



On The Edge

Editorial

On a planet pushed to the edge, with humanity in a state of emergency

Danielle Julien, Editor

I bought a book, which I must admit I didn't have time to read yet, with a very challenging or evocative title: to save the planet, let's get out of capitalism (Hervé Kempf). Our life style, based on the capitalist neoliberal economy of which I spoke in the editorial of the previous issue, with its credo of unlimited growth of profit and consumption on a limited planet, is leading us straight to disaster. In the North as well as in the South, in the developed countries as in the 'emerging' countries and also in the developing nations, the same script is repeated; the planet is ransacked of its resources, it is polluted as well as drained (thus great rivers don't even reach the sea), to produce consumer goods sold for the benefit of a handful of people while the majority remain at the edge of the simple necessity of a life of dignity.

We all live on this planet where, by the totality of human activities, the climate rather stable since some thousand years is on the verge of toppling over; some IPCC experts (*Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC*) have already sounded the alarm : if we don't drastically diminish our emission of greenhouse gasses to an inferior level to what we were producing even before 2000, we will be unable to stop global warming in time: above 2 degrees Celsius, we will be beyond the point of no return. Even the most pessimistic scenarios seem to be surpassed by the reality: we predict that the northern passage-way in the Arctic will be free of ice for ships in the summer well before the due date that the experts had foreseen; a perspective that delights the traders.

The variations in temperature are not new; the climate naturally varies. The planet has already known some higher average temperatures (Canada was once under tropical climate and London was once under the sea!) and lower (glacial eras covering even Africa) than those we actually know. What is alarming is that this last century of human presence on the planet has known a vertiginous increase of temperature in a very short lapse of time, leading to some important impacts on our living environment. The end of the last century is at the same time marked with the globalization of the neoliberal economic model. These two phenomenons are linked. The last IPCC report is unequivocal: human activities are the cause of the rapid global warming of the earth's atmosphere. In reality it is not the planet that is threatened (it has gone through far worse climates where the atmosphere was un-breathable), nor even life on the planet (we know extreme forms of life exist in nearly boiling waters), it is on more or less in the long term that human life and that of other species are threatened.

No matter whether we live in a developed, emerging or developing country, we find ourselves with all of humanity on the edge of a precipice, on the edge of a fall into nothingness, from the point of view of global warming with its disastrous effects: melting of glaciers that are an essential source of drinking water in the Andes and elsewhere, melting of the ice floe at both poles, increase of the sea level causing the swallowing up of inhabited islands and the flooding of densely populated coastal oceanic areas with the perspective of massive human migration, the rise of salt water in the rivers contaminating surface or underground water resources, more abundant and stronger rains and storms, difference of higher temperatures, variations in the rhythm of the seasons.

The politicians at Copenhagen were unable to agree on the fixing of some calculable objectives with a schedule of due dates, they didn't sign a restrictive treaty, without which it is impossible to overthrow the steam, and not even to limit the warming to 2 degrees Celsius. And for a reason: the leading lights of the business world, those who proclaim that the logic (the «invisible hand») of the free market can realise a just distribution of the wealth and reach a beneficial equilibrium, have succeeded over the years to bind their hands and sign some commercial agreements that prevail the rights of the businesses on the capacity of the governments to enact for the protection of the environment and the well-being of the people. At Copenhagen, the interests of the market once again prevailed over the issues of life.

The politicians seem unable to act, and the economic world sees but its own short term interest. It falls to the citizens to take over the situation. A Quebec organism has this slogan: one move at a time. It is not sufficient. I believe that it is Gandhi who said that the force of change resides in «the critical masses», that is to say in the number of people involved in the desired change. It was when the Indians were sufficiently numerous to rally in nonviolence that they could free themselves from the British power that was oppressing them. It could be the same for the planet. «Only a collective, massive and strategically planned action has a chance to reverse the tendency. The issue is not to throw alternatives. It is to marginalize the very principle of maximization of the profit by placing the cooperative logic at the heart of the economic system.» (Hélène Crié-Wiesner, in an article on Internet entitled «to save the planet, small actions are not enough»)

What are we ready to do, collectively as MFIC, for our planet where humanity is in a state of urgency, to build a collective move and confront the destructive economy of our home? In passing: the word «economy» comes from a Greek word meaning «administration of the house»; if the administration is bad and threatens the house to crash down, it needs to be changed; we could say that with this globalized economy, we have built a house on sand! What of this unrealistic idea (Utopia) are we willing to risk, collectively, with others, by widening our circles to reach out towards «the critical mass»? Even together we MFIC cannot do it by ourselves. I invite you all to reflect on this issue straight away. It is not too late, it is still possible to change course and it is urgent. We are all, younger ones or less young, from the north like from the south, without exception «at the edge.» Your reflections and your stories could be the subjects of the next issue(s) of «On the Edge». I'm already looking forward to read your stories.

“Life in Abundance- gift and work of all”

Ann Walsh

Every year our mission in Sónдор, which is the Dioceses of Chulucanas, has a campaign for better health. This encompasses all of health such as our planet, which is our common house, our surroundings and our personal hygiene.

This campaign has three actions throughout the year. One action is held on Independence Day of Peru, 28th July. On this day the people sow a plant and take care of it so that it will produce new life. Last year the tree was sown and this year that action was evaluated and more plants have been sown.

The second action happened in September during «family week». Last year the theme was «clean hands and clean heart». Our hope was that the family would better their habits of hygiene by getting in the habit of washing their hands before eating their meals etc. This year in September our campaign was that the families discover the nutritional value of the food they grow in their fields. The people here prepare many different dishes to share at the different events during the year.

The third and last event is to prepare for the coming of Christ. The theme is «We clean our villages, our house and our heart to receive Christ our Savior». On December 19th all the villages of all the parishes in the Dioceses participate in this community project and also through this event many learn to recycle their plastics, cans and paper etc.

Working with the poor in “Shekina”

Lidia Crisanto



In Piura, specifically in the Slum «Consuelo de Velasco» the center of Integral Health «Shekina», offers its services under the direct administration of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and supported by volunteers from the health care ministry of our parish «Lord of Miracles».

In the beginning, the Franciscan Sisters in charge of the evangelization of this area helped the neediest ill people to acquire the medicines that the doctor prescribed for them; they gave their prescriptions to the Sisters who bought the medicine. Soon, two volunteers Martha Cruz Garcés and Elena Córdova Rumiche, joined the effort and would also

visit the sick periodically, and on important feasts like Christmas, Day of the Elderly, etc. And they would bring them gifts of food, clothes, etc.

Then Sister Maureen Coyle gathered people to attend informative talks on holistic health and she would give them information on the treatment of disease through reflexology, the practice of Tai Chi or therapeutic prayer. They would also celebrate some important events.

Thus arose the idea to ask for the course of podal reflexology, to form volunteer therapists who would benefit the community with the practice of this holistic therapy. They were convinced of the many benefits for the physical body through natural methods.

After celebrating the feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4, 2001, in the parish hall, the work of the center began on October 5, with morning hours of 9:00-11:00 and afternoon hours of 4:00-6:00. The Sisters of Charity were in charge of the training. Twenty-three people attended but in the end only eight people offered their talent.

On February 3, 2003, the fantastic, modern building was inaugurated and continues to today, offering attention to the community with some new promoters of health. The center also offers special attention to senior adults on Wednesday. Periodically more promoters of health are prepared. For all this we thank God and the Franciscan spirit which flows in all this.



AWARENESS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Iris Chinguel Choquehuanca

The principal of the primary school Juan Jacobo visited us at the green house to ask if he could bring the students of the third, fourth fifth and sixth grades of the primary school to see the tree nursery. We agreed to the visit.



The engineer and I prepared a prayer and a talk for the students. Sixty students, six teachers, and the principal arrived and we began with a prayer to put us in the presence of our creator father, teaching the children the importance of praying and thanking God for everything he gives us every day. Then the engineer explained bit by bit the work that is done in the green house such as: The different classes of plants, the varieties that exist, the types of leaves, the forms and the different colors of leaves. He also explained what the different plants are used for. He said that there are ornamental, forest, medicinal, sun plants and plants of shade. He taught them how to care for them, plant them, and how to use them as a cure if a plague should occur.

He also taught them how to produce the organic fertilizer that we prepared in the nursery, in a natural way without using any chemicals. He explained how to care for the water. The children had a lot of questions for the engineer. The talk lasted an hour. Afterwards, the principal purchased some ornamental plants for the school.

Two days later the teacher responsible for the school environment organized an exhibition of all the types of plants and gave the children an investigation to do. They also summarized the information we had given them in their notebooks. The students with the best investigation and best plants received a prize. Each student had bought a plant to take back to the school. It was a wonderful experience of the power of passing on our knowledge to the students. They were full of enthusiasm and joy. It's wonderful to teach children the beauty of the plants that surround them and how to care for them.



Health care in an isolated outstation

Jacinta

In 1991, I went to Vanimo, part of the Sandaun Province along the boarder of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. Other MFIC sisters and myself went to the isolated outstation of Kamberatoro on the boarder of West Irian. I was to work in the Health Sub Center. It was very difficult as we have no roads, no cars and we rely on the small plane for everything. The plane sometimes couldn't make it due to heavy ground fog and rugged mountains and that means whatever serious cases we have in the hospital we have to find ways to help and treat our patients to the best we could. Also Vanimo our Provincial hospital is a hundred miles away on the coast. We were told not to send any labor cases (mothers) in to the hospital.

One day a young mother in her 20s came to the Health Sub Center with contractions with her first baby. After monitoring her we realized that she was having difficulties delivering. After various examinations I found out that it was a breech presentation. The other nurse and I managed to deliver it but the head got caught in the pelvic bone. At this stage the mother was unconscious. The father of the young woman went to the labor ward and said "Sister whatever you do is alright with me", meaning if she dies I can't blame you as you have done everything you can. Before I started to work on her I have explained everything. Couldn't transfer the mother as it was in the night and the Health Secretary was away. Both of us tried and managed to get the baby out at last. Of course it died. The father was very grateful that his daughter the mother was alive. This is one case. There are many other unusual things I have handled since I arrived there. I felt there is injustice done to our people because the doctor in Vanimo refuses to have these patients transferred.

In my four and a half years there I have tried my best to help them. I believe most of them are grateful. After the safe delivery the father of the young woman came to me with a very big bundle of greens to show his appreciation as he can't speak pidgin well. I was deeply touched. Most of the people are simple village people whom I realized appreciated what we gave them. Customs are barriers to the sickness so I learned some of them which help me to handle things in both situations.

Sister Louise Caouette at « La rue des femmes » de Montréal

Léonie Couture, responsable à la Rue des Femmes

Note from the editor: It is with pride for our Sister Louise's commitment and acknowledgement toward the author that we publish this text in On the Edge.

Seven years ago as we had just moved into our new house, House Olga, I had the pleasure of welcoming Sr Louise Caouette from the Community of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Having passed the age for foreign missions, she came simply to offer us her help, her time and especially her heart. Professing the same values and the same commitment, we welcomed her as a real gift from heaven.

La Rue des Femmes de Montreal (the Street of women of Montreal), an inclusive community committed to the women from the street, is based on justice, compassion, love and authenticity, and walks with these women who are deeply wounded by violence, rejection, abuse and exclusion on the road to healing and the rebuilding of self.

Sister Louise is a woman of humility and simplicity, with a vibrant heart who revives the courage to continue in the frailest and most broken women. She takes care of the most modest tasks, but how much more essential, is knowing how to recognize the true abundance in the essence of the gesture and the links that lead to self, to the soul and to the Spirit.

She is always ready to listen and to support her most humble sisters. She touches the divine in each one and gets closer to them by her love and compassion. Reaching out to those most rejected, she is able to see in them the essential and this gives them hope and dignity in peace, justice and healing.

She took an active part in the setting and building up of House Olga and Dahlia Centre at the rue des Femmes. She is an example of faith, of self-giving and of a profound respect for all around her. In the image of Francis of Assisi, whom she venerates, and according to her Mission Statement she is committed to reverence creation and to embrace all people, especially the marginalized and to focus particularly on the women in difficulty.

Thank you Sister Louise for your joy and your generosity, each day, so important in a world that is sick and superficial from so many wounds. It is people like you who, with both feet well anchored in the earth, a hand reaching out to others and a heart turned toward heaven, can give renewed hope when we may believe that all is lost. Thank you.

Growing Edges experienced in Southern Sudan

Margot Grobsmith, affiliate

When I «retired» as Campus Minister from Bishop Ludden High School in June 2006, I prayed that I would not become a «couch potato». I used the Prayer of Jabez music published by Forefront Records. It is a collection of songs by various musicians based on 1Chron. 4:10. Number four especially moved my heart, but little did I know what I was asking in the words: «So I stand at the edge of my borders and I long to reach past the world I know. Lord, enlarge my territory. Open my eyes, take my life beyond the borders.»

The Lord drew me to enter the homes, hospitals and lives of terminally ill persons with Hospice of Central New York and to risk taking troubled youth into my home for counseling. Then, in 2008 came the amazing invitation to accompany Mairead and Jeanette to Southern Sudan to a people trying to recover from tribal warfare, civil war and foreign invasions. So we left the «comforts of civilization» and moved beyond the fears of family and friends who thought we were crazy to enter a war zone with only an interim peace.

Next, our God of all surprises came again in 2009 and I expected it to be a «piece of cake» since I knew the Sisters of the Sacred Heart with whom we had worked in 2008. In addition, I'd be helping teachers learn to be more effective teachers – my forte! Surprise! A new border to cross! Just before we were about to leave, I developed a weakness in my knees which made me feel like they'd turned to jelly and wouldn't hold me up. Weakness of any kind stirs compassion in me for others. BUT, in myself – NO WAY! A new border to cross-accept a cane, accept help from others, and even ASK for help, to be afraid of falling...was definitely foreign territory.

However, I didn't need legs to teach and so our ever faithful God brought me to the edge of fear and pride and like the eagle pushed me over the edge. Just like the eagle circles around to catch the babies if they falter, there were the Circles of Communion, Elaine, Jeanette, Solidarity and the Sacred Heart Sisters on the ground and all the prayers of the Franciscan Community catching me lest I fall. Deo Gratias! Besides, how could I cry fear of falling amid these courageous people who have endured decades of 24 hour fear as they crossed back

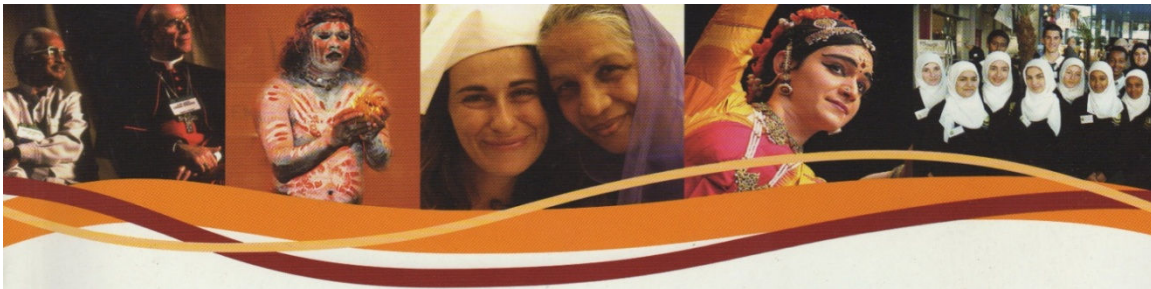
and forth over the borders of countries in search of safety and peace? These Sacred Heart Sisters who had opened their homes to us had opened their homes and bomb shelters and hearts to refugees and calmed their fears, shared their food and their faith. What a privilege to receive their kindness and learn patience from their example of how to find peace amid chaos.

May I please ask that you all continue to pray that the Lord of the harvest send others to water what has been planted? Pray for the growth of the new teacher training institute, and pray for perseverance for those teachers laboring under such frustrating circumstances.

Wishing you all peace and joy as individually and communally you meet and embrace your growing edges, I remain, lovingly in Francis and Clare, Margot Grobsmith, Affiliate.

Parliament of the World's Religions

Noela Leamy



From 3rd to 9th December I was privileged to attend the Parliament of the World's Religions held for the first time in Australia – in Melbourne. The book containing details of sessions is 360 pages outlining in detail 650 topics and introducing the eminent individuals chosen to present the input and challenge the listeners.

The lasting impression for me was the wealth of differences so obviously present and so peacefully and respectfully interacting. I could not describe the daily scene better than Joan Chittister who wrote:

«Everywhere a veritable art gallery of religion strolled by: sheikhs in silk, Buddhist monks in maroon cotton, Sikhs in a tall turbans, bishops in scarlet and gold chains, platoons of various nuns from all places, all traditions, Jewish rabbis in yamulka, imams and priests in mufti and lay leaders of all stripes loaded down with booklets to give away, petitions to sign and programs to advertise. Clearly, God speaks in many tongues and in many places to a world full of different people.»

The overall theme of the parliament was 'Make a World of Difference – Hearing each other, Healing the World' so the seven major subthemes reveal the strong focus on hearing and healing: : «Healing

the Earth with Care and Concern," "Indigenous Peoples," "Overcoming Poverty in an Unequal World," "Securing Food and Water for all People," "Building Peace in the Pursuit of Justice," "Creating Social Cohesion in Village and City» and finally «Sharing Wisdom in the Search for Inner Peace.»

Personally I followed the theme of Sharing Wisdom in the Search for Inner Peace and this topic focused on personal meditation and listening from the heart. But I was very much caught up also on the search for answers to poverty and hunger. Speakers including Hans Kung emphasized our personal responsibility to have less, live simply and to be active in sharing what we have with those on the edge. Crossing boundaries to find these needy people was a constant theme. It all sounded familiar but in a new way very personally challenging – and urgent.

There could be no doubt in the minds of the thousands of participants that religion had a vital role to play in today's world and that together we could be a very significant force for achieving justice especially for women, in creating greater equity and in care of the earth. One practical suggestion about food was to have one meat free day weekly because the amount of grain needed to feed one animal in preparation for slaughter was sufficient to feed huge numbers of people. The figures provided were staggering! And the difference just doing that would make to our carbon footprint, quite convincing. It was also suggested that since we are so competent in arriving at an agreed upon 'poverty line' perhaps we should move towards establishing a line above which people were living in greed.



ACRATH had a booth and display so we took turns in talking about trafficking to people who visited the site – dispensing armbands, hearing some encouraging stories and making some helpful international contacts. Our session/workshop was attended by so many of all ages that people were sitting on the floor everywhere. We were greatly heartened in the knowledge that hundreds of armbands bearing our website (www.acrath.org.au) and that of UNDOC (www.undoc.org) were taken by enthusiastic individuals to many different parts of the world. But there is much more to be done!