DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the 83rd of the VIVAT Newsletter!

This is a special year for VIVAT as the organization completes 20 years in November 2020. The issue covers the commemoration of the 20th Anniversary of VIVAT International held in New York. The National Branch of Indonesia reporting about their activities to celebrate this special event.

COVID-19 Pandemic continues to ravage the countries of the world including our VIVAT grassroots. However, it has not deterred many of our members from reaching out to the marginalized communities. Some of these stories are covered in this issue as shared by them.

From March 2020 onwards all events and meetings at the UN level as well as all the NGO Committees were held on virtual platform.

---

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Maria T. Hörnemann, SSpS
Paulus Budi Kleden, SVD
Eleonora Cichon, SSpS
Guy Mazola, SVD
Antonio Neves, CSSp
Gretta Fernandes, SSpS
Daisuke Narui, SVD

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Daisuke Narui, SVD

CO-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Helen R. Saldanha, SSpS
Robert Mirsel, SVD

REPRESENTATIVE IN GENEVA

Andrzej Owca, CSSp

TRANSLATORS

Spanish - Carlos Ferrada Montero, SVD
Portuguese - Stela Maris Martins SSpS
VIVAT marked the 20th Anniversary with a side event, “Migration and Homelessness: Hope from the Margins” on 18 February 2020 at Church Center for the UN. It was a well-attended event with over 100 participants which included representation from the Holy See, Philippines, and Madagascar. The occasion was graced by Sr. Maria Theresia Hörnemann SSpS, President of VIVAT. The VIVAT membership represented by Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters Dorota Maria Piechaczek, Rose Therese Nolta, Xaveriana Ngene, Ancy Jacob; Little Sisters of Assumption Sisters Susanne Lachapelle and Deysi; Comboni Sister Olga Sanchez; Comboni Missionaries - Fr. Jean Paul Pezzi and Oblates of Mary- Daniel Leblanc. The event began with a brief introduction and welcome by Helen Saldanha SSpS.

The panelists were, Ms. Hanta Fida Cyrilla Klein from the Permanent Mission of Madagascar, Sr. Maria Theresia Hörnemann, Sr. Susan Lachapelle LSA Family Health Services, Jean Quinn, UNANIMA International and Sr. Rose Therese Nolta. The session was moderated by Daniel Leblanc OMI.

Hanta spoke about her engagement is addressing the issue of homelessness as a diplomat along with the civil society in the last three years. She acknowledged the hard work of civil society in getting the homelessness in the agenda of the UN and hailed the role played by the African countries who pushed for bringing the issue to global negotiations. She stressed on the significance of cooperation among the countries, the importance of national context, and partnerships among governments and civil society.

Sr. Maria Theresia after a short introduction of VIVAT as an organization shared about the policy decisions and implementations the Congregation made to address the issues of migrants and refugees in four countries as good practices. She highlighted the importance of collaboration and networking for bringing positive results. The complex issues of our times demand of us working with likeminded networks in the best interest of the marginalized.

Sr. Suanne Lachapelle shared her experiences of working with the migrants and drew attentions on the inhuman conditions the homeless families live in. She highlighted various issues such as poverty, violence including sexual
violence, and the struggles faced by the migrant homeless through a case study. Based on her 40 years of experience she stressed that we need to address multiple dimensions of vulnerabilities while working with them.

Sr. Jean Quinn acknowledged the two groups that enabled the tabling of the issue of homelessness at UN namely African Group (countries) and faith-based groups. She highlighted the importance of political participation and inclusion of the voices from the grassroots to advocate for change. She explored connections between homelessness and displacement as she shared her experiences of advocating for the homeless in the context of family homelessness, displacement and hidden homelessness and emphasized the importance of addressing migrants’ homelessness.

Sr. Rose Therese presented intersections between homelessness and migration by sharing her experiences of working with them in Chicago area underlining the importance of working with other organizations. She spoke on how we can be the voice for the marginalized.

Daniel Leblanc summing up shared the instances where migrant women and children suffer the most. This was followed by good interactive comments by the participants and a light lunch.

Some of the learnings that can be helpful to VIVAT members throughout the world:

- Homelessness is linked to every Sustainable Development Goal – use as a framework
- Homelessness needs to be defined in order to be counted – then we can do more
- Homeless can be veterans of war, migrants or unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities as well as with mental health issues.
- Social Protection Systems is needed to address homelessness
- A home is a Human Right – why are there so many homeless in our world?
- Information is powerful and data can make a difference.
- People who are homeless are disconnected with their family and community.

This side event highlighted the importance of working with the migrants who become vulnerable due to their migratory status. Homelessness is one of them. As a priority issue VIVAT is committed to work with them, to rebuild their lives and strengthen advocacy efforts at the national and global levels.

Helen Saldanha SSpS and Rose Therese Nolta SSpS, VIVAT International

“The complex issues of our times demand of us working with likeminded networks in the best interest of the marginalized.”
THE 64TH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW64)

VIVAT members in New York and Sr. Florence Deacon participated in the opening session of CSW64 on 9 March 2020. The meeting was suspended after the opening statements and the adoption of the draft Political Declaration (E/CN.6/2020/L.1). During the Opening Session, the hosts invited all those who participated in Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995. It was great to see Florence standing along with a few others.

Throughout the year there were hectic preparations by the UN membership, UN Agencies, and civil society organizations. The focus of the event was on the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action that marked 25 years. The Commission bureau held briefings for discussions on the modalities with a suggestion to carry on the event with the limited participation of the New York-based member delegation and NGOs. Some of the Member states expressed their reservations on such modalities and asked it to be postponed to an indefinite date. NGO CSW Committee also advocated for suspending the session for a later date through an overnight signature campaign.

VIVAT International along with the NGO Committee on Migration had planned for a parallel Migrant and Refugee Women in the Global Compacts and Beijing Platform for Action. However, it got cancelled. This event was meant to advocate with the member states and civil society groups itself for giving visibility to migrant and refugee women in the Beijing platform.


In the process of developing a thematic focus on migrant and refugee women, VIVAT’s role has been to ask the NGO committee to give visibility to this issue. It was done as a member of the NGO Committee on Migration.
VIVAT participated in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Forum on Financing for Development Follow-up (FfD Forum) which was to be held from 20-23 April but was held virtually as an informal event on 23 April 2020. Two sessions were held. 1) The Financing for Development Forum: Financing a Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19, and 2) ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum Informal Virtual Meeting. Our committee has been working closely with the FSDO and with Jubilee USA and Europe, along with the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promoting the cancellation of debt, especially in the least developed countries.

Daniel Leblanc and Helen joined the efforts of the NGO Committee on Financing for Sustainable Development (FfSD). During the early part of 2020, this committee has made the effort to participate actively with the network of civil society organizations called the Global Social Economy Group (GSEG), with the Financing for Social Development Office (FSDO), and with the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) tasked with preparing the document on which the member states base themselves to prepare an outcome document at the Annual Forum on Financing for Development. Our efforts have also been hampered by the pandemic and we have had to meet virtually since March though initially through the committee an appeal was sent to the Member States for postponing the Forum to July 2020.

VIVAT also worked on the small group to submit proposals UN Financial Accountability Transparency and Integrity Panel (FACTI Panel) which would be published later in the year. Since FfD Committee had the event, this effort was to learn the processes that can be achieved only through financing. During COVID this was an opportunity to work along with the team.

VIVAT gave online feedback to the Reader survey for the Financing for Sustainable Development Report and Survey by the organizers of the Finance in Common Summit of 2020 at the request of FSDO. Florence Deacon who was involved in working with this committee also provided the feedback.
“Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16”

VIVAT worked as part of the NGO Committee on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (NGOCRIP) beginning in the latter months of 2019 and early 2020 in preparation for the annual Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from the 13th to the 24th of April 2020. The theme was to be “Peace, justice and strong institutions: the role of indigenous peoples in implementing Sustainable Development Goal 16”. This Forum also had to be “postponed” and eventually canceled. The preparation included working with the Amazon Sub-Committee of the Mining Working Group as the two groups were focusing on the Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon and have developed close ties to the Latin American Bishops’ Conference (CELAM in Spanish) and with REPAM (the Catholic church’s Amazon network). It was planned to the last details, the Indigenous persons coming to the Forum from several Amazon countries, some of who had participated in the Synod on the Amazon, and amongst them Cardinal Hummes from Brazil and Cardinal Barreto from Peru. Since the cancellation of the Forum, we have worked at better informing ourselves by having virtual Zoom meetings with speakers from Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Regular meetings for sharing from the Elders from different nations are planned through Facebook live streaming. (Inputs from Daniel Leblanc, who is in the executive committee of NGOCRIP is integrated).
UN@75 PEOPLE’S FORUM

“Humanity at a Crossroads: Global Solutions for Global Challenges.”

VIVAT participated in the UN75 People’s Forum for the UN We Need on May 14-15, 2020. Over 600 registered participants from 75 countries around the world attended the Forum on various online platforms. This forum highlighted the principle of We the People, which is at risk, and now more escalated due to the impact of the pandemic. The forum dwelt on the UN Resolution of 75th Anniversary. UN75 People’s Declaration and Plan for Global Action, entitled “Humanity at a Crossroads: Global Solutions for Global Challenges.” was released and sent to the President of the 74th General Assembly. The points included in the people’s Declaration are, addressing global risks through developing a global plan of action and promoting partnerships for peace, sustainable development, human rights, democracy, climate action, and disarmament. It also asks the UN systems to advance people-centered multilateralism by developing proposals to revitalize the United Nations. VIVAT has endorsed the Declaration. (http://un2020.org/forum-declaration/)

REACHING OUT TO THE MIGRANT POPULATION

In the wake of COVID-19, global vulnerability and insecurity have risen, as income loss and health disparities have been further exacerbated by natural disasters. Inspired by compassion and God’s transforming love, members of VIVAT from the Sisters of the Holy Cross have been responding to the urgent needs of those affected by COVID-19 through public health services, sustenance, and prayer. To meet the growing global demand for social supports, medical care, and food assistance, the congregation established the COVID Relief Fund, which continues to distribute much-needed resources to areas where sisters live and work through the generosity of its donors.

In Bangladesh, where Cyclone Amphan led to further devastation in May 2020, sisters have witnessed harsh conditions and the suffering of families. While keeping the coronavirus pandemic as a special intention in their prayer, sisters have utilized the COVID Relief Fund to provide financial support and food aid to more than 30 families in Dhaka.

As COVID-19 led to closures and restrictions, the Sisters’ Justice Committee in Ghana has had to suspend most of its advocacy activities, as well as its plastic waste recycling project, which in addition to removing discarded plastics from the environment also provides income for local workers. Recognizing that disruption to livelihoods and a serious shortage of hand sanitizers and masks were causing
tremendous suffering, the justice committee began donating food packages, face masks, sanitizers, and liquid soap to persons in need, including Liberian refugees and employees with whom the members work.

In Nuevo León, Mexico, COVID-19 has increased the hardships many migrants face and increased their exposure to violence. Despite government recommendations for people to shelter in place, the flow of migration has not stopped. When the quarantine began on May 22, sisters who minister to migrants and support local migrant shelters had to innovate to continue to meet the needs of the people. Sisters cooked every other day for the men, women, and children that were outside of the shelter and distributed water and face masks. They also continued to provide food, soap, and razors for those residing inside the shelter.

When the government lifted restrictions on June 5, sisters returned to Casa INDI to continue helping people with the process of getting their refugee visas. Unfortunately, services were ceased almost immediately when at least 30 people contracted COVID-19—despite taking appropriate precautions such as wearing masks, using hand sanitizers, and maintaining social distance. Sister Esperanza Acevedo Jacobo, who represents Mexico on the Congregation Justice Committee and is a member of the VIVAT, expresses the acute pain of these times, “It is hard because people want to talk and be close to us, but we have to adjust to this new reality, hoping that somehow we can find other ways to be close to them.”

The Sisters of the Holy Cross Congregational Justice Committee

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING THE LOCKDOWN

Domestic violence has been termed as the ‘shadow pandemic’ in this time of lockdown in many parts of the world as highlighted by Heads of UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO). The legal team at Streevani was deeply concerned about the situation of women and children. Stressful situations resulting from the lockdown like confinement within the limited household space, anxieties about losing employment, debts, and lack of basic amenities, all contribute to aggravating violence against women and children, who are most vulnerable in these circumstances. To reach out to women in crises the legal team enrolled in the Helpline for attending Domestic violence cases from 2 pm to 6 pm daily. Julie George also enrolled in the helpline started by the Indian Christian Women’s Movement network.
To date, there are around 30 cases the team has attended. Some calls were distress calls; some wanted to settle the family problems that are pending for a long time, some were harassed by the landlords since they were unable to pay the rent and such cases were attended by the team. One of the unique cases that we are dealing with is of a minor girl who was molested by her father. The man was in jail but due to an increase in the number of COVID-19 patients among the inmates, the jail authorities released him for a temporary period. The mother and daughter are scared to stay with him in the same one-room house. As it is, they live on the edge with no possibility of maintaining physical distancing given the dense neighborhoods they live in. Streevani legal team extends support to them and is in touch with them. When we receive distress calls, we immediately advise the woman to call on police helpline 100 for instant intervention or direct them to file a complaint at the nearby police station.

It was shocking to listen to another young mother who came to her natal home in March 2020 for delivery as it is the custom of the place. Thereafter she delivered and due to lockdown, she could not return to her matrimonial home. Recently she has come to know that her husband has got married to another woman. Now she is left with her four months old infant and with an uncertain future. Through our intervention, she has filed a case at the police station.

As such women and children remain on the margins and such pandemic situations propel them into multi-dimensional problems. The pandemic is a grim reminder that for some women and children, home is not the haven we imagine it to be. They may be protected from the Coronavirus, but other horrifying situations lie in wait around women staying indoors, and the systems are failing to protect them. Not only were more women facing violence, the frequency and intensity of violence against them also increased with the pandemic since many were cut off from family, friends, colleagues, and other support systems.

Isolation is the most shattering factor of the pandemic for women facing violence. India has been in lockdown since March 24, 2020. Being locked in with their perpetrators amidst fear, uncertainty, and financial insecurity is terrifying. Often there is a lack of privacy and space, hence their communications are being monitored and it limits them from seeking external support. Legal solutions and support systems, especially getting them out of the unsafe environment, etc., are not possible immediately in a pandemic situation. Currently, the lockdowns are eased, and several cases are increasingly seeking help from us. It is easier to be available to them in person, following the global COVID-19 guidelines. Providing support to women facing domestic violence in pandemic times should be treated as an essential service because women and girls experience the impacts of the pandemic in more ways than one.

Julie George, India

“The pandemic is a grim reminder that for some women and children, home is not the haven we imagine it to be.”
It is a time for all of us to be for each other as neighbors and fellow citizens to the deprived who lack necessities to live on. We are invited to move with courage and compassion.

We the sisters and staff from Uday Social Development Society Bhopal and St. Raphael Co-Ed School carried out the relief work to 4375 families with food and thereby 21875 members of these families have benefitted since last 28 days (28th March to April 25th).

The migrants, blacksmiths, construction workers, and families of daily laborers, domestic workers, widows, senior citizens, and other poor people were helped with grocery provisions such as wheat powder, pulses, spices, sugar, tea powder, salt, and cooking oil. Many individuals and departments came to help us in this noble work such as Bhopal Municipal Corporation, ActionAid, Zomato, Local newspaper groups, and many others. Police departments have immensely helped us to distribute food and manage the situation keeping in mind COVID-19 precautions. They have cooperated well with us and played a very vital role in implementing these services to the people. These philanthropical initiatives were implemented in 6 zones of the city in 25 slums and villages. About 500 masks are also distributed to domestic workers so that they protect themselves and others too. Since the lockdown is too long and people find to manage themselves and so domestic violence on the rise among children and women. Tele-counseling sessions to 730 individuals were arranged through the phone to deal with this issue. Spreading awareness on the pandemic and its safety measures are given one to one to the people. These services are given only to selected families and individuals who are the neediest, we still need to reach out to the rest of the people who lack basic needs, and our efforts will continue.

We also had an opportunity to undertake a symptomatic door to door survey for COVID 19 in a hotspot area declared by the government.

At the request of the Health Department of the Government, we joined hands with 35 others and collaborated in carrying out a door-to-door COVID-19 symptomatic survey in the hotspot areas of Bhopal, on 20-22 April. This was coordinated by the District Officer, Additional Collector, and faith-based leaders. We surveyed 8624 families comprised of 35994 family members in three days. All of us were given Personal Protective Equipment to protect ourselves. This enabled the government to follow up with the suspected cases.

Lizy Thomas, India
While at a global level, the COVID-19 became an unprecedented socio-economic crisis, highlighting the fragility of our social and health systems, at a local level, the tragedy took on such proportions. The names and features of the faces of the victims soon began to blur, giving way to controversies about cold and depersonalizing statistics that, in such circumstances, allow us to manage our helplessness better. We, too, Comboni Sisters, like so many other people in recent months, have received this dreaded visit.

Nobody knows how or when the COVID entered our community of Bergamo (a city in northern Italy, the "Red Zone" of the pandemic). When some sisters showed the first symptoms at the beginning of March, "the unwanted guest" was already inside the community. Sr Maria Rota, the coordinator of this community that at that time was hosting 55 elderly sisters, tells us that the absolute chaos came over them in a couple of days, without them even noticing. Sr Maria, the community bursar, and the nursing sisters were among the first to be infected. This situation made it very difficult to reorganize the community and establish protective measures for the other sisters. Being considered a religious community without official recognition as a social-healthcare structure prevented us from accessing the few means available: protective equipment, oxygen therapy, adequate material, and even specific treatments.

Seven sisters died in the first week (up to three in 24 hours! At the end of the emergency, ten sisters died). Most of the community and the external personnel: kitchen, cleaning and laundry, nurses, and assistants fell ill within a few days. The situation in our community reflected what was happening in Bergamo in those days. Rare was the family that was not in mourning. The emergency calls and the cases of people dying alone in their homes were multiplying.

The news was devastating. Concern was growing at times. Thus, I began my odyssey to cross Europe from the other side of the Mediterranean and reach Bergamo. I traveled 29 hours, where semi-desert airports with endless interrogations and self-certifications were only the appetizer of what it would mean to arrive in Bergamo’s ghost town. A deafening silence covered the city like a dense fog, interspersed only with the ambulances’ incessant wailing, which would become the soundtrack for the next few weeks.

The gesture of crossing the threshold of our community in Bergamo has been one of the few moments in my life, expressing more clearly and intensely the meaning of my missionary consecration.

Putting myself at the sisters’ service in the infirmary made me feel at home immediately: listening to their life stories and their passion for the mission. Even in the sister’s delirium moments, they continue to say their stories and offer their lives for the mission. I was moved to see how the people with whom the sisters have shared their lives remain so present, even as death approaches. Their lives as consecrated women and their prayers are intertwined with names in a foreign language that gives meaning even to extreme situations like the one we were experiencing.

Living Lent, Holy Week, and Easter 2020 in the heart of the "Red Zone" has made me witness that God’s Mercy is shown in the Cross’s weakness. A Mystery that today resonates strongly in the world in a way that escapes reason: Life is stronger than death!

Alicia Vacas, CMS, Italy
COVID-19 as we all know has a serious impact on the world especially with girls’ education and vulnerable women in society. It is a pandemic that has befallen humanity. In Sierra Leone; the cases have been on the increase, schools have been closed since March 31st 2020. Recently the government has announced the reopening of schools for exam classes in preparation for their external exams in both primary, junior and senior secondary schools to begin teaching 1st July 2020.

The challenges, risks created by COVID-19 on girl’s education and vulnerable women and how we the MSHR sisters are currently addressing the challenges with plans on how to address them to support girls’ education and women in the society include:

**CHALLENGES AND RISKS INVOLVE**

➢ It has been difficult getting students to keep studying their books especially those in exam classes.
➢ Another challenge the girls are faced with is that most of them are exposed on the streets of the market hawking either to help themselves or their parents/guidance to make ends meet (to feed).
➢ The risk of staying longer at home may lead to all forms of abuse at home and early pregnancies because women in this society are vulnerable.
➢ Another risk is the high tendency of school dropout due to early pregnancy and the negative impact of using one of our schools as an isolation center for the COVID-19 pandemic which was taken by the government.

**HOW WE ARE ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PLANS**

➢ We are somehow handicapped right now because we cannot bring the girls back to the classroom due to the COVID-19 virus but hoping that it will soon be over and the girls will return to school and life comes to normalcy.
➢ We are hoping to organize remedial lessons for the pupils preparing for their external exams bearing in mind they had not finished their syllabus.
➢ We are planning to source for funds while trusting that God will help us to get money to embark on psycho-social counseling for staff and students that will enable them to cope with the new reality and impact of COVID-19 which will help to deal with stigmatization for those affected directly or indirectly.
➢ In as much as the Government has assured us of fumigating the school compound being used as an isolation center, we hope to improve sanitation in the school by getting sanitizers, perfumes, disinfectants, soap, sanitary pads, and facemasks if need be to reassure students, parents and staff that the compound is safe and sound for teaching and learning.
➢ Some of the sisters are into creating awareness and sensitization campaigns especially with the vulnerable women in different communities.
➢ With the experience gained during the Ebola Scourge; we were able to practice and create awareness before the closure of schools with our staff and students on how to keep safe from the COVID 19 and avoid early pregnancy.

**In conclusion;** COVID 19 pandemic has a lot of negative impact on vulnerable girls and women because it has extended the stay of students at home and most of these women do not know how to protect themselves and their families at this time. As we all know time is not a respecter of anyone and it is passing away, we pray and hope that COVID-19 will soon be over so our girls can return to school.

**Roseline Okpanachi - Sierra Leone Region**
COVID-19 AND THE ASCS OF THE REGION OF BRAZIL

We, in Brazil, have been in “social isolation” for more than two months as decreed by the government of the States of Pará and Amazonia to avoid infection of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Our community of Belém is made up of Sr. Maria José, Mariene, and Jociene. Zaira Magalhães, the niece of Sister Ivone, ASC, is living with us and works as a psychologist in Our Lady of Guadalupe Hospital. She was called to work with patients infected with the virus, giving counseling to keep the fear of the sick and their families under control. This is a fundamental but painful experience for Zaira. The pandemic exposed the difficult situation of healthcare in Amazonia, with its lack of doctors, hospitals, beds for the sick, PPE for healthcare workers, and even medicines.

COVID 19 is demanding a more human world. The drama of humanity involved with the coronavirus is that virus undergoes mutations that create other illnesses. To defeat it, science has the problem of preparing a vaccine against this invisible enemy. Regarding Brazil and especially Amazonia, the chaotic situation that has been created requires a superhuman effort!

Quarantine and social isolation are difficult for everyone, however, we ASCs understand the need, noting the daily increase in the number of infected people and deaths due to COVID-19. The political problem has been aggravated by the coronavirus because the president of Brazil does not accept the prolonged closure of factories and other workplaces and blames the increase in unemployment on the holders of this law. Imbued with our charism in this pain of the world, and thanks to Sr. Nadia Coppa’s general letter, the calls of Pope Francis and the worlds of the CNBB (National Bishops’ Conference of Brazil) and the CRB (Conference of Brazilian Religious), and the scientists, we are trying to contribute in these ways:

- Praying the Chaplet of the Blood of Christ in each ASC community twice a week to ask God, with His immense power, to put an end to this pandemic and to inspire scientists in their research for a vaccine against the coronavirus.

- In some communities, the Sisters are participating in the collection of food that the diocesan Caritas is organizing to help the sick, the unemployed, and the poor.

- The ASCs of Santarem, Pará, who had begun making masks that are so needed, are continuing to make them and give them away, and the CRB (Conference of Brazilian Religious) of Santarem is joining the project. Some congregations are furnishing the materials and others are making them.

- Sr. Marilia wrote a poem on the current situation. One is entitled Igreja Domestic, (Domestic Church) about the value of prayer at home, which is very important now that the churches are closed.

Recalling the sacrifice of Jesus for our Redemption, and uniting it with the generous initiatives of companies and help from various entities in the fight against the chaos produced by the virus: “The coronavirus reminded me of the evocative expression FELIX CULPA (O Happy Fault) attributed to St. Augustine and used in the beautiful EXULTET sung during the Easter Vigil: “O HAPPY FAULT SORELY NEEDED! O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ...” and the coronavirus was necessary to bring about the generosity and engagement of the various realities for the fight against the pandemic – for example, the health professionals who risk their lives in the care of those suffering from COVID-10. And I say the same when I see in many people grow in neighborliness, in family life, in creativity, in solidarity, in reconciliation, in sharing, and mutual help. Then I say, “O HAPPY virus!”

Marilia Menezes, Brazil
The Covid-19 outbreak that hit the world throughout 2020 is a disaster for humankind. The Indonesian people are no exception, where VIVAT Indonesia inevitably feels the ferocity of the tragedy. Limiting people's movement from one place to another and avoiding crowds makes it quite difficult for people who work with daily wages or depend on people's markets, such as day traders and vegetable farmers. On the other hand, the nation-wide concerns also stir national solidarity. VIVAT members and the JPIC/JPR groups of the religious congregations belong to VIVAT International in Indonesia have taken initiatives to respond to this situation by doing numerous charitable activities.

For example, the JPIC Commission of the Timor SVD and SSpS Provinces formed a joint action to respond to the pandemic's impact on the several areas deemed the most difficult to access, such as in the Hanowai, Aitameak, remote villages Wini-Bakitolas, Kamanasa, Lahurus, and Fulur communities. The main activities are distributing basic foodstuffs for a thousand households with priority on widows, widowers, the elderly, and low-income families. Each family member received 10 kg of rice, a shelf of eggs, and one pack of 2 liters of cooking oil. Although the amount of cash distributed was not so significant, the impacted communities felt helpful in coping with the economic crisis. Interestingly, the SVD and SSpS congregations carried out the charitable activities in partnership with the lay partners. Provincial leaders from the two congregations were directly involved in delivering livelihood relief for the affected communities by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The commission of Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation (JPR) from The Dechonian Fathers (the Sacred Heart of Jesus congregation) takes care of the internally displaced people who have worked for two decades in the palm oil plantations areas in the South Sumatra Province. Many migrant workers have been laid off with this outbreak, their salaries and other benefits have been cut. Thus, migrant workers have shouldered a heavy economic burden during the pandemic era. So, the JPR Commission assists livelihood to the migrant worker's families.

Meanwhile, Sr. Josephine Palawati SSpS and the Women and Child Protection House community in Labuan Bajo, Flores shared masks and necessities with vulnerable groups such as vegetable sellers, motorcycle taxi drivers, and fish sellers. In Jakarta, VIVAT Indonesia's secretariat offered some foods and
masks to 250 neighborhood residents, especially for informal workers and households who stop working during the pandemic time.

All religious orders which are part of VIVAT International did similar things, such as JPIC SVD Ende, Truk-F Maumere, JPIC SVD Ruteng, SSps East Flores, JPIC SVD Jawa, SSps Kalimantan, SSps Jawa, and JPIC OMI. There are several lessons learned from this activity. When there is a massive disaster, the level of awareness of social solidarity will become more pronounced. On the other hand, we should be aware that we shouldn't fall into the trap of charity. We have to get out of the confines of charitable actions and try to become fighters for justice. For example, the JPIC groups can do monitoring the distribution of the social protection funds provided by the central and local government to make sure that it goes to the right people and groups. Besides, they also defend the rights and needs of people in distributing humanitarian aid materials.

Instead of flaunting our charitable actions to people like some politicians did to be known and popular, we have to pay attention to the guidance of the Word of God, saying, "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand not know what your right hand is doing" (Matt. 6: 3). Doing justice and defending people's rights, especially the vulnerable groups, are the reason for VIVAT International's establishment. (Agus Duka SVD, VIVAT Indonesia).

PHILIPPINES: PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Thanks be to God, all our Sisters in the different Communities are fine! We follow the guidelines of the government and our religious leaders to stay home and observe the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) for the good of all.

I am happy that in solidarity with our people who cannot avail of the Eucharist, in our communal discernment at the start of the Community Quarantine, we decided to forego the traditional Community Mass with the SVD priest coming to the Convent, even if we got special permission to continue (but with the proviso that we will close our Convent gate and doors, and not invite people in). We felt bad about that proviso! And, though God closes a window, He/She opens a door! We are happier now with our creative and meaningful Liturgies of the Word with Communion, integrated with Morning Prayer (or Lauds), or TV Masses! All of us enjoy the change: even our elderly Sisters!

Still, we feel moved to discern what more we could do, beyond safety measures for ourselves.

Here in the Provincial House, since our Drop-In Center for the poor was closed, we began "Food on Wheels," where Sister-volunteers cook food and distribute the food packs, using the Center car, to the
Homeless in our nearby barangays. Unfortunately, in the coming days, there were more roadblocks because of the hot zones (residences of COVID-19 positive persons) and warm zones (immediate vicinity of affected COVID residents), preventing us to continue. We discerned our next steps, and we decided to open the 1st floor of the Drop-In Center for at most 10-12 Homeless people whom we will be housing for the whole time of the ECQ. Since the Center is another building from the Convent, we feel it is relatively safe if we house them there.

In response to the call of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Phil. (AMRSP) for accommodations for health worker front-liners who are evicted by their apartment owners because of fear of contagion, we have likewise opened the 2nd and 3rd floors of the Center to 14 health worker-front-liners from the nearby hospitals in Quezon City.

May the Lord have mercy and release us from this pandemic soon! We surrender to His loving plan for all of us, and in our varied little ways, let us "heal as one!".

Sister Evelyn Jose, SSpS
Philippines North

JPIC SVD ENDE ASSISTS WOMEN WORKING IN BARS

Seventeen young women working in bars who have been based in and around the town of Maumere, Flores, received aid in the form of rice, eggs, and soap, on 23rd May 2020 from the JPIC SVD Team. These women are victims of COVID-19. They have been out of work for 3 months and have not received any income. Hoping for assistance for them from the state is as realistic as expecting rain in the middle of a drought.

This aid was distributed by JPIC SVD ENDE Province activists, Fathers Fande Raring, SVD, Ignas Ledot, SVD, and Otto Gusti Madung, SVD. They were assisted by two Ferrari nuns, Sr. Grace and Sr. Magdalena. The goods were provided by PT Wings Air, an Indonesian airline, and a generous benefactor from Jakarta, Ms. Emy.

Fr. Fande Raring, from the JPIC SVD Ende Commission, when asked for comment said, “The basic SVD spirituality is to give to those who are suffering, not considering pros and cons of their employment.” He went on to say, “Before helping these women, we assisted a group of trans-sexuals in Maumere. They are among the most vulnerable during this pandemic.”

Most of these women come from outside of Flores, from places such as Makasar, Kupang, Sumatra, and JavaBesar. They can’t work because of the pandemic, and they can’t return either to their homes as no flights are operating.

Even though Maumere is just a small city, it has about 20 bars. Their work is hardly a matter of dreams. They actually earn very little, and their wages are below the standard, and often they are mistreated by clients.