



Sister Water...

By the initiative of the Minister for the Environment, in conjunction with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the International network of Basin Organisations (INBO), the Global Alliance for Water and Climate (GAWC), which unites the Business Alliance and the Alliance for Megacities, spearheaded by UNESCO and Mother Water, organized a meeting in Rome from 23 to 25 October, with the theme **“Water and Climate: the great rivers of the world meet”**.

The meeting is born from the need to confront and give life to common initiatives that lead to an intervention towards the *water indisposition*.

In order to analyze these themes, those in charge of the most important rivers and lakes in the world (Mississippi, Mekong, Rio of the Amazon, Yangtse, Volga, Congo, Danubio and Lake Tanganika) met in Rome.

During the opening ceremony, the Secretary of State of the Vatican City State **His Eminence Pietro Parolin**, reminded everyone of the importance of guaranteeing *“everyone the right to have access to water, because life cannot be decent without it”*. In addition, His Eminence read a message that was sent by His Holiness Pope Francis, which affirmed that, *“seas and oceans have been a source of conflict for many centuries, but it’s time that the protagonists of the moments of dialogue and sharing returned. There is need to find effective responses to the fight for climate change to prevent forced migration and to maintain intact the ecosystem”*. In the course of the summit, you were present during the speeches, among them that of the Presidente del Consiglio **Paolo Gentiloni** who started with the example of Rome, that would not have existed without the Tevere, stated that *“the stories of conflict and peace have centered around the flow of water. Even today, 800 million people in the world do not have guaranteed access to water and the problems are getting worse. Investing in water safety is equivalent to investing in the safety of the citizens, for this reason we shall continue to defend the **accords of Paris** investing on **green economy and renewable energy”***. **Virginia Raggi**, the mayor of Rome also intervened, and she observed how the Bible speaks of water just in the first sentences of the Book of Genesis, where man is sent to take care of creation, and if everyone does his/her part they will have a positive influence on every one’s future. Satisfaction for the success of the Congress also comes from the Minister for the Environment, Gian Luca Galletti, three important results were arrived at: the first one is the **pact of Roma**, which has the objective of putting at the center of the debate on climate changes the question of rivers; the second is the birth of the **Italian Alliance for water and the climate**, which has the aim of promoting dialogue between the two worlds which are often in contrast, that of the environment and that of the big industries; and finally this Congress paid attention to the African Countries, those who suffer more for the scarcity of water, they actually decided to put Five million Euros towards a project that is aimed at **monitoring the two most important rivers in Congo and Senegal**.



16th November – *Let us pray for all the families in difficulties, in particular, for those whom the Lord has entrusted to our care so that we may accompany them until the rebirth of a new life.*

The force of evil seems to be hurled with all their anger against the family, knowing very well that once the family is destroyed, humanity sways in darkness, in insecurity, in the darkest solitude. We all know families in difficulty who ask for our help; sometimes, we can only help them with our prayers, and this is

exactly what we want to do today, entrusting them to the protection of Jesus, Joseph and Mary.

Statistics show that in Italy, an average marriage out of four happens to be the victim of separation or divorce. Something that is not strange in many countries where we are present.

16th December – *Let us offer our prayer for the mission in Brazil that is celebrating her provincial Chapter from 1st to 9th December.*

The theme of the Chapter is: “To revitalize our vocations, by following Jesus crucified, in the Fraternity and in the Mission”. Our best wishes and our prayers go to the sisters in Brazil, so that this moment of grace becomes true life, that leads to that “joy which reawakens the world”, just like what Pope Francis asks us, but before him Jesus had already asked us: “by this they will know that you are my disciples ...”.



Dear Sisters, Dear Friends, May the Lord grant us His peace!

The month of October saw many of our Sisters from many lands gather in our Motherhouse for the celebration of our General Assembly. We lived very meaningful moments of fraternity and of reflection on the theme, “Following Jesus, Poor and Crucified;” we shared the joys and challenges that we have met along the way and sought to learn more about, and better understand, new ways to more responsibly and transparently use our goods, thereby adding to the speed in which we can move toward a future that is overflowing with hope.

Also in October, we met for our usual three days of Missionary Formation with our Friends of the Institute and some other Friends from various parts of Italy. Those who attended participated with great interest and commitment; joy and gratitude characterized our days together, then all left for their places of mission with renewed enthusiasm, keeping the theme of our Missionary Day in mind: “The harvest is great...” Giving thanks for the many Sisters who give beauty and life to the Charism, and for the many Brothers and Sisters with whom we share our Missionary Journey, we wish all of you the gift of knowing how to nurture the seeds of life that come to birth in this world that has need for so much hope!

With a heartfelt greeting and a wish for a Good Journey toward the enlightened goal of the Resurrected One,

Sr. M. Rosalinda Salmaso

A witness about the Missionary Meeting that was held in our SFMA Motherhouse

We are two friends, Loredana, from Aosta, and Maria Luisa, from Torino. We were very glad to have received an invitation from the Sisters of Assisi to come to their missionary meeting, which was held on October 20-22. Sister Marilena Genera, a Comboni Missionary serving in Ecuador, was our animator.

And so we left for Assisi, happy to detach from our daily tasks, which can be stressful sometimes, and we became interested in deepening our understanding of a theme in mission spirituality and practice. It was great to return to the building which we consider our second home and to be welcomed by the Sisters, some who are missionaries, and some who are sisters, and to meet old and new friends.

We focused on the document, “The Joy of the Gospel.” Sister Marilena helped us analyze and discuss various themes from the book, in small work groups. We rediscovered our hidden needs: an evangelization method based on a relationship that encourages reciprocal exchanges and sharings, that springs from the Word and returns to the Word, and that witnesses with concrete gestures and acts. In this regard, we rediscovered our need to be “A Church that moves out.” Often we hold some expectations of the Church, forgetting two facts, however: that we are the Church and that evangelization and mission are integral parts of everyday life. We rediscovered that true encounters happen simply, through concrete gestures, through the witness of one’s life that flows more from the presence of Jesus than from any force of reason. The presence of Jesus reveals that “He journeys with us, breathes with us, and works with us.” (The Joy of the Gospel, 266). Our visit to the new Sanctuary of the Renunciation, celebrating Saint Francis’ divestment of his earthly goods, was stimulating. Through Fr. Carlos’ help, we were invited to strip ourselves, symbolically, of our material goods, and to make a place for silence within ourselves, so as to become welcoming of others. It pleases us to finish this sharing with the words of Father Primo Mazzolari: “Without anything, you can give something to someone, if you wish good for all. If you do not have stuff, you have a heart, and everyone else can take as much of it as he or she likes, because the heart grows by spending it, and it becomes more enriched when it strips!” Let us return home re-enforced by the spirit, for having known the joy of encounter.



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In Mexico, life continues

The recent earthquake had struck our people, destroying lives and houses. The damage was extensive, but the people never lost hope and they want to rebuild immediately. There is an incredible sense of participation from everyone; we also participated by sending Sr. Gemma, who together with the Franciscan Fathers went to their rescue and will remain there to help, with the hope that all the people who were affected could soon have a house.



Meanwhile, the holidays have finished and the children have happily started the new year, filling up the nutrition Centre where they find us available to help them with the homework and to give them a hot meal. Together with them, we are busy on the project we have embarked on of combating cancer. We collect plastic bottle tops: with 10,000 bottle tops we offer a session of chemotherapy to a sick child. The children compete to pick more bottle tops. Among them there is a little girl by the name of Fatima whose mother has a tumor, and she was the first one to bring the bottle tops. Herself and her two young brothers, aged six and seven years respectively, live with the grandmother because the mother cannot take care of them anymore because she's very sick.

It's interesting to see how the people in this area bring us food supplies and clothes for the most poor, for this reason, it's rare that our children and their families don't find something for themselves: the saying "the poor help their fellow poor people" is proved to be true.



Sr. Irene and her children

Appreciating another person's bread

By Sr. Mihaela Perca

I am sr. Mihaela and I would like to share with you, dear readers, my experience in Moldavia, which is the poorest Country in Europe. I lived among these people for one year and eight months. When I left Romania, I asked the Lord to grant me the grace to embrace this opportunity, of living with an open heart and to have the ability to be involve. In that way, I left without expecting too much, but I was sure that I would be welcomed just as I am. And that's how it was!

I had many experiences, but there's one thing that I will never forget. Maybe you are asking yourselves what I was doing? How where these people? What expectations did they have from us the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Assisi?

At first, it was not easy to find myself in a place where there was no haste, where silence was at home, a silence that was inviting you to enter and stay with yourself and with God. After a while, I started going out to meet people. I didn't know Russian but I also met people who spoke Moldavian, a language that was close to mine. With the witness of life, with concrete gestures that were freely given, I slowly got close to them and I tried not to judge them but to share with them the joys and sadness of their reality which were often so difficult to bear.

Meeting the people with whom I couldn't speak, I was observing them in order for me to understand their way of life, and in that way we cultivated strong bonds of friendship. I was not talking about Jesus, or about his love for each one of us, I had to be prudent. But I was listening, and when I saw that I could speak, I was talking about faith, about Christianity.



Sr. Mihaela and her children

There are very few Catholics in the Republic of Moldavia, however, there are two elderly women who come for Mass every day in our parish. The maximum number of people on Sunday's comes to 27. Not only is there material poverty but also a great lack of spirituality. However, they have great respect for each other, and they are welcoming and hospitable. The family is very important for them.

As a Congregation, we don't have a social activity, but with our simple presence we reach out to the people; by making visits to the old people and the poor families. On Sundays in the afternoons, small numbers of children were coming to spend some time with us. I was the one responsible for them, we were playing with toys, I was teaching them to make some drawings, small handicrafts, and we were singing together. Their simplicity was so captivating, I was able to see how happy they were, despite them eating the same type of food every day. I learnt from them the need to appreciate water. For us who are used to have water without much difficulty, we don't realize that for some people it's a luxury to have water. I was struck by the importance they attach to education, in their poverty they put in a lot of effort in maintaining their children in school. I was also going to prepare food for the old people and to take food to those who didn't have, to pay the bills or to do some shopping. I together with my sisters tried to reach out to these people, with our loving availability. I can write a book with all the stories that they were sharing with us. Truly, it was an enriching experience for me. I thank the Lord who gave me the strength to participate in the life and the work of the people of Moldovia.

Being at Ruth's House, Finally!

By Sister Barbara Donini, SFMA

As soon as I arrived at the Nutrition Center in San Kalembe, Zambia, in January of this year, I was fascinated with a small girl who had a strange bracelet. Her name is Ruth, and she is the eldest of five siblings, and all of them are at the Center for lunch from Monday through Friday each week.

Ruth had immediately attracted my attention, but not only for her little bracelet. I was also struck by her gentleness in caring for her little brother and her availability for helping out in the case of an emergency. I knew I could count on her!

In the beginning, I told myself, "Look at how creative this little girl is: she uses the simplest things to decorate her arm." Later, I woke up from that fantasy and reality opened up the door for me! Ruth often comes to the Nutrition Center with a small plastic bag tied to her wrist, begins to eat with her three little brothers, but all of them pay attention so as to leave a little bit of their portion of food: they must bring something back home for supper or for whoever has been left at home.

This is the great injustice they experience as their destiny: they are at a Nutrition Center because they have a history of malnutrition that is shown by their low weight and their bone development that is below the level for their ages and... they cannot even freely enjoy and completely finish the portion of food that is offered to them! Instead, they either have to, or want to, think also for the one who is home.

This is an injustice because, on the one hand, they are used to eating just a little bit and when we began to offer them their full serving of polenta, protein and vegetables, they automatically ate the plate of polenta and vegetables, and wanted to take the protein dish home with them. This is an injustice because even if you give him or her good meals, you see them growing very slowly....



Sr. Rachael

Surely, not all of the fifty children that we have been feeding have reacted in this way, but a good number of them seek to put some food in small plastic bags or in recycled boxes. If one asks them why they are doing so, some answer that, if they do not bring something home, their parents or their grandparents yell at them or beat them.

What is behind these words is, however, in reality, is something that is so much greater: they are not afraid of punishment because they know the value of sharing! The adults are teaching them the value of sharing: they, first, were the ones who brought back something for them when they had to leave their house for various reasons. Sharing is dividing, between you and me, the little that we have. They have to share whatever they have, with their parents and grandparents, even if it is only a small bit of food from the Center.

My little friend, Ruth, is already 17 years old, but she looks about 12 or 13. She is a little mother. In the morning, she brings her youngest brother to have breakfast, which we prepare for about twenty babies. Then she brings that brother home, then, more

often than not, she has to go to draw water from the well for the family and then returns to the Center around 11 AM.

The well is a great meeting place for the women of the area. They are always surprised when I go there to get water for us Sisters, but now, in our village, they are used to seeing me 'pump' for the water to come up, or wash our pails. I love to help out

with daily tasks. I tire easily, however, in trying to bring home the twenty-liter containers full of water, and I have slowly learned how to ask for help.

I could not understand how some people could see me carrying two large pails full of water and they would not ask me if they could help me; then they explained to me that it is a sign of respect, for these, my people, to not ask to help someone if he or she does not ask for help. And then I started to ask for help all the time! At last, I had arrived at Ruth's house! Finally!

When I first arrived at the Center, I could not come to understand what the children who came to our Center had in common. They are of very different ages: some are too big to be coming, being teenagers who have different attitudes, behaviors and needs. And so, we began to visit them at their homes, and we learned, there, the reason why they had to come to the Center.

When we went to Ruth's house, we were welcomed in the room of the Grandmother where the children's parents were waiting for us. They had prepared two chairs for us Sisters, one for me and one for Sister Rachel. Their Mother and Grandmother were seated to one side, and their Father and the children were seated on the other side.

Their parents were very young: dried out from exposure to the sun, yet people of great dignity, with gentle and kind manners, and big smiles. It was only after my second visit to their house that I began to sense that maybe their mother had a problem on the intellectual level. None of her children go to school: Mary is mentally retarded as a result of malaria, Ruth does not go because she often has malaria, and the two brothers do not go because of the lack of funds. Now the youngest son, Joseph, is attending our school.

Ruth's house does not have trees around it to protect it and I have come to understand why: their father prepares carbon for sale and, for this reason, he has cut down all of the trees. Green grass grows around, though, even if there are goats and cows wandering around the place.

At Ruth's house, like in the houses of all of the other families of the children who come to our Center, I have found a great sense of dignity and welcome, and I have learned a great lesson of life from them. Many are very happy that they were visited by us, that we have seen their reality, and they were almost overly proud to receive us in their home: one told me that he was happy to experience us among them, and not only experience their being among us.



Sr. Barbara