Generalate - evaluation process in Mondo Migliore. 10 – 12 July

Before we went on holiday or undertook some language course to improve our English or our Italian, we went for three days to a very beautiful place near the Lake Albano, just opposite Castel Gandolfo. Away from our usual place of work we had time to review our experiences during the first 6 months of our time in Rome, to clarify our vision for the future and to get to know each other more deeply. Claire Coldwell and Gill Chapman accompanied us through these days most competently and with great personal commitment. The Myers Briggs Type Indicator was a great help to us in understanding the particular strengths of our team.
350 Years of Mary Ward Sisters in Augsburg – Middle European Province

In July 1662 Mary Poyntz came to Augsburg with five companions, because the Mayor of that time had invited her to come and educate girls. The little group opened an elementary school immediately, and there has been a Mary Ward school in Augsburg ever since: a reason to celebrate and give thanks.

An exhibition in the Town Hall showed the eventful history of the school and those who ran it. The leader of the project was Professor Hans Frei, who had also set up the exhibition for the CJ 400-year Jubilee. Former pupils, friends of the school and the house, as well as tourists who happened to pass while visiting the Town Hall, were delighted with the exhibition. The fifteen sisters who had served as supervisors were able to confirm that fact. A picture at the entrance, of Mary Ward with pupils, and the caption ‘Half-women are no use in such times as these,’ attracted attention and aroused many people’s curiosity.

The climax and conclusion of the festivities was a solemn liturgy and closing ceremony in the Cathedral on 27th July.

The Cathedral was full of pupils – about 1000 – and the 300 guests from the town, the school authorities and the diocese, were impressed by their good behaviour, and still more by the carefully-prepared Mass, concelebrated by three bishops and six priests. The principal celebrant was Auxiliary Bishop Dr. Anton Losinger. During the liturgy of the Word four pupils, from the 17th century, the 19th century, the time after the Second World War, and the present day, were interviewed. At the same time the choir sang the canon ‘And the shoot burst out and grew from the tree’, from Albrecht’s musical.

This was accompanied by an offertory procession with first a basket of seeds, then twigs, then a leafy tree decorated with coloured streamers.

The closing ceremony in the Small Golden Hall, the assembly hall of the former Jesuit college, was equally impressive. The speaker was the former Minister of Culture, Professor Hans Mauer. His outstanding address was on the present situation of education, and what Mary Ward has to say to us today. Despite the heat and the lateness of the hour the audience enjoyed the fitting content and style of his speech. Then the festivity came to an end with a delicious and well-deserved meal in the school dining room and garden.

We Mary Ward Sisters in Augsburg are full of thankfulness for the success of the celebrations, and we were made aware once more of what significance we still have for the school and for the town.

Report by Sr. Margita Kahler
Three students leave the Roman community this summer

Sr. Bernarda Francu CJ, has done her Bachelor and Licentiate in Youth ministry and catechesis at the Pontificial University Salesiana. At the end of July she went back to the Romanian Province. Sr. Fides Strenkova, finished her doctorate at the Pontifical University Gregoriana and went back to the Slovakian Province. Sr. Cecilia Choi CJ, has only been in Rome for 11 months. She will first go back to the Korean province and will then continue her theological studies in the Philippines. On Sunday the 8th of July the sisters of the Generalate invited them for a little farewell party, to thank them for their contribution to the Roman community and to wish them God’s blessing for their future.

Sr. Jane Livesey reports from Rome:-

Sister Františka (my professional translator!) and I were in Russia for 12 days as part of the consultation visit of the Slovak province prior to the appointment of a new provincial. We have six sisters in Russia, all of them members of the Slovak province, in three locations—two each in Tjumen and Kyubyshev in Siberia and two in Novocherkassk, a town in the south of Russia.

We left Tjumen “gateway to Siberia”, at 4.30 am and were in the train for 13 hours! Barabinsk is the nearest station to the town of Kyubyshev where we have a community of two sisters working in the parish. Here summer lasts about three months. Spring and autumn are barely a month each and the rest just snow and cold— it can go as low as -30 degrees centigrade and these are by no means the coldest part of Siberia. But the summer is hot, very hot. In Tjumen it was about 38 degrees C each day and it was equally hot in Kyubyshev and even hotter in Novocherkassk. The climate is only one of the difficult circumstances in which the members have to live and work in Russia.

Now and again we passed villages which look as though they have been there for ever. People eke out a living and supplement it with from their own vegetable patch and a few chickens. Houses are small, wooden, often with no running water though they do have electricity. We also passed through towns and cities. To give a sense of the sheer vastness of Russia, of which Siberia is only a part – when we left Kyubyshev to travel to Novocherkassk we got up at 3.30 am to drive the four hours to Novosibirsk airport on the main road through Siberia which had clearly not been re-tarmaced since being—built-bone shaking does not begin to describe it.

The people we met in the village we visited are Catholics. They are poor and so do not always manage the 40 km into Tjumen for Mass as they have no car. The Catholic community in Tjumen is very small—only 40/50 regular Sunday mass goers with about 100 or so at Christmas and Easter. It is not easy being a Catholic as the Orthodox Church continues to be very powerful in Russia.

The Catholics in this part of the world (Siberia) are what are known as “German Russians”- descendants of Germans brought to Russia by Catherine the Great to work on her many projects because of their skills as craftsmen and artists. Eventually they settled in a series of small towns along the river Volga – until 1941. When Hitler invaded Russia and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 1939 went out of the window all these people were rounded up and deported to Siberia where they were distributed in small (or in some cases non-existent) villages miles from each other and everywhere else and left to fend for themselves.

In recent years the German government has developed a programme for those German Russians who wish to do so to go and live in Germany where they are provided with flats and money. Many have gone- but quite a few have returned because as they said, “in Russia we are German
pigs and in Germany we are Russian pigs.” It is mainly the next generation, who can adapt more easily who have remained and made a life in Germany.

Sisters of Tjumen Community

The sisters in Tjumen and the other two communities work as pastoral assistants in parishes supporting the parish priests, some religious, some diocesan and almost all from other countries such as Poland and Germany. Our sisters in Tjumen live in a reasonably sized very typical wooden house. They too cultivate their own vegetables because no-one trusts the markets because the vegetables and fruits are often bad and over-priced. When the sisters buy things such as meat they always try it out on the cat first- if the cat won’t eat it neither do they!

I have concentrated in this account on Tjumen, the place we visited first but our experience in Kyubyshev (once one of the “closed” towns of Siberia) and Novocherkassk was similar- and in each place the parishioners expressed great gratitude for all that our sister are doing with and for them.

So it was all a bit of an adventure but with a serious purpose- to encourage and support the members who have been missioned to a place and a mission that is very demanding both humanly and spiritually, but where they were doing exactly the things that Mary Ward talks about in the Institutum and St. Ignatius talks about at the beginning of the Constitutions –fostering the faith through any means available including teaching and preaching and catechising. And time and again I found myself wondering what Mary Ward is making of her Institute, crushed out of existence almost 400 years ago, having reached a part of the earth she might never even have heard of……

Kyubyshev Community with parish people

Novocherkassk
This summer an inter-branch and inter-province retreat and workshop was held in Chile for the Spanish-speaking Mary Ward sisters, with a similar programme being held immediately afterwards in Brazil, with the participation of some lay friends of Mary Ward. This was planned by CJ and IBVM sisters as a follow up to GC 2011. Sister Gemma Simmonds led both retreats and workshops, arriving in Santiago de Chile to address a gathering of sisters from Chile, Argentina, Peru & Ecuador, as well as sisters from these countries—2 Irish, 1 Indian, 2 Spanish and 1 Romanian sister en route for the new foundation in Cuba—so they were a truly international group. The dynamic was based on the way delegates had worked at the GC in Loyola, with faith groups, discussion groups, silent reflection & input on our CJ/IBVM identity & universal mission. The host province had organized everything to perfection and everyone participated with great dedication and seriousness, in a real atmosphere of prayer and union of minds & hearts. A short space such as this does no justice to it, but we all took several steps nearer to achieving some of the goals of GC 2011.

A similar programme was repeated in Brazil, and here is a report from the Brazilian province:

The meeting began with 40 sisters of the Brazilian province, 3 lay people and 1 diocesan priest, Fr. Marcio, whose notes helped us in giving this account. The first talk addressed the theme of our fundamental identity – as human beings and baptized persons, laying stress on the 3 primary elements of identity which we received at baptism: to be prophet, priest and king. These were constantly illustrated with practical examples from the life of Mary Ward, biblical texts and also the significant witness of the missionary life and activity of sisters from the Congregatio Jesu. During the talks we were invited to share practical examples from our own personal lives in respect of ecological questions, the care of planet earth, globalization and consumption, power within the church and the weakness within its structures.

In her second talk Sr. Gemma developed further the role of the mirror in the life of Mary Ward, referring to the Glory Vision, which is so important in the history of the Congregatio Jesu, and in which Mary Ward enabled us to find the face of Jesus when we look into a mirror and see the glory of God in ourselves and other people. Sister Gemma urged the group to have a spiritual vision of the reality of each person, looking with eyes full of compassion and forgiveness at nature, at humanity in general and at ourselves. Each one of us has her/his own mission which does not consist in what we do or in where we live, but in who we are, and this continues to be our mission until the moment of our death – a death which can be a mission in itself. Nevertheless we also share in the universal mission of the community to which we belong, called, as part of Mary Ward’s family, to unite the recollection of hermits with the zeal of apostles.

We watched a film about the survival of religious sisters under Communist persecution which featured the late Sister Clara Laslau CJ of Rumania. She knew how to live in the presence of God and recognize him even in the daily events of her life in prison. She bore witness to love and forgiveness as a member of the body of Christ, even when it was impossible to receive the sacraments during her fourteen years of imprisonment....

We asked ourselves how to live out a ‘mysticism in the world’, how to develop a contemplative way of doing things. Sr. Gemma talked about many aspects of the ‘Just Soul’ vision, for example freedom from clinging to the things of this world, ‘referring all to God’ and discernment of the world’s criteria. Our greatest challenge is to exercise power in God’s way and not in that of this world. On the 3rd day, continuing with reflections on the film we considered suffering from God’s perspective. Mary Ward did not show a passive acceptance, but struggled to unite her will with that of God.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Sr. Gemma for sharing such riches with us in the Brazilian province. We thank God for the op-
portunity of having such a deep experience of Ignatian spirituality, the way of Mary Ward and the witness of those sisters who consecrated themselves to the reign of God. We believe that all this will be of great help to the missionary endeavours of the Brazilian province.

Gemma Simmonds CJ

Sr. Assunta reports from Delhi Province

The Project for the Leprosy Patients is the brain child of Sr. Dominica who had worked very hard to collect funds to provide them with decent rooms for living. I have visited the ashram with Sr. Dominica and later with Sr. Tarsicia. Ever since I have taken over as the superior I too make visits with a companion once a month providing them with provisions for the month, which would amount to Rs. 25,000. At our request some teachers and well-wishers contribute once in a while by way of cash, clothes, gifts and meals. There are 22 male and 19 female inmates besides children. A number of them are affected, some have no limbs. Every year one or the other dies. Their children are kept in a boarding house at Dehradun. One would not believe that some of them are not given the BPL (Below Poverty Line) ration card. In the beginning I was hesitant to touch them. On many occasions I have been tempted to take the innocent and beautiful children in my arms but hesitated out of fear. Now my fear has vanished. They are a lovable lot and it is a joy to visit them. I notice that, though they are poor they are quite contented with what they have, making no big demands. I learned this lesson from them, to be contented with what I have and make no big demands on others. The beginning of this project was in the late 80s. One day while Sr. Dominica Hank was travelling down from Nainital, she came across number of lepers begging which moved her immensely. From that day on she wanted to do something for them in order that they need not have to beg any more. She did not know how to go about it for she did not have the means. At the same time she nurtured the thought and shared it with her students. Her students were very positive and were ready to contribute. Around that time Mother General Michael Pelli visited Nainital. Sr. Dominica revealed her desire and the General gladly gave her the permission to start the project. The first financial aid came from Mother General herself to start a bank account for them. From then on Sister Dominica did not look back. She gathered funds from generous persons in India (ex-students) and abroad and built proper houses for them and made strong walls around the Ashram with an iron gate. Ever since monthly visit is made by Nainital community providing them with provisions for the month. Sr. Dominica used to visit and spent time with them regularly while she was alive.

The patients remember Sr. Dominica Hank, their great benefactor with much love and great gratitude. It was her compassionate love and determination that brought happiness to these persons in great need.

The leprosy patients outside their homes
Thinking together with the JPIC Co-Secretary

The CJ General Assistants had a think-tank session with the JPIC Co-Secretary, Sr. Teresa Dagdag, MM, Ph.D. on 25th June. This initiative was taken to strengthen our JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) coordination at all levels. A historical overview of the development of the commission gave the background for our thinking and sharing. The strategic plan of the JPIC consists of professional development, centrality of JPIC in religious life, Focus of the Commission, and networking with other groups. JPIC commission has formed working groups in order to realize its goals, namely, Integrity of Creation, Africa Working Group and Anti-trafficking. The JPIC Promoters working Group are Catholic social teaching, Immigrants, Prayer for peace and life, Economic justice, UN Food and agriculture, Collaboration of men and women in the church, peace group etc. The questions asked were: (1) How do we do JPIC Ministry? (2) What are the situations of injustice in your place of mission? (3) How are you thinking of addressing them? (4) Who are your allies? (5) What can help you to sustain your efforts for justice? Do you have a spirituality for Justice, Peace and integrity of Creation? We also shared our ideas, challenges and dreams for JPIC. As a practical step forward for better coordination of JPIC in Provinces, we will be working out a role description for province level coordinators so that people suitable for the mission can be selected as province JPIC Coordinators.

The next edition of CJ News will be published in December. Your editor will be happy to receive news items and photographs from various provinces and regions especially from the ones from where we have not heard recently. Please would you make sure that the news items and photos reach the editor by 20th November. Thank you very much.