

"True trust in God we learn in times of need." Mother Bernarda

Edition 2021: Menzingen



**LIFE**



**Mother Bernarda**

**Celebrating 200 years**



# “Trust is the source of inner joy.”

Mother Bernarda 1822 – 2022



The cradle of our Holy Cross Congregation is located in the hub of a small rural village, Menzingen. From its conception planted in the heart and mind of two ordinary people, with big hearts for love and service of God, its founders, Fr Theodosius Florentini and Mother Bernarda Heimgartner, the mystery of life was given birth and quickly developed a unique charism and spirituality. 200 years later we see an ever-growing emergence of life rooted in the legacy and dreams of its beginnings that spread beyond the frontiers of Europe to Asia, Africa and Latin America. This growth contemplates the universal and transformative presence of the ‘Living Christ’ who continues the good work of love and service in each sister and lay associate of the Congregation today, for which we are uniquely called and are ever grateful.

*The stories encapsulated in this magazine will uncover the beauty of mystery that lives on...*



# A CLEAR, LIMPID and FRUITFUL VISION

Dear Sisters,

Since the location of the Generalate moved from Lucerne to Menzingen, not a day goes by without each of us visiting Mother Bernarda's chapel and stopping by her tomb to pray. As a community we have also chosen to celebrate Vespers on Friday, not in our new house, but next to Mother Bernarda to ask for light in our choices and to entrust all the needs of our Congregation.

We are not the only ones praying in that chapel. Many of our sisters from the houses of Menzingen and many people pass and stop there, in sacred silence. Many times, they write their concerns and their needs to be remembered during Mass in the Mother House.



A deceased person is not mourned in this chapel. We celebrate life, we feel protected, inspired, enlightened. The silence that is felt is not an empty, heavy silence. It is a living silence, full of life and words. Filled with a maternal presence.

This doesn't just happen in the chapel. In fact, in this place of the origins of our Congregation one still feels the spiritual charm of a woman who on October 17, 1844, together with two other sisters, entered this small village in Switzerland, immersed in the countryside, and transformed her life and that of the people through education and evangelization.

Poverty at that time was great and the means available were very few. But all this, together with other challenges and difficulties that we all know - did not affect Mother Bernarda's fidelity to the charism she received. And as she was faithful to the gifts of the Spirit, life flourished, spread, renewed itself and fascinated ... she did not know death.

On various occasions and documents the Church has invited all consecrated persons to set out again from the sources of the charism to rediscover her vitality and fruitfulness.

This does not mean "resurrecting" the past. Rather, it means "*cleaning*" our mentality, our community and mission structures, so that our choices can draw more clearly and creatively on the original charism. This is what happens in nature. Only the clear flowing water of the spring is clean, it can quench your thirst and make life blossom ... Polluted or stagnant water kills you and cannot be drunk.

From the articles that each Province has written for this LIFE, the miracles of a charism and a spirituality clearly emerge

which, thanks to the fidelity of Mother Bernarda and many sisters, has crossed the world and people's lives. Our own life.

Dear Sisters, in preparation for this 200th anniversary of the birth of Mother Bernarda, I wish you and me courage and discernment; courage to leave what no longer meets the needs of this world and discernment to recover together that clear, limpid and fruitful vision of the Spirit which allowed Mother Bernarda to promote a more human and Christian life in the society of her time.



I share with you what Pope Francis said to the Superior Generals in May 2019:

***"Do not be afraid to be few, but to be insignificant,  
to stop being the light that enlightens  
those who are immersed in the "dark night" of history"*** (10 May 2019)

May we therefore help each other not to cease to be light... as Mother Bernarda was and continues to be today. It is the best gift we can give to each other and that we can give to the world!

Thank you for all that you are and give

*12. Dorema*

Congregational Leader



Stained glass windows in Mother Bernarda's chapel, Mother House, Menzingen

# On the Anniversary of Mother Bernarda Heimgartner



On the occasion of the 200th birthday of Mother Bernarda Heimgartner, I would like to give thanks to God for the common roots of our two Institutes and for the fraternity that has developed.

Mother Bernarda and Mother Maria Theresa began their work under the motto: "In Cruce Salus" "In the Cross is Salvation". (cf. Thomas Binotto, Through All Storms, 2003) Both women were blessed by God with rich gifts. They were pioneers in their time, and they were trusted and expected to do immeasurable things. Both possessed a great capacity for suffering and an unshakable trust in God's merciful guidance. They gave all troubles, sorrows and difficulties to the cross, a connection, from which salvation and blessings flow forth for both Institutes today. They were strong women led by the Spirit of God.

Mother Bernarda's words are good for us, especially in our time full of crises and uncertainties, and they remain very current:

"God finds us in his mercy wherever we are" and "I rejoice in your cheerfulness and wish you joy and happiness together."

From this basic attitude of joy and trust, the bond between the two Institutes, Menzingen and Ingenbohl, could grow, here in Europe as well as in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Meetings and other events of cooperation on several levels continue to express our very special relationship with each other to this day.

It is a little bit like Mother Bernarda speaking again to all sisters of the Holy Cross on her 200th birthday: "Within ourselves we cherish the confidence that the work we have begun will succeed". (Mother Bernarda Heimgartner)

May God bless all of you and may He continue what is according to His plan and the need of the time.

*In the name of the Generalate of Ingenbohl,  
I wish you a touching and blessed Jubilee  
Year in cordial and sisterly solidarity.*

*Yours, Sr. Marija Brizar  
Ingenbohl, March 2021*



Mother Bernarda and Mother Theresa Scherzer



# A living legacy drawn from our Common Source...

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# Women of Living Faith

## (German Province)

*'You are my God, my Creator, my Redeemer, my Bridegroom, my Love, my dearest Father'' 'God really loves you' (Mother Bernarda)*

The first part of Mother Bernarda's quotation, comes from a letter to Sr Elisabeth Zürcher in 1851/1852. It is part of a prayer that Mother Bernarda writes for Sr Elizabeth. From what we know about Sr Elizabeth it is possible that she suffered from depression. Mother Bernarda offers a possible approach to Sr. Elizabeth. She invites her to stop focusing on her personal problems and instead focus on God. On a loving God who turns towards humanity as Creator, Redeemer, Bridegroom, Lover and best Father.

In preparation to write this article each community of sisters in our Province met for prayer and faith-sharing on this quote from Mother Bernarda. Before I share with you the fruits of our sharing, I would like to share some of our basic findings, namely, many sisters experienced the exchange very enriching. There were many personal

expressions about one's own image of God. Many sisters found it touching to hear about the experiences of living faith from each other. There was even the desire to actively engage again more with Mother Bernarda, her attitude of faith and her image of God.

***My God, my Creator** - "In my life I have been able to experience again and again that my **Creator** has guided me." "My Creator made me the way I am and He also loves me the way I am" (Sisters' Group Sr. Judith).*

*"In the last few months, together with other helpers, I was able to open up new perspectives for a sick person and thus become a **co-creator**. I was able to experience how fostering life fills me with joy. (Sr. Manuela)*

***God's creative power** is present for me in every person and in the diversity of nature. I bear witness to him by my life. At my rehab stay, I was the only one who made the sign of the cross and prayed before eating. Soon I was asked if I was a religious. Conversations about faith started coming easy. (Sr. Doris)*

*"In my encounters with the children and young people in the youth welfare institution, I want to convey that every human being is accepted, valued and loved by God. More than with words, I want to show this through my being and my behavior." (Sr. Chiara)*

***My Saviour** - "As I get older, I'm troubled by some things in my life. God is my **Saviour**. What is still unredeemed, He redeems. The world also needs redemption!" "In our situation in the world, we desperately need a Saviour. We can't do it alone, that is what we see right now during the Corona situation." (Sisters' Group Sr. Edith /Sr. Donata)*

***God as Saviour or Redeemer** has become a reality for the people in our parish. In the midst of the Corona Pandemic, 2020, and the restrictions imposed by it we talked to people as much as this was possible and invited them to come to us. They were very grateful that we did not retreat in fear, but instead went out to meet them. We could feel that our trust in God touched them, that they, too, no longer fearfully withdrew because of Corona. When the hard lockdown came,*

we finally used social media and let people, young and old, participate in our prayer digitally once a week. We were very surprised that each time a large group, between 60 and 220 people, took advantage of this opportunity. They reported back that this brought them out of isolation as Christians. (Sr. Franziska)

"I am experiencing **God's redemptive power** in trying to offer what is possible despite all the limitations the pandemic currently brings, e.g, Spiritual accompaniment digitally, spiritual exercises in daily life, meditations with live music, etc, at the same time this lets me experience how grateful people are. All this gives them new hope and strength in their faith." (Sr. Conrada)

Sr. Tharsilla and Sr. Pauline also report: "Even though we are not allowed to hold public services now, we still "hold the fort" here at the Church by our praying and being there, representing many. We encourage parishioners in their faith during "casual" conversations outside the Church."



**My Bridegroom:** "It makes me realize anew: Jesus is my **Bridegroom** who stands by me, knows me and accompanies me. I live my relationship with Jesus, my Bridegroom especially in prayer, adoration, Holy Mass, the Rosary and in silence. I pass on my faith in my encounters with children, staff and parents. Being a religious sister, I witness to my relationship with Jesus as my Bridegroom." Sr Elisabeth

**"My dearest Father... My Father in heaven** is everything to me: Father and Mother. Especially since I had a difficult relationship with my father, I try to teach the children and young people about the good Father in heaven when I work at the children's home."

"I didn't know my father because he was killed in the war. Only recently have I discovered God as the merciful Father and a relationship of trust has developed." (from the Sisters' Group of Sr Lucia and Sr Anna-Mirjam)

Many sisters describe how they want to communicate God's presence in their concrete daily life through small deeds, but above all through their attitudes and their very being. One sister in the Mussenhausen community puts it this way: "I want people to feel that I find fulfillment in God's love and that I live from it." Sr Verena, who works internally at the nursing station in Altötting, says: "In caring for, nurturing and meeting our elderly fellow sisters, we can let some of the **love of God** shine through."

**All these examples show how Mother Bernarda's image of God also influences our daily lives. As women of faith, we may bear witness today to Him and His reality.**

# The Joy of Consecrated Life

## (House Italy)

**"Where there are religious, there is joy," says Pope Francis.**

**"Be glad and happy in the Lord" echoes Mother Bernarda's message to her sisters.**

The content of this article reflects the voices and experiences of the sisters of House Italy who share their joy of living the consecrated life...

Mother Bernarda invites us to see ourselves with the eyes of the loving and good Father who gives us confidence and makes our hearts happy and peaceful in every situation.



...the joy of Consecrated Life!

In fulfilling God's will, we can live happily in joy and pain. Mother Bernarda invites us to be happy even in the midst of sufferings, because one day they will become our joy:

*"We carry the Cross happily since it is the inheritance of the bride and of the disciples of Christ. Stay faithful to your bridegroom, who is unparalleled, the one who can most surely give you happiness" - she wrote to a sister.*

Living joyfully is already being on mission and through this joy our lives can become credible and contagious ... But the experience of service can also be an experience of fatigue, suffering, misunderstanding, doubt, discouragement...

Looking at the "*Bridegroom who has no equal*" who first loved and called us to Himself, to send us on a mission by collaborating in the building up of the Kingdom, can fill our hearts and make us happy by overcoming the temptation to seek happiness elsewhere.

With God's help, living with serenity and loving the positive and difficult occasions that life offers to each one, transforms them into personal choices. It is a journey of self-giving and purification to adhere to the Father's Will for the good of people, thus making our frailties blessings, because the challenges help us to become more authentic.

A path that we can walk at all ages because "we are always on mission" even if we are sick in the hospital, in our homes for the elderly; even when we feel helpless, weak, or facing serious problems.



**Even fraternal life, lived in community, becomes the heart and the fire of the mission which makes one capable of making sacrifices for Jesus, the Bridegroom, who gave and gives his life for us daily.**

Jesus, who in order to save us, made Himself a servant out of love to make a total self-giving possible for us. He invites us to wash each other's feet, following the example of Mother Bernarda who lived with love, the daily martyrdom for the good" *of the Work that God had begun in her.* "

We too, today, can ask ourselves if our life of prayer as Sisters of the Holy Cross, and therefore of intimacy with the Father, in love with Jesus the Bridegroom, who lives in us, is the desire to give ourselves to the other and to wash each other's feet as a living testimony of the Paschal Mystery

So fraternal life educates us to a life of gratuitousness, acceptance, humility and forgiveness in the logic of love that pushes us to bear each other's burdens, because the sister is not a burden for you, but belongs to you... it is a gift that the Lord gives you to mature and grow together.

And from the heart can only spring a song of gratitude for the immense joy and peace in living as sisters, different in character, culture, formation but united by the same Charism: ***Jesus Crucified and Risen*** to be announced today to the person whose lives are lost and confused, sometimes desperate in this world traversed by the scourge of a virus that seems to give no respite.

In this context of challenge for the whole world, we too find ourselves immersed in hardships, problems linked to health, grief, new material and spiritual poverty and here too we feel strongly on a mission to create life. We can stand in the breach as women

who collaborate for the transformation of the world in fidelity to our Charism, sustained by the fidelity of our *Bridegroom* who is always with us: in the Eucharist celebrated and lived, in the Word broken and shared daily, a look at our many brothers and sisters who live dramatic realities around us and throughout the world. With this enlarged vision we feel part of the Family of God, the Church, which is concerned about her children, families, young people, the elderly, the poor and all its members. And our prayer, first of all, becomes more intense and our charity more attentive to our neighbour.

Even keeping ourselves informed helps us feel we are all in the same boat (Pope Francis) to live these moments together, feeling part of the same body, eager to give our contribution. This happens when we are questioned or even simply entrusting the "anguish" to the "merciful Father" for all his children, or invoking the joy of heaven to the many dead today. Our living as brides is being in communion with Him, walking after Him, sharing His great desire that "His kingdom" may come today as well.

Our fidelity to His love may be fragile but it rests on His **FIDELITY** which has always been. This spurs us to concretely live our personal relationship as women in love with Jesus, as when, at our first profession, we pronounced with the enthusiasm of our youth: "**HERE I AM**" ... with the commitment to renew my life every day.

**"Expect much, yes all from God."**

# **Walking in the Footsteps of Mother Bernarda today**

## **(South Indian Province)**

Whenever God intends to intervene in history, He prepares a human being for the task. God calls this particular person out of her/his normal situations of life and prepares for His mission (Abraham, Moses, all the Biblical Prophets). He puts His Spirit upon them (cf. Is 61:<sup>1-2</sup>; Lk 4:<sup>18-19</sup>) so that they may become His prophets. In the same way, God prepared Mother Bernarda and filled her with His Spirit so that through her the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross may come into existence.

Mother Bernarda was quite clear that the new Congregation is the work of God and it is the Spirit who moves it ahead. The Charism of the Congregation is the will of God. Therefore, to live the Charism is an imperative for its members.

We, the daughters of Mother Bernarda continue to discern the will of God to make our ministries effective according to the time and place. We do this to promote faith, and thus life to our society.

Indian Holy Cross mission (1906) was the initiative of the then Quilon Bishop, Rt. Rev Aloysius Maria Benziger. From then onwards, along with the Church, we find new ways and means reading the signs of the time to enter into the lives of the people with the Good News. As Pope Francis describes at the Synod of Amazon, we can say that in experiencing the beauty of moving forward together with the local Church, we open new pathways for the proclamation of the Gospel. To venture into the deep, we collaborate with the Church and find out new ministries intending to allow the Good News to reach out to the lives of the people.

Our pioneer sisters made their presence wanted by the Church, government and civilians by their devoted service to the sick people in government hospitals when caring for the sick was considered as menial work. Today, the attitude towards nursing has changed and now it has become a source of income. While for most of the lay nurses “nursing” is no more a service, the presence of our sisters in government hospitals is like a lamp on the lampstand. Their light shines in the darkness where injustice, bribery, mishandling of medicine and other supplies for treatment are happening. In this world of darkness, since the presence of our sisters is a threat to other staff, they even face the risk of losing their post in government hospitals, though they serve there on honorary base. However, knowing well their responsibility as a religious, they serve witnessing Gospel values.

Other than traditional ministries (healing and teaching), which were the most needed ministries of those days, today we focus on women and children, sexually abused girls, mentally disturbed people, who need psychological support, the unemployed, the aged, the migrants, and refugees. We are involved in the struggles of those who live on the peripheries and improve the quality of their lives. We reach out to the houses of the poor, the sick, the aged, the unwanted and people who lack life in its many forms and help them in their helplessness. This is being done in collaboration with the local Dioceses and with other Congregations, in social service centres, women and children development projects, Diocesan marriage tribunals, teaching theology to lay-people, and pastoral ministries.

Inspired by Mother Bernarda, we too analyse the situations in which we live and work and find out the root cause of the problems and ask what can we do as Holy Cross Sisters?

At the outskirts of Kerala, in a tribal village a group of people live without any access even to their basic needs. Though they are supposed to get all the privileges from the

Government, we directly engage taking care of the sexually abused children and giving them accommodation in our centre. We also collaborate with the department of Police for legal and safety issues. Lots of risks are involved in this ministry. By trusting in Divine Providence, our sisters take care of them fully and enable their holistic development.



government, often they go unnoticed. They are unaware of their own rights due to lack of literacy and education. Living with them, facing all the challenges, our sisters provide medical aid to the families and give education to the children. Many years of hard work and dedication brought life and real transformation to this tribal community.

Poor people from other states of India find Kerala a better place to earn their livelihood. There are also women migrants who come as domestic workers. Most of them are not treated fairly in the families where they work. One of the main aims of our sisters who are engaged in social work is to risk their lives and to protect and promote fair working conditions and just wages to these migrant workers especially to women workers. By focusing on these individuals who are far away from their families, dreaming of a better future, we contribute for the betterment of families and thus a better society. In collaboration with

Today, because of the pressure from within and outside, many of the people undergo depression. Evaluating its impact that affects not only these individuals but their families, and society, we provide an atmosphere to release their tension by running music school, music therapy in hospitals, making ourselves available to listen to them, and giving them counselling and psychological support. Following the example of Mother Bernarda, today we Holy Cross sisters live our prophetic role in our own context like our pioneer sisters, knowing well that the Congregation is entrusted to us by God. In varied measures and with a diversity of expressions, we offer the necessary contribution to the Church and to the proclamation of the Gospel to all. As members of the Body of Christ, we make ourselves available to the Church and its mission. Thus, we live the Charism of the Congregation and the dream of Mother Bernarda locally and contribute globally as Holy Cross Sisters.



# New Life Emerging through the Cross

## (North Indian Province)

The Cross of Jesus Christ is the most significant, liberating, redeeming and glorious sign of **new life** in all of human history. It is the sign of salvation, blessing and new life. *“The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”* <sup>1</sup> Cor 1:18. The richness of the Cross brought us salvation because Jesus made the sacrifice of His life with love, in obedience to the Father’s will. The ongoing power from the Cross is the power of love which is life transforming and is at work in every moment of our life. There is nothing more puzzling and more difficult to grasp than the meaning of the Cross. To experience the power and wisdom of the Cross is exceedingly difficult because we do not understand what the Cross truly signifies. Even for the disciples of Jesus, He had to explain the meaning of the Cross during their walk to Emmaus. We need to see the Cross as the magnificent symbol of love conquering hate and of light overcoming darkness.

The missionary zeal in the in the post Vatican II era. responded to the call Bishops to uplift our North had not yet heard of Jesus. The **“NEW LIFE THROUGH THE** context of the North took ten years before province in 1990.

The Congregation had already made inroads into the interior of North and North Eastern soil with the prospects of faith-formation and social transformation through education and health care. It was the illiteracy, poverty, and disease drew our attention. Our then superiors with their vision, foresight and discernment collaborated with the Capuchins in Eastern and Central Uttar Pradesh where they were already engaged in pastoral and education mission, initiated by Italian Capuchins.

Our pioneering sisters made their entry into this mission, facing all the hurdles with great missionary zeal, joy, and enthusiasm. What gave wings to the dream was our organized socio-pastoral ministry which took root in

Church in India, saw an upsurge  
Our Congregation  
from the North Indian  
evangelize and  
Indian people who  
the Good News  
reflection on the  
**EMERGING**  
**CROSS”** in the  
Indian Province,  
the beginning of the



every area of our mission from the very beginning of Holy Cross presence in North India. Our sisters went to the grassroots, trained local people as animators, empowered women through non-formal education and formation of Self-Help Groups, brought awareness on health, social issues, and human rights. They networked with governmental and non-governmental agencies in controlling communicable diseases like Tuberculosis, Leprosy, Malaria and Filariasis. They also reached out to places of natural disasters. Slowly and steadily changes took place in the lives of people as they heard the Gospel and a new generation started growing with enlightenment which came through education.

Primary health care facilities were set up in remote places where essential medical facilities were not available. They worked tirelessly in these limited situations of lack of qualified doctors and other trained personnel, placing their trust in the Lord who called them. Many lives from death situations were saved especially mothers and children. Slowly schools and hospitals came up with collective efforts with the Capuchins and Dioceses. These missions are scattered along the Indo-Pak border, heart of North India and North Eastern Tribal India. The unique feature of these missions is that they are situated in the remote villages, where they could serve the poorest of the poor facing the challenges of providing quality services.

Another life-giving venture our visionaries had taken up in 1980s was to collaborate with a lay surgeon specialized in treating cancer patients with a compassionate vision of giving decent and dignified care for terminally ill and dying cancer patients. The first hospice was built in Bandra, Bombay, and the first of its kind in the country with the logo ***“Add life to days, not days to life”***. Thousands of dying patients were individually accompanied by our sisters, who have touching testimonies. This pioneering mission has inspired many more organizations to set up hospices and palliative care facilities in different parts of the country.

Our Province also collaborated with Red Cross India in giving care to patients suffering from tuberculosis. A few of our sisters were engaged in prison ministry until recently. Some of our sisters are devoted to take care of leprosy patients who are

ostracized by the society. We are also engaged in rescuing “girl children at risk” offering holistic, personal development and education, giving them new life.

As in the early stages of our Congregation, the sisters of the Province had to face many challenges and difficulties in equipping them for various ministries in the context of vast areas with different cultures, languages, extremes of climate and sicknesses. In this process many of our sisters contracted tuberculosis which was rampant in the areas where our sisters were engaged in mission. As the years rolled by, they learned the local languages and adjusted to climatic conditions. Some sisters fell victim to the dreaded disease of cancer and some of our pioneers and those in active mission had to go to their eternal reward in their 60s. In spite of all these limitations the missions flourished, the standard of living of the people improved in the families and villages. The faith of the small Christian communities was nourished. New missions in the villages also helped to promote a good number of vocations to our Congregation.

If the above could be called internal struggles, there were those of the political situations, the consequences of caste system, illiteracy, child labour, child marriage, discrimination of women and growing polarisations leading to the disruption of the religious harmony. Growing fundamentalism and the new policies of the government are interfering with our life and mission at times. During these challenges and struggles the sisters find joy in serving people believing that new life emerges from the Cross.

At this time, we are reminded of the words of Mother Bernarda:

***“Give thanks to the Lord for every suffering. This is the most beautiful prayer.  
Your suffering will one day be your glory”***



# Living the Paschal Mystery in uncertain times

## (Southern African Province)

Living the Paschal Mystery according to Pope Francis is the *basis of conversion*. When we reflect upon it, no true experience of the Paschal Mystery will leave us “unchanged”. This is because, as the Pope says in his message for Lent 2020, “Jesus’ Pasch is not a past event; rather, through the power of the Holy Spirit it is ever present, enabling us to see and touch with faith the flesh of Christ in those who suffer”. For the Holy Cross Sisters today, following the footsteps of Mother Bernarda by going to the “peripheries”, this conversion experience is very relevant, because there we “see and touch the flesh of Christ” anew on a daily basis.

In our Province, Sisters have lost their loved ones due to Covid19, and in some cases, due to lockdown restrictions, could not attend funerals. This makes us grieve in the silence of our hearts, as we are not able to be with our loved ones, and only God’s grace will heal this with time. Our motto, “IN CRUCE SALUS” then makes more sense as “it points to faith in the redemptive power of the Cross of Christ and is for every sister a wellspring of strength, joy and hope” (Article 17: Page 47).

The Coronavirus Pandemic, which is disabling, due to lockdowns, has given us a deeper sharing in the Paschal Mystery. We “see and touch Jesus’ flesh” more in communities by making extra efforts to protect self and others. “The new normal” has become a common phrase nowadays, calling us to embrace new ways of living. I think if we were to rephrase it into Holy Cross language, we would be calling it “promoting life in the midst of limits”. This “new normal” has left us all with no choice but to change our lifestyle, so as to keep safe and at the same time redefine peripheries in our communities.



In our communities where members were infected by the disease or even when suspected, our levels of anxiety rose because of fear of death, infection, being quarantined and not wanting to be excluded. This was mixed with the desire to ‘reach out’ to others, to love community members and families.

Here in Renco Mine, Zimbabwe, we are currently a community of two sisters and five postulants, who live in close proximity. In communities where there are elderly sisters, who are vulnerable, the risk is high. Hence, the experience is that we live in fear and anxiety on one level or another. For us as Holy Cross Sisters, we have opportunities to be **“women of hope”**.

I am sure if Mother Bernarda would write to us today, she would repeat her exact words addressed to Sister Elizabeth, “Accept your suffering cheerfully for one day they will become



your joys” (In Cruces Salus: Page 41). It is this acceptance of our suffering with joy during this covid19, and during all experiences of suffering, that makes us sharers in the Paschal Mystery. We can witness this in our different ministries.

In his recent encyclical, ‘Fratelli Tutti’, Pope Francis says, “*Difficulties that seem overwhelming are opportunities for growth, not excuses for a glum resignation that can lead only to acquiescence*” (FT. 78). He also says, “Let us renounce the pettiness and resentment of useless in-fighting and constant confrontation. Let us stop feeling sorry for ourselves...” (FT. 78). This challenges us, as we are cut off from our usual day- to- day involvements. We are all called to forgive and find ways to live happily together.



Promoting life, in Renco Mine Formation Community, we creatively made use of these energies that are not used in outside involvements. The postulants enjoyed indoor practical activities like physical exercises, gardening, art, recycling and reusing plastic bottles. The lockdown coincided with the mango season. We made use of this opportunity to make mango juice, mango jam, mango aam papad (Indian jelly sweets), dried mangoes, mango cake and muffins. We used the seeds to develop mango trees’, nurseries for both the new farm in Masvingo (Zimbabwe) and Makambe (Zimbabwe - soon to be opened). These activities keep the young people excited and motivated to learn new things and there is no time for “feeling sorry” for oneself as Pope Francis says.

Personally, I feel inspired by our constitution which states, “...this places on us an obligation to penetrate the mystery of the cross and resurrection ever more profoundly through prayer and to live accordingly” (Article 11, page 41). The world today is in pain. This call to live the Paschal Mystery in these times touches me in the situation of my ministry as a formator.

I am also energised to see postulants happy and growing in this era where one could easily lose hope and sink into depression. Additional Holy Hours to pray for the end of Covid19 have helped us here in Renco Mine to reach out to the peripheries in prayer. Singing the Litany to our deceased Holy Cross Sisters brings tears to my eyes every Thursday as the words, “*Father we are here, Jesus under the Cross, Holy Spirit we are here to do your will...*” penetrate my heart. I feel that the Coronavirus pandemic has given us all, the chance to experience a renewed hope. We are not only left reminded of our relying on God’s providence, but like Mother Bernarda, challenged to face each day with hope. So, when I go through my day working in formation, I say like Mother Bernarda, “I put all my trust in you...” for He is *the way the truth and the life*, I surrender all my fears to God and remain hopeful.

# **Do you know the Secret?**

## **(Sri Lankan Province)**

Mother Bernarda Heimgartner, being a woman of prayer, found herself fortified, and strengthened, and had been endowed with wisdom and patience by the Crucified Lord, to whom she surrendered herself completely during those turbulent moments and events of her time. To mention a few trials among others, were the loss of her young efficient sisters one after another due to hard work, sickness, and poverty. A further blow was the transfer of eleven sisters to the New Institute of the 'Sisters of Mercy', Ingenbohl. All these and more brought Mother Bernarda much suffering. She often worked under harsh conditions which came rolling towards her just as terrifying crashing waves on a sea-shore. These attacks often threatened to engulf her life.

### **What was the Secret behind Her Successful Management?**

Mother Bernarda's deep faith and her commitment to the Lord urged her continually to seek help and support from the Lord. It was her deep trust in God expressed through her prayer that fortified Mother Bernarda, to shoulder bravely the crosses she had to bear. She was protected and constantly guarded under fire and water. It was noted that if it was not for her complete and continuous dependence on her Saviour she would never have withstood all those sufferings, with astonishing wisdom, patience, courage, determination and moderation.



Mother Bernarda having been abandoned by many remained faithful guiding the Institute along with her faithful sisters to the original purpose of the Congregation, all the time focusing on the Crucified Risen Lord who was the beacon of light which directed her path. As women living in this postmodern period how do we handle even our petty situations?

From the moment Mother Bernarda heard the call to follow Jesus, she willingly responded. In her letter to Sr. Elizabeth Zucker, written on 25th July 1854 she says: "May God's will be done in us. Let us be equally happy in joy and in sorrow. Let us willingly forego earthly consolations, so that one day we may enjoy eternal happiness". Through her fidelity and hope in the Lord especially during crisis times, the spirituality of the Holy Cross Sisters grew, and continues to live in the hearts and minds of each sister, who with the help of God strives to bring hope into the midst of challenging and limited situations in which we minister and live.

Mother Bernarda also experienced the Eucharist as a central part of her daily life as 'thanksgiving', 'breaking' and 'sharing', so that others may have life. When problems came

towards her, she allowed herself to be shared with others who needed her service. Through her untiring response in her service and love for the congregation she witnessed to the call of Matthew 10:<sup>39</sup>. "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

As Jesus was about to leave His disciples, He gave them the responsibility to teach His way of life to "all nations" and encouraged them that "He would be with them till the end of the world" Matthew 28:<sup>20</sup>. In keeping with her Lord's command, Mother Bernarda's zeal led her to send sisters as missionaries to foreign lands and fulfilling the expectation of the Founder's spirit, who believed, "The needs of the time is the will of God" and that he needed sisters who would fit in everywhere. Moore, L.C., Kalin 1978.



If Mother Bernarda were alive today, what would she be asking of us?

### What Others had to say About Mother Bernarda

Even Fr. Theodosius himself told Ruttimann in 1861, that Mother Bernarda indeed "possessed the third eye" of prudence, in spite of all that had happened between them, 'that no other sister would be able take the place of Mother Bernarda'. There are a number of heart touching letters written by the Sisters who left Holy Cross to join the Institute of Sisters of Mercy. How did she manage all these? Her continuous awareness of the presence of her Saviour Jesus and her way of life teaches her sisters that it is in death situations that life blossoms forth. When the hurricane of separation had subsided, it was Mother Bernarda, who went "beyond" the pain and suffering that she bore to re-establish the fatherly relationship of the Founder with his Sisters and the Institute.

Sisters of the Holy Cross today in 2021, thank both Jesus and Mother Bernarda, for the great gift of our spirituality of finding **JOY** in

**THANKSGIVING** both in happiness as well as in sorrow and suffering. She wants us to remain constantly; "Thanking the Good Lord for every suffering. This is the most beautiful prayer". She, further, reminds us "in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God" <sup>1</sup> 1 Thessalonian 5:18.

Sisters of the Holy Cross in the 3rd millennium are given numerous chances. What is required is that we delve deep into ourselves where the Risen Saviour is waiting, ready to listen to and help us. Jesus who called Mother Bernarda called us too, for he knew, that we too would be generous to Him, just as she was, and that we would live our lives in imitation of Him who is our everything. The invitations to lose ourselves are varied according to persons and according to each one's mission both in our communities and in our ministries. Let each one of us delve deep in this interior journey which will gradually lead to the discovery that we never dreamt of. As Jesus promised and as Mother Bernarda had shown it, our rewards will be GREAT!



# Our Call to Serve...



“Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh,  
senses their closeness and suffers that closeness  
as we try to help them.”

Pope Francis

# Courageous Women on Mission

## (Zambian Province)

**‘Take courage, life is a battle, and with God’s help you will conquer.’**

**‘May God, the Lord, in whom all good decisions have their origins, strengthen and confirm you’. Mother Bernarda**

Our Sisters are a model of the virtue of fortitude in the context where we live. Some of the great stories in the Province about fortitude are life experiences which are thrilling and breath-taking. They may look simple and ordinary but depict courage in day-to-day life.

Sr Maria Regina Kuhlman, Sr Roberta Zehnder, Sr Doris Arreger and Sr Rita Brennan are our remaining missionaries who have spent their youthful lives in Zambia in response to a call to serve the local people. One thing that we appreciate about them is how they say ‘yes’ every day, to let go the known and move in the unknown. The Zambia they knew when they arrived from their home countries is no longer the same. The local Sisters have also taken a different direction to answer the challenging modern trends. Yet our missionary sisters have chosen to spend the remainder of their lives in Zambia, where they have been since their youthful days.

What is striking in our missionary sisters is that they have not stopped working. They are still assisting where there is need. It is like taking the role of a grandmother. They still show us that prayer, community life and mission are very important. They relive and share the stories of the early years with love and fulfilment. Sometimes they share how they initially found thick forests with

vicious animals. On long journeys, they would meet elephants and lions. At times they had to wait for a long time in the bush until the ‘king of the jungle’ disappeared. They knew that’s what they have chosen. Besides supporting us with a different role, they usually tell us that they have not accomplished all, but like St. Francis they have done their part.



There was a prayer that we were taught to pray every day, *“All for you Lord Jesus, all for you, and out of the purest love of you. Amen.”* Sometimes we did not know that when we prayed that prayer as young ladies, we were completely committing ourselves for life.”

Sr Miriam Mutelo, our first Zambian Sister, and first local Provincial Leader who was followed by the late Sr Gertrude Makai were the local icons of the Province.

Sr Miriam was professed in 1972 and Sr Gertrude in 1974. At that time, local

vocations were limited. The missionary Sisters did not know what to do with the very few local Sisters who were with them. At one point, they were encouraged to join other congregations since there seemed to be no hope of local presence in the Province. The only answer they gave to their leaders of that time was “we shall remain Holy Cross, come rain come sunshine!” Full of faith and hope and convinced of their call to Holy Cross, they courageously faced the reality of their situation. God responded and after years of this dry spell, behold young women started to come and embrace our life. The influx was great. It was amazing to see Sr Miriam and the late Sister Gertrude giving up their professional careers and ambitions to put their energy into the initial and ongoing formation of the Province. It was not easy for them since they were now dealing with the young people who were from a different generation. But they continued to work on what was suitable for the modern formation by including reflections on the socio-economic issues, deepening the Gospel values, the Holy Cross Charism and Spirituality within the context of the Zambian culture. Both of them showed the character of being true Holy Cross and Zambian religious women. Amidst many pressures, both Sr Miriam and Sr Gertrude

held firm to what they believed; this inner conviction of being called and sent!

In today’s modern world, life offers different opportunities such as careers, business, technology and other attractive things to the younger generation. However, the Zambian Province experiences young people who still want to commit their lives to the Lord. We see them striving to live this life each day. Sometimes they struggle to balance between their religious life and what the world offers, but at the end of the day, they are more inclined to follow the Lord with passion.

We would like to conclude with the African Proverb which says, ***“If you are building a house and a nail breaks, do you stop building, or do you change the nail?”***

We continue to discern how best to follow Our Holy Cross ancestors while responding to the needs of today and in this way bring about the transformation of society and we always have a supply of nails nearby!

**“If you are  
building a house  
and a nail breaks,  
do you stop building,  
or do you change  
the nail?”  
African proverb...**





# Promoting God's Work rooted in Holistic Education

## (Lesotho Province)

*“As gladly as we would cooperate with you in giving the children of your parish a good education and training, to further God's work and their well-being.”* Mother Bernarda to Fr. Zumbach.

We, Sisters of the Lesotho Province are extremely happy and feel privileged to be given an opportunity to disclose more of Mother Bernarda's hidden qualities which are exposed in the above-mentioned statement. What fills us with great joy is to realize that the given theme is at the heart of our Congregation. Education of the youth is what Mother Bernarda and her companions believed they were called for, from the very inception of the Holy Cross Congregation. Being part of this institution, the Sisters of the Lesotho Province are walking along these paths “like mother, like daughter”. To elaborate the point we are making, we have picked some key words from the extract above:



**“Gladness”** For Bernarda, education is a source and token of happiness which is given freely and without expecting anything in return.” For the Holy Cross Sisters in Lesotho this statement is still the foundation and pillar of our Province. Here a Holy Cross Sister is nationally known by her unpretentious happiness in all her activities in school and everywhere. This notion also in return brings positive influence to our non-religious colleagues and also to our non-Catholic brothers and sisters down to the learners who receive education through the Holy

Cross Sisters' contribution. Both Mother Bernarda and our Sister -Teachers in Lesotho put great emphasis on the quality of education. It should be good and suitable for every child.

**“Cooperation”** Mother Bernarda picks up the notion of cooperation which entails that mutual readiness of working together with Parish-Priests, Parishioners and the Sisters. This is basic for ensuring success of both learners and progress in the Parish.

For us in Lesotho, good education goes together with training learners for readiness to be God's ambassadors and to embrace their total welfare. Mother Bernarda dedicated her life for the holistic education of girls helping them to become good citizens of their society. Today, like Mother Bernarda it is our ministry to educate independent thinkers among our girls who will become good well-formed woman, ready to contribute to our local society in Lesotho and



across borders. They will act with courage and be prepared to uplift the well-being of the Parish and the work places in all spheres of life.

Thus, through this foundation, Mother Bernarda left the Congregation a legacy. Being faithful to that legacy, the Lesotho Province is still carrying out the Mission entrusted to it in all the Centres of Education in which the sisters are engaged. They are as follows:

Like in every country, education in Lesotho has gone through its ups and downs through political influence and instability. Gradually, teaching of Religious Knowledge was slowly being phased out from primary level to high school. Acting on the saying of our Founder Fr. Theodosius Florentini, who believed that “the need of the time is the will of God”, the Holy Cross Provincial Leadership Team took the opportunity and had Pre-Schools opened. The first one is **Bernarda Pre-School** in Holy Cross Mekaling (the former Provincial House), then **Lerato Pre-School** in Mohale’s Hoek the present Provincial House and **Holy Cross Pre-School** at St.

Gerard Mafeteng. It was evident that children attending these Pre-Schools are nourished with spiritual food. Prayer is introduced as part of a holistic approach to educating the whole person, mentally, physically, psychologically, socially and even participating in national festivals with great pomp.

Holy Cross Sisters in Lesotho still run two High Schools, **Holy Cross High** and **St. Thomas High Schools**. Moreover, they are running two Vocational Schools, **Bernarda Home Economics** and **St. Elizabeth Training Institute** which has holistic Education as the Motto “St. Elizabeth educates the whole person”.

That’s what Mother Bernarda promised Fr. Zumbach, namely that Sisters are ready to give children of his Parish good education and training and to promote God’s work. Their well-being is being practised with full force in the Lesotho Province.

Hail Holy Cross! Our only Hope!

**Hail Holy Cross! Our only Hope!**



## His Wise Providence brings all things to good (Swiss Province)

"Let us trust in the fatherly goodness of God and in his wise providence, which brings all things to good."

"The good Lord, loving Father sometimes takes time to grant what we ask. He loves us more than we love ourselves"

In these statements of Mother Bernarda, I can see a great trust in a loving God who cares for the people. These lines speak of a positive image of God and a deep fundamental trust. It is this strength that enabled Mother Bernarda to cope positively with the many darkneses in her life. In my work in spiritual direction and as a retreat facilitator, the theme of trust has practically been the foundation. Again, and again, trust in the loving God was an important theme, especially when the experiences of everyday life were difficult, and questions and doubts made it very hard to trust. One such experience, I recall a woman who, years later was still very troubled by her teenage abortion. Her deep inner question; "Does God love me anyway?", had always occupied her and made her doubt His love. By meditating on the Bible text from Is. 43, her self-esteem was strengthened again.

"For this is what the Lord says; Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine." *Isaiah 43:1*

To have a name, my name, along with my person makes up my uniqueness. So, I am unique in the world, one of a kind in all of creation. And then it continues to say in verse 4;

"Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you."

Yes, it took time, a lot of time and patience until the reality of this Bible text could slowly take root deep in her soul. Through meditating these texts repeatedly, confidence could be built. The old guilt began to be transformed and replaced by a deep sense that God had plans for her as she had become and the realization that she had a unique place in this world began to grow within her. The experience that God can write straight even on crooked lines gave her new strength.

I also recall a woman with a disabled daughter. She talked about her shock after the birth when it became apparent that she had not given birth to a healthy child. She talked about the questions and doubts that had weighed her down. For a long time she had struggled with God and wondered why? Why me, why our family in particular, did I do something wrong, is it a punishment from God?

During the retreat, the following verses from Isaiah 43:<sup>2</sup> accompanied us.

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Fear not, for I am with you."

During meditations she was able to see different feelings from the past and memories of difficult situations with her girl in connection with this promise from the Bible. It became more and more clear to her, how God had accompanied her, how her family had always received help at the right time, how sometimes a good solution had unexpectedly appeared. Strengthened, and with new confidence, she could, and still can, continue on her way. And she could also see how she was repeatedly blessed and strengthened by this very child. Mother Bernarda might put it this way:

"His wise providence, which leads all things to good."

My role as a spiritual director and the retreat work have been a great source of joy to me. Walking an inner path with people, sharing joy and sorrow with them, accompanying them on their journey of life and faith, seeing trust in the loving God grow, has always been a great gift for me. *"He loves us more than we love ourselves"* said Mother Bernarda and that is still the very foundation of my life.

Throughout my ministry the following refrain has been with me for many years and continues to nourish my confidence.

"Full of trust I walk with you, my God, carried by the dream that is called life.  
At the end of this path you yourself will be the destiny, You, who are the life."



# Living our Collaborative Mission as the work of God

## (Central Indian Province)

**Can we not believe that God is the author and Father of all things, that through His providence, He guides all events?**

Collaboration is rooted in the Kingdom Principle of Spirit directed and Scripture anchored unity, a condition for God's fullest blessings and Provision. As Sisters of the Holy Cross, we are best known and validated by our love for the world and particularly for the suffering humanity.

In 2020, life took an extraordinary turn of events as never seen before. Humanity learned to negotiate with an insidious and life-threatening pandemic, Covid-19. As Holy Cross Sisters, we could experience God's providence and His close presence when we moved away from the traditional way of living and lived through a Holy Week with suspended Masses and closed Churches that was quite unprecedented and unaccustomed. Phrases like lockdown,

social and physical distancing, online liturgical services at home, to mention a few, had become part of our vocabulary and lifestyle.

How to account for suffering and death when there is a loving and omnipotent God was a question that arose in our hearts! Our faith in the Triune God was resolute and indomitable in the face of anxiety, uncertainty, isolation, suffering and death that resulted from the pandemic. Yet true trust in God's providence was visible in the countless efforts of individuals and groups of people who reached out beyond themselves to serve and save where possible others. Challenges imposed by the global pandemic were real yet we faced them with a heroic courage and determination.

Like everyone in the world, we Sisters of the Holy Cross also began to slow down, reflecting and preparing to welcome and shelter the homeless, the weary and provide them with physical, psychological and spiritual support.

And we woke up to a new reality to know:

how big we really are; what a little control we really have and what really matters is 'to Love'.

Collaborating with God and trusting in His Divine Providence, we dared to be different and remained open to the suffering humanity that stood exposed, wounded, fragile and feckless.

Our hospitals welcomed the patients and served them with total dedication and commitment, when all the other health care facilities refused to admit them.





We realized that God's work is too large and complex to be accomplished without collaboration. God's work is too important for it to be dependent upon any particular '*jar of clay*' (2 Cor. 4: 7) for 'successes.

This pandemic awakened us to the reality that when a single individual, group or a movement assumes they can do all of God's work alone, the failures are prominent and frustrate the work of God's kingdom.

All our experiences and life situations have taught us that God is moving whether we are aware of it or not. There are times when we can see and feel His hand moving so powerfully in our lives and the lives of others. And there are times when we feel God is absent. Regardless of our feelings, we are convinced and we know on a deep faith level that He is present and active in our response to the prophetic call of Jesus to rebuild the society which aims at the development and making qualitative differences in the lives of the urban poor, rural poor, tribal poor and women.



St. Paul speaking of the work of the apostolate says "we are God's coadjutors, collaborators with Him" (1 Cor. 3:9). Every type of apostolate is collaboration in the one work of redemption and sanctification which God has been developing through us. In all our endeavours we derive our strength from Christ Crucified to bring new hope and life.

The challenging situations have enabled us to make use of the available resources and to be partners in the collaborative and creative work of God by means of cultivating the land, producing fruits, vegetables and finding creative means to work at the grass root levels among less privileged ones especially in remote villages of Orissa, Karnataka and similar places.

Therefore, it is our conviction that through his Providence God guides all events and He will continue to guide all events as we move into the future with our trust anchored in His Divine Providence.

**“True trust in God we learn in times of need.”**

**Mother Bernarda**

## **“No one can fight life in isolation – We are ONE!” (Cunco Province)**

**“The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God ... no-one knows the thoughts of God but the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:10-11).**

It was this same Spirit, who enlightened Mother Bernarda and the first Sisters, through their experiences being close to and among the people, who started to know and enter the depths of the mystery of the Holy Trinity of God. The mystery of community life finds in itself genuine expressions of love that frees us from selfishness to find ourselves by serving others, ***“An authentic proposal of encounter with Jesus Christ that must be established on the solid foundation of the Trinity-Love. The experience of a one and triune God, who is inseparable unity and communion, is the starting point of all Christian spirituality founded on the Trinity”*** (DA 240).

Communion and fraternity are the essence of consecrated life. Mother Bernarda invites us to experience unity based on affection, respect and prayer: ***“Be loving to each other; admonish and encourage each other with gentleness and charity and strive to act and speak thus, just as each of us wishes others to speak to us”*** (Letters, I AM II.1.6.44a, p. 16)."

As we look at our history and recall the spirit of Mother Bernarda, we cannot fail to mention that she received the warmth she portrayed to the sisters from her family. Her home experience brought upon the generosity of heart that led her to live daily her convictions, to have the strength of soul that enabled her to receive and accept the call of God in her life, and then the mission of extending the kingdom and its demands in a hostile and unpredictable social context.

As Sisters of the Holy Cross of the Cunco Province living in today's social context, we believe that, following the example of

Mother Bernarda, we strive to listen to the voice of the Spirit that moves and renews everything, that welcomes life and awakens us to new experiences. We strive to do this by assuming its message of fraternal commitment with a close, fraternal relationship of respect and responsibility with the vocational, human, spiritual, and intellectual development of each sister, according to her gifts, talents, aptitudes, and skills. All this to meet the challenge to be a testimony of sisterhood, in a world that avoids the proximity of meaningful relationships for fear of commitment with others.

As Fratelli Tutti well describes, ***“NO ONE CAN FIGHT LIFE IN ISOLATION”. We need a community that supports us, that helps us and in which we help each other to look ahead”***.



In our communities here we have always tried to deeply live moments that may be difficult and situations that are at times far from the ideal, "with the same feelings that Jesus had", always with a renewed impetus to live in the spirit of the Gospel, as our Mother constantly motivated her sisters:

***"My dear sisters, be brave and every day begin to love God anew, to serve Him, to yearn only for Him and please only Him."***

The sisters of the Holy Cross are characterized by forming Christ-centered communities, where each sister feels loved, accepted, and valued. Where each contribution made with love to the only one who ***"loved me and died for me,"*** are important for the extension of his Kingdom and the full realization of their vocation to serve with generous and transcendent dedication. The community in the spirit of the Gospel is welcoming, fraternal and open to change, but above all, it trusts the mercy of God who outlines or draws the paths to be followed. Mother Bernarda put everything under His trust. She showed this in her letters to the sisters, where we can see the actions of the Spirit in the Institution since its inception. ***"May the Lord give you his Holy Spirit, so that you may recognize what is true and with his help, achieve the fulfillment of His holy will"*** *(Asp. Edmunda, 4 II 1858)"*

***"I do not trust my merits, but the mercy of God for the merits of Jesus Christ. The Lord is merciful with those who fear him".***  
MMB

The call to a Consecrated Life requires a condition of the heart that is willing to discover and do the will of God, and Mother Bernarda's life encourages us to live it, by saying: ***"Trust Him and invoke His help daily and incessantly, but with humbleness; because the Lord gives His grace to the humble; the Lord enters there where He finds the vessels empty and purified."*** *Letters, IAM II, 1,6, 55a, p. 16*. It is a call to follow Jesus in community, in an environment with clear objectives, based on evangelical ideals and advice. In practice it means building up and encouraging those who are a part of it, making them suitable for closeness, and generous and fruitful dedication to serve others in the different

circumstances or challenges of the mysterious ways in which God surprises us. To walk along this life option requires companions that are sound, fraternal and joyful, with a vision and ambition for holiness. Mother Bernarda showed this in her writings since, despite economic and spiritual difficulties, she always had time and dedication for her sisters: ***"I want to thank God for filling your hearts with such goodness. I pray that it reaches maturity and bears abundant fruit in the Lord's vineyard."*** She accompanied them to their new destinations, ensuring that they were well established in their new communities and that they had enough time for community and personal prayer, for recreation and to enjoy life when they met fraternally. Mother Bernarda had a very liberating, close and caring community experience for her time.

Today more than ever human beings yearn for closeness and belonging. Pope Francis urges us to bear witness to universal love where people coexist and contribute to a development with a vision of unity and respect, where dignity and ***"freedom is oriented towards love."*** In his encyclical, he tells us that we have to go to meet the others.

***"I ask God to prepare our hearts to encounter our brothers and sisters, so that we may overcome our differences rooted in political thinking, language, culture and religion. Let us ask him to anoint our whole being with the balm of His mercy, which heals the injuries caused by mistakes, misunderstandings and disputes. And let us ask Him for the grace to send us forth, in humility and meekness, along the demanding but enriching path of seeking peace"***.

He calls us, with humbleness and gentleness, to the risky but fruitful paths of the search for peace." Fratelli tutti 254

# Holiness in the daily and ordinary

(English Province)

*A collection of sister's experiences from the English Province*

**'Make an act of love of God in your heart over and over again.'**

Mother Bernarda to Sr. Elizabeth Zucher, 25 July 1854.

In this letter we witness Mother Bernarda as assuaging the fears of Sr. Elizabeth. In the midst of her anxiety and temptation Sr. Elizabeth is to turn immediately to God by making repeated acts of love for Him in her heart. Here, Mother Bernarda lays out her teaching on the prayer of an apostolic religious: Sr. Elizabeth is a teacher in the school in Menzingen, a Swiss Village. **The Lord is the companion** of Sr. Elizabeth. **It is He who enlightens, the Lord who saves;** therefore Sr. Elizabeth has no cause for fear. Though the mists of temptations rise up in her, the Lord is her light. Temptations may come, but they can make no headway; they can assault her heart but they are not able to overcome her. But Sr. Elizabeth is required to make a decision. In times of interior disturbance, she is to make repeated choices to turn to God and to express her love for Him.

In this excerpt, we witness Mother Bernarda as a spiritual guide. The letter also gives us a glimpse of her own interiority: **God in Jesus Christ is the constant companion of Mother Bernarda's life.** As apostolic religious in the twenty-first century, she is our inspiration and model.

In this light we read the lived experiences of our sisters, who like Mother Bernarda, realise that God in Jesus Christ is their constant companion in life as they strive to respond to the call to holiness in the daily and ordinary events.

## HOLINESS THE EXPERIENCE OF AN INNER GOD PRESENCE

*The call of God to holiness for all people, as I see it, is the experience of the inner God within each heart that makes room for harmony and balance. It is a lifetime journey as seen in the life of Mother Bernarda who showed great humility and care. She showed kindness to each and all*

*with respect for the other, seeking wisdom within for a harmony of being and practising gratitude for the little moments of each day in that prayer of a simple breath of longing and desiring of what the heart seeks. She asked God's help in living within the limitation of weaknesses and she knew BOTH joy and suffering with understanding that the full journey towards holiness must always include the Cross which we often avoid and reject. A person with holiness accompanies others for the journey to God with their blessing of transforming presence.*





## WHAT IS HOLINESS?

*During this past year, I have seen many examples of people thinking of others and their needs; talking to people on the phone who are lonely, giving donations to food banks for distributing to people who are in need especially if they have lost their job because of the pandemic. All this is done by volunteers, people who carried out works of mercy quietly, as we see in the gospel of Matthew 5:1-12. Prayer has become more central in people's lives. We are being encouraged to look at our own lives and ask; 'what is the meaning of life, what is it really about, what really matters?' Holiness is an inward journey seeking a deeper relationship with God and acknowledging the truth of who we are; people in need of God's love, grace and forgiveness. This has to be lived out in our daily lives, as it says in Scripture; 'Love the Lord God with all you heart . . . and love your neighbor as yourself'. Mark 12:<sup>30</sup>*

## LIVING HOLINESS DURING LOCKDOWN

*As we are a group of eight Sisters here at The Grange, all over 80 years, an active apostolate is rather restricted. When life is 'normal' a couple of us can be involved in the parish or with other activities. Yet we can still do our best as Mother Bernarda*

## MY LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOLINESS.

*When I reflect on holiness, I need not look further than the disabled (my term is other abled) children I used to help with before the pandemic. Some of these children are physically and mentally very different. However, each time I went to the Bedlesford School in Kingston, I came back feeling that somehow, I was in touch with something very precious and holy. They taught me what it means to trust, to expect and to be happy, to live in that moment and just to be. No wonder that Jesus had such a high regard for children; **"Let the little children come to me, for such as these belongs the Kingdom"** Matt.19:<sup>14</sup> - even more so, to children who are utterly dependent. Whatever help I gave to these children, I always felt I received back a hundred-fold.*

*said to be 'real religious persons'. It is important therefore, how we treat our carers and lead a spiritual life. We frequently have exposition in our chapel. It is amazing how many religious events we take place in on zoom. For example, we go to daily Mass in many different churches by streaming. We have sermons from different priests all over the British Isles and Ireland. It is great to see inside so many churches that otherwise we would never see. It is very encouraging too to see how many people attend daily Mass every day all over the country. There are also a number of retreats and religious conferences available that otherwise we could never attend. For example, talks on Thomas Aquinas, from a Dominican Sister in Oxford, Carmelite retreats, a series on St Mark's Gospel. In fact, there are so many it is quite overwhelming at times. Some of us had a day's retreat given by an American sister in Ireland. Several of us contact lonely people and those who are caring for the sick, by phone or zoom to give them hope and encouragement. There is much we thank God for in modern technology while isolating in lock down.*



# **Living our weaknesses with Christ**

## **(Cape Province)**

**“Lord, I want to give you my all but help me in my weakness. We take ourselves with us wherever we go but God’s mercy follows us wherever we are”. Mother Bernarda**

Mother Bernarda had to face her own weaknesses daily. She experienced much opposition from people yet she trusted God all the time, to help her in her weakness. In her short life as foundress of a new Congregation, she had heavy responsibilities, personal illnesses, poverty in the Institute, early deaths of sisters, opposition from Fr Theodosius and other priests yet she never stopped trusting God who was her source of strength.

In South Africa, our first Holy Cross mission started in Umtata in 1883 – a small seed which grew into a great tree as in several other countries as well. All mission stations began in poverty, with young sisters dying, yet all flourished and God’s kingdom grew.

Under Apartheid, segregation was insufferable, yet we lived through that struggle in society and grew in strength. In Parow, the Holy Cross Children’s Home was founded for the orphans of the 1918 Spanish ‘flu pandemic despite the extreme poverty of the community there. Babies were left abandoned at Church doors; police brought abandoned children to the Home – no one was turned away from shelter and food and the Sisters’ love.

Our Cape Province’s current missions also experiences limitations of all kinds - lack of vocations, meagre finances, theft, heavy maintenance costs, vandalism - yet God’s mercy is always with us. We have many benefactors who assist us in desperate situations. God continues to provide as He did in the time of Mother Bernarda.

We recognise a God who loves us unconditionally despite our brokenness in our daily living. Therefore, He is the first one to whom we turn to bring our limitations before Him; we confidently ask His help that we might continue sharing our gifts with others.

**“We take ourselves with us wherever we go...as we are.”**

By recognising our imperfections, we admit that we are on a journey towards wholeness. Our limitations help us value the complementary gifts of all people around us as facets of God’s abundance. This helps us to become appreciative, interdependent and humble. By working collaboratively, we are better equipped to produce more high-quality work in our ministry where we encourage that same spirit of generous giving and openness in receiving from others.

We know that weaknesses can be turned into strengths with a very simple tool, that being, the right mind-set. This is not just about the power of positive thinking, but also considering how weaknesses can actually be strengths; we grow in becoming more dependent on God. Our very weaknesses then serve as a healthy setting for ministry. God does not only use our strengths, He also uses our weaknesses, because when He helps us through a struggle or teaches us to live with it, we grow in empathy. We become sensitive to those with similar difficulties and our suffering becomes redemptive. If we develop the mind-set that weaknesses are actually opportunities for growth, we would break through our limitations and fears. Our strengths grow out of our weaknesses.

Our Sisters in our Frail Care were once vibrant in their respective ministries and though their bodies have become frail, it is a joy to hear them speak of their gratitude to God for the loving

care they receive. Among our Sisters and lay carers, there is an unselfish concern for the good of our Sisters shown through patience, kindness, trust, hope, endurance, truth and strong affection.

After fire destroyed the top floor of our Children's Home, nine months ago, so much good came about from that painful experience. The entire interior is currently being restored and refurbished by the same caring contractors who restored the partial damage by fire at our school in Cape Town in 2019.

As we move forward a new Board of Governors has been put in place. They will seek to ensure progressive managerial operations, supervision and appropriate accompaniment of staff and residents. Before the children return, they will participate in an orientation programme to encourage collaboration and more holistic care for the environment, beginning with their new surroundings.



We are aware that having good, positive and motivated teamwork with sufficient skills means having a strong awareness of how to work with others, for others and to find ways to adjust our approach to serve and live amicably in community.

Over the course of time, regular workshops were held to improve and reinforce solid relationships. Lockdown due to the current Pandemic meant restricting meetings as a Province. However, weekly community meetings were arranged through written material for reflection and prayer. Articles were taken from our Constitutions for integration of prayer in community life and ministry.

It was heart-warming to learn more about one another through sharing at community level, where we were afforded opportunities to collaborate with different members taking turns to lead; we mutually contributed our strengths and skills allowing ourselves to transform the limitation of our lockdown context to growth in interpersonal relationships and self-confidence.

God weaves our weaknesses, limitations and strengths into a colourful tapestry, called life, in order that we may appreciate the light and darkness, day and night as created by His loving Father, our Creator-God. It is important, though, that we recognize each individual experience that we encounter as part of the whole intention of God.

When situations become very tough, we need to remember to take the time to **'come home'** to self and God.

We take our inspiration from the words of Mother Bernarda...

"My dear Sister, be brave and every day begin anew to love God, to serve Him along, to long only for Him and to please Him along".

"Take courage, life is a battle, and with God's help you will conquer. God, the Lord, in Whom all good decisions have their origins, strengthen and confirm you."

*"I wish to thank God for filling your hearts with so much goodness. I pray that it may grow to maturity and bear abundant fruit in the vineyard of the Lord."*



Stained glass windows in Mother Bernarda's chapel, Mother House, Menzingen

"Let us constantly keep our goal and our call to holiness before our eyes and always remember that we are not only teachers and Christians but spouses of Jesus Christ, real religious persons".

"Love prayer, and practice it wherever you can, even if it is only a simple act or aspiration of your heart"

**"Make act of love of God in your heart over and over again."**



Stained glass windows in Mother Bernarda's chapel, Mother House, Menzingen

"Do not be afraid of suffering and hardships, for through them you become more like your divine spouse."

**"Accept your suffering cheerfully for one day they will become your joys'."**

"Let us bring before God our prayer, that we become spiritual sisters who seek to please Him and let us bear difficulties in real penitential attitude and then we shall be happy, even in bearing our Cross because this is the lot of a bride and disciple of Christ'."





## Part Two

Inspiring a love for LIFE in every season



## **Paul Nicholson SJ, from England**

*Fr Paul joined the Society in 1978, having been a pupil at the Jesuit school in Wimbledon, and then studied zoology at Durham University.*

*He says: “As I got to know more about Jesuit life and ministry, the idea of “a faith that does justice” appealed to me.”*



### **Living the Paschal Mystery as a Transformative Gospel experience**

Where do you look in the gospel to find those whose lives have been transformed by the Paschal Mystery? If the central concern of that mystery is the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, then there can be few better places to go than to the foot of the cross. Go there, and you find two figures: Jesus' mother Mary, and the “disciple whom he loved”, John. There can be no doubt that their own lives are being transformed by what they are experiencing, and enduring, there, in that particular time and place. As a result, they are able to offer three lessons teaching us how we might allow our own lives to be transformed by spending time with them there.

First, they are invited simply to stand there, in the midst of the suffering. Even though their every instinct must have been to try and do something, the truth is that here is little they can do to change the situation. It would have been more comfortable to be almost anywhere else, as we can see in the case, of the other disciples who are conspicuous by their absence, having run away to hide. But Mary and John continue to stand alongside Jesus for the long hours of his suffering. In part, for us, too, to live the Paschal Mystery means no more, and no less, than to stand alongside suffering people, wherever and whenever we encounter them. Of course, it may be possible that on occasion you are able to do something to alleviate their situation, through a kind word or a helpful deed. But even if you can offer no practical assistance, simply being there, resisting the urge to flee, has an immense value of its own.

Secondly, Mary and John are there together, supporting each other. Indeed Jesus, in one of his last words, commits them to each other's care. And if they are there together at the foot of the cross, they will also be together when the Risen Christ appears, and so on to Pentecost. Indeed, tradition tells us that Mary then went to live with John, and was supported by him (and no doubt, in turn, offered him her own support) for the rest of her earthly life. The truth is that the Paschal Mystery is never to be lived alone. We are always called to share its sorrows and joys. The Church was not an after-thought on the part of Jesus, a kind of helpful supporters' club for the extraverts among his followers. To be united, in the one body, journeying with others, is the very essence of discipleship. Perhaps

after a period of enforced social distancing we are more able to appreciate the value of this aspect of our faith.

Thirdly, they are sustained by hope. Hope is not a naïve optimism that desperately tries to believe that everything will be alright. Nor is it a kind of whistling in the dark to keep our courage up when trials come. At the foot of the Cross, the suffering is real, and the death is real. But hope trusts that neither the suffering nor the death has the last word. Jesus has promised Mary and John, as he has promised us, that God's will for our world will be achieved, no matter how deep the darkness or how challenging the evil. As we make our own small contribution to the building up of that plan for the world that Jesus called the Kingdom of God, my hope supports yours, and yours mine. It is that hope that enables us to continue to work, and that same hope that enables us simply to stand alongside each other when no action seems possible.

St Ignatius of Loyola believed that entering into a Gospel scene imaginatively was an excellent form of prayer. Letting a picture build up gradually in your mind's eye, noticing the people and how they look, hearing what is being said (and what isn't!), even getting a sense of the weather. Then finding your own place in the story, as a bystander, or as someone who gets more involved. This can be one powerful way of being at the foot of the Cross. Perhaps you talk with John, with Mary, or with Jesus. Perhaps you simply share their grief, or their hope. Maybe you bring your own sufferings, or the pain of people you know, to this special place. The Gospels are never simply texts to be read. They offer an invitation to engage with Jesus, with his Father, with His disciples, and in this way to deepen your own discipleship.

If you want to be transformed by living the Paschal Mystery, encountering Mary and John at the foot of the Cross is an excellent place to start.



The reliquary Crucifix at the Victoria and Albert museum, ca. 900-1000



### **Sr Angela Sianga HC, from Zambia**

*Sr Angela is presently living and working in formation at the novitiate in Mongu, Western province.*

*She. says: "I love teaching at any level and I am passionate about imparting faith especially to the young people. Preparing them for the Sacraments of Baptism and First Holy Communion gives me great joy that fulfils my soul."*

### **A holistic approach to formation as a transformative process of mind, heart and will**

Reflecting upon the holistic approach to formation as a transformative process of mind, heart and will, encompasses all aspects of our development and recognize the needs that emerge at different stages of life. We call each other to strive and be open to the changing needs of our multi-cultural societies. We equip ourselves to remain effective to our charism as Holy Cross Sisters and are open to the unfolding love of God in the Universe thus allowing ourselves to be touched by His Love and become a transforming presence in society.

The Holistic approach to formation is a transformative process and it encourages us to respond to the call of God at each point of our journey and to trust the process. Hearing the invitation of Pope Francis to be '**Missionary Disciples**', we become more conscious of personal and communal discernment. Therefore, we commit ourselves to an on-going self-evaluation and renewal that will enable us to be more integrated and prophetic in our contribution in Jesus' Mission of Oneness and bringing healing to our broken world. This calls for the courage to face the

beautiful and less beautiful areas within us and to seek ongoing conversion on our journey of faith. This can be realised when we are able to stop and pause in our busy schedules and note what is going on in our lives.

A Holistic approach to formation as a transforming presence in society, calls us each day to strive to be transformed through different tools that could facilitate this process. One of the strategies is SELF-CARE that is to create a balance between inflow and outflow, work, prayer, renewal courses and rest. This will make our mission more effective. Consecrated life is not just about useful service. It is about making the Gospel visible, tangible, and accessible in our Church and world today. This can be realised if we have time for self-reflection.

For us Holy Cross Sisters called to be a transforming presence in our time, it is important for each one of us to strive daily to renew our relationship with self, others, and God by discovering new ways of encountering Him. This can be actualised by seeking Him in our prayer and in all aspects of our lives. Transformation



cannot take place without having enough time for prayer and silence. Prayer is being present to the Presence, realising that God is always present to us, in busy places as much as in quiet places. If we persist in prayer this sense of God's presence will grow in us and then be transmitted to the world.

We are challenged to take responsibility and nurture our spiritual life by attending to our spiritual exercises consistently. All these are part of renewing our energy and transforming us in all aspects.

To be a transforming presence in society, we are called to use the skill of deep listening to what is going on in our own lives and those of others. This calls us to be at home with ourselves, and becoming aware of who we are, seeking healing, and wholeness. It is important to realise that without that empty space within us, we cannot give a listening ear to people who need our attention. We need to be women of character and virtue now more than ever before. To find hope we need to be prophetic, our lives need to witness to what we believe and who we are especially in the present times with the crisis of COVID-19. Being prophetic invites us to be in solidarity with the world. We might not reach people physically during these difficult times but through internet platforms and prayers, we radiate the light and hope to the world.

Ongoing formation is a transformative process of mind, heart, and soul. It invites us to be open and shift our attitudes in the way we look at issues. To approach life with a less judgemental attitude, be open and allow ourselves to be challenged by the changes in our world today. As Pope

Francis challenged us religious and I quote, *"As we thank God for the gift of Consecrated Life, let us ask of God for a new way of looking...a way that knows how to see grace...how to hope... To become intimate with Jesus, to participate in his life, does cultivate in us an entirely different perspective on reality."*

Looking back at my experience of being in Ireland for the Formation course I encountered elements of transformation in my own life. It was holistic, experiential and not academic. The course itself was a second novitiate for me, as I was not taught to be a formator but to be open to being formed. The course put in place the tools, which did not leave any stone unturned such as Counselling, Spiritual Direction, Mentoring, pastoral experience. All the lessons moved and challenged something within me. The first thing, which helped me to experience transformation was my willingness to open myself to be touched by whatever was offered and furthermore, I owned the journey towards transformation and trusted the process.

This Holistic approach to formation is transformative in all areas as I experienced it in my spiritual life, which has deepened, and the course helped me to be in touch with the infinite love of God. My image of God as a loving Father was strengthened. My intellect was challenged by so many new insights. I am now more inclined to perceive things in the light of faith. I was challenged to face the triggers which normally arises from my past experiences. This helped me to identify the causes of my reactions especially negative ones and I handle my emotions quite well.

The experience of being in Loreto House helped me to improve relationships by being a good listener and less judgemental. I have learnt how to create space in my heart for people who come to me to share their stories. This has helped me to be more compassionate with others and myself. I have also learnt to enjoy my own company and appreciate silence. It is in the silence that I realised who I Am and who God is in my life. “BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD”. My mental wellbeing was strengthened by seeking what is positive and life giving even amid darkness. Being positive in life brings out positive energies and that is powerful in bringing about life in my own daily struggles. Some lessons helped me to

bring about the AHA moment by awakening self-awareness and self-knowledge in situations where I was inclined to blame the outside.

The course confirmed that I am not what I do. This has helped me to treasure BEING and so work on my character and deepen my identity as a person who is worthy, and the realisation that what matters is God and therefore, everything else matters. The danger is to cling to position or responsibility for fear of losing our identity, and yet the two are separate. Although responsibility for such formation rests chiefly on the individual sister, it cannot be lasting or effective without the support of the community and the leadership.



**Self-reflection is having the courage to face ourselves!**

## **Ms. Elba Aida Salcedo Morales**

University of Chile Temuco headquarters: Librarianship  
Universidad de los Lagos Temuco headquarters:

She says: *“As Mother Bernarda, I have felt and I feel called by God, to live the Gospel values here and now, available like her, to go beyond what is already known and safe.”*



### **Living the charism of Mother Bernarda as a laywoman**

I am Elba Salcedo and my relationship with the Sisters of the Holy Cross is longstanding. At present I live in Temuco with Sr. Monica Neulinger. Together with Sonsoles, a lay matron, and Satu, my sister, we make up the community of “Caucasus”, (name of the street where the house that the sister and I have shared since we retired).

This picture of community, which may draw the attention of some, has resulted from the progressive fabric of very human relationships of work, care and friendship between us. Together we shared ideals and life projects. It has been possible, thanks to the support from the leadership of the Congregation, who have seen within the values and shortcomings another possible way of sharing life and mission in these times.

I come from a Catholic family, with a very Marian spirituality. As a teenager, I engaged in parish pastoral care: catechesis, missions, liturgical song ... In each of these areas I met with Sisters of the Holy Cross ... outside their schools. These were the years of the early 60s just before the beginning of Vatican Council II. The sisters, along with their educational work, were open to the “pastoral de Conjunto”, coordinating and collaborating with lay women and men in the other pastoral events of the diocese and parishes.

In 1976 I began my professional relationship with the sisters in different educational institutions of the Congregation. In 1987 I joined the Huichahue school. It is a recent insertion of the sisters, in a rural environment, led by Sr. Monica Neulinger, to care for very vulnerable children. At this time there was already talk of the Founders. Right here I met Mother Bernarda: the school not only bears her name; but everything is entrusted to her. Sr. Monica had participated in a course in Menzingen about the Founders and she conveys her enthusiasm. In the daily work of the school, collaborating in the care and training of these children, I began to learn about and know Mother Bernarda personally. My work with the sisters and with lay colleagues took on a new meaning.

Years later, in 1997, the Laicos Santa Cruz Movement emerged, which I enthusiastically joined, integrating the initial group with the support of Sr. María Teresa Leuenberger, and am actively participating in it ever since. Knowing the Founders, the origins and the Spirit of the Congregation, and sharing in the local group, life in the light of the Holy Cross Charism that we discovered, enriched my Christian experience and motivated me even more to serve.

In 2015, the Conference of Religious of Chile (CONFERRE) summons the congregations that have lay associates to meet. Hence, we met as Laity and Religious with the deep sense that "TOGETHER WE ARE MORE", and we continue to meet as Laity and Holy Cross Sisters. This has opened us up to new approaches and different experiences of lay groups and charismatic families, and motivated us to clarify our lay identity and way of participating in the Holy Cross Charism with the Sisters.



## Collecting my spiritual experience, I can also say that:

As Mother Bernarda, I believe that God is counting on me, the sisters and lay people of Santa Cruz to carry out His plans in the situations that we have to live in our environment, and I want to reciprocate their trust. I experience that conflicts and crises are inevitable, and that I need help to recognize them, resolve them and keep moving forward.

As Mother Bernarda, I have felt and feel close to God, as a loving and provident Father who cares for his creation and gives us what is necessary in due time; that's why I put myself with confidence in his hands ... and I wait.

As Mother Bernarda, I believe in the potential for life, goodness, resilience and creativity of children and adults, and for that reason, I am convinced that it is worth dedicating life to the education and training of people to humanize ourselves as a society.

As Mother Bernarda, I have the conviction that, together with my community companions, with the sisters and the laity, we are collaborating in a vast project: **THE WORK OF GOD**. He is counting on me, with all the potential he has given me and, although my current contribution is more limited and modest, I don't want to withdraw.

As Mother Bernarda, I have felt and I feel called by God, with other sisters, lay men and women, to live the Gospel values here and now, available like her, to go beyond what is already known and safe.

As Mother Bernarda, I try to cultivate a healthy, sober and simple spirituality, far from escapist visions and guilty moralism as I long to focus on the tender and merciful love of God that Jesus reveals to me and with whom I am walking along with so many sisters, brothers, and friends whom faith motivates.

As Mother Bernarda, I aspire to be able to let myself be affected by situations and people who question and urge us to live meaningfully and realistically the Cross and the New Life that Jesus proposes in these times of crisis and uncertainty.





**Sr. Franziska Mitterer HC, Germany**

Sr Franziska is a trained Spiritual Director and Retreat Facilitator. She is presently the novice directress for the German Province.

She says: *"I am fascinated by the similarity between the Ignatian spirituality and our spirituality as Sisters of the Holy Cross with the Paschal Mystery at its centre."*

## **Spiritual Accompaniment in the Light of our Charism as Sisters of the Holy Cross**

### **A Personal Word at the Beginning**

As a trained Spiritual Director and Retreat Facilitator according to the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola, I am fascinated by the similarity between the Ignatian spirituality and our spirituality as Sisters of the Holy Cross with the Paschal Mystery at its centre. As a spiritual companion, I am filled with a deep faith that no experience of death has the last word in life. This is a constant source of unshakable and joyful hope. With this fundamental attitude I meet the persons to be accompanied.

From a modern point of view, Mother Bernarda could in some ways be described as a spiritual companion for her sisters. She could not go to every locality herself when the sisters asked for direction, instead she sent letters. During the Corona pandemic, when face-to-face conversation is not possible, I also use the media and provide spiritual accompaniment by phone, by Skype or Zoom, or even by email.

Let me describe spiritual accompaniment in concrete terms, in the light of our Charism.

### **Spiritual Accompaniment**

Spiritual accompaniment means an attentive way of being present and a reverent form of accompaniment with the persons seeking spiritual direction. Spiritual accompaniment is intended to help them shape their own lives, based on a deep and sustainable relationship with God, which shows itself in a growing love and commitment.

In many of her letters, Mother Bernarda encouraged the sisters to grow in trust in God and to face challenges in their professional lives while staying connected with God who strengthens and accompanies each one. During painful experiences, she invited each sister to draw strength from contemplating the Crucified One who overcomes death in the Resurrection.

### **A Spiritual Relationship**

Before accompanying someone, the companion should have crossed through some *"deserts"*. Strengthened in faith by living through difficult life experiences, the companion will be able to understand people, who confide in them, at deeper levels. Here, too, Mother Bernarda is an example. By moving through painful experiences in faith, she was able to relate to her sisters with great empathy.

Based on mutual respect, the spiritual companion has an experience-based advantage. She has been on the spiritual journey for a longer time, has reflected on her own experiences, and knows the spiritual process. In this way, she can provide assistance to the other person. The companion relationship is characterized by honesty and closeness, as well as by great trust, which is based on God. However, it is not a relationship of friends. Thus, the spiritual companion is responsible for maintaining a healthy distance, in order to

preserve the freedom of the person being accompanied. Here, too, Mother Bernarda is a role model. How warmly she wrote to her sisters, describing herself as their loving mother. But she always maintained the necessary distance. This is clearly seen, for example, when she encourages her sisters to make their own decisions on whether to remain in the Menzingen Institute or to transfer to Ingenbohl in 1856: ***"May the Holy Spirit enlighten you to choose that which makes you content"***.

Both the companion and the person to be accompanied have their own relationship with God. This basic axiom forms the difference to a therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, Mother Bernarda draws on images from her own time for God and Jesus Christ, such as loving Father, Creator, Redeemer, Crucified love, Bridegroom, to strengthen the sisters in their relationship with God.

### Requirements of a Companion

The companion must believe that God is at work in every human being, that God wants to heal all and lead everybody to a life of fullness and that God is at work in the history of salvation even today.

***"I thank God for the goodness that He has placed in your hearts,"*** writes Mother Bernarda. Or she begins her letters with the words ***"Jesus is alive in our hearts."***

How convinced she was of the work of God in the human person, work that heals and urges one to a life of fullness and integrates her into the history of salvation.

### Content of Spiritual Direction

The starting point is the human longing for a successful and meaningful life. Advice given about personal prayer and spiritual exercises can be of assistance in shaping an everyday life that is rooted in faith. In this way, spiritual direction gives one help to ***"seek and find God in all things."*** (Ignatius of Loyola). Thereby, the concept of the human being for St. Ignatius of Loyola corresponds closely to the anthropology of Mother Bernarda and her first companions, namely that every person is created good by God, is loved by God

despite his or her dark sides, and that he or she has a unique personal calling and mission. Presumably the first sisters developed this understanding in their home canton of Aargau and at their places of education in Freiburg, Breisgau and Ribeauvillé. All three of these places had been influenced by the Catholic Enlightenment with a special conception of the human being and they were formative places for the first Menzingen Sisters: Just like a seed, a human being has much potential inside of him or her which waits to be developed and unfolded. All this is meant to serve the purpose of spreading the Kingdom of God, together with others. How central the mission was for Mother Bernarda is shown, when in a letter to Sr. Elisabeth, who is going through a serious crisis, Mother Bernarda assures her of her motherly love. At the same time she points out, that it was good that Sr. Anna had forgotten to visit the crisis-stricken Sr. Elisabeth, because this afforded Sr. Anna the necessary time to replace a sister for teaching in the school in Menzingen, who had unexpectedly fallen ill.

### A Final Word: Link to the 2019 General Chapter Message

Just as Mother Bernarda was a transforming person, in that she and her sisters encountered the educational needs of their time in an inner connection with the Crucified and Risen One, so too is Spiritual Direction a transformational process. The person to be accompanied recognizes new insights during the conversations. She can see the faithfulness of God who walks along with her, and His saving power. This frees the person to understand their mission. A mission always leads to networking with others. The spiritual director wisely accompanies the person in this process of transformation. Once people are transformed they can transform society to be more human and so manifest the values of the Kingdom of God.



## **Sr. Rita Kurusumuthu H.C. Sri Lanka**

Sr. Rita is a social worker by profession and is presently engaged in pastoral work. She is responsible for the Holy Cross lay Association in the province.

She says: *“Jesus is a living catalyst from whom we receive the inspiration to promote life.”*



### **Pastoral Mission as a Catalyst to Promote Life**

Pastoral mission is an essential part in the life of a committed and consecrated person who is called, chosen, and set apart to spread the Good news. We reflect deeper into the nature of the pastoral mission commissioned by Jesus, the True Shepherd whom we follow and imitate.

#### **The WORD became flesh and lived among us**

The Gospels bear witness to Christ and to the fidelity with which He fulfilled the mission for which He was anointed by the Spirit. It was a mission of evangelization and human redemption, which led Him to live among His people.

His startling proposal of the "Beatitudes" introduced a radical change of perspectives. Mission of Jesus Christ, as the Redeemer of humanity was to promote human life, and proclaiming the Good News of salvation through various activities. His guidance was like a shepherd leading a flock i.e., pastoral mission. Jesus entrusted the continuation of His pastoral mission to the Church. This mission of Christ is not entrusted entirely to the ordained ministers, such as bishops and priests, but to be shared by all the disciples of Christ. The pastoral mission of the Church relies on the support and collaboration of religious men/women as catalysts to promote life.

Religious Orders in the Church were started to live intensely and to spread the values of the Gospel. They chose to live chastity, poverty, and obedience as core values of the Gospels and filled with love, mercy, forgiveness, compassion, joy, dedication, understanding and peace as elements for day-to-day life to be real witnesses among His people. We influence and share Gospel values with the larger parish community. We enlighten people and express solidarity in their suffering and pain. An authentic religious can give of her best for the pastoral mission in which she finds herself. It can be a poverty situation due to unemployment or no suitable place for living. It could be a family issue needing love, mutual understanding, need for forgiveness etc. or it can be bad habits like using liquor, drugs etc. Women religious can talk with mothers or young girls, and can explain and exhort them in concrete ways how to move on courageously and with hope. In all these cases religious can share their knowledge in solidarity with people whom they know, and explore different ways to offer help.

Pastoral mission is mainly to impart the faith and help change the lifestyle of people in the world, aiming at promoting their quality of life amidst various demands and



problems. It is not imposing clerical or religious lifestyle on the people, but accompanying them with timely advice and exhortation to live their lives, in their own contexts, with all the challenges of life. People in the world are called to make difficult decisions, choices, sacrifices, in their living. They need encouragement as well as practical advice, reassurance in facing difficulties, and mediators to settle misunderstandings etc. In all such cases, the role of religious can play a big role by their love and understanding.

### **Sisters of the Holy Cross in Sri Lanka act as catalysts promoting life through their pastoral mission.**

Sri Lanka is an Island full of natural resources with beauty and was renowned by the name of “Eastern Paradise” but now it has become an opposite perspective land to many inhabitants of this country. People in this country need lots of accompaniment at different levels.

Many parts of the populations, among whom, we the Holy Cross Sisters are called to serve, are engulfed in darkness and despair. The darkness was caused mainly by the prolonged war and destruction. Losing their original and stable habitations, through displacements, lack of nurseries and schools. Human and material loss have made 90% of these people mentally, physically, and spiritually handicapped. The situation of the Up-country population, the so-called tea plantation workers are still worse to the extent that the minimum daily wages is only Rs.1000/-in spite of the repeated request. Their living conditions, educational prospect, health, transport facilities and spiritual needs etc. are yet to be considered. The Jungle rule of “survival of the fittest” is found in many areas where our sisters are called to do their pastoral mission. However, their presence and collaboration bring quality of life to the people in these areas.





A window into the lived Holy Cross Spirituality and the  
graces of later years shared by our elderly sisters as an  
inspiration to us to continue the journey  
of Mother Bernarda...



## Parts of the Mosaic of my Spirituality of the Cross

(Sister Alix Schildknecht. Menzingen)

My spirituality of the cross began at the moment of my birth as my birthplace is named as 'HELENA'. It was very important for my father that the patron saint of the house was not the beautiful Helen from Greek mythology, but the mother of Emperor Constantine, who according to legend had found the Cross of Christ. Therefore, he had a Cross put beside the name 'Helena' on the sign at the front of our house. Little did he know then that I would make my profession as a Sister of the Holy Cross in Menzingen on August 18, 1955, the feast day of St. Helen.

The Cross played a central role in our family. In every room the Crucifix had a place of honor. During our family prayer, everyone turned their gaze to the Cross. Our mother would make a Cross on our foreheads at bedtime, or before any travel. And again, it was the mother who blessed me just before she died. A few hours later she had a severe stroke. When she was carried out of the apartment on a stretcher, to be taken to the hospital, she made a Cross over herself with her healthy hand. She placed everything that was to come under the

blessing of the Cross. I was deeply impressed by this gesture and also a little ashamed of myself, when I thought: My Mom is better at living the spirituality of the Cross than I am.

But fate had dealt me a massive blow when I became the victim of intrigue. That's when I felt abandoned by God and humankind. I dragged myself through every day, unable to pray. Only in the Psalms of Lament did I find myself.

I also tried to follow the way of the Cross. And then, suddenly, I discovered my own passion history in each of the fourteen stations of the Cross. All my adversaries appeared in it. Looking at Jesus and his reactions, I learned to interpret what had happened to me differently. My story of suffering became a story of salvation. Since then, the Cross has become a paschal sign for me, a constant invitation to live resurrection in the midst of the manifold sufferings of this time.



## **My life is a great gift from God...**

**(Sr Miguela Muslin, Latin America)**

My life is a great gift from God, 'the good Father' as Mother Bernarda often called Him in her writings. I was able to experience His kind and provident hand. He took me along paths never dreamed of and called me to be a Sister of the Holy Cross, and then, like Mother Bernarda, to entrust me with the service of the Congregation. - Trusting in God, knowing that all He allows is for my good, and has sustained me throughout my life.

Along with her unshakable trust in Divine Providence, Mother Bernarda lived an active personal vocation, searching the will of God in order to be faithful to the mission entrusted to her. She accepted the sufferings and difficulties with the Crucified Lord. The experience of God's providence also increased in me the desire to do what pleases Him, and do His will.

With Mother Bernarda let us pray:  
GOD KEEP AND BLESS OUR HOUSE!

## **Do not cease to pray**

**(Sr Rita Jordaan, Cape Province)**

On 7 February 2021 I celebrated sixty-three years of religious life. The time seems to have passed so quickly that it leaves me wondering what I have done during all these years for I seem to have nothing to show for it.

I am aware that I taught for over fifty years while at the same time was involved in some parish work with the people and for the people in the area in

For Mother Bernarda the union between the sisters and the awareness of the common mission was important. At a young age, I left for an unknown country and had closer contact with different Provinces, and these were important to me. We organised meetings in different countries and continents: formators, Council of the Congregation, General Chapter, visits of the councillors to the different provinces, simultaneous translation in the Chapters, invitation of Sisters from other continents to visit the Motherhouse in Menzingen with opportunities to relate to all.

Mother Bernarda's struggle to remain faithful to the founding purpose was constant and hard. This required from us, and still requires imagination, initiative, and flexibility in the search of new paths, in the changing circumstances of our time,

which I was living at the time. I enjoyed that period for it was a time of self-discovery and spiritual growth.

In spite of my enjoyment, I felt that I was missing out on something. I became aware that my need was some kind of anchorage from which I could draw strength and courage to improve myself. I decided to pray daily for this intention, using the "*Bernarda Prayer*".

I decided on this prayer as I have always been attracted to it. The words and content are so beautiful and meaningful. The prayer tells me that I have been chosen to be a follower of Mother Bernarda. She is my leader, someone whom I could follow and imitate because of her trust and

dependence on God. Also, she would understand my fears and frustrations as well as the joys of my mission in the Kingdom of God.

I ask her "*not to cease to pray for me*" but to continue helping us to follow her example.

## **My experience as a sister of the Holy Cross (Sr Susan Moollel, South Indian)**

Looking back to my past 58 years of life as a Sister of the Holy Cross and my ministry as a Sister Doctor for 50 years, I am amazed that I could follow the footprints of the Divine Healer joyfully. I am grateful to God that the Healing mission of Jesus is continued through me. Life was and is not easy, yet I experienced God's love and protection. Divine providence has led me through smooth and difficult situations.

I can also joyfully and gratefully acknowledge that the basic principle of our Founders, **'the need of the time is the will of God'** has been running through my veins! To be conscious of the need of the time and to search for the will of God at all situations of life has grown in me as I grow in age and wisdom!

It all began in 1963! When I was to begin my life in the congregation, and my service to humanity, my Superiors and myself together discerned the *need of the time* in our country and in the Province. Accordingly, medical education was chosen for me and later to specialize in Gynaecology.

Almost always, my service was rendered to the most deserving people, in limit

situations which were chosen by the superiors and I have followed the will of God gladly in my practice. I am chosen to continue the healing mission of Jesus, bringing people to wholeness. As a Sister Doctor I was not satisfied with just the treatment alone, but I was determined to educate my patients for a wholistic and healthy life. Allowing hundreds of babies born into this world was one aspect of the divine mission He entrusted to me, which was a joyful experience. Throughout my service I depend on God, in great faith.

The expression of Mother Bernarda 'trusting in Divine Providence' was experienced numberless times which I name Divine Protection. God worked through my hands and those who worked with me. My mission and ministry as Provincial Leader for 9 years was founded on the principle of seeking God's will in the need of the time.

I was moved by the saying of Mother Bernarda, **'Be joyful when you are together'** and it has remained with me in my community life. My experience makes me proclaim: "TRUST in God in all situations! "

**All for Gods glory "unto you, O Lord only to you and not to me"**



## CLT Messages from Menzingen

I thank God for the good  
He has put in everyone.  
If we believe together in  
the great potential present  
in our spirituality we can  
become alive witnesses of  
the beauty and love of God  
Sr. Joanna



Leaping out in faith, working together as one,  
We put our trust in the future  
knowing that God has already  
been there.

I pray that we may be free from inner  
and outer harms and danger, be safe  
and protected and may all beings  
be safe, happy, healthy and live  
joyously. Love Sr. Rose Paul

M. Bernarda cultivated a deep  
relationship with God. A living  
faith in the indwelling presence of  
God in her soul always gave her  
courage. This inspires and challenges  
us to witness to the Crucified and  
Risen Lord and to see the suffering  
world around us with an eye of  
faith. Let us place our trust in Him!  
SR. Fatima

I read a magazine: "It is through  
gratitude for the present moment  
that the spiritual dimension of life  
opens up" I think is a great  
challenge for us to be grateful for  
each sunrise that the good Father  
give us. let us lovingly welcome  
these opportunities and continue to  
serve with joy and creativity.  
Sr. Matilde!

As I watch the blossoms  
here burst into life after  
the long cold winter, I too  
feel new life spring  
within me. It is my  
hope that throughout  
the seasons of this year  
you will be energized by  
life around you & the  
people you meet, in nature  
and events of everyday.  
God bless, Sr. Bernadette



## *The Oak Tree*

*A mighty wind blew night and day.*

*It stole the Oak Tree's leaves away.*

*Then snapped its boughs*

*and pulled its bark*

*until the Oak was tired and stark.*

*But still the Oak Tree held its ground*

*while other trees fell all around.*

*The weary wind gave up and spoke,*

*How can you still be standing Oak?"*

*The Oak Tree said, I know that you  
can break each branch of mine in two,*

*carry every leaf away,*

*shake my limbs and make me sway.*

*But I have roots*

*stretched in the earth,*

*growing stronger since my birth.*

*You'll never touch them, for you see*

*they are the deepest part of me.*

*Until today, I wasn't sure*

*of just how much I could endure.*

*But now I've found with thanks to you,*

*I'm stronger than I ever knew.*



*In thanksgiving to Mother Bernarda for the courage she  
took in responding to God's call. Her courage give birth to  
our Holy Cross Congregation for which each of us is grateful.*









*Holy Cross Sisters - Menzingen*