

# to bring fuller life to others



*Congregation of the Sisters  
of the Sorrowful Mother  
Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi*

**November 2013 #3**

Dear Readers,

In this third issue of *To Bring Fuller Life to Others*, as we had anticipated in the first issue, we present the theme *Called and Sent*. We will speak about vocation and mission as Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, how we are inserted into Jesus, the center of our faith, and into his mission.

In the first chapter of our constitutions we begin with a biblical quote from the Gospel according to Luke 4, 18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor..." In the synagogue of Nazareth, using the words of the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus announces something new: He declares that he is the One anointed by the Holy Spirit and the One sent by the Father, the reality and the fulfillment. He affirms clearly that this ancient announcement becomes the present reality: "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." Certainly this quotation which was chosen to describe the purpose and spirit of our congregation is not merely a pleasant greeting but a plan for life, a path for our journey as a community. This journey was designed from the beginning with the Norms of 1883, written by Mother Frances Streitel, and can be found in subsequent congregational documents. It is encouraging to know that many women have responded and continue to respond to the invitation to follow Jesus in a continuous act of love for God, attracted by His loveliness which allows them to care for others, especially the poorest of the poor.

Reading the brief accounts of our sisters who have lived their entire lives in the service of God and of their brothers and sisters and are now in retirement, one realizes that their lives are always involved in giving witness to the Love they have received and are now returning. Their current limitations, their daily joys and sufferings, are occasions of how they express their participation in the life and the mission of Jesus. Also the witness of some of our sisters who work directly with the poor helps us to understand that the service they provide is a gift from God. They do this ministry with and for the poor, not for themselves, because these actions find their root and their measure in Jesus and not in their own generosity.

Today more than ever before, as individuals and as community, we sense the urgency to imitate Christ, the center of our faith. We want to respond with generosity and humility to the call to bring fuller life to others.

*Sr. M. Teresina Marra, SSM  
General Superior*

## Called and Sent

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### Biblical Reflection

**Jesus wants to build a relationship with us to share his life and mission.**

### Our Spiritual Heritage

**The love of God is the steady rock in our lives. Strengthened by this stability, we too are sent to repair the house of God just as Francis of Assisi and Mother Frances were.**

### Experiences

**Jesus is the revelation of the Father's Love. He sends us to our brothers and sisters, especially to the poor, to be a concrete sign of this love: how do we participate in the mission of Jesus today to bring fuller life to others?**

# Called and sent

## Biblical Reflection

Sorry, I can't remember her name. No, I don't know him, not even his name. How does it feel being responsible for a group and not knowing one person, not being able to call anyone by name? Have we ever experienced that? How do we feel?

How often have I been called by my name today? When I hear my name I know it's me. I can pretend not to have heard. Or I can turn away. Or I can say that I am in a hurry right now. Or I can ask: What do you want? You have called me. Being known by name and being called makes one thing visible above all: someone wants to build up and/or deepen a relationship with me. A name is not just a noun – it is a key to a person including everything that is behind, not yet seen, an unveiled mystery.

In the New Testament we can see it clearly.

Whenever Jesus wants something particular to be revealed to a person, he turns toward the person and calls that person by name.

Mk 3:13-16 states:

***“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), ...”***

Jesus calls those he has chosen for two purposes: he wants them to be with him and he wants them to be sent. Each word in this phrase has special importance. Jesus chooses by himself. It is his free will and initiative, and he knows the persons he is calling. He wants to build up a personal relationship with the chosen ones, so it is important that he calls them by name; and if two happen to have the same name then a clarification is provided to identify the person meant. They are chosen to be. It is not first tasks that are important but being, and being with Jesus.

How different in our days! We choose people mainly because they have different tasks and roles. Jesus chooses his disciples to *be* with him. The mission comes afterwards. How helpful this is for me. Jesus calls me because he wants me to *be* with him. When the relationship has deepened and the human heart is filled by his understanding, acceptance, and love, the desire to proclaim comes by itself. I want to proclaim this Jesus and his message of unconditional love – even right now. But Jesus knows us deeply and that's why he does not send us right away, and not alone. We are sent two by two. And we are sent with those who have also been with Jesus for a time. We have experienced our companions being with Jesus.

That unites us. We are not better and not worse than others.



We have all been called by name in our baptism. And Jesus longs to have us with him in order that we get to know him better. Here real relationship and communication can take place.

What comes to my mind is the well known theory of the communication model of Friedemann Schulz von Thun. The four aspects of communication are:

- The *matter layer* that contains data and facts pertaining to the message
- The *self-revealing or self-disclosure aspect* in which the speaker – whether intended or not – tells something about herself/himself, her/his motives, values, emotions, etc.
- The *relationship layer* that expresses how the sender gets along with the receiver.
- The *appeal aspect* that contains the desire, advice, instruction and effect that the speaker is seeking.

How does this concern our topic about being called and sent? I believe we have to be clear about how Jesus communicates in order to be able to answer in the right way. So I want to apply the communication model for Jesus' way of building relationships.

The *matter* that Jesus wants to convey is the coming of the *Kingdom of God* made visible in his own words and deeds. What he *revealed about himself* is that he is *God's beloved son*. His *relationship* to us is that of a *friend* and a *servant* who *offers his life* for us. And his *appeal* is that we go out and *proclaim the Good News* to all the people of this earth. This is our mission. But this mission cannot be understood or fulfilled if we do not know Jesus, the one who sends us. And if there is no deep relationship with him we will tire very soon. It is also difficult to go on a mission if the goal is not clear.



I come back to the beginning. Jesus calls me by name and he knows me. He gives me time to be with him again and again (relationships are never finished) so I get to know him, his faithful, loving and trusting friendship with me and his message. Then he sends me out – not alone but with those who have also learned from him. So with this trust in my backpack – why should I not go?

*Sr. Gudrun Maria Schellner, SSM*

**The proclamation and establishment of God's kingdom are the purpose of his mission: "I was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43). But that is not all. Jesus himself is the "Good News," as he declares at the very beginning of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he applies to himself the words of Isaiah about the Anointed One sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. Lk 4;14-21). Since the "Good News" is Christ, there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces; he proclaims the "Good News" not just by what he says or does, but by what he is. (Redemptoris Missio, 13)**



## Our Spiritual Heritage

*„The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor.” (Lk 4:18)*

These are the words of the mission: God calls and sends us to announce his love to the world. When I think of the life of Mother Frances Streitel, I can clearly see how deeply she lived these words from the Gospel. Trusting in God, Mother Frances started many journeys and relied only on the power of these words: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor ...*”



Mother Frances’ power of “leaving” and of “starting” affected me from the time I first heard of her. She went, she started many times, she left safety and stability to start journeys based on *His Word*. Mother Frances went to the U.S. three times in a few years in order to support the sisters in the newly established mission. To cross the ocean more than a century ago was not a very easy task! Today, when I feel discomfort and fatigue in my travels from one country to another, and from one continent to another, it is difficult for me to imagine how challenging travel must have been a century ago.

We can go and leave people, places, roles and other things, or deal with hardships and dangers when we have already experienced a deep feeling of security, when we feel sure that our life is founded on something stable and safe as a rock. For Mother Frances this stable and safe rock was the Love of God.

Following Mother Francis’ words in her letter to her blood sister Hedwig “*May our Mother of Fair Love lead us profoundly into the mystery of the love of God*” (Mary Frances of the Cross Amalia Streitel – Letters to her parents and to her sister Hedwig, 25). The writings that our foundress has left to us are not many, but from some of her personal notes and letters we understand how profoundly she had experienced the Love of God and how important it was for her that other brothers and

sisters experienced this same love. For Mother Frances, *being in mission* meant sharing the Love of God, her most precious good, with other people.

To be aware and experience the love of God can be an invaluable treasure in our lives. When we live and grow in a relationship of friendship and love with God, we can live free and deep relationships with others: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Mk 12:30-31) The more authentic and alive our relationship with God is, the more we can live all our relationships in a free and well-ordered way. In so far as we experience that the Love of God for us is a gratuitous love, we will live mission and ministry joyfully, collaborating with God not from a sense of duty or the perspective of a salary, but gratuitously. Urged by this love Mother Frances started many times; she did not allow obstacles to prevent her, nor fears and hostility. From the very beginning she started new journeys without waiting for specific and clear directions. Surely Mother Frances had experienced that God calls and sends us, but he also becomes our companion during this journey and walks before us.

Also in St. Francis' history we can read this process: he "started" when he heard his name called in the church of San Damiano, when he heard God's words: *Francis, go and repair my house*. I have always reflected on how Francis must have felt at that time, looking around and seeing the old church where "the house of God" was located and the many needed repairs. He "started" repairing the house of God in a concrete way, by carrying the stones. Only step by step did Francis discover that the house of God was the Church, that God had sent him to be a sign of conversion in the Church, an instrument for the renewal and freshness of the Gospel, a concrete and clear sign of the Love of God. Only step by step did Francis understand that the *house* to be repaired included his *brothers* and *sisters*: how could he do it? By helping them discover their own dignity as creatures made in the image and likeness of God, by announcing through their lives, words, care, service, friendship and charity, that God's love is unique and special for each of us. Perhaps, if Francis had not started by carrying the stones for repairing the church of San Damiano, he would not have understood the true meaning of the words *go and repair my house*. How do we repair the house of God today? Are we really available to start our journey without a clear direction or without the required assurance or when many doubts arise within us and the problems of the world are obscure to our eyes? What does it mean for us today to have Mother Francis' spirit, courage, trust and resourcefulness?

*Sr. Samuela Maria Rigon, SSM*

**The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God's work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit. After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the apostles have a powerful experience which completely transforms them: the experience of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them *witnesses* and *prophets* (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:17-18). It fills them with a serene courage which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope which motivates them. The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with "boldness." (Redemptoris Missio, 24)**



## Experiences

In this particular issue of *To bring fuller life to others*, we chose to develop the theme of being *Called and Sent*. Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth, after reading the prophecy of Isaiah in Luke chapter 4:18-21, indicated that he understood his mission in terms of this same prophecy stated in these words: “today, he said, in your very hearing this text has come true.” Our mission is the same. Rooted in the call of God, the life of Jesus, and the charism of our foundress we too are called and sent to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel. Because of this call we continue to choose and pursue loving service to others with charity and selflessness. We continue to choose and pursue with open generous hearts to respond to the needs of today, the signs of the times. To live in this way we know deep in our hearts we are doing God’s work: our call to renew the face of the earth.

*Sr. Catherine Marie Hanegan, SSM*

As a starting point to address our theme, *Called and Sent*, we have asked some of our sisters who are actively involved in serving the poor and needy, together with some of our retired sisters who continue to live their commitment and participate in the mission, to respond to the following questions:

### **1. What does it mean for me to participate in the Mission of Jesus and bring fuller life to others?**

It was more than ten years ago after I did a reflection on our charism, our call to stay beneath the cross of the crucified people of today, to recognize the truly poor just as Mary did, that I began to think about ministry in Africa. I thought to myself: we have this gift of such a live and beautiful charism that we could share in Africa, the land of a crucified people. I discovered that the Spirit of God was already at work in our Congregation: the Congregation had begun a discernment process of prayer, reflection, meetings and events to determine if we could respond to this call of the Spirit to establish a mission in Africa. Our response was positive. God was merciful and heard the cry of the poor. Together with other sisters,

I am now in Ifunde, a village of the Diocese of Kahama in the savannah. We are here in the name of the entire congregation. Our patients are afflicted with malaria, various infections and AIDS. Children at the pre-schools in the villages of the parish and young people are our hope for today and tomorrow. They are the visible signs that the message of God to bring fuller life to ourselves and others is bearing fruit. During these seven years of SSM’s presence and service in Ifunde, some seeds have been planted to continue to announce the joyful message that God is the fullness of life and that Christ has risen and will not die anymore. To participate in the mission of Jesus for me is to see that His Word is still alive today.

*Sr. Alessandra Maria Zonato, SSM  
Tanzania*



**Humanity conceals two jewels in its midst and so seldom appreciate their value. They are the poor and the sick, through whom we can enrich ourselves with the most precious treasures for time and eternity if we mercifully assist them and strive to alleviate their hard and painful lot by love and kindness, in imitation of our divine Savior, who conceals Himself in the one as in the other.** (Mary Frances of the Cross Amalia Streitl - Various Writings and Documents of the Beginning of the Congregation, 109-1)

As I reflect on my years of teaching and now in pastoral ministry, I understand that perhaps as in the case of Jesus, “who one is” is more important than “what one does”. Jesus was baptized at the River Jordan by John the Baptist. After his baptism he went about doing good, healing the sick, and feeding the hungry. Our baptismal call is an invitation to participate in the ministry of Jesus. Being a disciple means following His way and doing what He did. For us it means to go out and live the gospel more by example. To participate in the Mission of Jesus means to go out into the desert and pray to the Father for strength; we comfort the mothers of those whose sons and daughters are victims of drugs or alcohol; we heal those who are paralyzed in some way or are sick and need healing. We allow Jesus to transform us, for in this world he has no other heart, mind, hands and feet but ours to serve. How awesome that Jesus has chosen to transform the world through us!



*Sr. M. Corita Ortiz, SSM  
US/Caribbean*



The defining feature of our total life-long consecration to God is an integrated contemplative life with a wholehearted commitment to a full time public ministry in His service.

As prophets among God’s people we mediate the Good News of God’s compassion and justice to people in concrete situations – not confined in institutions but deeply rooted in the Church.

Re-reading our initial charism – and the “signs of the times” – we found the only way to preserve and maintain an authentic faithfulness to our foundational charism is to express it in our lives in new ways. CREATIVE FIDELITY – a vision of the future beginning from new circumstances – is needed, along with this memory of the past.

A passion for making the Word of God known is not just an activity of consecrated life; it is an essential element in using the leadership style of Jesus.

*Sr. Mary Lu Slowey, SSM  
US/Caribbean*

**May the poor always enjoy the friendship of our Sisters; and if they cannot always be helped as their situation requires, oh, then, may a friendly glance, a sympathetic expression on the part of the Sisters help them to forget their hard lot for a few moments. Never should one permit oneself a severe judgment of the poor** (Mary Frances of the Cross Amalia Streitl - Various Writings and Documents of the Beginning of the Congregation, 109-2)



2. How has this mandate impacted our ministry with and for the poor?



“Called and sent”

My call to the Community of the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother is truly a gift of God’s love for me. I was privileged to respond to this love and to share it with little children, with the sick and the poor in my ministries as a kindergarten teacher and as a nurse doing home nursing and serving the elderly in a nursing home. Through these ministries God has given me the opportunity to live and promote our mission for 65 years. I was able to lend a helping hand to many people who needed assistance. Now in my elder years, I help serve our elderly sisters in whatever way I can. As long as I can I will gladly do little things for them, e.g., take Sisters in the wheelchair to the chapel or elsewhere. May God’s Spirit continue to work through me and allow me to share my life and bring some joy to our elderly sisters. In this small way I can contribute to the fullness of their lives.

*Sr. Daria Pöschl, SSM  
Germany*

I was called and sent for service by God through my baptism. I was called into discipleship through faith and grace to help build up the kingdom of God, specifically to provide service to the poor, the elderly and the sick.

They all wait to experience the love and care of God through us. We want to give back to the poor the dignity which they deserve as children of God. We are to follow the example of Mother Frances. It was her great desire that God’s kingdom would be made visible, that our hearts would be wide open in active love of neighbor.

May the Lord help me to be open to the needs of the poor, for their sad eyes and worried expressions are asking something of me. You, Lord, are my source from which I am nurtured to give service to the poor.



*Sr. M. Friedmunda Gaukler, SSM  
Vienna*



**The charism that emerged during the foundational years of the congregation continues to be the dynamic influence that shapes our specific mission within the Church. Through a dedicated life of apostolic service, vitalized by a contemplative spirit, we care for those in need, especially the poor, and in our own poverty seek the Lord above all. “Lord, I desire nothing but You, but You I desire to possess entirely.” (Our Way of Life, 4)**

I am 78 years old. I am in my third youth of the spirit and I am experiencing that my call and mandate to bring the joyful announcement of Jesus' Gospel to the poor is still alive. "Today" my mission is carried out in the Casa di Riposo "San Giuseppe", our nursing home in Capannelle, Rome. It is a grace for me to both enjoy the beauty of community life with sisters of different ages and to experience the same difficulties as our residents who are elderly and sick women. Every day I lead the rosary with reflections. I try to help other people to see life, faith, family, little joys and sufferings as a gift from God. I now have the time and opportunity to thank God for the other ministries that I carried out in the congregation. I continue to remember in my prayers the children that I taught, their families, our guests, and the poor whom I have served. I deeply believe that my life was guided by the Spirit and that united with Jesus Christ, I can still be an instrument to bring fuller life to others today.

*Sr. M. Angela Luongo, SSM  
Italy*



*"To bring fuller life to others – especially the poor"*

It's easy to quote this but I recall that the bishop who spoke at the assembly in Rome said it's about the "how" that we focus on.

Living where I do it's difficult to know what being "materially poor" is when there is no shortage of food, clothing, housing, and health care. Spiritually and psychologically is another matter!

I sense a strong notion that because we are religious we still feel a sense of having special privileges. I believe that our health care institutions care for the poor in many ways and our Sisters often keep them aware of the needs.

In retirement, I feel that my gift to the ministry is to give support through prayer and sharing of my gifts in any way.

*Sr. M. Ruth Linnebur, SSM  
US/Caribbean*

*"In spirit I beheld two mountains rise...  
In one I recognized Carmel; in the other Alverno ...  
Both mountains arched themselves into one ...  
The call which I received ... sounded like this:  
"To unite the active life with the contemplative."  
(Our Way of Life, 53)*