“Get the Lord’s road ready …
All low plains must be filled up, all
hills and mountains levelled off; the
winding roads must be made straight, the
rough paths made smooth, and all
humankind will see God’s salvation!”
(Luke 3: 4-6)
Introducing VIVAT International

VIVAT International was founded in 2000 by the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) and the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) as an organization to lobby in favour of the poor, the marginalized and for the protection of creation at the United Nations. Since 2005, ten other congregations joined the original founders of VIVAT. Many are well known in Ireland and include the Spiritans (CSSp), the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), the Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA), the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary (MSHR), Comboni Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MCCJ), Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SCJ), and the Religious of the Assumption (RA).

With a very wide distribution of congregations, it can be said that VIVAT has its finger on the pulse of the issues of the poor and marginalized worldwide. It is also a powerful voice as it is geared to bring their agenda to an international audience through lobbying on concrete issues presented by member congregations at the UN. How does it do this? VIVAT’s first strength is indeed in having access to the people its members are working with and their issues. It has also put an infrastructure in place to ensure that effective international lobbying can be engaged in. VIVAT opened and staffed a UN office in New York shortly after its foundation. In 2009 it opened another office in Geneva, Switzerland, home of the UN’s Human Rights Council and numerous international human rights groups. Other offices at regional level are being considered. VIVAT’s web page (http://vivatinternational.org/) gives an interesting summary of the broad range of issues it has lobbied on with the support of its membership since the beginning. Issues include areas such as poverty eradication, HIV /AIDS, indigenous peoples, migrations …, to name but a few.

Since early 2011, representatives of the congregations of VIVAT in Ireland have been meeting to focus on issues which will be prepared to be submitted for lobbying at the United Nations via VIVAT.
Dear Friends,

At this time of Advent we are encouraged once again to reflect on the depth of our Christian Story and its significance for our lives, our communities and our world.

We, the Irish Congregations who are members of VIVAT INTERNATIONAL (see the list on the previous page) have, for the first time, come together to produce some Advent reflections for our members, co-workers and friends. We hope it gives all of us an opportunity to pray for the needs of our world as we read and reflect on the work being done by VIVAT members in various countries.

May these Advent reflections and prayers become flesh in our lives. May they enrich our interactions with one another and with creation around us. May they awaken us to the global realities of justice and injustice, bravery and despair, integrity and corruption and enable us to find new and creative expressions of mission in our responses to the needs of our world today.

As VIVAT members we have a support structure in place to advocate and lobby for people made poor by global injustice. We can show our support for the women and men whose talents are not recognized by Church and/or Governments around the world. We can offer support through creative use of the Internet, to individuals and communities who try to build a better world. Through our voice and our vote we can exercise
personal and communal responsibility so that the values of Jesus may direct our lives and our lifestyles.

As VIVAT members we have enjoyed preparing this booklet together. It has been an exercise in implementing, in some small way, the values of collaboration, solidarity and missionary support. We hope you find creative ways to do likewise at your local level.

May you have a reflective Advent and a very happy Christmas,

Carmen Lee SSps
John Kilcrann CSSp
Bride Counihan LSA
Michael Kane CSSp
MaryRose Crowe MSHR
Leader: Conscious of the Lord’s coming and renewing our hope in God’s promises, we begin:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Hymn: from the index of this booklet or elsewhere.

Leader: Advent is traditionally a time of preparation for Christmas. This year we join our expectation in prayer and solidarity with other members of VIVAT as we watch and wait to celebrate the Nativity of Christ. Our theme this week is inspired by the Gospel of the First Sunday of Advent – “The time when you will be set free is very close.”

This is the first occasion when the member congregations of VIVAT in Ireland are coming together in a common prayer project – for this we also thank God.

Let us pray:
Liberator Christ,
you came into a holy place
and read the sacred word
about sight for the blind and freedom for prisoners.
Come to this place now.
Read these words to us
till our own eyes are opened, our faith is unlocked,
and we can see the world as it is,
and as it could be;
till the yearnings of ordinary people are taken seriously.
and the visions of the young are valued.
and the potential of the old is released;
till your kingdom is celebrated everywhere,
and your Church is good news for the poor.
Amen.

(Source: Iona Abbey Worship Book)
Psalm 130

God hears the cry of repentance: Those who trust God’s word find mercy

From the depths I call to you,
Lord, hear my cry.
Catch the sound of my voice
raised up pleading.

If you record our sins,
Lord, who could survive?
But because you forgive
We stand in awe.

I trust in God’s word,
I trust in the Lord.
More than sentries for dawn
I watch for the Lord.

More than sentries for the dawn
let Israel watch.
The Lord will bring mercy
And grant full pardon.
The Lord will free Israel
From all it’s sins.

(Source: The Psalter – LTP)
“There will be miraculous signs in the sun, moon and stars. The nations of the earth will be in terrible pain. They will be puzzled by the roaring and tossing of the sea. Terror will make people faint. They will be worried about what is happening in the world. The sun, moon and stars will be shaken from their places.

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud. He will come with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up. Hold your head up with joy and hope. The time when you will be set free will be very close.”

Jesus told them a story. “Look at the fig tree and all the trees,” he said. “When you see leaves appear on the branches, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, you will know that God’s kingdom is near.

“What I’m about to tell you is true. The people living at that time will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away. But my words will never pass away.

“Be careful. If you aren’t, your hearts will be loaded down with wasteful living, drunkenness and the worries of life. Then the day the Son of Man returns will close on you like a trap. You will not be expecting it. That day will come upon every person who lives on the whole earth.

“Always keep watching. Pray that you will be able to escape all that is about to happen. Also, pray that you will not be judged guilty when the Son of Man comes.”

Each day Jesus taught at the temple. And each evening he went to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives. All the people came to the temple early in the morning. They wanted to hear Jesus speak.

(New English Readers’ Version)
Overcrowded prison system an absolute disaster, report finds

(Note: the VIVAT linked congregations in Ireland are currently preparing a submission for international lobbying on issues around drug use, violence and general government neglect aggravating these areas)

From The Irish Times – Thursday, March 15, 2012 (Abridged)

Conor Lally, Crime Correspondent

The Republic’s overcrowded prison system is an “absolute disaster”, and new measures such as giving prisoners a third of their sentences off for good behaviour need to be examined to ease prison violence and tension, according to a new report.

Social campaigner Fr Peter McVerry said the idea of increasing remission from 25 per cent at present to 30 per cent was “not all that radical” in an international context, and yet would significantly reduce overcrowding.

“In Britain, for example, they have 50 per cent remission and they would not exactly be well known for having a liberal prison penal policy.” ...

Fr McVerry said about half of the 4,400 prison population had addiction issues yet there were only nine drug-treatment beds in the prison system.

While a new drug-free wing was being opened at Dublin’s Mountjoy Prison, there was currently “not one single square inch” of the jail drug-free.

He was also critical of the practice of dealing with overcrowding by sleeping between two and four prisoners in a cell originally built for one person by installing bunk beds and putting mattresses on the floor at night.

“I have known people who never did drugs when they were going into prison and by the time they came out they were on heroin; that’s because they were sharing a cell with a drug user.”…
We reflect:

The Gospel that we have just heard among other ideas encourages us to be alert in our watching and waiting for the hour of the coming for the Son of Man. The liturgy of Advent keeps us focused on the event that we will celebrate on December 25th.

- What are the signs of ‘the new thing’ that is being asked of or revealed to us at this time? At a personal level? At a Community level? At our national and world levels? (Pause)

- What is it that we wish Christ to set us free from? (Pause)

- What are we grateful for as we come to the end of one year and move into the new Advent season? (Pause)
Intercessions

With prayers for a world waiting in hope,
let us call on the Lord for assistance.

For the Church still waiting for unity,
still hoping for renewal, still searching for steadfast faith: [pause]
May we be blessed by the sound of the Gospel proclaimed to the ends of
the earth.
Come, Lord Jesus… Response [R]: Hear our prayer.

For all nations still waiting for peace, still longing for an end to war and
injustice, still searching for hope and for better times: [pause]
May we be blessed by a growing respect for all, and especially for those
who suffer most.
Come, Lord Jesus… Response [R]: Hear our prayer.

For those who have lost hope, still waiting for a job, still hoping for a
cure, still searching for a place to call home: [pause]
May we and those without joy this season be blessed by the sound of
God’s promise for them fulfilled.
Come, Lord Jesus… Response [R]: Hear our prayer.

For travellers and visitors, refugees, asylum seekers and exiles, families
and friends still waiting for welcome, still hoping for reconciliation, still
searching for a way to mend what has been broken: [pause]
May everyone we encounter this season be blessed by the hope of peace,
by compassion, and hospitality.
Come, Lord Jesus… Response [R]: Hear our prayer.

For the dead, especially for loved ones we miss this season, for the
forgotten ones who died alone, for the innocent ones caught in the
crossfire of violence, including the dead we now name…: [pause]
May all who have died be blessed by the voice of God
welcoming them home.
Come, Lord Jesus… Response [R]: Hear our prayer.

Our Father…
Final Prayer

Waiting in hope let us together affirm our faith:

We believe that God is present in the darkness before dawn; in the waiting and uncertainty where fear and uncertainty join hands, conflict and caring link arms, and the sun rises over barbed wire. We believe in a with-us God who sits down in our midst to share our humanity.

We affirm a faith that takes us beyond the safe place: into action, into vulnerability and into the streets. We commit ourselves to work for change and put ourselves on the line; to bear responsibility, take risks, live powerfully and face humiliation; to stand with those on the edge; to choose life and be used by the Spirit for God’s new community of hope. Amen.

(Source: Iona Abbey Worship Book)
May God during this Advent season write a message of hope upon our hearts, bless and direct us and send us out as living letters of the Word. Amen.

Final Hymn (from the index of this booklet or elsewhere)

The name VIVAT is derived from the Latin verb “Vivere” meaning “to live” and expresses our deep concern for all that exists and a vision of the world and of every human being as created in goodness and dignity. VIVAT stands for the equal rights and dignity of individuals, peoples and cultures.
Leader: As we gather together once more for our Advent preparation, let us be united with all people around the world who live in hope, believing in a better future, and trusting the God of Hope to act in their favor.

Hymn: Christ be our Light.

(Melody: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhQ0_XMUtVQ&feature=related)

Refrain: Christ be our Light! Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness, Christ be our light, shine in your Church gathered today.

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness, longing for truth we turn to You, make us Your own, Your holy people, light for the world to see. Refrain...

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled, longing for hope, many despair, Your Word alone has power to save us, make us Your living voice. Refrain...

Opening Prayer:

God of Compassion, all through history, Your people wait and hope, and You come to them in many ways on life’s journey. As Church and as Religious, we live in particularly challenging times and we wait in hope for You to raise up prophets who will lead us forward as church. Open our eyes, our ears, our minds and hearts to recognize the John the Baptist figures you send us now, calling us to turn away from paths which do not lead to You, and to live according to Your Gospel. Amen.
Psalm 146:

Refrain: Yahweh protects the stranger and gives justice to the oppressed.

Praise Yahweh my soul! I mean to praise Yahweh all my life. I mean to sing to my God as long as I live.

Refrain...

Yahweh, forever faithful, gives justice to those denied it, gives food to the hungry, gives liberty to prisoners.

Refrain...

Yahweh loves the virtuous and frustrates the wicked. Yahweh reigns forever, your God Zion, from age to age.

Refrain...
Gospel of the
Second Sunday of Advent, Year C:
Luke 3:1 – 6

It was the fifteenth year of the rule of Emperor Tiberius; Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis; Lysanias was ruler of Abilene, and Annas and Caiphas were high priests. It was at this time that the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the desert. So John went throughout the whole territory of the Jordan river. ‘Turn away from your sins and be baptized’ he preached, ‘and God will forgive your sins’. As the prophet Isaiah had written in his book:

Someone is shouting in the desert: ‘Get the Lord’s road ready for him, make a straight path for him to travel!

All low plains must be filled up, all hills and mountains levelled off;

The winding roads must be made straight, the rough paths made smooth,

And all humankind will see God’s salvation!

This is the Word of the Lord…
The area of Umburanas is situated in the semi-desert region of the North East of Brazil. When the Little Sisters of the Assumption (Vivat members) first went there, there was a chronic shortage of clean drinking water both in the town and in the rural villages. The water system in the town had been privatized shortly beforehand, and was owned by the Town Mayor’s family. Most of the poorer families of the town had no water as they could not afford to pay the constantly increasing water charge, so their supply was cut off. A public meeting was held organized by the missionaries, and a small group of concerned people formed a Water Commission to try to do something. The majority were afraid to get involved as it might be seen that they were ‘against the Mayor’. The group networked with the various parties involved in this problem but all said that ‘nothing could be done’. The Town Council said it wasn’t their problem as it was the Mayor who had privatized the water. The private Water Company said it wasn’t their problem but the peoples’ because they didn’t want to pay. The Mayor said it wasn’t his problem and that nothing could be done about it because ‘we live in the semi-desert.’ But the missionaries believed that ‘nothing is impossible for God’.

The small group continued, meeting after meeting, looking for a solution and praying that somehow they would find a way through. The long hard struggle finally paid off. After 5 years the private Water Company closed its doors and the State took over the provision of clean drinking water at reasonable cost, for the population of the town. Over the years, the little group also turned its attention to the rural villages where families joined together in schemes of voluntary labor and built over 1,300 water cisterns beside their homes, funded from Ireland. Their example finally led the State to finance the most recent 300 water cisterns built. What if they had believed that… nothing could be done!

**VIVAT story:**

“Small is beautiful….. and can be powerful!”

*a story of solidarity and hope.*
We reflect:

In this Second week of Advent, the Gospel reading from Luke 3: 1 - 6 presents us with the figure of John the Baptist calling people to repentance and change. ‘Repent’ or ‘reform’ comes from the Greek word ‘metanoia’ meaning ‘change your mind’. The following short story shows us the courage needed for this ‘metanoia’.

A Story of Discipleship – taken from “40 Stories to stir the Soul” by Sister Joan Chittister.

Once there was a student who was with a teacher for many years. And, when the teacher felt he was going to die, he wanted to make even his death a lesson. That night, the teacher took a torch, called his student, and set off with him through the forest. Soon they reached the middle of the woods where the teacher extinguished the torch, without explanation. ‘What is the matter?’ asked the student. ‘The torch has gone out’ the teacher answered and walked on. ‘But’ shouted the student, his voice plucking his fear, ‘will you leave me here in the dark?’ ‘No! I will not leave you in the dark’ returned his teacher’s voice from the surrounding blackness. ‘I will leave you searching for the light’

So we might ask ourselves:

- What is our attitude to change?
  How open am I/are we to change? (Pause)

- What are the difficulties I/we find in trying to be open to others who think differently to us? (Pause)

- How might this story help us to understand the call to change of mind which the Gospel asks of us? (Pause)

Pause....time for spontaneous sharing.
Hymn: Christ be our Light.

Refrain: Christ be our Light! Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness, Christ be our light, shine in your Church gathered today.

3. Longing for food, many are hungry, longing for water, still many thirst, Make us Your Bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed. Refrain…

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless, longing for warmth, many are cold, make us Your building, sheltering others, walls made of living stone. Refrain…
Intercessions:

Jesus teaches us the gospel values of respect, justice, commitment, compassion and integrity:

We pray that our lives may change so that all our ministries may be inclusive and non-discriminating, and that we may have the courage to challenge any unjust practices that exploit the rights of the marginalized and most vulnerable groups. Lord hear our prayer...

We pray that we may always promote the dignity of each person, through holistic development in our ministries, enabling each one to determine the direction of his/her own development. Lord hear our prayer...

We pray that we may be in solidarity with the marginalized and most vulnerable, in ways which change and transform their lives and ours, striving to persevere through all the challenges and obstacle. Lord hear our prayer...

We pray that we may always show empathy in our relationships with people, and minister in a spirit of mutuality where we learn both to give and to receive. Lord hear our prayer...

We pray that in our ministries to others, we may always practice transparency and accountability, implementing quality standards in all our work with those made poor. Lord hear our prayer...

Spontaneous Prayers may be added.
Our Father…

Final Prayer:

God who are ever-Faithful to your Church, we remember all those who are in positions of leadership, that each one may hear your inner call to change and transformation. May all have the courage to dialogue with what is new, with what is different, with what is not understood. May this dialogue lead to a new understanding of Your call to religious life especially for women, so that respecting the diversity of gifts in the Body which is your Church, your kingdom may come. Through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Final Hymn:

Refrain: Christ be our Light! Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness, Christ be our light, shine in your Church gathered today.

5. Many the gifts, many the people, many the hearts that yearn to belong, let us be servants of one another, making your kingdom come. Refrain:

Suggested Action: Consult http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/02/nyregion/in-deeds-nuns-answer-the-call-of-duty.html and research whether and where these kinds of ministries exist, in Ireland.

VIVAT engages in advocacy and lobbying on issues of human rights, justice and peace at the United Nations. It brings grassroots experience and insights to the attention of the international community. It raises awareness of issues among its members and provides a possibility for networking and collaboration with other agencies and NGOs.
Leader: Conscious of the Lord coming to us as Jesus the Servant to help us learn from him, we pray:

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Hymn

For melody go to: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_wMO5KxeAI&feature=related)

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, we are trav’lers on the road.
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night time of your fear.
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh I’lI laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow till we’ve seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony,
Born of all we’ve known together of Christ’s love and agony.

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you?
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.
Let us pray
Lord, we lift our hearts up to you to thank you for the blessings you shower on us each day. You are the ‘joy of our souls’. Inspire in us a burning desire to know the great mystery of Christ the incarnate God whose coming into the world we are preparing to celebrate. Amen

Psalm 15

Ant: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice is about to be revealed.

Who is the one, O Lord, who participates in Your kingdom?
What are the prerequisites for membership in Your family?

Your child, O Lord, walks cautiously –
and in obedience to Your precepts and principles.

He is open and honest before God and people
She speaks and acts in love towards her neighbour

He cannot condone that which is evil and doesn’t participate in that which promotes injustice.
She listens to her sister’s griefs and complaints.

He seeks to lighten his brother’s burden and to share in his sorrow and pain.
She reaches out to heal rather than to hurt, to be kind and gentle to all who cross her path.

Those who demonstrate this loving relationship with God and His human creatures manifest participation in His kingdom.
They will never be separated from the family of God.

Ant: Observe what is right, do what is just; for my salvation is about to come, my justice is about to be revealed.
Gospel of the
Third Sunday of Advent, Year C
Luke 3: 10-18

When all the people asked him, ‘What must we do, then?’ he answered, ‘If anyone has two tunics he must share with the one who has none, and the one with something to eat must do the same’. There were tax collectors too who came for baptism, and these said to him, ‘Master, what must we do?’ He said to them, ‘Exact no more than your rate’. Some soldiers asked him in their turn, ‘What about us? What must we do?’ he said to them, ‘No intimidation! No extortion! Be content with your pay!’

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, ‘I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand to clear his threshing-floor and to gather the wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out’. As well as this, there were many other things he said to exhort the people and to announce the Good News to them.

We reflect on the Gospel Reading:

We have just heard that different people were asking the question ‘Master what must we do’. As we come closer to Christmas how can we respond as servants to the following questions:

- How can we serve others this Christmas? (pause)

- What would Christ say to me, during this Advent, if I ask him the question – Master what can I do? (pause)

- I have been baptised with the Holy Spirit. How can I announce the Good News? (pause)

Time for sharing
The Centre for Women and Children in Mysore (the second largest city in the State of Karnataka, India) is focused on the empowerment of women and children who are marginalized and underprivileged. The Adorers of the Blood of Christ sisters and staff are committed to the cause of women and children through different activities. One example is the sponsorship programme – Financial and material assistance is given to poor families, serving a total of 60 children. They motivate the children to continue their education and work to reduce the rate of drop outs from the school and child labour. Another example is the children’s parliament – there are 10 children’s parliaments with a total of 300 children in 10 villages. They educate the children about their rights and guide them to be responsible citizens of the country. The third example is the open school – unfortunately, some students cannot continue their education due to poverty, sickness, departure of their parents, and other reasons so they are given this opportunity to attend regular classes.

There are many more projects which the sisters and staff are doing which are life-giving and shedding hope in this otherwise deprived area.
Intercessions:

Each year in Advent we hear these famous Advent antiphons that lead to Christmas. This year let us reflect on them in this new way:

**O Wisdom**, uttered by the mouth of the Most High, and reaching to the ends of the earth, open our hearts to include people on the margins of life.

Lord hear us…

**O Adonai**, ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, fill us with kindness in dealing with drug addicts.

Lord hear us…

**O Root of Jesse**, standard of the nations and of kings, whom the whole world implores, let us include all the leaders and governments in our prayers.

Lord hear us…

**O Key of David and Sceptre of the House of Israel**, what you open none can shut, come and hold the hand of the wounded of mind or body.

Lord hear us…

**O Radiant Dawn**, splendour of eternal light and Sun of Justice, shine on those lost in darkness and renew the faith in our time.

Lord hear us…

**O Emmanuel**, God present in our midst, long awaited Saviour and King, come and be with those torn by war and conflict.

Lord hear us…
Our Father…

Final Prayer

Open our hearts this Christmas Lord. Help us this Advent season to know more fully and to cherish more devoutly your redemptive love, and strive to love you in return. Above all, give us a heart like John the Baptist who knew who he was; that he was not the Christ. His desire was to decrease and that you, Lord, would increase.

May You help us this Advent to open ourselves to the startling news - that you God are offering us a share of your very own life. Amen

Final Hymn
(from the index or elsewhere)

Membership of VIVAT is made up of over 25 thousand sisters, priests, brothers and their associates from 12 religious congregations working in 122 countries in collaboration with local communities and NGOs.
Leader: We gather in prayer as we draw closer to Christmas and to the celebration of the feast of Emmanuel, God with us. We begin:

Glory to you, source of all Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit.

Hymn: from the index of this booklet or elsewhere

Opening Prayer: O God of history, open the door of our hearts to welcome You, as You were once welcomed into Mary’s womb. Come among us with all Your wisdom and power, all Your mercy and love, that we may learn to be like You who once inhabited human flesh and came to be like us. Holy are You and holy are we who are one with You forever. Amen
Poem:
(St John of the Cross)

IF YOU WANT

If you want,
the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy,
and say,
“I need shelter for the night, please take me inside your heart,
my time is so close”

Then, under the roof of your soul, you will witness the sublime
intimacy,
the divine, the Christ
taking birth
forever,

as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God,
each of us.

Yes, there under the dome of your being
does creation
come into existence eternally,
through your womb, dear pilgrim –
the sacred womb
in your soul,

as God grasps our arms for help; for each of us is
His beloved servant
never far.

If you want, the Virgin will come walking
down the street pregnant
with Light and
sing...

Pause

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah’s house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said: ‘Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.’

We reflect:

Hospitality is at the heart of Christmas. In today’s gospel we read of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth. The younger woman heading to Hebron – eighty five miles away – to visit with her older cousin Elizabeth to share extraordinary news. What a warm welcome! There is so much to share! Unexpected pregnancy, fear, letting go of personal plans, listening with contemplative hearts, and finally reaching the moment when both are able in their own way to respond with a wholehearted “Yes” to their God. Their hospitality to Divine Mystery allowing Jesus, and his fore-runner John the Baptist to enter this world through the door of their welcoming wombs. The joy is palpable: ‘The child in my womb leapt for joy’. These two contemplative women share their openness to the unexpected, to the Mystery of Life, to the unknown. In sharing their story with one another they find the strength, joy, resolve, to live out the invitation of God - an invitation to change history, to allow God become one like us.

- To what is God inviting us this Advent/Christmas? (pause)
- In what way does Mary and Elizabeth’s encounter speak to us?
- Are their unexpected events/new insights in our lives that we might wish to share with a good friend this Advent/Christmas? (pause)
- In expressing hospitality in our lives: who do we welcome? who do we exclude? (pause)

Sharing...
Philip Gibbs SVD reports:

Violence against women in PNG begins in the home. With regard to intimate partner violence, according to a 1992 report produced by the Constitutional Law Reform Commission “two thirds of married women in PNG had been hit by their husbands”. An academic study conducted in 2009 shared similar findings, noting that 65.3% of the interviewed women were survivors of domestic violence. Young girls, particularly those living with relatives or step-parents, are reportedly at high risk of sexual violence, which is perpetrated by male relatives such as uncles, cousins, brothers or male family friends. Although marital rape is penalized by the Criminal Code, only two cases have been prosecuted since the relevant legislation was enacted in 2003.

I attended a public forum with the Special Rapporteur in the capital Port Moresby. The meeting started with her giving a short address noting that empowerment of women must be coupled with social transformation, to fully address the systemic and structural causes of inequality and discrimination, which most often lead to violence against women......I spoke about how violence against women is one aspect of the wider issue of violence for both men and women in PNG and how there are some men who would like to be involved in advocacy against such violence but do not know how to begin.....I am under the impression that the Church needs to work not only in pastoral care, but also more closely with those in policy and planning. The findings of the Special Rapporteur will be discussed in a comprehensive way at the UN Human Rights Council in June 2013.
Intercessions

Mary and Elizabeth had a listening presence towards each other and empowered each other to respond wholeheartedly to God. May we have that same reverence and respect in our encounters with one another.

Lord hear us…

We have been blessed with people in our lives who have supported and encouraged us on our faith journey. We call them to mind now (pause). We ask God to bless them.

Lord hear us…

Jesus you have shown us the face of inclusive Love: Help us to reveal this love to others.

Lord hear us…

“Blessed is the fruit of your womb”
Jesus you give hope to the marginalized and the alienated:
Open our hearts to give a welcome and hospitality to the marginalized and alienated in society today.
Lord hear us…

Jesus you grew up in a family and neighbourhood:
Be with all families and neighbourhoods this Advent and Christmas. Heal wounded relationships and give us compassionate hearts.
Lord hear us…

Jesus you came to be one with us in our humanity;
May we share our gifts freely and willingly in a manner that gives dignity to all peoples.
Lord hear us…

Jesus you were conscious of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air:
Open our hearts and minds to celebrate the many expressions of your love all around us.
Lord hear us…

We remember those who have died and those who are nearing death at this time. May they experience the dawn of new life in your Presence.
Lord hear us…
Our Father…

Final Prayer

O Loving God, the founders and foundresses of our congregations set out on courageous journeys giving hope and joy to peoples young and old, women and men, rich and poor, from east and west, north and south, who needed help. May that same inclusive work continue today in our communities and inspire our VIVAT advocacy work worldwide.

Give us a listening presence like that of Mary and Elizabeth so that our encounters with one another may be respectful and freeing. May the celebration of God inhabiting human flesh awaken reverence in all of us for who we are. Holy are You O God, and holy are we who are one with You forever. Amen

Final Hymn (from the index or elsewhere)

VIVAT International focuses on issues dealing with human rights particularly in the areas of gender, poverty eradication, sustainable development, and the culture of peace.
Advent Hymns
(Please feel free to also select other appropriate hymns)

CHRISt, CIRCLE ROUND US
Text and music: Daniel L. Schutte
Melody: http://www.mycatholicvoice.com/media/KvQJag

Come, O Radiant Dawn,
Splendour of the morning light.
Come, Sun of Justice,
turn away the power of night

Refrain:
Christ, circle round us.
Christ, may your light surround us.
Shine in our living.
Fill our hearts with great thanksgiving.

Come, O flower of Love,
Holy branch of Jesse’s tree.
Come, bough of Blessing,
Bloom for all the world to see. Refrain

Come, O Word of Truth,
font of knowledge from on high.
Come, Holy Wisdom,
Be our faithful friend and guide. Refrain

SONG TO MARY, MOTHER OF THE LORD
Melody: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAKDRhnnPuA

When creation was begun, God had chosen you to be
Mother of his blessed Son, Holy Mary full of grace.

Ave, Ave, Ave Maria.

Lead us to your child above; He will teach us how to love,
How to pity and forgive, Holy Mary full of grace.

Ave, Ave, Ave Maria

Praise the Father and the Son, and the Spirit three in one,
As it was when time began. Now and evermore. Amen

Ave, Ave, Ave Maria
**HOLY IS GOD’S NAME**  
(John Michael Talbot)  
Melody: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br6gHdmKRvE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Br6gHdmKRvE)

My soul proclaims the greatness of my God  
And my spirit exults in God my savior  
For he has looked with mercy on my lowliness  
And my name will be forever exalted.  
For the mighty God has done great things for me  
And his mercy will reach from age to age  
And holy, holy, holy is God’s name.

He has mercy in every generation  
He has revealed His power and His glory  
He has cast down the mighty in their arrogance  
And has lifted up the meek and the lowly  
He has come to help His servant Israel  
He remembered His promise to our fathers

And holy, holy, holy is God’s name.  
And holy, holy, holy is God’s name.

**THE ANGEL GABRIEL FROM HEAVEN CAME**  
(Basque carol: tr. Sabine Baring-Gould 1834-1924)  
(Melody: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pliqObTHxUQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pliqObTHxUQ))

The Angel Gabriel from heaven came  
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;  
“Oh hail” said he, “O lowly maiden Mary”  
“Most highly favoured lady!” Gloria!

“For know a blessed mother you shall, be  
All generations praise continually  
Your son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold”  
“Most highly favoured lady!” Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her, head  
“To me, be as it pleases God!” she said  
“My soul shall laud and magnify His holy name”  
“Most highly favoured lady!” Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ was born  
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn;  
And christian folk throughout the world will ever say:  
“Most highly favoured lady!” Gloria!
O COME, DIVINE MESSIAH!
Venez, Divin Messie  (Abbe Simon-Joseph Pellegrin, 1663-1745)
Trans: Sr. Mary of St. Philip 1825-1904)
Melody: www.youtube.com/user/TORCHkids?feature=watch

1. O come, divine Messiah!
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.

2. Dear Savior haste;
Come, come to earth,
Dispel the night and show your face,
And bid us hail the dawn of grace.

3. O come, divine Messiah!
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.

4. O Christ, whom nations sigh for,
Whom priest and prophet long foretold,
Come break the captive fetters;
Redeem the long-lost fold.

5. Dear Savior haste;
Come, come to earth,
Dispel the night and show your face,
And bid us hail the dawn of grace.

6. O come, divine Messiah!
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.

7. You come in peace and meekness,
And lowly will your cradle be;
All clothed in human weakness
Shall we your Godhead see.

8. Dear Savior haste;
Come, come to earth,
Dispel the night and show your face,
And bid us hail the dawn of grace.

8. O come, divine Messiah!
The world in silence waits the day
When hope shall sing its triumph,
And sadness flee away.

ON JORDAN’S BANK
(Text: Charles Coffin, 1676-1749; tr. John Chandler, 1806-1876)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Py4N_hcvuAo

1. On Jordan’s bank, the Baptist’s cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake, and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings!

2. Then cleansed be every breast from sin;
Make straight the way for God within;
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

3. For Thou art our Salvation, Lord,
Our Refuge, and our great Reward.
Shine forth, and let Thy light restore
Earth’s own true loveliness once more.

4. Lay on the sick Thy healing hand
And make the fallen strong to stand;
Show us the glory of Thy face
Till beauty springs in every place.

5. Stretch forth thine hand, to heal our sore,
And make us rise to fall no more;
Once more upon thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.

6. All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Holy Spirit evermore.
O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL
(Psalteriolum Cantionum Catholicarum, Cologne, 1710)
tr. By John Mason Neale, 1818-1866; verses 2,7 tr. Fr.
The Hymnal 1940, alt.)
melody: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWLItU9ayFc&feature=results_main&playnext=1&dlist=PL744BA070E5BE4027

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel,
   And ransom captive Israel,
   That mourns in lonely exile here
   Until the Son of God appear.
Refrain
   Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
   Shall come to thee, O Israel.

2. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
   Thine own from Satan’s tyranny;
   From depths of hell Thy people save,
   And give them victory o’er the grave.
Refrain

3. O come, Thou Day-Spring, come and cheer
   Our spirits by Thine advent here;
   Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
   And death’s dark shadows put to flight!
Refrain

4. O come, Thou Key of David, come,
   And open wide our heavenly home;
   Make safe the way that leads on high,
   And close the path to misery. Refrain

5. O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might,
   Who to Thy tribes on Sinai’s height
   In ancient times didst give the law
   In cloud, and majesty, and awe. Refrain

THE WEXFORD CAROL
(Christmas Hymn and Carol Lyrics Book)
Melody: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3szyPMwuDC8

Good people all, this Christmas time,
Consider well and bear in mind
What our good God for us has done,
In sending His beloved Son.
With Mary holy we should pray
To God with love this Christmas Day;
In Bethlehem upon the morn
There was a blest Messiah born.

The night before that happy tide
The noble virgin and her guide
Were long time seeking up and down
To find a lodging in the town.
But mark how all things came to pass:
From every door repelled, alas!
As long foretold, their refuge all
Was but a humble oxen stall.

Near Bethlehem did shepherds keep
Their flocks of lambs and feeding sheep;
To whom God’s angels did appear
Which put the shepherds in great fear.
“Prepare and go”, the angels said,
“To Bethlehem, be not afraid;
For there you’ll find, this happy morn,
A princely Babe, sweet Jesus born.”

With thankful heart and joyful mind,
The shepherds went the babe to find,
And as God’s angel has foretold,
They did our Savior Christ behold.
Within a manger He was laid,
And by His side the virgin maid
Attending to the Lord of Life,
Who came on earth to end all strife.

Thoughts from our foundresses and founders
Wishing you a happy and blessed Christmas