. We did this on Saturday mornings. After some time these men realized that they lived almost across the street from us and offered to do some cooking for us on our outdoor grill. This was their way of expressing their thanks. We enjoyed some good meals and it gave us the opportunity to hear about their families, their hopes, and their dreams. It was at that time I thought they needed a place where they would feel safe and could express their concerns and fears and feel understood. We were able to find a volunteer to direct those interested and the sisters paid the rent for the space we needed. We then organized COMUNIDAD HISPANA, an immigration rights and community development organization based in Merrill. We established a Board of Directors, half of the members



Marta, Sr. Mary Thomas and Sr. John Mary visit amputee Fino

are Hispanic and half are Anglos, and chose a director to lead the group. The Board meets monthly to provide leadership and assistance where and when it is needed. This may involve translating, getting the children enrolled in elementary schools, job hunting and adequate housing. During the past years Hispanics have organized and taken responsibility in events such as food sales, entertainment for the public, Advent and all Souls day celebrations. Because of their initiative some schools now have interpreters for the children and



Board of directors for Comunidad Hispana

health care facilities have their own translators. Two families have recently bought houses for their families; some have pursued higher education; a few are near becoming citizens. Progress is slow but positive.

Our overall mission is to empower the Hispanic community to become active participants in the communities where they reside. Our vision is to see an integrated community with Hispanics sharing their traditions and culture while yet adopting the American way of life. We continue to concentrate on English classes and education and to begin a program of membership where the members will take ownership of the organization and feel at home. We hope we are giving a “voice to the voiceless” and a place where they will have peace and joy in the midst of difficulties.

## 15 Years Together with the People on the Way

Sisters of the community in Perm, Russia

Fifteen years ago, we the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross received the invitation to enter into the life of the people of the Russian Perm in the southern Ural, to be together with them in search of God in this vast and wonderful country. Today, as we look back with so much gratitude, we would like to share with you the great things that the Lord has done before our eyes and we were able to discover them here.

### History of the parish

I would like to briefly illustrate the history of the parish from which came the request for sisters. This story can be divided into two parts. The first part reminds us of the sad time of tsarist repression, which led to the first Catholics coming to Perm. They were Poles; St. Raphael Kalinowski was also among them. After great effort, the church was consecrated in 1875, the parish centre was completed, and it promoted charity to the poor of the city. The house for the priest was also built at this time.

This situation lasted until the year 1937. That year, the church was closed, the priest along with 41



Sr. Katarina Jureková

church members were shot and a tailor's workshop and a club for the differently abled were built in the church. This situation lasted until 1993. From that year onwards, the parish has written the second part of its history - the renewal of the parish. As Perm is far from Moscow, the members of the community, or rather those who looked upon themselves as descendants of the Catholics had to work hard to convince the Bishop to send them a priest. This happened, and after more than 50 years the first priest came to Perm.

The beginnings were very difficult. It was necessary not only to build the parish, but also to establish good relationships and contacts with the local community, with the Orthodox and the representatives

of other religions etc. Catholics in Russia were historically regarded as an alien element, followers of a foreign religion, and of course, there were many prejudices. Above all, the orthodox bishop, who supported the Catholic minority, was very much in favor of forming a community in Perm. The representatives of traditional religions and Christian denominations from the Permian region met and meet until today. They are Orthodox, Jews, Muslims, Staroobryadci (Orthodox of the ancient rite), Catholics, Protestants and representatives of the city and of the region. In the year 1990, enthusiasm for the reconstruction of the church, in the context of the new experiences of the community, and the open-mindedness of the world, which watched the happenings in Russia after the perestroika with great interest, received generous encouragement.

### **Arrival of the Holy Cross Sisters**

Nine years after the arrival of the priest, we set upon Permian soil in 2002. The church had already been renovated, social relations established. The task was to build a true Christian community - the parish. Unfortunately the priest, six months after our arrival,



Ecumenists with our three sisters: Sr. Petra Křištofková, Sr. Filipa Macháková and Sr. Katarina Jureková

decided to leave the parish. The new beginnings in the parish had exhausted him.

First of all, we learned to understand the people, their fears, their grief and their joys. We did not know the language so well, and while talking to us, people often needed a lot of patience. It also happened that after the conversation people asked us what language we had just spoken. We thought it was Russian. To this day, we are amazed at how much courtesy and help we have received from them until we could fluently speak Russian.

The parish experienced a painful period after the priest had gone. It was a time of purification. The excitement had vanished. The number of regular worshippers could be seen. And as it had

appeared in the history of the parish heroes, who did not shy away from Christ's life, even in this difficult time new heroes matured, the heroes of daily life. I speak, for example, of a family with twin girls who were four years old when we arrived. The parents drove them to church for seven years in summer and winter (and the winters are really hard). These twins were attending catechesis every Sunday, and often they were the only ones. Remain faithful on the way, and God will take care, as Theodosius Florentini has said. So God also cared for Perm. The mother of this family - Lena - learned the prayer of the mothers about which she felt concerned and with the support of our priest, she formed a prayer group with the women of the parish in which women regularly pray for their children. Gradually more children came to join the twins. A boy came along with his mother, a year after the death of his great-grandmother, who had lived near the church and prayed daily for them. The fruits of her prayer could only be seen. Both the granddaughter and her son have been attending the church regularly for eight years. There came the time of the return of some who had begun in 90s. Today there are several groups for children's catechesis in the parish. After 23 years even a

small group - sixteen youngsters - went to Poland for World Youth Day. This was the first time that a group of young people who had grown up in the parish and actively participated in community life, were involved in such a gathering.

For several years, we have been offering a common program for children from the parish in the summer holidays because they want to spend the summer time or at least a part of it together. May be these are small things, but for us, they are small miracles.

### **How does our parish continue to develop?**

In our parish, we put emphasis on preparation for the sacraments. The catechumenate lasts for one year, sometimes longer. We let people have time to ripen and take root. Many consider this important because they often come to the church to ask for baptism for their children, so that they do not become sick, etc. They regard the church as a business. One comes, chooses, pays and goes away. During the preparation their motifs are refined. This has its value. It happened, for example, that a young man came to ask for baptism for his son. As this son was still small, the priest



suggested that instead of the son, he should come for preparation. In the family, only the late grandfather was a Catholic, and the young man had no idea of Catholicism. It was a great surprise, when after a few months the father came and asked for baptism for himself. Later, he also brought his brother to prepare for the sacraments. During his preparation he also got a daughter, and so at Easter there were four baptisms in the family. The wives of both brothers followed their husbands and were also incorporated into the Catholic Church.

### **Would somebody still be Catholic in our time?**

At present, more and more people are coming to Catholicism because they have read something about Catholicism on the internet. It is very important for them to build personal contacts, to feel a living community, to be able to discover God who is not an impersonal reality as on the internet, but that he is present in his church, which is a community here on earth. There are also people who come because they have witnessed a living Christianity. For an example, a woman from the parish gives tuition in English. Parents of a boy brought their son to the tuition and



Lively parish

then when they agreed for the next date, which happened to be a Sunday, Julia said: "Well, but only when I am back from the church." That aroused curiosity in them. What is that, a church and why is it good to go there. There was, of course, a long way to go and they had to find answers to many questions before they would come to a decision that they too would like to consciously build a relationship with God in the Church.

These testimonies of the living Christianity of our community members make us truly joyful. The fact, that the parish is alive, and also confirms caring for the homeless. The sisters of St. Teresa of Kolkata, who have a house for the alcoholics and the homeless in Perm, told us about the nativity scene at Christmas that one of the homeless said, "I now know how God is. He looks at us with such love with which all

the people in the church looked at the children when they sang at the crib."

We thank God that we are witnesses of His goodness. Our parish community is small but

lively. Here people often laugh and say: "We are few, but in needed places." After fifteen years we look to the future with hope and trust because God will lead us on and protect his work.

## There Goes Something!

### 230 youth from the archdiocese go on pilgrimage to Hegne

Michaela Schwert, pilgrim in Hegne

The Pentecost holidays are already coming to an end and the last free weekend is about to come and soon students would return for the final round of the school year, or for their last examinations. Enough reasons to properly use the free time once again: outdoor pool, grill evenings or simply sunbathing in the garden - one would think. But 230 young people are travelling in this last holiday week. Rather than do the usual things, the youth packed their sleeping mats, sleeping bags and hiking boots in their backpack. Instead of relaxing in a hammock, they set out on foot. Many of them are those who received confirmation, members of youth groups, but there were also individual youth who set off on their journey. They come from completely different places. Some of them are on the road for almost a whole week; others break up only after Corpus Christi. However different the groups and their ways may be, they all have the



Pilgrim mass

same goal: the convent, Hegne at Lake Constance. On the way, the groups have a multitude of experiences: some had to look for the right way in the forest when the sign posts were no longer visible. Others find themselves amazed that they had been walking about in circles instead of getting ahead. But the pilgrims are not discouraged by this, but start



Morning worship

anew to reach the goal. Many come to their personal limits on the way and learn that there are more forces in them than they themselves had thought. Some also had special experiences in nature by walking barefoot, noting that you suddenly look at things quite differently as when, for example, walking on sharp pointed stones on the way.

In the afternoon of the Saturday, the pilgrim groups arrive in Hegne. First of all, of course, there is the refreshment with cool drinks and yeast plait. Then accommodation for the night and dinner are arranged. In the meantime,

however, there is still enough time to swim in the cool lake, or to simply stretch the tired bones on the isomat.

After this short relaxation, the evening program with new enthusiasm can start. The first part is entirely from the point of view of the encounter. After each pilgrimage group is briefly introduced and greeted by all other pilgrims with warm applause, each group gets to know their "prayer sister". Pilgrimage to Hegne doesn't end with arrival at the convent, but continues even as the pilgrims return to their places of origin. To

facilitate their continued journey in life, the young pilgrims are accompanied by a sister in prayer and "the pilgrim group" is provided with a postcard before departure. This way they could be in touch with their sister if they felt the need for it. The youngsters have the opportunity to ask all sorts of questions that burn within them, or simply talk about their experiences on the way to Hegne.

After this first part of the evening program, the young pilgrims move towards the next pilgrim station, the church. This is already impressively illuminated with colourful spotlights so that the pilgrims can go on immediately with "stay & pray". Until midnight there is the possibility of adoration and worship in the church. The young people are invited to write down their concerns, worries or requests and to bring them before the Blessed Sacrament or to burn a small candle. There is also the possibility of dialogue, blessing or the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation. In addition to this great offer in the church, there are also some other things to discover. Anyone who is looking for silence or wants to know something about Blessed Sr.

Ulrika, the right place is the crypt. The former stable invites you to relax together with snacks and braided buns. At midnight, the evening activities end with a solemn blessing in the church and then all the pilgrims head in the direction of isomat.

Sunday starts with a short morning prayer before breakfast. And what place would be more suitable for this than the lake? So the whole group of pilgrims go down the path from the convent to the shore, singing together, praying and taking a conscious moment to observe the silence of the early day. After breakfast and the packing of the backpacks, there is a great Pilgrims Mass with the Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Michael Gerber - who incidentally as every year was also a day with a pilgrim group on the way. Many pilgrims actively participate in Mass as ministrants, readers or with intercessory prayers. With this common Mass and a small lunch, this year's pilgrimage to Hegne ends. Whoever is curious and would like once to make a pilgrimage to Hegne: the next pilgrimage weekend is on 2nd - 3rd June, 2018.

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