Great is God’s faithfulness!

As we make our journey through Lent and draw nearer to the joyful celebration of the renewal of life at Easter, we ponder upon God’s never-ending love and mercy. The season of spring, which has just begun, directs our attention to this experience of God’s renewing love: «His steadfast love never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning...» (Lamentations 3:22.23).

It is with this knowledge that we move forward each day trusting that God is here with us, despite the destruction of life around us, the sufferings experienced in so many places in the world because of greed, hate, the pursuit of power and control over resources and people and our own struggles to remain steadfast in the love that we bear to others. The Lenten season thus, has given us the opportunity to renew our love and mercy in our own embrace of God’s faithfulness.

I pray that these Newsletter articles about our sisters in some parts of the world where there is much suffering, will inspire you to find hope and experience solidarity with the people concerned and with our sisters who journey with them. May their presence and work among the many who suffer displacement, hunger, deprivation of freedom, etc. be a renewing reminder of God’s steadfast love and mercy.

Sr. M. Therese Clement, O.P.
International Coordinator, DSI

MESSAGE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COORDINATOR

NEWS FROM VENEZUELA

Please remember the Sisters of the Congregation of Santa Rosa de Lima, native to Venezuela, other Dominican missionary congregations (Dominicanas de Santa Catalina de Sena, Colombianas, Dominicas Hijas de Nuestra Señora de Nazareth, Dominicas Misioneras de la Sagrada Familia, Congregación Santo Domingo, Soeurs de Charité de la Présentation and Hermanas Dominicas de Nuestra Señora de Rosario de Fátima), the Friars and other members of the Dominican Family serving in Venezuela.
Merida January 5, 2017
Dominican Sisters DSI
Present

Dear Sisters: accept our warm greetings as well as our wishes that the Holy Spirit fill you with the wisdom, health and grace that enable you to go on joyfully dedicating yourselves to Jesus Christ through the mission with which you were entrusted. We express our endless gratitude to God for the work that you are carrying out in the Order, to the benefit of our peoples, always at the generous service of those most in need. Today, more than ever, people find themselves in an environment marked by a consciousness of freedom, justice and dignity, which requires our presence that bears Jesus’s mercy.

The reason for this letter is to share some information with you about the situation of our own Congregation in Venezuela, mainly underlining that God is present throughout our lives and mission. He never abandons us; we perceive His presence while looking for solutions, thus nurturing in us solidarity, fraternity, mercy and generosity, so that each day we live a true miracle.

Venezuela is certainly experiencing a very complicated situation, a bleak outlook that touches the various dimensions of the lives of all of its inhabitants. Power is concentrated in the function of the government that goes hand in hand with a cult that idolizes the country’s political leader/s into gods. In this sense, we could say that our country is witnessing a dictatorship that stems from an ideology extended to all human being’s dimensions as in any totalitarian dictatorship, (economics, culture, family but most of all in education that is being re-shaped with the aim of creating a new citizen, a sort of new person endowed with a single thought). In order to achieve this, the government makes use of fear to dominate people, by creating “police” groups or unions, whose mission is to hate, pursue and destroy any dissident thoughts. Those who think differently or express disagreement, or march in the streets to protest, among other expressions, are prosecuted, threatened and abused. There have been cases in which some people have lost their lives. Elections were held, however the government has an institutional advantage due to its own power. During the last elections in which the National Assembly was elected, people voted for some parties that were different from that of the Government. However, the government does not respect the Parliament’s autonomy or freedom. In this situation, it is important to highlight that we are living in a destructive dictatorship, which will bring the country towards the abyss where progress, justice and freedom no longer exist.

On the other hand, the economic embargo, insecurity and manipulation are shocking. There is no liberty to organize an economic or social progress program. The State keeps everything under control, blocking and control-
Venezuelan people doing lines to get basic products

Unfortunately, Venezuela is categorized as one of the most unsafe countries in the world, prisoners in jail form a real mafia, protection of the weakest ones does not exist, crime and drug addiction reign there. The insecurity we are experiencing is great, criminals and offenders reach levels of cruelty never before witnessed. Insecurity reigns in every place or situation. There are various groups or people who steal using weapons, extort, kidnap, blackmail, kill or steal anything: a pair of shoes, a car, crops in farms or animals, which are killed and taken away from the place where they peacefully graze.

The food situation is grave, and national production is almost nothing. Very little is imported, and the black market thrives and for a basic product one needs to pay 100% more than its price. In order to buy any type of food, drug or cleaning product at a better price, one needs to stand in line even for more than 12 hours, without the certainty that there will be enough. Products are difficult to find and the working class’ salaries are not enough even to pay for the least of their basic needs.

The Venezuelan State has expropriated private manufacturers, thus increasing the number of persons affected, i.e. the condition of both owners and workers since by not allowing these companies to work, they have jeopardized production; and because they have succeeded in making the State-expropriated companies produce nothing and the factories have crashed, while prices of what little is produced in the country are on the rise.

This situation has become one of extreme poverty. It is difficult to find medicine. Hospitals are in a state of great deterioration. They have the equipment required, but are without the supplies that are necessary for their operation. Hospitals and our social security are in a state of real chaos. Health is undermined due to corruption and indolence. Moreover, many of our doctors have been encouraged to leave the country, and look for better opportunities for economic development. There is a huge shortage of medicine throughout the entire country. Many patients under regular treatment are desperate; malnutrition is on the rise. Mortality in the country has reached unacceptable levels, and endemic diseases, which had once been eradicated, have come back for this reason.

As far as health is concerned, in Venezuela mortality is rising, especially among children. Although the Venezuelan population is a joyful and friendly one, tourism is collapsing. New airlines do not land in the country. Venezuela is considered as an unsafe destination. Venezuela is experiencing the flight its inhabitants. Due to these awful conditions people prefer to find jobs out of
the country, in a climate and living conditions that are very harsh due to them becoming migrants.

The Catholic Church is detested. Bishops, priests or persons who denounce people’s awful conditions are insulted, threatened and mistreated. During one of the most important processions taking place in the country, that of the Virgin of the Divine Pastor in Barquisimeto, this year there was unanimous cry from the crowd, asking for the miracle of a free, thriving, fair and advanced country.

This critical situation affecting our country afflicts our lives and mission within the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of Saint Rose of Lima. Our Congregation was founded here in Venezuela 117 years ago as an answer to the chaos of a similar situation, when a group of brave young women took care of a virtually abandoned hospital. Today, our Congregation has 25 Communities or Works, 23 of which are located in Venezuela, one in Colombia in Girón, operating a nursing home in the Diocese, and another parish-based one in Peru, in the Diocese of Chachapoyas.

In Venezuela there are 25 missions, of which 14 are schools, 5 nursing homes, 1 orphanage, 4 houses of evangelization or fellowships and 1 Foundation helping the homeless poor. Finding medicine, diapers, food, cleaning equipment, infrastructure maintenance or paying what personnel actually deserves for its work is a real challenge.

As for internal religious community life it is necessary to highlight that the Congregation has 129 sisters, among whom many are elderly and some are sick, but we also have a good group of sisters who are dedicated to the mission with joy and mercy. We also have three junior sisters, six novices, five postulants and various young women in the process of entering the Congregation. Certainly “nothing is impossible to God”, and we therefore go on even in the middle of this crisis. The sisters have no health insurance. They only have the public insurance which does not cover basic health requirements. With many sisters who do not work due to their age, and who earn a monthly salary ranging from 10 to 12 dollars, it is impossible to meet basic life needs. The widespread deprivation affects communities and this has consequences on the opportunities to study, update, participate in organizations as well as international formation. The same applies to lay people accompanying us in the mission, who fight daily to make ends meet in their families and continue to be present where the poor needs them.

Often it is difficult not to have some milk or a corn cake for breakfast, or deodorant or a bar of soap to wash up, or the money to pay the doctor, or not being able to find the medicine so urgently needed; it is painful to not have the money to pay for the novices’ formation or simply to have to call off a subscription to a Church or Congregation magazine. I do not want to go on listing the difficulties of a beautiful country, blessed with natural resources and with a noble people, with a great and caring heart, willing to work, love and build a different future. What is more important is that the Mercy of God is spread through the solidarity offered through each project and at all times. We believe in the love of God, who is approaching...
us in the various situations of our lives and takes pity on our grief by offering simple acts of reconciliation, love and freedom: “I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them…” Ex 3: 7-8. Being convinced of God’s love, we cannot turn our heads and hope that someone else is going to care for the poor, while walking far from the path of the needy. As a Congregation, we recognize that it is time to stop in order to raise our own awareness and accept our task as believers towards those brothers who are awaiting a gesture of freedom, mercy and solidarity. We live fearing our weaknesses, but the strength of the Spirit fills us up with light, joy, courage and faith in order to announce the hope of the Good News to this people who loves, suffers and hopes. (R.G)

May God fill you with His blessings and guide you to the encounter with His love.

Sincerely yours,

Sr. Emérita Ávila Urribarri
Superior General

Sr. Dilcia Zambrano
Secretary General

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Lk 4,18-19. Quoted from Is, 61,1).
Participants of 2017

Srs. Juliana Idoko, OP & Clementina Oti, OP of Nigeria representing the Continent of African

Srs. Judy Morris, OP & Sr. Margaret Hillary, OP of USA representing the Continent of North America

Sr. Rukhsana Yaqoob, OP of Pakistan & Sr. Emmanuel Yen Do, OP of Vietnam representing the Continent of Asia-Pacific

Sr. Laura Ines Nino Martinez, OP of Colombia & Sr. Helena Im, OP of Mexico representing the Continent of Latin America & the Caribbean.

Sr. Helen Mary Harmey, OP of Ireland representing the Continent of Europe

The following is a brief reflection that sets the tone for the Sisters’ experience together:

Icon “Mirroforas”:
(https://eukleria.wordpress.com/2013/03/27/las-mirroforas/#more-3003)

"It is no secret that we live dark times and that we frequently feel perplexed and discouraged. Perhaps we can learn from the women who went to the tomb on Easter morning bearing perfume, something of their ability to cope with whatever may come our way with wisdom and courage.

First, we encounter some women who are "miróforas", i.e., those who carry perfumes, who rise early to go and anoint the body of Jesus. The allusion to the "first day" and "sunrise" accompany his appearance in a scene submerged in a universe of new meanings: we are at the beginning of the new creation and the light of the Risen One wraps them in its glow. They are aware of the size of the stone and their inability to move it, but that is not an obstacle in their determination to go to anoint the body of Jesus ".
(Cf. Dolores Aleixadre)

The invitation for us is to share our gifts, our anxieties and our hopes – just as the women who went to anoint the body of Jesus. These women, sharing the little they had, expected to find death; but instead, they encountered new life. During our days together, we will learn of the harsh reality faced by women and girls throughout our world. But we will also hear stories of hope and of great courage. We will, in some way, experience a sense of resurrection, in the midst of darkness. And we will also experience a great sense of solidarity with women throughout the world – because in some way, we all share the same reality.
IRAQ OCTOBER 2016.

By: Sr. Marianne Goffoël, O.P.

It was because of Sr Maria’s invitation, Prioress General of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena, that I visited Iraq from the 10th to the 22nd of October 2016. This congregation is close to my heart having lived there around twelve years, 1970 to 1983. This proximity has made me keep a deep and lasting relationship with the sisters. So how, could I remain indifferent to what is happening in this country for several years!

I wanted my journey to be a support, a presence, a sign to say that in the Occident we do not forget this wounded population, hurt by so much barbarism. I felt supported by a lot of people, friends and acquaintances here in Belgium who encouraged me to leave… And who gave me a few important donations to meet the many needs.

So I arrived in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan which for some years now has enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy. The City which is also known in history by the Battle of Alexander the Great who defeated Darius III in 331 av. J.C. (known under the name of Battle of the Arbela). The sisters were waiting for me at the airport. What a joy to see each other again! The house which serves as their mother house (the 3rd in a short time) is located in Ain Kawa. Once a small Christian village, it now fully coexists with the city of Erbil. Although the Kurds share a long border with Daech, one feel more or less safe and life seems to be normal. Kurdistan had to take more than a million and a half of refugees. It thus faces countless challenges.

Very quickly in mingling with the Sisters and the people, more particularly the Christians, one realises the difficulties in which they live. And each wishes to tell his/her story:

« I had 800 chickens, 7 Dutch cows which produced 50 litres of milk per day, 120 calves. All these animals are treated according to the most sophisticated European systems. On the 6th of August 2014 –Everyone remembers- we had to leave Qaraqoche not being able to take anything with us. We had 10 minutes to leave. Normally, Erbil is a one hour drive from Qaraqoche. The journey took more than 24h as everyone was rushing to leave as soon as possible. 56 000 inhabitants left all at once. The cars became bogged down in the sand. And we are here without knowing what have become of our possessions. My wife cooks for a small community, it is our only means of subsistence »

« I had a small ice cream factory. I left with my van to go around the city of Qaraqoche in order to distribute my products in various locations. My van was not very fast. We left everything behind. Whilst I was fleeing, I received a phone call (on my mobile phone). It was a member of Daesch who ordered me to come back and hand in the keys of my house and my small ice cream factory, or he would blow everything up. He got my telephone number from my van that I left behind »…

« My family, said a sister, had to leave the village of Tell Eskof. She wanted to take the jewellery that she owned but when she left the village she was stripped of the only goods taken with her ». 
This exile will remain in the memory of all. In the Nineveh Plain, in the month of August, the temperature is no less than 47 degrees in the shade...

Initially, the refugees arrived in the courtyards of the churches, schools..., in schools or large hangars for the most fortunate, in unfinished buildings. … all these places too cramped to accommodate these thousands of people. Some were sleeping in the street. Fast enough assistance came through many NGO’s. Tents were erected and a life under a canvas roof began to be organised...

At the end of September, the schools started again. Those who were refugees there had to find other places. And then winter soon arrived, temperatures dropped significantly. After three months, whole villages were fitted with containers and enabled families to seek refuge under a metal roof, one room per family.

Again, everything was put in place gradually. Today in each camp we can see a dispensary with doctors, volunteer or barely paid nurses. Yet all these people must also live. A little help is welcome.

This exile has had a big impact on people’s health. Like for example as regards to the congregation, 16 sisters died in more or less 15 months that followed their escape!

Primary and secondary schools have also been set up. The sisters were strongly urged to guide them. Several pensioners offered their services but also young people. A sister by the name of Ban who studied the Montessori method during her studies in America, applied this method to the Kindergarten children. “They, she explains, have been very traumatised and many have become violent. You have to manage all of this.” She also applies yoga. I was struck by the discipline there and above all the calm. Sister Huda who then welcomes these children to primary school notes the difference with children coming from other Kindergartens.

“But,” Continues Sister Dan, it does not end there, it is also necessary to take care of the parents who are also sometimes very disturbed. It is the congregation of the sisters (with external aid) which rents houses to open these Kindergartens. They also provide for the teacher’s wages. At the moment they receive 150€ and must deduct 50€ from their salary for transportation costs. Sister Dan hopes to raise the salary to 200€ (thanks again to the generosity of the donors).

What particularly struck me was the indispensable presence for Christians of a church or chapel. The cross dominates the entrance of each camp. I truly admire the faith of these Christians who have
MISSION BRIEF                                                    January - March 2017

Cont’d IRAQ OCTOBER 2016.

stood firm, who have chosen exile rather than renounce it.

What is the situation at the moment? A few rich families were able to rent a house. The church, with external means, has rented a few houses where several families are piled up. The camps are still there. 1200 families per camp. Tents still exist. But it is the Yezidis, the most unlucky, the most persecuted by Daesch, who are still in these tents, especially in the region of Sinjar, a city occupied by Daesch.

I was able to visit another village where Christians remained but were often threatened. It is located at the end of Mosul – Duhoq axis. On this axis all villages are Chaldeans. Of course, other villages are Yezidi and Muslims. They all had to flee… 600 families currently reside in Al Qoch, a village located on the side of the mountain and dominated by the monastery Rabban Hormiz dating from the 4th century, which is located in the mountain.

I also had the opportunity to accompany the sisters to Kirkuk, an oil city located outside Kurdistan. In welcoming the Bishop, Mgr Yousef Thomas, he showed all the projects that are subsidized in his Diocese: dispensary, laboratory, pharmacy, schools etc…. An original project and one that welcomes students from all the cities of Kurdistan and whose parents cannot provide for their needs. They go there to pursue university studies in the Arabic language. They are 400 distributed in different houses rented for this occasion and containing around 30 students. They are accommodated without distinction of religion. Thus there are Christians, Muslims and Yezidis. A beautiful learning school to live together and prepare for the future. The bishop has put in place an adoption system. A student costs about 2000 € per year.

In Kirkuk, there are more or less 800 refugee families. Some find work but most of the time this is not the case and they are then helped with food and rent. The Bishop has opened a small factory of taheniye (sesame oil). It supports a dozen families. The Kurds are welcoming Christians. What would be the reason? Perhaps there is a certain interest in welcoming them, to be seen in a good light by the Occident. But according to the Bishop, it is because the Christians have shared in the suffering of the Kurdish people during the War against them by Saddam Hussein. The Bishop is from Kurdistan and knows what he is talking about.

A week after our visit to the sisters in their new community and students living nearby, an event occurred: Daesch entered the city of Kirkuk to blow up several strategic places such as the police office, a hotel, a power plant…. To prepare for this, about thirty men gathered in the street of the sisters and students and settled in the houses. At 3 o’clock in the morning, three
of them settled in the student’s building, drinking and eating… What fear, what panic when they realised the situation! Fortunately, thanks to their GSM or that of the sisters, the people’s army was alerted and after hours of waiting, the female students were released in a few moments. The latter were hiding under their bed. It is a miracle that nothing happened to these young girls. In the end, feeling surrounded, the members of Daech then blew themselves up.

This event brings back memories to the people: at Qaracoche, Daech had cut off the water two months before the exodus. Upon their arrival, they had asked: « Where are the girls and women? »… This reinforces all fears.

If one speaks of this famous date of 29 June 2014 where the Caliph Ibrahim is self-proclaimed caliph, we must know that the situation had deteriorated since several years. Perhaps one still remembers the hostage-taking, priests and even a bishop, and we can list them… Rarid, Eskender, an Armenian, the Bishop of Mosul, Faradj, two young priests of Qaracoche… Some had not wanted to be bought and experienced a pure and simple execution.

As soon as it will be possible, hundreds of young people are preparing to return to Qaracoche to clean their city, they say. It is certain that a lot of mine-cleaning will be necessary. And there too, we will have to help them rebuild what was demolished.

Think of returning is not so obvious. will a new « Daech » not emerge from the neighbouring villages?… Some say. “The Muslims who left with us are those who are not part of Daech, those who remained, are” and that is scary. From time to time resentment is expressed -we can understand that. But the spirit of revenge does not live in their hearts.

The sisters are waiting. The younger ones express their difficulty of living in all these tensions: «We cannot live a normal life, we cannot work in fear ». Their mission is to follow the people. They, as well as
ASIA PACIFIC DOMINICAN FORMATORS’ COURSE

The 2017 Asia Pacific Dominican Formators’ Course is currently underway March 6-31, 2017 at the Caleruega Retreat Center in Nasugbu, Batangas, Philippines, with the theme Dominican Formation for Preaching. Now in its 9th year, this four-week conference is a program of the Asia-Pacific Dominican Formation Center (APDFC), a regional study center for members of the Dominican Family. Held every three years, the course aims to equip present and future formators in their work. This programme is really dear to the region as the formation of formators is paramount to the continued health and growth of the respective branches of the Order. Sr. Bernadette Kiley, Continental Coordinator for Asia Pacific will be present to conduct one of the workshops and take the opportunity to meet the formators of her continent and network among members of the Dominican Family.

MISSION BRIEF
January - March 2017

Cont’d IRAQ OCTOBER 2016.

the refugees, give me the impression of being foreigners on their own lands.

And who will fight over the city of Mosul and this whole region if everything is liberated one day? The Kurds covet it. It was once a Kurdish city. The Turks covet it. Was this region not part of the Ottoman Empire? The Arabs, of course, think they will get it back. And many others perhaps... A complicated and ambiguous situation!

To conclude, I will focus on a few scenes:

Everywhere people pray and sing. Their faith is great and their confidence without limit. And this other image of a class of 23 children... They sing and clap their hands: « We are the butterflies of peace ».

May God hear their prayer!

Marianne Goffoël O.P.

1st mass in Qaracoche in the cathedral (burned and damaged)

1st mass in Qaracoche in the cathedral (burned and damaged)

MISSION BRIEF
January - March 2017

Cont’d IRAQ OCTOBER 2016.

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MISSION BRIEF
January - March 2017

Cont’d... DSI EVENTS (January - June 2017)

March 10-11

CPDI & USMID: FORMATORS’ COURSE FOR ITALIAN DOMINICAN
A course for Italian Dominican Formators was held at the convent of San Sisto on Friday 10-11 March. It was organized by Consiglio dei Provinciali Domenicani d'Italia (CPDI) and Unione delle Suore Superiore di Malta ed Italia (USMID). Fr. Vivian Boland presented the new "Formationis Generalis" of the Order.

March 13– 24

UN-NGO COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
The 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women takes place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 13 to 24 March 2017. Since 2013, Dominican Sisters from each of the continental areas of DSI have had the opportunity to participate in the formal sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, as well as in the many side events that take place during the Commission. The time they spend together is also an opportunity to grow in their appreciation for the Dominican Family and the plight of women and girls in the various parts of the world where our Sisters live and minister.
More information: www.dsiop.org

March 18

JUSTICE AND PEACE SEMINAR IN ROME, ITALY
This Seminar was opened for all the Dominican Family from Rome. It was held in “Sala Giovanni Paolo II” - Casa dei Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane, Via Aurelia 476, Rome.
Theme: "The no-violence, a Political Style for Peace", organized by the Social Centre of the Angelicum and Gregorian Universities and the Commission of Justice and Peace of the UISG and USG

April 19 - May 8

FORMATION MEETING OF THE DOMINICAN FAMILY OF ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE (PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE)
The International Promoter of Justice and Peace, Sr. Celestina Veloso will participate in the Formation Meeting of the Dominican Family of Angola and Mozambique (Portuguese Language) & Visit to the sisters: Congregation of Dominicas de Santa Catarina de Sena (Angola) & Hermanas Dominicas Misioneras del Rosario (Angola)
CODALC TEAM MEETING IN CUBA

This meeting will be held in Cuba. This meeting will be held in Cuba, April 28-May 3, 2017. Preparations will be made for the Workshop "V Predicarte", CODALC will also organize the meeting of Theologians and they will focus what is related to the Formators School. In addition the team CODALC will carry out an analysis of their different Federations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

THE INTER AFRICA ORDER OF PREACHER (IAOP) MEETING

This meeting shall be in Nigeria in May, 2017. Sr. Faustina Jimoh, DSI's Continental Coordinator for Africa and Sr. Julienne Nkiema, Zonal Coordinator for West Africa shall participate.

PLANNING MEETING FOR CONTINENTAL ASSEMBLY, AFRICA

This meeting will be held in Nairobi, Kenya. It will bring those with key leadership roles in the Continent together to plan for their General Assembly slated for 2018. In addition to the usual review of the mission, inter congregational collaboration and planning for the future, the Assembly will elect a new Continental Coordinator for Africa for confirmation at DSI's General Assembly of 2019.