



Sisters
Hospitallers

Newsletter - March 2021

CONTIGO

Nº 41

In-Depth

Learn about how to support the Benedict Menni Foundation and collaborate on its projects.

News

Discover our provinces' most important news over the last months.

Up close

Meet Blanca Flor Guerrero, General Councillor and responsible for coordinating the Lay Hospitallers process in our Congregation.

#Committed

We introduce Mariana Fernandes, a volunteer from the Province of Portugal.

Cooperation embraces others



This year, instead of having a solidarity project to bring the entire congregation together, we have chosen to support the Benedict Menni Foundation (BMF) to collaborate on development projects at the various Sisters Hospitallers centres across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

'I would like to conclude this message by announcing that for 2021, we will not be supporting a specific solidarity project; the donations from the communities and centres will instead go directly to the Benedict Menni Foundation (BMF), which will allocate the donations to the various existing projects presented'.

This is how the Superior General of Sisters Hospitallers announced that this year, instead of having a solidarity project that brings the entire congregation together, Sisters Hospitallers have chosen to support the Benedict Menni Foundation to enable its collaboration on development projects at the various Sisters Hospitallers centres across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The Foundation invites us to collaborate on this new initiative with the motto: '**Cooperation embraces others**'. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we find ourselves far from each other and, in many cases, far from our beloved ones and feeling lonely. But there is always something to do; the Benedict Menni Foundation continues to collaborate, knowing that to cooperate means to embrace others. It means being with others when they need it the most, bringing them hope and working together to guarantee health, education, and opportunities for everyone, everywhere in the world.

The Benedict Menni Foundation 'A commitment with mental health'

The Benedict Menni Foundation was founded on

July 8th, 2004, with the support of the Congregation of the Sisters Hospitallers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with the purpose of “carrying out actions geared towards development cooperation and international and national humanitarian aid with a special focus on the most disadvantaged countries and people”. The Benedict Menni Foundation (BMF) specialises in cooperating with development in the field of mental health to prevent and improve the conditions of thousands of people experiencing marginalisation and exclusion across America, Africa, and Asia.

The Foundation’s objective is to carry out actions oriented towards cooperating with development and national and international humanitarian aid, with a special focus on the most disadvantaged countries and people.

The Foundation recognises the humanitarian principles of the United Nations’ world summits, the guidelines and policies of the European Union on international cooperation, and the 2030 Agenda. It strives to promote human development, considering all facets of a person, so that society can become an agent of change for justice. Moreover, with the support of professionals and volunteers, the Foundation carries out various collaborative projects, responding to the neglect that people with mental illnesses face.

Sticking to the Hospitaller’s identity framework, the projects supported are based on the centrality of the human person; valuing their integrity, respecting and defending their dignity with a comprehensive, personalised, and interdisciplinary approach; and striving to reintegrate them into society. **The projects supported also aim to strengthen solidarity and international collaboration, transitioning from ‘solidarity characterised by welfare aid’ to ‘fruitful solidarity’.** The purpose is to manage resources responsibly and efficiently, taking appropriate measures to care for our ‘common home’ and those who live in it and looking after those who need it

most.

The BMF’s trajectory prioritises activities that benefit women, as the Foundation knows that women suffering from mental health issues are facing discrimination the most, which is often worsened by their situation of poverty. Therefore, with its projects, the Benedict Menni Foundation seeks to empower all women and girls, working towards gender equality and the end of discrimination and stigmatisation.

In line with the Hospitaller spirit, the Benedict Menni Foundation sees true development as transitioning from less humane living conditions to more humane conditions for everyone, which is why its actions are aligned with the search of social, economic, and environmentally sustainable development. In this regard, the Foundation has made a commitment to the 2030 Agenda and to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its work. The Foundation contributes to SDG 3 on Health and Well-being and specifically focuses its efforts on achieving target 3.4: ‘By 2030 (...) promote mental health and well-being’, with projects that help improve the conditions of mental healthcare services by scaling up

key infrastructures of its counterparts’ local health centres; helping to purchase required equipment; bringing mental health facilities to the most marginalised segments, such as rural populations and homeless people; and implementing rehabilitation and social/family reintegration programmes.

SDG 4, ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’, is also another one of the focuses of the Foundation’s activities; it supports education and vocational training projects and promotes schooling for children through its sponsorship programme. The Benedict Menni Foundation also contributes to SDG 5, ‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls’, thanks to its history of prioritising activities that benefit women.

“Sticking to the Hospitaller’s identity framework, the projects supported are based on the centrality of the human person, valuing their integrity”



“The BMF contributes to promoting mental health and well-being with projects that help improve the conditions of mental healthcare services”

Projects for 2021

This year, the Benedict Menni Foundation continues working on new projects—some have already begun—supported by, for example, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID, for its abbreviation in Spanish), the City Council of Pamplona, the City Council of Cendea de Cizur, and the City Council of Cendea de Olza, in addition to the Sisters Hospitaliers Centres, sisters, private donors, companies, and private foundations. We expect to be able to support other projects thanks to everyone's collaboration. This cooperation has become increasingly important due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has led to a reduction in some official aid channels while increasing inequalities

Some of the projects that need support for this year include:

- **Angola:** 'Facing the pandemic in Angola - Solidarity and mental health services at the Arimba Psychosocial Rehabilitation Centre'.
- **Argentina:** 'Day Centre facility for elderly adults who are in the process of becoming dependent, in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina'.
- **Cameroon:** 'Social/family integration and rehabilitation of homeless people with mental illness in Yaoundé, Cameroon' and 'Food, hygiene, and rein-

tegration programme for inmates at the Yaoundé prison'.

- **Togo:** 'Comprehensive care for malnourished children'.
- **The Philippines:** 'Life programmes through income-generating activities for people with mental illness'.
- **India:** 'Empowering women with mental illness for their social/family integration' and 'Rehabilitation and socialisation of women with mental illness who are highly vulnerable due to lack of family and social support'.

These are just some of the projects that the Foundation plans to carry out in 2021, in addition to its awareness-raising activities and sponsorship programme.

Collaborative work brings us together; it makes us feel closer to each other. Collaborating means working together with others to achieve a common goal. It is about working together for a fairer world because collaborating means embracing others. Those of you who would like to collaborate with the Foundation in 2021 can donate to the Benedict Menni Foundation. Account number: ES91 0049 1834 11 2910177325.



Blanca Flor Guerrero

General Councillor and responsible for coordinating the Lay Hospitallers process in our congregation.

“We will keep working on creating common general criteria regarding the identity of Lay Hospitallers and their belonging”

When was the General Committee for Lay Hospitallers created and what is its aim?

The committee was created in September 2019. The first meeting as a work group was scheduled for March 2020, but, due to the pandemic, the work was halted and meetings were resumed in June 2020.

The aim was set by the XXI General Chapter: to promote the comprehensive development of Lay Hospitallers throughout the congregation.

Who are the members of the committee?

The committee is made up of seven people, including sisters and laypeople: Sister Rosario Iranzo and Antonio Molina from the Province of Spain; Claudia Antunes, a layperson from the Province of Portugal; Sister Ana Lucía Castro and Graciela Garate from the Province of Latin America; Sister Benelie Liliosa Kimia from the Province of France; and myself.

What are the actions that will be carried out and what will the work be like?

The committee is asked to:

1. Create common general criteria regarding the identity of Lay Hospitallers and their belonging, which will be used to guide the processes that will be carried out by different groups.
2. Design a training and accompaniment programme and create general and provincial coordination

structures to accompany Lay Hospitallers.

We meet online every second month.

What steps have you taken so far?

We spent our first meetings learning about the lay groups' reality in the provinces of Spain, France, Latin America, and Portugal.

We could see their wide range of experiences and plans but, above all, we could see the desire of many people who feel called to live their Christian faith with a commitment to serve those assisted at our centres or in their surrounding area.

What is your strategic approach for the future?

There are many possibilities for the present and future. We will keep working on creating common general criteria regarding the identity of Lay Hospitallers and their belonging, as well as designing a training and accompaniment programme.

A wish for the future

My wish for the future is, without a doubt, that the Hospitaller Laity will grow in number and in terms of their charismatic identity. Currently, over 20 lay groups are part of the congregation. The first groups date back to 2003. We are talking about people who have been developing a particular sensitivity towards Hospitaller charism for over 18 years.

Being a Chaplain during a pandemic Province of Portugal

Over the past year, we have experienced some very special moments', said Brother Hermínio Araújo, OFM, chaplain at the São José Psychiatric Clinic of the Sisters Hospitallers in Lisbon, Portugal, for the past 20 years.

We have overcome these months with everyone's help, as a Hospitaller family, knowing that when we go through difficult times, we become even closer and take better care of each other. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have worked hard to keep us all safe while continuing to do what identifies us from a spiritual and religious perspective. Pastoral sensitivity, the result of many years of experience, has allowed us to constantly adapt to the specific circumstances we are experiencing. I am referring to the members of the Pastoral Healthcare team –of which I am member–, collaborators, users, and sisters.

The 2020 Lent and Holy Week celebrations are an example. We worked hard to quickly adapt to the new reality and were able to involve different people who attended the celebration of the Stations of the Cross via social networks. Another very symbolic celebration was Easter Sunday in 2020, when, after the Eucharist with the sisters, we held the Eucharistic procession in the outdoor spaces of the clinic, allowing ourselves to be embraced by the presence of the risen Jesus Christ. Even some of our neighbours spontaneously joined us from their windows.

But, undoubtedly, the most significant experience was the pilgrimage with Mary, which took place 9-18 October 2020, with the visit of the Pilgrim Image of Our Lady Fatima for World Mental Health Day. This initiative was organised by the clinic together with four more Hospitaller centres in the Lisbon area: Idanha Health Clinic (Belas), Santa Rosa de Lima Health Clinic (Belas), Nuestra Senhora de Fátima Psychogeriatric Centre (Paredes), and the Brothers of Saint John of God's Telhal Health Clinic, with the motto 'Experiencing with Virgin Mary



the impact of the pandemic on everyone's mental health'. Throughout all the days of this pilgrimage with Virgin Mary, I have witnessed unique moments of encounters, prayer, gratitude, and praise in each house. Some of the words I heard the most were 'thank you!'. I have seen users, collaborators, sisters, and brothers experiencing this pilgrimage intensely.

In addition, while following the established safety measures, we have kept our activities related to Pastoral Healthcare going at the clinic throughout 2020, especially ones related to individual support for the people receiving assistance and employees.

Holy Week 2021

In 2021, with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, we are also preparing various activities to celebrate Lent and Holy Week with the message from Pope Francis. Many people are involved: users, sisters, collaborators, volunteers, family members, and Lay Hospitallers.

These past months, we have experienced very difficult times, but as Pope Francis said, it has been 'a time for renewing faith, hope, and love', a time when we feel very close to the mission of Jesus: a mission of healing, care, compassion, and salvation of the world.

Social reintegration in Yaoundé Province of France

In addition to the mission that we, Sisters Hospitallers, carry out at our health centre in Yaoundé, Cameroon, we are expanding our apostolate by assisting homeless people with mental illness and providing them with material aid and psychological support for two Saturdays a month. This work is carried out thanks to the collaboration of the professionals at the centre and the group of Lay Hospitallers. **The people who are helped receive accommodation at our Béthanie House and medical treatment based on their needs with the aim of social and family integration.**

In spite of the current Covid-19 pandemic that is paralysing the world, sisters, collaborators, and Lay Hospitallers in Yaoundé have the courage to approach these vulnerable patients neglected by society for their illness.

In 2020, Béthanie House received nine patients:



four women and five men, all from different regions of Cameroon. Once stabilised, they began a reintegration process that had positive results: eight of them were successfully reintegrated into their families. It is very satisfying for the entire Hospitaller Community to be able to help people that were almost dead, restore their dignity as human beings and respond to the invitation to 'practise hospitality'.

ComputerWorld Award Province of Spain

The Sisters Hospitallers Province of Spain won the ComputerWorld 2020 Award for Digital Transformation in the Healthcare Sector. This award recognised the digitalisation project that the Institution has been working on for more than a year.

For Emilio Rodríguez, provincial IT Director, this award recognises everyone that has participated in an 'absolutely transversal' project that also shows that *'the decision we made in 2019, opting for a project of this magnitude, was the right one'*.

The award-winning HR project allows the organisation to coordinate the organisational structures, spread across different centres and geographical locations, consolidate all the information on collaborators and manage different professional groups' talent.



Fuencisla de Santos, Sisters Hospitallers' Human Resources Director and one of the people behind the project, also agrees that *'we are proud to receive an award that recognises many people's work and effort to carry out a strategic project during such a complex time like the one we have been experiencing in recent months'*.

World Day of the Sick Latin American Province

On 11 February, the Father Benedict Menni Home and the Sisters Hospitallers' Benedict Menni Rehabilitation Centre in Montevideo (Uruguay) celebrated Our Lady of Lourdes Day and the XXIX World Day of the Sick.

The users at both centres, together with sisters and collaborators, experienced this very special day with a celebration that helped them to reflect on Pope Francis' message. Early in the afternoon, the collaborators gathered to attend a presentation with the song 'Perder la vida', and a prayer for the sick. **They prayed to Our Lady of Lourdes asking for health for all, especially for this pandemic situation we are experiencing.**



In the chapel, residents attended a Eucharist led by Father Guido Danelón. The residents who could not join at the chapel celebrated in the Sagrado Corazón hall with a prayer and several songs through which they prayed to the Virgin Mary for the sick all over the world.

Theatre Therapy Province of Italy

Dr Jessica Marini, a Psychiatric Rehabilitation Technician at the Sisters Hospitallers' Villa San Giuseppe centre in Ascoli Piceno (Italy), explains how she has designed and developed **a drama-mediation workshop for the centre's residents with schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder based on including elements of drama and theatre therapy.**

'While they are different in theoretical terms, both approaches use instruments like our body, voice, stage space, play, and objects that are theatrical art tools (such as masks), and they are both geared towards the same general goals. The goals can be knowing our psychophysical identity, recognising and expressing our emotions, using social skills and interpersonal effectiveness, developing resources such as creativity and imagination, and learning to tolerate suffering'. In addition, with the help of the stage as a potential space, theatre therapy promotes learning, develops motor skills, improves cognitive skills, and allows participants to experiment with a wide range of roles, which results in a freer, more



authentic, and less rigid or dysfunctional identity; this is all done through verbal and non-verbal language in a judgement-free zone.

For me, doing theatre therapy means not only providing a psychiatric rehabilitation tool, but also rediscovering the life of madness, accepting tragedy, making tension disappear, and providing a safe place where you can confidently experiment with creative movements, communicative expressions, interpersonal relationships, and new roles', said Dr Marini.



Mariana Fernandes

“We are very grateful to all the volunteers who collaborated with CSRSI during the pandemic”

Following the guidelines of the Directorate-General of Health, we, unfortunately, had to let most of our volunteers at the Hospitaler Centres in the Province of Portugal go during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Rainha Santa Isabel Health Clinic (CSR-SI, for its abbreviation in Spanish), located in Condeixa-a-Nova, is one of the twelve health facilities managed by the Sisters Hospitalers Institute. At the beginning of April, this centre found a creative way to meet existing needs by creating a Volunteer Scholarship with the community and senior Nursing students through social media and the parish and in liaison with administrators at the Escola Superior de Enfermagem de Coimbra (ESENFC).

A total of 34 candidates applied. All of them took part in an initial interview and after considering their profile, availability, preferences, and the centre's needs, 17 volunteers were selected.

One of these volunteers was a nurse, Mariana Fernandes. When ESENFC made this alternative training available for the students, she immediately joined, and it felt completely natural to her since, in general, volunteering is ingrained in her way of life, especially during

these difficult times that society is experiencing. In addition, mental health and psychiatric nursing is what interests her the most and what she is most enthusiastic about, so this made her choice even more logic.

Mariana states that this experience gave her the chance to see that nursing interventions in mental health are very complex since, in addition to procedures geared towards patients' organic needs, they require a continuous use of therapeutic tools, such as active listening, therapeutic communication, a helping relationship, assessing emotions, and always focusing your interventions on the person's potential so that their rehabilitation is as successful as possible.

This experience helped her acquire, enhance, and broaden her knowledge and skills cumulatively. According to the nurse, it contributed to building her professional identity. After finishing her Nursing degree, she went to CSR-SI to start her professional career.

We are very grateful to all the volunteers who collaborated with CSRSI during the pandemic. They have been extremely helpful during this difficult period that we are experiencing, and it was a true blessing to share how they embraced the Hospitaler mission with joy, enthusiasm, and generosity.