



On the Edge

Editorial

A limit has been crossed when a government does not listen to the voice of its citizens

Danielle Julien, mfc, editor

Over the last few weeks two events retained the attention of the media in Quebec since they touch a fundamental issue of our society, of our citizenship: the possibility of being heard and listened to by our political leaders.

The provincial government is promoting new projects of exploitation of pockets of natural gas trapped in some rocky formations (schist) that technology now permits to fracture in order to extract the gas. It seems that our subsoil is rich of this resource. The problem is that the deposit lies in agricultural zones, in the most populated part of the province: 80% of the population lives in the south, on the banks of the St Lawrence River. The potential impacts on the environment, especially water, would be enormous. To fracture the rock and free the gas, millions of litres are needed to which would be added a great quantity of chemical products: this polluted water could reach our underground sheet of water and thus contaminate it, or else be dumped back in the environment without being properly decontaminated. There is a risk of conflicts in the use of water between the mining companies, the farmers and the municipalities. The government proceeds in great haste, privileging the mining companies to the detriment of the population who is shouting its opposition loud and clear. The government refuses to adopt a postponement on all the explorative projects of the schist gas as long as some serious environmental studies have not been done; and yet this is what the citizens in the area concerned and the environmental organisms are asking. And the government turns a deaf ear while he is supposed to protect the interest of the population.

This same provincial government has just adopted, under gag, a law that touches the French language, a most sensitive issue for us. This new law allows the Francophones access to non subsidized private English schools that were up to now reserved to Anglophones; this is a breach in the protection of the French language, fragile in this continent dominated by the English language¹. Some televised reports show how the English language is spreading here in Montreal; it is our culture and our Quebec francophone identity that are threatened by the government that is supposed to protect them! The gag is a legislative procedure that authorises the government to modify the laws relating to the adoption of a government bill. This measure allows the governmental to limit and even to diminish the debating time and to precede faster the adoption of a governmental bill particularly if it is controversial. Once

¹ In public schools (financed by the government) in Quebec, teaching is in French and English courses are given to all the students as soon as the primary. Francophones thus have the possibility to learn English in the public school system. Moreover, all the immigrants who come to establish themselves in Quebec must learn French. This is exactly what our sisters did when we were teaching at "Notre Dame de la Défense" in Montreal, a school attended by numerous Italian immigrants, and this well before the adoption of laws protecting the French language in Quebec.

again, it is the capacity of being heard, especially if we are opposing the government that was staved off. Decidedly, in a country, however democratic, our freedom is limited more and more by a government that doesn't want to listen to its citizens any more.

What events retain the attention of the media where you are? Can you read the signs of the times and identify the issues and push us to go beyond our comfort zones? When a government goes beyond the limit that it should not transgress, how do we position ourselves? I leave it to you to find situations in your country that could correspond to those that I have evoked, and to create in those situations how we, as MFIC sisters, associates, or affiliate members are called to go "to the edge".

Note from the editor: When you send photos to accompany an article, I ask you insistently not to include them in your text. Send your photos in files, format jpeg as attachments. The photos sent within a text are very difficult to treat at the time of the translation and layout. In the future, photos I receive included in the text will be secluded and will not appear in your text. Thank you for taking this advice into account.

AT A PARTY, THERE IS SHARING

Gustina Renteria Chinguel, fmic

Note from the editor: pictures from the original articles in Spanish could not be included in this edition.

Parties are important in our country, as we celebrate our birthdays, saints' days, the day of the Holy Cross and many other events. And so, in our Archdiocese of Piura and Tumbes the Eucharistic Congress was celebrated August 12-14, and we had present the travelling images of "The Prisoner Lord" from Ayabaca, the Cross of the Lord of Chocan and the Virgin of Mercy, which the faithful call "Little Mother Meche". This celebration occurs once every fifty years. Piura is the first city evangelized because the missionaries who brought the Word of God for the first time, arrived through the port of Paita, Piura provided hospitality to the first missionaries who went to different areas of the country to evangelize then to the people from different towns, as this year Piura is offering hospitality to the faithful who are coming from so many different places for the Eucharistic Congress.

Approximately 5,000 people attended each of the three days of celebration and reflection at Grau Stadium and Don Bosco Coliseum, but many more wanted to enter, but because of lack of space, had to listen to the message of God from outside. Every day had a theme for families, for children, for young people, for those in poor health.

We went with the children from the family catechesis program in the very poor mission settlements, where we are in mission. We had the experience of being with children from different parts of the Archdiocese. Some of our children were very emotional, others enjoyed the songs and dynamics, and others were surprised to see so many children. Some said they would return for the next Eucharistic Congress.

Seeing so many children I think that the Catholic faith will never die, but will continue producing fruit. However, we have to take care of it as a small plant, that surely afterwards will grow and produce and will give more than we believe possible. We can say that there is faith in Piura but it needs to be awakened because some are asleep.

We felt moved to see so many people enter – children, young people, adults, old people, those in authority, and people of high society. It was interesting to see the poor and the rich, and the devotion to the images

brought by their devotees from far away. This is our faith. God unites us and brings us together, and social status doesn't matter.

This celebration was for me a time of reflection, of encounter with myself and with God and with all my brothers and sisters in Christ, making a public confession. There were moment when I felt the desire to become an ordained priest, but that is not possible since I am a woman. I realize that women are still being marginalized in different occupations, professions and responsibilities. You can also see money and power very clearly since authorities and some important people can enter the celebration without any problem.

All this causes me to ponder my spiritual life because while Jesus Christ looks for the forgotten, marginalized, abandoned, for those whom no one remembers in order to put them in the first places, and raise them, and give them the better places, we do the opposite. We like to take the first places for ourselves and to be indifferent or ignore others.

How difficult it is to occupy the last places, how much it costs to put oneself in the place of the forgotten, of a poor person who only has money for breakfast and then has to look for lunch, or of a prostitute who has to sell herself because she doesn't have money to feed her children.

After that reflection I understood better that it isn't easy to be a lesser sister, to be little as St. Francis says, to be within the group of the forgotten, to be but one of the group, to live, to savor the indifference, the marginalization the exploitation. We have to work and pray so that each creature in this world may have the place that corresponds to him/her, as a child of God the Father.

THE ENCOUNTER WITH FATHER AND MOTHER

Gustina Renteria Chinguel, fmic

We are close to celebrating the First Communion of the children in the mission settlements where we work. We had an all day program with the parents and children on September 5, and truthfully, it was an interesting experience. The parents were with their children, and they entered fully into the day and at times they reflected on the communication between parents and children, the faith that they transmit, the testimony that they give.

This part was difficult for some parents who were conscious that there hadn't been dialogue in their home, and there was a moment full of emotion when they recalled the return of the Prodigal son to the home of his father.

So many hugs and tears at having your child at your side and hearing the child say "I love you, Mom or Dad" or "I love you, my child", sentences that they forget to say in many homes because parents are concerned with materialism as the things that have replaced these key words in the home. I am sure that God gives us opportunities to express how much we love those who gave us life and protect us when we're not able.

There was so much sorrow and resistance from fathers and mothers to assist at this program, especially from the women who are beaten, ignored, or abused by their husbands. How difficult for them to hug and say "I love you". There were reticent spouses who share married life, who at the beginning of the day didn't want to say anything and simply gazed, but, little by little, they were opening up and finally they were forgiving one another when they left.

I have always thought of what married life would be like. Today I am working closely with married couples and through so many testimonies that I have been able to listen to, I have come to the conclusion that married life is the most difficult vocation, but people choose it so easily because they don't know what love really is, are guided by sentiment, passion and emotion, and forget what St. Paul says about love (1Cor 13:4-7), and what Jesus says about vocation (Mt 19:10-12).

This realization has caused me to thank God for the vocation that God has given me, and which I have to nurture, and that each day of my life on earth I respond with "Here I am, Lord, I have come to do your will." I feel that we have helped many married couples through this program to think seriously about the vocation that God has given them and to look at the responsibility that they have been given. These experiences that I am living have caused me to work harder in promoting religious vocations with young people.

In the visits and programs that I am doing in the high schools, I feel that I have a big responsibility to help young people to choose the vocation that God has given them to develop and be happy in the life they choose. Sometimes the criticism and murmuring cause a young person to think that a religious vocation isn't for them and many think only of the vocation of marriage. So, when they have a workshop on religious life it really catches their attention, especially when a young lady says that she wants to be a religious. Her friends may judge, question, and doubt her vocation, "You want to be a nun – no way".

And so they end up getting married, although they don't feel inclined to that state of life, or they are afraid that they'll end up alone if they don't marry. There are many marriages in crisis who can't overcome their difficulties. I see it in the Family Catechesis program or in the talks in preparation for baptism or the talks for women.

The important thing during these programs is that the wives who usually attend and who have overcome their matrimonial crises are the ones who counsel those with problems, telling of their own experience. It's clear to see that some have made the correct vocational choice in choosing marriage because they are developing, are happy, and are courageous and give testimony of their married life. I pray that God will help us give testimony of our vocation, the life we have chosen.

CHANCE OR PROVIDENCE

Francine Paré, mfic

For a few years already, a summer programme continues... All began after a visit in an alleyway in the vicinity that challenged me... It was early July, therefore, the moving period. I could see children playing in the alleyway, amongst garbage bags...and the nauseating smell coming from these bags, among cast-off mattresses and other rubbish! An urgent call surfaced within me: what to do for these children?

That summer I was responsible for the pastoral care of the camp at the Patro. Coming back from that visit with a friend, also responsible for a group of young people at the Patro, we met with the monitors for the camp and (we) verified their interest in volunteering some of their time for these children. We began by initiating a street library: we'd take off two nights a week to regroup these children, supply them with books and organise a "reading activity" for the younger ones. If these children could not attend the Patro because their parents didn't have the means, well the Patro would go to them!!! More than a dozen volunteers joined Micheline and me for this activity.

This activity was maintained over the years, with another objective: to bring these children away from the alleyways by having them participate in some free activities and seeking funds for other activities: going to the circus, musical concerts and some theatrical activities, visiting a beekeeper etc... new monitors have continued to get involved during the week and over the week-end. A very good collaboration...

In my heart and spirit I believe we need to free ourselves from numerous prejudices: the grand-parents were on (the) welfare, the parents also; therefore, the children will also «be dependent on (the) society"...These children are not as brilliant as others; we are not to spend too much time with them, etc... My deep conviction: if we only gave them as much chance as the others?

This year, as I was about to meet with the monitors and assistant monitors to talk about the project, a young assistant ran up to me and challenged me:

“Hi! I’m so happy to see you... How... » I more or less responded, so he continued: « You don’t recognize me??? Charles-Antoine, Charlie, YOUR CHARLIE ... » And the lights went on in my head. Three years ago, this young man was with us in the alleyways, he must have been about sixteen or seventeen years old. During the summer we had invited them to come to the Patro for some free activities, freestyle swimming, activities in the library, etc... Charlie had been present and was deeply involved during the summer; he would watch out for our arrival with the books, he would help us to set them up and assemble the young people.

And the dialogue continues:

Yes, now I recognize you: but what are you doing here at the Patro?

Ah well! I was looking for a summer job and I came to get employed at the Patro as an assistant monitor. As this is what I already do at home with the young ones, organising activities and playing with them...And this will pay for part of my year at the College of Further Studies.”

(Charles-Antoine is the eldest of six children and the father is handicapped following a work accident.)

In my heart, an intense joy and also lots of emotions: to see one of our youths becoming autonomous and devoting himself to others...to see him get away from the alleyway and the danger of “street gangs”...We don’t always see the results of what we do, but when we do, we make the most of it! I came across him often during the summer, especially in the activities with the young ones from the alleyways: he was one of our best monitors, responsible, and motivating for his group! Chance or Providence? I like to see the hand of God in this.

A STORY OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Lidia Crisanto

In our Integral Health Center "Shekina", we have a refuge apartment and we harbor women that are in situations of risk by family abuse, human trafficking, sexual violence, etc. On May 23, MINSA, (The Ministry of Health) called to ask us for lodgings for Jhinna Pinchi Colampa, from Tarapota in the Amazon region, who had to attend the Court of Justice, as she had denounced several police and authorities. We at the Shekina Center received Jhinna with lots of love, made friends with her, and took care of her needs. The psychologists had sessions with her, and we also began treatments of massage, Healing Touch and reflexology. Later, she herself learned these techniques and helped us in

the “Shekina. One day MINSA invited us to support a civic action for the rights of woman. Jhinna accompanied us, dressed as a therapist and applying massage with great attention and care.



From the media, we learned that Jhinna had been the victim of sexual exploitation. She was deceived by a pimp to work in Piura as a prostitute. That same night he took Jhinna, and other youths from different parts of the country to a night club in Piura where they were ordered to dress in short skirts and high heels, to put on excessive makeup and to dance with men and provoke them to lust. These young people received no payment for their service, except being given their meals.

The memory of her small daughter whom Jhinna had left behind with her sister in her hometown of Tarapoto helped her to escape and to denounce this way of treating innocent youths and children against their will. Some of the children in these night clubs are only 13 years old. Before coming to us, Jhinna found support in the national police that offered her a place to stay for a few days in the precinct of Piura. For revenge, her daughter was abused, and her hymen was broken. After this happened, Jhinna had the courage to leave Shekina and go to Lima in order to publicly denounce, on national television, all those who were involved in this human trafficking. Some of these people were in positions of authority such as police and officials. A commission was sent to Piura from Lima to investigate this social evil in order to improve the treatment of people.



SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF SOUTHERN SUDAN

Nuala Mulleady, mfic

Sisters, greetings from Tenafly! I am writing to invite you to join in solidarity with the people of Southern Sudan as they prepare for a Referendum in January 2011 regarding the future of their country.

Solidarity with Southern Sudan, in collaboration with the Sudanese Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Aid for overseas Development, has initiated a prayer campaign for peace in Sudan called, "101 Days of Prayer for a Peaceful Referendum in Sudan".

Great efforts are being made to have an intense time of prayer and fasting and awareness raising to prepare for a peaceful Referendum. Sept.21st is International Day of Peace as designated by the UN and January 1st is World Day of Peace celebrated by Catholics and other groups. There are 101 days between these two Peace Days.

The Referendum is expected to take place on Jan. 9, 2011. Voters of Southern Sudan will be asked to express their preference to remain united with Northern Sudan or to separate and become an independent country. Peace at the moment is very fragile and either decision will bring its own challenges. Whatever the decision may be the people of Southern Sudan need a free and fair referendum and a peaceful acceptance and implementation of the outcome. Thank you for joining your prayers to those of the Sudanese people.

101 Days of Prayer...September 21,2010 to January 1, 2011 May the God of peace be with us all!
PS Check out the website of Solidarity www.solidarityssudan.org