

Our Journey with our Lay Partners

The Sisters of the Singapore Province have worked with the laity since they first came to Singapore in 1854. During the early years and, indeed, up to the period of World War II, this partnership was characterised by a sharing in the ministry of offering the gift of education to young girls from all backgrounds, and from diverse faiths. Likewise, other lay persons assisted in the care offered by the Sisters to very young children who had been abandoned owing to the social ills of extreme poverty, sometimes superstition and the non-availability of medical care for sick or infirm children which prevailed up to the post war period.

Many of the lay persons who assisted in these two ministries were women of deep faith who admired the courage and quality of care shown by the early Sisters to those most in need. They were deeply impressed by the pervasive influence of the many Sisters with whom they worked, particularly by the attitudes and values they revealed in their care for sometimes difficult children. They, too, came to take on these attitudes in the ministry they shared. The relationship between the Sisters and the laity was one of esteem, collaboration and mutual respect.

In the Post World War II period, Singapore underwent huge social change with the coming of independence and the growth of the modern city state. This period coincided too with the changes in religious life which came about as a result of Vatican II. Progressively the number of Sisters in active ministry grew fewer as age and ill-health took their toll.

The post-war re-envisioning of our partnership with the laity emerged from the successive international IJ Chapters from 1971 onwards and more specially from the challenges posed by the social changes of the last fifty years. The influence of the IJ Sisters was no longer one emanating from numerical strength and personal virtues.

The new emphasis came from a vision of “growth together” for both Sisters and laity. It is a search together to encounter Christ at a deeper level and to enter into a transformation whereby we come to look upon our world and on all we encounter in a more incarnational way, drawing strength together from the life and actions of Jesus as revealed in the Gospels. It is therefore from this well of strength, this underpinning that we are called to collaborate in shared ministry today.



(Standing Left to Right – Dr Esther Chong, Secretary, IJ BoM, Sr Deirdre, Dr Noeleen Heyzer, UN Under-Secretary-General and Exec Secretary of the UN (ESCAP) and Sr Maria at the CHIJ Forum)

1. As the leadership of our 11 Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus (CHIJ) schools was progressively placed in the capable hands of lay leaders/Principals and Vice Principals we came to recognise, in the seventies, the need

to invite these lay leaders and their support teams to undertake a deepening of their understanding of the IJ spirituality in relation to their new role as leaders. This was based on the recognition that their capacity to become a formative influence in their school community would, to a great extent, depend on their integration of the spiritual thrust which provides the ethos of a CHIJ school. Almost all had, in their student days, an experience of a CHIJ education which they treasured but they acknowledged that their new role required them to work with the Sisters to identify what it is that is really critical to provide the distinctive type of education articulated by our Founder and provided by the early Sisters.

The efforts undertaken were many, from breathing new life into our proclamation of mission to the meaning of the school crest, so that these would speak to the young generation of teachers and students and inspire them. The efforts at working together are on-going and demand a search for ways of engaging the school leadership in their own spiritual transformation that they in turn may become instruments in the transformation of their school community. The search is never ending as we seek together to respond to the deepest hungers of our students for meaning and purpose in a society which offers much that is progressive but which does not feed the soul. During our celebration in 2014 of the 160th Anniversary of our foundation, our search for “persons of transcendence” whose lives make a tremendous impact on others, placed the life of Mother Mathilde and her founding team before us as a source of inspiration in our on-going journey.

2. Many other initiatives have been undertaken in this effort to grow together.

Foremost among these have been the efforts to deepen the spiritual dimension of the service offered by the members of the [Board of Management](#) to the 11 CHIJ schools and to the [Children's Homes](#). There is an on-going effort to work together to be instruments of unity and of hope.

- Some Sisters assist their lay partners in reaching out to children whose deprived background in early life places them at risk. By giving them a head start, through supplementary enrichment and remedial programmes, they help them grow in motivation and confidence to realise their talents and avail of the opportunities open to them.
- A few Sisters work with lay partners on our IJ website to make it a source of inspiration to those who seek something uplifting.
- A few Sisters, who have retired from the teaching service, offer pastoral care in selected Primary schools and make themselves available to young, inexperienced teachers who need encouragement and affirmation when things are difficult.
- The parents of children in one of our CHIJ Primary schools, who deeply wish to engage in their children's faith formation, work collaboratively with one of our Sisters and are growing in confidence in taking over the leadership in organising retreats, liturgical services and formative sessions for youth.
- Five Sisters engage in pastoral outreach with their lay partners to the elderly in homes and a hospital. Those facing severe illnesses and needing human consolation in their fears, find support in this group.

Our Lay Partners with the IJ Sisters



The IJ Fraternity

The birth of the Fraternity came about through seeking what groups of our lay partners and associates really wanted most in a shared future. Their response was a request to work with them in getting to really know the IJ spirituality and what it is that has motivated and sustained our Sisters over 300 years. The initial small group of laity and Sisters, many of whom did not know each other, began the journey with hope. Sessions are held at the convent on a Saturday morning monthly when all draw aside from their week's labours and concerns to pray together, to spend quiet time in reflection and to share what is taking place in their lives. The central tenets of Père Barré, incarnation, abandonment and trust in Divine Providence, are explored together and in a manner that engages each member of the group.

The naming of this group came about after a year together. As the level of bonding and of trust grew, so, too did the depth of sharing. These sessions of 9 Sisters and 14 lay persons, including 2 couples, have become a source of spiritual strength for each member in living out his/her calling in life. A few have been inspired to offer their services in the formation of teachers in the IJ mission in Yangon, Myanmar, while some others engage with migrant workers. From this interaction sprang the need to come up with an English Language programme for migrants which would equip them with the basic language needs which would leave them less vulnerable to being exploited. This programme is in turn shared generously with any support group likely to profit from it.



CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF NICOLAS BARRE 2016 with IJ Fraternity members

Introduction

Today as we celebrate the feast of Nicolas Barre, we offer our prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of Nicolas Barre himself and the Institute. We ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into this spirit of oneness with Him so that we can continue to grow more like him in his loving relationship with the Father and the Spirit and in his fidelity to mission to the people.

Opening Hymn: Be Not Afraid

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.
You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way.
You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand.
You shall see the face of God and live.*

Refrain* Be not afraid. I go before you always.
Come follow me, and I will give you rest.

If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown.
If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed.
If you stand before the pow'r of hell and death is at your side, know that I am with you through it all.*

Blessed are your poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs.
Blessed are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh.
And if wicked men insult and hate you all because of me, blessed, blessed are you!*

Word of God: Philippians 2:1-11

"If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was ⁱⁿ Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death - even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Reflection

God is with us at the first moment of life. This is the central message of the Incarnation – that God is with us. No amount of guilt or hesitation will cause God to turn away, no failing in the past will ever quell God's love for us. The miracle of the simple manger, the silence of the stable, speaks to our hearts of a God whose love we cannot earn – a love that is pure, freely offered and unconditional.

The simplicity and loving acceptance portrayed by the crib scene at Christmas confronts us with the challenge to be vulnerable, open, willing and trusting as we face new things. It is a challenge to do our part to bring goodness to life, to nurture the impossible, to believe in the fragile and small things that make life worth living for everyone. The heart of the Incarnation is that God comes to us in small things and asks us to believe in our own smallness. The miracle of Jesus birth among us assures us of the life and hope within us that springs up and flows outwards towards others. Vulnerability reveals the need to relate to others, recognising the support and solidarity we need to move forward together in life.

The Incarnation for us, is to allow the final reality of Jesus to embody itself in our humanity. The mystery of the Incarnation remains what we are going to live.

We have all experienced vulnerability at some stage in our lives. It can be the most painful of experiences and yet the most fruitful. Our vulnerability helps us deepen our commitment to do something in our own lives that makes life better for others, whatever our smallness, however remote we feel from the problem. We know that God very often chooses the little ones to carry out life's greatest tasks.

Opening Prayer as a group

O God, we thank you for our time together to pause and reflect on our life and mission for which we are called. Send down your Spirit and renew our hearts and minds. Renew us and renew our fraternity that we may envision a future full of vitality and growth. May this time apart grow hearts grateful for each other and your mission through us that we may return refreshed, open to each other and always to the movement of grace in our lives. Amen

Reading (Book of the Institute No. 4)

"Christ calls us to Himself, to share in His life and unite ourselves with His mission. He invites us to follow Him in the ways He chose in His Incarnation and to recognize Him to-day in the poor and the 'little ones' with whom He identified. 'In so far as you did this to one of the least of these, you did it to Me.' (Mt 25:40)

Impelled by the Spirit we respond to that call and through His power commit ourselves entirely, unconditionally and forever."

Our response:

Incarnate God, help us to renew our commitment to follow your path of the Incarnation in the present reality of our life, in the lives of all who strive and yearn for human dignity and in the depths of the ordinary.

Together, let us renew our commitment to God.

"We are companions on a journey
called to deepen our understanding of the Spirituality
of Blessed Nicolas Barre which is the inspiration of
the Infant Jesus Mission in all its expressions.
We celebrate the spirit that has brought us together,
has sustained us and informs us in the way
we work and live to promote the Kingdom of God." Amen

Blessings

The LORD bless us and keep us;
The LORD make His face shine upon us,
And be gracious to us;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon us,
And give us peace. (Numbers 6: 24-26)



On waking, turn your thoughts to God,
be thankful for the grace of a new day in which to work selflessly
for God's glory, your neighbour's salvation and your own sanctification.
Above all else ask for the special guidance
to do God's will in all things,
and live your vocation to the full.

N. Barré: Statutes and Rules 3:1

Hoping against hope,
and when everything seems to be without hope,
we must go forward all the more in hope."

N. Barré: Fundamental Maxims 13

<p>Prayer of Abandonment (Letter 12)</p> <p>Refrain*</p> <p>Lord I want nothing more, I desire nothing more. Only to be ready to desire what you desire, And as you desire it.</p> <p>1) Lord you hold me in your presence. You watch o'er everything. All my concern, all that happens to me. Nothing escapes your adorable guidance of my life. This is enough for me.*</p> <p>2) O Jesus, O Love, You are my God, my all. Centre of infinity of goodness and greatness. May Jesus come to be in us, May he find his delight in us. And so forever be, nothing left for us to desire.*</p> <p>3) Choose Lord, what you want of me. Do with me what you will. Act and plan everything in the way that pleases you. And I will try to desire, to act and follow you in everything. And everywhere without reserve or limit.*</p> <p>4) Lord I want to belong totally to you. No more division or separation. Neither in life nor in death, in sorrow or in joy, on earth or in heaven. My beloved is mine, and I am his forever. O Jesus, O love.</p>	<p>Prayer of Abandonment (N. Barré: Letter 12)</p> <p>LORD, I want nothing more, I desire nothing more only to be ready to desire what you desire and as you desire it.</p> <p>It is enough for me that you hold me in your presence, that you take care of everything, that you watch over all my concerns, all that happens to me and that nothing escapes your adorable guidance of my life. O Jesus! O Love!</p> <p>You are my God and my All, centre and unfathomable depth of goodness and greatness! May Jesus live and his will be done! There is nothing left for me to desire.</p> <p>Choose Lord, what you want of me. Order all things, plan and arrange all things in the way that pleases you, and I will try and make my desires and actions yours, to follow you in everything and everywhere, without reserve or limit.</p> <p>Finally, Lord I want to belong totally to you, no more measuring or portioning out, neither in life nor in death, in sorrow or in joy, on earth or in heaven. My beloved is all mine and I am his forever. O Jesus! O Love!</p>
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Hymn to Fr. Barre

<p>De vos enfants, exaucez la prière . Veillez sur nous O Saint Père Barré. Choisissez-vous un essaim d'ouvrières. Par le Seigneur à votre attire.</p> <p>Dans L'institut, conservez d'âge en âge. Un zèle ardent, l'humilité, la foi. Le pur amour, la force et le courage. Pour observe à jamais votre loi (2x)</p>	<p>O hear our prayer, most holy Father Barré. We are your children, watch o'er us we pray. Touch many hearts to follow in your footsteps. To dedicate their lives to youth and poor.</p> <p>Drawn by the Lord to make Christ known and loved. Fill us with zeal, humility and faith. Pure love and strength and courage without fear To keep your spirit alive in our hearts (2x)</p>
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Sharing Sr Celine's birthday joy



Let's 'Lohei' - during Chinese New Year 2017



Prayer and reflection on Good Friday 2017

