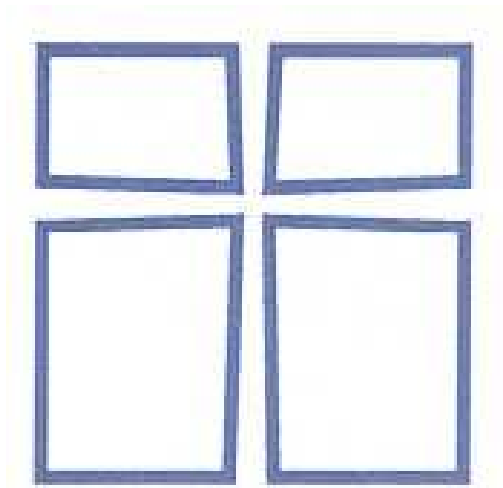


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# *Theodosia*

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Quarterly  
of the Sisters of Mercy  
of the Holy Cross  
Institute Ingenbohl  
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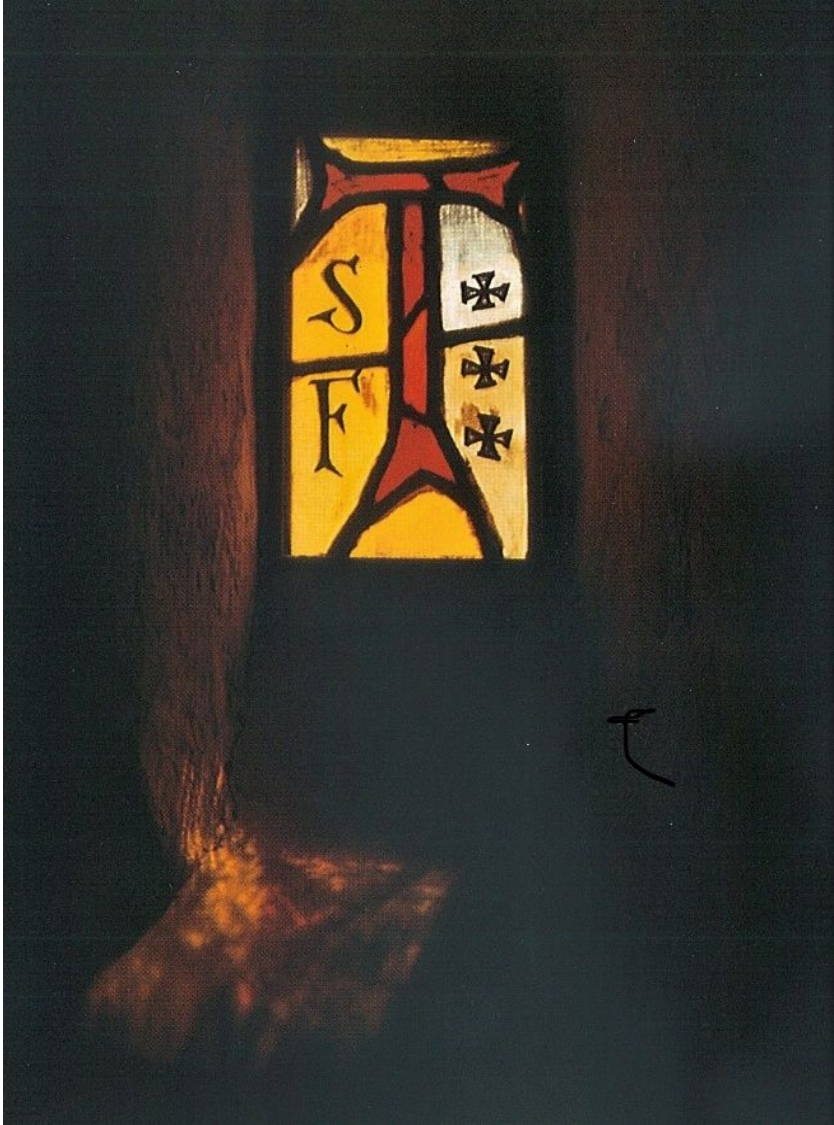
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## Contents

Theodosia 2019 / 3, 4

<b>Picture</b>	4		
<b>Editorial</b>	5		
Christiane Jungo, Ingenbohl			
<b>How Francis Dealt with Lepers and the Poor</b>	7	<b>Providing Accommodation and a Home</b>	27
From Franciscan writings compiled by Sr. Christiane Jungo		Sr. Sandra Brodmann, Locarno, Province Switzerland	
<b>140 Years of Service to Differently Abled People - From the St. Joseph's House in Herten</b>	10	<b>When Strangers Become Friends</b>	31
Book extract by Sr. M. Clarissa Rutishauser		Selma Zurbriggen, Luzern, Switzerland	
<b>More than a Profession</b>	12	<b>A Story worth Sharing</b>	36
Sr. Isabelle Zanger, Herten, Province Baden-Württemberg		Sr. Peggy Jackelen and Sr. Mary Anne Rose, Merrill, Province USA	
<b>Loving Such Children</b>	14	<b>Holy Cross Mission - Collaborative Mission of Ingenbohl and Menzingen Sisters in India</b>	40
Sr. Maria Thomas Müller, Herten, Province Baden-Württemberg		Sr. Vijaya Sebastian Bangalore, India South Province	
<b>140 Years of Life for People with Disabilities Pius Institute Bruck at Mur</b>	17	<b>Accompaniment in Formation - International Formators' Congress in Assisi</b>	45
Sr. Romana Miklautsch †, Graz, Province Europa Mitte		Sr. Maria Magdalena Schlageter, Hegne, Province Baden-Württemberg	
<b>50 Years at the Caritas Home in Cerová - Memories and the Jubilee Celebration</b>	20	<b>From our Provinces and Vicariates - Christian Education for over 10,000 Children</b>	49
Sr. Margaréta Kolníková, Trnava, Province Slovakia		Roman Catholic News Agency	
	3	<b>Information from the General Leadership</b>	51



La Foresta, glass window in Franciscan convent,  
Image: Cantina - Verlag, Goldau CH

## Editorial

The "Theodosia" is completing its 134<sup>th</sup> volume as a double number 3/4, 2019, and the contributions illustrate in various ways what our Vision 2020 expresses: *We journey with the people shaping together a dynamic life*. These are people on our life paths, people of all phases of life, people of different cultures, people with and without disabilities. They and their needs could not be more different. But despite all their differences, the reports and experiences testify to *openness, trust, hope, courage and connectedness* and attitudes with which the sisters travel around the world.

Here is an overview:

We have many role models for encounters with people. Today we look especially at Francis of Assisi as he gradually becomes aware of people on his way.

Two major institutions for people with disabilities are celebrating their 140<sup>th</sup> jubilee this year. Both owe their existence to the initiative of Mother M. Theresa Scherer: St. Joseph's House in Herten, Germany, and the Pius Institute in Bruck at Mur, Austria. Sisters narrate the history and their experiences.

Cerová is a special place for our sisters of Slovakia. A place of ups and downs in the last 50 years! A review that touches!

When a school with a boarding opens and meets the needs of the times, there are unexpected new opportunities for the women and sisters. So in Locarno in Switzerland!

When a young woman does an internship in Uganda, she not only has something to tell, she also feels accepted.

When, due to the lack of sisters, leadership roles are transferred to secular men and women, it can take different ways. The sisters of USA show us how the charism can also be passed on.

Collaboration on a grand scale is the "Holy Cross Mission" - the joint mission of the Sisters of Ingenbohl and Menzingen in India.

To give emphasis to the formation of the young women and sisters was the aim of the Congress in Assisi in September this year.

In order to fulfil the ecclesial and social function of formation better, five Franciscan-oriented communities in Austria including the Holy Cross Sisters, joined together.

In the "Information from the General Leadership" we come to know about the appointments to Leadership positions, and announcements of important events in the coming year.

Sr. Christiane Jungo

## How Francis Dealt with Lepers and the Poor

From Franciscan writings compiled by Sr. Christiane Jungo

As members of Franciscan families, we cannot avoid the example of Francis. His preference for people on the periphery was not innate. He confesses that it required a special event, into which God Himself had led him. The experience gave him new eyes and a new feeling. He saw the two arms of the leper as a brother, and a sister, and ultimately his beloved Jesus, a perception that extended to all poor people. Here lies the approach for all our tasks in working with and for the people.

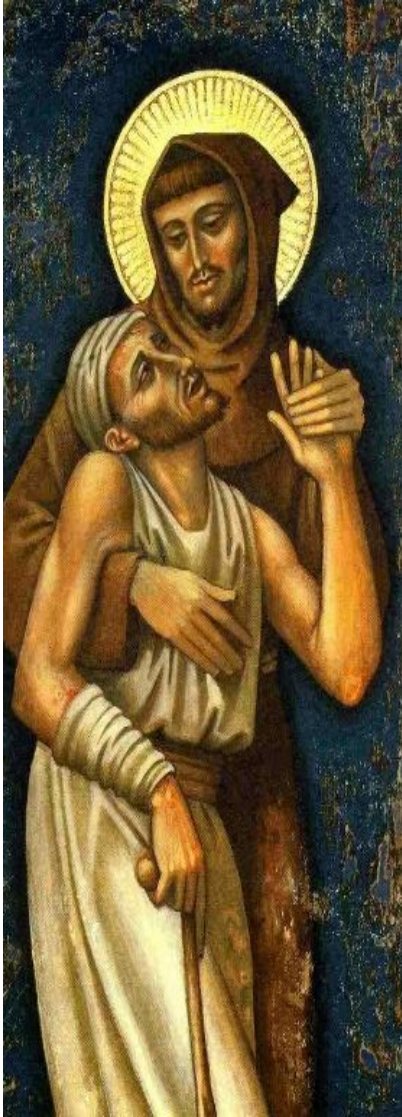
At the end of his life, Francis wrote a will. It provides information about what shaped him and what was sacred to him. *"Thus the Lord led me, Brother Francis, to begin the life of penance: for when I was in sin, I did not like to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them, and I showed them mercy. And as I departed from them what had been distasteful to me was transformed into sweetness of soul and body. And after that experience, I left the world" (Testament 1-3).*

The encounter with the leper is therefore at the beginning of his change of mind. It transforms Francis totally. The tradition from the Three Companions emphasizes that the leper gave Francis the kiss of peace and not the other way round. *"And while otherwise he was accustomed to having great disgust for lepers, he now committed violence against*

*himself, got off his horse, handed the leper a coin and kissed his hand. Then he (= Francis) received the "greeting of peace" from him (= the leper).*

In 1 Celano 17 we read in more detail: *"Then the holy lover of every humiliation went to the lepers and lived with them, serving with the greatest care for all God's sake and washing away all decay from them, even wiping away the pus of the ulcers, as he himself tells in his Testament, where he says: "For when I was in sin, it seemed very distasteful to me to see lepers. And the Lord has led me among them, and I have shown them mercy". - For the sight of lepers, as he said, once seemed so horrible to him that he held his nose with his hand when, at the time of his worldly life, he only saw their houses from a distance of about two miles. But when he began to meditate with the grace and power*





Francis and the leper, Piero Casentini

*of the Most High on holy and useful things, he met one day, still in worldly garb, a leper. Then he pulled himself together, overcame himself, stepped up and kissed him. - From then on, he began to despise himself more and more, until through the mercy of the Redeemer he achieved complete victory over himself. - He was also a helper to other poor people as long as he remained in the world and still followed the traces of the world. To the needy he stretched out the hand of compassion and with the afflicted he bore heartfelt compassion. - One day, when he had reproached a poor man who had asked him for alms, completely against his habit - he was very obliging - he immediately grasped him and began to say to himself that it was a disgrace and shame for him, one who, in the name of such a great king, asked him to refuse what he had demanded. Then he took up the matter in his heart, and, as far as he could, did not deny anyone who asked him anything in God's place. He kept this resolution scrupulously precise and realized it until he gave himself unreservedly in every respect. So he first gave the evangelical advice before teaching it, which reads: 'He who asks you, give to him; he who wants to borrow from you, do not turn away from him'".*

In Rule 9:3, Francis states: The brothers *“must rejoice when they associate with ordinary and despised people, with the poor and the weak, with lepers and beggars on the way.”*

On 23 November 2017, Pope Francis met 400 members of the Franciscan Family in an audience. He asked them to open their hearts to "the lepers of today": The commitment to the excluded

and the marginalized should never come from an attitude of superiority; religious should be aware that they are only giving back what they themselves have received freely. In particular, he called on them to adopt an inviting attitude towards the homeless, the unemployed, the sick, the abandoned elderly, abused women and migrants. "Embrace the lepers of our time," said the Pope.

## 140 Years of Service to Differently Abled People From the St. Joseph's House in Herten

Mother M. Theresa had a special love for children and adults who had to go through life with disability. It was her special desire to send sisters to such institutions, or to give them a suggestion to open them. One such institution is the St. Joseph's House in Herten. Sisters from the province Baden-Württemberg have done their best there for decades. Two sisters share their experiences.

### Today

The St. Joseph's House, Herten is a Catholic institution that offers help for people with disabilities. It is one of the earliest homes for the disabled in South Baden, Germany. Herten is a district of Rheinfelden and today it is the largest employer in the region with about 1300 employees. Around 900 people with disabilities are cared for at eleven locations, including senior citizens since 2005. The St. Joseph's House was initiated by Mother M. Theresa and celebrated its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019.

### Beginnings

Sr. M. Clarissa Rutishauser describes the origin in the book "Mother Maria Theresa Scherer, Life and Work ", Theodosius-Publisher Ingenbohl.

In the winter of 1878, Mother Maria Theresa Scherer came to Herten



Fr. Karl Rolfus and Mother M. Theresa

for a visitation, where two Holy Cross sisters helped the village priest Karl Rolfus to set up a hospital. On the way from the railway station to the village they met two persons who suffered from cretinism (mentally handicapped people due to iodine deficiency) in quick succession, one after the other. At the sight of these people, the Superior General said to the parish priest: "We must also do something for such people, as our sisters in Bruck at Mur in Styria do. Rolfus agreed, but forgot the conversation. Only when weeks later, a letter from Ingenbohl came, in which the Superior

General inquired about the state of affairs, did the matter get rolling. For her, the house had been an arranged thing, and she made sisters available in advance.

With faith in God and the support of good people Rolfus purchased an old house: On June 30, 1879, the house "Maria Hilf" was inaugurated as what is today the St. Joseph's House. It began with

three severely handicapped children.

When Mother M. Theresa came to visit after one year, she was happy. She was carrying one of the poor disabled children in her arms when a young woman arrived to join the convent. She looked at her and said, "If you can love such children, you can come." She came and became a sister of Mercy of the Holy Cross.



## More than a Profession

### In the special school with handicapped people

Sr. Isabella Zanger, St. Joseph's House, Herten, Province Baden-Württemberg

Although retired for a long time, Sr. Isabella enthusiastically tells us about her experiences, the challenges and joys of the special school in Herten.

#### A look back

I experienced my second call when I came to Herten in 1973 and was allowed to teach disabled people in the Karl-Rolfus-Schule for 31 years until my retirement in 2004. A long-cherished wish came true! After the study and the training as a specialized teacher for mentally handicapped ones, I had also the technical qualification for the instruction. I am able to say: I love differently abled people in their personality, in their openness, naturalness, spontaneity and originality.

It was important for me to take the pupils seriously in their being, to empathize with them, to get to know them with their "actual state of abilities", in order to then orient the curriculum with corresponding goals/individual objectives to each pupil. It is a pupil-oriented, practical life lessons, which should lead to independence, to the reduction of behavioural problems, to good social behaviour and to participation in environmental activities, up to the later work in the sheltered workplace or other areas: training courses such as shopping, practicing correct waste separation, household tasks such as cooking, washing by hand and in the

washing machine, personal hygiene, gardening, manual training with fine and gross motor skills for making various products. I had to create the necessary study material for each student with and without aids.

As a class teacher I taught eight to nine students (from the lower school to the work level), whose communication possibilities were different. That is why communication was very important in the overall teaching. I had students who could not speak, but who had an understanding of language. For these I used sound gestures for the spoken word as well as supportive communication for understanding with symbols and picture cards. There were also pupils who could only communicate by facial expressions, the smallest gestures such as winking, raising their hands. Others spoke two to three sentences in a blurred pronunciation or even in full sentence expression.

All this required an alert heart and ear from me, in order to respond to the different students in many different ways and to support them. There were also autistic students in the class who showed special behaviour and needed a lot of understanding, empathy and help. The "supported communication" on the computer was a help for them to communicate.

For severely and physically handicapped pupils it was particularly important to me to give them pleasure in the senses through basal stimulation such as music and rhythm (basal stimulation refers to all nursing and therapeutic measures used to promote physically and mentally handicapped people). Roles in performing arts, i.e. theatre, awakened self-confidence and a sense of value. I will never forget how happy the children were when they were allowed to take



Sr. Maria Thomas Müller and Sr. Isabelle Zanger

part in a football match with pupils from another special school at sports festivals here or in Offenburg. The school trips to the Black Forest were also very enjoyable with all the activities there, such as board games, hikes, horse riding, barbecues, etc. an experience that former pupils still talk about today.

It was also important for me again and again to deal with the problems of the pupils or the parents, to listen to them, to stand by them, to advise them, to alleviate their suffering and to write down their state of development in an annual report.

I must not forget that the pupils showed a strong openness and, in many cases, an astonishing understanding for religious instruction. They also enjoyed it when we made a film of the Christmas story with them in class. Enthusiastically they slipped into their role. They could and wanted to be involved in the pupils' Mass in many different ways.

It was always important for me to meet the pupils with joy and humour and to get involved with them. It was always a mutual giving and taking, yes, a common journey.

## Loving Such Children

Sr. Maria Thomas Müller, St. Joseph's House, Herten, Baden-Württemberg

Mother M. Theresa's instruction for a young woman's aptitude for the convent, Sr. Maria Thomas has been living for more than 50 years day after day. Love and gratitude speak from her memories.

### **A look back and experiences**

Since 1967 I have been accompanying people with disability at St. Joseph's home in Herten, especially with the residential group. In my early days the group had 20 male residents, then schoolchildren. In the last years, there were still eight people: young adults, who during the day, go to the workshop or visit a support group. This already shows that an enormous development has taken place over the years.

I had very different experiences. I encountered people with a minor disability and people with multiple physical and mental disabilities; people with different degrees of challenging behaviour and people who were easier to accompany; people with autistic features, psychological problems, auto aggressive behaviour or epilepsy; people who were able to move around and people who were dependent on a wheelchair; people with an active language or

no language at all; people who had a little vocabulary and people who were able to communicate with simple supporting gestures. All these people had to be encouraged with individual support measures, especially in the practical area of life, to accompany and lend them a hand in everyday life with the necessary assistance, to organize leisure time, to attend holy Mass, to cultivate customs, to celebrate festivals, etc.

Over the years I became more and more aware that in dealing with them, just like with other people, certain values are very important, such as attention, esteem, patience, trust, empathy, listening, reliability, willingness to reconcile... Not to mention that we are all on the way with some handicaps and therefore always depend on each other.

For some of the residents it was a matter of learning their language step by step and discovering, perceiving and understanding

their expressive possibilities. I would like to show you a few examples of how the dialogue with such a resident took place in everyday life. I remember a boy who came to us when he was seven years old. I could quickly understand some of the words he spoke at that time: mummy, daddy (baba), milk (mimi), sun (honne), food and a few others. All these things were very important to him in his everyday life. He visibly expanded his own vocabulary with many special "words" and did not rest until I understood what and who he meant by them, e.g. for certain roommates and co-workers, for good and bad, for church, for animals, for wishes and ailments or displeasure. I practiced a lot with him with lottery cards by letting him name the object on the uncovered card. For example "I have a car" etc. For him it was a good language exercise, and I also got to know his words, which he used for the individual things. If he had a headache, he pulled down the blinds in his room and said that he had "hair pain". When I pulled up the blinds in his room in the morning, he expressed his joy about the new day by shouting: "Oh, day there, Honne (sun) there!

It was important for him that his bed was covered with sheets from

his mummy, to which he only said: "Mummy bed." Every Sunday evening, he got a phone call from his mother. He would always sit near the phone in time to wait for the call. If the mother was once prevented, she would inform us in time and give us a changed time, so that we could prepare him accordingly. It always impressed me very much how the two could talk to each other over a longer period of time with just a few words on the phone, how the mother understood his questions by the tone of his voice and then told him from home what he wanted to know. In the exchange with the mother we also got to know words from each other which the boy only used at home or only with us. So it was more and more possible to talk to him about situations at home.

When I visited him again in the intensive care unit on the evening of his death to say goodbye, when I came to his bed, he took out his hand right from under his blanket and slowly pointed his finger upwards: His sign for God and heaven. Then I knew that he also "recognized" this situation, and he could soon go home in the presence of his parents to the place where, as it were, the beloved sun always shines for him.



I was often able to enjoy the religious openness that most of these people showed and how they understood with their hearts what was important.

Here are two examples: The mother of one of our co-workers had died. When she returned to work after a few days, a resident spontaneously fetched tablecloths, napkins and a candle. When I asked him what this was all about, he said: "The mother of (name) is celebrating resurrection. We must also celebrate a feast." That moved us all very much and of course there was a festive coffee party.

A resident in the group died. He was the friend of the latter resident. This was a very painful experience for him. So the next day he came to me and asked me to bake an Easter lamb with him, for his friend had now resurrected. Deeply moved, I gladly agreed with his wish. We then placed this lamb with a picture of the deceased friend and a candle. It is a mystery to me how deeply faith often lives in these people. With great gratitude I look back on this time and this way of being on the way. It was by no means the case

that I was only asked and I gave. No, I was also given very rich gifts!

"Discover the grain of gold hidden in every human being." This word, which is attributed to our Mother Maria Theresa, has always been and continues to be my companion and inspires me to journey with people; with and without disabilities, with co-workers and fellow sisters. I have experienced that it is worthwhile to go again and again on a "treasure-seeking" and also to marvel how HE accompanies us on all paths and how He lives and works in every individual person.

Meanwhile I am retired and work in an honorary capacity. Sometimes I am asked by the former residential group to take over a ministry, for example in case of illness of employees. In addition, I accompany the residents who wish to attend church on Sunday and make a small leisure programme for one or two or three residents. When I come to the ministry, I am greeted with joy, and a resident usually greets me with the following words: "You are here today? I will help you!"

## 140 Years of Life for People with Disabilities

### Pius Institute Bruck at Mur, Austria

From various contributions by Sr. Romana Miklautsch, Graz, Europa Mitte Province

The logo of the Pius Institute is based on that of the Holy Cross Sisters worldwide. But each part of the cross comes in a different color, and colored balls roll out of the cross, as it were. Both occur abundantly in the history of the Pius Institute: the cross in all colors and facets, but also an abundance of the joy of life.

The entrance gate of the Pius Institute carries the year of foundation, **1879**. Since then, people with special needs have experienced instruction, education and accompaniment in their diverse situations of life here. "The need of the time is the will of God". This motto was probably decisive for Mother Maria Theresa

Scherer when she saw on her travels through Austria, the neglected, handicapped people for whom she wanted to create a home. And so she became the initiator and founder of the Pius Institute. Sr. Concordia Fischer was the 1st Provincial Superior of the Province Styria-Carinthia and a strong supporter the young institution.



Sr. Marija Brizar with last three sisters:  
Sr. Ehrentraud, Sr. Simone, Sr. Sunitha

In **1879**, the Zehenthof of Propstei in St. Ruprecht was acquired and renamed the Pius Institute, after Pope Pius IX. The first residential special school was established in what was then Austria. On 12 September 1879, the sisters moved in, and on 10 October the actual opening of the work with four sisters and twelve children took place. Mother Maria Theresa was personally present.

The achievements of the sisters were also honoured by Emperor Franz Josef on the occasion of his 60th government anniversary with

the golden badge of merit. In 1882 he visited the Pius Institute and granted annual subsidies.

The first concept from 1879 made an offer for experimental and elementary school also an offer of employment and care at home.

In the First and Second World Wars, the sisters and employees had to do almost impossible things to protect those entrusted to them. In 1914, the school rooms were used as a military hospital for 200 soldiers, while the school was still in operation. The interwar period was not easy due to the political conflicts at that time. In 1938, the Pius Institute had 300 children with 49 sisters.

In **1940**, the NS regime (National Socialism) began its unhappy campaign of annihilating "unworthy life". The children and young people were constantly transported away. About 200 children were brought to the Vienna area. About 80 children came to Kainbach near Graz, a branch of the "Feldhof" - today the "Sigmund Freud Clinic". There the children stayed with the sisters for some time.

In **1942** the children and young people moved to Schloss Pertlstein. After an adventurous escape, the sisters returned to

Graz with the children in 1945. Theodosia 1/2011 p. 20ff: "Walking through the fire" narrated this.

Incidentally, in 1942, the Pius Institute was confiscated. During this time the Holy Cross sisters were always with the children. The Pius-Institute was abolished, but the tasks and the mission of the Pius-Institute continued.

In **1948** we got the Institute back in a very desolate condition for our work. It was the beginning of a beautiful period of development, in which we constantly tried to meet the demands of the times and to implement the pedagogical developments courageously and constantly within our conditions.



Our mission statement was always based on the mission and heritage of our founder Mother M. Theresa Scherer, to enable people with impairments education and thus integration, and to provide shelter through security and stability.

Since its foundation, the efforts are made to fulfil the social, educational and religious needs of the children in the best possible way, namely

- through the management of a good special school,
- through offering a suitable home, in which our children and young people are not only socially well organized but above all, they are able to live in a humanly appealing way,
- and through the professional preparation that they can experience here.

We have a preparatory year for the general special school. Within the framework of an internship, it is clarified which area of the workshop/service is suitable. The young people have the opportunity to complete a partial qualification in six different apprenticeships: carpentry, garden and green area landscaping restaurant manager, cook, administrative assistant, cemetery and ornamental gardener.

The in-house vocational training assistant supports the apprentices in socio-educational, psychological and academic aspects during the entire training period.

### **Guidelines and direction in the Pius Institute**

1. To promote disabled people according to their possibilities and to take them seriously.
2. Not only to integrate them into society, but also to give them the best possible quality of life and thus security and stability.
3. To train them into full-fledged members of society without judging them by their ability to perform.

"Where a work is accomplished, a dream is continued, a tree is planted, a child is born, there life is at work and a way is cleared in the darkness of time," said Hermann Hesse.

## **50 Years at the Caritas Home in Cerová Memories and the Jubilee Celebration**

Sr. Margaréta Kolníková, Trnava, Province Slovakia

Cerová is no ordinary place for our Slovakian sisters. It is a witness to their most painful and happy moments. It is full of memories in all colours. Cerová tells us about an impressive part of the history of the Institute.

### **Cerová - a historical place**

Cerová is a place of remembrance and "a praying heart" of our province in Slovakia. For us it is "Holy Land", where many life stories of our sisters have been planted like seeds. Many of our sisters received their religious formation here and prepared themselves for their vows. Here many sisters praised God for their lives, sufferings and prayers.

This year we celebrated the 50 years of the arrival of the first sisters to this place. But soon we will have to leave Cerová, which had become our home. We are preparing a new home for our elderly sisters in Podunajské Biskupice and we are starting again a common journey in a house from which we were expelled during the expropriation. It is an opportunity to look back to the past with gratitude and to let ourselves be inspired by the memories of this jubilee year and all that God has done for us.

The castle in Cerová had an interesting history even before the arrival of our sisters. Built around 1700, it was first used as a manor house belonging to several noble families. Later, after the Second World War and the beginning of the totalitarian regime, it was nationalized. Soldiers were accommodated in the castle. Then an agricultural school was founded here and later an orphanage for boys was established. After the destructive earthquake in 1967, the buildings collapsed. "Gypsy families" lived in the abandoned rooms for some time.

Our sisters were forced by the totalitarian regime to resettle in the Czech border area. During the political "thaw" period under the politician Alexander Dubek they were able to return from exile, from exile to their original homeland in Slovakia. Our former provincial house in Podunajské Biskupice was also nationalized in the 1950. The younger sisters

worked in different places. The elderly sisters were placed in so-called Caritas homes, where they lived with sisters from different congregations and institutes.

### **Cerová - painstaking restoration**

At the request of the Superiors, the state gave them the ruins of the castle in Cerová. They were to transform the property into a functioning Caritas home - then it would be exclusively for them. It has become a true home to this day.

The beginning in Cerová was really very difficult. The first sisters came between the end of summer and the beginning of autumn in 1969. What they had experienced here has been best expressed in the documents and chronicles in the archive:

*"When the first two sisters from Holíč arrived in August 1969, they knew that nobody could live in the castle. The condition of the castle was absolutely terrifying and frightening: defective power cables, rotting floors ... It was impossible to lock a door, the toilets could not be entered ..."*

*"In Cerová - Lieskové we can expect work and work from all sides: holes in the roof, cracks in the walls, water pipes destroyed*

*by frost, damaged power lines, broken Cerová during the renovation, broken window panes broken doors, cracked floors and dirt over dirt. In short- this is the inheritance we got!*



Cerová during the renovation



*But we overcame the first terrible impression. With courage in our hearts and trust in God, we agreed with the Caritas headquarters that we would provide capable sisters to lead the construction and support the construction, that we would finance the catering of the workers, and that the sisters from different communities would participate in the work teams."*

Because of the uninhabitable rooms, the harsh conditions and the hard work, our sisters in Cerová truly began "with the sign of the cross". But they also experienced God's help and blessing, and above all they received help from the inhabitants there.



The sisters of the first group were able to find almost nothing to sleep in when they arrived at the "castle". That is why they turned to the neighbours who gave them great help. In the first few days our sisters were given food and shelter in three families. This help lasted for a long time. After a request by the priest the people brought food and wood for the winter time. They saw that the sisters not only pray, but also work hard. With time a cordial relationship developed between the sisters and the village

community, which continues until today.

After the first six months of preparation for the reconstruction of the castle, the first workers arrived on January 1, 1970. A long phase of construction and reconstruction began. We remember above all three sisters, the "builders", who took on this demanding task and gave everything to build the new Caritas home.

Sr. Vianea Hirjaková was the first Superior, the Directress of the Caritas home and at the same time the "forewoman". This capable and intelligent sister sacrificed her life and her strength to the construction of Cerová. She stayed here until her death at the age of 66. Also her two fellow sisters - her collaborators - Sr. Regina Taká ová and Sr. Nazária Koprdová are to be mentioned in a special way. They have contributed significantly to the fact that the castle ruins have become a functioning Caritas home.

Already in 1971 the first sisters, "the first residents", moved into the rooms which were still under construction.

### **Cerová - our new home**

Already in October the elderly sisters in need of care were brought here. At the same time, the novitiate was in Cerová from the beginning. Here the novices were able to receive their formation discreetly and secretly. This is how our chronicle describes it:

*"Under such circumstances a novitiate was carried out in 1971-1973. The novices, together with their leader, were employed at the Caritas headquarters. In the afternoon or in the evening after the working hours they could study. In 1971 the 'Dub eks spring' was already over. In the Caritas homes the strict regime applied again as before 1969. The state, political supervision was reintroduced. The holy profession, the taking of the religious vows, was only possible at night with darkened windows. In the night from 13 to 14 September, fourteen sisters made their first holy profession."*

These young, courageous sisters were faced with a difficult test: after the "novitiate of labour" and the first profession, the state ordered them to take off their religious clothes and to leave the religious community. These sisters had to work in public services.

After the abolition of the religious community and the expulsion of





Cerová today

the sisters from the so-called "Mini Provincial House" in Trnava, the then Provincial Superior Sr. Melánia Šolcová lived in Cerová. In 1977, Mother Edelfrieda Haag elevated the Caritas home in Cerova to the status of the Provincial House of Slovakia. It was already the third provincial house. More and more sisters came to Cerová. They came as pensioners, but also from dissolved communities. Younger sisters were forbidden to stay in Cerová. The challenge was great. The task was to look after the sick, elderly and needy sisters and

to do the housework for the large house.

In later times, the Superior succeeded in obtaining permission for younger sisters to be allowed to work for Cerová today. Here they were also allowed to wear the religious dress.

On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, on 14 September 1981, all construction work was completed with the inauguration of the so-called "little church". Above all, the gratitude and satisfaction

of the sisters could be felt that they had succeeded in building a "true" home.

### **Cerová - lights of hope**

In the 80s and early 90s there were up to 187 sisters in Cerová. After the so-called "Velvet Revolution", the sisters were finally allowed to be active in public again in religious dress and to dedicate themselves to pastoral work. In the Caritas home retreats and spiritual encounters for girls were offered. Some people simply came to experience the silence and to find new strength through prayer.

After many years it was finally possible again to take young women into the convent and to train them. More than 120 of our sisters experienced the beginning of their religious journey in Cerová. After the fall of the totalitarian regime, the religious formation took place in Cerová in all phases (candidacy, postulancy, novitiate) until the final vows.

Prayer, sacrifice, work and effort, suffering and joy, beautiful

religious jubilee celebrations, vestition, professions - as well as accompanying dying sisters and the "going home" at the end of one's life - all these characterize the community in Cerová and is like a beautiful mosaic that remains as a memory.

In 1996, the headquarters of the Provincial Leadership and the religious formation were moved to the newly built provincial house in Trnava. Since the second half of the 1990s the number of sisters in Cerová has been reduced. The number of graves at the Liesková cemetery in Cerová is increasing. 336 sisters are already buried there.



Jubilee Profession 1972

### **Cerová - gratitude for the past**

On 7th September, 2019 we celebrated 50 years of life in Cerová with many sisters. It was a really beautiful family celebration. During adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, we surrendered to God in gratitude our past, the present and all that the future may bring us. Through the PowerPoint presentation, the history of this special and beloved place became vivid once again for all those present. The solemn Thanksgiving Mass with Mgr Stanislav Zvolenský, Archbishop of Bratislava, and several concelebrants crowned the day. Sr. Šebastiana Tuptová, Provincial Superior, expressed her sincere thanks to the sisters of the

community there, especially Sr. Alena Števková, who has been serving as Directress of the Caritas home in Cerová for almost 30 years. In the afternoon, neighbours, local residents and benefactors were invited to an agape. It was a joyful and cordial celebration. Special thanks to Sr. Mansueta Krá ová, the Superior in Cerová.

Until the already mentioned new home in Podunajské Biskupice is ready, Cerová will remain the home for our elderly and needy sisters. Through their prayer and acceptance of their suffering, they pray for God's blessing upon our Congregation, upon the church and upon the whole world.



The present community in Cerová, Easter 2019

## Providing Accommodation and a Home

Sr. Sandra Brodmann, Villa Erica, Locarno, Ticino, Province Switzerland

After the General Visitation, Sr. Dorothee Halbach requested us to write a report about our mission for the women with whom we live every day.

### Looking back

In 1933, the Holy Cross Sisters took over the house Villa Erica in Locarno to provide accommodation for sisters and women in need. After ten years, however, the shelter home was abandoned and a girls' school opened instead, as education of young women in Ticino was in

total neglect. In 1970, the old villa had to be demolished for safety reasons, and the present building was erected on the same site in 1978. The boarding school offered accommodation for up to 90 girls in double bedrooms with their own bathroom.

After 72 years we had to close the language and vocational school in 2015 due to lack of sisters. At the same time, renovation work was planned for the 40-year-old house. Since we had been renting rooms to former schoolgirls for twenty years and realized that there was a lack of such cheap accommodation in Locarno, it was decided to turn the villa into a house for several age-groups by planning apartments for the elderly who were still independent. Man proposes, but God disposes. Due to appeals from neighbours we had to change plans during the construction work, and instead of apartments we made furnished single rooms with group kitchens.



Former school Villa Erica



Residents

### **The present**

Already during the construction work the demand for rooms increased, and today we accommodate over thirty 18 to 64 year old women. The house is almost always fully booked. At the moment about half of them are young women in different education, e.g. students of the Pedagogical University, interns in social professions, who are looking for a cheap room in a safe place from Ticino or especially from Italy. They appreciate the quiet house where they can study well. In addition, each has her own room with a washroom to retire, and the various kitchens offer the opportunity to eat

together and exchange ideas. We are happy to see and hear how they spend the evenings together in lively discussions and vibrancy. The young women have a need for community and also appreciate the sharing of their experiences with the sisters.

During the summer holidays the students can leave their rooms and we open the house for guests of the International Film Festival. Many of our regular guests come from far away, e.g. a Thai film critic or a group from Taiwan who want to draw attention to the delicate situation in their country with their film.

## A shelter for body and soul

The demand for cheap rooms from other women of all ages turned out to be an unforeseen new need. More and more foreigners and women come to us in emergency situations. We only rent the rooms on a monthly basis; for some it is a temporary solution, others stay with us for several years. Our tenants are women from Ticino or the rest of Switzerland, from Italy, Germany, France, Croatia, Spain, Russia, Brazil, Uruguay, Turkey and the Dominican Republic. At the moment we have women from Poland and Romania who work at home as caregivers for the elderly, and then we have younger and older women, especially from Italy, who are looking for work, which is hopeless in their home country. All these women themselves say that they find accommodation, home and security with us. Their stories, their current situations and problems are impressive. All suffer from the distance to their families, but take it upon themselves to financially support them in difficult situations. Here in Switzerland they are often exploited, but cannot defend themselves in order not to lose their job. When the people to be cared for suddenly become the victims of serious nursing cases or



Sr. Sandra, Sr. Gerda and Sr. Marialuisa

even die, these women stand on the street with their suitcases. One recently said on behalf of others: "We are grateful that you sisters exist, because otherwise nobody will take care of us".

You will also find with us women, who speak their own language, have the same mentality and experience similar difficult situations. They help and support each other. They need the open ear of a sister who lets herself be touched by their problems and, in addition to a good word, often provides concrete help, especially in times of unemployment or when they are even paid out. Many of them can live a dignified life thanks to the modest rent.

### **The three sisters**

We three sisters are also active in two parishes and thus are with people and their destinies. One of the sisters also give German classes, e.g. to priests and doctors, so that they can better accompany those entrusted to them.

After the class it was obvious to continue our contribution to the education of young women. However, through God's guidance and our flexibility, a new apostolate has emerged for some

worrying needs that were previously unknown to us. Openness and solidarity with women from different countries and in different situations is a new and meaningful challenge for us three sisters.

Being there every day for the disadvantaged and thus indirectly helping their needy families abroad is for us sisters, a continuation of the mission of Mother M. Theresa, under whose protection and guidance we stand. We are convinced that she smiles encouragingly at us.



## When Strangers Become Friends

Selma Zurbriggen, Lucerne, Switzerland

As a young woman Selma Zurbriggen (20) is involved in a church project with "Voyage-Partage". She plunges herself into a new culture and gains insight into the work of our sisters in Kikyusa, Uganda. For her, volunteering is an amazing experience.

I am the only white person for miles and people call me Muzungu. The first few days I felt like I was in a movie, but it wasn't really true. But once you get to know the people and replace an unknown crowd with familiar faces, you are suddenly a part of the hustle and bustle in Uganda. Kikyusa has now become my second home. Kikyusa is a small village near Wobulenzi, in the Luweero district, about two hours north of Kampala, the capital of Uganda. I live there with the Holy Cross sisters.

Almost seven days a week I am in the sisters' school, St. Kizito Primary School. The school has seven primary classes with about 50 girls each, who are hardly manageable. I mainly teach in the 4th grade and help out the first graders where I can, be it sharpening pencils with a razor blade, painting posters or distributing notebooks I still don't really know how to sharpen the pencils, the little seven-year-old

are much more experienced. I can call almost any kid by name. In the beginning they just stared at me, then they came to touch me very gently and meanwhile I am almost thrown over in a group hug.



### Everyday life in Kikyusa with many facets

The unpaved roads resemble a red ski slope with a lot of traffic. If it hasn't just rained when the roads become a small river, they are dusty. If a car passes by, it whirls up so much dust that the air



is transformed into a red fog and the eyes burn.

The houses of Kikyusa are made of bricks and are only one storey high. A piece of cloth serves as a door during the day. Freshly washed clothes hang on clotheslines that are stretched between the houses. Women carry their babies on their backs and the freshly bought things on the heads. Everywhere small shops sell clothes, food, mobile phones etc. Cooking is done at the roadside and people loudly advertise their goods. "Hey Muzungu, how are you? Gjangu!" The street is like an official garbage can. In addition, one has to avoid the speeding bodabodas (bicycles or motorbikes) and cars.

Every Saturday is a washing day. The clothes are washed by hand with a blue soap. At the beginning my hands were a little bit scratched. The sisters were shocked by my wrinkled hands, because their hands remain completely smooth, even if they have been in the water for hours. In the meantime I only have to fear the wild baboons that run over the washing line and make the clothes dirty. They do not know about the dishwashers. Here the "machine" has hands

and feet, and like on a conveyor belt the dishes go from hand to hand until I dry them at the end together with Sr. Claris, and we handle it together.

Mostly, we have electricity and running water. The emphasis is on "mostly" because on certain days one or the other is on strike. After one or two days it comes back again. Running water is a real luxury here. Most people bring it from boreholes (holes deep in the ground from which the water is pumped up with a pump).



I have a rather improvised shower that only carries cold water. But this is not too bad, because it is really hot here and only the rain, the wind and the cool morning hours bring cooling. I also have a normal toilet in the convent. But in school they use latrines: A small house with a hole in the ground. The garbage is burned in the backyard. They throw it into a big hole and make a fire.

You cannot expect to have a peaceful sleep. You can hear music until late at night, the megaphone of the Trading Center (shopping mall), a newborn baby crying from the Health Center, or Muslims calling out to Allah in full volume at any time of the day.

The poverty here in Uganda cannot be compared to anything in Switzerland. The country of the sisters and their school are like a small oasis. Here, poverty is hardly felt. The green and white checked school uniforms, the parquet floors in the convent made of glued-on foil, the ice-cold shower, the very dangerous gas stove and the stable concrete walls are pure luxury. I have visited families who all live together in a room measuring five by six meters. The huts are partly built of mud. Clothes are worn until they consist of more holes

than fabric, shoes until they fall off the feet.

Many people live on what they plant. So if it doesn't rain in time, everyone has a bigger problem. Day in, day out, Posho (white maize porridge) is eaten with beans, sometimes also Matoke (golden yellow porridge made of plantain) or seasonal fruits like pineapple, mango and jackfruit.

Not everyone can afford to pay the school fees. The sisters try to accommodate people as best they can. The monthly salary of a teacher is 200000 Uganda Shillings (50 CHF). Despite all the difficulties, the people are somehow happy. On Sundays they all put on their beautiful colored dresses. In the church there is drumming, singing and dancing.

I am always welcomed with open arms and am impressed every time anew by the creativity of the people in Uganda. They use what they have as well as possible. Banana leaves are used for cooking or you roll them up and put them on their heads so that it is more comfortable to carry heavy things. What used to be waste is turned into a football by little boys and the girls make

African dolls from dried banana leaves.

## Health Center

For the last 20 days I am in the Health Center. Every Monday about 100 HIV patients come for a medical check-up to get their medicines. The small Health Center takes care of about 4000 HIV patients altogether. HIV is an epidemic problem in Uganda and other African countries. But with the right medication, one can live safely with the HIV virus. Some have been living with it for 25 years. However, pregnant mothers with HIV are carefully



examined to prevent the baby from getting HIV. If the mothers do not come for a medical check-up, we have to go to their village.

Clinical Officer Alex patiently explains to me how he examines his patients for malaria, tuberculosis and typhoid fever. Diana and Sr. Sylvia also taught me how to take blood samples. Meanwhile I diagnose malaria and tuberculosis under the microscope.

Last Tuesday, we went to the village to treat the local people. So many people came. I took mainly blood pressure and temperature. Since it is rainy season at the moment, many children have malaria. If we would not distribute free medicines, they would not get any medical support because there is no money.

People always smile at me with surprise and happiness when I greet them in Luganda: "Wasuze otya, nyabo" (Good afternoon, Madam). The children flock around me and want to be examined too. Smiling, they keep asking me: "How are you?", the only English sentence they know.

On Wednesdays, many mothers come with their babies to be examined and vaccinated. I give the little ones vitamin A and vaccine against polio and diarrhoea (but only orally, not as an injection). This is not very easy as a large part of the women do not understand a word in English and my Luganda is limited. I can ask questions, but I do not understand the answers.

Only recently, a 13-year-old boy came to the Health Center. He had a 10 cm long and 3 cm deep cut below his knee. An accident with a panga (a big, round curved) knife with which, they can even chop off big branches). A nurse stitched the big wound, which was

deep down to the bone, and my stomach started to rumble. But my curiosity was greater, and I watched the nurse at work. The boy hardly pulled a face and he did not cry. He looked at his leg with great interest. The children here are really tough.

Next to the Health Center there is a big construction site. The foundations of the new building are already there. They want to expand the Health Center and build an operation theatre for complicated births. It is a big and important project for the sisters. However, since the money is quite scarce, the project may take a long time.

## A Story worth Sharing

Sr. Peggy Jackelen and Sr. Mary Anne Rose, Merrill, USA Province

This story is worth telling. At a time when in many of our institutions, the leadership of sisters had to be transferred to secular men and women, the sisters of the USA Province tried to put something of our charism into the hands and hearts of the co-workers as well.

### A part of Institute's history

In 2014 the leadership of Bell Tower Residence was transferred to lay leadership. We, Sisters Peggy Jackelen and Mary Anne Rose, having formerly served in the leadership roles at Bell Tower, were asked to develop a Mission Integration Program for all employees of Bell Tower Residence that the philosophy,

traditions, and spirit of the Holy Cross Sisters would continue to be integrated in their lives. Although it seemed a daunting request at first, we realized it was a gift to share our rich heritage with the employees.

We began by positioning Bell Tower Residence (Bell Tower) within the greater Holy Cross



Process work of Sr. Peggy and Sr. Mary Anne with staff

Sisters' international congregation. Employees were surprised to learn they were participants in this large entity dedicated to meeting the needs of the times since 1856.

### **Exploring and living core values**

When an individual desires to become a member of an organization or business, it is important to understand its mission. The mission statement gives purpose and direction to what is to be accomplished every day. The core values describe how the mission is carried out. During our four sessions together we explored the impact of Bell Tower's mission statement and core values.

A small glimpse into the public life of Jesus laid the foundation. He showed his disciples the way to continue the ministry after his death. "Love one another as I love you." By his actions Jesus showed his followers how to become "foot washers."

Each participant was invited to observe ways in which their co-



Common prayer

workers demonstrate the core values in their individual roles at Bell Tower. Later these observations were shared with the group. Employees began to realize the living of the mission and the core values has given Bell Tower a place of respect in the Merrill community and beyond. "Faith-based" sets Bell Tower Residence apart from many other assisted living communities in the Merrill area.

Since it is quite popular in these days to want to know the stories of our past, a brief introduction to significant individuals in the rich history of our congregation was shared. Francis of Assisi, Theodosius Florentini, and Theresa Scherer were "foot-washers." Their strong faith impelled them to respond to the needs of the poor, the sick, and the disheartened. Others,

attracted by their good works, followed. There is one additional piece of historical background imparted to each group --the journey to America. It was Mother Theresa Scherer's dream to send sisters to the United States. That fulfillment was interrupted by the death of Fr. Theodosius, the ministerial needs in Europe, and then her own death. Mother Aniceta Regli shared this dream – and at the request of Bishop Wehrle, six sisters made the long journey to the prairies of Dickinson, North Dakota in 1912.

This fascinating history led to the establishment of Merrill, WI as the central headquarters for the sisters.

**A mission**

The final component included an invitation to each participant to stand on the shoulders of those who have come before them. If willing to minister in this tradition, each participant wrote a personal commitment as to how he/she would continue to share the story by living the mission



A group of employees receives the mission



Sr. Pat, Provincial Superior gives a badge as a sign of mission

and values in his/her ministry at Bell Tower Residence. Each commitment was expressed in a public missioning ceremony and accepted by the Provincial Leadership Team of the U.S. A. Province.

**Note:** As of May 1, 2019, Bell Tower Residence is no longer a sponsored ministry of the Holy Cross Sisters in Merrill, WI. Although employees greatly appreciated the program, this Mission Integration Program will discontinue.



## HOLY CROSS MISSION

### Collaborative Mission of Ingenbohl and Menzingen Sisters in India

Sr. Vijaya Sebastian (Menzingen), Executive Director of the of the Holy Cross Sisters-Mission, Bangalore, South India

Edited by Sr. Elsit Ampattu, General Councilor Ingenbohl

Since six years there is a close collaboration between the Holy Cross Sisters of Ingenbohl and Menzingen in India. What has proved to be beneficial in the area of health care has drawn more circles into the social and pastoral ministry, into work against human trafficking. Other communities are also interested in the exemplary collaboration.

### Collaboration in Health Care

Fr. Theodosius Florentini, an ardent apostle of social reform, who read the 'signs of the time' in 19<sup>th</sup> century and ventured into courageous measures to alleviate the human suffering, keep on inspire and motivate us.

Sr. Prabha Varghese from the Central Province of Ingenbohl Sisters, the Executive Director of CBCI- CARD, during her official visit across the different states of India in the discharge of her duty, got an idea and an inspiration to initiate a dialogue between the two Congregations bringing together all the Provincials and the Leaders involved in Health Care with the aim to find a way to counter the ill effects of the three major industries of Health Care, and more profit, much more profit



attitude of the Health Care Providers.

On 15 February 2013, the Leaders of Sisters of the Holy Cross – Menzingen and the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross - Ingenbohl in India came together at Maitreya in Bangalore believing “The need of the time is the Will of God” and convinced of a collaborative endeavor of the Holy Cross Health Care network spread across the country can strongly face the challenges of health care delivery and offer solutions to the health care needs of our country.

The leaders of the two Congregations signed the Bangalore Declaration, institutionalizing the Collaborative Mission of the two Congregations, christening it “Holy Cross Health Care Mission”. The Six Provincials and the Six Councilors, each of them representing Health Care Mission in their respective Provinces, constituted the Steering Committee of the Holy Cross Health Care Mission.

As a result of combined deliberations, discussions and prayer it was confirmed that we need to venture into a new combat with joint efforts. We also realized that with the advancement of specializations, technology, running of a hospital today has become very complex. It requires highly qualified professionals and sophisticated systems for finance, operations, procurement, Human Resource Management (HRM), Information Technology (IT), Branding and promotion, legal assistance etc.

### **Vision, Mission, Objectives of HCHC Mission**

We adapted the vision, mission and objectives of the Health Policy of the Catholic Church in India to the HCHC Mission. “Having received the mandate from Jesus Christ, the Divine Healer, to

ensure life in its fullness, and inspired by His compassionate love, the Catholic Church in India envisages a healthy society where people, especially the poor and marginalized, attain and maintain holistic wellbeing and live in harmony with the Creator, with self, with one another and with the environment”.

Collating the data on Health Care ministry from the Six Provinces was an eye opener, as the contribution to the National Health of India by Holy Cross Sisters figured to be quite significant through the 31 hospitals and 24 health centers spread across the whole country with more penetration into the unreached and underserved rural areas.

The realization, that together there are 3600 in-patient beds available for the two Congregations paved way to set up the Process of Common Procurement. By November 2013 the Central Office of Holy Cross Health Care Mission was set up at Maitreya, Bangalore with a full time Executive Director, Procurement Manager and an Office Secretary. Seed Money to finance the initiative was contributed by each Province.

Training for “Transformation for Mission” was perceived as an urgent need to provide

humanized, affordable, compassionate and quality care and Holy Cross Health Care Mission engaged a professional team to prepare the training module and to train the sisters from all the Seven Provinces as Trainers.

Twenty one sisters got trained in 24 modules and all the Provinces conducted the “Transformation Training for Mission” for all the sisters as well as for the employees including doctors.

The Steering Committee got dissolved eventually and now the Seven Provincials constitute the Governing Council. There was a consensus to include all the ministries as well as ongoing formation of the two Congregations and since then the collaboration initiative is renamed “**HOLY CROSS MISSION**”.

Accreditation for Hospitals and Health Centers has become a mandatory norm across the Country. As part of the Collaboration Initiative, Orientation Trainings were conducted for sisters and staff for NABH Accreditation from 17 Hospitals who volunteered to begin the process.

It is encouraging to note that 8 Hospitals have already received

Entry Level NABH Accreditation from the Quality Council of India and this will in turn help us to realise the vision of **Holy Cross Mission** to provide Excellent Health Care to more people through solutions that brings costs down, increase access and improve quality thus delivering sustainable solutions to Health Care Needs.

### **The collaboration continues**

Hospitals managed by other Congregations and other Christian Organizations joined the Common Procurement of **Holy Cross Mission** and have experienced the benefit of Collective Bargaining.

There has been a lot of efforts taken by all concerned to keep alive the Collaboration. The feeling of togetherness and the strength experienced is phenomenal especially during these troubled times in our country due to the withdrawal of high-value bank notes (Demonetization) and the implementation of a new tax system (GST).

The meeting of all the Administrators, Purchase Managers, and Pharmacists of the Hospitals served as a forum to exchange their knowledge and

expertise and provided an opportunity to share the lessons learned from experience.

The Collaboration in the ongoing formation has opened up the way for the sisters to get enriched from each other and to experience the unique life and mission of the different Provinces of the two Congregations.

The Sharing of Personnel between the two Congregations in times of acute shortage and crisis is an unforgettable experience. The Institutional Training Facilities of the two Congregations are shared by both the Congregations, and sisters and candidates return back with updated skills and expertise, increased vigour and enthusiasm, more zeal and broader outlook.

Response to the two “National Consultation” of the Sisters involved in Social Empowerment Ministry and Pastoral Ministry was overwhelming and jointly started to work together to involve specially in issues related to Human Trafficking. Other Congregations got to know about the collaboration of the two Holy Cross Congregations and a few Congregations benefitted from the experiences shared by Holy Cross Mission on their invitation.

The involvement of Sisters in Education Ministry is much more significant. Perceiving the challenges of the New National Education Policy which in many ways does not seem to align with Christian Principles, the Governing Council of the Holy Cross Mission, in July 2018, organised the first Consultation with our Sisters – 86 Sisters – who hold Leadership Positions in Institutions owned and managed by Holy Cross Sisters. An expert who practices courageously the Christian Principles enlightened the participants on how to stay alive holding on to our Vision and Values and on new models of education to combat the contemporary crisis. The group drew up HCM EDUCATION MINISTRY DECLARATION: 15 July 2018 and efforts are on to implement them.

The Resources of Christian Organizations have become the burning subject of intense scrutiny for the present Central Government. Therefore, the Governing Council in December 2018 conducted a Seminar for all the Provincial Procurators and Finance Managers of Societies and Institutions with inputs from experts. The enthusiastic engagement and involvement of the participants prompted us to

conduct the Follow up Seminar in March 2019.

The written feed- back received after all the important meetings reveal that the coming together of the Two Congregations was providential and the experience is very much enriching and rewarding for all concerned.

By now, the benefits of collaboration have begun to become visible and a few Religious Congregations showed interest to hear about “Holy Cross Mission” – the Collaboration of Two Congregations. Since February 2013, Fifteen Congregations invited us to learn from the experience of **Holy Cross Mission.**

# **Accompaniment in Formation**

## **International Formators' Congress in Assisi**

### **from 18 to 27 September, 2019**

Sr. Maria Magdalena Schlageter, Hegne, Province Baden-Württemberg

The different phases of formation in our community, in spite of all cultural differences, need a common theme, which is shown to us in "Ratio Formationis" (Living from the Source). In order to deepen it, the sisters of the General Leadership and the responsible sisters of the provinces and vicariates met in the inspiring Assisi.

"Give roots and branches to the women who come to you."



I deliberately set this invitation and request, which Fr. Ludger Schulte, the speaker at our Congress gave us at the beginning of my report on the precious days in Assisi. It shows the perspective with which we have illuminated the theme of the Congress.

"Accompaniment in Formation" is a way into the depth and into vastness. To experience how this depth and vastness is lived and accompanied in the different

Provinces and Vicariates in the different phases of formation was a precious experience for 37 formators, the General Leadership, the moderator (Mrs. Magda Emerich-Scholliers from Germany) and the speaker (Fr. Ludger Schulte, OFM Cap, also from Germany), who worked with us for three days.

### **Highlights from our program**

At first it was about us: how everyone feels as a person and as a formator. A day of retreat together helped us to get to our own roots. The theme was "Like clay in the potter's hand". We set off with a lump of clay and impulses.

We could feel holistically what wants to take shape, how something grows, how it forms. To know that God, whom we trust, is the potter, gives peace and serenity, strength and joy. In the

evening we came together with what was created and praised and thanked God in prayers.

The following day we became aware of what it means for us to be members of the formation leadership. We shared our motivations and also the challenges of this task. Where do I myself stand in my role in the field of tension and in the dynamic process of individuation and integration and where would I like to stand? What does it need and how can it work? We asked ourselves this question again and again. Where do we form? How are the people who come to us today? What skills do we need to help our formees grow and enjoy inner freedom?

The image of the "organic formation" accompanied us in looking at everything that belongs to the formation, so that growth can happen, which elements belong to it and where and how personal accompaniment has its place in all this structure. Various pictures were created in the table groups. An image that accompanied us throughout the day was the picture of the bird on the branch. The point is that each formee can take her place in the tree, the branch of the Congregation in inner freedom. The goal of the formation can be

called: "Every bird should finally sit freely on the branch." It could lead to overstraining if we think that we can achieve this in the accompaniment, but we can go along in different ways and know that we can build a network with experts in the background.

The discussion about different types of conversation (spiritual guidance, pastoral care, therapy, counselling, supervision) and their respective specifics are again a help for us, also in the reflection of our own ways of accompaniment in the respective phases of formation. We have deepened the general understanding of vocation, which is also described in the "Ratio Formationis", we have looked at the criteria of a spiritual vocation and we have felt that it is a matter of being touched, of being fruitful, of being alive and of being in flow.

In a Biblical reference by Sr. Petra Car (Europa Mitte), about five stations from the life of Abraham, we recognized the movement of God's promise, our own humanity, the constant dynamics and the basic experience that God goes along on this journey.

In all this there is always a crisis, and it wants to be accompanied with confidence. In a pantomime by Fr. Ludger, once again we

were able to experience very closely what is happening in this dynamic. As formators, we have recognized that it is not a matter of avoiding crises, nor of interpreting them and finding solutions, but of giving the space of mercy in which something new can emerge after all the pain. In the discussion on the topic of "spiritual abuse" we were sensitized to any kind of border violation.

The effort with the "Ratio Formationis" made us grateful

because it is a good basis for our work and is experienced as a gift: The phases of formation in their goals, the profile of formation leadership, embedded in our charism, provide orientation.

### **From Assisi back to the task**

We were able to experience these days of the Congress in the midst of the place where St. Francis lived and died. We visited different places together and were very well guided by Sr. Anke, the Siessen Franciscan, and sent





on our way with impulses. Whether it was San Damiano or the Carceri, San Rufino or other places - we felt the Franciscan spirit that inspired and motivated us. Bonded together by a liturgy that went to our hearts, we were also able to experience and give ourselves as gifts in our diversity.

On September 27, 2019, we concluded the Congress with joyful and grateful hearts. In a missionary celebration we gathered the flowers into a bouquet and Sr. Marija Brizar sent them again to our mission with the sign of the blessing, the Franciscan Tau. We are grateful

to our General Administration for making possible the Congress in this holy place and also for the opening of the space of encounter, mutual encouragement and the knowledge of how important it is that we can network, exchange and help each other, even across borders. We are grateful that translators helped us to understand each other and for all personal attempts, across all language barriers, to communicate with prayer and the heart in such a way that we felt the vitality and joy of being together. In this way, we are newly rooted and inspired to set out for our provinces.

## **From our Provinces and Vicariates Christian education for over 10,000 children**

From CNA German/EWTN (Roman Catholic News Agency)

**The "Association for Franciscan Education" is the largest Catholic private school authority in Austria.**

Vienna, 29 April, 2019

Five Franciscan religious communities have founded a common school association in Austria. The "Association for Franciscan Education" (VfFB) accompanies more than 10,000 children and young people on their way to education.

The "Verein für Franziskanische Bildung" (Association for Franciscan Education) is thus the largest Catholic private school organisation in Austria, which looks after educational institutions from nursery schools and kindergartens to elementary schools, secondary schools and colleges. A total of about 1650 employees are employed in five provinces and as many dioceses.

*"We are deeply convinced that Franciscan education has great*



Founding members, in the middle Sr. Gabriele Schachinger, Provincial Superior Europa Mitte

*value and undisputed future potential",* the association informed. According to the nuns, the aim is to secure the Franciscan character and the economic future of their educational institutions in the long term. *"Jesus Christ and his message encourage us to be open to the religious dimension of our lives and to build a trusting relationship with God, following the example of Saint Francis".*

The five Orders are:

- The Franciscan Sisters of Amstetten
- the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception - School Sisters of Graz
- the Franciscan Sisters of Vöcklabruck
- the Holy Cross Sisters of Europa Mitte Province
- and the School Sisters of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Order of St. Francis in Apostelgasse in Vienna

The five member Board of Trustees of the Association, drawn from the five religious groups agreed on the "why", of the association:

*"Together we can better fulfill this ecclesial and social educational mission, which goes back to our respective founders, than alone. Through the merger, we will be perceived more strongly as partners to the public".*

*The Franciscan way of education means "to support children and young people in discovering and developing their abilities and talents. Commitment to the poorer and weaker is our special concern".*

The concrete implementation will begin on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2019. A managing director has already been found: Christoph Burgstaller will start his work in summer.

## Information from the General Leadership

### Appointments

**On May 2, 2019** the General Leadership appointed the Provincial Leadership for the Europa Mitte Province for the next three years:

Provincial Superior: Sr. Magdalena  
Walcher, first  
term of office

Assistant: Sr. Petra Car

Councillors: Sr. Maria Dolores  
Scherrer  
Sr. Verena Bergmair  
Sr. Clara Mair

Official start: 19 November, 2019

In preparation for the appointment of the new Provincial Leadership, the General Leadership, together with the Provincial Leadership, has decided to reduce the number of Provincial Councillors from six to four.

We thank Sr. Gabriele Schachinger, the outgoing Provincial Superior, as well as Sr. Francesca Fritz, Sr. Martina Mayr and Sr. Theresia Hörger, the outgoing Councillors for their committed, loyal and selfless

service for the welfare of the sisters and the province. We wish them all the best and God's abundant blessing for their future mission.

**On September 30, 2019**, the General Leadership reappointed the Vicariate Leadership of Brazil for the next three years:

Vicariate Superior: Sr. Cláudia  
Regina dos Santos,  
2<sup>nd</sup> term of office

Assistant: Sr. Rosângela Maria  
Santana da Silva

Councillors: Sr. Alcenia Barreto  
da Paz  
Sr. Beatrice Krsta i  
Sr. Terezinha de  
Jesus Bernardes

Official start: 25 January, 2020

We sincerely thank the newly and reappointed sisters for Provincial Leadership of Europa Mitte and the reappointed sisters for Vicariate Leadership of Brazil and their willingness to accept this demanding mission. We wish them strength, courage and confidence for their task. May God's blessing be with them!

## **General Chapter 2020**

The General Chapter will take place in Hegne, Baden-Württemberg Province, from August 11 to September 9, 2020. Due to the construction work in progress on the convent hill in Ingenbohl, it will once again take place outside of Ingenbohl after a long time.

A General Chapter is essentially a spiritual event, and it is the highest executive body of the Congregation. The Chapter under the theme "Moved by God's Spirit, going forward with courage" begins with a six-day retreat accompanied by Fr. Thomas Dienberg OFM Cap, Münster in Germany.

We could get Mrs. Anne Elisabeth Höfle from Vienna and Fr. Thomas Dienberg as moderation team.

We recommend the preparations for the Chapter, which have already started months ago, then your prayer in a special way for the realization of the Chapter in the first part and the Chapter voting in the second part.

## **Jubilees**

**150 years of the Province Styria/Carinthia, founded on 2 February, 1870.** The sisters commemorate in 2020 various events of the beginning of their former independent Province (it belongs to the Province Europa Mitte since 2007).

A team of sisters has on the jubilee motto "Life in abundance is given to us - we are still on the way", planned activities and offers which will be of particular interest to the sisters of the region as strength of commemoration.

**125 Years Province Baden-Württemberg, founded on January 1, 1895**

**90 years Province Italy, founded on July 24, 1930**

**50 Years First Indian Province, founded on March 3, 1970**

**50 Years Vicariate Slovenia, Founded on May 1, 1970**  
(since 2007 in Europa Mitte Province)

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