

English edition 2016



# Letters from the Missions



## Sharing His presence

Missionary Contemplative Movement "Charles de Foucauld"

*Letters from the Missions*

English edition 2016

year I

Missionary Contemplative Movement  
"Charles de Foucauld"

Corso Francia 129  
12100 Cuneo  
Italy

**Editor:**  
Ezio Bernardi

**Editorial staff:**  
Anna Pendenza, Paola Turrini,  
Pino Isoardi, Christoffer Andresen.

**Translator:**  
Joseph Chaney

**Contacts:**  
3663172176 – Staff  
0171.491263 – Office  
[cuneo.defoucauld@centromissionario.org](mailto:cuneo.defoucauld@centromissionario.org)

*For reproductions quoting is requested.*

**Front page photos**

From the mission in Ethiopia. On  
the left a group of mothers during  
the extra-food service.

On the right Sister Sara with some  
guest's in the mission house and  
the Chapel in the mission of  
Shashamane

**Tipolitografia**

**Bruno - Dogliani**

## Summary page

<b>OUR STORY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>PRAYER, THE SECRET TO JOY</b> <i>Fr Pino Isoardi</i>	<b>6</b>
<b>FISHERS OF MEN</b> <i>Fr Christoffer Andresen</i>	<b>8</b>
<b>ALLOW OURSELVES TO BECOME INVOLVED</b> <i>Elisabetta G.</i>	<b>10</b>
<b>THE DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN</b> <i>Mary Meinero</i>	<b>13</b>
<b>JESUS AND BASEBALL</b> <i>Nadia Marmondi</i>	<b>16</b>
<b>VISITING THE PRISON OF HONG KONG</b> <i>Eugenia M.</i>	<b>18</b>
<b>LEARNING TO LOVE...</b> <i>Sergio e Marinella Melis</i>	<b>19</b>
<b>LEARNING TO TRUST</b> <i>Paola Turrini</i>	<b>22</b>
<b>CHILDREN ARE OUR JOY</b> <i>Ombretta Neri</i>	<b>25</b>
<b>TAKE COURAGE, DO NOT BE AFRAID</b> <i>Chiara Pastura</i>	<b>28</b>

*letters from the missions* is in digital format in  
[www.centromissionario.org](http://www.centromissionario.org)  
and can be required by post at  
[cuneo.defoucauld@centromissionario.org](mailto:cuneo.defoucauld@centromissionario.org)

**La Guida**, *settimanale cattolico cuneese* – supplemento al. n.4 /2017 – Autorizz. Tribunale Cuneo del 31.05.1948 n.12 – Iscrizione ROC n. 23765 del 26.08.2013 - "Poste Italiane SpaSpeed. In Abb Postale D.L 353/2003 (conv. In Legge 27.2.2004 n.46) art.1, comma DCB CN (Italy)".

# Editorial

## **Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near (Philippians 4,5)**

I am writing this message on the first of December, while we celebrate the memorial of Charles de Foucauld. Exactly one hundred years ago, on this day at 7:30 in the evening he lost his life in a violent way. He lost his life, giving it up for love, as he had given it for thirty years, from the moment in which he encountered Jesus in October of 1886.

He died alone in the desert, without having the community of missionary brothers of which he had dreamt and for which he had prayed for so many years.

From this seed which fell in the ground of Algeria and his style of witnessing to the gospel, over twenty families of consecrated people, of lay people and of priests, have been born and draw their inspiration from him.

Our contemplative missionary movement was not born directly due to his inspiration, but we discovered a deep harmony with him especially due to the centrality given to the Eucharist and due to the passionate desire to become brothers and sisters of the poorest of the poor.

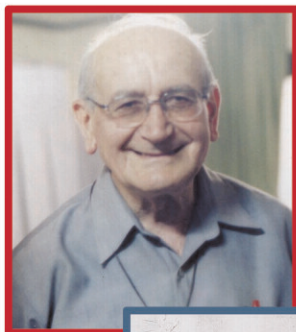
Our missionary presence, whether it be in the refugee camp in Kenya, or the in the prisons of Hong Kong, or among the drug addicts in Brazil or among the homeless people of Moscow, or in the other missions which are not mentioned in these pages, is truly a small presence. Looked at from the point of efficiency it is actually insignificant.

We would however like to let ourselves be led by Jesus' way of seeing things, who did not hesitate to liken the Kingdom of God to a little bit of yeast or to a mustard seed. So we trustingly ask Him to come into our smallness, in order to reveal his closeness to those who are most wounded and least considered.

In relationships with those who are smallest, we are always surprised to see that we both give and receive, and in this we discover a secret of profound joy.

**Fr. Pino**

# Missionary Contemplative Movement "Charles de Foucauld"



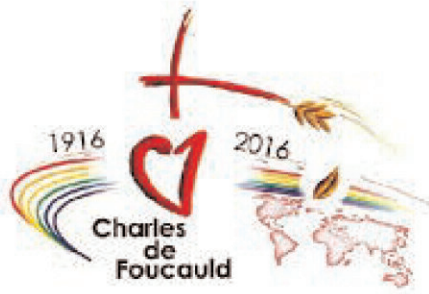
## Our Story

The community came to be on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 1951 at Cuneo after the end of the Second World War (1939-1945) when Father Andrea Gasparino (1923-2010), a young priest of the diocese of Cuneo, took in the first five boys who had neither a house nor a family. Little by little the number of the boys increased and so what came to be known as the "City of Boys" was born.

A group of volunteers and later on the first consecrated sisters joined Fr Andrea in order to help take care of the boys. From the beginning, everything was lived in a radical trust in the providence and care of God. Very soon the importance of prayer became clear and was given priority, especially when faced with many difficult situations of suffering among the boys.

A decisive development was the beginning of the continuous Eucharistic adoration which took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1959. From this moment the desire of the Community to serve the poor in the poorest countries continued to grow stronger, along with the increasing awareness of the importance of an inner life and prayer. The dream to leave for the missions became reality in 1961 in Brazil, and later on in other countries. The Community is now present in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe.

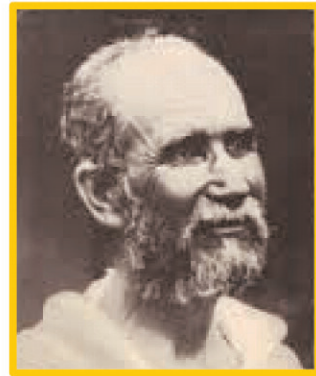
In each mission the two important pillars are: prayer, always centred on the Eucharist, and sharing our life with the poor in their marginalisation, without



building big structures trying to create friendships.

In the second half of the 1960's, as soon as we became aware of Charles de Foucauld and of his writings, the community discovered a great similarity. This consonance with his spirituality is today also expressed in the name of the Community (Movement). Simultaneously with the beginning of the missions, the mother house in Cuneo, felt called to share the gift of prayer and of the word of God with the youth, with families and with all those who help us.

In 1990 the community was acknowledged and approved by the Holy See as Missionary Contemplative Movement Fr De Foucauld," thus including all those who in different states of life follow our spirituality.



### **Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916)**

He was a French aristocrat who during his youth lived without giving any importance to God. After some years spent as a Cavalry officer and after a dangerous experience as an explorer in Morocco, he experienced a radical conversion who opened him up to the desire to give his life to God.

For six years he was a trappist monk in France and in Syria, but he always looked for a life that was poorer and which was more similar to the life of Jesus at Nazareth.

After spending some years at Nazareth, he discovered that Nazareth, is not just a geographic location but is also a spiritual reality where God unites Himself with man especially with men who are suffering.

Charles spent the last fifteen years of his life among the people of the Sahara, in close contact with Islam. His mission, was rooted in long hours of daily Eucharistic adoration, he wanted to be a witness to Jesus, by being a friend and by sharing his life with others.

# Prayer, the Secret to Joy

*Joy is not something that we can find by ourselves, it is rather a gift that we are called to receive. God desires to give our lives joy. In this short lesson on prayer, we can find certain paths which will help us to understand that the source of our joy is a life of prayer.*

**fr. Pino Isoardi**

## **A letter that teaches us how to pray**

A little after 50 A.D. Saint Paul wrote a letter to the Christian community in Philippi, a city in Macedonia, which he had founded a few years before during his second missionary journey. It is a brief letter written with a heart overflowing with affection and gratitude.

Following is a passage from the conclusion of the letter:

*"I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. -Let your kindness be evident to everyone: the Lord is very near. There is no need to worry; but if there is anything you need, pray for it asking God for it with prayer and thanksgiving, and that peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, will guard your hearts and your thoughts, in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4,4-9)*

In those words of St. Paul we can find precious indications on how to pray. St Paul is writing while he is in prison, but his letter still "has an aroma" of joy from the beginning to the end. Let's try to discover the reason.

## **Rejoice in the Lord always**

To be joyful is to feel good and it is for

this reason that every man and woman on earth thirsts for joy; however not everyone looks for joy in the right direction... and frequently we confuse joy with satisfaction. Satisfaction lasts only for a moment; joy, on the other hand, is a constant state of being in the soul. Paul invites us to true joy: Rejoice in the Lord *always*. And he rejoices even in a place which has nothing joyful about it, namely prison.

## **Your kindness be known to everyone**

One finds the secret of profound joy along two paths which are very closely related to each other:

- Have faith that the Lord is always present and close to us.
- Generosity, kindness towards everyone.

Having a living faith that Jesus is present in our daily lives is an inexhaustible font of peace and joy. Paul experienced this 2000 years ago and we can also experience this today. Whoever opens himself up sincerely to God will be able to experience this.

Generosity, a big and upright heart that tries to get close to everyone in real friendship, with good will. This continues to pour joy into our hearts. Let's say this

clearly: *joy which is constant does not come from always getting more things, but from having real relationships, real friendships.*

Joy comes from communion with that which the human heart desires the most: with our brothers and with God. Isn't it true that relationships of real communion, are what give real serenity to our days?

### **God is near!**

And yet it is not always easy to be aware of God often, it seems as if He were absent. God has a very discreet way of being close to us... He prohibits Himself from imposing on us. He searches for us and He makes us search for Him. This is Love which gives the maximum amount of respect to our freedom. Do you really want to search for Him? God will allow Himself to be found. Do you think that you can do without Him? He waits and will not invade your life. He stays at the door and knocks (Rev 3)

To search for Him we have some paths that everyone can walk down. They are: silence, reflection, listening, charity and the poor.

### **Fill your minds with what is true**

St. Paul asks us to pay attention to our thoughts, that is to the work of reflecting. Just as in any other era, nowadays it is important to have a healthy training of our thought. Today there are many gyms dedicated to help us keep our body fit; but how much more necessary are gyms for our thoughts and for our emotions. It is necessary to take care of our mind and of our heart in order to learn how to think well and how to love well. If we allow rubbish to enter us, it will not do us any good. It is rather a form of pollution that poisons us.

Prayer is the true gym of the spirit in order to bring light into us and to help create order within us or rather to help us to create space for the Holy Spirit who has been in us since the day of our baptism. To

pray is to choose to put ourselves into communion with Him so that our lives can be richly filled with generosity and with joy.

### **Live in trust**

That prayer is the source of our joy becomes constantly clearer: to pray means to live each event not by ourselves but together with God, not delegating our cares to him as if He were a magician but instead taking each event into our own hands in order to entrust ourselves to the hands of God. St. Paul knew well that life is also made up of painful situations, of obstacles that make us fearful and which worry us, but he experienced that things which we live together with God no longer oppress us. It is one thing to live in fear and in solitude; it is quite another thing to be afraid but to put ourselves in someone else's hands. The difference is that fear can be overcome by trusting

### **In every circumstance**

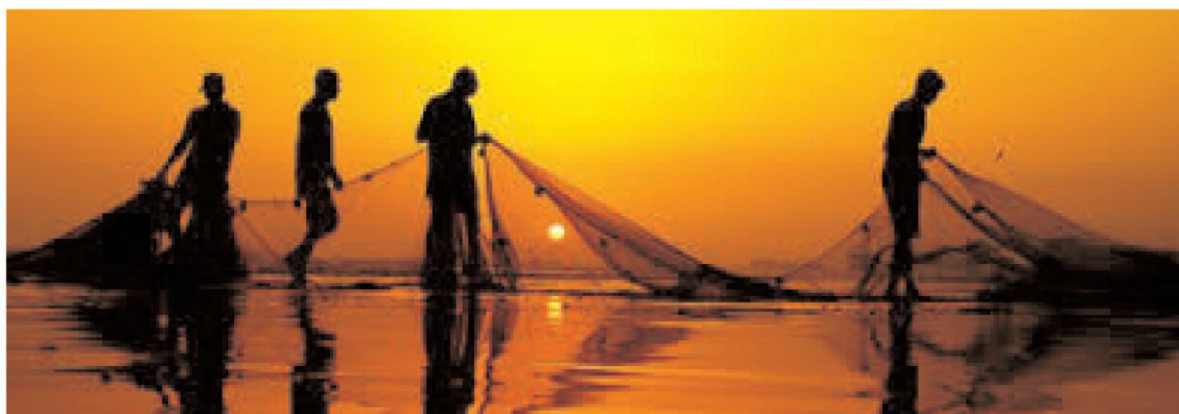
Christian prayer is communion with God at the centre of our lives. We can bring everything into our relationship with Him: thoughts, and activities, moments of joy and of tiredness, relationships, people, failures, dreams and fears, everything, really everything.

Prayer makes room for everything that we experience, nothing has to remain outside.

Here is a way to test the authenticity of our prayer: if it makes us responsible in our lives.

- Whatever is evasion is not prayer!
- Whatever is sentimentalism is not prayer!
- Whatever does not bring us to the heart of our relationships and of our problems is not prayer!

God is the God of life not of our fantasies. To pray means to learn how to live our life together with Him, one day at a time!



# Fishers of Men

*As he was walking along by the Lake of Galilee he saw Simon and Simon's brother Andrew casting a net in the lake -- for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Come after me and I will make you into fishers of men.' And at once they left their nets and followed him. Going on a little further, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John; they too were in their boat, mending the nets. At once he called them and, leaving their father Zebedee in the boat with the men he employed, they went after him.*

**Mark 1,16-20**

In the Gospel of Mark, we meet Jesus on the banks of the river Jordan as he asks John to baptize him. He leaves the water with the voice which echoes in his heart saying “You are my Son, the beloved...” (Mark 1)

After years of tension with the political powers in Palestine, John the Baptist is arrested. It is at this point that the life of Jesus takes on a new form: He ends his hidden life and lets other people share in the message which is pulsating in Him, namely “The kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” It is a message that in Him is not just words or ideas, rather it's truth is fully expressed in His humanity.

This new development in the life of Jesus at the beginning has a communal aspect to it. Certain people are fascinated by Him and drawn to Him because “they want to understand more”, “because they want to

see what he does and to hear what he says”, and so we come to the “calling of the first disciples.”

Jesus, walking along the banks of the Sea of Galilee, meets two brothers who are at work. They are fishing. He addresses them with a clear call to follow Him. He calls them in a strong way and promises them at the same time that they will become “fishers of men.” Simon Peter and Andrew decide to leave what they have in their hands and to follow Him. Farther along on the banks of the same lake Jesus sees two other brothers and the same thing happens.

Jesus did not go to seek His disciples in the temple, nor in the court of Herod, among those who “are running things.” He went down to the lakeside to speak to fishermen, who work very hard in circumstances which clash with the high ideals of religion. He went into workshops, into

places where men drank, to places where the underworld gathered, to the tax collectors who exploited people. Jesus was not afraid of the limits that people have, and he certainly did not call people to follow Him because they were successful.

This is very beautiful, because it is a different way of experiencing encounters. Jesus was able to see beyond what others saw. Peter, an illiterate, who was busy with his nets, will go to Rome driven by the message that he bears in his heart. The fisherman of Galilee who had fought with Jesus over what it meant to be the Messiah, and who refused to acknowledge Jesus in the shadow of the cross, this same Peter will be the centre of unity for the community of disciples. He let himself be carried, to a place that he never thought he would reach, because he trusted in a God who forgives and who saves. Jesus and his Gospel are not scandalized by our personal limits, but assume them and help us to find a way out.

God often calls people who are at their work. In the old testament the angel of God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush while he was busy pasturing his flock; prophet Amos recalls something similar about his vocation "The Lord took me as I followed the flock" (Amos 7); and in 1 Kings chapter 19, we see Elijah who throws his mantle on Elisha, while Elisha is in the fields. He did not call them in the temple, nor did He call them by mail or by phone, nor while they were reflecting, but God reached out to them in the events of their ordinary lives.

Why did he reach out to them during their work? Because it is where we, men and women, apply ourselves and come into contact with the reality of our lives. It is

there that we can see our gifts, and we can see them taking shape in concrete events. But it is also there that we touch our limits, and we see that the mind often gallops towards goals without realising what is needed to reach them. How many times have we started a job, only having to stop and to re-evaluate how much time we will need for it. It is also while working that we get to know those who are at our side; and where tensions flare up "because that's not how this job should be done." Work is really where our heart can be revealed.

Work thus becomes a moment of listening, a spiritual moment. How many people have never glimpsed the connecting thread of their lives in the work that they are doing. A job such as that of a brick-layer, teacher, labourer, can really become a privileged moment of light in the life of a person. It is there that I see what I can accomplish, and also discover which gifts that I have received.

"Fishers of men," this is the promise that Jesus makes to Peter and Andrew. "Men" are the new goal, not fish. It is not just the catch or the profit that is important, but rather the communion which is born among us. The image of nets is probably connected to that of judgement (Jeremiah 16). These two disciples, like all others, are called to become people who build up the community, to gather people around a Word which judges and which saves, which puts them in crisis (the word "judgement" in Greek is related to the word "crisis"). A crisis which saves, which can open up our lives to His presence, so that we can exclaim "Master, at your command we will cast our nets", as St. Peter did (Lk 5)

**fr Christoffer A.**

# Allow ourselves to become involved



## Letter from Kakuma



**Above:** the shelters of the newly arrived at the camp  
**Below:** Gianna with some friends

*Sister Elisabetta tells us in this letter about her experience meeting the residents of the refugee camp of Kakuma, where she has been living since 2013 (the mission started in 2011).*

At this time we are reflecting together with our Christians on how to allow the mercy of God to come into our lives and also how to become instruments of mercy for others. We have started to “take the dust off” the works of mercy, trying to put them into practice in our surroundings. Instead of analyzing them one by one, I find that it helps me to sum them up with a rather modern expression which touches me inside: “Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and allow ourselves to become involved”.

In January we reopened our little school for the mothers. Gianna started up an English class, especially for Somali

women, who responded enthusiastically. It is a nice way for us to reach out to them and, by getting to know them personally to get rid of prejudices and fears.

Renata and myself on the other hand have realized that for many of the mothers from the Great Lakes it is too difficult to start studying English right away. The reason for this is that many of them were never able to go to school because of the wars and uncertain situations in their native countries. Due to this we have started up two classes in which we teach them to read and write in Swahili. It was not easy at the beginning but now we see that many of them are excited when they

see that they can recognize and distinguish different syllables.

We are very grateful that we have started up this service, because being illiterate is a great poverty which conditions these women in many ways. It humiliates them in front of others and makes them unable to benefit from the few possibilities that the Camp offers them. Imagine not being able to read an advertisement for work, a notice that food will be distributed, an SMS, not being able to realize who is calling you, not being able to sign a document, not being able to read a sign in the hospital, or in any official place, not being able to write a letter to ask for work etc..

Through this service we have been able to get to know any of the mothers and also their problems: Justine, from the Congo, who was robbed of absolutely everything while she was at school (food, clothes, pots, etc.). Rukia, from Somalia, who is 28 years old, and is already a widow with two children. Sifa from Rwanda, who suffers greatly, because she has still not had a baby after four years of marriage and is greatly afraid that her husband will decide to marry another woman, ... and many others.

We try to be present to each one of these people and to help them in some way if we can. "Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and allow ourselves to become involved."

Another field of activity is the apostolate of the motorcycle. For the last three weeks our car has been undergoing repairs and so we are helping the micro business of the motorcycles in the camp. In the morning, we take one to go to school, in the afternoon we look for one to reach the small Christian communities; in short each one of us looks for a motorcycle taxi to undertake their apostolate. The trips usually take around 15 -20 min-

utes, during which we listen a great deal. As soon as the drivers realize that we speak Swahili, they begin to open up their hearts and tell us about their lives: they are many small diamonds to cherish and to take to the Lord who assures us that no tear is ever lost.

I will share two examples with you: Julius is a young father from the Congo. He comes from South Kivu which is a region which has a lot of gold and coltan. His father was not rich, but he had a piece of land on which he had built a house, and also had some land which he cultivated. He was very well respected in his village as a just and honest man, who had the courage to denounce injustice and who defended victims of injustice. For all of these reasons he was considered a nuisance by those who were exploiting these lands. Julius by this time was already married and lived not too far from his father's house. One night he heard a lot of noise, shouting, shots and then nothing. He started running: his father, mother, his siblings, uncles and aunts had been killed and their houses had been looted. He did not let himself be seen by anyone, nor did he take anything to remind himself of his parents; he simply returned home, packed his bags and escaped with his wife and his children, knowing full well that he as his father's son would be the next target.

Now he has been in Kakuma for the last six years. He knows that he cannot return to his own country, and that he has nothing left in his own country. His whole family is here, his wife and his seven children. He asked me: what kind of future can I offer them?

Samuel is from Burundi He escaped many years ago from his own country, and took refuge in a camp for refugees in Tanzania after many members of his family had been killed. There he met Miriam

## Kenya

and they married. Some years ago the camp where they lived was closed and so they moved to Kakuma, with their four children. He shared with Renata while they were traveling “my relatives have told me that I can return now, but only if I accept a condition which is impossible for me: I would have to return alone with neither wife nor with my children.” The reason? He is a Hutu, while she is a Tutsi and for this reason even the children cannot be accepted since they do not have pure blood.

Many times we cannot do anything concretely for them; but we can always listen to them with our hearts and talk to the Lord about them. “Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and allow ourselves to become involved”.

To conclude I would like to ask for a prayer for an initiative that we have decided to undertake along with our

parish priest. Our bishop has allowed a Holy Door to be opened in the camp, since the residents here are really prisoners under an open sky, since they could never go anywhere else for the pilgrimage. What we would like to do with them is to organize a “week of mercy” for each one of our eight sub-stations, during which we can have moments of prayer, of reflection, of visits to the families, moments of listening to them and of preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, getting ready for the climax on the last day which would conclude with the pilgrimage to the Holy Door. With the help of God we will begin at Easter. “Open our eyes to the needs of our brothers and allow ourselves to become involved”.

I greet each one of you with much affection also on behalf of Renata and Gianna.

**Elisabetta**



**Above:** A motor cab passes in one of the central roads in the camp.

**Left:** Ely and Marianna with the moms from the school

# Letter from Ethiopia



Mary receives  
Anna from her  
father's arms, 1994

## The door is always open

From the mission in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, Mary writes about Anna's encounter with her family.

We usually hear the news that “the door is always open” from the choir of children who are infallible antennas which collect novelties, insignificant events, news of thefts etc..

This time the shouts were particularly agitated, shrill and insistent: “Sisters, come, there’s a small being above the gate!”

Perhaps the old chameleon, which occasionally placed itself above the gate with his tongue out to catch insects, and which had disappeared since we had replaced the old broken down wooden gate with one made of iron had returned. At any rate it was worth it to go and see this “small being”

Above the sharp spikes of the gate one could see two hands which were holding up a tiny baby girl. It was a man from the nearby camp for refugees. He said that the mother of the child had died during childbirth, and he, a poor man, already supporting six children could not raise the new born (whom we will call Anna) and provide her with what was needed for her to survive. The little girl in fact was dehydrated, wrinkled as if she were an old person, and feverish. A weak cry and her gasping breath made us act urgently. It was the 22nd of July, 1994.

Anna recovered rapidly. She stayed with us during the day and in the evening her

## Ethiopia

father took her back to their tent wrapped in warm blankets.

Some months later her father asked us to find an orphanage which would give her a chance to be adopted, as he had obtained the necessary documents, and so the sisters responsible for abandoned children accepted Anna who left for Italy the next June.

One beautiful morning last week, a sister, a lady and a young girl got out of an unknown car. The woman who has been helping us faithfully for years with the activities for the sick, turned to her companion and whispered, "It's Ghetu's daughter, she's the same as her father!" We did not catch the comment.

Anna's adoptive family had scheduled a stay for her and her mother in Ethiopia so that she might get to know something about her country of origin, where she had spent the first year of her life. They also hoped that she might get to meet her brothers and sisters, seeing that she could not meet her parents who were supposedly dead.

They said that they wanted to know the truth in every detail no matter how unpleasant or painful it might be.

So I began "Yes I remember the day well when your father brought you here. Your father is alive and so is your mother (as a matter of fact they came here two years later with a new born child). Your father took care of you, came to visit you, but he knew that you wouldn't survive if you lived in tent, exposed to the cold, in the mud, without care, and with a mother who was seriously sick in the hospital. He always loved you and so he did what he could to save you. He wanted to give you a better future. Without any doubt this was the reason why he said that you were an orphan. But if you only knew how many times he asked about you, when he

met us; he always wanted to know where you were. We knew that you were in Italy, and certainly we could have traced you, but we couldn't do this without a precise request from you.

Anna's expression changed with every detail that she heard; her smile continued to broaden and become more radiant and her tears fell to the earth: "So my father didn't abandon me! He didn't throw me away! He came to see me! Tell me everything about him!"

"When you were born, your father was about 50 years old, a former soldier of the last regime. He had been thrown out of Eritrea with his family, could not find work and so had to make a living by playing the violin and begging. Your mother is alive, but we never met her. Our assistant knows where they live. Would you like to meet them?"

Her head jerked up and through the tears she was able to say "I have been waiting for this blessed moment for ever!" Her adoptive mother was even happier than the daughter and she was also able to confirm this through her smiles and tears.

Two days later, the meeting took place at our mission. Her father, mother, a brother and a sister, came long before the agreed upon time, obviously very moved and very dignified. Anna and her mother also arrived much earlier than the appointment.

A very moving encounter, but I would also say full of mutual respect and restrained, just as it happens when the feelings are real: attentive and sweet gazes and silent long embraces.

They put together the real tale: "You know Wudde (this was the name she was born with) I dreamt about you many times -the father began in a voice that could barely be heard- now I am old and sick

but only a few months ago I told your mother 'I am certain that the Lord will make me see Wudde, that she will come and find me before I pass away.'"

Anna snapped her head up and took her father's hands and kissed them for a long time. A short while later they all left to visit the poor dwelling place made of iron sheet, in which her parents lived and they scheduled a family reunion and a big feast for the following Sunday.

The Italian mother left the following day, while Anna continued her experience with the orphans.

A little later a phone call came from the mother "A profound peace has entered into Anna. All the anxiety, restlessness and insecurity which had tormented here

since her adolescence have disappeared. The resentment against us, who had taken her away from her country, has miraculously changed into gratitude". Anna has made peace with her mother, father, and sisters.

She had reached them by telephone overflowing with gratitude. "May the Lord be thanked who surpassed all of our desires and expectations".

Sunday evening Anna told us "thank you sisters, I just had the most beautiful day in my life." The tale ends and begins at the same time... Let us thank the Lord who is present with a father's love in the life of each person... even if we are too distracted to notice it.

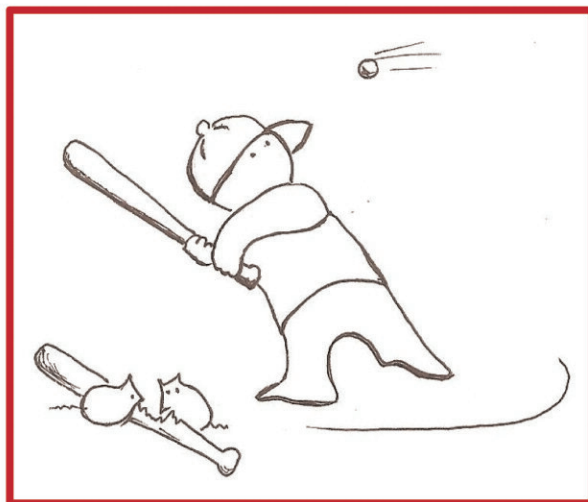
**Mary**



**Above:** in the summer 2016 a group of girls from Cuneo (Italy) went with sister Sara to visit the mission in Ethiopia  
**Right:** Federica and Tighist



# Jesus and... baseball



*It would be so beautiful if we were able to tell everyone that the Lord only desires the happiness of every person and that we can find this happiness by obeying and living in union with Him.*

*Nadia M.*

Contemplatives who are sent to the poor. This vocation of our community speaks deeply to me at his time. *“How does my being a contemplative guide, form and inspire my meetings with people?”*

I would like to give an example: For a few months I have been visiting an American woman in prison here in Hong Kong. She is elderly, 67-years-old and was fooled into participating in the trafficking of drugs; I dearly hope that she will be able to prove her innocence and that she can return home to California.

Every week I receive a letter from her. These letters are always a challenge for me because she always ask me questions about faith, prayer or about the Bible.

## **Abstinence**

Once a letter arrived from her that was different than her usual letters. “Sister I am experiencing abstinence, not for drugs

but for ...baseball. My favorite team is about to take part in the championship and I know nothing. How much I would like to know the names of the players! If by chance you happen to see anything in the newspapers dedicated to sports about the Angels - the team from Anaheim (California) tell me something. I asked the social worker in the prison if she could give me any information and she laughed in my face and told me that she had other (more important) things to do.”

To be sincere I also immediately thought that baseball was not really a priority, but afterwards I thought of how Jesus met people in their daily lives and how he entered into our daily lives sometimes even leaving us unexpected joys which show us that He cares for us and that we are important to Him.

If the names of some of the players could give this poor woman's heart some rays of sunshine, why not try? About baseball I know absolutely nothing, but thanks to the internet I was able to find the desired information immediately, her favorite team, the names of the players etc. I wrote her a letter and sent her the information.

## **A Breath of America?**

When I met our friend the next time, she

# 香港

(Hong Kong)

was waiting for me with a splendid smile, and then she told me very emotionally: “Everyone made fun of me for this desire, only Jesus took me seriously.” I asked her how Jesus was involved in all this and she answered “Jesus, through you granted me a desire which seemed ridiculous. For me to have some information was like breathing a breath of air from America, but above all it gave me a chance to dream about the intimacy I enjoyed with my children, remembering how we used to sit together in front of the TV and watch the games. Jesus knew that this was important for me and that the abstinence from baseball, above all was due to me missing having my children close by, and so he came to me through your kindness.”

A contemplative among the poor is like a channel that God can use to pour out His love on people.

A contemplative among the poor, is like an antenna that receives, and absorbs what Jesus wants to tell us through the poor person and who can see the traces of God in daily life.

The Lord confirms us in the beauty of our vocation

*Taken from a letter from Nadia, written in March 2015. She has been living in the mission in Hong Kong for 30 years.*

## The latest news about Celia

In the last few days the trial of a group of elderly people from different countries, who without realising it became involved in the transportation of drugs has come to an end. Upon their arrival in Hong Kong drugs were discovered in their luggage and after their arrest they were forced to wait for a year and a half until they were declared innocent.

After overcoming her initial shock, Celia lived her time of imprisonment as a mission: she taught many girls and women how to pray. Now that Celia has gone home, the memory of having met her has remained in the hearts of the women in prison, since it gave a direction to their lives and since it was like a ray of light which brought hope and consolation with it. The witness of someone who really lives their faith as Celia does, encourages us but also makes us ask ourselves with what intensity we live our own faith and how we bring it to those people whom we meet.

**Renee**

## Hong Kong



Prison cells in Hong Kong

# Visiting the prisons of Hong Kong

When we first introduced ourselves to the prison-chaplain, we had only been in Hong Kong for three years. He immediately noticed our broken English, and our ridiculously poor Cantonese, and took note of our admitted inexperience, and then said “I can’t bring myself to send anyone away who is offering to do some good.” And so we began our visits to the women’s prisons, which has led us on a pilgrimage through different institutions ranging from the centers for illegal immigrants to maximum security prisons.

We meet women of all ages, nationalities and religions. The very strict regulations allow us to meet individuals (subject to prior approval) in a small room set aside for visits. We listen to their stories, to their anguish at being separated from their children, to their daily joys and troubles, their rebellion against their destiny, and their need to believe in a God who does not abandon us. We always end our visits with a prayer which no one ever refuses even if they do not share our faith. Every once in a while we reach them by means of a post card, or we send them a greeting card or a book; these are like little crumbs of happiness which allow them to say: yes, *someone else cares that I exist*.

The prisoners are our traveling companions. Many of them teach us courage, patience and how to have the strength to come through a situation that seems impossible. We can see our own faults mirrored in them, and we experience our own inadequacy, our own need for mercy and for intercession. Their names and their faces fill up our prayers and our liturgies.

*Eugenia M.*

# Learning to love...

## In the favelas



**Above:** Sergio with a child during the visit in 'crakland'

**Right:** Jane and Marinella while visiting a family in 'Parque Planetario'



*At the beginning of October 2015 Sergio and Marinella left for a two months experience in the mission in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro. Here they share there thoughts.*

We would like to share some thoughts with you about our experience in the missions in which we were involved and which led us all the way here ...to Brazil. We spent these two months living in an apartment very close to the mission of Vila Valquerie, but we were also able to visit the other missions, including the favela of Jacarezinho, where the brothers live and the favela of Caxias, where the Sisters Adriana, and Eva live, who have now been joined by Maria Agnes, who arrived with us.

We went to Crackland (a large area where those addicted to crack gather) twice with with the brothers and sisters accompanied by a group of lay volunteers. Every Saturday they bring sandwiches and cold drinks to the people who live in those very sad places. The aim of these visits is to get closer to those who live there, listen to them, try to give them some affection, and pray with them. These were very emotional experiences, which moved us greatly, because we could see their mood, their suffering, and

## Brazil

also their desire to be free of their addiction. In some cases we experienced a strong sense of unity with them, during our prayer. It came as a surprise to us that everyone including the small children know prayers like the “Our Father” or the “Hail Mary” by heart and that they readily prayed with us as if it were a normal gesture to them.

It made a great impression on us to see so many young people, adults and even families, with children who due to the addiction to drugs, live along the railway lines in filth, surrounded by garbage. Some of them have built shacks made out of wood and cardboard.

As I am writing this, there is a strong storm outside, and so we ask ourselves: How will they be able to sleep tonight? How and where will they be able to find shelter from the rain? And the parents of the children, what shape are they in? Will they be able to take care of their children?... to give them shelter?

In a very great contrast, these small children, with their lightheartedness and with their cheerfulness, bring some light into that place full of desolation and sadness.

I ask myself however, “If they keep on living in that environment what future will they have?” There are girls between the ages of 11 and 13 years who are already prostitutes. How can one remain indifferent?! We ask ourselves these questions because neither the authorities nor the social services are taking measures against the problem, not even for the minors!

I, Marinella, spent two days at Parque Planetario, and at Caxias, to experience some of the activities of the sisters together with them. One morning, after cleaning the St. Clare’s ( the chapel of the

Catholic community) we had an hour of prayer led by Eva together with some of the women of the favela. I was very surprised by the intensity of their prayer as a community, when I noticed that even among people from different cultures and countries such as Brazil and Italy, the problems we face are practically the same. Although they do not have many things that we consider necessary, they dedicate most of their time in prayer, just as I do, praying for their children, their families and for their work.

I would like to say a few words about a person whom I found to be truly extraordinary: Genilda. During her prayer, she asked the Lord to help Alyson, a small boy who is not hers who had great learning difficulties, and who behaves in a very effeminate manner (in fact he dresses himself up as a woman). He is ridiculed a great deal by other children and barely tolerated by the adults in the area, most of whom tell Genilda not to take care of him, since “it is surely time that is just wasted.” Genilda however, always replies to them by asking them to pray for him and with a wisdom that can only come from a heart that loves freely she said: “If a donkey has a broken leg, surely it does no good to break the other one...!!”

Genilda is 70-years-old, she was widowed and left with eight children to raise; later on she had two other children by her second husband, and now that all her children are grown up she takes care of her father who is ninety-nine years old, of her two grandchildren (the daughters of her daughter who passed away last year) and also of Joao, an adopted child. Alyson’s mother works and so is away from home until the evening and so Alyson and his brother have practically been living with Genilda since their own grandmother died. Soon there will be a

new entry into her house, a new born infant, who is the child of a girl with psychological problems, who asked her to raise her child for her. Naturally Genilda said yes.

Every day, Genilda with the help of another grandmother, takes care of the grandchildren, and also of various other children of the neighborhood, providing lunch for them absolutely free of charge since the parents of these children only do odd jobs and so cannot repay her.

I am amazed to find such great sensibility, generosity and openness of heart towards others, in people like Genilda, who really do not have great economic resources. They are women of great faith, and of much prayer, who live the Gospel daily and every day open up their arms however they can. They simply give themselves completely to others, entrusting themselves to the Lord.

*Sergio and Marinella*



**Above:** Piero, Fabrizio and Jane during one of the visits in 'crackland'.

**Right:** Mary Agnes with some of the girls visiting the mission of Parque Planetrario

# Letter from Russia



Michail in a bar next to the station

## We learn to trust

In this letter (from December, 2015) the sisters in Moscow tell us how they are facing this moment of uncertainty: “Where do we place our hope?”

We are going through a moment that is particularly uncertain because of everything that is happening. Our bishop Paolo Pezzi sent a message of consolation and of hope to everyone in which he asked this question “In what can we still hope? What can we rely on?”. On the one hand I also feel this uncertainty, and this anxiety about the future, on the other hand though I have a strong hope inside of me because I am certain that the Lord is alive and that He is not indifferent to all of this suffering.

In our own small experience there are many signs of His Providence which strengthen us in the faith and in our abandonment to Him.

### **The material signs**

I would like to make a list of some of these insignificant, small signs, which tell us about how God cares for us and for our friends.

One Sunday, after the celebration of the mass, the parish priest of the Korean community (a community with which we have long been friends) handed us an envelope saying, “This is a very small contribution for your service to the poor on behalf of the women of the Legion of Mary”. The organization “International Women Club” also offered us a donation which has enabled us to be more generous in our preparation of the meals.

An English couple gave us a second hand refrigerator, which is in excellent condition; we had been hoping for one for two years in order to store the meals that we distribute in the streets.

A girl who had been in the orphanage ran by the community of "The poor servants of Divine Providence" (of Don Calabria) needed a desk and a bed and suddenly a Spanish woman phoned us to let us know that she had them and wanted to give them to us.

Another girl urgently needed a wheel chair and we had a new bright red one which we had received from the Salesian sisters.

### **The spiritual signs**

Providence also shows itself in the helpfulness of the many people who freely offer their time, their energy and their abilities:

*Valoja* is a young man who is always willing to help us by transporting us in his car or in helping us with any problem with our computer. These are moments in which we meet each other which frequently become occasions for deep conversations.

*Elvira*: since last year she has faithfully come to pick us up and to take us to the train station, as we are always loaded down with bags of food or clothing. This year she found a job and so she is not available every Saturday, but she insisted that we take a taxi which she pays for every time that she is working and so cannot come.

Last year we started praying the rosary with the Italian women who have been helping us for years. We also added a moment of formation in which we choose a Mystery of the rosary and reflect on the page of the Gospel which refers to it. It is a moment that is also enriching for us, because we discover new things or other things reemerge which

we had forgotten from the central passages of the life of Jesus.

*Cristina*: Every Saturday she comes to prepare the meals for the poor, and it is beautiful because we can spend the whole day together, and when she does not have too much to study, she stays to help us distribute the food.

*Rita*: For the last three years she has taken part at the food distribution in the street with great tenacity, faithfulness and a great capacity to listen.

*Anja*: She is really like a sister to us, and she calls herself a member of our community. We are connected by a deep friendship and by great trust. In a special way she has taken on Phillip, a man of who is fifty years old, with psychiatric problems, who was completely alone, but who now lives in a therapeutic community. She goes to see him every week and stays with him for hours; I am deeply touched by her dedication and patience.

### **Michail**

Michail Pavlovich is a real gift of God, a man who lives in the woods. He is our assistant on Saturdays as well as our defender and our brother, seeing as when he speaks to others about us, he says that he has two Italian sisters!!! Last Saturday, he taught me a great lesson. When we had finished distributing food, Serghej, an old acquaintance, asked me for some money for the metro. Since I knew that he sometimes drinks, I took some time to think about what to do, and while I was thinking, Michail took him aside and said to him "I don't have much, Serghej, but I see that your need is bigger than mine; I have a hut in the woods, you on the other hand are living in the streets." And he gave him a fistful of money, without holding back a single coin for himself! Try to guess which page of the Gospel came to my mind? (The gospel of Marc 12,41-44 red.)

## Russia

Michail was worried about Anna Maria's health (in fact she was not well and so she was not with me), wanted to send her a message through me: "Even though there were many organizations that tried to help the people who are homeless, sooner or later they all stopped for one reason or another. You, even though you first lost the prefabricated house and then the cellar, have continued, only apparently always in a smaller and weaker form. I know first hand that the homeless people have a great affection for you and respect you both above all for your faithfulness. Once I heard one of them say that Anna Maria and Palina, never gave up on us."

Maybe one of the gifts of Providence is

just this perseverance, even when one can not really see the point, when doubts arise, then the Lord sends us his "angels" to strengthen us in our service.

I will stop the list now, but I could continue...

I will make the words of Psalm 40 and 22 my own:

"I am poor and needy, the Lord cares for me!"

"Even though I go through a dark valley I do not fear any evil because you are with me!"

Thank you, Lord, for all of the signs of your Providence and especially for your presence in our daily lives.

**Paola T.**



**Above:** Annamaria and Paola with Sofia, who had come to Mosca to spend a couple of months with the sisters in the mission.

**Left:** Visiting Michail's house in the forest



# Children are our joy

at school in  
the middle of the slum



Ombretta with the  
school class



*In Khulna we live close to an area called Rupsa which takes its name from a nearby river. This is a slum where our sisters started their activities when they came to Bangladesh. They began by building a house on stilts, living among the other families.*

**Ombretta N.**

The land on which the sisters built was not approved for housing, but many families that came to the city from the villages built their huts here anyway after making deals with the presumed owners of the land.

As one approaches the slum on the main road one sees that on the one side the river flows and on the other side of the street there are houses, which are all built along-

side of the *goli* (little side streets) which go all the way to the end where there is a big *pukur* (swamp). Now in every *goli* there is a pump to get water, and so all the families go there to wash themselves and their clothes. In addition there are always some animals (chicken, ducks, geese and goats) which roam about and so it is always necessary to be careful when one is walking to

## Bangladesh

not crush anyone (as we are always surrounded by a group of children who accompany us), and to not fall into any of the holes on the street.

Around thirty years ago the first small school was opened which was a small wooden room built alongside the main road. The first teacher was a young Christian man called Omrito, who still works for us and who is esteemed by everyone. We often give thanks for him and especially for the great qualities that he has especially for his honesty and faithfulness.

Today the area has changed a great deal. One notices certain signs of material progress, here as everywhere else in the country. The local authorities built many small shops and now almost all the houses are made of bricks. There are still many families that live here (around two thousand) and the majority of the families are Muslim.

When one says that every family here has their own house, one is speaking about a house of three or four square meters covered by a roof made of metal sheet. Since the families are generally large, this means that there are at least six or seven people in each one of these "houses". Thus many families have added on a second floor, built with wooden beams, which they reach by climbing a ladder. Every night some of the family members go and sleep upstairs since not all of them can fit downstairs.

Now we have two schools, four teachers and four classes: the little ones in the pre-first grade, the first grade and the second grade. After the second grade we encourage the children and also help them finan-

cially to be enrolled in a government school. Ten years ago there were sixty-five children in each class, now the number has diminished because there are other small schools.

Our service is a small one especially now since there are also other possibilities, but the people appreciate it because the teachers really teach lessons (three hours in every class), while in other places teachers let the children play after a little bit of class time.

We try to stay close to the children, to get to know their families, to go visit them in their homes especially those ones who have the greatest difficulties. There are some children who are already used to the life on the streets, the parents go to work, and the children get lost on their way to school, stopping to play in some alley. Now the area has changed and gotten worse, since drugs have arrived, and so our worries have increased. I think about Phoesal,

Ragib, Noion, Munna, who was already being taken around by one of his uncles to gamble. I would often come to the school, and when I didn't see them in the classroom, I would leave with one of the other children to search for them, at home or in the streets. When we returned to the classroom I would

sit close to them, and give them some special attention. In this way after a few months we were able to convince them to come to school regularly enough.

We always recommend that the children study and do their homework, but it is not that easy, especially since there is not enough space. The other day we went to the houses of Noion and Kamili, a very



Karima and her friend in the mission-house

cute young girl, but who struggles at school and is also somewhat sad. Going into Noion's room we saw that there is a bed, which is used for everything: to sit on, to study on, to eat on and at night it is, of course, slept in. The room is very dark.

In Kamili's house there is no bed at all, they sleep on the floor, and in fact when we got there the mother and her younger brother were asleep on the floor. In this culture the male children are more important and it hurt to hear Kamili's mother say that at night Kamili goes to her grandmother's house to sleep there while she, her husband and their son

---

**These children  
are our joy and  
our hope, we know  
that some of them  
have gone on to  
high school and we  
hope that the  
number will  
continue to  
increase**

---

stay in their own house.

Our schools always have their doors open, which means that when some child disappears for a month like Moina did when her mother took her to her village after fighting with her husband, and then returns begging us to accept her child again, we cannot say "no" and so we take them back in.

These children are our joy and our hope, we know that some of them have gone on to high

school and we hope that the number will continue to increase.

We entrust all of these children to Jesus who said "Let the little children come to me."



**Above:** Sabina with a blind mother and her friend in the mission house

**Right:** Sadhona shares a moment of joy with some children



# "Take courage, do not be afraid"

## Summer camp in Albania

From the 1st to the 16th of August six youths from Cuneo took part at the summer camps in Albania (at Gramsh, Muchan, and Gostime, where our mission is located). They joined the volunteers from the Sebino (from Brescia) with whom we have been working for the last twenty years.

The volunteers are always joyfully expected because together with the games they are also able to create confidence and to pass along the joy that comes from staying together. They are able to perform this mission as a group offering their friendship while living a sober, simple, demanding lifestyle sharing the life of the people in the village.



**Above:** Chiara during the morning-prayer.

**Center:** children during an activity in Gramsh

**Below:** not without a snack!

*“What are you doing this summer, because there’s an opportunity ...?!”*

And so began the journey to Albania thanks to a chat in community. The proposal was to go and stay in Albania for two weeks and help at a summer camp. I agreed almost immediately without thinking much about it. After all I had already taken part in many summer camps, all I would have to do was to change the location because after all “children are the same all over the world, aren’t they?”

As the departure date got closer however, I was no longer so sure of my decision and the question that came into my mind was “Why do I have to go?” I was afraid of not being capable of what was expected of me, to not fit in with the group of volunteers and to be alone so far away from home. And so by the time we left I wasn’t sure that I had made a good choice and even less sure that I would have a good experience.

Nonetheless I departed with Jesus’ phrase “take courage, do not be afraid”! (Mt 14,27) going through my mind, and the uncertainty which I had experienced earlier gave way to happiness at being involved in a mission and at living an experience of sharing with others.

The association with which I went was the association of the Volunteers of Sebino, which for twenty years has been helping the people of Albania in many ways, including running summer camps. During the first two weeks of August Italian volunteers and Albanian children entertainers work together to create an environment in which the children who participate can grow, and also be entertained. In addition to the summer camp for children, during these two weeks there is also a “Space for Youth” which offers the Albanian youth who work as children’s entertainers in the morning, the chance to play and to reflect thanks to the activities proposed by the volunteers. Thanks to this Space for the youth the Albanian volunteers

are very well prepared and responsible and so the Italian volunteers only act as coordinators.

The child who will remain in my heart the most is Sabian. He is a *gypsy child* who is also a deaf mute. The first time I saw him he was bare foot, with a pair of girls trousers on and a sweater (which probably wasn’t very well adapted for the heat of Albania). Seeing that the children who were only six years old didn’t want to shake his hand or to stand either in front of him or behind him in line, made me see at first hand the discrimination which I had been told about. The two of us had a beautiful week together, spending more time playing by ourselves than with the others, and for once the difference of languages wasn’t a problem; all that was needed was a hug or a smile, and it was nice to see how this little one grew, changing from being bad tempered to being someone who invited others to join in our games with an altruism which taught me a lot. Indeed one takes part in these experiences to help, to do, and to give, yet one comes back with a heart that’s full of gifts received.

I learnt to smile especially even when I didn’t understand what the children were saying to me. I learnt that one can live for two weeks with only three T-shirts (and that it is also simpler that way). I admired the big and vibrant faith of the Albanian youth. I looked up at the Albanian stars and saw the same ones as I see in the Italian sky. I colored, drew, and made origami until I was exhausted. I played at “hide and seek”, and ate sunflower seeds, learnt some popular dances and many songs. I learnt the way of washing of the URN (Use lots of soap, Rinse little to save water and to take away the odour of sweat, and Not wring out to avoid wrinkling). I made friends in Albania and in Brescia. I cried when saying goodbye, while promising to return■

**Chiara Pastura**

**Indeed one  
takes part in  
these  
experiences to  
help, to do, and  
to give. And  
comes back with  
a heart that full  
of gifts received.**

# Being a missionary is also...



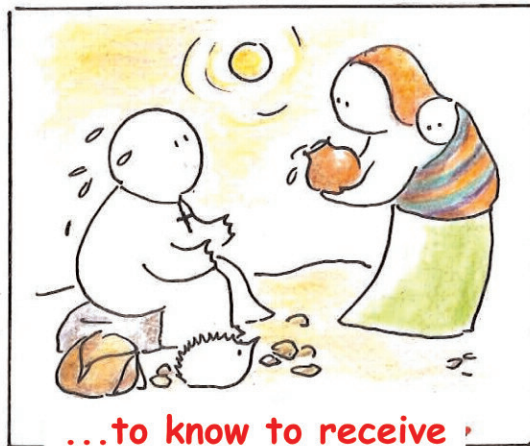
...to feel small



...to be like everyone



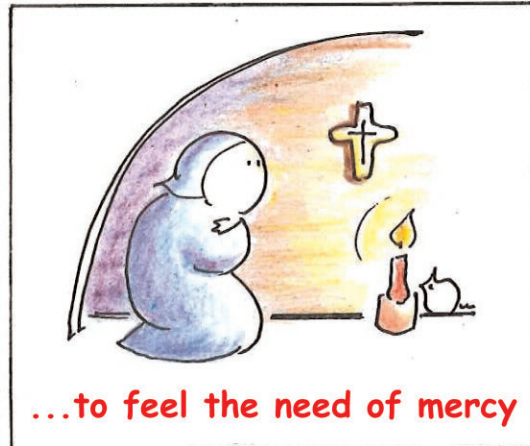
...to do normal things



...to know to receive



...to accept weakness



...to feel the need of mercy

# Contacts

<b>Albania:</b>	ramondalla@yahoo.it (00355) 587 20185 - Gostime
<b>Bangladesh:</b>	frattootpara@gmail.com (0088) 041 810891 - Khulna
<b>Brazil:</b>	frat.vila@gmail.com (0055) 21 24533323 – Rio de Janeiro
<b>Ethiopia:</b>	misfucad@ethionet.et (00251) 118957362 – Addis Abeba
<b>Hong Kong:</b>	contmisfrat@gmail.com (00852) 23831215 – Kowloon City
<b>Italy:</b>	info@centromissionario.org (0039) 0171 491263 – sisters - Cuneo (0039) 366 3172176 – brothers - Cuneo
<b>Kenya:</b>	mdfnairobi@gmail.com (00254) 716616183 - Nairobi
<b>Korea:</b>	todongkorea@gmail.com (0082) 55 7527665 - Chinju
<b>Madagascar:</b>	frativato@moov.mg (00261) 2022 48898 - Ivato
<b>Russia:</b>	fraternitymos@hotmail.com (007) 495 3948857 - Moscow

**For other information visit our homepage  
[www.centromissionario.org](http://www.centromissionario.org)**

