



Sisters  
Hospitallers

*Newsletter - December 2020*

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Nº 40

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## #Committed

Meet Susana Martins, Lay Hospitaller from the Province of Portugal.



# “Antena Aynos” project in Cameroon



This project, which is supported by the Benedict Menni Foundation and the Pamplona City Council, aims to improve medical care and facilitate access to medical devices for people suffering from mental illness who live in communities far from the Yaundé health clinic.

Year after year, the Benedict Menni Foundation works on development cooperation projects that aim to improve mental health care in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This year the Foundation supports the “Antena Aynos” project, conceived by the Benoit Menni Mental Health Clinic in Yaundé (Cameroon). The project’s goal is to provide mental health care access to those who live in communities far from the clinic. Let’s take a look at the history of this centre and explore how this project came about.

## History of the Benoit Menni Mental Health Clinic in Yaundé

The history of the Mental Health Centre is tightly linked to that of the Congregation in Cameroon. It all began with the appearance of the first Cameroonian Hospitaller ca-

lling in Italy; then, on 13 April 1993, the sisters embarked on their maiden voyage to Cameroon.

Mons. ZOA Jean, Archbishop of Yaundé, granted his approval to establish the Congregation in Yaundé. On 1 July 1993, the Benoît Menni Mental Health Clinic opened, beginning its activity in the community’s own house.

In July 1994, a small facility was rented in Biyemassi for psychiatric assessments, before building the centre on Mvolyé hill in the Efoulan district, an area of 300,000 residents today. The local population is very diverse, a virtual mosaic of all the tribes of Cameroon, and many expatriates from Africa and Europe (laity). In December 1995, operations began in this building.

The Yaunde project derives from the objectives of the Congregation, which promotes caring for those who suffer from mental illness in their own environment. The model of care in the African community is based on the creation of dispensaries and outpatient centres in the primary sector and the development of programmes that aim to:

- rehabilitate peoplesufferingfrommentalillness;
- compensate for the effects the disease has on the family unit;
- contribute to the construction of a social space that promotes integration.

The centre is located in the Yaundé III district, in the Yaundé III urban community, and the Efoulan health district. The Sisters Hospitallers' Benedict Menni Healthcare Centre has become a benchmark given the positive nature of the work it conducts, and it is considered by the local population to be a true benefit to society, especially to those with fewer resources.

### Mental health in Cameroon

Mental health in Cameroon has yet to become a major priority. Despite having a high

incidence of mental illness and one of the highest suicide rates in Africa (17.1/100,000 among men in 2016), Cameroon does not have a national mental health policy or relevant legislation. In addition to a lack of institutional protection, there is scant public spending allocated to the issue, only 0.26% of total spending. The training and specialisation of mental health professionals are also minimal. According to data from the World Health Observatory, only 0.003 of every 100,000 residents worked as psychiatrists in the country in 2011.

### The "Antena Ayos" project

The Sisters Hospitallers centre in Yaundé is a beacon for patients suffering from mental illness, as is evident from the statistics of those treated. The number of patients grows year after year, many of whom travel over 100 km to visit this reputable centre. The daily monitoring of patients at the Yaundé Mental Health Clinic shows that a significant portion arrives from remote locations. Over the years, many people have arrived from towns like Ayos, Ebo- lowa, and Akonolinga, 150 km from Yaundé.

It is for this reason that the centre has created an "antennas" project, consisting of mobile

This project aims to provide mental health care access to people living in communities far from the Yaundé centre.







The number of patients grows year after year, many of whom travel over 100 km to visit this reputable centre.

teams that travel to these remote areas providing care to people suffering from mental illness. The project, which is supported by the Benedict Menni Foundation and the Pamplona City Council, aims to improve medical care and facilitate access to medical devices for sufferers who live in communities far from the Yaundé health clinic.

The mental health team from the clinic in Yaundé regularly travels to meet the residents of Ayos and Ebolowa, where they conduct consultations, deliver medication, and follow-up on treatments.

The project also entails raising awareness of mental health issues, mainly among relatives. Until recently, this project was made possible by the immense support and dedication of our dear sister, Mercedes Gurbindo, to whom we

said goodbye not long ago, to our great sadness.

### **Lend a helping hand to the Benedict Menni Foundation**

You can join the Benedict Menni Foundation in collaborating on this project and many other initiatives, either as a volunteer or by making a donation that will help our efforts to improve mental health care in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Donations are welcome at this account: Banco Santander: IBAN: ES91-0049-1834-1129-1017-7325

You can contact the Foundation at: [fundacionbm@hscgen.org](mailto:fundacionbm@hscgen.org) or [coordinadorfbm@hscgen.org](mailto:coordinadorfbm@hscgen.org)

# The Christmas celebration in times of COVID-19

## Pierangela Shaw Sherman

Relative of a Sisters Hospitallers user in Uruguay.

**“It fills me with peace and joy to know that my mother is well cared for.”**



**“We are endlessly grateful to the home that cares for her. We see her exercising, painting... activities that make life worth living.”**

My mother, Berta Sherman, has lived at the Sisters Hospitallers' Benito Menni geriatric centre in Montevideo (Uruguay) since July 2017. Before her admission, she was increasingly confused and had suffered a serious episode of disorientation, which led us to seek professional help. After visiting several centres for the elderly, we arrived at the Sisters Hospitallers. Their home provides the necessary medical care and a pleasant environment in keeping with custom. Since she

arrived, my mother's medical care has been excellent and the sense of humanity in the home is incomparable. In her first year as a resident, she returned to a healthy weight and regained her spark and insight, despite her failing memory. The centre offers her a refuge, where all of her needs are met. She has found spiritual support and affection, for which she is grateful every day.

### Christmas in excellent care

This Christmas, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren had tickets to travel to Uruguay to spend the holidays with her, but they will not make the voyage due to COVID-19. I will go alone and hope my brother can join us. We will avoid restaurants and the family gatherings of the past, but nevertheless, it will be a great joy and a tremendous blessing.

We are grateful to the home that cares for her, that keeps her pain-free and encourages her to celebrate life. We see her exercising, painting, attending Mass, watching movies, taking part in events that make her feel happier than ever.

In light of the COVID-19 situation, I feel anxiety on a personal, family, and global level, but it fills me with peace and joy to know that my mother is well cared for by the Sisters Hospitallers. My wish this Christmas is to feel her close, happy, and safe, in the excellent care of the home.



## Joan Bertran Muñoz

Medical doctor, Coordinator of internal medicine and bioethics at the Sisters Hospitallers' San Rafael Hospital in Barcelona, Spain.

**"The Hospitaller community works to fulfil the mission of our founders"**



**"The dedicated work of all the hospital co-workers strengthens the bonds of the Hospitaller community"**

### Christmas in the hospital

This year we prepare for Christmas a different way. The epidemiological indicators of the SARS-CoV-2 virus have improved, and now we must maintain basic epidemiological norms: social distancing, hand washing, facemasks. The forecast is to gather with fewer people, respecting the current precautions at all times; virtual engagement will take precedence. Holiday decorations, the nativity scene at the hospital entrance, the lights outside the building, and the illuminated crèche will showcase one of the most important liturgical times of the year.

The celebration of the Eucharist will comply with current rules, and naturally, we will miss the participation of people from the neighbourhood, who typically join the sisters at Christmas. However, flyers will be distributed detailing the events that can be followed on TV or online (and how to connect). An attempt will also be made to continue the Children's Drawing Contest, though the award ceremony will be virtual.

As a safety precaution, we will discourage large numbers of people from gathering in a single space. We will also check for symptoms of the virus and ensure people comply with the three basic rules: social distancing, hand washing, and facemasks. We will facilitate online communication to avoid any unnecessary visits and we will circulate information about all activities through the hospital website and email.

### Bonds of the Hospitaller community

The main difference will be social distancing, controlled capacity, and the need to celebrate virtually, not just by viewing the broadcast, but by sharing comments and experiences through virtual conferences, email, social media, phone calls, and video calls. A large Mass will not be possible, nor the usual Christmas concert starring our Menni Quartet. It will not be possible to share a communal Christmas dinner at a nearby inn for the whole staff with dancing, and a gift raffle, but the dedicated work of all

the hospital co-workers in caring for COVID patients and continuing to care for COVID-free patients strengthens the bonds of the Hospitaller community. This situation will continue to affect our patients and their families, selecting moments to share with more intensity or meaning

than usual, and asking—to the extent possible—that patients return to their usual surroundings as soon as possible, especially at Christmas. We will have to get used to virtual communication and prioritise family visits, especially in end of life situations, as is currently being done.

## Corinne Barennes

**Volunteer at the Sisters Hospitallers' Maison Sainte Germaine in Paris (France).**

**“The COVID-19 pandemic limits the scope of my volunteer work”**



**“The COVID-19 pandemic limits the scope of my volunteer work”**

In previous years, preparing for the holidays with the centre's users meant helping them write Christmas cards and participating in the Christmas market that the centre organises for

the entire Hospitaller community. We also prepare various activities throughout the holiday season, including reading stories, singing carols, etc.

This year, in light of the health crisis, we will celebrate Christmas differently, since each volunteer can only meet with one resident for one hour on Saturday morning. We can chat, but because of social-distancing mandates, there are no games, no cards are written, and there are no outings or crafts. I visit the centre less frequently now because I do not want to run the risk of exposing residents to the virus.

COVID-19 limits the scope of my volunteer work. I sense anguish and anxiety among the residents in their questions. This has been an especially long period for them and Christmas is particularly difficult. I also have very little interaction with the sisters.

My greatest wish for this Christmas is for the confinement to end so we can resume a “normal” life while respecting the necessary healthcare guidelines.

## Fausta Tremanti

Patient of the mental health area at the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa di Cura Villa San Giuseppe in Ascoli Piceno (Italy).

**"We experience awaiting the arrival of the Baby Jesus in a very simple way"**



**"We experience awaiting the arrival of the Baby Jesus in a very simple way"**

Christmas is always a beautiful celebration that has a special flavour for us here at the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa di Cura Villa San Giuseppe in Ascoli Piceno (Italy). We experience awaiting the arrival of the Baby Jesus in a very simple way, that is, taking part in the preparations we all know with joy and serenity: the manger, the Christmas tree in the pavilion of each centre, etc.

Today I can definitely say that my psychophysical condition has improved relative to the past, thanks to the treatments and activities we are offered. Unfortunately, the current global health crisis prevents us from enjoying a physically-close Christmas, and there is certainly a veil of sadness compared to other

years. Hearing the news on TV makes us feel helpless and uncertain, and sometimes, fearful.

### **The pandemic sweeping the world saddens me**

I would like to thank the healthcare professionals and the sisters who work at our centre for the warm care and acceptance they provide us on a daily basis. Thanks to them, in recent years, I have been able to control my thoughts—for me a great source of discomfort—more, and understand my pathology and how to manage it. Also, thanks to rehabilitation activities, I can enjoy my autonomy and the pleasure of being active. At this particular time, they also provide support in managing all the emotions that stem from what we are going through, calming us down and ensuring we never feel alone. The pandemic sweeping the world saddens me, especially because I am unable to hug my family and loved ones. But thanks to the co-workers and the sisters, our suffering is alleviated and we feel them close to our hearts even though we are physically distant.

My greatest wish would be to go home at Christmas for a few days and spend time with my sister. I know that, sadly, the pandemic prevents us from doing so and, in that respect, I hope this situation will be over soon so we can relish the normality of our days. Another wish, very dear to me, would be to return to Rome, where I lived for a time, and enjoy a good coffee in the Piazza Colonna and savour that sense of freedom again.



## Rute Rodrigues Asseiceiro

Occupational Therapist at the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa de Saúde da Idanha in Belas (Portugal).

**"We try to minimise the fallout from the fact that most patients are unable to go home for Christmas"**



**"We try to minimise the fallout from the fact that most patients are unable to go home for Christmas"**

This year is very different from others, due to the pandemic's impact on the life of the institution and, specifically, on the routines of our patients at the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa de Saúde da Idanha in Belas (Portugal), where I've worked for 20 years. Prolonged confinement causes fatigue, uncertainty, sadness, anxiety, etc., challenging professionals to take action to contain the spread of the virus while engaging in creative exercises that enhance mental health and wellbeing, and thus restoring hope, security, and normality, to the extent possible, every day.

With Christmas approaching, naturally, we all have wishes, concerns, expectations of being with family, going home, hugging our loved ones. We will continue to celebrate the holi-

days, but this year we will do so in a way that adapts to the current situation, trying to minimise the fallout from the fact that most patients are unable to go home for Christmas and visit their families.

### Reinventing the Christmas celebration

We are placing special emphasis on the experience of Advent, making each day festive, joyful, different, and surprising with an interactive Advent calendar that stimulates the imagination and encourages the involvement of everyone at the centre. We also have the usual holiday decorations.

This year, the Christmas celebration will leave the auditorium stage and come to life digitally in all of the centre's healthcare structures. We hope that the creative contributions of all the teams to the Online Christmas Celebration will translate into that sense of serenity and belonging that is so important to everyone. With regard to family members, in addition to the reduced number of in-person visits, we will try to increase contact through video calls, cards, and photos. We also plan to celebrate Christmas dinner in very small groups, so patients can enjoy the culinary delights and the holiday atmosphere.

As for myself, I wish I had the creative capacity to reinvent the Christmas celebration in a joyous and meaningful way. I also wish that in my heart there will always be room for self-improvement, courage, resilience, and the ability to reinvent myself every day during this pandemic.

## Anastasia Gifty Acquaye

Sister Hospitaller

**“Our goal is to bring Christmas to African homes”**



**“Thanks be to God, the pandemic has not hit Africa with as much force as in Europe”**

It is very sad how this pandemic has come and rearranged our lives in every possible way. With Christmas so close, it seems clear that this year the activities we normally engage in at this time will be affected to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the country.

Based on the reality where I am, the Sisters Hospitallers' St. Benedict Menni Hospital in Dompoe (Ghana), Christmas looks different. I am referring mainly to our mental health unit, which has been closed since March. Our services now consist of regular home visits, where we deliver food and medication to patients. It is very gratifying the way they welcome us and say they look forward to seeing us again soon!

This year, our plan is to bring Christmas to their homes, so they can celebrate the arrival of God in this world with the hope that we will all be able to welcome Him.

### **We have learned to think about others**

The most noticeable difference this year is that, because of COVID-19, we cannot socialise like we used to. In previous years, the holiday celebration at the hospital began with the Holy Eucharist, followed by games of all sorts. This year, there will be less contact and we will be fewer in number.

Thank God, the pandemic has not hit Africa with as much force as in Europe. We have had and still have infections, but our numbers are insignificant compared to what we hear from other continents. We take all the precautions we can: social distancing, frequent hand washing, and facemasks are part of our routine. Though in open spaces it is unusual to see people in facemasks, their use is mandatory in enclosed spaces. I think there is one good thing to emerge from this pandemic: we have learned to think about others.

### **A very strange Christmas**

With regard to the patients of our centre, they will not have the joy of celebrating Christmas the way they typically do. Every year, our patients and their families gather at our facilities and together we celebrate the Eucharist at the hospital, but that will not happen this year. Our co-workers will not have their usual celebrations either because we must follow the established security protocols. As a result of CO-



VID-19, we are unable to receive visitors or our community of volunteers at our facilities. This Christmas is going to be very strange.

Because we cannot come together as a family to celebrate the holidays this year, on behalf of the sisters and the hospital management, I want to wish all of our

co-workers, patients, family members, and volunteers a very Happy Christmas. May the Christ Child heal our world gloriously and give knowledge to the researchers working day and night to find a cure for this pandemic, so that life can return to normal. May God keep us all safe.

## Godfrey Dasmariñas

**Nursing Coordinator at the Sisters Hospitalers' Maria Josefa Recio  
Therapeutic Centre in Cebu (Philippines).**

**"We experience situations beyond our control"**



**"It is time to strengthen our faith;  
that is the right way to celebrate  
Christmas"**

Christmas is fast approaching and it is a very important season here in the Philippines. Many families look forward to preparing for and celebrating this time of grace.

Personally, celebrating Christmas helps me remember that the Lord Jesus Christ was born and will live among us. The centre's co-workers, the sisters, and the patients listen to Mass and

organise activities to celebrate the holidays.

### **We have to learn to trust God and cast away our fears**

This Christmas, since Mr Covid is still on the prowl, we must modify our behaviour, ensuring we maintain social distancing, use facemasks, and wash our hands frequently.

At times like these, we experience situations beyond our control. The circumstances are difficult, since we face the unknown, with uncertainty on the rise; we feel stressed, anxious, and emotionally exhausted. Now more than ever we have to learn to trust God and cast away our fears. It is time to strengthen our faith; that is the right way to celebrate Christmas.

My Christmas wish this year is to stop the spread of the virus and end the pandemic. I hope the scientists and medical experts can create a vaccine that is safe and available to everyone.

Christmas is not an event; it is a person who was born and who lives among us, putting a smile on our faces and hope in our hearts.

## Teresa Mai Thị Thúy Hồngv

Sister Hospitaller

**“Christmas is a time of joy that we want to experience together; it is a very special, meaningful time of year for us Catholics”**



**“All of the Vietnamese Sisters Hospitallers are sensitive to the pain of the victims of this catastrophe”**

### **Christmas, a time of grace**

Christmas is a time of joy that we want to experience together; it is a very special, meaningful time of year for us Catholics. For Vietnamese sisters in particular it is an opportunity to celebrate and relive the salvation of God, who comes to the world through love incarnate.

Though in Vietnam the COVID-19 pandemic has not affected us as much as in other countries, we have been experiencing the traumatic consequences of flooding in the central region of Vietnam (Mien Trung) since late October 2020. All of the Vietnamese Sisters Hospitallers are sensitive to the pain of the victims of this catastrophe, which has cost li-

ves and caused much material damage, and we pray for them.

We are in Advent, a time of preparation to welcome the Saviour and celebrate Christmas. In Vietnam, we will embrace it as an opportunity to remember God's plan of salvation through prayer and service. In our country, it is tradition to create a representation of Jesus' incarnation before Mass on Christmas Eve with the participation of all members of the community (sisters, resident children, children with disabilities and their families), making the ceremony more lively and meaningful.

To find God incarnate in this Christmas celebration our lives must be meaningful to Him, our eyes must “see the invisible,” and we must “listen to the voice of He who speaks without words.” Let us hear the word of God, the invitations full of wisdom from the Church and the testimony of the saints. The basic points of this are: finding God in silence, prayer and surrender, meditating on the Word of God to reach illumination and delivering the Good News of salvation to the world.

This year, to prevent COVID-19 contagion, we are complying with all safety measures and helping to build a healthy living environment.

### **The pain of this loss is enveloping humanity**

The eternal God is the God of love, so the natural disasters that occur and especially the current pandemic are part of his will. As the prophet Isaiah said, “A battered reed he will not break off, and a smouldering wick he will not



put out until he leads justice to victory” (Mt 12:20). Still, the pain of those who are dying from this pandemic is enveloping humanity.

Through faith, we can say that in the midst of this pandemic we have seen evidence of God’s mercy manifested in the charitable actions of others. This brings us closer to God, to turn our eyes to Him, to renew ourselves from within, to embody our charism in a more real and conscious way. The pain will continue to exist around us, in our lives, in the lives of our patients, families, co-workers, volunteers, and

through our charism, we are summoned and sent to alleviate it.

Perhaps COVID-19 will be a great purification in the history of humanity, clearing out the rubble, the harsh forms of slavery that lie in the hearts of man. Faced with this pain and suffering, we ask the Lord of Peace to help us reflect on our own selves, to find the most authentic and immutable value, to find in ourselves and these painful events the “Immanuel,” the small, merciful God, the God of Peace.

## News

### **Bolivian Women’s Day Province of Latin America**

Because women are still the victims of sexism, every 8 March we celebrate International Women’s Day. In Bolivia, every 11 October we celebrate BOLIVIAN WOMEN’S DAY to commemorate the presence of women in the home and in the lives of each family member, as well as in society as professional, entrepreneurial, working women, and as authorities with the right to decide and issue opinions at many of the country’s public and private institutions.

During her short tenure in 1980, president Lidia Gueiler Tejada issued a Supreme Decree establishing 11 October as Bolivian Women’s Day in honour of the birth of the Bolivian writer, teacher, and poet, Adela Zamudio.

At our institution the role of each employee is fundamental. They perform their functions



with the dedication and affection necessary for our children—who need them so much—to feel protected, cared for, and part of the family they may have previously lost or that may have shunned them for their condition.

In the Puntiti Therapeutic Community, co-workers do not focus on the disability or the limitations of these children; rather they take them into their hearts and lives.

## Reopening our doors Province of England

After several months of confinement, the doors of the Sisters Hospitallers' St Benedict Menni Health Centre in Monrovia (Liberia) have reopened for admissions, home visits, family gatherings, and patient follow-ups.

Since activity in Liberia and the rest of the world was altered by COVID-19 in March, the priority has been to protect patients, sisters, co-workers, and relatives by following the guidelines established by the Liberian government. In early September, the situation began to improve, making it possible for the centre to once again admit patients.

In order to monitor patients while preventing the spread of the virus, we prioritised home visits. Social workers took it upon themselves to follow-up on patients, helping them to maintain their mental stability. This initiative resulted in a massive improvement in the majority of patients.



Among the centre's most effective therapies are relaxation techniques, designed to alleviate the stress associated with various health issues, which have been on the rise since the outbreak of the pandemic. Autogenic training has proven highly effective. This is a psychotherapeutic technique based on passive concentration, using visual imagery and bodily awareness in conjunction with deep breathing, progressive muscular relaxation, meditation, and tranquil background music to bring the person into a state of relaxation. This technique is mainly used to alleviate psychosomatic disorders triggered by stress.

## ABC Health Award Province of Spain

The Sisters Hospitallers' Centro Hospitalario Benito Menni in Valladolid has received the award for the best private hospital for its Post-Covid Rehabilitation Unit from the Spanish Newspaper, ABC.

Provincial Superior, Matilde Porras, and Provincial Managing Director of the Sisters Hospitallers in Spain, Alberto Martín de la Mata, accepted the award on behalf of the centre at a gala hosted by the Health Minister, Salvador Illa.

The aim of the Post-Covid Rehabilitation Unit is to rehabilitate patients who, after recovering



from the virus, leave the hospital with serious health problems as a result of extended ICU stays. Thus far, the unit consists of a neuropsychologist, an occupational therapist, a speech therapist, and two physiotherapists. It can accommodate 50-60 patients.



## Rehabilitation activities Province of Italy

During this delicate time, the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa di Cura Villa San Giuseppe in Ascoli Piceno (Italy) has reorganised its individual and group rehabilitation and education activities so they may continue in absolute safety.

The centre's rehabilitation service for people suffering from mental illness is prioritising individual interactions with each user. The programme includes group activities, mainly of a psycho-educational nature, where users learn to recognise their strengths and weaknesses, recover and deepen the skills necessary to improve their quality of life, and integrate into their environment in a satisfactory way.

Group activities are supplemented by individual refreshers to strengthen the information learned through techniques like art therapy, dance therapy, and theatre workshops, which help patients express their needs.



Education and rehabilitation activities at our centre, especially in this time of fear, risk, insecurity, and stress, aim—to the extent possible—to promote continuity and stability in patient routines through ongoing, meticulous collaboration with specialised professionals.

## Mental health care Province of France

Coinciding with World Mental Health Day, the sisters and co-workers at the Sisters Hospitallers' clinic in Togo dedicated a week to raising awareness about mental health issues, with the aim of achieving a change in social behaviour, since in Africa people suffering from these types of illnesses are largely discriminated against.

Of note among the actions carried out is an initiative whereby patients from Dapaong are visited in their homes, so everyone receives care and no one is excluded. Since its launch, they regularly visit an area around the city where sufferers are shut away, physically bound, and tortured. The sisters and co-workers from our Institutions talk to the families and provide



medical attention to 120 patients, in addition to delivering food.

The authorities in the area have thanked the sisters for their work, acknowledging that, since their arrival, the situation has changed considerably, especially the attitude of families toward the sick. Today, they more readily accept the illness and welcome the sisters' visits.



## Susana Martins

**“The goal of my group of Lay Hospitallers is to talk about life and seek God”**

The group of Lay Hospitallers from the Sisters Hospitallers' Casa de Saúde do Bom Jesus, in Braga (Portugal) held their first meeting on 3 February 2010. This year we celebrate our 10th anniversary!

We started with 15 people and a decade years later we are 14, eight of whom are original members.

I'm Susana Martins and one of the things I like most about this group is that the goal is not to follow a plan or a document; the goal is to seek God! And like any true search, trial and error, tweaks, and fresh starts abound.

I also like the freedom we have to speak openly about how we think or feel on any subject. In this group, we talk about life. It is the basis of everything. We try to find answers and meaning in what we experience and discover about God in this life. The goal is to walk side-by-side.

Nobody is offended, nobody judges, and nobody is expected to be a certain way.

We help others whenever we can, not as often as we would like, but when people ask for help it is a joy to be able to deliver.

The truth is that it feels very good to be in tune with what is essential: that's what keeps us going as a group. We want to grow! We want to learn about other lives, other places of significance, and show what we've discovered, and dream about what we can discover together! At our 10th anniversary celebration, we issued a challenge: Walk and bring a friend with you!

We were 25 at the table. It was great to welcome these friends into our little family. We felt a renewed sense of energy and pride in being able to share a bit of our history. We were left with hearts full of hope, eager to be more committed than ever.