



Sr. Françoise Petit

Report on the last six years and issues for the Company today

Father Tomaž, Father Bernard, Sisters.

Yesterday, the Assembly was declared officially open by Father Tomaž, who communicated a message of trust to us and an invitation to remain in faith and attentive to the Spirit all throughout these weeks that are so important for the Company. Thank you, Father.

We thank Father Bernard for his constant presence with the General Council and for his very brotherly relationship with the Daughters of Charity. This is certainly what Saint Vincent and Saint Louise would have wanted.

Our thanks to Sister Evelyne for being here with us and remaining so devoted to the life of the Company and so close to the Provinces and each one of us in prayer.

Today, I am going to present you with a report on the past six years. However, before entering into the topic at hand, I will say a few words about the composition of our Assembly.

As you know, *“The number of delegates must be at least equal to the number of ex officio members. When the number of delegates is less than that of the ex officio members, the Superioress General with her Council determines a method to complete the required number”* (C. 87c).

This is what we did during our Special Council meeting in September 2019. As the number of ex officio members was 62 and the number of delegates 57, we had to choose a method to designate five additional delegates. After reflection and study, the General Council decided to ask for an additional delegate from:

- the Region of Albania, the only Region in the Company,
- the Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia because of its recent union with the Province of Thailand and the greatest number of countries (9) making up a Province,

- the Province of Rosalie Rendu because of the union of the Province of Great Britain with the Province of Australia,
- the Province of Madagascar, the Province in Africa with the most Sisters,
- the Province of North India, the most populous Province in Asia with less than 500 Sisters.

I would add that the average age of the 124 members anticipated for the General Assembly is just over 59 years old and that 71 of the 124 members, or 57%, have not previously participated in a General Assembly.

This time, circumstances related to Covid-19 changed both the organization and, to a certain extent, the face of our General Assembly, which in the end numbers just 116 members present.

Beyond the numbers, let us keep in mind that we are here to represent the Company as a whole, to be the voice of every Daughter of Charity, whatever the country or Province where she is at the service of Christ in our poorest brothers and sisters. It is essential to become ever more aware how much our diversity is an asset for the future, and that the enrichment is mutual. Let us be open so that our thought and reflection be as broad as possible.

The Church itself is beginning a synodal process, and we can be thankful for this. Let us humbly acknowledge the good fortune we have because the Company offers us the means to take this path of synodality whenever we prepare a General Assembly: the Visitatrixes' Inter-Assemblies Meeting to suggest a theme for reflection by the Company as a whole, Domestic and Provincial Assemblies, consideration of propositions during the General Assembly and the guidelines that will take shape in the Provinces depending on specific contexts in Local Community and Provincial Plans, which allow all Sisters to express themselves for the common good.

Synodality, however, is not just a question of organization; above all, it is for each one of us a state of mind to maintain, and the Ephata theme is clearly part of that movement: mutual listening, openness of heart and mind, desire to discover and understand different realities, giving up one's opinion sometimes, readiness to act for the Company as a whole.

From this time forward, we are invited to act in this spirit that can give credibility to all that might be passed on to the Provinces. The General Assembly is the privileged time to go forward together and serve Christ in our brothers and sisters together.

The life of the Company since 2015

To begin, a few words on what shook all of us deeply. I am referring to the sixteen months of Sister Kathleen's illness and then her death. It seems natural for me to begin with her because it should have been her here today. This was a difficult experience for each one of us. Fortunately, I can say that we experienced it together, that is, all the Daughters of Charity throughout the world, at a distance but in communion. As the General Council, we felt this, and it was a real support despite our many questions, the difficult day-to-day experience and very real and deep pain. This evening, we will celebrate in faith her passing along with that of all those who have left us since 2015, especially those who died as a result of the pandemic.

We wanted to offer you this moment as a time of thanksgiving and gratitude for what these Sisters were and for the mission that each of them carried out until the end of her life: mission with persons who are poor, mission at the service of the Company, mission of presence. In faith and hope, we will pray with the Daughters of Charity throughout the world because this prayer service will be live-streamed on the website of the Company.

Now, let us take a look at what has happened since the last General Assembly.

- A.** Some realities of the Company
- B.** Missionary commitments in the Provinces
- C.** Formation
- D.** Some significant events

These four sections, I hope, should give you an overall picture of the Company.

A

Some realities of the Company (4)

SHIFTS

Statistics

Statistics do not tell the whole story, but they are indispensable for a realistic reflection on the present and the identification of possible signs for the future of the Company.

Total members: If you look at the graph, the message is clear. For some perspective, look back to 2009 when we were a total of 18,832 Sisters; in 2015, 15,591 Sisters; and in 2020, 12,855 Sisters. The decrease is constant and relatively regular. The fundamental explanation is simple: the number of deaths is high and increasing, especially in Europe and North America. To this, we must add the relative decrease in the number of women entering. We have gone from 118 entrances in 2009 to 83 in 2015 and then 91 in 2020.

It is perhaps a little risky to try to predict the future, but we might imagine that at the next Assembly, we will still have about 10,000 Sisters, maybe somewhat fewer.

An overall study is not sufficient. Let us now look at the evolution in the number of Sisters by continent. Little by little, three lines are going to meet, in all likelihood: those of Europe, South America and Asia. What will make the difference is the average age. If we look at this variable since 2009, we note that it increases by 1 to 2 years every six years. In Europe, the current average is 77 years old (up 1.5 years), in South America almost 68 years old right now (up 1.5 years) and in Asia, 55.5 years old (up 1 year).

Women entering the Company:

In Asia, there were 33 admissions per year between 2015 and 2020, approximately 36% of the admissions to the Company as a whole (a total average of 90 per year over this same period). This number of 33 Sisters represents 1.87% of the current total number of Sisters in Asia.

Next, you see the blue line corresponding to Africa. The average age is 49.2 years old. The statistical progression seems slow, but it is exponential. In fact, there are about 25 Sisters who enter each year, representing 27.7% of the total new members for the Company and more significantly, 2.5% of the current total number of Sisters in Africa. The line should change shape and intersect the other lines.

As a comparison, South America has an average of 21 Sisters entering each year, which represents 0.70% of its total members, North America 0.42% and Europe 0.15%.

This reality does not shock us even if the question of vocations remains a mystery. Who knows, we could be surprised in Europe and North America! The Lord continues to call.

Whatever the case, these figures and percentages show that the physiognomy of the Company in six years will quite simply be different: less Sisters overall, less in Europe and North America, a decrease yet a less striking one in South America and Asia, and more Sisters in Africa. What will the average age be? It is possible that it may decrease because 13% of our Sisters are currently over 90 years old (72% of whom are in Europe, or 1,212 Sisters out of 1,688 total 90-plus year-olds).

I conclude this section with a suggestion: rather than considering the overall decrease in our numbers as an inexorable fall towards something “less,” look at it as an opportunity to seize for better closeness, flexibility and simplicity. This could be a call to convert how we look at our situation, convinced that Christ is waiting for us in it. That’s what hope is.

Departures from the Company

The departures which we will now mention, while always painful, are limited in number. However, it is important to reflect on this issue because it touches all Provinces.

During General Council, we studied what was happening in the Company, relying on statistics and looking more closely at the reasons for departures. We must admit that some of them are inevitable and sometimes even preferable, but the Provinces question themselves. What are the weak points that were not noticed and that become breaking points on some Sisters’ journeys?

In terms of figures, we observed that, since 2003, there are less departures overall in raw numbers per year. This is to be expected because the total number of Daughters of Charity is declining. From 2009 to 2014, an average of 88 Sisters per year left, and from 2015-2020, 65 Sisters. In 2020, there were 57.

We see that the situation differs by continent. In contrast to entrances, we can observe that the percentage of departures is higher in Africa than in Europe. They are the two extremes: 0.2% in Europe against 1.1% in Africa. It’s logical because departures mostly take place in the age range of 30-60 years old and no longer after age 80!

The percentage of departures in relation to the total number of Sisters is stable and even in slight decline (about 0.47%). In the Company, we could not speak of a “hemorrhage” (an expression used in the document, *The Gift of Fidelity, the Joy of Perseverance*), but rather of a constant phenomenon that we should examine lucidly but without fear.

How can we bring up the dimension of fidelity and perseverance in the current context? Do we need to reexamine formation programs? How can we strengthen community life as a place of formation, growth and mutual support in difficult moments?

RECONFIGURATIONS OF PROVINCES

Since 2015, 8 reconfigurations have taken place. In chronological order: Belgium-France-Switzerland, España-Sur with North Africa, St. Louise de Marillac-Asia, España-Norte, España-Este, San Vincenzo-Italia (with the Province of Naples), St. Louise de Marillac-Asia a second time (with Thailand, for a total of 9 countries) and Rosalie Rendu (Great Britain with Australia).

How might we evaluate this new organization? The Sisters from these Provinces could explain better than I, but they have expressed themselves on various occasions, and, in summary, this is what we have heard:

Positive consequences:

- ◊ Less Sisters are taken up by leadership roles, less Treasurers, less Secretaries. They have been freed to respond to apostolic calls. We can give thanks because it is one of the objectives of these reconfigurations.
- ◊ The richness of diversity is a reality that the Sisters discover in practice and that progressively leverages an opening of mindsets and sometimes a disruption of customary ways of acting. It takes time to get to know each other. We have observed the efforts of the Visitatrixes and their Councils to dream up gatherings and hold various ones by region, by theme, by ministry... There is no age limit to opening oneself, and the elderly Sisters are interested and often motivated by all these offerings
- ◊ When there are several countries in a new Province, the Sisters who accept to cross a border acknowledge, after the inevitable period of adaptation, that they have grown in their vocation on a human and spiritual level. Their perspective has expanded, giving them more energy. Sometimes, they even regret not having this experience earlier. Their availability is a witness and gives new momentum to the Province.
- ◊ Some reconfigurations have had the effect of prompting a new reflection on missionary priorities and have given Provinces a breath of fresh air.

More difficult consequences:

- ◊ Resistance to change and the lack of availability among some Sisters weigh heavily in a Province and limit missionary boldness. We must acknowledge this aspect that really requires working on Ephata, especially personally: being open to transformation, which translates into trust and availability.
- ◊ It is clear that the issue of distances is often mentioned by Sisters after a reconfiguration and especially when the Province includes several countries, sometimes with administrative restrictions on going from one country to

another. Distance is perceived as an obstacle to a close relationship with the Visitatrix. It also has a financial cost. It is not a question of denying these realities; nonetheless, we must also consider that Provinces that have not been reconfigured and that consist of only one country experience similar realities. Some examples: Madagascar, North or South India, Amazonia... in these very vast regions or countries, distances are huge and transportation means sometimes very limited. Visitatrices must thus spend two or three days to reach some local communities.

This feeling of the lack of a close relationship sometimes leads us to wonder about the role of Provincial Councillors. Are they sufficiently recognized? Are the delegations that the Visitatrices entrust to them adequate, well-defined and implemented?

- ◊ There can also be the fact that different languages within a Province are perceived as a real barrier among the Sisters. It is true that one could ask how a Visitatrix who only speaks one language could communicate with a Sister of another language. This can result in suffering, misunderstanding, frustration. It is a challenge in these new Provinces.

Having said this, each General Assembly insists on learning languages, and the reality is that no real progress is made. What could we do to make headway in this area? Some Congregations require that their members learn a specific language, in general that of their Founders. Another solution: necessarily learn a language from a list of choices? It is a subject to take seriously to lead to more actual results.

COLLABORATION

From the beginning, collaboration has characterized the life of the Company. It continues, in a different way, of course, and is tending to expand. It is now well-established that it is unthinkable to work alone, wherever we are. All the Provinces have this experience with international or local associations, other Congregations or partners. I would like to recall some more or less recent collaborations on the international level today, for the internationality of the Company also plays out in its participation in these networks.

- DREAM: Since 2005, this partnership has continued with Sant'Egidio in Mozambique (2 centers), in Nigeria (2), in Cameroon, in Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo), in Kenya and in Tanzania. In total, there are 8 centers that authorities in these countries recognize for the quality of their medical care and their respect of persons.
- Depaul (Non-profit at the service of people who are homeless) began in London in 1984 and has since expanded into several countries. The partnership with the Daughters of Charity comes naturally since it is based on a shared passion to reach out to people experiencing homelessness.

- Vincentian Family: In January 2020, a meeting in Rome brought together 250 leaders from various branches of the Vincentian Family. Some left heartened, having discovered to their surprise that the Vincentian Family is a reality. In September 2021, a video-conference formation session was offered to international leaders: “Pray, dream and collaborate in the service of those who are poor.”

You all know the Famvin Homeless Alliance (FHA) and the “13 Houses” Campaign to which the Provinces contribute generously, both on a local and general level. I invite you to visit the FAMVIN website.

- United Nations: You were recently informed about changes in staffing, which will take effect in the near future.

What the Daughters of Charity say in the commissions in which they participate is the voice of the servant-Church, and it is valued. On the website of the Company, their articles can be considered not just informational but also formative for all of us on major current issues in the light of the social doctrine of the Church.

- The institutional Church: The Company’s collaboration has taken concrete form through its presence in:
 - ◊ The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. You surely recall that in Summer 2019, Sister Kathleen was appointed a member of this Congregation. She was not able to put work into it, but it is a fact to bear in mind that the Church trusts the Company. I think that she would have been able to bring the different perspective of a Society of Apostolic Life.
 - ◊ The Dicastery for promoting Integral Human Development: two Daughters of Charity are present there. Sister Carol Keehan, as I had informed you, is a member of the Vatican Covid-19 Commission, created for the organization of an equitable distribution of the vaccine in the world, and Sister Mary Louise Stubbs is very involved in Project WASH, which aims to improve water access and hygiene conditions in Catholic health facilities in several countries.
- Collaboration with our brothers and sisters who are poor has progressed but deserves to be further expanded. How can we consider them not just as active players but also more as our brothers and sisters? Fratelli tutti offers us some good guidance on this subject. I imagine that the Assembly will afford us the opportunity to develop this line of action.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

I leave you simply with a few points of reference (5). I won't say any more now because our Assembly will be marked by it, and Sunday afternoon you will have the opportunity to informally discuss this crisis that has affected the entire world and is not yet over.

- On a human level, in the Company, 169 Sisters died as a result of Covid-19 in 2020, and unfortunately, 56 more Sisters died of it between January 1 and August 31, 2021. We could say that we have a 25% excess death rate compared to the average number of deaths annually.
- Provinces were impacted on an organizational level: closures of local communities earlier than planned but also the opening or revision of some works; concerning the renewal of terms of Sister Servants, extensions that shouldn't have occurred; sending on mission or vows for the first time that were postponed; the difficult issue of salaries, especially in schools and services receiving the public...
- The suffering of seeing poverty explode. Faced with this, you were haunted by a sense of helplessness; at the same time, your creativity increased tenfold, as well as your courage. We could give so many examples!
- The dramatic introduction of modern means of communication has changed our way of working and relating. You were obliged to have Council meetings on video calls, Provincial Assemblies... there are lessons to take from this for both our very being as Daughters of Charity and our actions.
- The financial impact on the Company. Sister Teresa Sanno will speak to you about it this afternoon.

My description of changes in the situation of the Company since 2015 was a little long; now, we will turn to the second point.

B

Missionary commitments in the Provinces

We observed that all the Provinces made ample use of the Inter-Assemblies Document to act on some priorities that were emphasized six years ago, in accordance with the actual possibilities of each Province.

Thanks to the study of Provincial Plans and Formation Plans and during visitations by General Councillors, we picked out the priorities that the majority of Provinces implemented. During the Assembly, you will have the opportunity to speak about this again, so here I will just mention the broad outlines:

- The peripheries: everywhere, and it's an obvious choice because they are so much in line with our charism.
- Migrants, with very specific commitments in the Provinces (in Italy, Ethiopia, Ecuador, USA, Brazil...)
- Emergency situations - mobile teams - Interprovincial missions: mobility is alive and well in the Company, even if we would always wish for more! (in Mozambique, Spain, Latin America, Ukraine, the Philippines...)
- Modern forms of slavery. For this final point, just a comment. Modern forms of slavery are a real concern for all Daughters of Charity, and some Provinces have indeed taken initiatives, but we are far from having reached the goal expressed in the IAD, *"a concrete commitment in each Province that will contribute to combatting modern forms of slavery."*

C

Formation

Provinces are very much aware of the importance of formation, both initial and ongoing.

- Your formation plans are complete, dense, detailed. They are based on the Initial Formation Guide while accounting for your contexts, the situation of young women who come, the number of Seminary Sisters and the availability of external formation programs. The trend is toward "personalizing" formation and stressing the human dimension. This is good and necessary, but perhaps we should be more attentive to balance the process' human, spiritual and Vincentian dimensions. This is simply our reaction when reviewing your plans.

- Creation of Interprovincial Seminaries: slowly, they are being established since in some Provinces, the number of Seminary Sisters is insufficient, and it is clear that young women need to interact and compare themselves with others, experience community life, enrich each other and get to know each other better. Moreover, as with Provincial reconfigurations, this also makes it possible to reduce the number of Sister formators and to pay closer attention to these Sisters' level of competence.
- The final draft of the Guide Preparation for vows.
- A trend seems to be developing, that of Interprovincial or continental formation sessions, especialmente a nivel de las Hermanas más jóvenes. Esta es ciertamente una puerta que debe abrirse aún más. Hay una demanda de las jóvenes a este nivel.
- Sessions at the Mother House continued. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the last session in March 2020 came to an abrupt stop before the scheduled end, an unforgettable event for both the Sisters present and the Councillors responsible for the organization of that session!
- A question remains unresolved for the General Council as to the need to update the Guide for Initial Formation or not. During this Assembly, it would be good for you to discuss this and offer your opinion.

Some significant events

In 2017, the 400th anniversary of the Vincentian charism was celebrated in all the Provinces, and a good number of Daughters of Charity participated in the Symposium in Rome.

In 2018, the Daughters of Charity returned to Fiji (Province of South India).

In 2019, a retreat of the Province St. Louise de Marillac-Asia at the Mother House allowed several young Sisters from China to come to Paris.

The same year, the Daughters of Charity arrived in Papua-New Guinea (Province of St. Louise de Marillac-Asia).

In 2020: the website of the Company was updated with a new team. The Sisters are from six Provinces (Quasi-Province, Belgium-France-Switzerland, St. Louise de Marillac-Asia, Mozambique, Warsaw, Madrid-Santa Luisa). They did much work on video conferences, and almost all of them were able to gather in July 2021 to prepare for communication during the General Assembly.

Late 2020: arrival of the Daughters of Charity in Senegal (Province of España-Sur).

In 2021: return of the Daughters of Charity to Uzbekistan (Province of Chelmno-Poznan).

Recently, the membership of the International Finance Commission was changed in part with the replacement of a Sister from the Province of Slovenia by a Sister from the Province of Central Africa.

2

Never-ending conversions

In addition to the major challenges, primarily missionary, and other challenges that you have studied and that you will further explore, I am going to put into words, because I think you are already aware of them, what I call “never-ending conversions” that could further strengthen the vitality of the Company.

A

Faith and trust: foundations of our fidelity

Faith is no longer self-evident in a great number of countries, but neither is simple trust.

Concerning faith, the Inter-Assemblies Document brought out the need to revitalize “*the quality of spiritual life*” and to “*return constantly to the Gospel.*” The section on “*A close relationship with Christ*” also offers practical avenues. It is an ongoing issue, and we are so convinced of this that we risk hearing it without really drawing sufficient consequences for a conversion that never ends and that is nonetheless essential, both on a personal level and for the Company.

Let us shore up our faith life, which is all the more necessary since we live in a superficial society that can have a powerful influence on us. Our life is founded on the cornerstone of Christ, nothing else. This is a call to strengthen our interior life, to draw constantly from it in order to remain real disciples of Jesus and missionaries of the Gospel and to form younger Sisters in this aspect so that they might know the joy of the gift of self and the joy of fidelity.

Trust: On the whole, there is not necessarily a crisis of trust, but it has been put aside. People think they can live autonomously, without depending on others. The individual trumps everything and “trusting” is sometimes considered an obstacle to freedom. We also live in an era of doubt in which everything is quite often questioned, especially when it comes from authority figures, politicians, scientists (for example, concerning global warming, the pandemic, vaccines...). People do not grant others their trust.

Suspicion becomes a reflex, which is added to a lack of nuance in discussions or dialogue, resulting in hardening ideologies and the temptation of individualistic self-centeredness and nationalistic or ethnic insularism.

All these tendencies can insidiously seep into our own life. This can come out in weaker relationships, for trust is the basis of encounter, in discouragement, joylessness, even leaving one's vocation. Constant distrust of everything and everyone can poison our personal life and our local communities. It seems to me that we need to locate these thorns and pull them out as quickly as possible. Trust, which is not the same as gullibility nor blindness, means believing in the other person, believing in what is possible. What witness can we offer of this?

Faith supports us, but it must be nourished. Trust gives us a joyful, generous and free confidence, but it must be built. It is up to us to find the means because these are the foundations of our fidelity.

B **The service of fraternity: a mission for today**

You have studied the theme of “living together,” and we will continue our reflection during this Assembly. “Living together” has its two components, community and relationships outside it.

The Sisters 7-10 years of vocation placed a lot of emphasis on the importance they give to relationships within community. It seems that they are aware of being missionary disciples and express their need for community support and a place to renew themselves for the mission.

For the same reason, you also highlighted repeatedly during your Provincial Assemblies that the local community should be this place of faith, fraternity and formation. You believe that, in addition to this dimension of support, community “living together” is also a witness, that of the Gospel.

Today more than ever, fraternity is what the presence of a community can offer the world. Experiencing its lack because of the pandemic has made evident what every human being needs: real, not virtual, relationships that are faithful and authentic.

The law can, or could, offer more equality, security, health and even education, but while fraternity could be decreed, it cannot be legislated, at least not completely. However, we all know now that it is a priority for a world experiencing indifference, fear, violence, disrespect of human dignity, etc. Otherwise, how could we explain the excitement surrounding Fratelli tutti?

How could we more fully be a presence that places humanity at the center and considers the quality of relationships essential? Relationships among us, relationships with our brothers and sisters. How can we make them simpler, more loving? How can we make sure that all the means that we must use do not become priorities that take up all our attention, in the name of efficiency?

Today, perhaps, we should be attentive to giving more importance to human aspects, to taking time, being fully present with our brothers and sisters, tending to our relationships, allowing ourselves to be moved, like the Good Samaritan, being able to put ourselves in the other person's shoes, working on our relationship with Christ because He is the source of all that we are and can be with our brothers and sisters.

Fraternity, considered as an attitude, a way of being, could take on a full-fledged missionary dimension, another way to be present to the world.

It involves envisioning a real conversion: changing and even evangelizing our relationship to time, technology, the community-mission balance and our way of relating to others.

The challenge of hope: sign of the resurrection

Life has changed, society changes. Against a background of a crisis, we constantly hear the call to generously strengthen our gift of self to God in the service of our brothers and sisters, an invitation that the Holy Spirit whispers to us. Saint Vincent and Saint Louise continue to inspire us and help us to keep newness and energy in our vocation. *“If the love of God is a fire, zeal is its flame”* (Saint Vincent, August 22, 1659, CCD XII, 250).

Zeal, creativity and courage exist in the Provinces. This reality is a source of hope for building the future together. Just read all those testimonies in the Echoes and on the website. It is the life of the Company.

The motor driving all this is faith, hope. Hope is a movement, a dynamic energy that pushes forward, that opens breaches towards what is possible. It is a call to take life as it is and decide to be involved in it. Hope does not remove obstacles, difficulties and suffering, but it makes it possible to approach reality as it is without keeping gates closed out of hand. It involves going from “It’s impossible,” “We have to be realistic” to “Why not?” and “Let’s give it a try!” The Assembly is a privileged time to build on what is already happening and to dare to open gates without fear because God trusts us and we trust Him.

Hope therefore has nothing to do with a willful and tense attitude but is rather receptivity to the intuitions that the Spirit traces out for the future, with the Lord, with our brothers and sisters living in poverty.

In the person of Pope Francis, the Church insistently invites us to this. *Laudato si* (2015) and *then Fratelli tutti* (2020) are two documents that shook up the world, the people of God, the Company. We have assimilated the principle that “*everything is connected.*” We have heard that we need to “*hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” (*Laudato si*, 49).

Our response today is Ephata! Let us open the gates of courage, simplicity and fraternity in order to continue to serve our brothers and sisters increasingly well and be with them. Our hope before the many empty tombs in our society – suffering, despair, solitude and so many others – is a sign that getting back up is possible. The world needs witnesses who open the gate of hope.

I conclude with a text by a volunteer from an association for those who are homeless, written after an encounter, an unconditional encounter that opens up to hope:

“He came this morning, and I asked him, ‘Tea, coffee or broth?’

He looked at me, and I looked at him. His hand spoke of his dire poverty, and he took some bread.

A little further down the street, I caught sight of him, and he recognized me.

He looked at me, and I looked at him. We no longer had any words. Our elbows knocked.

He was there in the street, still chilled to the bone. And he looked at me, and I looked at him.

We communicated through this regard alone. In each of our hearts, warmth reigned.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!”

Yes indeed, all our “Ephata” open us to encounter, to everyday encounters. They are good news for us and for others because we belong to the same humanity straining toward hope. Let us believe in this Good News!