

SCARBORO MISSIONS

January-February 2009 \$1.00



“To those who follow other religions...the Church wishes to engage with them in an open and sincere dialogue in search of the true good of humanity and society.”

Pope Benedict XVI

Dear friend of
Scarboro Missions,

Please remember us with your prayers and financial support so that we may witness to the Gospel overseas and in Canada. We will continue to be good stewards of all your gifts as we put ourselves at the service of others. Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity.



VOLUME 90, NUMBER 1
JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2009

Publisher: Scarboro Foreign Mission Society
Editor/Designer: Kathy Gillis

The Scarboro Foreign Mission Society (Charitable Reg. #11914 2164 RR0001) is a Roman Catholic missionary community involved in mission overseas and in Canada. Founded in Canada in 1918 by Fr. John Fraser, Scarboro's initial purpose was to train and send missionary priests to China. Forced to leave China after the Second World War, Scarboro began working in the Caribbean, Asia, and Latin America.

Scarboro Missions publishes four editions each year, plus a calendar. The articles published represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Society.

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Printed in Canada and mailed from Toronto East L.P.P., Scarborough, ON. Return postage guaranteed. ISSN 0700-6802

"We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada through the Publications Assistance Program toward our mailing costs."
PAP Registration Number 9984



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**Cover: With these words, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his commitment to dialogue in his first sermon as Pope in 2005.
Credit: L'Osservatore Romano.**



By Kathy Gillis

Let us build a city of God

For the past five months, the world has watched as a banking crisis has led to dire predictions of an economic crisis and an employment crisis. In Canada, many are already feeling the effects, even Scarboro Missions.

This year, we are saddened to report that for the second year in a row we have had to cut back an issue of *Scarboro Missions* magazine. The economic downturn of the past months has meant that we have had to look again at stewardship and how we are best able to use the resources given to us.

We will do our best with four issues, plus our calendar issue, to continue to effectively share Scarboro's journey in mission and help you to understand the changing face of mission as we have experienced it in the past 90 years of our history.

This first issue of 2009 focuses on dialogue with other faiths, an area that is key to mission today. In his lead article on page 4, Fr. Jack Lynch tells us why Scarboro Missions has been involved in interfaith dialogue and the leadership of the Church in this area since Vatican Council II.

Fr. Jack tells us that dialogue is key to understanding our role in God's missionary agenda. God has been active throughout the history of the world and by dialogue we learn how God has been present to others. As the world becomes more multicultural and multifaith, we cannot but enter this conversation.

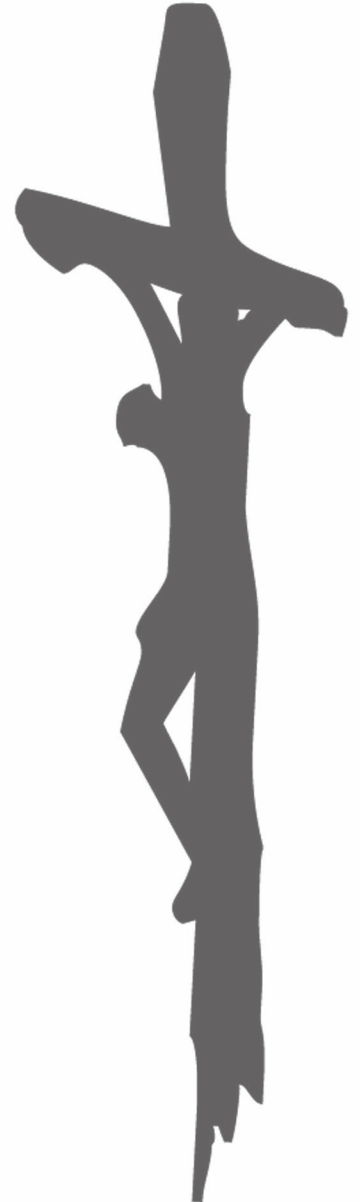
This year, the theme for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January 18-25) is from Ezekiel 37:17: "That they

may become one in your hand." Day 7 reflects on "Christians face to face with a plurality of religions," even as we pray for unity among ourselves. It says, "...if we listen carefully to our neighbours of other faiths, can we learn something more of the inclusiveness of God's love for all people, and of his kingdom?"

Other articles in this issue also provide food for thought in our efforts to participate in God's plan of salvation for all. Fr. David Warren's reflection on the Beatitudes shows us that Jesus is calling us to look at the world in a radical new way—to be merciful, to hunger for righteousness, to be peace-makers, to be poor in spirit.

Janet Malone, C.N.D., writes about Thomas Merton and his journey towards God through silence and solitude. Sharon Willan looks at two 12th century contemplatives, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare, and what they teach us about being more prayerful and compassionate—about being more like Christ in a world where so many are being crushed by suffering and injustice.

With our minds on Lent and the passion of Christ, let us journey though these economic times with faith and without fear, and let us keep our eyes, ears, and hearts open to recognizing the face of God and the movement of God in the world.∞





INTERFAITH DIALOGUE...

Part of the Church's evangelizing mission

By Fr. Jack Lynch, S.F.M.

Why is Scarboro Missions involved in interfaith or inter-religious dialogue? The question is very valid and I would like to respond to a few of the common concerns that we hear from some of our supporters and other members of the Catholic Church.

In this issue on page six, you will find a statement outlining the rationale for our involvement in interfaith dialogue. It is one of our priorities at Scarboro Missions and the statement articulates our mission, vision, and motivation for our involvement in it.

Our experience at Scarboro has taught us that many Catholics are unaware of the initiatives of the Popes and the leadership of the Church in the last 45 years since the Second Vatican Council. I invite you to read the articles in this issue and to spend time with the material on "Catholic Milestones in Interfaith Dialogue" outlined in the centrefold. It is a wealth of information and for some I would guess that it might be surprisingly new information.

At Scarboro, our commitment to interfaith dialogue has grown for a variety of reasons. First of all, we respond as a Catholic community in mission to the leadership and guidance of the Church beginning with Pope John XXIII to the present. Secondly, we are motivated by our own collective experience in global cross-cultural mission over the last 90 years and our contacts and friendships with many people of other faith traditions where our members have lived and worked.

Thirdly, with modern communication, mobility, and immigration we no longer live in isolation from other

"The Church respects and esteems these non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God."

Pope Paul VI, Evangelization in the Modern World, 1975

peoples and religions nor should we live in isolation. Since our founding 90 years ago our world has changed dramatically and so must we. We must come to know and love our neighbour as Jesus taught, but for today's world. We ought to remember that Jesus engaged in the same kind of dialogue with people of other traditions and beliefs other than his own and even presents some of them as models of faith.

Some Catholics have expressed concerns about engagement in this kind of dialogue and also about what it means. In the Vatican document, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991), proclamation of the Gospel and interreligious dialogue are seen as distinct but related activities within the mission of the Church. Church teaching in *Dialogue and Proclamation* and also in *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), the 1990 mission encyclical of John Paul II, state clearly that "inter-religious dialogue is part of the Church's evangelizing mission." (RM 55)

I firmly believe in the observation of Pope John Paul II that interfaith dialogue is not done as a tactical move of self-interest but "is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where He wills." (RM 56)

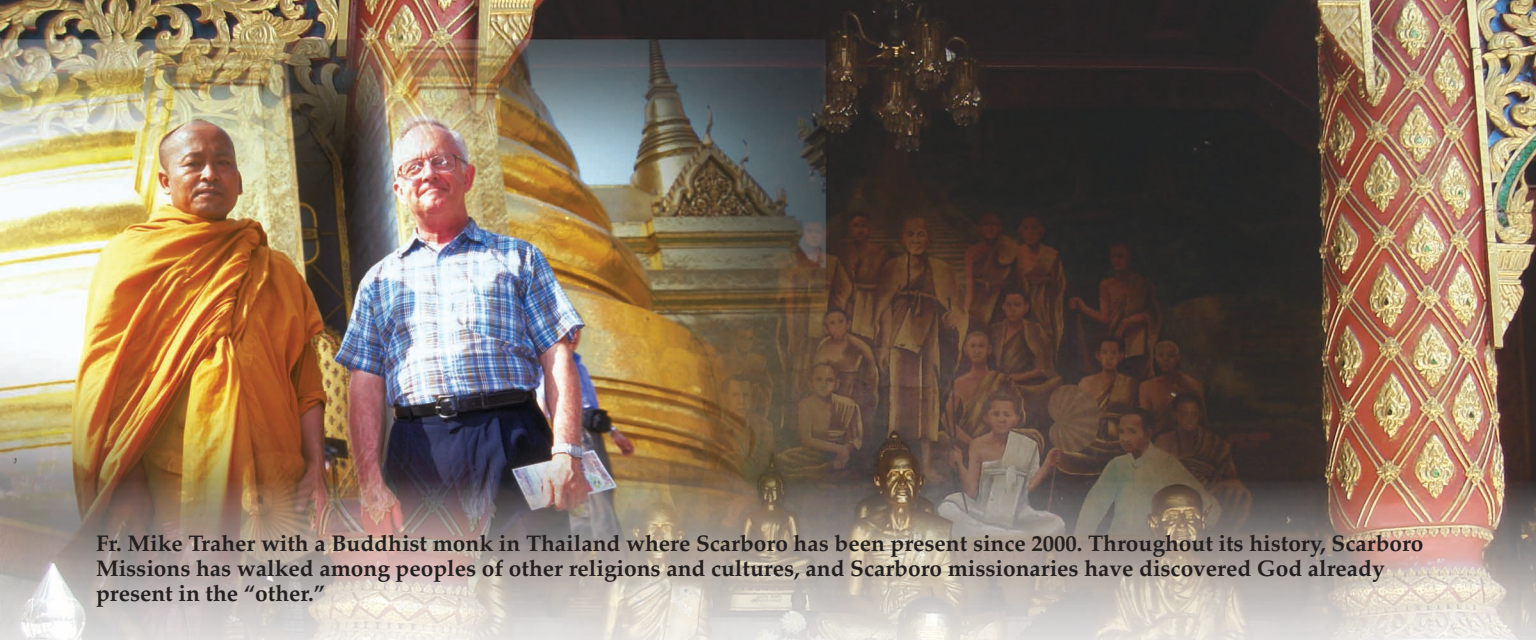
My strong expectation is that Christian hope would radiate through to all in every dialogue. It must be a hope that emanates from a deep personal relationship with Jesus and what he is for the Christian. Dialogue in turn must reflect an authenticity in our Gospel witness—we must be followers of Jesus not only in what we say but in the witness of our lives.

An exchange of beliefs

True dialogue is an occasion for a sincere, honest exchange of beliefs during which the participants listen intently and respectfully with an openness to learn, to understand, and to appreciate the belief of the other. My personal conviction is that it is essential that everyone speaks in the first person singular so that the participants give a personal testimony of their beliefs.

If I am speaking with a person of another religious tradition, I express what I believe and I respond to any question as honestly as I can. In a dialogue, one does not dilute or accommodate one's belief to the listener. If that is the case it really isn't a true dialogue.

Dialogue must be both truthful and respectful. This is very demanding because it challenges me to state in



Fr. Mike Traher with a Buddhist monk in Thailand where Scarboro has been present since 2000. Throughout its history, Scarboro Missions has walked among peoples of other religions and cultures, and Scarboro missionaries have discovered God already present in the "other."

my own words what I believe. It is as if I am invited to respond personally to the question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am?" Then I begin to speak in the first person about my belief in Jesus, his teaching, and his revelation of God.

Dialogue leads to an enrichment of my faith. Pope John Paul II expressed it so beautifully when he said, "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another, we open ourselves to God." So often in the Gospel accounts we hear Jesus admonishing his disciples to not be afraid or fearful and I believe that we need to have the same trust and openness when we dialogue with another. We believe that one of the goals of interfaith dialogue is a deeper turning to God by each partner in the dialogue.

Another concern that we hear is that dialogue leads to relativism, the perception that as Christians we are placing Jesus and other religious leaders on an equal footing. We state unequivocally that as Christians we believe in Jesus, His mission, and our salvation. At the same time, we also believe what the Catholic Bishops stated in 1974 at the Synod on Evangelization: "We wish to foster dialogue with non-Christian religions, so that we may reach a better understanding of the Gospel's newness and of the fullness of Revelation."

God's presence in the world

Ultimately, the foundation for all dialogue and missionary activity is the conviction that "mission is first and foremost God's presence and activity in the world." It is "*missio Dei*" — God's mission. That is the first and primary principle that Pope John Paul II reminds us of in *Redemptoris Missio*, his encyclical on mission activity. He reminds us that the Spirit of God is the source and author of mission. We are called to participate in an historical project that comes from God and belongs to God.

When we do so, we do not begin from nothing for we recall that we live in a world in which the Spirit of God is already operative. God is already present in the peoples, cultures, and faith traditions of others. God is present everywhere before us and salvifically active in ways unknown to us.

Our first step then is contemplation and discernment of the action and movement of God in history, i.e. to discover God's missionary agenda. One of the ways is through dialogue. Michael McCabe, SMA, a priest of the Society of African Missions, speaks of mission as an encounter with a mystery: "the mystery of a missionary God whose love embraces the world and all of its inhabitants; the mystery of the Spirit of God present in unexpected places and unsuspected ways because of the limits of our own life experien-

ces and our own cultural world; the mystery of people's participation in the paschal mystery in ways we have neither known nor imagined due to our limited religious experience or our experience of God from the perspective of our own culture."

Dialogue is key to understanding our role in God's missionary agenda. God speaks and we listen and respond to God's invitation. In this context, I can't emphasize too much the importance of interreligious dialogue and its significance for mission today. As the Asian Bishops stated in 1978 in Calcutta concerning dialogue with the great religions of Asia: "Sustained and reflective dialogue with them in prayer will reveal to us what the Holy Spirit has taught others to express in a marvellous variety of ways."

I believe that the Holy Spirit is both the inspiration and the guide in true interfaith dialogue. The Spirit is leading us to the truth and to reconciliation. In Delhi, India, in 1999, Pope John Paul II expressed his "hope and dream that the next century will be a time of fruitful dialogue, leading to a new relationship of understanding and solidarity among the followers of all religions." Let that hope continue to motivate all of us.[∞]

Fr. Jack Lynch is the Superior General of Scarboro Missions.

Scarboro Missions Interfaith Mission Statement

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we desire to follow Him more closely. We believe that the Spirit of Jesus is present in peoples of other religious traditions. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we desire to hear what He might be saying to us through them. We believe that peoples of other faiths might inspire us to live our Christian faith more fully and more deeply.

We believe, furthermore, that God is working in our world to bring all peoples together in Christ. God is calling the Church to be a sign and an agent of this work of reconciliation. We believe that there is an urgent need for reconciliation among the religions of our world and that the Church is called to promote this reconciliation.

For this reason, Scarboro Missions, inspired by the teaching of the Church, desires to enter into a conversation with peoples of other faiths and also to foster a conversation among the religions. We believe that this conversation will promote cooperation toward peace, social justice, and the common good.

Catholics

Compiled by the Scarboro Missions Department
of Interfaith Dialogue

Catholic involvement in interfaith dialogue is the best kept secret on the planet. In the last 40 years, there has been a dramatic opening of the Church to other world faiths.

The religious face of this planet is changing. At a dramatic pace, more and more regions of the world are becoming environments of multiculture and multifaith. At the root of this phenomenon are international patterns of migration. In the last 100 years, the profound and worldwide movement of peoples and cultures has provoked a meeting of religions that is new to history. And this encounter among religions has been intensified by technological advances such as the Internet.

This historic encounter of religions is accompanied by another remarkable phenomenon—the interfaith dialogue movement. The great faiths of the world are now talking to and cooperating with one another in a fashion that is new, exciting, and challenging.

Here are some of the many features of the Catholic conversation with other religions:

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65)

This Ecumenical Council is seen as the watershed event that gave official Church blessing to interfaith dialogue and inspired decades of Catholic involvement in interfaith dialogue. The Vatican II documents have been followed up by numerous Church documents affirming interfaith dialogue. (See “Official Church Documents on Interfaith Dialogue” on facing page.)

Papal Leadership

Pope Benedict XVI and the previous three Popes have provided courageous leadership as the Church journeys through the uncharted territory of interfaith dialogue. (For more on this subject see the centrespread poster “Catholic Milestones in Interfaith Dialogue” in this issue, and the article, “Popes Lead the Way”, in the January-February 2007 interfaith edition of Scarboro Missions magazine.) The extraordinary teaching, witness, and action of Pope John Paul II in terms of interfaith dialogue deserves to be viewed as one of the most amazing and influential phenomena of the 20th century. His global interfaith influence has gone far beyond Catholics and has touched people of all faiths.

AND THE interfaith conversation

International Catholic Activity

Catholic theologians around the world are making an enormous contribution to the larger effort to explore the theological meaning of the Christian encounter with other faiths. And Catholics at all levels of the Church are involved in interfaith dialogue, often in leadership roles.

Dialogue and Christian Mission

The Church now considers interfaith dialogue to be part of its mission. This position is strongly supported, for example, by Pope John Paul's 1990 mission encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*.

In 1991, a joint statement by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples entitled, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, asserted that proclamation of the Gospel and interreligious dialogue are distinct but related activities within the Church's mission. Accordingly, one of the goals of interreligious dialogue is a deeper turning to God by each partner in the dialogue. The goal of proclamation is a commitment to faith in Jesus Christ.

Peace, social justice, and the common good

The emerging global interfaith movement is committed to the promotion of justice, nonviolence, equity, and ecological sustainability in all societies. In response to Church teaching, many Catholics involved in interfaith work are likewise embracing these important social values.

Jesus and other religions

As a result of breakthroughs in Biblical scholarship in recent decades, Catholics are learning that there are numerous occasions in the New Testament in which Jesus affirms the faith experience of people of other cultures, religions, and ethnicities. Jesus even presents people who are not members of his own faith as models of faith. These individuals include the Canaanite (Syro-Phoenician) woman whose daughter he healed (*Matthew 15:21-28*), the Roman centurion whose servant he healed, and the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10:29-37*). (See article on page 20.)

OFFICIAL CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Below are some of the official Church documents on interfaith dialogue published since the Second Vatican Council. These include papal encyclicals as well as documents produced by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, by Bishops' Conferences, and by Congregations within the Vatican (e.g. the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). Other official documents are listed in this issue's centrespread poster, "Catholic Milestones in Interfaith Dialogue".

1965 *Nostra Aetate*

This Declaration of the Second Vatican Council is a landmark in interfaith relations. For Catholics, the document initiated new understandings and new directions in promoting dialogue and reconciliation with the followers of other religions, particularly in Jewish-Catholic relations.

1974 *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, Nostra Aetate (n.4)*

The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews speaks of a fundamental condition for dialogue when it states that "on a practical level in particular, Christians must strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism."

1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*

In this statement, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews affirms that a fundamental dimension of dialogue is precise, objective, and rigorously accurate teaching on Judaism for the Church's faithful.

1991 *Dialogue and Proclamation*

This joint statement by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples asserts that interreligious dialogue and proclamation are distinct but related activities within the Church's evangelizing mission. The goal of interreligious dialogue is the deeper conversion to truth by each partner in the dialogue. "In the final analysis, truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we must allow ourselves to be possessed."

2000 *Dominus Jesus*

A Declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Jesus* asserts that interreligious dialogue does not diminish the duty and urgency to announce that Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour for all humanity.



Jesus as a role model for society

By Fr. David Warren, S.F.M.

"Founders of Religion as Role Models to Society" was the theme of a symposium sponsored by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Toronto on November 27, 2008. In the absence of Fr. Damian MacPherson, director of the Office of Ecumenism and Interfaith Affairs for the Archdiocese of Toronto, Scarboro missionary Fr. Dave Warren was asked to speak for Christianity. His partners in the symposium were a Jewish rabbi and a Muslim imam. The rabbi spoke about Moses, the imam spoke about Muhammad, and Fr. Warren spoke about Jesus of Nazareth.

What characterizes the life of Jesus of Nazareth is a radical reversal of the values of the world. Jesus articulated his values in a series of phrases which Christians know as the Beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The world today—as did the world of Jesus—considers the rich to be blessed. But Jesus declares that the poor are blessed; not because the poor are morally superior to the rich—often they are not—but because the poor need God more than the rich do. Not only are the poor more vulnerable than the rich but they are also socially inferior. Jesus sided with the poor and with other people on the edge of polite society. He died a poor man, naked on a cross.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Once again Jesus reverses the values of the world and declares blessed "those who mourn." He means those who are not happy with the world the way it is and who long for a better world. In his day, Jesus was far from happy with the world the way it was. He longed for the new and better world which would come with what He called "the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The world would tend to say that the earth shall inherit the meek. The world considers aggressive people to be successful. Jesus is not recommending that we allow people to walk all over us—Jesus was certainly no pushover—but He is recommending nonviolence. Jesus rejected violence as the way to change the world. Rather than inflict violence, He suffered violence.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

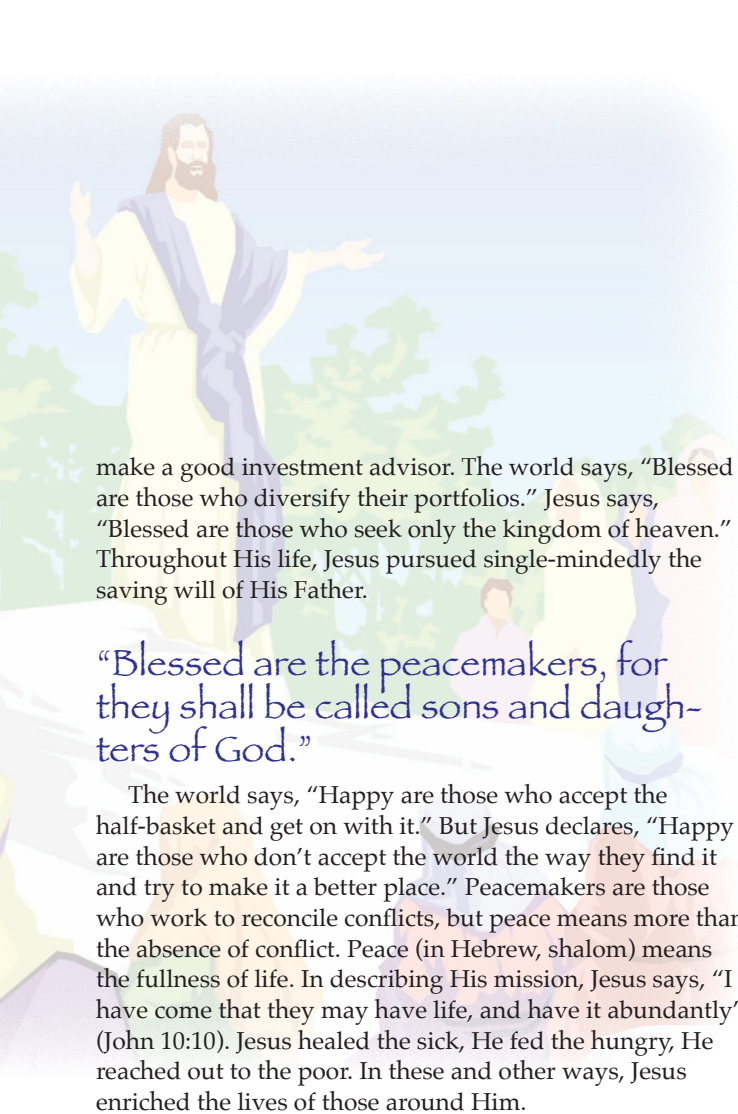
We all long for a more just world. Righteousness in the Hebrew Scriptures does indeed mean justice. But it means much more than that. In the Hebrew Scriptures righteousness means the whole plan of God to save His people, a plan which includes, of course, the establishment of a just world. When Jesus declares to be blessed "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," He means, blessed are those who enlist themselves in the service of God's design. The world is more inclined to enlist God in the service of our own designs and objectives. However, Jesus' prayer was, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

The world is more inclined to advise against being merciful: If you're merciful, people will take advantage of you. Jesus is the Merciful One. As He was dying on the cross, He prayed for his persecutors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

We tend to equate purity of heart with the virtue of chastity. But the pure in heart are not only the chaste; the pure in heart are also the single-minded. Jesus would not



make a good investment advisor. The world says, "Blessed are those who diversify their portfolios." Jesus says, "Blessed are those who seek only the kingdom of heaven." Throughout His life, Jesus pursued single-mindedly the saving will of His Father.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God."

The world says, "Happy are those who accept the half-basket and get on with it." But Jesus declares, "Happy are those who don't accept the world the way they find it and try to make it a better place." Peacemakers are those who work to reconcile conflicts, but peace means more than the absence of conflict. Peace (in Hebrew, shalom) means the fullness of life. In describing His mission, Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus healed the sick, He fed the hungry, He reached out to the poor. In these and other ways, Jesus enriched the lives of those around Him.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Once again, Jesus reverses the values of the world. The world says, "Happy are you when people speak well of you." In the eyes of Jesus, however, approval signifies compromise with the world's values and agendas. Approval means not success but failure. Remaining true to His values, Jesus experienced opposition and eventually crucifixion.

The values by which Jesus lived and died don't seem to make any sense in the real world. But they are not based on the real world. The values of Jesus are based on what Jesus calls "the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven, or reign of God, is the in-breaking of God into the world in unsuspected places and among undeserving people. The kingdom of God is the new world which God is even now creating. Jesus is a role model to society, but not to society as we know it. Jesus is a role model to society as God dreams it to be.∞

What characterizes the life of Jesus is a radical reversal of the values of the world. Jesus articulated these values in The Beatitudes.

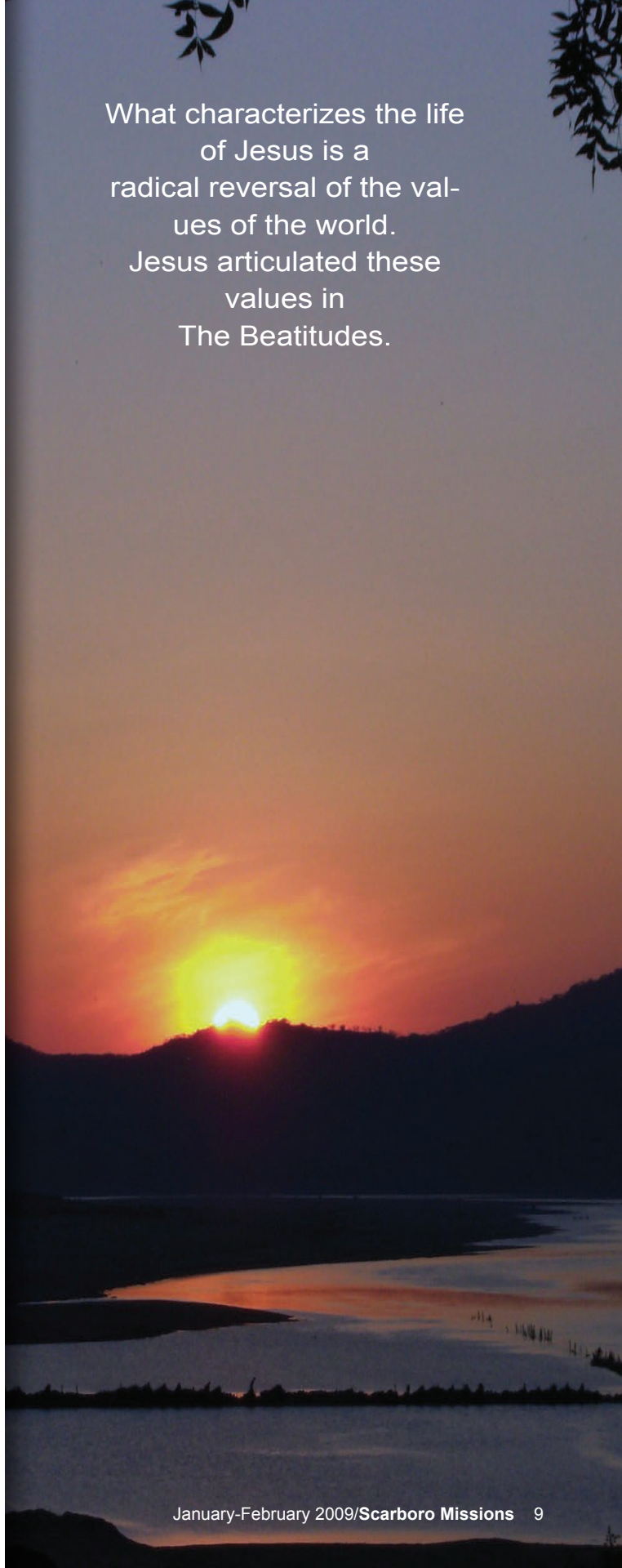




Table of hope

By José Robelo, MCCJ

Overnight, Joey A. Velasco became a well-known artist in the Philippines. Barely six months after taking up painting at age 38, Velasco rendered the above scene of Jesus at supper with street children. He entitled the work *Hapag ng Pag-asa*, or “Table of Hope.”

Velasco regards his newly discovered talent as God-given. “I am only the paintbrush,” he says. His portrayal of underprivileged children radically changed his life and the painting that gained him fame became a symbol of the fight against extreme poverty in the Philippines.

An entrepreneur at age 21, Velasco

had built a manufacturing business with 30 employees, when suddenly in 2005 a serious kidney problem brought him to a hospital for major surgery. “During my three-month convalescence at home,” he says. I felt the urge to create figures of what I had experienced in the hospital, so I started scribbling, dabbling, sketching, but everything was so crude.”

With his wife Queeny overseeing the business, Velasco bought art books and searched the Internet to learn how to do portraits. Then he learned that Norman Sustiguer, a teacher of fine arts at the University of the Philippines, had just retired

and moved into his neighborhood. “I was lucky to become his student,” he admits. “I learned by doing. I started painting portraits of my wife, my four children, anything that caught my fancy.”

But the principal inspiration for the painting that gained him fame came from the eating habits of his children—Marco, age 11, Chiara, eight, Clarisse, five, and Marti, four. “My kids were complaining about their food and becoming choosy,” he explains. “So, I thought of providing them with a visual reminder, strong and challenging, of their blessings of life and to appreciate what was on the



“My kids were complaining about their food and becoming choosy. So, I thought of providing them with a visual reminder, strong and challenging, of their blessings of life and to appreciate what was on the table.”

Joey Velasco, who became a well-known artist in the Philippines after his rendition of Jesus at supper with street children, shown here.

He entitled the work *Hapag ng Pag-asa*, or “Table of Hope.”

Photo inset: Velasco (right) with a Filipino living in the United States who donated land in the Philippines to build houses for the poor.



table.”

To find models, Velasco went to different squatter areas of Manila, under the bridge and to the North Cemetery, where families live amid the tombstones. “I fed the kids noodles and juice, and when they were not looking, I took photos,” he says. In 45 days, he completed the 4-by-8-foot canvas, which he put on his dining room wall.

Asked about the reaction of his children, the artist replies, “I don’t have to talk anymore. The painting talks to them.” He was brought up short, however, when his offspring asked the names and identity of the children in the painting. “I had no

answer,” he says, admitting his chagrin. “I just used them as models. I didn’t know them personally.”

That would change. When a priest friend, Monsignor Romulo Rañada, saw the painting, he was so impressed he suggested unveiling the artwork at the close of the National Eucharistic Year at the cathedral in Manila. Velasco agreed. People flocked to see it. The work was publicized in newspapers, on television, and over the Internet. Charitable organizations asked if they could print and sell copies to raise funds for poor children. The surprised artist complied.

The fame, however, began to bother him. “I didn’t paint it for the public, just for the house,” he says. “People told me they liked the beauty of the painting, the realistic aspect. I was feeling proud. Then little by little I came to realize that the painting showed more meaning than even I thought about as I was painting. I was no longer looking at the painting. The painting was looking at me. The subjects of my painting were observing me. I could no longer escape them. They became missionaries to me, and took me on a spiritual journey.”

Using his photos, he retraced his steps to the squatter areas, the bridge and the cemetery. “I searched for each one of them, and it was only then, when I knew who they were, was I able to find myself and my God. I thought they were the ones who were lost, only to find out I was the one actually lost. From those children I learned what they were

doing every day, who their parents were, and things I never learned in school, like the nobility of character, courage, and faith in the face of unspeakable poverty.”

Velasco also says the experience changed his image of God. “In my encounter with the children,” he explains, “I realized that God is not a far God, but a near God, someone who is offering love for free. If you notice the children in the painting, they are not looking at Jesus. I began to realize that Jesus cares even for those who do not bother with him. I did not pay attention to God for a very long time, but God paid attention to me because of his unconditional love.”

Before, he says, the faces in his painting were anonymous. Now, he can answer his own children: “I can tell them which one is Itok, which one is Nene, Joyce, Tinay, Emong, Onse, Buknoy, Michael, Doday, Jun, Roselle or Sudan.”[∞]

Fr. Jose Rebelo, a Comboni Missionary of the Heart of Jesus, is editor of World Mission, an Asian Catholic magazine published by the Comboni Fathers. The above story was adapted for Maryknoll magazine from an interview with the artist in World Mission. Reprinted with permission.

end of Ramadan, a month of fasting.

1974 Asian Bishops, Evangelization in Modern Day Asia

The bishops of Asia, where Christianity is a minority religion, publish this landmark document which argues that dialogue with all peoples, cultures, and religions is part of the Church's mission.

1974 Synod on the Evangelization of the Modern World

The synod declaration proclaims: "We wish to foster dialogue with non-Christian religions, so that we may reach a better understanding of the Gospel's newness and of the fullness of Revelation."

1975 Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelization in the Modern World

In this exhortation, Pope Paul VI speaks of the Church's respect and esteem for non-Christian religions and encourages Catholic contact with them.



1984 Dialogue and Christian Mission

On its 20th anniversary, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue publishes "The Attitude of the Church Toward Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission". This document places interfaith dialogue squarely within the scope of the Church's mission.

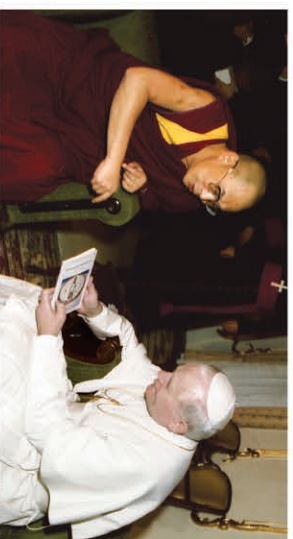
the Second Vatican Council's condemnation of all discrimination toward Jews.

1990 Encyclical, Redemptoris Missio

This important papal document on mission activity contains a strong interreligious theme. Pope John Paul declares, "Each member of the faithful and all Christian communities are called to practice interfaith dialogue."

1993 Israel-Vatican Accord

Israel and the Vatican establish full diplomatic ties, easing centuries of discord.



1995 Greetings to Buddhists Worldwide

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue issues its first annual greeting to the worldwide Buddhist community on the occasion of Vesak, an important Buddhist feast. This gesture is part of a growing international Buddhist-Catholic dialogue.

1995 Hindu-Catholic Relations

In this first annual letter to the worldwide Hindu community on the occasion of the Hindu feast of Diwali, the Pontifical Council calls for closer cooperation between Hindus and Catholics, particularly in promoting religious values.

2001 Pope John Paul II Visits Mosque

During his trip to Damascus, Syria, John Paul II becomes the first Pope to visit and pray in a mosque.

2005 Jewish Leaders Thank John Paul II

From around the world, 160 Jewish leaders travel to the Vatican to thank Pope John Paul II for his extraordinary efforts in promoting Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

2005 Benedict XVI Welcomes Interfaith Dialogue

In his first sermon as Pope, Benedict XVI proclaims: "To those who follow other religions the Church wishes to engage with them in an open and sincere dialogue in search of the true good of humanity and society."

2005 Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations

Pope Benedict visits a synagogue in Cologne, Germany, and calls for a renewal of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

2006 Pope Benedict XVI Prays in Turkish Mosque

As an expression of his commitment to Muslim-Christian dialogue, the Pope visits and prays in a mosque in Turkey.



2008 Muslim-Catholic Relations

In response to a letter from 138 Muslim scholars, Pope Benedict XVI approves the establishment of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, which brings together Vatican officials and Muslim scholars.

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Catholic Milestones in Interfaith Dialogue



1962 Pope John XXIII Convenes Vatican II

In convening the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII envisions a renewal of the whole Church. Vatican Council II is now seen as a watershed event in this new openness toward Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, indigenous peoples, and others.

1964 Secretariat for Non-Christians

During the Council, Pope Paul VI establishes the Secretariat for Non-Christians as a sign and a structure of the Church's desire to dialogue with followers of other religions. (In 1988, the Secretariat was renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.)

1964 Encyclical, Ecclesiam Suam

Issued by Pope Paul VI, this is the first papal document in history to promote interfaith dialogue.

1965 Second Vatican Council Ends

The Council produces ground-breaking documents on interreligious dialogue, religious liberty, and pluralism. In these documents, the Church recognizes and respects the presence of grace, truth, and holiness in other religions.

1967 Catholic Greetings to Muslims Worldwide

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue sends its first annual greeting to all the world's Muslims at the

1984 Pope John Paul II Visits Canada

During his visit to one of Canada's earliest Native Christian missions near Midland, Ontario, the Pope declares, "Christ, in the members of his body, is himself Indian."

1985 Pope John Paul II and Muslim Youth

At the invitation of the King of Morocco, John Paul visits Casablanca where he addresses 80,000 Muslim youth on the values common to Christianity and Islam.

1986 World Day of Prayer for Peace



Pope John Paul II invites leaders of world religions and of Christian denominations to Assisi, Italy, to pray and fast for world peace. In so doing, he becomes the first religious leader in history to convene such a gathering.

1986 Pope John Paul II Visits Rome Synagogue

John Paul II becomes the first Pope in modern history to visit Rome's chief synagogue. In his speech he reiterates

1995 Jesuit Interreligious Ministry

The 34th General Congregation of the Jesuit Order decides that interfaith dialogue must become a "distinctive characteristic" of Jesuit ministry worldwide.

1997-2000 Jubilee Year 2000

A general renewal of the Church leading up to and including the Jubilee Year includes a focus on interfaith dialogue, ecumenism, peace, and social justice.

1998 We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah

In a long awaited document on the Holocaust, the Church expresses repentance for those Christians who failed to oppose the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

2000 First Papal Visit to Israel



During Pope Paul's historic visit to Israel, he visits Judaism's holiest site, the Western Wall of the ancient temple, and offers a prayer of forgiveness "for those who have caused these children to suffer."



Contemporary hermits

A reflection on Thomas Merton, model for the contemplative life, on the 40th anniversary of his death

By Sr. Janet Malone, C.N.D.

Going apart in silence and solitude whether full-time or in a rhythm of withdrawal and return is integral to many religious traditions and spiritualities. Hinduism's forest dwellers, Islam's Sufi mystics, Judaism's kabbalists, Christian monks and hermits, each focuses the necessity of a contemplative-mystical life of simplicity, detachment, and selfless love. Each group has its models, gurus, saints, whose lives exemplify different rhythms of silence and solitude.

In this reflection, we look at one such model, Thomas Merton, who, like us, had "feet of clay," yet followed his deep call in a conversion journey to in-depth silence, solitude, and contemplation.

40th Anniversary

December 10, 2008, marked the 40th anniversary of Merton's death. A Renaissance man, world traveler, lover of literature, poetry, music, and languages, he became a Catholic in 1938 and then joined the Cistercian monastery (Trappists) on December 10, 1941. He had hoped to enter the Carthusian order of hermits but there were no monasteries in North America, and with World War II raging in Europe, he knew it was unwise to go there. Instead, he entered the Trappists.

Merton lived as a priest-monk at Gethsemani, Kentucky, paradoxically deepening his inward journey of silence and solitude, becoming a mystic, spiritual leader, pacifist, prophet, as he became a more prolific writer, poet, scholar, theologian, photographer, teacher, political activist.

By nature garrulous and loquacious, Merton was not your stereotyp-

ical monk. With his autobiography, *Seven Storey Mountain*, published a short time after he entered the Trappists, Merton became known worldwide as a model and mentor for countless people searching for "the real" in life. Twenty-seven years to the day he entered Gethsemani, Thomas Merton died of accidental electrocution in Bangkok, Thailand. He was there as one of the seminal speakers at a meeting of East and West monks, Sisters, and abbots, all searching for common ground in their common search for the mystery of God.

Silence

When Merton entered the Trappist monastery, he was well aware of its silent lifestyle. He was also aware of his gift, desire, even need, to communicate, yet he resolved to become a silent monk. Silence, at this juncture in his life was an either/or dynamic: silence and speaking (writing) were dualistic opposites. The lived reality of this exterior silence was demanding on most of the monks and, it would seem, particularly on Merton. Even the Trappist sign language, used for purposes of necessity and charity, was creatively used and expanded by Merton to the point where stories were

"I shall certainly have solitude. Where?
Here or there makes no difference.
Somewhere, nowhere, beyond all 'where.'
Solitude outside geography or in it. No matter."

Thomas Merton

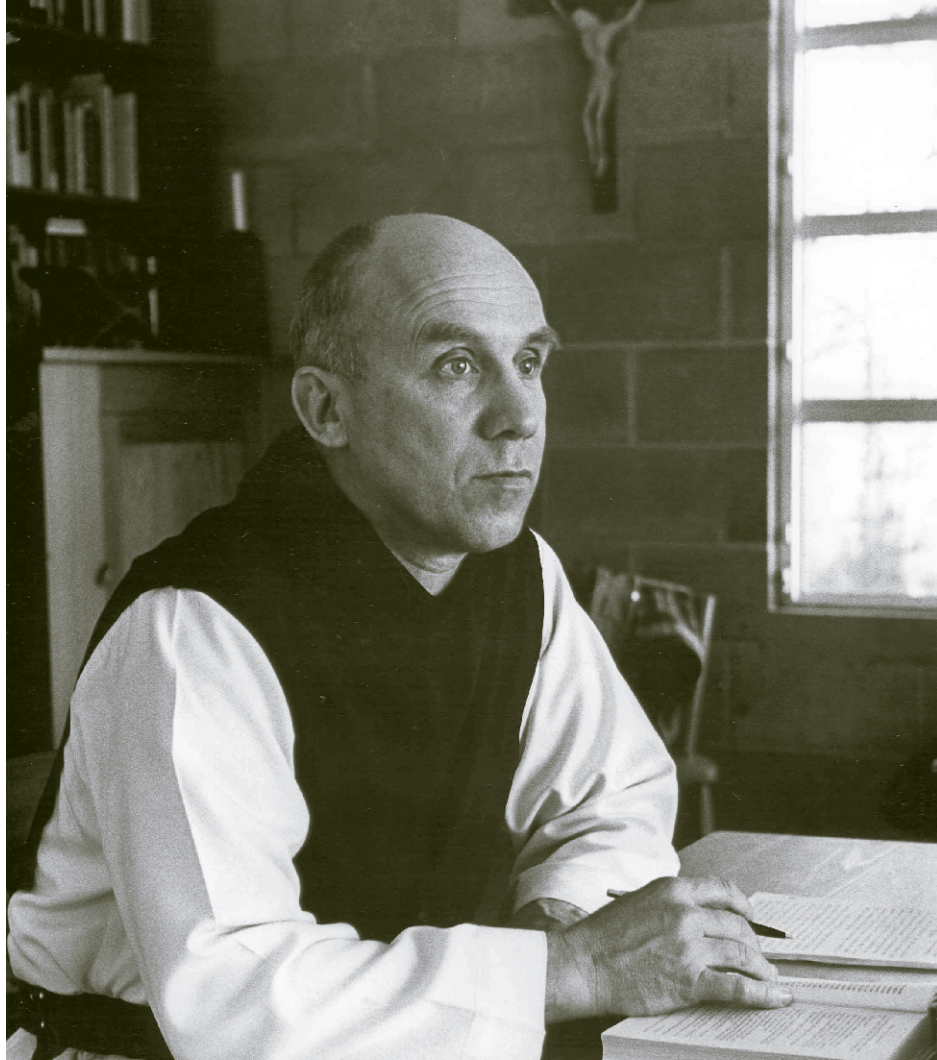
told about his being the most un-silent silent monk in the monastery.

Gradually, Merton saw the need and necessity of this exterior silence as the disciplinary practice of refraining from unnecessary speech in order to foster patience, equanimity, charity, and interiority. It became the initial step to interior silence, the silencing of one's heart for that "all encompassing silence of a mystical experience... an experience that is ineffable..." (- *John Teahan, The Message of Thomas Merton, 1981*). Merton's daily contemplation contributed to the maturation of his thought on both exterior and interior silence as a positive, creative source out of which merged the word/Word as an expression of the truth within himself and God.

Solitude

Benedict, the Father of Western monasticism (480-547 A.D.), was initially a hermit, but over time, when disciples came to join him, he moved from the solitary, eremitical life to a communal lifestyle. When Merton entered the Trappists, the communal or cenobitic life was the only lived reality, with the hermit life now seen as antithetical to communal life.

From the very beginning, Merton



Photograph by John Howard Griffin. Used with permission of the Merton Legacy Trust and the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Kentucky.

felt called to the hermit life, a vocation within a vocation. He spoke of his in-depth desire for more intense physical and interior solitude, a desire that deepened in his years as a Trappist. He researched this aspect of the Trappist life and wrote prolifically about it, only to have these writings strongly censored by his Cistercian order. Despite these many setbacks, Merton's determination and hard work resulted in the eremitical life being restored in 1964 at a meeting of Cistercian abbots of North and South America held at Gethsemani. Now, hermitages would be integral to Trappist monasteries, available to those who felt called to the solitary life. On August 17, 1965, Merton became the first official hermit of the Cistercians since perhaps the Middle Ages.

Contemporary Hermits

Forty years on, both the desire and need for silence and solitude have burgeoned in ways Merton intimated in his writings. Midst rampant consumerism, narcissism, noise pollution, and seeming lack of religion and/or spirituality, contemporary hermit life is growing beyond any specific geography. Women and men, lay and religious are living this vocation, many without the support of formalized structures.

Contemporary hermits, variously called recluses, lay hermits, marketplace hermits, urban hermits, forest dwellers, live their own rhythm of silence, solitude, and contemplation in the midst of their daily lives. Called into silence and solitude for a period each day, a time each week, or full-time, today's hermits gradually develop their own unique rhythm, a

rhythm that informs how they live their lives.

Steeped in a desire for right relationships with all life, one can find contemporary hermits involved in peace and nonviolence vigils, fasts, eco-justice issues, as well as a caring presence in the neighbourhoods of their own specific geographies. Some form support networks through such publications as the quarterly newsletter, *Raven's Bread*, which focuses the different issues, concerns, and insights of many contemporary hermits from around the world.

Thomas Merton, in his life of many twists and turns, followed his deepest desire, that of becoming a full-time hermit. He is a model for us about keeping a dream alive. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of his death, we can remember Merton's passion for following his deepest desires. Like us, he often said he wanted to live into God's deepest desires for him. Still Merton trusted in God's wisdom and love for him even when he was not sure of the way. We also know from deep within, God's deepest desires for us are our deepest desires. And we make the way by walking even when we are not sure of the way.[∞]

Janet Malone, a member of the Congregation of Notre Dame (CND), is a skills trainer, workshop and retreat facilitator, and author of the book, "Transforming Conflict and Anger into Peace and Nonviolence", published by Novalis ISBN: 9782895076926 (2007).



What is mine to do

By Sharon Willan

"I have done what was mine to do...may Christ teach you what you are to do." These words spoken by Francis of Assisi before he died, offered a call and a challenge to his newly formed communities: the Franciscan Brotherhood, the Poor Ladies of San Damiano (Poor Clares today), and the Secular Franciscans. Francis had lived a full Gospel life in which he became Christ for others. His love of God, of neighbour, and of all creatures influenced everyone who came in contact with him. He encouraged those who would follow Christ to be gentle with all of God's creation.

His first female follower, Clare of Assisi, founded the Poor Clares and spent 41 years in the San Damiano convent embracing a contemplative stance and a life of simplicity.

What are we called to do? How can the spirituality of 12th century saints provide a framework or guide to living today?

Francis reminds us that we are companions on a journey and as such we care for each other. In his *Canticle of the Creatures* written a few months before he died, Francis called all living and inanimate things "Brother" and "Sister," thus showing us how intimate a relationship we have with all that the Holy One has created. Francis saw that the world was permeated with the goodness of God. Today, science is reinforcing this vision of intimacy.

We have lived through an amazing technological shift in the past 60 years. We have seen astronauts land on the moon. We have gazed in wonder at galaxies and planets captured by the Hubble telescope. We have been blessed with medical breakthroughs

How can the spirituality of 12th century saints such as Francis and Clare of Assisi provide a framework or guide to living today?

undreamed of 50 years ago, and much more. The iconic picture of Earth from space provides us with a vision of an undivided, unified Earth. Francis' intuitive *Canticle of the Creatures* captured this spirit of interconnection and unity all those years ago.

The journey of prayer

The journey of prayer is the discovery of God at the centre of our lives. We pray that we may recognize the image of God within us, that we may give birth to God, allowing the image in which we are created to become visible.

Clare of Assisi outlines the contemplative stance of prayer as a deepening of our relationship with our Creator. We must first look, she says. We must notice, be observant, pay attention. It is in the eyes of the risen Jesus that we see compassionate love. Jesus lived a life of passion for the good of humanity. He prayed, helped others, showed us how to be servants to each other, critiqued his own faith, and followed a political path that eventually led to his death. Clare reminds us to look at the whole of Jesus' life and learn to live with the same passion that motivated him to love God and neighbour. Clare says that looking at Jesus in this way will lead us to a deeper "gazing" that

will bring us into a closer relationship with God. This in turn will become deep contemplation.

Karl Rahner, when speaking of the planet, said that we must become mystics if humanity is to survive. In contemplation, we look at our world with the eyes of Jesus, gaze with compassion upon the poor and marginalized, contemplate God's love, and then reach out with this compassionate love to all creation. The mystic is a relational person, deeply intimate with the Holy One and deeply committed to the planet. Contemplation and relationship are inextricably woven together.

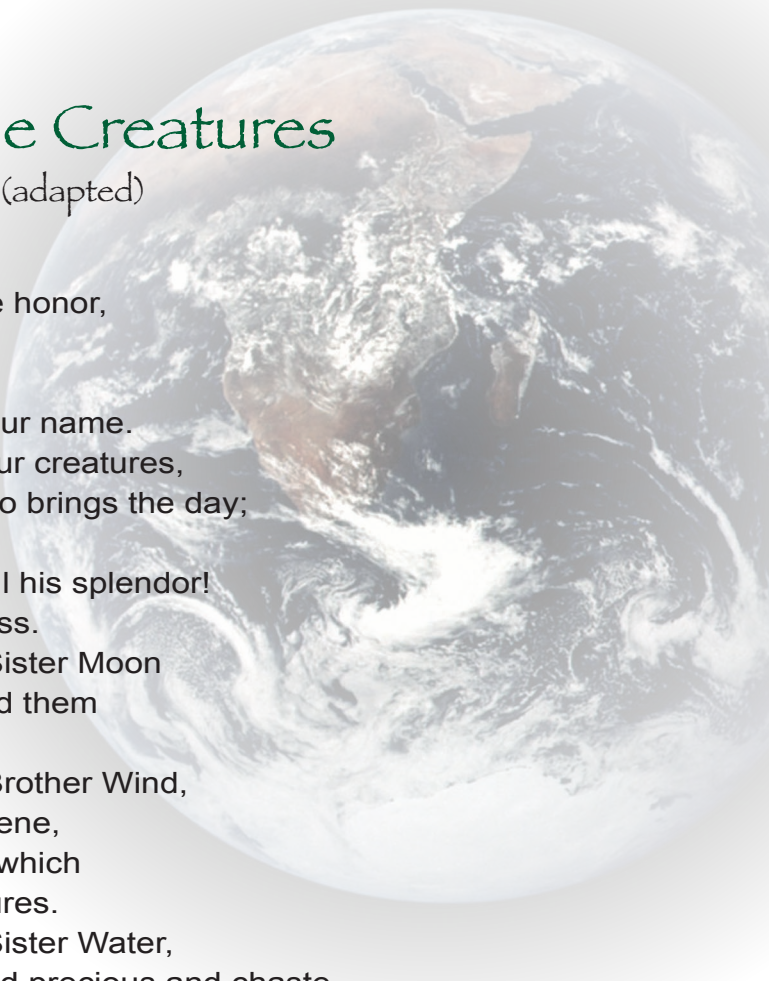
"As Francis deepened his relation to God, the person became less of an object and more a brother and sister. The deeper he entered the mystery of Christ, the more he recognized Christ in the world around him" (Franciscan Prayer, Delio). Franciscan spirituality teaches us that the world is the cloister: we enter the world, remain in it and through the gifts God has given us, we change what needs to be changed.

Contemplation is the cloak that envelops our actions, enhancing our passion for all of life. Without contemplation we soon tire. It is only in taking time to "be" that we can "do" what is ours to do.

By spending time with God on a daily basis, the common good rather than individual benefit would become our way of life. We would truly give birth to God and make God visible as Jesus did. This is what Francis and Clare did with their lives some 800 years ago. It is what we are called to do today.☉

The Canticle of the Creatures

Saint Francis of Assisi (adapted)



O Holy One, Creator of life,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor,
and all blessing.
To You alone do they belong,
and no one is worthy to mention Your name.
Be praised, my God, through all your creatures,
especially through Brother Sun, who brings the day;
and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, O God, he bears the likeness.
Praised be You, my God, through Sister Moon
and the stars, in heaven you formed them
clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my God, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which
You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my God, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my God, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my God, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my God,
through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, they shall become peaceful.
Praised be You, my God,
through our Sister Bodily Death,
who embraces us on our journey home.
Praise and bless my God,
and give You thanks
and serve You with great humility.

Motivated by the Spirit

By Sr. Ann Kiely and Sr. Monica Delaney, F.M.D.M.

Have you ever booked into a place to stay and discovered that it far surpassed your expectations? That was our experience when we arrived at Scarboro Missions in Toronto last August to participate in the Franciscan Internship Program. The three-month program has been held at Scarboro each year for the past five years. We thought that the location would simply serve as our venue. However, we soon discovered that Scarboro Missions is no mere venue, but a vibrant community with open doors not only for our little group but also for many others from around the world.

We are two Sisters of the Congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood. Both of us are enjoying a very welcome sabbatical break as we have been in leadership in our congregation for many years. While in our Motherhouse in England we heard about the internship program and recognized that this would be a helpful preparation for new ministry in the future.

The course is aimed at helping those who have a love for Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare to grow in their appreciation of the rich heritage that Francis and Clare have given us in their Christ-centred spirituality. In addition to deepening our own spiritual journey, the course also offers the foundational material for those who feel called to the ministry of spiritual direction.

We were a group of nine participants representing seven different nations: Canada, England, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Switzerland, and the

Scarboro Missions is a vibrant community with open doors not only for our little group but also for many others from around the world.

United States. This diversity of cultures is itself an enrichment, but this enrichment was further deepened through our participation in the life of the Scarboro community.

Hospitality

Our first contact with Scarboro Missions was at Toronto International Airport when we were greeted by the smiling face of Fr. John Carten. On arrival at their central-house we received exceptional hospitality. From our very first moment we were helped to feel a genuine part of the Scarboro family. And what an amazing family they are. Much of our day was taken up with study and reading related to the course, but our education continued when we met with the priests and lay missionaries in the dining room at meal times. Here we had the privilege of listening to many fascinating mission experiences. We heard stories of incredibly beautiful encounters with people across the globe, stories in which the good news has been proclaimed and received with joy. So often we found ourselves wishing that such moving encounters could be recorded on a wider scale so that the hearts of others could be lifted

in knowing more about the genuine goodness that is happening in our world through Scarboro Missions. Even while we were there we witnessed Fr. Brian Swords being sent to mission in Burma and Fr. Charlie Gervais to Ecuador.

Attending daily Mass we learned much from the fervour of this praying community. We also received real nourishment from the reflections on the Word of God, reflections that are frequently drawn from the ways in which the Scarboro missionaries have recognized the face of God in those they serve.

Just as we were received with great hospitality by Scarboro Missions, we were impressed by the way many others from a wide variety of countries were received. There are members of other foreign mission societies staying at Scarboro while in Canada to do studies and also to learn English. At present, there are priests and seminarians from mission societies in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Nigeria. The family atmosphere is such that we were often at table together, Franciscans, Scarboro members, and other foreign missionaries all sharing values that are important in today's world.

Interfaith dialogue

Another area that impressed us while living here at Scarboro is their commitment to developing healthy interfaith dialogue. We were delighted to participate in some of the Education Series organized by Scarboro's Department of Interfaith Dialogue. One of these events was "Exploring the Common Elements in



2008 Franciscan Internship Program participants. Scarboro Missions, Toronto. Photo right: Franciscan Sisters Monica Delaney and Ann Kiely (second and third from left) and Scarboro lay missionaries Mary Olenick (left) and Kate O'Donnell (far right) at a Scarboro community gathering.

the World's Religions" during which J.W. Windland, a specialist in interreligious dialogue, highlighted the factors common to all religions through a very effective Powerpoint presentation.

Perhaps Scarboro's greatest contribution to building a global interfaith community is through the inspirational Golden Rule poster. We were particularly impressed to hear how this poster has been widely received in the English-speaking world and is now translated into many languages. We look forward to extending this message of the Golden Rule through the posters we carried home to share with our Sisters. They will use the posters in the different countries to which they are missioned.

Spiritual reflection

We were also amazed to discover another unexpected activity taking place at Scarboro. Through their vibrant Mission Centre, Scarboro has responded to the spiritual hunger in the world by offering opportunities for reflection and enrichment to a wide variety of people from different backgrounds. While at Scarboro we saw the Mission Centre opening its doors to people of all ages from youth to adults, as well as to people from all religions. We were particularly encouraged by the number of young people at the Centre whose faces shine with God-given joy and so give us great hope for the future of our world. What is so inspirational is that all who come to the Centre are seeking God in differ-

ent ways. We were struck by the way the young express their search with energy and exuberance, while adult groups such as the Zen Meditation and the Christian Meditation groups express theirs through a contemplative silence that pervades the whole Scarboro house.

While we were at Scarboro Missions, the community celebrated the 90th anniversary of their founding as a mission society. We were privileged to be invited to join the 300 participants in a mass of thanksgiving for God's blessings on this courageous group of missionaries. The Powerpoint presentation at the conclusion of the day showed the past, present, and future of this missionary community. This presentation confirmed for us that the wonderful spirit that we experienced over the past few months has always been a part of Scarboro Missions' way of life described so aptly in their Mission Statement:

"...motivated by the Spirit, we dedicate ourselves to the person, teaching, and mission of Jesus Christ who said, 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full'" (John 10:10).

We left this place very much enriched not only by the Franciscan Internship Program but in a special way by living among a group of people who continue to respond to what Jesus said he came to do: "I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."∞

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Buddhist monks in dialogue with Fr. Gerald Vogin of the Paris Foreign Mission Society and Vicar General of the diocese of Kompong Cham, Cambodia.

FOUR LEVELS OF DIALOGUE

In 1984, the Vatican's Secretariat for Non-Christians issued a document entitled *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions (Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission)*. The document described interreligious dialogue in this way:

"It [dialogue] means not only discussion, but also includes all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment."

Dialogue and Mission identifies four levels of interreligious dialogue:

- **the dialogue of life** where Christians and others live together in a neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their problems, and their preoccupations with one another;
- **the dialogue of deeds** where Christians and others work together in the pursuit of humanitarian, social, economic, or political goals;
- **the dialogue of theological exchange** where specialists deepen their understanding of each other's spiritual values;
- **the dialogue of religious experience** where Christians and others share with each other their experiences of searching for the Absolute.

This page compiled by Scarboro's Department of Interfaith Dialogue

Jesus and other spiritual traditions

How did Jesus of Nazareth view people of other faiths? How did Jesus relate to people of other religions? Did Jesus value the teachings and practices of other faiths?

Generally speaking, these are not questions that Christians have bothered to wrestle with throughout Church history. But the 20th century witnessed a profound shift in this regard. The growing international situation of reli-

gious pluralism combined with dramatic advances in biblical scholarship have pushed the envelope.

Throughout the world, more and more Christians are now studying the New Testament with these burning questions in mind.

One of the themes of the Bible is that God is a God of universal salvation—God's love and God's covenant extends to all humanity. We find this theme in both the Hebrew Scriptures and in the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus was aware of having been sent to the Jews: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). But on occasion he crossed the boundaries of race, culture, and religion.

On several occasions in the New Testament, Jesus affirmed the faith of individuals who were not Jews. He even presented non-Jews ("pagans") as models of faith; for example, the Canaanite (Syro-Phoenician) woman whose daughter he healed (Matthew 15:21-28). Jesus was so amazed by the faith of the Roman centurion that he remarked, "Truly, I tell you, nowhere in Israel have I found such faith" (Matthew 8:10).

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) contains a challenging interfaith message. The Samaritans were not Jews. Indeed, there was much animosity between the two groups. The Jews of New Testament times viewed the Samaritans and their religion as inferior.

But, as was his custom, Jesus used an anecdote to challenge the conventional wisdom. In the parable, it is the Samaritan—the outsider—who proves faithful, not the two religiously observant individuals who belong to Jesus' own faith group. The moral of the story is clear: God's love is universal—it is not restricted to any specific group, race, culture, or religion.

When Jesus sat by the Samaritan woman at the well and even spent two days in her village (John 4:4-42), he was breaking a taboo—Jews were forbidden to have contact with the despised Samaritans.∞

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An Ecuador experience

By Peter Bagnall

After months of anticipation, the fab five: Julia Duarte, Fr. Terry Gallagher, Kate O'Donnell, Kathy Murtha, and I—all delegates from Scarboro Missions—boarded a plane headed south on our way to the Missionary Congress of the Americas. We landed first in Bogota, Colombia, and were hustled through three security checkpoints before boarding a plane for Quito, Ecuador. The small airport in Quito was crammed with people and most of the arrivals were attending the Congress.

Within an hour we made it to a central parish where we were to meet our host families. It was another couple of hours before our bags arrived so we made good use of our time dancing to the Congress theme song and mingling with Ecuadorians and their guests from all over the Americas.

“Amer-i-ca! Amer-i-ca! Amer-i-ca con Cristo!” the song rang out through the night and we danced away until our bags arrived around 2:00 a.m. and we finally made it to our host families and our beds.

My experience with my host family—16-year-old Bernardo and his Mom, Marybell—was one of the highlights of the Congress. They were very generous, even inviting me to join a family prayer gathering and a birthday party for Bernardo. However, I think my favourite memory of my host family was simply walking around town with them and chatting about life in Ecuador, in Canada, and in the Church. Marybell was very proud of her city, her country, and her people. I was impressed by the city of Quito, nestled in a valley surrounded by the Andes mountains. But even more, I



Approximately 3,100 participants from all over the Americas attended the third Missionary Congress of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador, from August 12-17, 2008.

was in awe of Marybell's larger family and the people that I met, full of welcome and hospitality, friendly as can be, and quick to share customs, traditions, and stories.

A buzz of activity

The Congress itself was a never-ending buzz of activity. It was interesting to see so many missionaries, about 3,100, filling a large conference centre and wildly waving flags to represent their country. Those who hasten to build bridges through cross-cultural ministry still maintain a great level of national pride and don't hesitate to make it clear where they come from.

The keynote presentations at the Congress were in Spanish and diffi-

cult to follow through the translators provided; however, I do remember one cardinal from Colombia speaking not only about the guidance of the Spirit, but also about the *pushing* of the Spirit. He said that the Spirit pushes us in every direction: *out* to be with others, *over* to lend a hand to those less fortunate, *in* to our own depths to learn more about ourselves, and ultimately *up* to the One who created us. This talk became for me a bit of a metaphor for the entire Congress. We were all inspired to chat and connect with people from many different countries—even if we didn't speak their language. We were challenged to face the reality of poverty in the streets and marketplaces of downtown Quito. We were led into prayer on a number of



Left: The closing mass of the Congress. Below: Scarboro delegates to the Congress (L-R Kathy Murtha, Kate O'Donnell, Julia Duarte, and Peter Bagnall) celebrate with Bishop Victor Corral (centre) of the Diocese of Riobamba where Scarboro missionaries have served for many years. After the Congress, these delegates visited some of the Indigenous communities that Scarboro accompanies on the slopes of Mount Chimborazo.



occasions, with our host parish community, our host families, or with the entire Congress. We shared lunch with a group of Colombian Sisters one day and Indigenous Ecuadorians the next. The Spirit guided us through the four chaotic, action-packed, and wonder-filled days of the Congress.

A visit to Riobamba

Following the Congress we thought we would have a chance to relax for a couple of days in Riobamba where Scarboro missionaries have served for many years. Little did we know that Fr. Charlie Gervais had different plans for us. Nelson, our driver, drove us past spectacular mountain views to Riobamba where we were treated to pizza, wine, and Indigenous music. The next day, we headed up to the mountainous regions. It was in the small village of Pulingui San Pablo that I was most amazed by the people and especially the warmth and love they had for Fr. Charlie and for Julia Duarte, one of our group and an Ecuadorian. Julia and her husband Tom Walsh had worked in this area for many years as Scarboro missionaries.

While we were there the people were working together to finish the construction of a school in the village that would serve several communities in the area. The people live in traditional straw huts and may not have a lot of modern amenities, but they have



each other. And they were remarkably open to joking around and having fun with us even though we didn't speak the same language.

It was inspiring to hear about projects that the people have accomplished with assistance from Scarboro missionaries. We visited Casa Condor, a tourist centre and hostel promoting eco-tourism in the region. We saw the Jambi Kiwa factory where Indigenous women with knowledge of herbal remedies have started a tea company and are now shipping their products around the world. And we visited a housing complex in the city of Riobamba that accommodates Indigenous people who come down

from the mountains.

We enjoyed meeting many Ecuadorians in our tours of the Riobamba mission. For this traveller, a return to Ecuador—the land of big mountains and big hearts—to learn and share in the culture and life of the people would be most welcome. The Missionary Congress of the Americas was a wonderful experience, made even more so by the hospitality and warmth of the Ecuadorian people.∞

Peter Bagnall spent last summer working and living at Scarboro Missions in Toronto and learning about the work of mission today. He is now in France living at a l'Arche community.



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