



Franciscan Sisters Congregational JPIC Newsletter

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Netherlands: Solidarity and Community In the Midst of a Pandemic

By Mirjam Wolthuis



The Covid-19 threat made these last months quite quiet. Not only our community life was dismantled, but also several planned activities with guests from outside our house. Even the feasts of Easter and Pentecost had to be adjusted to the new regulations. March, April and May became a kind of reflection period because there were less appointments, lectures and gatherings. We were all very much concerned with all persons who didn't have a house to shelter in or running water to clean their hands. We prayed daily for equal opportunities and especially good health care for every human being. We hoped so much that this pandemic would be the

beginning of a better world. In our garden we placed signs about the necessary 1½ meter distance.

The 75th memorial of the liberation of the Netherlands (May 5th) and the end of World War II would have been a reason for big festivities in our country and also in Alverna. We had to change our plans because of the virus. The community of sisters gathered in the morning for a special service with pastor Marlies in our central hall, not in the chapel which is too small for enough places at 1½ meters. At the ground floor, the first and the second floor sisters came together with a view of the 'stage'. Poems, songs, prayers and the story of the encounter of Peter and Cornelius (Acts) were shared. In the afternoon Mirjam invited several sisters to share their memories of liberation day.





Sisters told about the hunger and the first real food in these days and about the unfolding of the Dutch tricolor flag until then hidden somewhere in the house because it was forbidden. The war memories from Sr José were collected in a small booklet and this was presented that afternoon. It was an important day to celebrate. And on top of that everybody was so happy to be somehow 'together' again! We then raised our glasses in a grateful toast to freedom and peace

During these Dutch weeks of isolation and distance, in the USA a black man named George Floyd died due to police violence. We were all shocked by this misdeed. Also, in the

Netherlands demonstrations were organized against racism and discrimination. But we didn't join physically of course. It would be too dangerous and too exhausting. In their weekly reflections to encourage and contemplate by Marlies and Mirjam, the famous speech of Reverend Martin Luther King from 1963 was read. It was as if it was written in 2020! It is still an invitation to reflect about our own prejudices. It was an invitation to accept people just the way they are and not to judge on race, age, sexual preferences, color of skin or national origin. We are more hopeful than ever that the world will be a better place, since all humankind is created in the image of God, who has many many faces and colors.



Germany: Extending Community and Friendship

By Sr. Alexandra Völzke



Regional day of Koinonia in the mother house on the subject of "Mindfulness with ourselves & with creation"

This thematic day of our Koinonia siblings in February 2020 started with prayer and an earth dance. Afterwards some thoughts about "Mindfulness with us" were brought up: Mindfulness with myself also has something to do with self-care. Self-care means to understand that we are responsible as part of the big picture - also for myself! After listening to a text from Matthew 13, 44-46 – "The treasure in the field" – we worked with clay to look for this treasure in our own lives. The clay was kneaded with closed eyes. The

Koinonia siblings then came to a personal exchange about the astonishment at how something figurative came out. Finally, they dealt with the sun chant of St. Francis.

Sternsinger donate to Romania

The German children's mission organization "Die Sternsinger" is the Catholic aid organization that works worldwide for children in need, e.g. with the star singing campaign. In January 2020, 30 star singers from the local community visited us, brought songs, joy and blessings to St. Clara and the motherhouse and enjoyed sweets and drinks with us. They reported back to us how beautiful and friendly our old people's home has become and how well and warmly they are welcomed here again and again by sisters and residents. At the request of the children and young people, part of the proceeds from this campaign, which raised more than 8,000 euros, will go to our project in Caransebes, Romania. At the beginning of February we showed a power point about Romania to the young people and told them about the project there. Who knows, maybe there will be a cooperation between the young people here and those from Caransebes!

Country seminars of the temporary missionaries (MaZ'ler)



In March 2020 the language and culture weekends for East Timor and Malawi took place in Salzkotten. These are always prepared by former MaZ'ler who also carry them out independently. After all, they are the experts for the countries that are well known to them. They talked a lot about their experiences, showed photos and videos from the projects, cooked, sang and danced together—everything that is typical of the country. Above all, however, they shared the local language with each other, so that the new Maz'ler could already write a small letter to the project partners at the end of the weekend. Other topics included the history of the respective country, customs and social and political conditions. And of course there were a lot of questions that had to be answered. In preparation for the assignment abroad, the young people's eyes for the big world as well as for social issues such as racism, migration and global injustice widen. Unfortunately, due to the corona virus pandemic, the departure of the new MaZ'ler has to be postponed to an unknown date. We hope, however, that many young people will take this step into adventure and bring with them a lot of experience and social commitment when they return to Germany.



Visit of the communion children



In March 2020, the first communion children from Salzkotten were again our guests in four groups. After worshipping together, we went to the Francis fountain to find out something about and to experience St. Francis. After a question and answer session on religious life, with cookies and drinks in the novitiate, the children were able to playfully experience the sun chant in the meditation room. At "Mother Earth" they were then allowed to sow sunflowers and received the photo of the plants as a greeting and consolation, since their first communion had to be postponed due to the virus. The accompanying parents of the children are always encouraged to think about faith, environmental protection and social justice.

Romania: You Are the Light of the World!

S. M. Lydia Fechetă



The last months of the year were for the whole world a great provocation! The Corona Virus pandemic affected all people around the world, children and adults, young and old, families and alone, sick and healthy, in one way or another — everybody. We in Caransebes and Timisoara also felt these needs and concerns: how we will go through this and what can we do for the people around us, etc. We were preoccupied for the children in our kindergarten who had to stay home, for the poor sick old people in Homecare Station, and for all those we know, especially people who need help.

We organized for the children in our kindergarten and their families to give them some food for this time. Our thoughts were also of the old people alone and sick in their homes, people who need somebody. We tried in this time to be near as much as possible, and the phone was very good. To hear them, to talk to them, to feel they are not alone meant much to so many.

After Easter, came in our souls the old people in our parish, which were alone in their homes on feast days, whose children couldn't come home to be with their parents, people who have nobody. And so, we decided one afternoon to visit 20 people, to





bring them a candle they couldn't bring home on Easter night and something sweet, to remember the feast day. Respecting all the rules to come in contact with the others, in front of their houses, we called the people on the phone to come out. They couldn't believe it, and thought it was a joke. We needed to explain it was true. It was a great joy and surprise for all, because such a visit was unexpected. *You haven't forgotten us! How it happens, direct me! God bless you! All best wishes and blessings for everybody!* Great words from grateful hearts! Surprised and with no words, some of the them called us the day after to thanks us for the joy and idea we brought them,

and to excuse themselves in that moment of joy and surprise they had no time to react. All this happened with the help of our sponsors from Germany, who support us to help all people in need. May the Lord reward them all with his grace and blessings!



Joyous and grateful was the reaction of all we visited. It was a small light we brought in their hearts, but for them it means so much! For this experience, we get much more then we brought, because the joy and gratitude have no comparison.

We also commemorated, in the week 16.05 – 23.05.2020 the 5 years since we reflect more intensively about our common home helped by the encyclical *Laudato Si*. Every day of the week, we read a paragraph, and the whole day some questions helped us to reflect. It was a good opportunity to see the danger, the source and especially what can we do to live responsibly in our world and also to think of future generations.

We put all our hope, trust and faith in almighty God, to guide us, to make us feel His light and blessing and so to be for others an instrument of light, peace and joy.

Brazil: Santarem Celebrates Just Before the Onset of COVID 19

By Sr. Raimunda Barbosa

Visit of the General Council and Study Of the Rehabilitation of Mother Clara



From 24 to 26 of January the sisters Alice and Johana gave recent studies about our founding Mother Clara to the Brazilian sisters. It was an occasion of great joy for the entire Region.



Welcome to New Members of the Alliance (lay associates)

The two teachers, Vanessa and Marielle, who have been accompanying the sisters' work since last year, were welcomed as members of the Alliance of the Region. There are now a total of six lay people in the group.



Santarem becomes an Archdiocese

February 2, 2020, the day of consecrated religious life, was also a special day of celebration for the whole diocese of Santarém, which was elevated from a diocese to an archdiocese. On that day Dom Irineu Roman, CSJ was installed as the first archbishop. The presence of the Papal Nuncio Dom Giovanni Agnello, bishops of the northern regions 2 and 3 of Brazil, and thousands more of the faithful gathered for the ceremony in St. Francis Church.



Also in February, S Raimunda advised and organized the north and northeast interprovincial course on Franciscanism. The theme of the retreat was an invitation to the friars: “Return to first love!”.

Celebrating the Easter Season During a Global Pandemic

Because of the quarantine period, in prevention of COVID 19, these celebrations took place in the homes. In the region of Brazil, each community organized its prayers in communion with the entire Christian church worldwide.



The COVID 19 epidemic surprised us a lot, but it also brought us learnings. Some sisters showed symptoms, but it was not very serious. We intercalate to help care for them and protect ourselves as well. The pandemic has greatly affected Brazil and generated much unemployment. In Santarém we have an average of 2,787 confirmed cases and 153 deaths. During quarantine time we sew masks to donate to homeless and needy families. It was a project of the religious congregations of our diocese.



We also added a partnership in a federal university project to raise funds and buy products from rural family production and set up agro-ecological baskets to donate to people in need. The private schools continued their classes over the internet. Sr. Ivone and I learned how to teach classes online. It remains a great challenge, but we have learned many things. In this project named FEEDING THE LIFE, 160 families have already benefited in just a month



Indonesia: A Prayer As People Fight COVID 19

By Sr. Angela Siallagan



The orphanage of Panti Pius of Sinar Pelangi Foundation are cleaning up the environment by wearing a mask and keep social distancing in front of their homestead, Pondok Gede, West Java at Wednesday (July 01, 2020). During the Pandemi Covid-19, they always wear the mask, social distancing, and wash hands with hand sanitizer. PHOTO FCJM/Sr. Angela Siallagan/2020

the temple of God is in my heart. I care about the street vendors near my campus that are closed because there are no students studying and buying food. How do they feed their wives and children? Come on, if you are fortunate enough, please help people around you. Order some food via Ojek Online so that they may bring money home later tonight. If any of your neighbors open small stalls, go and buy something from them. In the news, many coffee shops have had to close their doors. When the economy plunges, inflation is inevitable. Soon commodity prices will also spike up. Those who rely on daily wage incomes will



be suffocated. Corona Virus carries death as if it is right in front of our eyes, ready to attack at any time. Then I was worried, like that fear when the plane swayed into the thick clouds in the sky. Fear that I don't have guaranteed safety. Some WhatsApp Groups are filled with lectures every day; people like to tell everything about the corona virus. Church announcements have unclear directions. I paused, reluctant to talk. Many of them make pleas to God when they are in danger. Many people don't

remember God when they were in happy times: when they received gifts, received bonuses, and when their requests were granted. They became closer to God in times of trouble, but not when they are in times of freedom. We are all lucky to just be able to hunker down. Out there are medical professionals who gamble with their life while caring for the sick, due to the danger of the virus. Journalists with extra energy cover all the news in detail and give accurate facts, because some people have mistakenly labeled the virus as simply a hoax. What can we do for those in the frontlines of this fight against Corona? As a simple person who has nothing, I can only bow my head ... sending a prayer for them. May God still be pleased to listen.

Corona virus slows us down for a moment, secluding us in our own homes, putting down our desires and dreams on the table, in our wild home. I was trapped in Gading Serpong. I wanted to go back to my family, but I'm afraid this effort will only bring disaster to others. I do not see the wisdom of this tragedy other than a pure disaster. I believe God will not destroy thousands of lives just for the sake of wisdom. What I do know is that God provides us with knowledge to fight the virus. God does not leave us helpless; we are not lacking if we are willing and being serious about it. Religious people say, because of this virus, places of worship have been closed. I do not care, because after all,



Malawi: Harvesting Brings Hope

By Sr. Raynelda Saragih

St Francis School promotes organic vegetable gardening



St. Francis Primary School has embarked on organic vegetable gardening where learners, teachers and workers are involved in the production processes for vegetables. The vegetables being grown include Chinese cabbage, melons, tomatoes etc. The teachers are finding it wise to demonstrate what they had been teaching their learners, including students and other workers, during agriculture lessons. This education is critical at this time when the government has closed all schools as one of the preventive measures against the spread of covid 19 pandemic, and when going to the market might be a risk since one may get into contact with a lot of people. Meanwhile, the teachers are encouraging all the learners to take the knowledge about organic vegetable gardening to their respective homes so that they can produce their own healthful food. This reduces the cost of buying vegetables from the market and allows them to use the money for other purposes. It also helps them avoid exposure to COVID 19 since they do not need to go to vegetable markets. After their participation in the production, the learners promised to implement all they learned about vegetable production in their homes and to teach their relatives. So far around 700 people, including children and workers, are benefiting from the small project of vegetable gardening. It is interesting to note that the children are able to establish a vegetable garden from the first stage of production to the harvesting stage. One of the learners, Alice Kafwafwa, said that what she learned will not end with her alone, but rather she will transfer the same knowledge and skills to her relatives and friends who may also teach other friends so that each household in her community has a small portion of vegetable garden that would save money. Alice added, "I have learned that the vegetables that are produced through the use of chemicals are bad for our health and many of the diseases that people are

suffering from nowadays, if traced, are likely to be discovered that they are related to the kind of food that they eat which are not produced in a good way."



Charity works of sisters

The sisters are also doing much charity work. In addition to extending the government efforts in ensuring that no child is out of school by offering education to orphaned children, they are giving out clothes and food to elderly and vulnerable people from the surrounding community.

St Francis takes environmental protection to heart

St Francis School plants trees as a way of addressing environmental degradation problems. Looking at the extent to which global warming and climate change have changed the environment of Mother Earth, making it almost impossible for people to produce enough food all year round, St Francis Catholic primary school is implementing activities that mitigate the effects of the above said issues. As of now, the school is planting trees both around and outside the school premises. The school understands that trees play an important role in carbon sequestration from the atmosphere (reducing carbon amount in the atmosphere which causes global warming resulting in the changing of the climate which affects farming and the livelihoods of people). Moreover, the trees provide fresh air to people for their breathing. So far, the school has planted a good number of trees and is planning to plant thousand more around the school come the rainy season (November to December) and to donate others to the chiefs near the school so that they can also plant trees in their areas. Meanwhile, the school has established 3 fruit/tree nurseries which shall be ready for transplanting during the coming rainy season.

St. Francis plants trees as a way of addressing Environmental Degradation problems



St Francis continues to reduce the Covid 19 pandemic by sewing facemasks and following all other prevention measures



As the world is still experiencing the pangs of the Covid 19 pandemic such as closing down businesses worldwide, restricted movements, and increasing death toll, St Francis Catholic School is following all the preventive measures against the pandemic such as frequent washing of hands, avoiding handshake and avoiding being in overcrowded places to ensure that no child/learner, teacher or even a worker falls victim of the pandemic. Moreover the school is sewing facemasks using pieces of cloth given to the staff, children (orphans) and other people working at the school in order to maximize their protection against the disease. The masks are being sewn by some of the women working at the

school under the guidance of the sisters. To increase the number of the beneficiaries of the products, the sisters are planning to train many other people in sewing them.



Sister Raynelda also teaches students how to colorfully decorate shirts, which afterwards they can bring home with them.

St Francis Catholic School puts its trust in God



USA: Two Deadly “Viruses” Afflict the USA

By Sr. Beatrice Hernandez

In mid-March, the United States began to suffer from the growing COVID 19 global pandemic. Due to a very poorly coordinated federal government response, each of the 50 states in the US had to address the crisis on its own. In Illinois, where our Motherhouse in Wheaton is located, the governor issued a “stay at home order” shortly after Sisters Magdalena, Alice and Johanna arrived here to participate in our Provincial Chapter scheduled for April. To keep the sisters living at the motherhouse from getting sick, the building was closed to all visitors and non-essential workers. Those of us with offices there have been working from home ever since, and the general council had to stay isolated from the sisters for 2 weeks. Because of the continuing danger from the virus, our Chapter had to be postponed. Although S Johanna was able to return to Europe, S Magdalena stayed with us to assist us in moving ahead with Chapter preparations and later was unable to return to Rome due to air travel disruptions, until the end of June. As of this writing, the US has over 2.7 million diagnosed cases of COVID 19 with 130,390 deaths. Because of the pandemic, millions of workers temporarily lost their jobs, causing an economic crisis for many families. Through our Wheaton Franciscan Ministry Fund, we have been trying to respond to emergency needs as much as possible, as well as praying for all those in crisis and who have suffered deaths or illness in their families.



This year, due to corona virus, the 50th anniversary of Earth Day and the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si* had to be celebrated virtually. A “hornbeam” tree was planted at our Motherhouse grounds on Earth Day. A prayer was posted on our Wheaton Franciscan website so that the sisters could join each other in prayer on that special day, as the tree was planted. Sisters Bea and Sylvia also honored the day by wearing special shirts depicting Earth as seen from space. They also spent time outside enjoying the beauty of the flowers and flowering trees in the yard of their home in Elgin Illinois, bringing spring joy and hope to their lives.



In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we in the United States are facing an even more deadly virus that threatens all of us—the insidious and lethal virus of racism. On May 24, 2020 at a little after 8PM, George Perry Floyd was arrested and while handcuffed, face down on the ground, was murdered by Minneapolis police officers. While pleading for his life with the words “I can’t breathe”, the officer kept a knee on this neck until he died—8 minutes and 46 seconds. The whole incident was taped by a young girl with her phone, as she and other civilians called out to the police to stop, that they were “going to kill him”, to no avail. There have been innumerable episodes of police brutality and extrajudicial police killings of unarmed black men and women in their custody, without convictions, and often without charges even being filed against the perpetrators. Even when video

recordings have been used to document these crimes, convictions almost never happen! Most heart wrenching of all was George Floyd’s calling out to his Mother, who died over 10 years ago. Why call on her at that moment—because a mother is the one who protects us when fear overwhelms us; a mother soothes and comforts us when we suffer; a mother loves us when hatred seems to engulf us. But in this case, I couldn’t help but think that George call out to his mother because he knew he was dying. He called out to her to help him face his own death and to welcome him into her loving arms as he crossed the threshold between death and new life. Sadness, anger, and frustration washed over me as I saw human life and breath taken from a black man by the knee of a police officer on his neck. The scene, all too



poignantly, has come to symbolize the yolk of racism that black Americans have borne for the last four centuries. This episode sparked outrage worldwide, leading to peaceful marches and demonstrations. Although there were some instances of violence that were highlighted by the media, most of demonstrations were peaceful. Thousands of people of all races in the US took to the streets and for over 5 weeks demanded an end to police violence against black, brown and native American people. The time for change is long overdue and the people stood up for justice in spite of the covid 19 pandemic and the risk to their own health. Indeed, we must be the change we wish to see in the world (as the sign held by Sharon Devo, our Tau Center for Spirituality director, states as she joins a demonstration in Bartlett, Illinois).



This chalk drawing from Covenant Companion Paige Sandel was made on the driveway in front of entrance #5 at our Wheaton Motherhouse. “Come Holy Spirit”—a profound plea during a time of grief and unrest following the police killing of George Floyd. In this same weekend, the United States surpassed 100,000 deaths due to corona virus. **Come Holy Spirit, Come!**

Our Merry Mask Makers

In the early days of the pandemic, Sr. Trish temporarily stopped making quilts and turned her talents to making masks, and she recruited fellow quilt maker and friend, Ida. Not to be left out, Ida recruited her husband John (for pattern cutting). Covenant Companion Mary Krsytinak also joined in the sewing of masks.

Through our Wheaton Franciscan social media and personal connections a request for “helpers,” went out, particularly for the cutting of fabric. More than a dozen people responded to this request. With the assistance of these helping elves more than 1,000 masks were donated to local nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

Sr. Lynn also joined the band of Merry Mask Makers. Sr. Lynn has made more 300 masks, some toward Sr. Trish’s masks project and others for family members and friends. Sr. Lynn is living consciously through this pandemic, mindful of how one might move through a process while reducing one’s exposure to contagions and saving one life at a time.

We are grateful for the contributions and gifts of all of our Merry Mask Makers and their helper elves. We know they blessed each and every mask with their love and gifts of time and talent.



Timor Leste: A Young Country Faces Old and New Challenges

By Sr Blandina Mahulae



East Timor is a country with the official name Republica Democratica de Timor Leste or Democratic Republic of East Timor. It is one of the developing countries located in Southeast Asia. In a demographic, East Timor's population is estimated to be 1,300,880 people in the 2015 population census. The people of East Timor are a mixture of Malay/Indonesian and African ethnic groups, and a small part of Portuguese descent. The official language used in East Timor is Tetun and Portuguese, according to the constitution of East Timor, while Indonesian and English are also spoken. These four languages have been used in East Timor since its separation from Indonesia and its declaration of independence on 20 May 2002. With the creation of a new country, regulations began to be enforced by governments and churches. Dili is a metropolitan city and the country's leadership are all based there, ranging from business, education, and government offices.



Problems are still often experienced in East Timor related to the economy such as high poverty rate, high birth rate and population growth, lack of employment, and low levels of public education, from the early days when East Timor was born. Many East Timorese went abroad to become workers in both factories and companies. There are also young children being brought out of the country and sold for the sake of family needs or just to get a job. Through these concerns, on February 15, 2018, East Timor's nuns formed JPIC organization centering their attention on Human Trafficking. The establishment of the JPIC group began with a Eucharistic celebration led by Bishop Virgiliu do Carmo da Silva, SDB Bishop of the Diocese of Dili. It was attended by the envoy of East Timor nuns. This was followed by a seminar for three days to introduce and explain the situation and circumstances in East Timor in conjunction with



Human Trafficking. Sr. Blandina Mahulae FCJM participated as the coordinator of JPIC TEAM of nuns. Since the establishment of JPIC Timor Leste, the main program is to educate about Human Trafficking problems to school children and children living in dormitories or orphanages managed by the bishopric and nuns. This Program was conducted for one year until 2019. The goal is for young people to know about the Human Trafficking problem and how to prevent it.

The corona virus has greatly affected Timor Leste, resulting in a lockdown in the country. The land at the eastern end of Timor Island, announced the lockdown on Thursday, March 19, 2020. Presently roads, economics, offices and governments do not run properly. Programs do not run including JPIC programs. Everyone works exclusively at home.



In this Covid-19 situation, many people are more creative, especially for planting vegetables, arranging crops, cleaning yards and cleaning themselves to maintain health. One of the activities was made by the FCJM sisters along with orphans by clearing the yard and planting vegetables. To maintain hygiene and health UNICEF also donated hygiene tools for St. Clara Orphanage such as: buckets, mops, towels, hand sanitizer, etc..