

# REFLECT



Ursuline Sisters  
Generalate  
Rue Musin 1  
1210 Brussels

June 2016

Dear Sisters and Associates,

## Have a Heart for Refugees

*"Give me a heart to share with others, a heart wide open to others' needs".*



The whole issue of refugees in Europe, their rights, their trials, and their needs has been on my mind for some time. Living in the heart of Belgium, having seen the steady stream of refugees on the nightly news has left me moved to the core. Today 70,000 people are stranded in Greece. Borders are closed and fences have gone up. As I watch children and families on the move, climbing over barbed wire fences, waiting on endless lines for some relief from aid groups in camps, I ask myself if I have a heart for refugees.

What must it be like to be a refugee? Do I have a responsibility to do something? The migrants' experience has something to teach me. Aren't we all migrants, pilgrims on the road of life headed toward our eternal home? They present a parallel with our own life as a human.



When I talked with a few refugees in Brussels last September I saw them as my brothers and sisters so they ceased to be statistics. They are people who have been driven out of their country and are now facing a really difficult journey that includes integration into a completely different environment and culture. Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" is what motivates the migrants. The reasons why people leave their home, range from

severe draught, political persecution, armed conflict and often to join family members who have preceded them. All hope and dream for a better life for their family, a job and a normal family life.

People on the move need to rest and it may be during these times when they pause to regain their strength before moving on that refugees might ask themselves: "What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?"

I remember my mother saying, we are all equal in God's eyes. Each person is a unique expression of God's great love. Each person has a purpose in life. In the meager baggage carried by the immigrants, it is rare not to find a religious symbol of their family heritage, like the Bible or the Coram.

Pope Francis in " *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si)* speaks of the need to show compassion for immigrants, refugees and all the poor, and the urgent need to work for peace in a troubled world. We have an example of hospitality towards the refugees when the Pope went to Lesbos where people who want to be on the move are confined to camps. He told them, "You have made great sacrifices for your families. You know the pain of having left behind everything that is dear to you and—what is perhaps most difficult—not knowing what the future will bring." He left them with one message: "Do not lose hope!"

In a stunning move to show welcome for the refugees and to awaken the consciences of people in Europe and the

world, Pope Francis took 12 Syrian refugees, six adults and six children, back to Rome with him on the plane from Lesbos. They are members of three families and all are Muslims.

Scripture points to some ways of entering into the heart of people seeking a new home often far from a homeland they loved but were forced to leave to have a better life for their family. The biblical references that come to mind: In Genesis 11:27 Abraham is the picture of a migrant who wasn't stopped by obstacles in his life. He is man who looked to the future when God said, "Leave here and go to a land I shall show you." In Hebrews 11:13-14 we read that the descendants of Abraham "recognized they were strangers and foreigners on the move in search of a homeland." Jesus was an itinerant preacher who as a baby had to be taken to Egypt to save his life. There are other stories of movement and searching for a home. Ruth leaving her homeland to go with Naomi is another story of people on the move searching for a new home.

In conclusion I have to say that faced with such a massive movement of humankind, I wonder what we can do. Maybe you can find out in your area where there are places, inroads that you can connect with people in need of your company or counsel. First listen to them with a loving heart and find out what they need.

Could you envision you or your community doing a simple action according to your capacities to make newcomers feel welcomed in your area, in your parish?

I close with a reminder of our 2014 commitment to mission: "We adapt to the needs of our times and we become messengers of joy, peace and hope especially to the vulnerable."

Siste Jane Quinlan

Lord,

*Wake my heart from its listless sleep,*

*Mend my heart of its brokenness...*

*Forgive my heart its faults and failings...*

*Strengthen my heart as I face my fears...*

*Warm my heart when it grows cold...*

*Heal my heart of its aches and wounds...*

*Stir my heart with your Spirit's power...*

*Counsel my heart with your wisdom's light...*

*Touch my heart with your gentle peace...*

*Crown my heart with selfless giving...*

*Be at home in my heart to dwell there,*

*Lord: and lead my heart to dwell in yours.*

*Amen.*

From a "Concord Pastor"

## Transition Reflection

As I was pondering over what I could write about transitions in my/our life I recalled something I read years ago about the "decades" crises in women's lives. Women in their 30's focus on their choices...will these choices make me happy? In our 40's we are more concerned about our life purpose. Are our efforts worth the struggle? What else is possible? In our 50's our questions focus on legacy. How can we share the wisdom we gained over the years and how can we apply our talents and skills? In our 60's women look toward retirement; time to enjoy family and friends, more leisure time, volunteering, lunch out and perhaps a trip to the city, museum, the park, a cruise as well as more time for

prayer and reflection. (I still have Sr. Bernard's TV so I plan to buy a new TV and watch all those programs and movies that I never had time to see). Aren't these "decades" all times of transition but we never named them such! St. Angela was a woman on the go. She was an ecclesial woman, as we are, and she must have experienced these same transitions. She was flexible and grace filled. And what is her advice to her daughters today...in our mature years?

"If with change of time and circumstances it becomes necessary to make fresh rules or to alter anything then do it with prudence, after seeking good advice." She says: "Have confidence and strong faith that God will assist you in everything...and place your trust and love in God alone." Angela also tells us that we must constantly live in an attitude of openness to the Spirit and in continual conversion of heart. Finally, in her last council she assures us that every request we make of God will most certainly be granted. And I myself shall be in your midst furthering your prayers.

For our reflection:

What gives you hope as you move into the future?

Am I capable of living with a little uncertainty and do I have to see that I am secure in all the domains of my life?

Is there something I need to leave behind in order to move forward?

Sister Bridget Olwell, OSU  
Charism Circle US Province

## Pilgrimage to Tours France

### Walking in the Footsteps of Marie of the Incarnation

Sr. Victoria Baa (Ranchi Province) and Sr. Mridula Tirkey (Tezpur Province) had the privilege of visiting the city of Tours, France from April 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> as part of the International Tertianship Program 2015-2016. They have described for us this memorable spiritual pilgrimage.



Sisters in the Tertianship program visit the Loire River, where Mary worked in her brother-in-law's transport business.

Tours is a significant place for all Ursulines because it was the birth place of Marie Guyart, known as Mother Mary of the Incarnation. She was a 17<sup>th</sup> century Ursuline who was the first woman missionary in Quebec, Canada in 1639. Mary was canonized in 2014 by Pope Francis.

We were guided by the Ursuline Sisters of Tours and followed in the footsteps of Mary to where she lived, to Saint Pierre des Corps, the church where she was married and her son Claude was baptized. We went to the Loire River where she worked in her brother-in-law's

transport business and visited the first monastery of Ursulines and the chapel of St. Michael where she made her Religious Profession.



Sisters attended Mass in the Church of St Michael where Mary of the Incarnation professed her vows.

Her journey was a journey of obedience that took her from being the wife of Claude to the spouse of Christ, from mother of a young boy to being the mother of a colony, mother of the church in Canada, mother of the Canadian Nation.

As we followed the paths where she walked, we were deeply touched and inspired by her missionary zeal, the undivided love for Jesus by which she witnessed her "Yes" to the Lord throughout her life. We came to know not only her religious commitment but also her personality as a woman, wife, mother, widow, business woman, mystic, religious writer, educator, and missionary. We learned from her to embrace God's call in many different and challenging ways, to be always willing to listen, to discern and to go where the Lord wants to lead us. We

experienced her living presence in the present Ursuline community in Tours.

We express our gratitude to all the sisters in the Tours community. Throughout the pilgrimage we were united in our prayers, with all our Ursuline Sisters.

Sr. Mridula Tirkey and Sr. Victoria Baa

## Noted Author's Address to the Extended Council



During the Extended Council in April in Brescia, the members were privileged to listen to Quericolo Mazzonis, author Spirituality, Gender and the Self in Renaissance Italy: Angela Merici and the Company of St Ursula. The following is an excerpt from his talk where he speaks of Angela's respect for the individuality and interiority of the Ursulines.

### Individual pedagogy

Angela's pedagogy acknowledged the diversity of single individuals and refused to impose common codes of behavior. Angela's starting point is that each Ursuline is

different and the members of the government should respect such diversity. Angela warned the Colonelle that they had to respect the choices made by the Ursulines: "who can judge the heart and the innermost secret thoughts of any creature?...it is not up to you to judge the handmaids of God; he well knows what he wants to make of them" (Ric., 8). As you can see this passage also shows that Angela believes that the center of the individual is

located in her interiority. The diversity of the Ursulines is reflected in Angela's terminology that describes a variety of character-types (especially in the *Ricordi*). She described a wide range of personalities citing positive and negative inclinations of character: the terminology used by Angela includes "humble", "pleasing", "human", "good", "sober", "strange" (difficult), "pusillanimous", "cowardly", "presumptuous"

and having a "wide conscience", "disconsolate", "timid", "inclined to despair", "doubtful", "fragile".

Thus, starting with this diversity, Angela proposes a very modern way to deal with the daughters, which is reminiscent of the modern figure of Maria Montessori. Angela gives innovative advice to the members of the government, both the Colonelle and to the Matrone. In this advice again Angela's respect for individuality and interiority of the Ursulines emerges. In Angela's advice love was a guiding principle at the expenses of a more traditional ideal of the exercise of power. In her pedagogical advice, perfect

execution of external practices was not central. Indeed, Angela does not associate general penalties to the misconducts of the Ursulines. Rather, Angela affirms that each Ursuline is different and deserves a specific treatment:

If you see one faint-hearted and timid and inclined to despondency, comfort her, encourage her... And on the contrary, if you see another presumptuous, and who has a lax conscience and little fear of anything, into this one instill some fear (Ric. 2)

She was very precise in her description of personalities, and understanding towards the difficulties the Ursulines might experience. She never yielded to the temptation to simplify the complexity of human responses to a new form of life:

When you see that one of them finds great difficulty in deciding to give up fashionable trifles and other similar frills... do not have too high a hope about her that she will persevere under this Rule. For if she does not want to do what is lesser, much less will she do what is greater. (Tes., 6)