

events

is a news dossier
published periodically by
the Information Office of Opus Dei
in Southeast Asia.
the Prelature of Opus Dei
is an institution of
the Roman Catholic Church
founded by Saint Josemaría Escrivá.

新聞摘要

主業會東南亞區資訊社所發行之期刊
主業會是羅馬天主教會內的一個自治社團
由聖若瑟瑪利亞施禮華創辦

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3rd issue 2006

新聞摘要

二〇〇六年第三期

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主業會監督造訪黎巴嫩：和平是上主的恩賜

蔡浩偉主教前往黎巴嫩作了一次簡短的牧民探訪後，現已返抵羅馬，隨著近期爆發之戰爭，主業會監督鼓勵主業會的信友及所有信奉其他宗教的好友成為「和平的播種者」。

2006年10月15日

此四天行程由10月11日星期三開始。

監督稱：「在衝突期間，我們與各地眾多的基督徒聯合起來，深切地為這國家祈禱。對你們的痛苦我們感同身受，亦為你們難過。此經歷須喚起所有人在日常交往中向每一個人，逐一散播和平的信息。你們要成為主業會創辦人口中之和平與喜樂的播種者。」



主業會在黎巴嫩的福傳工作於1996年展開。基督徒和其他信仰的人士均有參加他們舉辦的培育課程。

在黎巴嫩期間，蔡主教採訪了艾蒂拉(Al Tilal)，一所位於貝魯特(Beirut)以北28哩貝布魯斯山區(Byblos Mountains)的國際專業、文化及靈修培育中心。他會見了該中心的職員、參加活動的人士、及居住在附近的家庭。

主業會監督促請所有在場人士，不分宗教信仰，一同為和平祈禱；他稱向上主懇求是維護和平的最佳方法。他前往位於夏理沙(Harisa)的黎巴嫩聖母聖所為同一意向祈禱。在聖體小堂逗留幾分鐘後，他來到廣場的聖母像前頌唸玫瑰經。

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稍後，蔡主教與貝布魯斯主教(the Maronite Bishop of Byblos) — 伯加拉雷蒙席(Bechaara Rai)會面。他們談論各方面的措施以幫助信友承擔起建設黎巴嫩天主教會的責任。他也與宗座駐黎福傳代表路易濟吉提蒙席(Msgr. Luigi Gatti)談論有關現時的形勢及教會對黎巴嫩及中東的期望。

隨後，他探訪了馬安禮宗主教(Maronite Patriarch) — 拿撒拉菲(Nasrallah Sfeir)。宗主教對艾蒂拉(Al Tilal)推行的關社活動尤感興趣，並鼓勵主業會信友及其好友繼續發展此類項目，切合黎巴嫩的需要。

監督與基督徒及信奉其他宗教的朋友聚會時，一再強調須以祈禱互相支持：「所有的祈禱、所得的恩寵、及在這段重建的時刻對每人的關懷一定會激勵我們多些對各式各樣的人談論天主，重新喚起他們樂觀的態度，各盡所能改進我們的社會。」

學生是「真理的尋求者」

主業會監督在羅馬的宗座聖十字架大學主持新學年開學禮時，勉勵教師與學生「永不將追求真理與友愛分隔開」。

2006/11/12

宗座聖十字架大學校監，主業會監督蔡浩偉主教10月9日主持新學年開學禮時說：「為學院學生而言，推動愛德意味著注重與別人一同工作。藉著與別人交談和交流意見及經驗，人成長為真理的尋求者。」

蔡主教接著引述教宗本篤十六世的第一道通諭「天主是愛」的其中一段去勉勵每一個人「永不將真理的探求與愛他人分隔開。一個基督徒是一個用心去看的人，他的心敏銳地看到別人的需要而準備就緒去回應。」

開學禮在新落成的、奉獻給教宗若望保祿二世的禮堂舉行。大學的校長，馬利安魯·法西奧啟動了禮儀程序，開學禮除了有學院師生外，亦有外交人員參加——其中包括伊朗駐聖座大使，穆翰默·法利沙達。

「這新學年，」校長說：「充滿著潛能去繼續去年在學生人數和種類方面的增長，及在研究方面開設新的領域。」

他加上：「我們有意繼續循這方向邁進，但隨著數目的增加而來的，是許多文化上的挑戰，令這大學，和在羅馬所有的宗座大學得到如此緊迫的責任。」

法西奧蒙席加上：「我們四周的世界有著豐富的人性和基督宗教的資源，能使千萬計的人為服務他人而獻上自己的生命，通常鮮為人覺察到但卻富有成效。這些人是地上的鹽。」

他強調：「然而，我們不能閉目不理那些困擾著當今文化和威脅著人的尊嚴的複雜問題。」

於是，「就是在這歷史時刻，我們天主教徒、其他基督徒、和善良的人們必須尋找一個清晰而肯定的據點：我們親愛的教宗本篤十六世的訓導權。」

今年註冊的1,467位學生中包括就讀大學四大學系(哲學、神學、教會法和傳訊)的930位，及就讀高級宗教研讀學院的537位學生。

他們來自世界每個部份代表著76個國家；以百分比計算：非洲是21，亞洲為13，歐洲是23，北美和南美為17，大洋洲是2。

重拾天倫於餐桌上

在出售自己的餐桌前請三思而行，因為家庭聚餐可重拾天倫之樂，甚至亦有相關書籍講述其可取之處。

五十年前，在大城市還未完全發展，全球化還沒出現，以及雙親不需都外出工作的時候，家裡每天都會有例行的晚膳。在大約五時至五時左右，做父親的會開始鎖好他辦公室的抽屜，穿上外套然後坐火車回家吃飯；而做母親的會準備一頓豐盛的晚餐，與孩子們一起圍在餐桌前晚膳。用餐時不光只是吃飯，還會互相細說今天所發生的事情，傾聽各人的事情藉以加深親子間的關係。

聽起來好像只是幻象？其實家庭生活本應如此，但何以現在親子聚在一起的時間卻那麼短暫？然而事實上在五十年前已有輪班工作的工人、長時間工作的通勤者及在職母親。有些專業人士每天必須工作至夜深才回家，有些父親則會在回家前到酒吧消遣，以致夜歸。而在用餐時則每每上演親子大戰，父母總要斥責孩子們「保持你的儀態」和「吃那些放在你面前的東西」。有時候，人們會因為得以從家庭的瑣事中逃離而鬆一口氣，即使他們沒把家事做妥，亦只會埋首於自己的興趣上。

同樣地，一齣澳洲電影「城堡」以滑稽及輕鬆愉悅的方式顯示家庭聚會的迷思——即父母與孩子一起溝通的好時光。這齣電影足以令那些一直逃避現實的人覺醒。這齣電影包含了在這個每天均需廿四小時工作、充滿個人主義及連繫著的世界中，那些被我們低估的、重要的有關家庭及個人幸福的事實。

青少年的恩賜

這是新英倫雜誌記者Miriam Weinstein在她搜尋有關食品專題時無意中發現的事實，這亦促使她撰寫這本“The Surprising Power of Family Meals: How Eating together makes us smarter, stronger, healthier and happier”。題目鮮明指出這項研究並非只依重回憶及迷思，而是有賴於技術上的研究。大部份的研究都跟青少年有關。

事實上是一項研究促使Weinstein開始她的計劃。哥倫比亞大學國家毒癮症及濫用藥物中心(CASA)嘗試阻止青少年消極的行為，包括濫用藥物、飲酒及吸煙，以及未成少女未婚懷孕。在一九九六年，他們開始尋找資料，試圖找出那些沾上惡習的青少年跟沒沾惡習的青少年的分別。研究人員驚訝地發現，在他們預設的行為中，與家人吃飯比前往教堂及在學校得到好成績還重要。

CASA每年都會為這項調查問卷進行修改。在2003年研究資料顯示，相比只跟家人每星期吃飯兩次的青少年，那些每星期跟家人吃飯五次或以上的青少年多不會吸食香煙(85%對65%)、喝酒(68%對47%)及吸食大麻(88%對71%)。他們亦很少會表現沮喪及感到無聊，而在學校多半會獲得優異的成績。

明尼蘇達大學Marla E Eisenberg及其他學者均在他們的研究中有同樣的發現。他們在1998-1999年間跟4767個住在不同地區的青少年進行資料搜集。去年的研究發現，慣常的家庭聚餐有助減少青少年產生沮喪的感覺及萌生輕生的念頭，特別是女孩子。雖然受訪的青少年表示他們跟家人有著聯繫，然而無法跟家人共進晚膳的負面心理及行為的影響持續，這亦把父母的婚姻狀況、學校成績、種族及社會經濟狀況考慮在內。據研究人員稱：「跟家人共進晚餐能使家庭有定時的聚合時間，以及使父母能與子女有協調的溝通，特別是女孩。」

報告指出只有約四分一的青少年在過去的一星期內與家人一起進餐達到七次或以上，而約三分一的青少年表示只跟家人吃一兩次飯，甚至沒有。但這種情況亦有改善的跡象：2003年度CASA調查顯示青少年與家人吃飯的次數有上升之趨勢——約每星期至少有五次是與家人吃飯的青少年，由1998年的百分之四十七上升至2003年的百分之六十一。

每天的例行習慣

如果家庭聚餐只能避免青少年濫用藥物，那麼這已經是值得付出的價值。然而它的功效不僅如此。這項活動發揮它保護孩子的最根本性質。正如Weinstein指出：「與家人吃飯能使孩子更能信任父母，而父母亦能親

近孩子。吃飯能聯繫我們的宗教信仰、種族及家庭的傳統。」

可靠性是Weinstein所強調的重點，她用「習慣」來形容跟家人吃飯。這不是一項特定的計劃，不需要每天都做改變，不需要我們盡力去改以使之成為珍貴的時刻。相反，這是每個人都能做到的。「這是在生理及社交需要中獲益，它讓我們實行一個真正的家庭：我們培養彼此間的感情，與各人分享所有事情，在生命中一起前進。」這種自然的親密關係與質素融合。Weinstein指出：「研究人員發現我們童年時最寶貴的回憶並不是昂貴的禮物、大型表演或運動項目，而是持久的關心、分享及與家人歡渡的時光。」

然而「習慣」在宗教的層面上亦無不可能成為餐桌上的話題，每代的孩子都會學習在用餐前及用餐後作禱告，而Weinstein以她猶太族的背景，並不害怕去喚起這種感覺。她說：「騰出時間與家人相聚，使我們的餐桌成為神聖的小地方，這是一個曾受我訪問的女人所說的，可謂忙裏偷閒。」我們會進一步探討與James Stenson所寫的“Parent Leadership”中指出家庭聚餐是「與家人歡聚的神聖時光，我們祈求上主給予家人祝福，以真摯的態度向對方問好。」

學校舉止行為及其他

Stenson 從餐桌禮儀中引申出此結論，使其重新成為熱門話題，尤其是成長於六十至七十年代的父母們發現他們缺乏教導子女如何有社交的技巧。正因如此，禮儀學校相繼出現，許多孩子報名參加課程，指導他們如何跟成年人握手至喝湯的禮儀。有些在職母親說他們沒有空閒教導自己的孩子，大概是因為缺乏或只有短暫的家庭聚餐時間。

全家人坐下來吃一頓飯，不受電視（在明尼蘇達飛行員研究報告中發現，約百分之五十三的受訪青少年在吃飯時會看電視）、電話、文字訊息、因約會而提前離開飯桌、互聯網及電腦遊戲的干擾，是學習餐桌禮儀的最好時光及環境。父母會成為年幼孩子的榜樣，在餐桌上可養成得體的舉止（或是糟透的！）

Weinstein 亦指出，在餐桌上孩子們會學到一些基本知識，例如均衡的飲食習慣；減少吃零食以免令正餐時沒有胃口；以適量的談話避免飲食過量造成過飽（身體約需二十分鐘感到飽感）或養成的挑食習慣。在這個情況下，孩子們會免於過胖，而女孩子們亦不會養成過度節食或有飲食失調的習慣。

更重要的是，正餐時間正是學習家庭背景、家庭觀念以及如何將這些觀念應用於日常生活及社會上的最好時間。這些價值觀可轉化為一種美德：即留意各人的需要、說點笑話提升家庭氣氛，及把最大份的甜點留給家人等。當孩子們協助準備晚餐及收拾碗筷時，他們亦學懂如何照顧別人及自己。

綜合上述所說的好處，為何家庭聚餐的次數還是日漸減少？或許這個衰退原因是從「電視配飯」的五十年代開始，吃飯的最佳伴侶是電視劇“*I love Lucy*”及“The Bob Hope Show”。從那時起，來自快餐業及電子產品競爭大幅攀升，造成主因。

而其他的促因是在職母親數目的增加（明尼蘇達研究顯示，家庭聚餐跟母親們不出外工作有關）；工作過度（特別是父親們）；孩子們排得密密麻麻的時間表（校隊訓練，學習游泳及上音樂課等）；及離婚或單親家庭。

在最近的華爾街雜誌的專欄內，紐約出版商Cameron Stracher 特別指出使家庭聚餐沒落的一個較少人留意的原因：父母不喜歡跟子女吃飯。他寫出：「Arlie Russel Hochschild 在“*The Time Bind*”中指出，當家庭變成跟工作沒兩樣的時候，父母便沒有理由匆匆趕回家吃飯。許多男士稱，如果要在時間跟金錢中做選擇，他們會選前者；但事實上，他們會選擇後者。畢竟，誰會願意理會一個只因他的飯菜中有些怪東西而鬧情緒的六歲大的孩子？留在辦公室總比在家好，吃些外賣，喝點啤酒，然後才慢條斯理地回家，回到家時孩子都已經入睡了。即使某些家庭的父母親都留在家中，他們多半都會等到孩子入睡後才吃飯。有位母親告訴我：「跟孩子們吃飯很沒趣。」

現在我們來到問題的根源：為何家裡會變成辦公室般？為何六歲的孩子會亂發脾氣？誰規定跟孩子吃飯是樂趣無窮的？從另一角度來說，任意容忍孩子犯錯又是誰的責任？顯然這個問題是牽涉到家規及父母的方式，而且不能把全部責任都推卸到女性的身上。

Stratcher解決問題的方法是他積極參與教育的工作。在處理他每天需五十分鐘的通勤時間時，他制定了「與父親晚餐」的規定，這是一個與孩子及孩子們於一星期內至少五次一起做飯的協定，達時一年。「做飯」不光只是站在一邊看，而是要幫忙一起做。你可以從他的網絡日誌按這位父親的故事作參考，他談及有關薄餅、麵包、黑豆墨西哥包，及有關學校的活動、友誼及家庭關係等，而其他的父親可隨意拿來作參考。

沒人可以漠視那些能使家庭分裂的壓力，使家中的成員仿如住客，各自吃飯及各自精彩。雖然不能把家庭聚餐當成維繫家庭及有助青少年的唯一途徑，然而Weinstein亦指出這項活動是最可行的一部份。只要花點心思，可使家庭聚餐能再次為家庭重拾天倫之樂。

October 2nd photo gallery

十月二日的相片展覽

A photo report about the founding of Opus Dei 78 years ago.

以相片報導 78 年前主業會的創立



The Central House of the Vincentian fathers, where Saint Josemaría received God's inspiration to found Opus Dei. The adjacent Basilica de la Milagrosa was profaned during the Spanish Civil War, and was left with only its walls intact; all the liturgical objects inside were destroyed. It was restored after the war.

聖施禮華在這所聖雲先會的中央房子內領受了天主的啟迪去創立主業會。

毗鄰的梅拉高沙大殿在西班牙內戰時遭受玷污及破壞，只剩下它的牆壁是完好的；所有在內的禮儀用品全被毀壞。它在戰後才被修復。

Saint Josemaría was on a retreat at the Vincentians' central house from September 30 to October 6. The third day of the retreat - Tuesday, October 2, 1928, feast of the guardian angels - he went to his room to pray. At that moment, while re-reading notes he had made of insights received from God over the previous 10 years, he saw that God wanted him to open a new path of sanctity in the Church: Opus Dei.



施禮華由9月30日到10月6日在聖雲先會的中央房子參與退省，在退省的第三天——1928年10月2日星期二，護守天使的慶節，他在自己的房間內祈禱。那時刻，當他在重讀過往十年來他所寫的從天主所領受的啟迪的筆記時，他看到天主要他在教會內開啟一條成聖的新途徑：主業會。



Next to the basilica's entrance is a plaque which states: On October 2, 1928, while doing a retreat in the house of the Vincentian fathers, Saint Josemaría Escrivá received in his heart and in his mind the divine seed of Opus Dei.

在大殿入口處的一旁安放了一塊金屬板寫著：當施禮華在1928年10月2日，在聖雲先會的房

內參與退省時，他在心靈和腦海中領受了主業會神聖的種子。



The Church of Our Lady of the Angels.

天使之母聖堂。



Bell of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels, now conserved in the Shrine of Torreciudad. The bell in its new location.

天使之母聖堂的大鐘，現保存在托勒斯特聖母朝聖地，它的新位置。



Patio between the Basilica de la Milagrosa and the Vincentians' central house. The room in which Saint Josemaría was staying on October 2, 1928, has not been conserved. "Three years ago today," wrote Saint Josemaría on October 2, 1931, "I was putting together some loose notes which I had been taking up till then; from

that day the mangy donkey [his self-deprecating term for himself] discovered the beautiful burden that the Lord, in his inexplicable kindness, had placed on his shoulders. That day our Lord founded his Work: from then on I began to do apostolate with young people. And to form groups. And to pray and get others to pray. And to suffer... I received a light to see the whole Work, reading those papers. Moved, I knelt down in my room contemplating the grace of God, and I remember hearing with emotion the sound of the bells of the parish of Our Lady of the Angels.

在梅拉高沙大殿和聖雲先會的中央房子之間的庭院。聖施禮華在1928年10月2日所居住的房間沒有被保存。聖施禮華在1931年10月2日寫道：「三年前的今天，我在整理一些多年直到那時所寫的活頁筆記；從那天那生癩的驢子 [我自我貶抑的自稱] 發現上主以它無可解釋的仁慈，放在他雙肩上的的美麗重擔。在那天吾主創立了祂的主業會：由那時起我開始從年青人著手做使徒工作，和組成小團體，及祈禱和要求他人祈禱，並克苦……我讀著那些紙章，卻領受了看到整個主業會的亮光。我感動，在我房間內跪下默觀天主的恩寵，我記得情緒激動地聽見天使之母堂區的鐘聲。」”

2006 年聖施禮華的一些恩惠

我非常感激聖施禮華

我想寫出聖施禮華所給予我的一個恩惠。那是另一個星期一，當我在路上行走著要回到我的辦公室時，我發覺沒有鑰匙在身。我幾乎從來不會失去我的東西，尤其是我的鑰匙。鑰匙是放在我手袋中的一個特定的間格袋內，我習慣每次都精確無誤地從那兒取出及放回我的鑰匙。然而那天當我打開我的手袋時，我真不能相信我的眼睛，因為它們不在那裏！就好像它們在空氣中消失了，這怎么可能呢！我不斷在回憶和找尋它們可能的所在地方。



過了不久我認為還是繼續工作直到我下班回家，心中在希望也許不知的它們被留下在家裏。然而當我抵家，到處找尋，卻怎也找不著。我有點不知所措，因為我實在茫無頭緒，我的鑰匙是甚麼一回事啊！既然這樣的事不常發生於我，(失魂？疏忽？)這令我坐立不安！第二天我再相借鑰匙來開啟我的辦公室。於是我決定熱切地向聖施禮華懇求這恩惠。

過了一段短暫時刻，我再詢問其他同事有否見到它們。有的！鑰匙在我工作的其中一間病房中找到了。我非常感激聖施禮華助我尋回的我的鑰匙。

C.H.L., 新加坡

2006 年 8 月 10 日

搖曳滑浪與皈依

一個下午的後段時分，在風高浪急的情況下，我正在滑浪板上搖曳滑浪。一個大浪衝來使我失去平衡，並將我猝得反轉，令我頓時失去繫在皮帶上的水翼。大浪一浪接一浪地湧至，一時間我只能看到白頭浪。我返回沙灘上，立時向主業會創辦人祈禱讓我的一對水翼重現。我

在距離沙灘大約150至200公尺大浪翻騰的地方失掉它們。我一遍接著一遍地用祈禱卡來祈禱，同時我沿著沙灘尋找。過了一會我看見其中一隻水翼躺在沙上。雖然每次我抬頭只看到浪仍然很急，我差點感到無望，但我繼續祈禱為要找尋另外那一隻。不久夜色低垂，而我開始步行回公路上。一對夫婦帶著一隻狗走近我，執著另一隻水翼，問是否屬於我的。他們在一公里外找到它的。

翌日我的一個信仰不活潑的朋友，問我可否幫助他去尋找他照相機的記憶卡，它只有兩公分乘三公分的大小。兩星期前他與他的孩子們在郊區散步時遺失了的，卡中有些是在一次旅程中所照的相片，而他不願失去了它們。我向聖施禮華祈禱，我們花了差不多一小時在那他們先前行走過的路徑邊行邊找，我們完全沒有主意它可能在那裏。突然我看見它在草地上，我的朋友完全不能相信他的眼睛。我告訴他一些因著主業會創辦人的代禱而獲得的恩惠，包括前一天我所得到的。現在我朋友與他的家人會在星期日參與彌撒。

A.M.L., 西班牙

2006 年 7 月 10 日

大大的小恩惠

最近我得到了許多聖施禮華的恩惠。我在本星期兩次請求他助我尋找泊車的位置，而我就在我前行的對面找到一個位置，完全不需要等候。堂區司鐸請求我母親為聖體聖血節的遊行而預備祭台，並且準備大約一百或二百人的茶點在遊行後享用。她真的很憂慮，因為沒有人提供協助，那麼她就必須獨力處理。我們向聖施禮華祈禱，在翌日彌撒後，一位女士前來提出幫忙去買東西和預備祭台。聖體出遊莊嚴地完成，而每事都進行順利成功。謝謝你，聖施禮華。

我感到猶如聖施禮華像聖神的播音筒般在我耳邊低聲耳語告訴我所需要做的事：小心注意那微不足道的事、細力地關門等等。我是非常感激他呢！

夏蓮妮, 法國

2006 年 6 月 27 日

他肯定由天上給予我們幫助

我在彌撒中得到向聖施禮華作九日祈禱的經文。我並不知道那台彌撒是為他的慶日而舉行的。我沒有理會那經文，但它經常在枱上出現，那時我正在處理一項似乎沒有可能會被通過的方案。於是我決定向聖施禮華作九日祈求，我很被那經文感動，它說：「望主使我能將一生的每一時刻及每一情況轉化為愛祢的機會，並為教會服務……」它令我明白可以將每天的活動以天主為中心，去服務他人，如此就能開始去愛天主。在這數月以來我仍然唸那經文，為那方案的通過而祈禱。我在一個晚上要求聖施禮華至少給予我一個徵兆以示天主在考慮我的請求，好使我至少能有保證和心內平安。許多人需要依賴這方案的實現。農民和他們的家庭會從這方案獲益良多。聖施禮華已給予我一徵兆表示他在為我的請求而代禱。雖然方案至今尚未實現，聖施禮華真的在增強我對全能上主的信德，他肯定在天上給予我們幫助。

V.P.C., 菲律賓

2006年6月8日

聖施禮華從天上向我眨眼示意

我們公司與一個客戶洽談一個特別棘手的合約已有一段頗長的時間，直到最後在昨天2006年6月26日星期一到達了「執行」的階段。當我在審視有關文件，熱切地想按下「付印」之鍵時，我吃驚地發現某特定條款意外地被遺漏了，如果在這階段提出這問題，我們的客戶當可利用這機會來製造麻煩，並要求重新洽談合約。

我站在面對知情不報和專業操守之間的十字路口。我看了看放在我桌上的一張聖母相然後舉心向聖施禮華：「父親，請在你的慶日給我一個奇蹟吧！」我用電郵告知我們的客戶關於那遺漏的條款，準備面對由他們和我的上司而來的批評。

當我們的客戶在數小時後，指示我付印已包含那條款的修正合約時，我幾乎可以看見我們的父親從天上向我眨眼示意呢！

I.G. 新加坡

2006年6月27日

墨西哥：我只需要二十張相片

一月底我在索諾拉省的卡博卡市進行一項拍攝工作。可是其中一部照相機壞了。我的原意是當我一旦把它拿到一家在瓜達拉加拉的可靠的店鋪時，就儘快修好它。不過幾個星期過去了，我對那照相機沒做任何事。

接著，我在三月中必須去歐博根進行另一項工作。理所當然地，我帶了工具箱，以為所有的裝備都齊全了。當我到達時，才發現帶來的照相機竟是那部壞了的照相機。這是一項很重要的工作，因此我努力修理，卻不成功。

然後我突然閃出了請求天主幫忙的念頭。完成這事後，我才想起自己所用的詞語有些不相關。以下這幾句話就是我說的：“聖施禮華，你知道你在做什麼，但是你一定要幫我。幫我修好照相機。我只需要二十張相片。如果你能讓它拍出那二十張相，我就可以保住飯碗了。”

明白到主業會創辦人對聖母的摯愛和信任，我還加唸了一遍聖母經。正巧，照相機就在那一刻恢復了功用。真是個奇跡！我在街上跪了下來，感謝他給我的這麼巨大的幫助。我說“巨大”，是因為我的道德觀念被徹底地削弱，我的專業身份也受到衝擊。一個專業攝影師怎麼可能忘記帶備正確的裝備呢？

非常高興地，我裝上了一卷36張底片的膠捲並開始拍攝。拍完20張後，不知怎麼地，那照相機又壞了。難以置信：剛好是我請求的數目！幾天之後我終於到達了瓜達拉加拉並修好了照相機。

西班牙：一個安全的防盜設計

於過去半年，我的花店平均一個月被盜兩次。在我胸口拿著把槍，又或在我身邊抓著把刀，他們就這樣搶走了我一天的收入。我絕望得連精神都崩潰了，要接受三個月的治療。

一天我把自己的憂慮告訴了我的一個常客，他說，“你看，我會給你帶張聖施禮華的祈禱卡，你就會發現他們不再搶劫你了。”不久，她就給我帶來了一份期刊及那張祈禱卡。我把祈禱卡放在現金抽屜裏，在開店前做的第一件事就是說：“看，施禮華，只有我一個人在這裏，所以不

要讓賊進來，要不我會發瘋的。”然後我唸了一遍天主經。

自此以後他們就沒再來了。只有一次，一個剛出獄的年青人打算把我綁起來，不過，帶著不尋常的鎮定，我將他說服了。他告訴我他的情況很差，結果我給了他一點錢幫他過關。起先他猶豫不決，最後還是接受下來。

我對聖施禮華給予我的幫助懷著莫大的感激。大家都知道我多次被劫。現在每當他們來買花，都會問我目前的情況。我就告訴他們整個故事，甚至給他們看祈禱卡。

(Translation) www.josemariaescriva.info (Testimonies)

尼利沙·拿奧

印度的新德里

我是個印度人，信奉印度教，而我對於每樣超凡的事物均感興趣。我與主業會的接觸追溯到它開始在新德里運作的時候，它曾幫助我去探求自己的屬靈道路。聽了關於施禮華和他的使命大大的激發了我。我差不多已閱讀過他的所有著作：道路、鍊爐、天主之友、等等。我對他很是尊敬，並且透過他向天主祈禱，求他賜我祝福和助我做個更好的人。



我想分享一些我所注意到藉他代禱之助的經驗。當我的一個叔叔病危時，我曾向他誦讀選自施禮華著作的一些很美麗的論點或段落，我的叔叔雖然一出生就是印度教徒，他也相信基督。他曾問我基督是否也為他而死。當他聽到我答說是的，他便滿懷快慰；數天之後他平安地去世了。

自從我養成了經常默想主業會創辦人的教導這習慣後，我發現較容易去面對人生的困境，而我會對著那些惡待我的人報以微笑，我更加忍耐、包容和憐恤他人。

日常生活中成聖的召喚

訪問士提芬曾 (Stephen Tsang)，一位在倫敦賽斯 (Chelsea) 工作的建築師：「在香港幾年的天主教學校生活並沒有使我踏足學校小聖堂。後來我到了倫敦入讀大學，結識了幾位天主教徒，他們對信仰是那麼自然不做作，引起了我的興趣...」



2006/05/29

很多皈依的故事，尤其是載於虛構小說中的，都是從失望、寂寞、甚至精神崩潰開始。

這些故事的主人翁，經過那些情緒上的衝擊而尋找到天主。但當生命面對新的轉變時，又會尋找另一些選擇。我的故事很簡單。一條在普通事物中追求聖德的道路已靜靜地為我鋪砌了。

我那平靜和備受保護的童年並沒有任何天主或信仰觀念。在香港幾年的天主教學校生活並沒有使我踏足學校小聖堂。後來就讀聖公會寄宿學校三年，也沒有受到多大影響。我發覺週遭的人很少接受信仰。一個急速的決定帶我到了倫敦入讀大學。建築系一年級時曾探訪過 Netherhall House。我從沒想過會留在那裏，因為父母建議買一小房子給我居住。可惜新物業的契約遇上一些困難，買賣合約預計不能在新學期開始前完成。由於急於找住宿，Netherhall House 便成為明顯不過的選擇。我預計只是短暫的居住。那裏有不同信仰的學生。不久我結識了幾位天主教徒，他們對信仰是那麼自然不做作，引起了我的興趣。

我也被宿舍內偌大的聖堂吸引著；建築上它是那裏最大的房子，裝飾也是最好的。不久，我嘗試花一些時間留在小聖堂，也慶幸沒有人查問我的來意。其中一位宿生教我默禱，使我立時感覺到與一位「私人的神」密切的聯繫。這獨特的體驗在這27年來一直沒有退減。很快我便參加了早禱聚會。我常利用聖施禮華著作的一本小書《道路》作祈禱，全無文化障礙問題發生。之後，很自然的發展便是開始參加平日彌撒，希望

與這位「私人的救贖者」多些結合和認同。

我很興在這段時間沒有人催迫我領洗，或者他們估計我需時頗長。我在利茲（Leeds）度過聖誕假期。在假期內繼續祈禱，即使下著大雪也參與每日彌撒。我的姊姊曾租車子接載過我幾次。她也是在一所天主教傳教會學校就讀，但卻有著迥然不同的體驗。我很清楚已接受了這份信仰的禮物。回到Netherhall House便表示已為領洗做好準備。但很驚訝地他們著我等候片時。有些評論家不時暗示主業會成員只對精英份子有興趣，並以強迫手段達其目的，這不是我的經驗。

天主教信仰其中最大的吸引是對聖母的敬禮。我忽然明白以前學習過的文藝復興藝術原來是生活信仰的表達。除了在宿舍中各式各樣的敬禮外，我也喜歡探訪「聖母貧苦者」（The Poor of Our Lady）。即使在漢斯特（Hampstead）這富裕地區，也有很多人受著孤寂和疾病的煎熬。家庭氣紛對了解天主教文化大有幫助。2月2日我終於領洗加入天主教會；事後宿生們為我大事慶祝。我的雙親起初有些憂慮，但眼見沒有帶來壞影響，便當了我的辯護者，在疑惑的親友前大力支持我的決定。

律師樓終於完成一切文件程序，買賣合約完成了。在離開Netherhall House前，是領洗後不足一個月的一個黃昏，正在唸玫瑰經的時候，我感覺天主清晰的召喚，我可以不離開自己的職業而奉獻一生為天主服務。可能當時我對天主教教理認識不深，但對這召叫是肯定的，也從此對這決定永不畏縮。當時我與一位女同學往來甚密，一起繪畫，但並沒有甚麼承諾。自然地，交付給天主便是自我完全的奉獻，無論是現在或將來。非基督徒的雙親也明白這道理，但以他們的中國文化來說，當然喜歡另外的選擇。

在日常生活中尋求聖德的教義已廣泛談論，也是教會日常訓導的一部份。每人的生活都有很多情況應用得到，每日都是充滿刺激的歷程。作為一位建築師也有很多機會予以實踐：無微不至地完成每樣工作、用心照顧每位客人的個別需要、耐心地為每一個計劃尋求獨特的解決方法、創作適合的設計好幫助家庭生活順暢愉快……等等。我永遠不會忘記聖施禮華的一番話：「當上主看到祭台及其裝置被打理得井井有條，祂會對負責打理的人特別憐愛，甚至不計較他們個人的缺點。人性和神性就在普通日常生活中融合在一起。那些人若忽視了單調乏味的物質化細節，便不可能從別處尋找到天主了。」

感謝天主給與的美好十年

嘉羅蓮桑尼是一位有三個小孩的職業女性。今年八月標誌著她已成為主業會 supernumerary 會員的第十年：“感謝天主給與的美好十年…”

2006/10/16

“媽媽，我可以再要一顆葡萄嗎？”我們三歲的兒子，安尼旭，在過去的二十分鐘裏不斷地提這個要求，一次又一次。我就快控制不住自己的耐性了。這時我明白到我可以聖化這個時刻。我現在以什麼方式回答他關係重大，而這是我能奉獻天主的一個機會。



這就是主業會于我的意義 - 盡力將每天平凡的生活和其細節過得完好。我害怕地想到如果我沒有遇到主業會的話，會是怎樣地去處理每天的生活。

今年八月標誌著我已成為 supernumerary 會員的第十年。我認為自己不值得一提，但是卻十分榮幸遇上了主業會。

吸引我參加主業會工作的，除了是聖施禮華敏銳，明快及富激勵的教導外，更是因為我可以繼續目前的生活而又能夠熱愛天主。

“每件平凡的事情中都有其神聖的一面，等待著我們去發現，”我們的創辦人說過。一個如此既簡單而又深邃的領悟形成了他教誨的中心。

我從聖施禮華的生活中找到很多怎樣把平凡生活變得精彩的例子，當遇到疑慮時我嘗試問自己“他會怎麼處理這件事呢？”…這樣的掙扎繼續著。

主業會給了我一條堅實的通往快樂的道路，但是它要求我們每天堅定不移地保持在這道路上。美好的事情是我明白目標在哪里 - 感謝我從主業會得到的指導。

這個八月，我就已有美好的十年要感謝天主…而安尼旭，雖然他不知道，卻從他帶笑的媽媽的掙扎中得到了一些益處(葡萄)。

國際學生組在泰國的美索特建立了一個孤兒院

二十名來自臺灣、印尼和新加坡的學生利用他們的假期來服務孤兒

2006/10/16

一個超過20名來自臺灣、印尼和新加坡的學生團在泰國的美索特花了兩個星期來改善和發展聖嬰孤兒院的設備。這所位於美索特近郊，靠近泰國和緬甸邊境的孤兒院由泰國的國立天主教委員會管理。目前，這所孤兒院照顧大約30個因政治動蕩而流離失所的緬甸兒童。

在工作營之前，這些來自新加坡國立大學、臺灣國立政治大學及臺灣附屬天主教山學舍的參與者(大學生)已通過個人捐贈者和從臺灣、新加坡、馬來西亞的早期的工作營參與者那裏獲得足夠資金以應付旅程和建築所須的相關經費。

庫恩匹克先生(Kuhn Piko)，一個提供他在建築方面的專業技術的緬甸志願者，這樣評論這些孩子們：「他們沒有母親、沒有父親、沒有家庭、沒有希望」。但這卻成為鼓勵參與者們的來源：一個幫助那些一無所有的人的機會，給他們一個家。

工作營的參與者在日曬雨淋及酷熱之下從事建築的工作。這座三房建築物，牆是用磚和竹建成的，屋頂則用錫鐵，可提供一間廚房，一間飯廳或閱讀室和一個小女生宿舍。「真是意味深長」，這是摘自一個新加坡國立大學名叫尼克的學生的意見。

在施工過程中，志願者每個傍晚都可以與小孩子們一起玩遊戲和運動。臺灣的學生們和赫伯特教授(Prof. Herbert)率領一個棒球「訓練營」，而其他的學生們則模擬一個世界盃足球比賽。在稻場旁邊建立了一個排球場呢。

參與者也可藉這個機會去參觀由主業會倡議的新加坡雷溫納少年培育計劃(Ravenah Study Program)在過去幾年來贊助的幾個計劃：發展聖文森特孤兒院的設施、改進兩所與窮困地區為鄰的學校的衛生設備、及為克倫幫移民的新生力量(New Blood school)建造一所教室建築物。

「看見這些緬甸志願者在新建築物內教導這些移民孩子是很有意思的，」塞格拉博士這樣說道。他是今次及上一次工作營的領導者。塞格拉博士及今次的參與者在參觀了新生力量(New Blood school)後，把上一次工作營的學生們提供的英文教材捐獻給這所學校的校長時說的。

來自臺北的漢思，被「孩子們簡單的生活，擁有如此少卻感覺無比歡樂」感動了。毋庸置疑，貧困和物質的匱乏意味著與今日富裕的社會相比，努力給他們提供一個家。新的友誼將使這些在美索特的日子變成難忘的經驗。

斯里蘭卡的海嘯救災工作

2006年七月在斯里蘭卡馬達拉市的一項自願活動為珍妮和其他十一位女孩子提供了一個機會，善用她們的時間及力量為海嘯受難者作出一些改進。

2006/11/13

關切的行動

令珍妮，十二個來自新加坡及香港的女孩子的其中一員，感動的是“嘗試去作出改進”，她不顧當時斯里蘭卡日益增強的緊張局勢，參加了一個自願服務工程，在2006年七月冒險來到受海嘯衝擊的馬達拉市。



這項工程由西班牙的NGO, Promocion del Desarrollo Cultural y Social de Andalucia (PRODEAN) 所開創，並由新加坡的Family Enrichment Society (FES) 和香港的東亞教育協會 East Asian Educational Association, Hong Kong (EAEA) 聯合主辦。一筆5,200元歐羅的海嘯鎮災款項可用作贊助這些自願工作者去當地工作，監管如何利用這筆款項。它團結了這十二位女孩子並使她們的經驗極有收穫。

準備

我們是一群九位來自新加坡及三位來自香港的女孩子，在出發前數月我們各自在自己的城市作準備。一位在新加坡的斯里蘭卡朋友，任瑪麗，給我們上一些基本語言課並講解斯里蘭卡文化。我們也舉行一些提高團隊精神的講座，還有天主教的社會教義座談會。兩個小組都為斯里蘭卡的小朋友準備了幾項活動和遊戲，例如扭汽球，折紙手工，唱歌。



為了提供機會給別的有興趣幫忙但不能去的女孩子，我們通過售賣自製曲奇餅和由一位名叫瓊安娜的建築系學生所設計的短袖襯衫籌得更多善款。一些朋友

和同事隨意作出了大方的捐贈。

透過這幾個月，我們彼此更瞭解大家。來自不同背景和信仰，我們一些是年青的專業人員，一些還仍在大學。為海嘯災民服務的共同目的團結了我們，也展開了我們之間新的友誼。

在馬達拉難忘的十天

海嘯發生在大約兩年前的2004年十二月，但當我們抵達馬達拉時很明顯的可看到還有很多事可做。查理斯何華華森神父是當地海嘯救災工作的聯絡人：房屋重建專案，為災民提供新工作技能的生計專案，以及為受海嘯影響的兒童而設的獎學金基金。他也是我們的聯絡人。

我們開始時是跟隨他探訪一些家庭。那些家庭現在大多數已住進新房子裏，通常是還沒完工的。很多人沒有任何傢俬。有人寫道，“他們的大方慷慨令我感動。不顧自己的情況，許多人在我們探訪時還為我們準備了小食，而那些缺乏條件的人則為此感到不好意思！這件事無疑給我留下深刻印象。”

當我們跟當地教區的一些年青人合作去完成古馬先生的房子時，真正的工作才算開始。同心協力地，我們粉刷了牆壁，用沙紙磨光了門和窗框，又鏟泥又推車地造出了一個花院，甚至於還種了幾棵植物。我們許多人從沒做過這些工夫，但完成一天的工作後，滿足之心令我們忘記了體力上的辛勞。我們付出微小的力量以鼓勵三十歲的古馬先生重新振作，他在海嘯中失去了妻子和三個孩子。

另一項建屋工作是幫本身帶病並和九十歲高齡母親同住的繆利太太建櫥房。我們徒手以大石頭和磚塊砌出了地基，而最後的石工則由一些男人完成。桃莉和另一個女孩子幫繆利太太的母親洗澡，更替她修剪指甲，使她大為高興。



在另一個受海嘯影響的地區威利格馬，我們為一家孤兒院的兒童及住院學生舉辦了一些活動。我們為每位參加者準備了一個“禮物袋”，裝著些他們久沒玩過的小東西。瓊安娜出色的扭氣球手藝令所有小朋友大為驚奇，他們都要跟自己的氣球造型拍照留念。而當茱迪教孩子們裝飾好曲奇餅後，平時普通的茶點便有了特別的新意。

善款不單為一所學校的落網球戲女生校隊購買了落網球，它還帶給我們和那些女生一場友誼賽。那群年青的女生打得真好！這場比賽很有樂趣，不過看到孩子們如此興高采烈才是我們最大的喜悅。愛麗斯，珍妮和凱薩琳更還有精力和她們打第二場比賽呢！



持續終身的影響

我們在馬達拉所面對的工作和住宿條件是特別差的。我們都需要依靠每日禱告和彌撒來得到力量及支持。眼見斯理蘭卡人在這樣貧苦的生活中仍保持著快樂，無疑讓我們感到更應珍惜一些平時習以為常的事物。

由PRODEAN 而來的善款幫助了三所學校重建圖書館並添置新書，威利格馬的教區聖堂重修石窠，而我們則能為五個在巨浪中喪失家園的家庭提供一些基本的傢俬和櫥房用品。斯理蘭卡人都衷心地表達了他們的感激之情，有些更以不尋常的方式：一位女士的禮物竟是她從自家花園採下的木瓜！



在許多不同的感謝方式中，我們都被他們一而再，再而三的大量道謝而深受感動。我們絕對是不值得如此多的注意。無論如何，正如珍妮所說，我們只不過是要“嘗試去作出改進。”

A Resumé of the Pastoral Visit of the Prelate of Opus Dei to Canada

September 21, 2006

Bishop Javier Echevarría arrived at Trudeau International Airport in Montreal on Thursday September 14th. Soon after arriving he met with several families from the Montreal area.

The following day, September 15th, he visited the Manoir de Beaujeu, a recently expanded conference centre used for retreats and workshops. There he consecrated the chapel and had get-togethers with more families, encouraging them to be very faithful to each other and make the home a place of affection and peace. In the evening he also met with a large number of priests coming from different dioceses, including Ottawa, Quebec City, Longueuil, Montreal, as well as some nearby US dioceses in Vermont and Massachusetts. He thanked them for the generosity in their ministry and encouraged them to love the Holy Mass and be very available to the faithful, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation. He told them how well he remembered St. Josemaría's habit of always recollecting himself in prayer before celebrating any Mass.



Montreal University Students

On Saturday the 16th the Prelate met with university students from Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, and Kingston. A first year accounting student asked how he could bring Christ into his studies. Msgr. Echevarría underlined the importance of honesty and coherence in studies, and compared the spiritual life to the daily work of bookkeeping, where one could see daily the pluses and the minuses in one's struggle to be more a man of God; at the end of the day, a good act of contrition where you ask forgiveness for all those minuses puts you again at balance with God who always forgives. He also encouraged a recently



Bishop Echevarría addressing the crowd in Montreal

baptized student from China to know his faith deeply in order to bring the light of Christ to his country.

General Get-together in Montreal

About 1300 people were present later that day for the main gathering that took place in the Theatre Maisonneuve at Place des Arts in downtown Montreal. He began by

saying that he was very happy to be in Canada which he said is a vast country with enormous resources and great potential. Saint Josemaría had sent the first members to this country in 1957. The Founder of Opus Dei had immense hope in the goodness of the people here, and prayed for Canada often.

"St. Josemaría was a great friend of this country. He prayed a lot for you. I cannot describe the intensity of his prayers, because he began praying even before I was born," he said. Responding to a question about how to juggle the numerous responsibilities of life, including work, family, home with the corresponding temptation of not having time for God, the Prelate spoke about the importance of finding God in the little things of each day. "Sometimes we may be tempted to think that God wants us to undertake big extraordinary things that require heroism. That may happen, but the vast majority of our life is made up of very ordinary events at home, at work, with the family and with friends. God is not disinterested in these apparently mundane trivialities of everyday. If we do them with love of God and an upright desire to serve others, we will have sanctified them."

He compared God's love to that of parents who are touched by gifts from their children even if it is something like half-eaten candy. God is pleased with our conversation with him, the bishop said.

Julie Gaudreau, a young professional woman from Saint Hyacinthe told the Prelate that in Quebec, many people think one has to go into foreign lands in order to help others, yet there is plenty to do here. She told him about a tutoring program she had begun in a school with many immigrants and that it was in thinking of others that one ends up truly happy. The Prelate encouraged her in her work and said that sadness is indeed the dregs of selfishness. He said we should write this in large letters. He guarded the audience against a common attitude in many people at the end of a long and tiresome day: they come home and plunge themselves in the newspaper, mute and without even a smile or a kind word for their spouse. This is not just a homey unimportant detail, he said, it is very important for the couple. He urged husbands and wives to "love each other crazily." He advised busy parents to keep a photo of their family on their desks. "Look at the picture and fall in love more and more everyday." With this example, the Prelate honed in on the essential point: the need to stay on the same wave length as those around us, particularly those most intimate to us in the family. This positive attitude will make families full of that cheerful warmth that should characterize Christian homes.

At the end of the gathering he invited the people there to pray for the Pope daily and to read the Catechism of the Catholic Church and its accompanying Compendium recently published by Pope Benedict XVI.

The Prelate's trip to Lebanon: Peace is a gift of God

Bishop Javier Echevarria has returned to Rome from a brief pastoral visit to Lebanon. Following the recent outbreak of war, the Prelate wanted to encourage the faithful of Opus Dei and their friends of all faiths to be "sowers of peace."

2006/10/15

The four-day trip began on Wednesday, October 11. "During the conflict," the Prelate began, "we joined the many Christians everywhere who were praying very much for this country. We suffered along with you and for you. This experience must stir us all to spread peace in our ordinary dealings with people, one by one. You have to be, in the words of Opus Dei's Founder, sowers of peace and joy."



Bishop Mattar, Maronite Bishop of Beirut, with Bishop Echevarria

Opus Dei began its apostolate in Lebanon in 1996. Along with Christians, people of other faiths take part in its means of formation.

While in the country, Bishop Echevarria visited Al Tilal, an international center for professional, cultural, and spiritual formation located in the Byblos Mountains 28 miles north of Beirut. He met with the center's staff, with people who take part in its activities, and with families who live nearby.

The Prelate urged everyone present, whatever their religious affiliations, to pray for peace; imploring God for it, he said, is the best way to preserve peace. With this same intention, he went to pray at the shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa. After spending several minutes in the Eucharistic chapel, he prayed the Rosary on the esplanade in front of Our Lady's image.

Later Bishop Echevarria met with the Maronite Bishop of Byblos, Bechaara Rai. They spoke of various ways the lay faithful are being helped to assume their responsibilities in building up the Catholic Church in Lebanon. The



Prelate also spoke with Msgr. Luigi Gatti, the Apostolic Delegate in Lebanon, concerning the present situation and the Church's hopes for Lebanon and in the Middle East.

Next he visited the Maronite Patriarch, Nasrallah Sfeir, who was especially interested to learn of the social activities promoted by Al Tilal, and encouraged Opus Dei's faithful and their friends to continue

developing that work, so necessary for Lebanon.

In his meetings with Christians and those who profess other faiths, the Prelate emphasized that all believers need to support each other with their prayers:

"All these prayers, the graces received, and the particular concerns of everyone in this period of reconstruction must stimulate us to speak more about God to all kinds of people. Help them renew their optimism in doing what each one can do to improve our society."

College Students, "seekers after truth"

The Prelate of Opus Dei opened the academic year at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome by urging the faculty and students "never to separate the pursuit of truth from fraternal love."

2006/10/11

"For college students, promoting charity means placing emphasis on working with others. It is in conversation and the exchange of views and experiences that people mature as seekers after truth," said Bishop Javier Echevarria, chancellor of the Pontifical University of the Holy



Cross and Prelate of Opus Dei in opening the new academic year on Oct. 9.

Bishop Echevarria went on to cite a passage of Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, "*Deus Caritas Est*" that urges everyone "never to separate investigation of the truth from love for others. A Christian is a person with a heart that sees, a heart that is sensitive to the needs of others and ready to respond."

The inaugural ceremony took place in the new auditorium dedicated to the memory of Pope John Paul II. The university's rector, Mariano Fazio, opened the session, which, along with faculty and students, was attended by diplomats--among them the Iranian ambassador to the Holy See, Mohammad Yavad Faridzadeh.

"This new academic year," the president said, "is full of potential for continuing last year's growth in the size and diversity of the student body and in the opening of new areas for study and research."

"We intend to continue along this course," he added, "but in addition to numerical increase are many cultural challenges that give to the work of this university, and of all the pontifical universities in Rome, such pressing responsibilities."

"The world around us is rich in human and Christian resources that enable thousands of people to offer their lives in the service of others, often unseen but nonetheless fruitful. These persons are the salt of the earth," Msgr. Fazio added.

"We cannot, however, close our eyes to the complex problems that trouble contemporary culture and menace respect for the human person," he stressed.

It is, then, "at this moment in history" that "we Catholics, other Christians, and all people of good will must find a clear and certain reference point: the teaching magisterium of our beloved Roman Pontiff, Benedict XVI."

This year's enrollment of 1,467 includes 930 students in the four divisions of the university (philosophy, theology, canon law, and communications) and 537 in the Institute of Advanced Religious Studies. Seventy-six countries are represented from every part of the world; in percentages: 21 Africa, 13 Asia, 23 Europe, 17 North and South America, and 2 Oceania.

The incredible reappearing family dinner

By Carolyn Moynihan

Friday, 16 September 2005

Don't sell the dinner table — family meals are making a comeback. There is even a book about their surprising power.



Fifty years ago, in an era left behind by the growth of mega-cities, globalization and the two-income family, there was a daily ritual called the evening meal. At 5 o'clock or five-thirty, dad locked his office drawer, put on his jacket and took the train home to where mom had a nutritious dinner cooking and the kids ready to sit down with their parents and eat. Not just eat, but also report on

the day, listen to the others and deepen family ties.

Fantasy? The family as it should have been but seldom was? Perhaps. It is true that even 50 years ago there were shift workers, longer-haul commuters and some working mothers. There were professionals who had to work late and dads who went to the pub before making it home—also late. Conversation at the table may often have consisted largely of fights between the kids and exhortations from parents to "mind your manners" and "eat what's in front of you". Everyone, at times, might have been relieved when they could escape the company of their nearest and dearest and pursue their own hobbies—although not before doing their allotted chores.

All the same, the myth of the family dinner as a time of bonding and harmony—hilariously and charmingly captured in an Australian film called *The Castle*—is persistent enough to give those who have lost touch with the reality, pause. Does it not contain an essential truth about family life and individual well-being that we tend to underestimate in our 24/7, individualistic, wired world?

Especially good for teenagers

It was this sort of question New England journalist Miriam Weinstein stumbled on when she was researching topics about food, and that led her to write *The Surprising Power of Family Meals: How Eating Together Makes us Smarter, Stronger, Healthier and Happier*. This is a title that makes big claims—claims that depend not on memory and myth, however, but on scientific research. Much of the research concerns adolescents.

Take, for example, the study that kicked off Weinstein's project. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, known as CASA, tries to keep young people from destructive behavior (the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, as well as schoolgirl pregnancies). In 1996 they ran a study to see what, if anything, distinguished the kids who engaged in these actions from those who did not. They were surprised to find that, when it came to predicting behavior, eating dinner with family was more important than church attendance or grades at school.

CASA has run variations on this survey every year since. In 2003 it showed that, compared with teens who dine with the family only twice a week, those who have family dinners five or more times are more likely to report that they have never tried cigarettes (85 per cent compared vs 65 per cent), alcohol (68 per cent vs 47 per cent) or marijuana (88 per cent vs 71 per cent). They are also less likely to suffer high stress and boredom, and are more likely to receive A's in school.

Similar findings have come from research by Marla E Eisenberg and others at the University of Minnesota, who in 1998-99 collected data from 4767 adolescents from diverse neighborhoods. Last year they reported that regular family meals also protected young people—especially girls—against depression and suicide. Even when teenagers reported a sense of "family connectedness", negative psychological and behavioral effects of missing family meals persisted, as they did when the parents' marital status, school level, race and socio-economic status were taken into account. The researchers say that "family meals may... provide a formal or informal 'check-in' time during which parents can tune in to the emotional well-being of their teens, particularly girls".

Only about a quarter of young people in the Minnesota study reported eating seven or more meals with their family in the past week, and one third reported eating family meals only once or twice a week, or never. But there are signs of improvement: the 2003 CASA survey showed an increase in teens having dinner with their family at least five times a week—61 per cent compared with 47 per cent in 1998.

A daily ritual

If family meals did no more than protect teenagers against substance abuse, they would be worth the effort. But, of course, they do much more. They protect kids because they have already performed a more fundamental task. As Weinstein puts it, "These meals give children dependable access to their parents, and parents access to their kids. They connect us with our religious, ethnic and family heritage."

Dependability is essentially what Weinstein means when she uses the word "ritual" to describe the family meal. It is not something contrived, that has to be reinvented every day, that we have to strain ourselves to make into "quality time". Rather, it is something pretty much anyone can do. "It takes advantage of basic biological and

social needs, for nutrition and socialability. It allows us to act out what it means to be a family: we nurture each other. We enjoy things together. We travel through life together." This natural togetherness then sets the stage for "quality" to emerge. "Researchers find that our most meaningful childhood memories are not the big ticket items—the shows or the sports events—but rather the ongoing sense of caring, of sharing, of spending our time together," says Weinstein.

But "ritual" in its more religious sense is not out of place in discussions of the family meal, as generations who grew up saying grace before and after meals learned, and Weinstein, with her Jewish background, is not afraid to evoke this sense. "Making time for each other, making our kitchen table what one woman I interviewed called 'a little holy place' creates a shelter in a hectic world," she says. We could go further and say with James Stenson of Parent Leadership that family meals are a "sacred time together—where we call down God's blessing on the family and treat each other with cordial respect".

A school of manners and much more

Stenson makes this comment in the context of table manners, a subject that is coming back into vogue as parents who grew up in the anything-goes era of the 1960s and 70s find themselves without the skills to prepare their children for social life. Schools of etiquette are springing up where children are drilled in everything from shaking hands with an adult to drinking soup. Some working mothers say they do not have the time to teach their children everything they would like—presumably because family meals are infrequent or rushed.

A meal that the whole family sits down to—and that is not sabotaged by television (53 per cent of teenagers in a Minnesota pilot study reported frequent TV viewing during meals), phone calls, text messages and early departures to meetings, the internet and computer games—is clearly the ideal setting for learning table etiquette. From their early years children will learn from their parents' example and gradually form the habit of good manners (or bad!).



They will learn, as Weinstein points out, such fundamental things as what constitutes a reasonable portion or a balanced meal, to limit snacking so that everyone is hungry at the same time, to alternate consumption with conversation and so avoid over-eating (it takes 20 minutes for our bodies to register satiety) and finickyness. In this way they will be protected from obesity and girls, in particular, from extreme dieting and other eating disorders.

The family meal also teaches kids how to converse in a social setting—to listen and to tell a story—and, apparently, gives them the lion's share of their vocabulary. In a study by professors from the Harvard School of Education, over a thousand new words in preschoolers' vocabulary had been learned at the dinner table, while only 143 came from being read to.

More importantly, mealtimes are a natural setting for acquiring family history, family values and awareness of how these values can be applied to everyday life and to problems and opportunities in their society. Most of these values can be turned into virtues around the meal table itself—attentiveness to the needs of others, lifting the mood with a funny anecdote, generosity in leaving the biggest serving of dessert for someone else—or immediately before and after. When kids help with meal preparation and cleaning up they are learning how to serve others and also look after themselves.

Just add willpower

With all this and much more going for it, why has the family meal declined? Perhaps decay set in with the TV dinner that made its appearance 50-odd years ago and proved the perfect accompaniment to family fare like "I Love Lucy" and "The Bob Hope Show". Since then, competition from the fast-food industry and electronic distractions have hugely multiplied, creating strong pull factors.

Among the push factors are working mothers (the Minnesota study showed a link between family dinners and mothers not working outside the home); overtime work (especially amongst dads); overscheduled kids (the school team practice, the swimming and music lessons); and separated or single mothers.

But, with the exception of the single mom (a dad who is alive somewhere but never at the table is a permanent psychological as well as practical obstacle to family dining), are not most of the reasons for not dining as a family, in the end, excuses?

In a recent Wall Street Journal column, New York publisher Cameron Stracher pinpointed one rarely-acknowledged reason for the decline in shared mealtimes: Parents don't want to eat with their children. He wrote: "Arlie Russell Hochschild noted in *The Time Bind* (1997) that as home becomes more like work, and work becomes more like home, there are fewer reasons to rush back home in time for dinner. Most men say that, if given a choice between time or money, they would



choose the former; in fact, they choose the latter. After all, who wants to deal with a six-year-old having a temper tantrum because there is green stuff on her pasta? Much easier to stay at the office, order in, drink a beer and trudge home when the kids are asleep. Even in families where both parents are at home, they often wait until the kids are in bed to eat. As one mother told me: 'It's just not fun to eat with them!'

Here we approach the root of the problem: Why is home more like work now? How come the six-year-old is still having temper tantrums? Who said dining with the children had to be fun? On the other hand, whose fault is it if it's torture? Clearly there are issues about domestic roles and parenting to be addressed -- and they do not all fall into the lap of women.

Stracher, for his part, has resolved to pitch in. While struggling with questions about his 50-minute commute, he has instituted "dinners with dad", a commitment to make dinner with his wife and two children at least five nights a week for a solid year. And "make" means more than just be there. You can follow this saga at his blog where he writes eloquently of pizzas, bread and black bean burritos, and of side issues like school fixtures, friendship and extended family—and where other dads are making free with advice.

No one should make light of the pressures that splinter the family today and turn members into flatmates who eat alone and find their community elsewhere. Nor is the family meal the whole story when it comes to family togetherness and the wellbeing of younger members. But it clearly is part of the story and, as Weinstein suggests, the most do-able part. Just add willpower and the family dinner should reclaim its place in the home.

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Favours granted through the intercession of St Josemaria Escrivá

I am so grateful to St Josemaria

I wish to write a favour granted to me by St Josemaria. It's another Monday and as I walked towards my office, I discovered I do not have the keys with me. I hardly ever lose my things and above all my keys. The keys are kept in a particular pocket of my handbag and it is a ritual that I take and place it back at the exact spot. However when I opened my bag that day, I could not believe my eyes they were not there! It was as if they vanished into thin air. How could that be! I kept recalling and searching where they could possibly be.



After some time I thought just continue to work until I get home, hoping that may be somehow they were left behind at home. However when I returned, searched high and low, they were no where to be seen. I was getting a little over-whelmed because I have no clue as to what happened to my keys! Since this does not happen to me often, (absent-mindedness? carelessness?) it made me lose my peace! Next day I had to borrow the keys again in order to open my office. Then I decided I will pray very fervently to St Josemaria for this favour of locating my keys.

After a short while, I asked some other colleagues again if they have seen them. Yes! The keys were found in one of the wards I worked. I am so grateful to St Josemaria for helping me find my keys.

C. H. L., Singapore
August 10, 2006

Boogie boarding, and a conversion

I was boogie boarding late one afternoon when the waves were quite rough. A wave caught me off balance and flipped me over so hard that I lost both fins even though I had them on a leash. That wave was followed by a whole lot more, and for a time all I could see was white foam. I got back to the beach and prayed to the Founder of Opus Dei that my fins would reappear. I'd lost them 150 or 200 metres from the beach, where the waves were breaking. I prayed one prayer-card after another as I searched along the beach. After a while I saw one of my fins on the sand. I carried on praying to find the other one, although every time I raised my head and looked at the waves breaking out there, I nearly lost heart. Soon the light failed and I started walking

back to the road. A couple with a dog came up to me and showed me the other fin, asking if it was mine. They had found it a kilometre away.

The next day a friend of mine, who didn't practice his faith, asked me if I could help him look for the memory card of his camera, which measured only 2cm by 3 cm. He'd lost it on a walk in the country with his children a fortnight before, and it had photos from a trip that he didn't want to lose. I prayed to St Josemaria, and we spent almost an hour going over the walk that they had done before. We had no idea where it might be. Suddenly I saw it on the grass. My friend couldn't believe his eyes. I told him about some more favours granted through the intercession of the Founder of Opus Dei, including the one I had the day before. Now my friend goes to Mass on Sundays with his family.

A. M. L., Spain
July 10, 2006

The case was unbelievably quick

A year ago we rented an apartment to a tenant who never moved in and never paid so much as one month's rent. We cancelled the contract in writing, he returned the keys, and a few months later I found a buyer who offered a very good price for the apartment. When I took him over it, I saw that the tenant had stored quite a lot of furniture in it. I contacted him to ask him to remove it, and he answered that the signature on the contract cancellation was not his, and the contract was still in force. Then a lawyer contacted me (one who had been demoted for undue appropriation) and asked me to hand over some money if I wanted to take back the apartment. As legal actions can take a very long time to come to court, I prayed to St Josemaria asking that this affair could be sorted without our having to pay anything. I called a removal firm to clear the apartment, but the tenant was on the watch, called the police, and filed a complaint.

At this point our lawyer told me that we'd have to pay if we didn't want to lose the buyer, so I took the sum of money the tenant was asking for and deposited it in my lawyer's office, and the tenant cleared out his furniture. I kept on praying to our Father, and for no apparent reason the tenant's side refused to accept the money that they had asked for and decided to go ahead with legal action. My lawyer returned the money to me. The case came to court a month later and the judge found in our favour. The court case was unbelievably quick in coming to court, and I attribute this to the intercession of our Father, the founder of Opus Dei.

A. M. L., Spain
July 10, 2006

A very tiny favour

On June 25 I went to buy shoes. I wanted to wear it for the Mass of St Josemaria on June 26 and realised that the shoes were too tight. I asked the Father to help me to feel comfortable so I could follow the Mass with attention. I thought this is a silly request but we can ask anything to the Saint. And I gave him thanks for his care.

M. P. T., Singapore
June 27, 2006

St Josemaría winked at me from Heaven

Our company has been negotiating a particularly tough contract with a client for quite some time, till finally it reached 'execution' stage last Monday 26 June 2006. While I was scanning through the documents eager to press the 'print' button, to my horror I discovered a particular clause which was accidentally omitted, and of which our client could have taken advantage to create a brouhaha and re-negotiate the contract altogether if this were to be brought up at this stage.

I was at a cross road between sweeping the dust under the carpet, and professional integrity. I glanced at a picture of Our Lady on my desk and raised my heart to St. Josemaria: "Father, please give me a miracle on your feast day!" And I proceeded to e-mail our client about the clause omission, ready to face the music from them and from my own boss.

I could almost see that our Father winked at me from heaven when, a few hours later, our client instructed me to print the amended contract with the clause in!

I. G., Singapore
June 27, 2006

Big little favors

Recently I received many favors from St Josemaria. Twice this week I asked him to help me find a parking-space, and I found one just opposite the place I was going, without having to wait at all. The parish priest asked my mother to prepare the altar for the Corpus Christi procession, and do the refreshments for after the procession, for maybe 100 or 200 people. She was really worried because she had to do it on her own, no-one offered to help. We prayed to St Josemaria and the very next day, after Mass, a lady came up and offered to help with the shopping and preparing the altar. The Corpus Christi procession was magnificent and everything went off very well.

Thank you, St Josemaria!

I feel as if St Josemaria whispers in my ear the things I have to do, like the Holy Spirit's loudspeaker: take care of that little thing, shut the door gently, etc., etc. I'm so grateful to him!

Hélène, France
June 27, 2006

A week later

I asked my bank for a loan to pay off some debts, though they had always turned me down before. One day I went into the cathedral and saw the picture of St Josemaria, and I prayed to him with such faith that a week later the bank agreed the loan.

Every time I am in need I pray to St Josemaria and he grants me all the favors I ask him for.

Y. S. R. C., Peru
June 22, 2006

He is surely helping us from Heaven

It was during a mass that I got hold of the novena prayer of St. Josemaria. I didn't know that it was his feast day which the mass was being celebrated for. I ignored the novena but it kept popping up on my table and at that time I was working on a project that seems to be very impossible to get pushed through. I decided to make a novena to St. Josemaria and I was so touched by the way the prayer said, "that I may learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and to serve the church..." it made me realize that I can start to love God by simply making my everyday activities centered in God, by serving others. I am still praying the novena for several months already, praying for the project to push through. One night I asked St. Josemaria to at least give me a sign that God is considering my request, that I can have assurance and peace of mind at least. So many people are depending on the project to materialize. Farmers and their family would benefit much from that project. St. Josemaria gave me a sign that he is helping me intercede in my request. Though it has not materialized yet, St. Josemaria is truly helping me strengthen my faith to the Almighty. He is surely helping us in heaven.

V. P. C., Philippines
June 9, 2006

Nilisha Rao

New Delhi, India

I am Indian, a Hindu by religion, and I am interested in everything transcendental. My connection with Opus Dei goes back to the beginnings of its presence in New Delhi, and has helped me in my search for my own spiritual path. Hearing about Josemaría Escrivá and his mission motivated me a great deal. I have read nearly all his books: *The Way*, *The Forge*, *Friends of God*, etc. I have a great respect for him and I pray to God through him to grant me his blessing and help me be a better person.



I would like to share some experiences where I noticed the help of his intercession. When an uncle of mine was ill, and close to death, I used to read to him some really beautiful points or paragraphs taken from books by Josemaría Escrivá. Although Hindu by birth, my uncle had faith in Christ. He asked me if Christ also died for him. I said yes, and when he heard this he was filled with happiness; a few days later he died peacefully.

Ever since I acquired the regular habit of meditating on the teachings of the founder of Opus Dei I have found it easier to face up to life's difficulties, and I have a smile for people who treat me badly. I am more patient, tolerant and compassionate.

A vocation to seek sanctity in ordinary life

Interview with Stephen Tsang, an architect working in Chelsea, London

2006/05/17

Many conversion stories, especially those found in fiction, are preceded by disillusionment, loneliness or even psychological breakdown.



The protagonists who eventually found God after such emotional roller coaster often find themselves opting for other answers when another life changing experience comes along. My story was simple, in a quiet way paving the way for me to receive a vocation to seek sanctity in the ordinary things of life.

My calm and protected childhood had hardly any notion of God or religion. A few years in a Catholic school in Hong Kong didn't even lead me to set foot in the school chapel. Three years in a Church of England boarding school didn't make much impact either. I realised that very few around me had any faith at all. A last minute decision saw me going to London for University. I visited Netherhall House during my first year in an architectural school. It never crossed my mind that I would stay there as I was looking forward to having my own place, a small flat my parents suggested purchasing. The solicitor had difficulties with the deeds of the new property and the completion of the purchase was not forthcoming when term began. Needing accommodation urgently, Netherhall House became the obvious choice. I thought it would only be a very brief stay. There were students of different faiths, I soon met a number of Catholics and was intrigued by the naturalness of their faith.

I was also drawn to the large chapel in the residence; architecturally it is the biggest room with the best finishes. Before long I was spending brief moments in it and quite happy that no one ever questioned my being there. One of the residents introduced me to the concept of mental prayer. There was immediately a sense of connection with a Personal God; this distinctive character still holds me now 27 years after the event. Soon I was joining in with the morning prayer session. I often used the little book 'The Way' by St. Josemaría, no cultural barrier ever seemed an issue at all. Then attending daily Mass was a natural progression, the desire to be more united and identified with this Personal Redeemer grew.

I was happy that all through this period no one ever 'pushed' me to embrace the Faith, perhaps they were expecting me to take a long time. I was in Leeds during

Ten Wonderful Years to Thank Our Lord For

Caroline Sawney is a working mother of three children. This August marks the 10th year she is a supernumerary member of Opus Dei: "Ten wonderful years to thank our Lord for..."

2006/09/09

"Mummy, can I have another grape" Aneish, our three-year-old had been at it for the past 20 minutes... the same request over and over again. I was on the brink of losing my patience with him. At this point I realised that I could sanctify this moment. The way I now respond to him did matter and it was something I could offer up to God. . . .



This is what Opus Dei means for me--struggling each day to live my ordinary life and its details well. I shudder to think of how I'd be dealing with my day to day life if I had not met the Work.

This August marks the tenth year that I have been a supernumerary member. I consider myself, besides being unworthy, privileged to have met the Work.

What had attracted me to the Work, besides St Josemaria's incisive, crisp and inspiring teachings, was the fact that I could remain in my current state of life and yet be able to love God well.

"There is something divine in every ordinary thing and it is for us to discover it," our founder said. An insight so simple and so profound is what is at the core of his teaching.

I find a wealth of examples from the life of St Josemaria on how to live my ordinary life well, and I try to ask myself in times of doubt "How would he have dealt with this?" . . . and the struggle continues.

Opus Dei has given me a solid path to happiness, but it calls for a constant daily battle to keep on that path. The great thing is that I know where the goal is - thanks to the guidance I get from Opus Dei.

Come August, I would have had ten wonderful years to thank our Lord for... and Aneish too, little does he know, would have gained some good (grapes) from the battles of his still-smiling mother!

the Christmas holidays, prayer and daily attendance at Mass continued despite heavy snow falls. My sister hired a car to take me a few times, she was also in a Catholic Missionary school but had a different experience. It became clear to me that I had received this gift of Faith. Upon returning to Netherhall I expressed my readiness for Baptism and was presently surprised to be asked to wait a little longer. Certain critics have at times hinted that the people of Opus Dei were only interested in the elite and often would use coercion to achieve their aims; these were not my experience.

One of the great attractions of the Catholic Faith is the devotion to our Lady. My previous studies of Renaissance art suddenly made full sense as the manifestation of a living faith. Other than the various devotions practiced in the residence I loved the idea of visiting 'the Poor of Our Lady'. Even in the affluent area of Hampstead there are many who suffered loneliness and ill health. The family atmosphere was another great help in understanding Catholic culture. It was on the 2nd of February that I was baptised into the Catholic Church; the residents put on a great show of celebration afterwards. My parents were apprehensive to start with, but seeing no adverse effect developing, they became strong defenders of my choice in front of the questioning of other relatives.

The solicitor eventually got his work done and the contract was completed. Before my departure from Netherhall House I felt a clear calling from our Lord that I can dedicate my whole life to His service without leaving my chosen profession. It was during the Rosary one evening, hardly a month after my baptism. Perhaps I knew little Catholic doctrine at that time but I was sure about the calling, and have never looked back on my decision. I was going out with a girl who was in school with me and we did paintings together, but there was no commitment. Naturally, giving myself to God meant for me a total dedication of all that I was and would be at that time. My non-Christian parents understood this too, although their Chinese culture would have preferred otherwise.

The doctrine of seeking holiness in everyday life is now common language and part of the everyday teaching in the Church. There are so many practical application in one's daily life that everyday becomes an adventure. Working as an architect provides many opportunities of realising this: finishing everything to the last detail, serving the individual needs of every client, finding the unique solution for each project, creating the right designs to bring order to family life etc. I will never forget that St. Josemaria said: 'When our Lord sees that the altar and fittings are well cared for, He looks upon those responsible with special love and overlooks their other defects.' The human and the divine intermingle in ordinary everyday life, those who neglect the humdrum material details may not be able to find God elsewhere.

International Group of Students Build an Orphanage in Mae Sot, Thailand

Twenty students from Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore spend their holidays serving orphans.

2006/09/11

A group of over 20 students from Taiwan, Indonesia and Singapore have spent two weeks in Mae Sot, Thailand, to improve and expand the facilities of the Holy Infant Orphanage. The orphanage, which is run by the National Catholic Commission on Migration of Thailand, is located in the outskirts of Mae Sot, near the Thai-Myanmar border. Currently, it accommodates around 30 Burmese children whose families have been destroyed by the civil unrest in Myanmar.



Prior to the dates of the work camp, the participants, who are students from the National University of Singapore, the National Chengchi University of Taiwan and residents of Heshan, an Opus Dei affiliated student residence in Taipei, secured enough funding from individual donors and former work camp participants in Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia to cover expenses related to the trip and the construction needs.

Mr. Kuhn Piko, a Burmese volunteer that provided his expertise in the construction efforts, remarked about the children *"they have no mother, no father, no family, no hope"*. But this became a source of encouragement for the participants: the opportunity to help those who have nothing, to give them a home.

Under the sun or the rain or the heat of the day, the participants of the work camp pursued the construction of a three-room building, made of brick and bamboo walls with a tin roof, to accommodate a kitchen, a dining or study room and the dormitory for the little girls. *"It is very meaningful"* was the summary comment of Nick, a NUS student.

Along the construction work, there were daily opportunities to play games and sports with the kids in the late afternoon. The Taiwanese students with Prof. Herbert led the way to a baseball "training camp" while other students simulated a world-cup football competition. A volleyball court was also set up next to the rice fields.

The participants also had the opportunity to visit projects that Ravenahl Study Program, an Opus Dei initiative for the formation of the youth in Singapore, had sponsored over the past years: the expansion of facilities in the St. Vincent orphanage, the improvement of sanitary facilities of two schools in impoverished neighborhoods and the construction of a classroom building in New Blood school for Karen migrants.

"It is very rewarding to see the Burmese volunteers teaching the migrant children in the new building", said Dr. Segarra, Team Leader of this work camp who also led the previous one, after visiting New Blood with some of the current participants to give to the Principal of the school English teaching materials provided by former work camp students.



Singapore-based Dr Ignacio Segarra (right) and Professor Peter Herbert (left) led the team.

Hans, who came from Taipei, was moved by the *"simplicity of their lives, how little they have and how happy the children are"*. Without doubt, the poverty and lack of material means and its contrast with today's affluent society, the efforts to provide them with a home and the new friendships will make these days in Mae Sot an unforgettable experience.



Preparing the floor and the posts for the roof of the new facility at the Holy Infant Orphanage.

For more information about the work camps or how to contribute to social projects, please contact Dr. Segarra at segarra100@gmail.com or Prof. Herbert at heshanresidence@cecea.org

Tsunami relief work in Sri Lanka

A volunteer project in Matara, Sri Lanka in July 2006 offered Jenny and 11 other girls a chance to make a difference for tsunami victims with their time and effort.

2006/11/13



A Thoughtful Initiative

To "take a stab at making a difference" was what moved Jenny, one of a group of 12 girls from Singapore and Hong Kong, to venture out on a service project to the tsunami-hit town of Matara, Sri Lanka, in July 2006, in spite of the mounting civil tension in the country then.

The project was initiated by *Promoción del Desarrollo Cultural y Social de Andalucía* (PRODEAN), an NGO in Spain, and jointly organized by Family Enrichment Society, Singapore (FES) and East Asian Educational Association, Hong Kong (EAEA). A tsunami relief grant of 5,200 euros was available to sponsor the volunteers who would work on location and supervise the use of the grant to its completion. It brought together these 12 volunteers for an extremely fruitful experience.

The Preparation



We were a group of nine girls from Singapore and three from Hong Kong, and we began preparing ourselves several months prior to the trip in our respective cities. Ranmalie, a Sri Lankan friend in Singapore, gave basic language lessons and explained Sri Lankan culture. We had other talks to help build team spirit and also a seminar on Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church. Both groups prepared several activities

and games for the children in Sri Lanka such as balloon-twisting, origami and sing-along sessions.

To give a chance to other girls who couldn't go but were interested to help, we raised more funds selling home-made cookies and T-shirts designed by Joanna,

an Architecture student. Some friends and colleagues freely offered generous donations.

Through these months, we got to know one another better. Coming from diverse backgrounds and beliefs, some of us are young professionals while others are still at university. The common purpose of service to the tsunami victims was what united us, and this was to be the beginning of many new friendships among us.



Ten Unforgettable Days in Matara



The tsunami occurred almost two years ago in Dec 2004, but it was evident upon our arrival in Matara that there was still much to be done. Father Charles Hewawasam is the local coordinator for tsunami relief work: re-housing projects, livelihood projects to equip victims with new work skills and a scholarship fund for tsunami-affected children. He was also our coordinator.

We began by visiting some families with him. Most of them live presently in new houses, often unfinished, and many had hardly any furniture. Someone noted, "What impressed me was their generosity. Despite their situation, many still offered us refreshments during the visit, and those who could not, felt sorry for not being able to do so! This definitely made an impact on me."



The real work started when we collaborated with some young people from the local parish to finish Mr. Kumar's house. Together, we painted walls, sandpapered doors and window frames, shoveled and wheel-barrowed soil to make a garden, and finally even planted some seedlings. Many among us have never done such work, but the physical demand was all forgotten with the sense of

fulfillment at the end of the day. We had contributed in some small way to encourage Mr. Kumar, 30, to get back on his feet after losing his wife and three children to the tsunami.

Another construction project was building a kitchen for Madam Muriel, who was sickly and lived with her 90-year-old mother. We manually laid the building foundations with large rocks and stones broken to fit one another, while some

men did the final masonry. Dorothy and another girl bathed Muriel's mother and offered her a manicure, much to the old lady's delight.

In nearby Welligama, another tsunami affected area, we had activities for some student boarders and children of an orphanage. We were able to present each child with a "goodies bag" with things they had not enjoyed for a while. Joanna's balloon twisting skill thrilled the children who all wanted to have photos taken with their balloon figures. After Judy had worked with the children at cookie-decoration, the usual tea-time cookies had become a special treat for them.

The donations not only purchased a netball kit for the girls of a school netball team, it also led to a friendly match between us and the girls. The young school girls were good players! It was great fun, but what gave us most joy was to see the children so happy. Alice, Jenny and Katherine even had energy for a second game with them!



An Impact that Would Last a Lifetime

The work and living conditions we faced in Matara were expectedly minimal. More than one found herself turning to daily prayer and Holy Mass for strength and support. Seeing the joy of the Sri Lankans amidst such poverty certainly moved us all to a greater appreciation of the things so often taken for granted.

The grant from PRODEAN managed to help three schools rebuild their libraries and stock up new books, the parish church in Welligama had its grotto repaired, and we were able to provide some basic furniture and kitchenware for five families who had lost their homes to the waves. The Sri Lankans were all expressive of their gratitude and some in most unexpected ways: one lady's present was simply a papaya picked right from her own garden!

Amidst the many gestures of gratitude, we were moved by the profusion of their appreciation. We certainly did not deserve so much attention. After all, as Jenny had said, we merely wanted to "take a stab at making a difference".