

IHM Overseas Update

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Great opportunity to witness the Gospel



Maria Antonia Aranda Diaz was in her 40s when she left her career as an engineer to become a Sister, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (or IHM Sister). She thought she would devote her time to family ministry, helping couples work on relationships and guiding children to read Bible stories. Her path took another turn entirely.

Aranda has joined Catholic sisters, brothers and priests who have gone to the United States-Mexico border to minister to the migrants there. These religious have responded to the humanitarian crisis caused by thousands of asylum seekers arriving at the border and being denied entrance or access to asylum applications. The problems have been compounded by the serious health issues of COVID-19. Aid from men and women religious has ranged from meeting immediate needs for food and medicine to spiritual solace for those who have been traumatized.

It is a modern-day Bible story, Aranda told *Time* magazine, “Starting from Genesis, we’re talking about migration, no? The people of Israel, the Hebrews, they walked through the desert,” she said. “Matthew speaks of love for the needy.”

Now 60, Aranda serves in a different kind of family ministry than she had once imagined, working to help migrants join their families across the border. She calls it “a great joy and satisfaction ... knowing that, in some way, our work is helping other people find happiness.”

The article, “Our Work is Helping People Find Happiness,” appeared in *Time* magazine on Jan. 7, 2020. Read it [here](#).

GRAN OPORTUNIDAD DE PRESENCIAR EL EVANGELIO

María Antonia Aranda Díaz tenía 40 años cuando dejó su carrera como ingeniera para convertirse en Hermana, Sierva del Inmaculado Corazón de María (o Hermana IHM). Pensó que dedicaría su tiempo al ministerio familiar, ayudando a las parejas a trabajar en las relaciones y guiando a los niños a leer historias bíblicas. Su camino tomó otro giro por completo.

Aranda se ha unido a hermanas, hermanos y sacerdotes católicos que han ido a la frontera entre Estados Unidos y México para ministrar a los migrantes allí. Estos religiosos han respondido a la crisis humanitaria provocada por miles de solicitantes de asilo que llegan a la frontera y se les niega la entrada o el acceso a la solicitud de asilo. Los problemas se han visto agravados por los graves problemas de salud del COVID-19. La ayuda de religiosos y religiosas ha variado desde la satisfacción de las necesidades inmediatas de alimentos y medicinas hasta el consuelo espiritual de aquellos que han sido traumatizados.

Es una historia bíblica moderna, dijo Aranda a la revista Time: “A partir de Génesis, estamos hablando de migración, ¿no? El pueblo de Israel, los hebreos, caminaron por el desierto”, dijo. “Mateo habla del amor a los necesitados.”

Ahora, con 60 años, Aranda se desempeña en un tipo de ministerio familiar diferente al que alguna vez había imaginado, trabajando para ayudar a los migrantes a unirse a sus familias al otro lado de la frontera. Ella lo llama “una gran alegría y satisfacción. . . sabiendo que, de alguna manera, nuestro trabajo está ayudando a otras personas a encontrar la Felicidad.”

St. Joseph Preschool news



After five months at home, the children of St. Joseph Preschool are back in session with masks, sanitizers, temperature checks and their own individual worktables. Some have forgotten their second language (English) and others can no longer write their names in isiZulu. The staff are energized to get the children up to speed and ready for Grade One. Children are adaptable and seem very happy to wear masks and join in this new adventure!

Peg O'Shea, IHM

Rita Rennell's Jubilee



Three weeks before God called her home to her eternal celebration of life, Rita Rennell celebrated, in a small way, her 75th Jubilee on Sunday, July 26, 2020. On the day before, Rita received in her room a plant of yellow roses and a card with greetings and names of her South African IHM companions along with a mini South African flag attached to the card. The card noted that if she were in South Africa, she would be transplanting this plant to her beautiful garden.

On Jubilee morning, Jane Herb, IHM President, brought Rita down to the Leadership area where Jubilarians were waiting to process into Chapel.

When asked if she had received a plant the day before, Rita responded with enthusiasm, "Yes, it is beautiful!"

As Rita waited in her wheelchair, she mentioned that she was uncomfortable and would like to go to bed. Annette who was privileged to escort her up the aisle realized that it would be too much to stay for the whole liturgical celebration. Rita received the welcome and joy of community as she came up the aisle. Following the singing of the Gloria, they discreetly moved to the side door of the Chapel where a Health Care aide was waiting to return Rita to her room. Later, her large overflowing bag of greetings was sent to her to enjoy Jubilee greetings from her many friends.

For the next weeks, Rita slept most of the time and was put on hospice care. God took her home early Saturday, Aug. 22, feast of Mary, Queen of Heaven. Thank you Rita, for your generous service and friendship.

Annette St. Amour, IHM

South African women and COVID-19

I am a member of the South African Circle of Concerned African Theologians. The Circle was founded in 1989 by Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana. She was heartened that at that time, African theology was developing — but very concerned that all the voices were male. The Circle was designed to encourage African women across the continent to write and publish their theology and to support one another as they did so in local "circles."

Phase 5 of the lockdown in South Africa began in late March. Soon after, our South African Circle began to hold Friday afternoon Zoom meetings for sharing and support. After a few weeks, the idea of a book about the experiences that women were having with COVID-19 surfaced. Circle members were very enthusiastic about the idea and work began to contact possible writers.

The editorial team of which I am a member has a wide variety of contacts. Nontando Hadebe, South African Circle coordinator, is a prominent Catholic feminist theologian who engages internationally on theological issues. Daniel Gennrich is a gender

activist in the Anglican Church with a special focus on gender-based violence. Nobesuthu Tom is a master's student in theology at the University of the Western Cape and also works with the Desmond Tutu Centre for Religion and Social Justice.

Members of our Friday Circle meetings represent diverse churches and outreach activities. Using our extensive network of contacts, the call went out for reflections on women's experiences with COVID-19. We expected 15-20 contributions. As I write this, we have more than 35 with more coming. In addition to short and long essays poetry and art work have been submitted. A noted local artist has donated 12 of her paintings and we will use some of them for the cover and as "divider" pages.



Women are truly sharing their pain and their hope in their reflections. The economic meltdown because of the lockdown is described in many heart breaking ways. One woman was so traumatized by the peril of her family that she stayed in bed for three days, unable to move — but then rose up and realized she had to do something for herself and her family and for others. Some women narrate the various food parcel projects they have initiated. Others describe the effects of the lockdown on their families, especially the children. In June, a male columnist in the local paper, *The Witness*, wrote an article in which he listed the many, many South African women who have been murdered — by their husbands, partners, employers and strangers. This devastating list will be included in the book.

Early in the lockdown, a woman was about to give birth to her fifth child. She did not want to risk a hospital delivery, so the baby was born at home. But tragically, she developed a raging infection and died in hospital. She was a well-known gender activist and a friend has narrated Tamsyn's story.

A spiritual director describes how her ministry has become completely online and the advantages and disadvantages. Other women share their experiences of online liturgies and new ways to pray together as a family. In addition to the personal reflections, there will be a few longer theological articles on issues such as hope and reading the Book of Job in a COVID-19 context.

The book will be in PDF format to be posted on the South African Circle website. There will be a limited print edition. We are hoping/planning that the book will be launched on Dec. 10 — the final day of the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, which is also International Human Rights Day.

Sue Rakoczy, IHM

Staying connected to mission

As I write, it is the 35th anniversary of arriving in Africa, in South Africa with three other IHMs in October 1985 to begin our new mission in collaboration with the Redemptorists. Many



memories flow of those first days and years in South Africa and now a year back from South Sudan, I eagerly receive news of what is happening there. Gratefully, I have been in contact with a Kenyan Sister of Mercy who now coordinates the Solidarity Pastoral Team to which I was a member and she resides with other members of the Pastoral Team at the Good Shepherd Peace Center outside of Juba. I was privileged to be one of the original Team members who opened the Center, sponsored by the Association of Religious of South Sudan, and continue to be interested in its development as a conference and retreat center.

As everywhere, everything stopped in March with the advent of COVID-19. All South Sudanese borders were closed; also airports and travel within the country were closed. The new Center Team was in Juba and finally able to move to the Center at the beginning of May. In June, still with limited movement, the staff offered directed retreats to religious in the Juba area, two or three at a time in the spacious 40-room Conference Center. This was much appreciated. In July, with a grant that Joan Mumaw, IHM, helped to obtain, a retreat was sponsored for the diocesan clergy of Juba along with both the newly installed bishop and the auxiliary bishop. It was most significant since in the recent months, the clergy had been entangled in a very divisive struggle to accept the newly named bishop from another tribe. At the end, they requested more help to develop desperately needed unity among themselves.

Another significant event I would like to share is the honor of a Nobel Peace Prize given to the World Food Program, the food-assistance branch of the United Nations and the world's largest humanitarian organization focused on hunger and food security. WFP's efforts to combat hunger and improve conditions for peace have been deservedly recognized. In South Sudan, we witnessed their tremendous work and traveled their planes in order to reach our own areas of ministry. When I arrived in the country in 2014, WFP was the only transport available to fly from Juba to other areas of the country. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), such as Doctors Without Borders, as well as missionaries and church personnel were able to fly to remote areas of the country. We witnessed the survival of many suffering people through their efforts.

Annette St. Amour, IHM

***Overseas Update* Format**

The *Overseas Update* is available only in a digital format on the IHM website and via email to South African friends. Doing our share to save the trees!

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The Next Issue

will be published in May 2020. Please send any news and articles to Sue Rakoczy, IHM (srakoczymonroe@gmail.com) by May 1, 2020. Thank you.