



Sisters  
Hospitallers

*Newsletter - May 2020*

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Nº 37

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# Annual solidarity project: improving mental health in East Timor



**This project aims to put into operation a mental health centre in the region of Maliana, where there is virtually no infrastructure to care for those suffering from mental illness.**

Last year culminated with the announcement of the new Sisters Hospitallers' Solidarity Project for 2020: the opening of a mental health clinic in East Timor. This project aims to put into operation a mental health centre in the region of Maliana, where there is virtually no infrastructure to care for those suffering from mental illness.

The project consists of two parts: i) the opening of a small outpatient mental health clinic that offers consultations to the local population; and ii) the dispatching of a mobile healthcare unit to other areas of the Bobonaro district so more people can benefit from consultations and medical treatment.

The Benedict Menni Foundation engages in

fundraising to help with the project and promotes the dissemination of information and awareness about the issue of mental health in East Timor.

## **East Timor**

East Timor is one of the poorest countries in Asia, with 50% of its one million inhabitants living below the national poverty line. It is also the youngest country in Asia, having obtained independence from Indonesia in 2002 after three years of conflict, crisis, and violence.

Prior to the humanitarian crisis of 1999, there were no mental health professionals or services in the country. In addition, many primary care facilities were destroyed in the conflict. After independence, the mental healthcare

field began to develop, though many deficiencies persist.

The Sisters Hospitallers travelled to East Timor and conducted a diagnostic analysis of the country's mental health needs, through which they were able to determine the many shortcomings affecting the population in the healthcare field. People suffering from mental illness are still "treated" with the traditional medicine of very old cultural and religious rituals. With few exceptions, there is no organised response.

After evaluating the context of access to mental healthcare in East Timor, the Sisters detected a need for new infrastructures that would allow the population to be cared for, especially in rural areas. The region with the greatest need was Maliana, a city in East Timor located 149 km southwest of Dili, the country's capital. With 22,000 residents, Maliana is the capital of the Bobonaro district and is situated only a few kilometres from the Indonesian border.

### Objective and development

The project seeks to address the needs detected and aims to improve the mental health of East Timor residents by opening a clinic for the rehabilitation and integration of people suffering from mental illness. The outpatient centre for consultations and the treatment of mental health will be recognised by the Ministry of Health and supplemented by other services. In addition, a mobile health unit that can travel to rural areas away from the clinic will aim to bring comprehensive care to the most vulnerable people.

The centre's focus will be comprehensive, promoting — in addition to care services — the integration and rehabilitation of people suffering

from mental illness, working to raise awareness about the issue, and bringing the family and the community in line with the Hospitaller spirit of accepting the whole person.

The project is still in the nascent phase. The Sisters in the region have already made initial contact with the Ministry of Health and have begun to interact with the people of East Timor. We expect that the project will develop step by step and thus help improve the mental health of the people in the most need.

The Benedict Menni Foundation has issued an appeal for help with the project and plans to carry out awareness campaigns in every country where the Congregation is present. The Foundation welcomes donations from anyone who wishes to collaborate with this just, unifying cause that proves solidarity knows no boundaries. Don't hesitate to lend a hand!

**"The centre's focus will be comprehensive, promoting, in addition to care services, integration and rehabilitation"**







**“The execution of these projects helps enhance the culture of solidarity within the Congregation. There are places where resources are extremely scarce”**

### **Solidarity projects: a story of community**

The initiative to undertake a new solidarity project every year has a long history. In 2012 the first annual solidarity project was launched: a rehabilitation centre for people suffering from mental illness in Trivandrum, India. As the instrument that channels cooperation for the Congregation’s development, the Benedict Menni Foundation is tasked with promoting the project and accepting donations of support.

The execution of these projects helps enhance the culture of solidarity within the Congregation. There are places where resources are extremely scarce and as a religious Hospitaller community, we work to expand the Hospitaller presence and continue practicing hospitality in different parts of the world, despite the difficulties.

The achievements of the Solidarity Project initiative are many. The actions carried out to promote the various projects demonstrate the creativity that emerges from acts of charity. We have secured considerable support



in the funding of these projects, facilitating their success and improving the mental health of people in disadvantaged countries.



## Georgina Donzing

Sister Hospitaller since 1988 and director of the St. Francis Xavier Hospital in Assin Foso, Ghana.

**"I am concerned about the welfare of the large staff, under my leadership, so we are taking all possible measures to avoid contact with the virus"**

A Sister Hospitaller since 1988, Georgina Donzing holds a degree in Nursing from the University of Ghana. She also studied teaching for vocational training in Rome (Italy) and speaks four languages: English, Italian, Spanish, and Twi, her native tongue. Her Hospitaller career has been based primarily in Africa. She is currently the managing director of the Sisters Hospitallers' St. Francis Xavier Hospital in Assin Foso (Ghana).

### **How do you feel and how are you coping with the COVID-19 pandemic?**

I feel good, hopeful. I know that God will answer our prayers for a vaccine or medication to be discovered soon.

My life and my routine have not changed much. I still move around the hospital to observe the different situations that may arise, visit the units, and interact with patients and visitors. I am more cautious than usual to avoid contracting the virus. In Ghana, there has not yet been a total lockdown.

### **What protocols have changed at the hospital as a result of COVID-19?**

So far the hospital is working well, despite the fact that preparation and the preventative mechanisms are exhausting our economic resources. We have implemented measures to stop the spread of the virus. At the entrance of our facilities, we have installed a control sta-



tion where our healthcare personnel can examine and detect suspected cases of COVID-19 before these patients access the complex.

We have installed hand-washing stations throughout the hospital to facilitate and promote good hygiene among patients and professionals. We have also acquired protective equipment for the entire staff.

As head of the hospital, I am concerned about the welfare of the large staff under my



leadership. Their safety is my priority, so we are taking all possible measures to avoid contact with the virus.

### **What measures are being taken to ensure the safety of patients?**

Since 4 February, before the first case was reported in Ghana, our Quality Control and Clinical Monitoring Team organised a training workshop for the whole staff where they received training on the coronavirus, as well as the prevention and control of infectious diseases. We also embarked on a public education campaign: we collaborate with the city's radio stations to discuss disease contagion and prevention.

In addition, we are very strict about visiting hours and only allow patients one visitor at a time in order to limit the flow of people coming in and out of the hospital.

### **What has been your biggest concern so far?**

The scarcity of PPE (personal protective equipment) and the increase in prices of essential

healthcare items, particularly since the National Healthcare System has not reimbursed us for the funds we have had to advance for the past year, causing the pharmaceutical companies from which we buy products to refuse us credit.

### **What measures are you taking on a personal level to prevent contagion?**

I strictly adhere to the established protocols for all personnel, such as frequent hand washing; I insist that everyone who visits the office wash their hands regularly. And we no longer shake hands. I am very careful because I am in close contact with many people, some of whom are vulnerable. I take social distancing very seriously.

### **Is there anything you would like to say to the Hospitaller community?**

I want to encourage the Sisters, the professionals, and the volunteers from all our centres to continue their wonderful professional and humanitarian work, and continue praying. I also want to urge everyone to adhere to WHO protocols on disease prevention.



**"I want to encourage the Sisters, the professionals, and the volunteers from all our centres to continue their wonderful professional and humanitarian work."**

## Donation of facemasks

### Province of France

In March, the Sisters Hospitaliers' Maison de Retraite Bethanie centre in France **appealed to the talent of local seamstresses to make facemasks to help protect its professionals from COVID-19.** Many families and anonymous individuals joined the initiative altruistically to combat the lack of protection for our collaborators who ensure the health of our sick and elderly population.

This beautiful charitable gesture produced more than 100 masks that have been received with great joy and appreciation by the entire Bethanie staff.



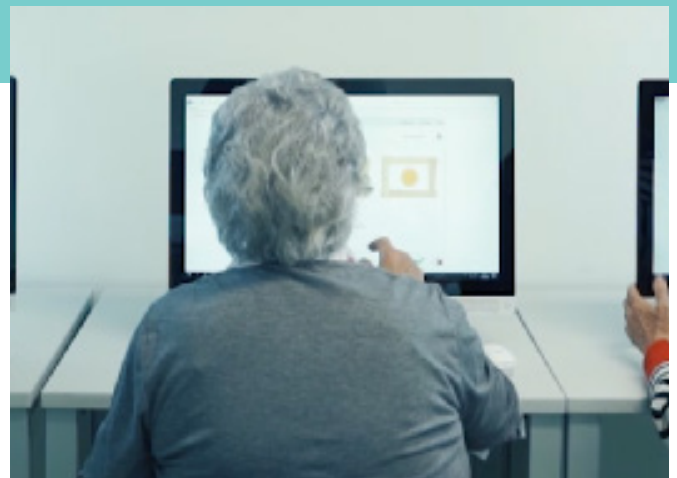
## Active and healthy aging

### Province of Portugal

In 2018, the Sisters Hospitaliers' Casa de Saúde da Idanha in Lisbon (Portugal) opened **a gym to improve the cerebral capacity of older people.** Its main objective is to promote active, healthy, and inclusive aging.

The gym offers elderly people from the town of Sintra free fortnightly brain fitness classes, led by a specialised, multidisciplinary team. Each participant has an individualised training plan that allows them to adapt the activities to their unique needs, potential, and expectations.

Training plans include non-pharmacological intervention supported by new technologies like robotics. Activities include computerised cognitive training, cognitive and physical exercise, cognitive stimulation with non-immersive virtual reality, and classes about healthy lifestyles. These training plans have improved the cognitive, motor, affective,



functional, and social performance of elderly people.

Sessions are also offered to enhance literacy in the areas of aging and dementia, cognitive assessment, consulting, and training for different organisations.

In light of its scientific relevance and strong social impact, the facility was recently awarded several prestigious awards in Portugal.



## Prayer in solidarity

### Delegation of the Philippines

During the quarantine, the Sisters Hospitallers community in Pasig (Philippines) agreed that each Sister should offer one hour of prayer, reflection and adoration each day, in unity with the entire Congregation and the Church for the healing and protection of those affected by the coronavirus pandemic, especially among our users and healthcare professionals.

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me”(John 14:1). God will always be there; He will never abandon us.



## Horticultural therapy

### Province of England

Since the beginning of the year, the Sisters Hospitallers' St. Benedict Menni Centre in Liberia has offered patients a new activity: gardening. The goal of this initiative is to provide patients suffering from mental illness a therapeutic and occupational activity that helps with their rehabilitation.

A group of volunteers from the Sisters Hospitallers' Aita Menni Hospital in Spain were tasked with launching the activity. The project leader, psychologist and director of Intellectual Disability at the Aita Menni Hospital, Macarena Aspiunza, lists the benefits of gardening, according to numerous studies.

**Cognitive:** improves vocabulary and communication skills; arouses curiosity, observation skills and sensory stimulation.

**Social:** improves interaction within the group; improves consideration for oneself and others; enables integration in the community through professional training.



**Emotional:** reduces anxiety, stress, and unsettling behaviour; boosts self-esteem, satisfaction, and a sense of achievement; improves management of anger and frustration; enhances a sense of wellbeing.

**Physical:** develops and improves motor skills and coordination; achieves physical activity goals; increases outdoor activity and exercise; promotes healthy eating habits and reduces obesity, etc.



## Hope in hard times

### Province of Italy

At the Sisters Hospitallers' Villa San Benedetto Menni in Albese (Italy), everyone remembers 10 February 2020 as the beginning of a long and challenging period, which still affects the life of the entire Hospitaller community. That day, the first security measures were taken to contain the spread of the virus that has brought humanity to its knees: COVID-19.

The crisis began in Italy with incredible speed. At our centre, coronavirus containment actions multiplied daily, becoming increasingly drastic in terms of both the measures indicated by the Ministry of Health and the decisions of the Coronavirus Task Force established specifically at the facilities.

The main objective has always been to protect the health of everyone: residents, collaborators, and family members. Since the



onset of the crisis, collaborators have made colossal professional and humanitarian efforts, for which we are deeply grateful.

At a time of incessant work, fatigue, pain... there has also been moments of consolation, support, and affection from the entire Hospitaller community, as well as from citizens and companies in the area that have chosen to reaffirm their trust in the Villa San Benedetto. Thank you!

## Training in governance and promotion

### Province of Spain

On 18 and 19 February, a group of 35 Sisters Hospitallers, Superiors and Leaders of community groups from the Province of Spain and the Province of England shared a workshop on the subject of "Embodying an evangelical and charismatic style of promotion and governance."

The Claretian, Gonzalo Fernández, head of spirituality and Vicar General of his congregation led this activity. The workshop facilitated the mutual exchange of knowledge and demonstrated new elements and techniques in this revamped approach to Hospitaller promotion and governance.

"Thank you for the richness and the spark that rekindles the heart to experience the journey with hope and enthusiasm, knowing that Jesus is by our side. He has sown the seed of



goodness in everyone; He asks us to focus on the seeds of life, to dare to dream, because an Institution that does not dream knows that its days are numbered. Our continued commitment to community promotion is a worthwhile endeavour," said the participating Sisters.

This training session, which corresponds to one of the lines of the General and Provincial Chapters, was organised by the government of the Province of Spain.



## Carlos Chamusca

**"I realised I had always been on the path to hospitality and I decided to join the group of lay Hospitallers"**

After a long life, 50 years of marriage, two children, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren, during which I did not always give God His due attention, I sensed Him calling me, asking, "Why do you not follow me?"

After reflecting on the paths the Lord had chosen for me; humanity, acceptance, love, service, mutual assistance and care, I realised I had always been on the path to hospitality and I decided to join the group of lay Hospitallers at the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa de Saúde da Idanha in Lisbon, Portugal.

The group consists of centre employees and volunteers, as well as other people from the nearby parishes who identify with the Hospitaller charism. We meet once a month and follow a text that gui-

des us through the reflections proposed by the Province.

We engage in many activities of a spiritual and charitable nature. Some initiatives are carried out at the Casa de Saúde da Idanha, while others take place outside the centre, allowing us to raise awareness about the lay Hospitallers and their objectives among the local population.

Sharing with the Sisters and the other lay Hospitallers has given me a deeper understanding of what it means to let the Samaritan spirit of Jesus enter and inspire me to embody and transmit the Hospitaller charism.

Also, as a member of the group of lay Hospitallers, I am a volunteer at the centre. Visiting six days a week allows me the opportunity to give and receive a tremendous amount of love. The happiness I feel knows no limits.



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