



Sisters  
Hospitallers

*Newsletter - November 2021*

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Nº 44

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## #Committed

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# For a safe and quality education



**In the first half of the year, the Benedict Menni Foundation sponsored a project at the Sisters Hospitallers' Guardian Angel Learning Centre in the Philippines designed to ensure a quality education for students, some of whom live with a mental illness and/or disability.**

## **Guardian Angel Learning Center**

The Josefa Hospitaller Foundation, an affiliate of the Sisters Hospitallers' Congregation, manages the Guardian Angel Learning Centre, located in the city of Pasig (Philippines). The school, which is accredited by the Philippine government, offers quality education to children aged 4-12, with both regular education and special education courses.

- Regarding regular education courses, the centre enrolls 18 pre-primary students (4-6 years old) and 90 primary school students (6-12 years old).
- For special education courses, the centre enrolls 54 children (3-12 years old) with different pathologies: autism, functional diversity and/or Down's Syndrome, among others.

The school's goal is to help guarantee the right to education for children with special needs, who attend the centre to develop themselves to the fullest extent possible.

Focusing on special education, the school offers early intervention for toddlers with special needs through an inclusion programme (integrated into the regular school programme) that features occupational therapy sessions with the centre's professionals and the child's circle of support, which may include parents, teachers, therapists, centre personnel, and the entire educational community.

The centre has more than 22 professionals and 10 classrooms for normal school activities, two dedi-

Our school offers quality education to children aged 4-12, with both regular education and special education courses.



cated occupational therapy rooms, a cafeteria, a library, a laboratory, and a playground for the recreational activities that are so necessary in schools.

Nevertheless, in the last year, an important issue emerged regarding the children's safety and the sustainability of the school, due to the condition of some of its facilities. Specifically, the existing water pipes—being very old—developed leaks, which resulted in excess water consumption (a scarce resource in the area), negatively impacting the school's budget and hindering its main purpose: providing quality education.

Moreover, the school's roof is rusty, deteriorating, and leaking a lot, so much so that during the rainy season, classes are interrupted because of leaking and flooding. Heavy rains and storms hit the Philippines with increasing frequency, making it necessary to have a strong infrastructure capable of withstanding adverse weather conditions, where we can provide uninterrupted quality education in a safe environment for children.

### Project context

According to the United Nations, in 2020, the population of the Philippines was approximately 109,581,078 people, equal to 1.41% of the total global population. The Philippines ranks 13th on the list of the world's most populous countries (and

dependent territories).

The Philippines ranks 113th on the UNDP's Human Development Index. Income distribution is uneven, with 20% of the population owning more than 50% of income. Over 20 million Filipinos live below the poverty line, and more than 70% of the population live in the country's rural southwest region.

Also, given its geographical location, the Philippines is one of the countries most prone to natural disasters: floods, typhoons, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and droughts. It is situated along the Pacific Ocean's Ring of Fire and within the Pacific's typhoon belt. The country suffers from these meteorological phenomena mainly between June and November, though—given their unpredictable nature—typhoons can occur at any time of the year. In Pasig, temperatures peak between April and May (34°C), and reach their lowest in January and February (24°C).

### Project development

Considering the above, this project aims to improve and update the educational facilities by replacing the water pipes. This will allow us to provide a quality education and contribute to the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4: To ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning





opportunities for all.

Furthermore, the centre's holistic approach to education (SDG 4) and wellbeing (SDG 3) guarantees that students suffering from mental illness and/or functional disabilities can develop as individuals, integrate into the community on equal terms and be ensured the right to non-discrimination.

The project is designed to assist the children who attend the Guardian Angel Learning Centre and the staff who work at the school.

Thanks to this project and a subsidy from the City Council of Cendea de Cizur (Navarra, Spain), the school is more sustainable today. Final testing was carried out in June 2021 and no leaks were detected, the benefit of which will be reflected in the upcoming water bills.

Now the children, collaborators, sisters, parents, relatives, and other visitors have access to an uninterrupted water supply and the school has enough water for daily use, mainly for drinking and maintaining the cleanliness of the premises.



## Léontine Judith Ngo Mbock

Sister Hospitaller, Second General Councillor

**“I hope that the next Chapter will be a true Paschal occasion and that the revitalisation we all hope for will become a reality for each Hospitaller”**

Léontine Judith Ngo Mbock, a Cameroonian Sister Hospitaller who studied religious teaching, as well as vocational accompaniment and discernment, updates us on the constitutional review process that she herself coordinates. Sister Léontine is currently Second General Councillor, focusing on training in the Congregation.

### **In 2019, the first meeting of the Constitutional Review Commission took place. What progress has been made in the last two years?**

With tremendous effort and joy in what we do, we have been in the process of reviewing and updating the Constitutions. In the period from 16 March 2019, when we began this journey, until today, we have made substantial progress. In the first year, the process focused on a spiritual itinerary, requiring the Review Commission to prepare dossiers, with the work of personal reflection, prayer, sharing and community celebration. This led us to revisit our charismatic origins, to broaden the theological and ecclesiastical view of our vocation and mission, to deepen our identity as consecrated Hospitallers and grow in congregational communion.

In the second year, we continued to prepare the text with contributions from all the communities and provinces, illuminated by the reflections of the dossiers. We exchanged ideas back and forth about the text with input from all the Congregation's sisters, making it a truly synodal process.

Other significant moments include exchanges and

debates with experts in theology, consecrated life, and canon law. Taking their observations and contributions into account at each stage of the process has helped broaden our horizons. They have also helped us delve deeper into our pursuit and discernment. The general government has played an important role in providing support and paving the way forward. It has been a consistent presence, especially when we have needed to make crucial decisions to advance the process.

### **As coordinator of the commission, what has been most gratifying and the most difficult part of the process for you?**

The most gratifying part of this journey is seeing the motivation and involvement of the sisters... the mobilisation in general, the spirit of communion and of belonging to the same religious family and identifying with the new text. The most difficult part is managing the uncertainty. For example, at the beginning, we didn't know where to begin or who to call for help; there are certain moments of tension that come with projects of this magnitude.

### **Where is the Constitutional Review Process at the moment?**

The review and updating process is well underway. On 4th October, the Commission delivered a draft of the Constitution's new text to the General Government, so we have completed our task.

### **What actions will be carried out during the months ahead?**



It is now a new group's turn to address the pre-chapter process. Their work consists of designing the dynamics to help the chapterhouses assimilate the CONSTITUTION PROJECT, and then the same group will also design the chapter itinerary. On 15th October, we began the pre-chapter phase with an online plenary session in which all the sisters participated.

The chapterhouses will now follow the proposed itinerary with group projects online, and the other sisters will accompany us by praying and giving sisterly support. Once the text is agreed on and approved by the Chapter, the final corrections will be made and it will be sent to the Congregation for Institutes of Sacred Life for ratification.

### **How will this review affect our Institution in general, and the Hospitaller mission, in particular?**

The review has allowed us to deepen our charism and spirituality, the result of which is the renewal of our vocational identity, the revitalisation of our lives as Sisters Hospitallers, all of which will give new momentum to the apostolic mission. In this respect, the review affects our Institution and the Hospitaller mission.

### **A wish for the future...**

I hope the next Chapter will be a true Paschal occasion, that the revitalisation we all hope for will become a reality for each Hospitaller, and that we will continue to practice Hospitality with creativity, prophecy, and renewed dynamism, spreading it to new generations and all those who participate in this mission of charity.

## **Hospitaller pilgrimage Province of Portugal**



Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Province of Portugal has been unable to meet in Fatima as a family united by Hospitality, as is customary each year. But, **because Mary is our Mother and ever-present in these days of suffering and difficulty, the provincial government thought it would be good to honour her at the Sisters Hospitallers centres in Portugal, under the motto: "Virgin Mary, Mother of the Visitation."**

So, Mary visited the centres of mainland Portugal from 25th June to 8th July. The centres located in Madeira, Azores, Mozambique, and Angola shared these festive moments through digital media.

The pilgrimage was characterised by moments of great faith, affection, devotion, joy, and beauty. Patients, collaborators, sisters, volunteers, lay Hospitallers, young people, and other friends participated in the various celebrations that each centre prepared with so much creativity and commitment.

*"Because we could not visit her in Fatima, Our Lady appeared to us, not as a vision, but as the reality of a Mother visiting her children. In silence, trusting and grateful, we contemplated her while reciting the Rosary", says one user of the Sisters Hospitallers centre in Parede.*

Some sisters from the general government joined online to take part in the farewell celebration on 8th July, at the end of which, our General Superior, sister Anabela Carneiro, expressed her appreciation for the creative way the Hospitaller pilgrimage was carried out by bringing Mary into our homes.

## For the love of God Province of Latin America

Last September, with great joy and delight, three collaborators of Sisters Hospitallers in Montevideo (Uruguay) experienced the sacrament of Confirmation. The ceremony was led by the Auxiliary Bishop, Monsignor Luis Eduardo González, and attended by residents, professionals, and the community of sisters from the centre.

Despite the pandemic, the collaborators were determined to embark on the journey of preparation to say: "I am here, Lord, because you have summoned me." The Holy Spirit completed the Baptism as they were anointed unto God and imprinted with the indelible mark of the Lord's witnesses.

They felt illuminated by the light of God's spirit and called upon to embody the practice of Hospitality



more deeply, having received a message from our founders to live and personify God's love and tenderness toward others. "This is my only desire: to dedicate myself to consecrate souls in the service of the Lord, so they may praise him in this life, sing his praises for all eternity, and rejoice in the Almighty in harmony with the angels of heaven" (St. Benedict Menni, C 778).

## Promoting inclusive labour Province of Spain

Eight people living with disabilities are preparing to take public service exams through a free course taught by professionals from the Sisters Hospitallers' Social-Health Centre in Palencia (Spain). Training, which began on 30th August, focuses on accessing the post of Ancillary Support Tasks announced by the Ministry of Finance and Public Function. This project is part of the external development sessions targeting social/labour insertion that the centre has offered since 2008 and in which more than 650 students have participated.

*"Our goal is to enhance the employability of people living with disabilities and these public exams are a great opportunity for them to secure a stable job,"* explains Clara González, the Head of Training and a Psychologist at the Sisters Hospitallers' Social-Health Centre in Palencia.

This type of training teaches the seven principles and, in an easy read of this announcement, Clara



González and her team help the participants organise their studies and give them support techniques to enhance their concentration.

These students are also eligible for internships at public organisations. *"For them, it's a motivational boost because they don't consider themselves capable of doing a job until they're in the position",* she explained.



## An especially charming summer Province of Italy

The summer of 2021 may have seemed like a 'normal' summer, but compared to the previous summers at the Sisters Hospitallers' Villa Miramare centre in Italy, it was not. Naturally, there was more freedom and openness than in 2020, but there was also more fatigue because of an almost chronic, medicalised, filtered, protected life.

The centre's collaborators had to reinvent all the summer activities that residents love doing outdoors. They turned the centre into a pizzeria twice, with a terrace and tables overlooking the sea; they also converted it into a theatre with live music; and finally into a boat for a better view of the sea, organising an internal programme of events to ensure the guests' stay replicated a cruise, full of activities.

These evenings, such as 19th August, with live mu-



sic, pizza on the terrace, and bonfires by the sea, were successful thanks to the dedication of our collaborators, who contributed with more of their time, attention, help, ideas, joy, support, and commitment, when possible. With everyone's cooperation, it was a magical day with fireworks... the perfect end to a perfect evening enjoyed by all.

## Puzzles to assess mental health Province of England

At the Sisters Hospitallers' Benedict Menni Mental Health Centre in Monrovia (Liberia), our collaborators test the concentration of patients living with a mental illness, as well as their IQs, with puzzles and drawings. For some tasks, patients are divided into two groups to monitor their ability to work in teams and communicate. For others, patients are assessed individually in these two simple activities.

A recent study from the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) found that solving puzzles reduces stress, occupying and entertaining the mind to create a sense of serenity and meditation. Another benefit, especially pertinent for those living with mental illnesses, is that they can be solved in groups, combatting the sense of loneliness that often results from this condition.

Puzzles are also an effective measure of the evolution



of a person's mental health for two reasons. First, they reinforce one's ability to focus on a specific task, understand the exercise, and fit small pieces together. Second, the concentration process boosts the production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that regulates mood and affects concentration, motivation, memory, and motor skills.





## Gloria López de Larrañaga

**"The most gratifying part of volunteering is sharing my time with others, giving the best of myself as a person"**

My name is Gloria López de Larrañaga and I have been associated with the Sisters Hospitallers' Perpetuo Socorro Hospital in Pasto (Colombia) since 1992.

I'm 72 and I've been with the group of Hospitaller volunteers for 28 years. Their motto is "Service, Love, and Faith." For me, it's very important to be part of the volunteer team, otherwise it rarely happens, and you become a less effective volunteer. I participate in activities with primarily young users living with a mental illness, helping with crafts and sewing. I currently attend the sewing workshop where the patients' clothes are cut, made, and altered. The workshop takes place every week from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. I am also available if it's necessary to tend to any unforeseen circumstances.

The most challenging part of my life as a volunteer is the current situation, since the pandemic has limited our ability to provide services and assistance in person.

For me, personally, the distance has been

difficult, not being able to spend time with users who value our presence so much and who are the most important part of our job.

The most gratifying part of volunteering is sharing my time with others, giving the best of myself as a person: my time, my knowledge, my love. Everything I do is imbued with the Hospitaller charism. Always at the forefront of my mind is our founding father and volunteer, St. Benedict Menni, who reminds us of the words of Christ: *"I was ill and you cared for me."*

