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#### **Witnesses of love,**

Loaded with a few bags of daily necessities  
Carry the load by the strength of enthusiasm  
Not feeling the burden, the eyes shine with joy.  
Love hides itself in suitcases packed to the last bit of emptiness,  
The heart is full of what is ahead, already imagined, already created,  
already tasted, though not yet come.

#### **Travellers of humanity,**

urged on by universal brotherhood,  
You paint the world with strokes of charity,  
As your brush goes up and down you draw smiles on faces of all colours.  
Depart in gladness as a lofty idea guides you.  
There is greater joy in giving than in receiving  
As freely you once received, freely give.

#### **Ambassadors of peace**

You set out to know the heart of others,  
To understand pain,  
To embrace helplessness,  
To share hope,  
To stretch out the hand of fraternity.

#### **Builders of justice,**

You face the challenge of listening to the cry of the poor,  
You'll shed tears of compassion  
Open your bags, find something to keep the balance aligned,  
As you offer your time, your energy, your resources, you turn back the  
swing of the evil world.  
Your youthful courage is the force that globalizes the earth and spreads it  
with beauty.

This dream lasts but a Summer?  
Make your dream live on.

Volunteers  
on the  
move

Dearest Volunteers you are all the above, but there is a higher way.  
Greater Love is the emptiness of self that becomes space for the dream  
of the Other. To want what the Other wants, to dream what the Other  
dreams... this is the very nature of infinite Love. Jesus emptied himself,  
took the form of a slave and became obedient even unto death, death on  
a cross... (Phil 2)

That the experience of service in other cultures and countries may lead  
you to the greater gift of self.

St. Patrizia Livraga  
VOICA International Coordinator

#### **VOICA**

Via Aurelia Antica, 180  
00165 ROME - ITALY

Tel. +39 06 39375103  
Fax +39 06 6385885  
[www.voica.org/en](http://www.voica.org/en)  
[voica@fdcc.org](mailto:voica@fdcc.org)

# My return to mission

Hi everyone!

I just wanted to let you know that I arrived in Jakarta last Friday and am getting ready for the next part of the journey to my island. Today, I will leave for the island of Timor and will stay in the city for the night. Tomorrow or the next day, I will FINALLY arrive to the village of Nurobo. It has been quite a journey. The flights were super long, but everything went so smoothly.

I sat next to some amazing people. On the flight from Washington to Qatar (13 hours), I sat next to a man from Iran. Now most Americans would be worried, but he was one of the kindest people I have ever met. He is an economics professor and was in America for an ethics and morals seminar. We had a wonderful conversation about spirituality. He said that Muslims,

Jews, and Christians are all seeking the same thing...to become better people. How true! It just proves once again how people are people no matter where they are from.

The next flight was from Qatar to Singapore (8 hours). I sat next to a computer guy from Singapore. Well, for the first 7 hours, we were both out cold. He fell asleep before me and did the whole head bob thing. Slightly amusing, especially after the 13 hours from D.C. and a 6 hour layover in the Qatar airport. Everything was a little amusing after that ...hehe. After we had some breakfast, we started talking about life in Singapore. All they do is work. He said there is absolutely no time for anything else. Sounded awful to me. Then, I told him where I was going, and he couldn't believe it. He was astounded that I would go all the way from America to Indonesia just to teach people English. Then, he got his backpack and gave me two pieces of chocolate that he bought in Qatar. He thought a moment and looked in his backpack again. He poured out half of his chocolate and put it in a bag for me. I couldn't believe it. I told him that he didn't have to. He said, "You are helping people, so I'm helping you." People are just so beautiful. Sometimes we forget that, don't we?

My last flight was from Singapore to Jakarta (about 2 hours). I sat next to a clearly wealthy man from Singapore. He

was very friendly and told me all about his successful career working for the United Arab Emirates. Again, I explained what I was doing in Nurobo. Yet again, he was simply amazed that I would do something like that. He told me that he envied me and said that I was a God-send. Now, under normal conditions, those are very kind words, but when a rich (probably not Christian), business-minded man says this to the greasy haired - not showered for three days -super exhausted -12 year old looking girl, it was extraordinary! God was so good to surround me with good people like my three flight buddies.

I have been in Jakarta for about 4 days now. Quite an eternity when I have nothing to do. I am soooo anxious to see my friends and students in Nurobo! It has been killing me just to wait here. However, it is good to see 5 of my former students who are studying to become sisters in Jakarta. And, I got pretty much caught up on my sleep, which I think was the point of keeping me here this long. Today, I will leave at 2:30pm for Kupang (city on my island). I will sleep there tonight and maybe tomorrow night too. Then, I will take the bus with the rest of the chickens and pigs to my village 6 hours away. I do love the craziness and simplicity of life! Well, I thought I'd write one last email before I venture back into the no-internet zone.

Also, my number and address have not changed. My number is +6281339190698. My address is: Susteran Kanossian, Paroki Nurobo, Atambua Timor Barat, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia.

I hope you are all well! I'm praying for you always. I love you!  
Take care

Meghan Kasun  
West Timor 2006/2008



Meghan and her friend in Nurobo

# JOY IN GIVING

*BrasHi everybody!*

I know, even this time I'll linger over my experience here in Brazil but please don't be scared of the length of my tale and be patient, I'll just take 5 minutes of your time...after all, I only write every two or three months!

One year and a half have gone by since I arrived in Brazil, but, if I have to be truthful, the time passes so quickly that it seems like yesterday. At the same time so many things have happened and I have been going through so many experiences that I feel like I've been here for a lifetime!

As I told you in the previous story, I am so happy to be in Brazil and the joy I feel is so great for all I've done and still do everyday. Even today I need to share that joy because I want to let you know how beautiful and rewarding it is to devote one's life to others, always being ready to help, doing the best you can to solve other peoples' problems ( in this way you also understand how futile yours are!).

After one year and a half I have so many things to tell you but I don't want this e-mail to become a novel so I prefer to focus on what we are building, day by day, in our community.

As you all know, one of our main purposes (but not the only one) is to promote children's education through many different activities, the most important being catechism classes and the recreation centre. For example, in May, the month dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Sister Amelia suggested that we say the Rosary all together every evening from Monday to Friday in St. Bakhita's Chapel. She encouraged the children to take part in the prayer, promising them an excursion out of Praia Grande, our village.

This initiative was a real success, the presence of the children at the prayer was incredible! Faithful to the appointment, they met everyday at 7.00 to pray all together! Even the presence of the children at the Mass and at the recreation centre was important to

attain our goal...you won't believe it...the majority of children haven't missed a day, some just one day, and some other have missed two or maximum 3 times! That means that in the last month we have met 40 children every day! In this way we have kept them away from the street by giving them the opportunity to strengthen friendship and build relationships based on solidarity.

Moreover, we have achieved another goal: some parents didn't let their children go to the centre alone, so they went with them and took part in the activities with the result that our community has been enlarged and strengthened.

To end brilliantly, on Saturday we took the promised trip. We were 80 persons huddled together in a coach for 50! In the morning, we went to the Mass in the Santos Cathedral to celebrate the 60 years of work done in Santos by the Canossian Sisters. In the afternoon, we went to the botanical gardens.

I was so delighted to see the children looking so happy about being in the park, watching animals or doing anything else, even the most insignificant things. I understood how important it must have been for them, even these little things (from my point of view) and how much they needed them. Some of the children have never taken trips like that, even with their parents. This is why it was a great joy for me to have the honour of sharing this experience with them!

Obviously not everyday of my stay here in Brazil has been as happy as last Saturday.

Sometimes you have to beware of how you behave because at any time you could hurt someone unintentionally, even for something you could have done but you didn't.

Sometimes I ask myself if my work is really helpful, but then, if I think about it, I realize that even if I could help just one person it

Michele in the day of his birthday



would be a real success! If everybody had the courage to help one's neighbour or just one person, the world would be with no doubt better for anyone...when there's a will there's a way!

The important thing is to believe and have faith in what you are doing because everything you do for the good of your neighbour won't be lost, even if you'll never see it. I'm the real example of what I'm saying as each member of this community gives me a lot, unwittingly, everyday. They keep doing it even if I don't show them, by practical means, my gratefulness.

I think for this time I've written enough. I send you all a tight hug and I wish you a life of peace, serenity and unselfishness! See you soon!

Michele Minunno  
Brazil 2006/2009





**Fausto , Tricia & Luca**

**Making Progress with Projects in Aru, Congo**

Greetings from Aru, Democratic Republic of Congo, where VOICA is taking root! We VOICA volunteers are now working with the Canossian Sisters to start up a bakery, establish a farm, set up a computer center and build the volunteer house.

The Volunteers - I (Tricia Pipkin ,Colorado, U.S.A.) arrived on September 1, 2007 and began teaching English at Adia Lemi high school, and giving English and music sessions at St. Magdalene of Canossa preschool. I plan to serve in Aru for two years.

Fausto Signoretto (Verona, Italy) arrived December 8, 2007. He wears many hats: driver, bakery assistant, engineer, farmer, electrician and general handyman. He also has committed to two years of service.

Luca Serotti (Brescia, Italy) arrived with Fausto on December 8. Already, he is becoming famous in

Aru for the delicious bread that he makes at the new bakery.

Simone Lovato (Verona, Italy) arrived January 22 and departed February 28. He was very busy employing his expertise as an electrician as he installed electrical systems and solar panels during his five weeks with us.

The Projects - Bakery: Construction of the new bakery and the large wood-burning oven inside was completed in December. Fausto and Luca lined the oven with corrugated sheet metal, soldered oven racks and began experimenting with different dough recipes and techniques for properly heating the oven.

On December 23, the long-awaited container arrived carrying the industrial-size electric oven and mixer. Luca began using the mixer immediately to mix the dough in the evenings during the three hours we have electricity from the main generator. Often Fausto and I also accompanied him for dinner and community nightlife at the bakery.

The electric oven required more electric power than the existing generator produced, so a new generator was ordered from Kampala, Uganda. Towards the end of January, Luca began baking with the new electric oven. Now he produces about 1000 rolls each day and it is selling well. We have also begun baking pizza, banana cake and corn bread. These are novelties for the people here, but they're catching on fast. The profits

from the sales at the bakery will help fund other projects in the province.

The bakery shop has also been a good place to interact with the local people of Aru as we sell the products of the bakery, candy and soft drinks. We are discussing ways to make it a social gathering place with opportunities for sharing God's word and for fellowship.

**Farm:** What was simply an open field near a year only ago is now the beginning of a working farm that will help fund Canossian projects. Nine cows, one

bull and two calves sleep in the newly constructed barn. A chicken house awaits the arrival of its hens and the fields are being plowed for planting. A tractor and plow arrived in the container in December, and Fausto worked diligently to design and build counter-weights for the tractor that would allow the plow to be used, and he has begun training a local man to drive the tractor. Planting will begin in the next month or so with the coming of the rainy season.

**Cyber Café:** The finishing touches are being completed in the construction of the cyber café that will house five computers that allow access to Internet and about twenty others for general use. These computers also arrived in the long-awaited container and Fausto and Simone loaded the needed programs and began setting up the computer systems. Internet service possibilities are being investigated and the solar panels await installation. Access to computers is extremely limited in Aru. We hope that this center will provide opportunities for the people of Aru, especially students, to learn computer skills and do research.



**Volunteer House:** Within the next couple of weeks we hope to be completely moved into the new volunteer house. Major construction was finished in January. Simone and Fausto, with some help from Luca, installed the large solar panels and accompanying electrical system that now provides twenty-four hour power for the volunteer house. The painting of the interior was finished at the beginning of March and plumbing is almost complete. Now we need to move the wood stove from the old kitchen to the new and put up the curtains. We are grateful to last year's short-term volunteer group, the province and all who contributed to the construction of our house!

**And One Project in Ariwara: Solar Panels for the Hospital!** During Simone's stay in Congo, he spent almost a week working with Fausto on installing the solar panels and accompanying electrical system for the hospital in Ariwara. At the time of writing, Fausto has returned to Ariwara to continue working on this big project that will give the hospital much-needed access to twenty-four hour power.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to make these projects possible. Please keep us in your prayers, that we are able to make Jesus known and loved through these projects and in all our work.

Tricia Pipkin  
Aru, DRC, 2007/2008



# Spiritual Exercises for Youth

I am looking for meaning...

For you who would like to walk, to fly, to run...and you who feel immobilized by many fears or by external or internal conditioning...

Have you tried to listen to the Lord, who puts in the heart desires, thoughts, relationships, and the will to work again?

Would you like to let Him talk to you heart? Would you like to listen to Him?

We invite you...

Spiritual exercises for youth are not a strange thing...

They come in this search of a true sense that we have together, sometimes through difficulties, while we run from side to side of our cities, our days, our relationships...when it seems that "there is no meaning".

The time of spiritual exercises is a cultivating time to build inner silence to try to listen to the voice of God by letting God enlighten our life, the questions that live in our hearts, and the choices that stay in front of us.

Canossian sisters and Father Mimmo Mucciarone will accompany us during this journey.

## Information Desk:

Sister. Giovanna Della Luna -  
cansegct@fdcc.org  
Sister. Filomena Rispoli -  
filosfdcc@hotmail.it

Tel.: 0039 095-437286  
0039 06-9576561  
Fax.: 0039 095-437207

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# Holidays in Mission Lands... Why?

Summer holidays are getting close and the people I meet ask me: "Where will you go this summer?" Full of joy I answer, "to a Canossian Mission in Brazil."

Their reactions to this answer are different: some understand this choice because they had the same experiences, others look at me as if I was going to the moon, and still others ask me why I choose to sacrifice my holiday for a voluntary service in mission.

I want to say that each one of us has his own story, so there is not the same answer for everybody. Each one of us has a different motivation.

What urges me is the faith in Jesus Christ and the love toward my neighbour, because in my opinion, this is the true richness of life.

In one of the VOICA formation meetings that we had this year, I remember Sister Pat making us reflect if we could pick a moment that changed our life. During my life there was the "pick moment" that put inside of me the desire to go to mission. In these last few years, my family and I



Elena

assisted two very sick people at the same time whom were close to my family. Taking care of them day-by-day with patience, bringing them to the hospital, and staying with them until their death, I got closer to the strong reality of suffering, and discovered the central part of the human being as our brother and son of God. Even through a kind word, a comforting word, a smile, a caress, we can give joy to a person who is suffering. From this experience in my family, a desire was born in me to enlarge this love and direct it toward the poorest and furthest people, as well as the desire to go beyond the small reality that surrounded me.

Jesus invites us to be close and to help all of those who suffer both in the body and in the spirit, because inside each person there is His Presence. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," (Matthew 25,40).

Mission is giving oneself to humanity through charity, love, compassion and gratuity.

Many people could say that there are also many poor people that we can help without going far away. Certainly yes! But we cannot remain indifferent when 20% of the people use all of the resources of the planet and the rest 80% have to survive with what remains. The poorest people in the Southern Hemisphere are also victims of wars, diseases, and exploitation, and they don't have water and the basic things to live a life with dignity.

We cannot always stand at the window

without doing anything except judging. It is necessary to do something, even small things that allow us to share, to serve, to help our brothers.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says: "You will always have the poor among you" (John 12,8) but for this reason we cannot get discouraged. In front of so much need, we think that the little gestures are not worth it, instead they are worth a lot, especially they are done with love.

We live in the material world and in riches, we have everything, we are always looking for more, and we are not happy.

Going to mission I will better appreciate the true values of life and rediscover the worth of many small things, like a glass of water, or a piece of bread.

It will also be a chance to open my heart and mind to a different culture and a different way of thinking than our own, though we must remember that it is not inferior.

For sure when I come back my heart will be full of joy and happiness, not for what I did but for what I received in spiritual and human growth.

I end by wishing and hoping that other people may have the fortune and the desire to live a month in Mission, to discover the value of universal charity, social justice, solidarity and love.

Elena Meggiolaro  
Short-term Volunteer  
Brazil, Summer 2008

## 1 Month and 9 Days...

This is the time that is between now and the day of our leaving for mission in Malawi!

We came to know VOICA by chance one day in November. In the midst of thousands of doubts, questions, and uncertainty, but with a great desire in our

hearts to live an extraordinary experience, we filled out the preliminary forms. The amazing thing was that after the first formation meeting, we understood that this was our place, our calling. The VOICA adventure began on March 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 in Brescia (Italy), the day of



Laura e Tony



the first meeting. We did not know what was waiting for us, if there were great experts (people with long missionary experiences) or professors ready to answer our bigger question: "What is mission?"

Instead was very nice and reassuring to find friends with the same doubts, fears and desires that we had. Friends with whom we got along very well since the beginning, and that made our approach to mission special. Formation meetings had an important role in our personal journeys of growth, because they lead us in the true missionary environment, starting from the example of the gestures and

the words of Jesus. Jesus, the One who accompanies us in daily life and who will come with us in Malawi as well. The moments we shared together during the meetings gave us the possibility to share with others our life and ourselves. The strongest moments of this formation were the three days living in Rome. It was a unique and unforgettable experience. We were fascinated by the beauty and simplicity of living together without know much about one another except for the same desire and love of being a missionary in a country far away from home.

We lived very deep days among prayers, songs, witnesses, reflections, workshops and games...nothing was missing! All of these moments of sharing and listening to the Word of God made us understand that our mission will not start in a month and nine days but we are already living it now in our daily life and in our preparation. So it is with our hearts full of joy that we are preparing ourselves to walk on this new road.

Laura & Tony  
Short-term Volunteers  
Malawi, Summer 2008

## A party of LOVE

The support, the care, the admiration, the enthusiasm, and the desire of our friends to be part of this project, the building of bathrooms and a playground for the primary school of Nsanama in Malawi, Africa, gave us the idea to organize a party where love for the others and the joy of loving were the main theme.

So we gathered all together and started to talk about the initial ideas. It was difficult! Who could imagine that organizing a party was so complicated! Find the place, the music, good food, games...and all of this at the cheapest price! Well, in the end we made it!

Saturday the 14<sup>th</sup> of June (the day of the party) we began at 1.00 pm.

After having cleaned the place, Francesco, Tiziano, Germano and I (Claudia), with the support of Sister Paola, put up all of the pictures and decorations, prepared all the food and drinks and have organized all particulars, desolation and fear of failure prevailed in us.

At 8 o'clock the first friends started to arrive...after an hour, a big crowd of people came, and there was the line at the cashier and at the refreshment bar. We were worried because we did not know

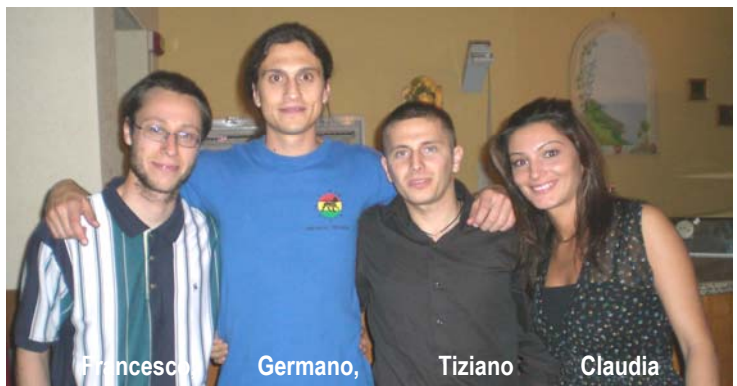
how to manage all of the people. But the night went on very well with live music, food, a lottery, the charity bazaar, and a lot of warmth and love from the people. There were friends, relatives, friends of friends, and strangers... our eyes could not believe it! In the following days we kept asking ourselves, "Is charity that easy and beautiful?" It was wonderful to see people around us contagious with our enthusiasm. As the magnet passes its energy to the pieces of iron, we pass on the desire to collaborate and we had an army of volunteers who helped us! That night could not have been done without the collaboration and the commit-

ment of everybody, and their help touched us very much. Without them we could not make it!

The theme of the night could be summarize with the slogan: "sharing and participation." Now we want to transform the money we collected (a lot of money) to help many people.

From our friends who came at the party we have learned how to work in cooperation, nourished by the will of doing something simple, something good. Now, thanks to you, we are ready to go!

Claudia Neroni.  
Short-term volunteers  
Malawi Summer 2008



Francesco

Germano,

Tiziano

Claudia

# VOICA Formation

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Kyle

My name is Kyle Kleber and I will be volunteering with VOICA for one year. I am from North Carolina in the United States and have just graduated from the University of North Carolina after studying psychology and religious studies. I have chosen to volunteer in order to live my faith by showing the love of Christ to my neighbors.



Elizabeth

My name is Elizabeth Ruginis. I am 21 years old from Rhode Island, USA and am volunteering with VOICA



for one year. I recently graduated from Stonehill College in Massachusetts with majors in Education and Mathematics. I decided to volunteer with VOICA because I have a passion for service and I am looking for an opportunity to serve outside of the country with the mission of spreading Christ's love before entering the workforce or pursuing graduate studies.

Magdalena

My name is Magdalena Opanasiewicz and will volunteer with VOICA for two years. I am 25 years old and I am from Poland. In Poland, I volunteered for a few years and I worked with handicapped children. I have always wanted to go on a mission in another part of the world. I feel the voice of God in my heart and I want to answer his call. Today I am in Rome for formation and I am getting ready to do that work. Please keep me in your prayers.



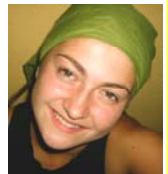
My name is Nicole Helmke and I will be volunteering for 2 years. I am 22 years old and from Wisconsin, USA. I just graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a degree in microbiology and French. I decided to volunteer with VOICA because I felt a call to serve Jesus in his poor and have felt a great sense of peace about this mission in particular.



Nicole

My name is Gosia, I'm 21 years old and I'm from Poland. In April this year, I met Voica. For me the most beautiful thing is serve others, helping, it's the way to give something from myself, love and compassion, but also learning for myself. Voica give me this chance, chance to "Dare di Più" (Give more) and be witness of God's Love for others.

Gosia





# we're looking for...

Do you want to run the risk of losing your life in the service of your neighbour imbued with the spirit of gratuity and love?

**We are looking for LONG TERM VOLUNTEERS** ready to serve 1-2 years in our mission sites in Asia, Africa or South America.

We are looking for young adults willing to give their own time with joy.

We are looking for teachers, both qualified and unqualified, animators, educators, nurses, doctors and health care personnel, and for all those who have the courage and the will to bring themselves into action.

## CIVIL NATIONAL & FOREIGN SERVICE

There is important news!!! May 31<sup>st</sup> we delivered VOICA Projects for Service with the Italian Government Scheme (Servizio Civile Nazionale e Internazionale).

From next year forward, it will be possible to leave for one of our missions as volunteer in civil service.

**Only Italian citizens** can enroll for this voluntary service scheme. Applicants must be between the ages of 18 and 28 years old at the time of the application.

The National Office for Civil Service will grant volunteers who are serving abroad € 433,80 per month, plus an allowance of € 15,00 per day.

It is also possible to enroll to this service for our VOICA Office in Rome. To these volunteers, the Italian National Office will give an allowance of € 433,80 a month.

**Lead me also,  
Spirit of God,  
strong and  
sweet,  
to run toward  
Jesus,  
to lose my life  
with Him  
serving those  
who, though  
they do not  
know Him,  
seek Him.**

### For further Information:

#### VOICA Office

Via Aurelia Antica, 180 -  
00165 Rome

Tel. +39 06 39375103  
Sister Pat +39 339 1160529  
E-mail voica@fdcc.org

Visit our web site:  
[www.voica.org](http://www.voica.org)



Hello, my name is Veronica Molina. I am 24 years old. I am from Quito-Ecuador. I studied Agro-industrial engineering in Honduras, and then a Master degree in food science in Texas. I had been working for 10 months before coming to VOICA. I decided to come here, because it was always in my mind, but was until now that I was able to come. I would like to go to any country in Africa and offer the best I can. I plan to volunteer for one year or two. Thanks for welcoming me here.



# CANOSSIAN GUYS!

I left everything to them, my heart, my mind, my thoughts, my certainty, my old life.

In four months I gave up everything for them.

I did not look for it and I did not want it, but it happened! It was a slow walk towards a new existence, and maybe they have done for me much more than what I have done for them.

But, who are "they"?

They are a group of boys, some of them already men, the others children who act like adults, all of them with the same life wasted on the streets without any purpose, without any dreams, without hope, only with the desire to get drunk and be violent.

These boys have so many talents but they don't know it. They waste their life because they don't know how to use it, because nobody has ever taught them. They think that they can find happiness in the bottom of a bottle of alcohol, they laugh for a few hours and then they abandon themselves to sadness.

These are my boys, they are the "Canossian guys."

Everything started by chance. One morning, the sisters organized a Way of the Cross to involve them in something new, and to talk to them about Jesus Christ and the sacrifice He made for us.

That day none of them talked to me, they kept distant from a *white, foreign woman* who had just arrived.

It was February the 29<sup>th</sup>...a miracle like that could only happen on a unique day, in a unique year like a leap year.

As a group, they were born on the first of March, my birthday, Saint Magdalene's birthday as well! One of them, named Christo, asked me to give a name to the group just born and without thinking I said: "Canossian guys." From that moment on, everything started.

I was their godmother because in a certain way I baptized them, but day by day I became their mother, their sister, their friend, their counselor. I don't know if I have been a good missionary. I have thousands of fears, many uncertainties, and I was afraid to make mistakes. But I am sure about one thing: I gave them my heart.

Everybody here asks me, "What did you do in this group?" My answer is always the same: I stayed with them!

It seems stupid, useless, but this is what I did, I spent my time with them. I talked with them, we shared our culture, I cried with them, I laughed with them, I danced with them, I stayed with them rather than leave them on the street all day long.

What did I do during those four months in West Timor? I lived....I lived with them.

The problem is that this time we spent together was like a healing process for them, and for me also, but it stopped so fast because my time there was over. I now feel hurt, I feel incomplete and I know that for them it is the same.

I would like to go back to finish what I have started, to build a project that may leave something concrete for them. I would like to go back because this is what I feel inside me, and I feel it so deeply that it is like having a volcano inside my stomach that is about to explode. It is very difficult to face the reality here, people think that I am running away from reality, I am wasting my time, I am making a mistake...



I think that I will return, I will entrust myself and my future to God, I will pray so that He may not leave me and leave my "boys." I want to go back and build something for them and with them. Only then I will be free and able to fly again

While I am writing this article I am listening to their songs, music that has united and accompanied us in this period, and a reflection come to my mind:

They are all dancing, they are dancing as if they have never done anything else in their life. It is enough to listen to the first notes of a song and their bodies start to move, their arms get ready to welcome the arms of a girl and their feet start to draw geometric pictures on the ground...it is a fantastic dance.

It is as if I see them in front of me, I look at them and I love them, I love all of them, I love their faces, the effort they make in dancing, I love the patterns they make with their hands. I would stay hours



to watch them and I would dance forever with them.

Then, I think of the reality, of facts and I realize that every time, after a celebration, when they stop dancing, they go back to their life. The desire to dance all over the world is replaced by the desire of violence and alcohol.

Maybe I am a dreamer, a romantic, maybe I don't have hopes and I am a failure, but I have to return to them to make them understand that they are so beautiful when they dance, when they smile, when they live, and that they cannot throw away their existence. They cannot.

Claudia Spadoni  
Nurobo, West Timor  
February/June 2008



## A Container of...Solidarity!

On Saturday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, in Italy, in a town of the Milan province called Buffalora Magenta, a container for Togo, Africa was loaded.

Paolo Alghisi was the leader who organized all of the work and tasks. With the efforts of some VOICA Volunteers and friends, Paolo has collaborated for this shipment destined to our dispensary, S. Bakhita, in Togo. The "mission container" ended well. Each of the volunteers gave their contributions, working based on their strength and experiences. Everybody was satisfied by the work they completed.

In the container were boxes of medicines, boxes of surgical gloves, instruments for surgery, a medical bed, an ecograph, boxes of material for schools, as well as clothes, food, cabinets, and many other things.

All of this was possible thanks to the generosity of our benefactors that once again have entrusted us and helped us to pour another small drop in the ocean of solidarity!

When everything seemed loaded, a small car came. Inside the car, an old man was driving with his wife seated beside him. They were Maristella's parents who brought the two last things missing: two

exhibitors for eye-glasses! Once again Providence is not only Divine but also creative!!

And a hearty thanks to all of those who helped to create this container, to those who organized it, managed it, collected the material, carried and loaded the goods, and gave money. We also give a special thanks to those who trusted in this voluntary effort!

**May the Lord reward  
your generosity in joy!**



# Are you sure you have everything!!!

I am writing this article because I feel the need to reach all of you who keep asking me questions about my mission by sending messages, emails or letters. Well, I am sitting at the "hot" table of my house in the Sudan (it's 45°C!!), and I am trying to collect in a few sentences how I live here.

The change from Cairo to El Obeid was very fast and also very shocking. The differences between a big city and a village in the desert are many, but the culture is the same: Islam. As you probably know, the Sudan is made by desert and burned land. Green spots ("Grassy areas" would be better) are present only near the Nile River, in the South Sudan.

There are about 500 tribes, some of them are nomads and they breed camels and cows.

It's nice to see them eating the baby grass when the rain season comes. The majority of the inhabitants live in huts made by rags and straws. The families who live in better conditions are those who live in houses made by mud and share their houses with relatives, chickens and goats.

Here in El Obeid there are also many buildings in cement, built in the Arabic

way, which means two entries: one for men and one for women. There are walls between the two sections inside the houses. This is to prevent a friend visiting the husband from seeing his wife.

One day I visited some girls who study in our mission, and their father and their brothers never came inside the room to see me, not even to eat the food the mother had prepared for us. The mother went to serve them in the other room of the house. Only children could come, but they could not eat either. These little houses look fine from the outside but they lack all hygiene facilities: running water, bathrooms, mosquito nets, window panes, a floor, and sometimes even tables and chairs. Instead they have a lot of beds! They have beds everywhere. They are not used only for sleeping, but they are used as couches, tables, and chairs as well. Outside the shops it is possible to see men laying down on beds. Drivers usually bring the beds with them above the bus so they can sleep when they get tired.

What is absolutely amazing is the sense of community and simplicity that these

people have. They gather together for prayer and for meals. There are two principal prayer times: at 10.30 am, named future, and at 4.00 pm. During the latter prayer, everything stops. The offices close and doctors cannot be found.

When it is time for meals, they gather together to sit on something, or on the ground. Then, they eat no matter the dust, the dirty smoke, and the donkeys.

A big tray put in the middle offers beans, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, bread and polenta of white flour. If there is a special celebration, goat meat must be on the table!

They eat with hands from the same plate and at the end of the meal they wash their hands in a jar of water.

It is true that ice cream doesn't exist but they have such strong human relationships that it overrides any expectation of elegance or refinement. I would lie if I said that I have gotten used to everything. Their hygiene standards and the fear of getting some viruses are a limitation for me and sometimes I have found myself in embarrassing situations. I try to act like them and eat their food when they offer it to me because I know that that little is all they have and it would be offensive to reject their offer. I realized that my face betrayed me so when it happens I say laughing "sti kawaja" which means I don't know how to eat it, and they start to laugh.

There are difficulties, day by day, month by month, in a culture so different. The weather is so hot, the language so difficult and the religion so strong that it would be impossible to overcome all difficulties without the presence of the people of GOD! There are only few Christians but when we gather together on Sundays, in Church, it seems like being in another world. Have you ever been in a stadium and by mistake went to the area



Federica with few women of the mission.

## Local houses made by mud



where fans cheer the other team? I feel I live like this all week, but on

Sundays, or when we have any religious celebration, I have the feeling that finally

I am with the team of my heart, and sing and share my joy with them so as to become a party!

The collaboration with these people leads into something that goes beyond friendship, something so deep and simple. Something that makes you believe that you are not alone, something that always assures you a support, an advice, a caress... maybe it's "human relationship?!?" Could this be the lost value in the streets of our Western cities, so clean and organized? Where moms gather in coffee shops, in the mornings, to drink coffee together and friends go to pubs to eat fast food but nobody is concerned with asking his friend if he has eaten, if he is fine or if he feels alone...

Federica Maifredi  
Egypt 2007, Sudan 2008

# TRIP TO ASIA

Our involvement in Asia began three years ago when we were sent as volunteers to mission in East Timor. This was a significant time in our lives personally, and it had a lasting impact on how we view the world. It was our dream to one day go back to the place which had made such a huge difference in our lives.

In April this year, our dreams came true. Over a one month period we had the opportunity to visit not only East Timor but also Jakarta, Hong Kong, China and Macau. Because of the generosity of the Canossian sisters,

we were able to learn so much more about these places and experience again the Charism of St. Magdalena amongst her sisters.

Our first stop was in Jakarta, where we visited our friend Lech and his wife Ewa. Straight away we were reminded of the stark reality of the tremendous inequality that exists between the rich and poor in this world. Coming from England, it was quite a shock to see sprawling slums interspersed with gated wealthy communities.

From Jakarta we flew to Kupang in West Timor and then onwards by bus to Dili. It was an amazing feeling to be back in East Timor. The sisters received us in Balide, where the specter of violence still looms over the place. There are still a lot of refugees living in fear of violence from local people. The convent, however, was a bustling place with a lot of people and activities. For two years the Sisters have been

looking after these desperate refugees, providing them with shelter, food and a safe haven. It was truly moving to see these people gather every evening for prayers under candlelight. They prayed for peace and harmony in their communities. These fellowship sessions would often go on for hours. It was nice to see the place so lively and full of spirit. A whole community has grown in this place.

We saw some of our students we taught while we were last there, which seemed like only yesterday. We experienced the same hospitality, love and affection. Things were still the same: we were offered the same sweet Timorese coffee and cookies like on our last visit. We also visited Baucau where we stayed with VOICA volunteers. There have been some changes, a new Sister is in charge of the centre, there are new students and fresh faces, but we were still made to feel very welcome. Sr. Candida, gave us the opportunity to lead some seminars and provide training to the students. It felt good to be able to contribute something from our part to help develop and enrich the lives of these young women. We learned how much more can be achieved when we combine our talents and abilities with





Jola

can we truly love someone when we do not really know them? It is our responsibility to share our faith in Jesus with others. God uses people like us to spread the good news. This was manifested so strongly in China, where the sisters have a mission where they work in the slums and help address the needs of the people. They work under difficult circumstances as they cannot operate freely. It takes great courage and conviction to bring the love of God to this people there. Their efforts to reach out under trying circumstances are an inspiration to us all. Our Christian faith should be vibrant and enable us to look be-

and take a step out in faith. We have to open our eyes to the needs of God's people around the world. We need to realize the opportunities we are blessed with, as sometimes an experience of living and working with our poor brethren can show us the truly important things in life. This trip and experiences during our travels brought alive our Christian spirit. We thank God for giving us this opportunity to realize what is really important in our lives. It is a challenge for us to keep alive this spirit in the days and months to come.

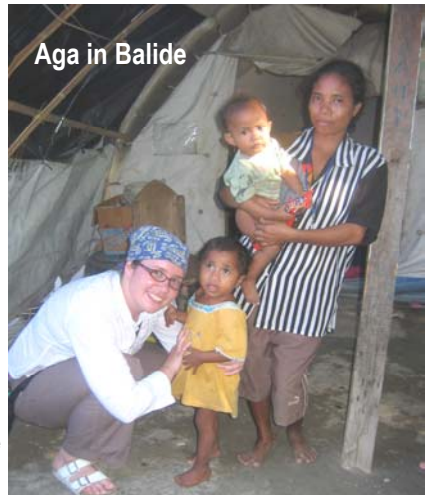
Agnieszka Milewska  
Jolanta Balazy  
VOICA Volunteers

those around us and how rewarding it can be to everyone involved. The centre in Baucau not only helps these girls to learn new skills, the Sisters are very diligent in following up and ensuring that the training is put to good use and that the students will not miss any opportunity that might come their way.

After staying two weeks in East Timor, we flew to Bali and from there we flew to Hong Kong. Hong Kong is a land of great wealth with ostentatious displays of the capitalist way of life. However we were so fortunate to be shown such kindness, hospitality and love from the people we met there. The trip was so enriching, we were welcomed in true Christian fashion by people we had never known before. We were touched by the lives of the sisters there, how they found their faith in God. It was wonderful to see how God is working in different parts of the world, and reaching out to people who are searching for his love. The experiences the sisters told us of how they found God was so inspiring and made us realize how strongly God is working today throughout the world in different cultures, even those that don't have a Christian heritage. The words of St. Magdalena, has a real meaning for us today. She said, "Jesus is not loved because He is not known." How

beyond the confines of our immediate surroundings and share the love of God with our brothers and sisters in need.

It is very easy to conform to the world and be trapped by our daily routine. It is easy to lose the spark of our missionary zeal despite having uplifting experiences of God's love. We cannot afford to lose this. We have to be alive and vibrant in our Christian life as well as keep the simplicity and the spirit of mission alive in our daily life. We have to be vigilant against complacency. We have to move out of our comfort zone



Aga in Balide



Jola & Aga in an elementary School in China



## From the Gospel of Matthew (13, 1-23)

On that day, Jesus went out of the house and sat down by the sea. Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd stood along the shore. And he spoke to them at length in parables, <sup>2</sup> saying: "A sower went out to sow. <sup>3</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, where it had little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil was not deep, and when the sun rose it was scorched, and it withered for lack of roots. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. But some seed fell on rich soil, and produced fruit, a hundred or sixty or thirty fold. Whoever has ears ought to hear." The disciples approached him and said, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" <sup>4</sup> He said to them in reply, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given <sup>5</sup> and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away. <sup>6</sup> This is why I speak to them in parables, because 'they look but do not see and hear but do not listen or understand.' Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says: 'You shall indeed hear but not understand you shall indeed look but never see. Gross is the heart of this people, they will hardly hear with their ears, they have closed their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted, and I heal them.' <sup>7</sup> "But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it. <sup>8</sup> "Hear then the parable of the sower. The seed sown on the path is the one who hears the word of the kingdom without understanding it, and the evil one comes and steals away what was sown in his heart. The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and receives it at once with joy. But he has no root and lasts only for a time. When some tribulation or persecution comes because of the word, he immediately falls away. The seed sown among thorns is the one who hears the word, but then worldly anxiety and the lure of riches choke the word and it bears no fruit. But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields a hundred or sixty or thirty fold."

## Context of the text

We walk along a quiet, good stretch of the road following Jesus: we are almost halfway on our journey. From the beginning of His manifestation among people, He did not stop to catch the attention of others, which included all of those who listened to Him. Starting from chapter 12 of the Gospel of Matthew underlines in an explicit way how among the crowd who listened to Jesus day by day, was born a group of disciples that follow Him with perseverance. Actually, among them Jesus chose TWELVE, and as we saw, He gave to them His power. Now He talks in parables to this mix of listeners, made of people who don't want to be challenged (unknown crowd) and by people who welcome His message (disciples)

## For an attentive reading

Underline the verbs that indicate: to listen, to hear, to understand.

How many are there? Is there difference of meaning inside the text in which they are written? Try to explain what "TO UNDERSTAND" means for you. The central meaning of all of chapter 13 is the question that the disciples ask Jesus at verse 10: "Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?" This question refers to a problem of all the Christian community: why do some understand the words of Jesus and others don't?

At this question, the Gospel of Matthew gives us the same answer as Mark. It displays a text of Isaiah, trying to show that the possibility to understand the language of the parables depends upon the attitude of those who listen, their availability to spend their life for the sake of truth. The first of them is the parable of the Sower, its explanation underlines this fact.

## MEDITATION

The disciples ask Jesus a question that sometimes we also would like to ask: "Why didn't Jesus talk in a more explicit way?" Still today when He speaks, in the history of the world and in our daily life, He is not very clear and easy to understand. Maybe Jesus was trying to explain to His disciples (as He still he wants to do it today) that His word doesn't want to be understood on a paper, as if it were a geometric problem where you can write and give a demonstration, but IN OUR LIFE AND WITH OUR LIFE. When I live His Word, the Word becomes clearer and clearer. I don't just understand what it wants to tell me, but also why. The Word faces me as a MIRROR OF THE TRUTH and it tells me who truly I am.

So, in this parable it is as if Jesus said to the listener, "Step back, to those who listen, but don't understand. What I say and I do looks strange, and without meaning." ...and for you?

"For those the mysteries of the Kingdom of God will remain hidden and the field of their hearts could not produce any fruit."

And for us?

## PRAYER

Oh Lord, please do not allow me to listen to Your Word with blind eyes, with closed ears to Your Truth, with a heart busy with my own interests, so I will not be tempted to think that You speak in an unclear way, or, that You want to be understood only by a few privileged people.

## ACTION

At the light of this Word, what could change in my life?

# NEWS

On April 15<sup>th</sup> Roberta Laini (Italy), a young obstetrician came back after 2 months of missionary service in Togo.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> Fedrica Tommasi (Italy) a young obstetrician left for Togo for 6 months.

On May 13<sup>th</sup> Maria Delfina Antonelli and Ilaria Ciavarella, two young nurses, came back after 2 months of service in Togo.

On May 29<sup>th</sup> in Venice, a charity concert took place. The money raised will be devolved to the VOICA Dispensary in Togo for the project "Nku doyovo" (Heal Eyes).

On May 31<sup>st</sup> the VOICA projects for Italian Youth was sent to the national Office of Civil Voluntary Service for the year 2009.

On June 7<sup>th</sup> a container for Togo was loaded. The container left for Togo on June 19<sup>th</sup>.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> Claudia Spadoni (Italy) came back after 4 months of service in Nurobo, West Timor.

On June 18<sup>th</sup>, the Summer Formation for Long Term Volunteers began. The New volunteers are: Magdalena Opanasiewicz, 25 years old (Poland), Veronica Molina, 24 (Ecuador), Kyle Kleber, 22 (USA), Elizabeth Ruginis, 22 (USA), Gosia Tonder, 22 (Poland), and Nicole Helmke, 22 (USA).

On June 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Canossian House in Verona, the short term volunteers had their sending off Mass. There are sixty-four volunteers who will go to Mission in Egypt, Uganda, Malawi, Togo, Congo and Brazil for 3 weeks this summer to carry out the summer projects.

In July, Meghan Kasun (USA) and Angela Fowlkes (USA), volunteers in West Timor; Dagmara Kmiec (Poland), volunteer in East Timor, and Monica Messa (USA), volunteer in Togo will come back as they will be finishing their VOICA service. THANKS for your generosity.

From August 19<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> in Moccone (Italy), there will be a course of Spiritual Exercises for youth from 18 to 30 years of age.

**WE THANK ALL OF THESE VOLUNTEERS THAT HELPED US TO  
REALIZE OUR PROJECTS FOR THE POOR WITH LOVE AND  
GENEROSITY IN THESE MONTHS.**

**16 THANKS FOR YOUR SERVICE.**

**MAY THE LORD ALWAYS BLESS AND ACCOMPANY YOU  
WHEREVER YOU GO.**

## My Hands

*Before You, O Lord, I  
open my hands,  
covered with ashes,  
marked by my sin  
and by my failures,  
that they be able  
to build and  
that You may erase  
the dirt...*

*My hands, closed,  
holding my  
possessions and my  
ideas, in front of you,  
O Lord, I open them  
so they can be able to  
let go of  
my treasures...*

*My hands, ready to  
lacerate and to hurt,  
in front of You,  
O Lord, I open them,  
so they may become  
able to caress.*

*My hands, closed like  
fists of hate and  
violence, in front of  
you, O Lord, I open  
them, so they may  
Be put in your  
tenderness.*

*My hands, get  
separated from their  
sin, in front of You,  
O Lord, I open them:  
I am waiting for  
Your forgiveness.*

**Charles Singer**