

# *RNDM Reader*

*Volume 2*

*Feast of The Visitation 2015*



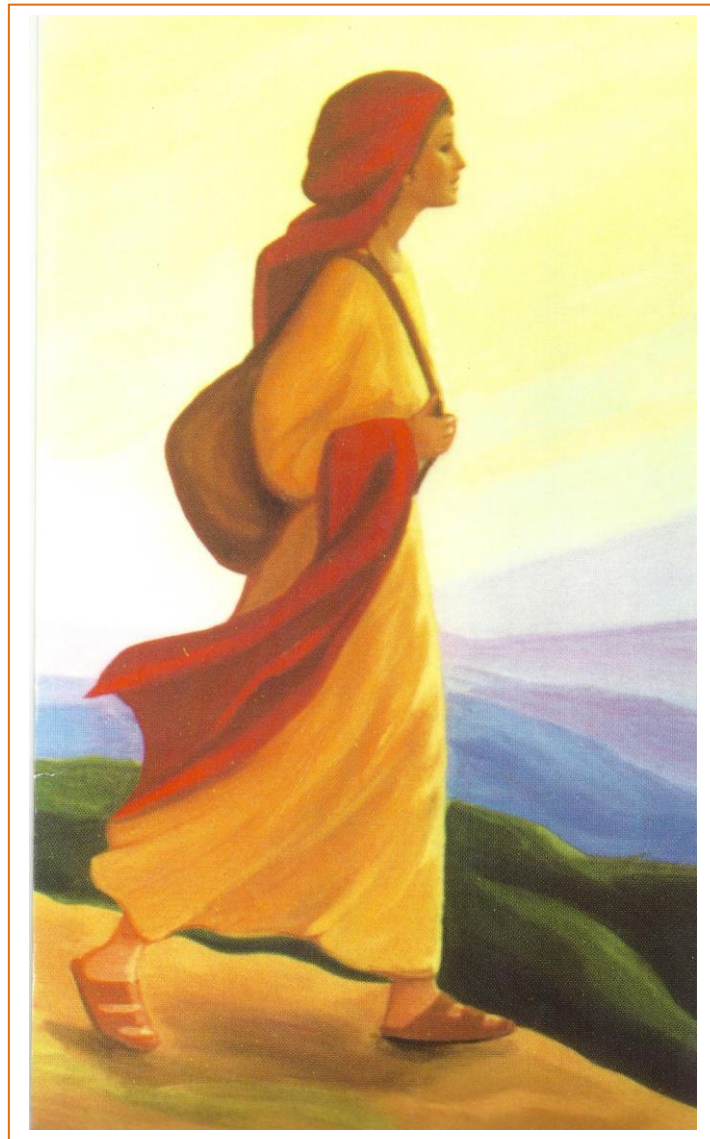
*We are Keepers of the Story*



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## *In Haste...*



*Artist: Sr Maria Van Galen,  
an Australian Franciscan Missionary of Mary  
who was missioned for many years to Papua New Guinea ...  
an influence visible in many of her paintings.*



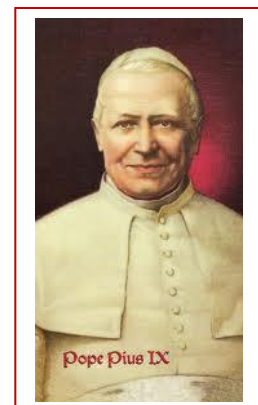
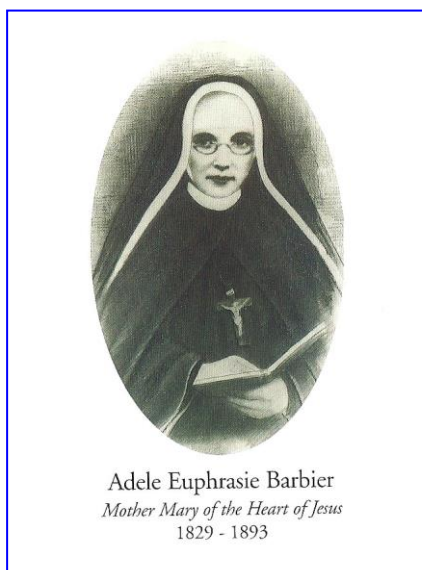
R.I.P. 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014

## Introduction: Sr Marie Therese Ryder RNDM

In this our second eReader we want to reflect on the significance of the Visitation of Mary with Elizabeth in our RNDM spirituality. What inspired Euphrasie as she reflected on this Gospel story in Luke 1:26-56? She certainly saw in Mary someone who through her times of contemplation lived with a heart attuned to God's word in her everyday life, someone who in response to that word was ready to be 'sent' where the Spirit of God led her. For Euphrasie 'mission' didn't primarily mean a particular mission to where a person might be sent, but rather it was first and foremost being drawn into deep communion with God, and flowing from that communion, a readiness to be sent wherever to live God's will, as Jesus did, in the power of the Spirit. This attitude that was manifested so strongly throughout Mary's life is given vibrant expression in her 'going in haste' to visit Elizabeth.

In a private audience with Euphrasie and her companions Pope Pius IX referred jokingly about the Congregation's name: ***"Our Lady of the Missions: but the Blessed Virgin did not go on mission..... except to the home of her cousin Elizabeth!"*** Euphrasie and the Sisters were touched and delighted by the Holy Father's words. They confirmed the insight that the RNDM missionary way combines Mary's inner contemplative spirit and outgoing, enthused service to others. (Letter of Sr Marie Augustin, 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1877). Mary's example stands as a model for living the Divine Missions. News of her cousin's pregnancy sends her swiftly on an outgoing path of love as she visits Elizabeth, the current of the divine missions flowing through her.

We hope this current of the divine missions flowing through each of us might be stirred and strengthened through the different reflective expressions presented in these pages.



## ***A Heart for the World – the Visitation.***

*(A talk given in 2004 by Sr Maureen McBride, then Congregation Leader – abridged)*

Throughout our Constitutions Mary is presented as an icon of mission for RNDMs today. There what is emphasized is Mary's simplicity, gentleness and humility. However, we can also see in the Mary of the Scriptures a woman of extraordinary courage and strength, a woman who is ablaze with love for her God and vibrant with compassionate delight in humanity – a woman with a heart for the world.

In the story of the Annunciation we see Mary as a woman overshadowed by the power, passion and promise of the Spirit. She struggles with the announcement of God's mysterious plan, and questions, not afraid to raise objections. Her 'yes' is a conscious assent to participation in the design of God.

Nazareth was a small village. As a young, unmarried Hebrew woman, Mary's life experience was narrow and limited, yet she dared to break out of the confines of this protected world and, impelled by the Spirit, audaciously embarked on a potentially perilous journey to Ain Karim, a hill town of Judah. There are no details of the preparations or of her companions. Luke simply states "***She set out in haste***". Such was the power of the desire within her to join Elizabeth in this awesome and astounding moment of their lives. Elizabeth Johnson describes Mary of the Visitation in her book "***Truly Our Sister***" as a '*woman of Spirit, embarking on the task of partnering God in the work of redemption*'. It seems that Mary's heightened excitement and clarity of purpose enables her to transcend the obstacles of the journey and her natural fears.

The urgency, energy, vitality, power and movement of this journey sweep us into echoes of Euphrasie's life.....or maybe even memories of our own impulsive, inspired and generous missionary actions. (Following this first journey Mary is, as it were, unstoppable – she is a woman on the move – to Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, Cana, and Jerusalem many times, tradition ending her days with John in Patmos, Greece.)

### **Mary's Inspired Intuition**

Mary's mission to visit Elizabeth was a simple, spontaneous, gentle and generous gesture of support, an inspired, intuitive response of solidarity, the desire to be with her aging cousin in this most profound moment of her life. Her ministry there, in contrast with the action-packed journey, was to be one of quiet presence, to be with Elizabeth in the last stages of her pregnancy, to ponder, probe and share the mystery of God's action in their lives.

### **Rupturing the Silence**

Luke's account of the Visitation surges forward with the self-assured assertiveness and spontaneity of Mary entering the house of Zechariah and greeting Elizabeth. But an

unexpected and unusual situation awaited: Mary walked into a house that was shrouded in silence! We must recall that Zechariah had been struck dumb at the announcement of his wife's pregnancy! Elizabeth Johnson observes rather sardonically, "*Such a quieting of the male voice is highly unusual in scripture.*" But she continues, "*Into the spacious silence two women's voices resound, one praising the other and both praising God. The outpouring of the Spirit happens in traditionally female domestic space.*" In breaking the silence and praising God the two women are totally present to each other in gentle familiarity and delighted surprise.

### **Elizabeth's Mellow Fruitfulness**

Elizabeth welcomes Mary with outstretched arms, with laughter, tears, embracing, singing, dancing, twirling, words tumble out in exuberant profusion. The child in her womb bouncing, leaping, thrusting and thrilling in harmony with his mother's excitement. Elizabeth is left clutching her belly and gasping for breath. In a flash her six months of mute gestures and contemplative confinement is dispelled. The time for silence is broken, it is now time for speaking. Elizabeth, like Mary is filled with the Spirit, and her first words are of blessing:

***Blessed are you among women! Blessed is the fruit of your womb!  
Blessed are you who believed what was spoken to you by our God  
would be fulfilled!***

### **Women of Spirit-birthing Hope**

In this Gospel scene we experience yet again God's amazing reversal of the expected: this is the only account in the New Testament where women are centre-stage. Age is no barrier in this encounter. Each woman has endured an experience of brokenness, humiliation, and of being surrounded by an aura of suspicion. However, Elizabeth, the prophet-bearer, symbolizes the mature wisdom-woman, once barren, now fruitful, formerly sorrowed and shamed, because to be without child in the Hebrew culture signified a curse of God. Now joyously expectant, she reaches out to welcome the young unwed mother, Mary, the God-bearer, young, vibrant, passionate, impulsive, courageous risk-taker, and take her to her heart.

Filled with the emotion of the moment of the encounter, stirred by the blessings of her cousin, Mary bursts forth in a song of thanksgiving, the Magnificat, the ancient hymn of exaltation and liberation. She sings of her passion for God and of God's passion for humanity. It is a song which articulates God's vision and justice for all creation and for the poor and abused of the earth. It is the song of God's struggle to bring about a world of mutual and inclusive relationships, reverence and respect for every person, in whom the divinity dwells. Mary thus becomes the spokesperson for God's integrity and redemptive justice.

## **Some Implications of the Visitation for those drawn by this Missionary Spirit**

What is the meaning of this story for us who live in a world fractured by violence, trauma, suspicion, mistrust, where even the most innocent, the children are victims of unspeakable acts of terror?

Like Euphrasie, we are inspired by Mary of the Visitation to be intrepid women of faith and courage. Mary's deeply contemplative spirit invites us to ponder alone and with others the Divine Missions and the mysterious action of God's gift and grace in our lives.

Stirred by the same zeal as Euphrasie, we are called to have a passion for God and a passion for humanity. We are challenged to be border-crossers and boundary dwellers, transcending barriers of age, culture, geography and belief.

God-touched and frail, we are called to reach out to others to share experiences of our own brokenness and the miracle of healing.

Wherever we are we are called to be attentive to the movement of the Spirit within ourselves and within the persons among whom we live and work. We are called to be a listening presence, affirming, challenging and encouraging each other. Like Elizabeth, we are called to create spaces where each person finds affirmation and peace.

As Gospel people of hope we celebrate our joys and sorrows, discoveries and delights, pain and struggles, and we journey with others in life's passages. Where oppression, abuse and injustice occur we are impelled to join in solidarity with others to break the silence and to speak with integrity and justice.

Women working with women, we empower other women, especially those on the margins of society, to develop their full potential as women, to contribute their giftedness in their family, social and religious context.

Like Elizabeth and Mary we are called to be big-hearted, generous and full-throated in the Blessings we pray for others- for the people with whom we live, whom we encounter in different contexts, and for all of God's creation.

Above all we are invited to be Spirit- birthing Women of Expectation!



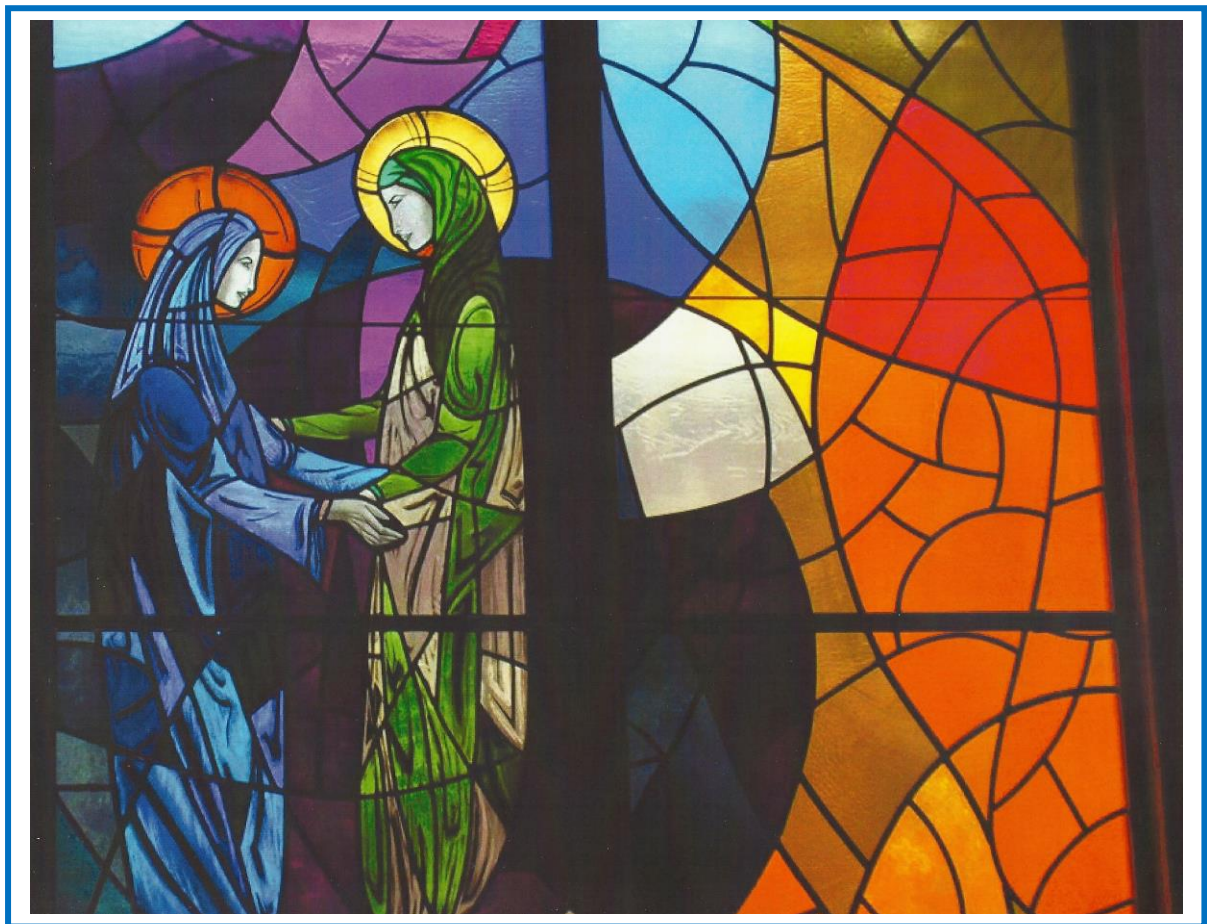


## A STAINED GLASS WINDOW ...

A stained glass window was created  
for our Provincial House in Winnipeg Canada...

*As I prayed in the Chapel at St Edward's Convent, I was always drawn to the window with its brilliant colours, especially the blue, and the soaring lines drawing us up and out. The window was a thing of beauty leading us to contemplation. Most of all, when I saw the two women figures honouring one another, I remembered who we were, are and continue to be, women meeting women, women serving women, women loving and healing one another, women giving glory to God together.*

Sr Claire Himbeault RNDM.



*Sean Sykes: artist and producer of the Visitation stain glass window*

## *Mary, a woman on a mission: The Visitation*

*Carmel Linden, Partner in Mission*

Luke's account of the sequence of events between the Annunciation and the Visitation is delivered sparsely, in a dry, matter of fact fashion. After hearing from the angel that her cousin Elizabeth is pregnant and in her 6<sup>th</sup> month, Mary quietly agrees to the angel's terms of her own conception and then immediately sets off for the hill country of Judah where Elizabeth lived.

How extraordinary!

It appears that Mary's very first thoughts are not of her own wondrous experience, but of going "as quickly as she could" to help Elizabeth who, miraculously, is pregnant in her old age. The striking vision of the young and newly-pregnant Mary striding through the hills to be at her cousin's side, presents her as a wonderful role-model; a woman of action, decisive, compassionate and generous of heart; a woman on a mission.

It sounds like a dangerous expedition for any woman to undertake! Did her parents and friends try to dissuade her? Just imagine what grave hazards she might encounter along the way! What about her own health and safety? While not voiced by Luke, these considerations are no doubt pertinent to all those women who set out on the missionary trail. Regardless of these valid concerns, they know deep in their heart what they must do. This response to the missionary call reveals much of the Spirituality of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions: a certainty of purpose, a deeply felt concern of the needs of others, a loving zeal. A brave heart.

But that is not all there is to it.

Elizabeth's welcome upon Mary's arrival expands the canvass to show that this Visit is much more than a humane and generous undertaking by Mary. When Elizabeth proclaims Mary as "the mother of my Lord", a whole new perspective is painted into the concept of Mission. There is no mistaking Luke's intention here. Elizabeth's words serve to both endorse and clarify the event of the Incarnation. Mary physically brings God with her into the heart of Elizabeth's home. And therein is revealed the true heart of the spirituality of the Sisters of our Lady of the Missions: to participate in the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus as they go about their work.

What a commotion!

When Mary enters her home, Elizabeth's baby leaps in her womb and she erupts into joyful cries. Then Mary bursts into a song praising God's magnificence. The joy of it all! On this euphoric note, Luke invites us to participate in the mystery.

And that's it.

"Mary stayed some three months and then went home". The birth of Elizabeth's son is related in the next section, so it isn't even clear if Mary was there for the event. Sort of an anti-climax. Like the beginning of the story, there is a conspicuous lack of detail. But the hum drum events of Mary's stay with Elizabeth were not of interest to Luke. They would only detract from his skilful depiction of the wonderful mystery of the Incarnation and its impact on the world forever more.

All of us are called to carry the Christ to our neighbours and friends, be they far away or close at hand, in extreme need or simply needing a caring face. What a miracle! Don't you just want to leap up and sing God's praise?

*"... for nothing is impossible to God"*



## *The Feast of the Visitation: Whole School Liturgy*

### *Sacred Heart Girls' College, Oakleigh Victoria*

Every year the Sacred Heart community gathers in our College hall to celebrate the Feast of the Visitation. The Feasts of the Visitation and Pentecost are the two patronal feast days of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions. As a Catholic secondary school for girls, Sacred Heart draws upon the life-giving charism of the RNDM Sisters. At this gathering the RNDM Sisters and members of the College Board are our guests of honour.

Our liturgy commences with the reading of Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth, Luke 1:39-56. The Gospel of Luke tells us of Mary's journey into the hill country of Judea, a distance of approximately 20 kilometres. Mary provided support for her kinswoman Elizabeth, an older woman who had also conceived a child. Elizabeth in return offered her kinswoman the protection of her home to the unmarried and pregnant Mary. The College Choir then sings *the Magnificat, Mary's Song of Praise*.

The Euphrasie Barbier Address follows the Gospel, with an RNDM Sister providing insights into the ministry and outreach of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions in the twenty-first century. Sacred Heart Girls' College is privileged to be partners-in-mission with the RNDM Sisters, the women religious who founded our College in 1957.

In recent years our community has entered into a formal partnership with the Delesan Kailawan Centre in Kulaman, an RNDM founded community in the hills of Mindanao, the southern Philippines. The Delesan Kailawan Centre provides girls and young women of the Dulangan Menubo indigenous tribe with the opportunity to access formal education through the provision of a dormitory. The DK Centre also provides health care for the Dulangan Menubo and celebrates their rich culture.

During the 2014 Euphrasie Barbier Address our guest speaker, Sr Madeleine Barlow, recounted her recent experience in the hills of Mindanao. The RNDM Sisters in Kulaman provided intensive post-natal care for Baby Sam, a Dulangan Menubo child whose mother died following his birth. Sam's father returned to his village to care for his other children. Sr Madeleine told the gathering that after three months a thriving baby Sam was able to return to his barrio with his father.



*Baby Sam with his Dad*



*Sr Kyi Kyi Win RNDM with Baby Sam*





*Sr Madeleine Barlow with Baby Sam*

## **We are the Dulangan Menubo People**



Our student leaders then launch the Walkathon, the College's major fundraiser for the year. Funds raised by the College Walkathon support the RNDM Sisters in their ministry to the Dulungan Menubo. In 2014 students from throughout the College participated in the Barrio Challenge, an initiative which required students from the different house groups to work together to carry a bucket of water, a bundle of sticks, flour and eggs. The Barrio Challenge sought to raise empathy and awareness within the Sacred Heart community of the challenges the Dulungan Menubo confront in their daily life as they work to sustain their families. The team of students who completed the eight kilometre course with all items intact were acknowledged as the winners of the inaugural Barrio Challenge. The Sacred Heart community gains a great deal from our relationship as partners-in-mission with the RNDM Sisters.

Our annual celebration of Mary's Visitation to Elizabeth provides the opportunity for the College community to celebrate and support the life giving ministry of the RNDM Sisters as they work amongst the marginalised in urban Manila and rural Mindanao to make God's presence real in our world. This partnership is mutually beneficial for the Sacred Heart community and the RNDM Delesan Kailawan Centre, in the same way that Mary's relationship with Elizabeth enriched both women.

Michael Smith (*Partner in Mission*)

Deputy Principal – Faith & Mission  
Sacred Heart Girls' College  
Oakleigh, Melbourne, Australia

## *The Visitation and Mary's place in the RNDM Spirituality*

*Sr Shanti Rosario RNDM (Philippines): Article, Mandala Artwork and Reflections*

The Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions from its birth is a Religious Missionary Congregation.

Euphrasie Barbier, our Founder, could not have a better choice than the “Visitation” as the model for her Sisters to participate in the Divine Missions.

Being a mystic, Euphrasie understood that to carry out the Mission of the Trinity we have to follow the “Word”, who took flesh in the womb of Mary of Nazareth because of her total availability to her God. Mary became God’s handmaid (servant). Lk.2:38.

Through her pondering heart, Euphrasie realized that the very “Yes” of Mary put her at the service to the Word and hastened her to go to the hill country of Judea to help her cousin in her great need. With her awakened spirit, Euphrasie knew that only in the spirit of Mary are we able to carry out the Divine Missions in our everyday living.

In the Visitation Scene we see that Mary’s spirituality is:

- A lived experience - a conscious involvement – going out of oneself believing the message of deep faith. Her journey involved light and darkness. Hers was a Faith Journey. The journey of a pilgrim from Nazareth to Judea to Jerusalem, to Calvary, from Easter to Pentecost.
- Mary pondered. Her pondering spirit made her contemplative; shaped her life in the way she lived in communion with her Son being united with God in the Spirit. And this spirit of communion compelled her into the missionary activity.
- She is one of the *anawim* - the lowly ones of God. She was in solidarity with the simple and was a woman for others.
- Mary is the first faithful disciple of Jesus who received the word and kept it. Mk.3:35. Lk.11:27-28.

Euphrasie adapted a set of values and activities from Mary’s own life that are clearly shown in the event of “Visitation” for her missionary congregation:

- Her zeal
- Her faith /faithful love; her hope
- Her simplicity and humility
- Her modesty /dignity/ her beauty in thoughts and actions
- Her charity/ hospitality
- Her generosity
- Her courage
- Her blessedness and she being the blessing
- Her joyful presence
- Her bringing the “Good News” beyond boundaries.

## Mandalas by Sr Shanti Rosario RNDM, Depicting Mary's Place in our Spirituality

### 1. Visitation Mandala



Mary and Elizabeth are at the centre

The colours red, blue, yellow, brown, and the flame depict that their lives are centred in the heart of the Trinity. They are in love “blue”, and “brown” down to earth women. They are Spirit filled - full of hope - pregnant with new life. They are blessings to each other and ready to share the joy with each other, bringing the Good News to all.

Radiating outward, the dark purple circle is faith – God-centred, committed.

The blue circle is faithfulness, love confidence, and many others...

The pink circle is universal love for others and oneself, tenderness, generosity and sensitivity to the needs of others.

The green circle is Hope and Life; compassion.

The orange circle is Mercy.

Inside the circles there are mixed colours to indicate that goodness, humility, simplicity, charity and generosity are intermingled in one's being.

The flames outside the circle represent Zeal.



## 2. Visitation Mandala with Symbols



### Reflection 1

- In the centre, Elizabeth and Mary are caught up by the fire of the Spirit.
- Encircled by the Trinity: Yellow for the Father, Blue for the Son, Green for the Spirit.
- Deep Purple is Faith and the symbol is Simplicity.
- White Flowers: Purity, Wholeness, Goodness.
- The Outer Circle symbolises Humility with Strength.
- The Flames represent Zeal.
- The mixed colours inside indicate Humility, Simplicity, Charity, Zeal, Love, Unity and Harmony, Compassion ...

### Reflection 2

- Mary and Elizabeth are blessings to each other.
- Caught up by the fire of the Spirit.
- Their lives are full of grace, centred upon God by the colour Yellow.
- With the Pink circle indicating Universal and Unconditional Love.
- The Deep Blue and Purple circle indicates their Sensitivity, Thoughtfulness, Dignity, Faith, Depth, Communion, Truth and Beauty.
- The Green circle shaded with Red and other colours indicates Compassion and Harmony.
- Flames: Zeal.

### Designs inside the Mandala

- White flowers: openness, kindness, wholeness, purity, new beginning...
- Green plane: growth, desire to expend, protection from fears and anxieties connected with the demands of others: Balance.
- Purple design: simplicity.
- Pink design: humility with strength.



## “The Visitation”

St Shelley Barlow RNDM

This exuberant scene of the Visitation appears in the 2006 film *The Nativity Story* directed by Catherine Hardwicke. For me it evokes sheer joy: the physical joy of motherhood, the joy of nature, the joy of two ordinary humble women, celebrating the amazing gift and promise of life growing within them, the entwining joy in the Spirit who breathes and broods in them, bringing forth life, life which will herald the Good News for all creation. Through struggle and impediment, Mary and Elizabeth now experience the Spirit's surprise, their joy incarnating the mystery of divine life in our midst. Their experience of divine visitation is for all of us an invitation to embrace the sacred presence and flow of light and life in our world.



*The Visitation scene from the 2006 film [The Nativity Story](#).*

*Mary was played by Maori-Australian Keisha Castle-Hughes  
and Elizabeth by Iranian Shohreh Aghdashloo.*

# *The Visitation: An Experience of Sisterhood*

*Sr Sandy Stewart* RNDM,

Nestled between Gabriel's great announcement and Mary's prophetic and magnificent song of praise to God lies a story of a wondrous journey and encounter--full of joyful cries, danger, blessing, dancing and leaping all over the place!

*The Visitation* is a compelling story because it carries such Life and Promise. The experience of both Mary and Elizabeth was rife with the Spirit that "comes upon" and "overshadows", that is, empowers and protects. Their very life experience, and that of their people, made God's promise of fidelity worthy of their trust. The promise, joy, warning and hope of *the Visitation* is true in our day too, in our RNDM lived experience.

What is the starting point for making such a claim? Our Scriptures are very clear: the *starting point* for our relationship with God -- and therefore with one another and all created reality -- is '*experience*.' We have the capacity to know God by relationship, more than explanation, and thus experience itself is the communication of God. In the West particularly, we have relied on the perspective of metaphysics and rational thought to understand God, as if to say, "If we can think it, we can believe it." As true as our philosophical perspectives might be, they can never be an adequate starting point for falling with wild abandon into the arms of Love. And for that Love to create a world of justice for the whole earth community it thrives on the *relational experience* with all who would say 'yes' to the invitation to participate. Recognizing and trusting our *experiences* of God is an essential starting point for our life of faith. Without such *experience* it would be hard to support any claim that God is just as present and active today as long ago.

At the heart of *the Visitation* the *experience* of relationship is central to the message and promise of God: I AM always with you! Mary and Elizabeth are bound in an intimate relationship with their God. They are each carrying in their bodies the fulfillment of God's promise for themselves and their people struggling for freedom. They are "two spirit-filled pregnant prophets crying out in joy, warning and hope for the future."\* Mary and Elizabeth are also bound in an intimate relationship of mutual love with each other, "each needing to talk with another woman who knew what it meant to grapple with God's intention."\*

Like a diamond refracting light to reveal a prism of possibilities the story of *the Visitation* enlightens a variety of aspects of our RNDM spirituality. We will highlight just one here. In recent years in Canada we have experienced the gift of welcoming younger RNDM women from other parts of the world for academic as well as English language/formation studies. There would be little argument that these women are in their "Mary" years! Like their Hebrew sister, they are full of courage and consent, hearing the word of God in their lives and acting upon it. Likewise for us in the Canadian province, there would be little argument that we are living in our "Elizabeth" years! And like our Hebrew sister, seasoned both by

dashed dreams and undreamt surprises, we carry in our bones the marrow of our own ‘Mary’ years: *I know the plans I have in mind for you--it is Yahweh who speaks--plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you.* (Jer.29: 11-12).

The *experience* of *visitation* here is an encounter of mutual encouragement for old and young alike. It carries the potential for the fullness of joy and hope, struggle and promise found in the original account. Trusting the ever-present and active God of our lived experience, we Canadians can embrace the role of Elizabeth in our own day, “taking Mary in and nurturing her, affirming her calling, nourishing her confidence, and assuring her she does not face an uncertain future alone.”\* Though these young women have journeyed to a land of RNDM mothers and grandmothers, together our experience reflects the mutuality of sisterhood. There is a relationship of equality and shared wisdom here: a way of being whole and fully open to seeing and experiencing more than anyone asked for or imagined...an experience full of grace. As it did for our sisters, Mary and Elizabeth, *this visitation* too carries Life *now* and Promise *for the future*.

Since *experience* itself is the communication of God, what might this experience of *visitation* be revealing to us of God, of ourselves? Where might this *experience* lead the Canadian province and the congregation? The invitation, like all of God’s promptings, is to live the experience with eyes wide open, soft, yielding, full of holy curiosity; too simply said perhaps, we must live it all fully and see what happens!

The story of the Visitation is a story of *relationship*. The Scriptures are full of such stories, assuring us that God extends to all -- one-by-one and together -- an invitation to share the divine life. Thus reveals the Trinitarian truth sung at the heart of all reality: all is in relationship, all is one. In living fully our many relationships--our sisterhood with all, our brotherhood with everything-- the future will continue to come toward us full of many divine *visitations*. Inherent in each is the invitation to participate in something larger than ourselves. Each one, even the ones we would not want, carries Life and Promise. And as religious life evolves into greater evolutionary consciousness inside a cosmic story that both frightens us and frees us, we will be glad of the company of our Hebrew sisters, Mary and Elizabeth; we will be glad of their free consent, their courage, their conviction and joy...most surely their joy, dancing and leaping all over the place!



\* Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister, A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saint* (New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.,2003)

## The Visit

Greetings exchanged.

Confidences shared.

Hearts touching.

Spirits intertwined.

Difficulties examined.

Problems confided

Spirits yearning

for fulfilment.

Mutual honesty.

Shared vulnerability.

Would that all my encounters

possessed this depth.



*Sr Marilyn Beblanc RNDM*

*Canadian Province*

Taken from: *“Rejoice!”* A Message from the Teachings of Pope Francis

## HAIL MOTHER OF JOY

13. Rejoice, full of grace (*Lk 1:28*), “the greeting of the angel to Mary is an invitation to joy, to a deep joy, announcing the end of sadness [...]. It is a greeting that marks the beginning of the Gospel, the Good News”.<sup>82</sup>

Alongside Mary joy expands. The Son she carries in her womb is the God of joy, of contagious, engaging delight. Mary throws open the doors of her heart and runs to Elizabeth. “Joyful in achieving her desires, sensitive in her duty, thoughtful in her joy, she hurries towards the mountain. Where, if not towards the summit, should she set out so kindly, she who was already full of God?”<sup>83</sup>

She went in great haste (*Lk 1:39*) to bring the happy news to the world, to bring all the uncontainable joy she held in her womb: Jesus, the Lord. *In great haste*, it is not only the speed with which Mary went. We are told of her diligence, the careful attention with which she undertakes the journey, her enthusiasm.

*Behold the servant of the Lord* (*Lk 1:38*). The Lord’s servant ran in great haste, to become the servant of all people.

In Mary the Church is all who journey together: in the love of those who go out to the most fragile; in the hope of those who know that they will be accompanied in their going out and in the faith of those who have a special gift to share. In Mary each one of us, driven by the wind of the Spirit, fulfils our own vocation to move out!

*Star of the new evangelisation,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of the world.  
Mother of the living Gospel,  
Wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones  
Pray for us.  
Amen. Alleluia!*<sup>84</sup>





## *Panel from Misereor Hunger Cloth, 1984*

*Sr Marie Therese Ryder RNDM*

This painting of the Visitation was one panel of a Hunger Cloth commissioned by the German Charity organisation MISEREOR. Its first Hunger Cloth was commissioned in 1976 as a way of evoking a response to the hungers of our world.

In 1984 the Jyoti Shi Art Ashram in Silvepura Village, North Bangalore, India, was invited to paint the Hunger Cloth for that year. They chose the theme of women in the Bible in recognition of the fact that women most often bore the burden of the hunger of our world. Each of the 7 panels depicts some aspect of that reality. This panel of the visitation is full of joy and energy as Mary and Elizabeth experience deeply between them that God has become present in their world in a new, powerful and redeeming way.

The painters of this Ashram, who come from different faith traditions, see art as a bridge between these different traditions.



# *The Visitation – [Luke 1:39-56]*

*Maureen Palfrey, Partner in Mission*

Most of us are familiar with the story of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth.

The feast of the Visitation was adopted by the Franciscan Order in 1263, at the suggestion of St Bonaventure. In supplication for the end of the Great Schism, Pope Urban VI extended the feast to the entire Church in 1389.

The feast of the Visitation of Mary could be truly described as the ‘feast of Magnificat’, the famous canticle of Mary. Mary’s choice to be the ‘Theotoka’ or bearer of God was certainly a pure and simple grace. No one is more conscious of this fact than Mary herself. That is why she gave vent to her joyful acknowledgement of this immeasurable bounty of God, a veritable goodness towards the humble handmaid of God. It must, however, be stated that God shows immeasurable bounty towards all, provided the persons are ready to say the ‘fiat’ or ‘yes’ to God’s salvific will.

As I read this passage of Luke, many questions were posed:

- How far did Mary have to travel?
- How did Mary get to the Hill Country?
- Did she need a travelling companion?

The Hill Country was approximately 70 miles from Nazareth, according to the map of the First Century in my family bible. Did she go on foot, camel train or donkey?

We do not know the answers to these questions and do not need to know. All we need to know is that without thought for herself, Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth. She showed selfless love and care for Elizabeth while coming to terms with the greatest thing that had happened to her. This journey makes Mary the first missionary.

Traditionally it is believed that Mary remained with her cousin for three months, up to the birth, or even the circumcision of John.

From the visit we are endowed with two great prayers still used in the Church today – from Elizabeth, ‘Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb’ and from Mary, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour’. What more do we need?

While we may not receive a visit from a celestial being, we are certainly prompted by the Holy Spirit to carry out works of mercy as an integral part of our faith. The Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions have led the way and encourage us to follow Mary’s example. Euphrasie, in following this example, founded the Congregation based on contemplative prayer and good works.

I ask myself, can I put aside my needs and desires to assist others in their time of need? It is in giving that we receive.

How willing are we today to openly display our faith in God and to show care and compassion to others?

Euphrasie says in her letters *'There are difficult burdens to carry in life. We can lighten them for one another by our thoughtfulness, a kind smile, a little service; often nothing more is needed to console and encourage one another'* [1869] RNDM GEMS.

Whilst visiting Sr Cecilia Tirkey and the RNDM Sisters in India recently, it has been my privilege to see for myself the difficult burdens of everyday life for the marginalised families in Banaswadi in Bangalore and Bijapur. They welcomed the Sisters' visits joyfully, pleased that they were not forgotten.



This photo of a grandmother with a child on her knee was taken in Bijapur. We were invited to the house for a meal.



The man and his wife have 2 children and also house his mother. His sister, the mother of another small boy and a baby girl, died shortly after childbirth, and the family are looking after them too.



Sr Cecilia also took me to visit her Aunt and Uncle in Bijapur, Floreancia and John Tirkey. We were greeted with the Hindu/Indian custom of washing the visitor's feet.

This was performed by Floreancia.

First the feet are rubbed with mustard oil (warm) and then hot water is poured over the feet. This is a very moving tradition.

A truly humbling and Biblical experience.

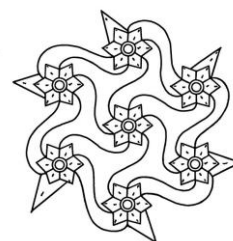


Visits to the families and daily greetings to the children of Preshita Matha School Kollam, Kerala were also greeted with great joy and big smiles. I saw that it takes no effort at all to show our love and kindness for others. Language was not a barrier; a smile and a happy greeting were welcomed happily.

*'Have confidence in God, be humble, love prayers and be very kind'* [1867] RNDM GEMS

**Action:** Be open to God's plan and submit yourself to it, no matter how difficult it is from your thinking.

**Reflection:** Trust in God for without Him you are nothing. But with His love, you have everything.



*The Visitation Tableau*, part of a display called 'The Holy Land' is at St Mary's parish in Angamali, Kerala. It's about 40 minutes away from the Sisters' house in Amalapuram, Kerala. The pathway is cobblestones and very hard on the legs, which I guess makes it more lifelike.



Maureen and Sr Cecilia shared birthday celebrations in the dining room of Preshita Matha Convent, Kollam, Kerala.



## Visitation

*To visit, to come, to be.  
Mary went over the hill country  
To be with her cousin, with child.  
Joy abounded, infant leapt,  
Is this the Mother  
of my God come to me?  
To visit, to come, to be.*



*Two women danced life,  
Proclaimed God.  
Mary, Elizabeth,  
Women of strength, courage, love.  
Young and old celebrate life.  
We RNDM's celebrate life far and wide.  
We dance with Mary and Elizabeth.  
Jesus is with us.  
We visit, we come, we are one with Him.*

P. Keogh RNDM 1995

## Magnificat

*My soul sings praises to my God.  
Wonderful and great things happen to me.  
Elizabeth my cousin and older woman,  
is blessed with child.  
Happiness brims over for us.  
Among all people, I am blessed.  
Glorify God with me, He is the mighty One.  
His presence is in each of us,  
Come adore.  
His mercy is for all who believe,  
His strength is great.  
He feeds many people,  
His salvation is for all.  
His wonders will never cease.  
He is here for all,  
Blessed are we in His Presence.*

P Keogh RNDM 2011

## A series of Visitation Poems

By Sr Patricia Keogh RNDM



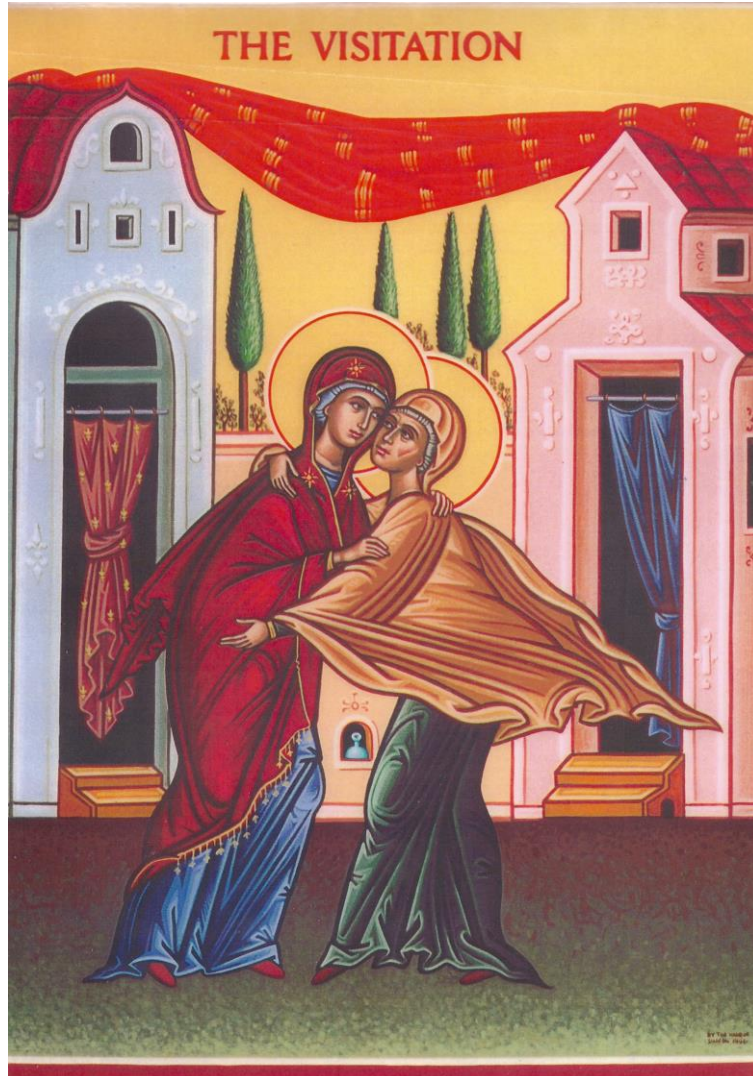
### Mary - Elizabeth

*Mary a slip of a girl  
Unwed God child within  
Hurries over hills and dales  
To come to Elizabeth,  
Older and with child.  
The child leaps for joy.  
The Mother of my God has come.  
What joy, what comfort.  
Blessed are you among women,  
Blessed the fruit of your womb.  
Two women danced life,  
Proclaimed God.  
Mary, Elizabeth, women of strength,  
Courage, accepting friendship.  
Elizabeth mother of John,  
Mary mother of Jesus.  
Gentleness, compassion,  
Serving one another.*

P. Keogh RNDM 2010



## *“Windows to Heaven”*



This icon of the Visitation is from a collection of icons called "Windows to heaven"; a recent work from an Art School attached to an Ohio Monastery, a co-operative effort of artisans and craftsmen throughout the USA.



# Visitation: Bangladesh

*Kate De Lacy, Partner in Mission,*

Year 8 Level Coordinator, Sacred Heart Girls' College, Oakleigh Victoria

What drives a woman to spend her Christmas holidays travelling to and around a country gripped by political instability and known for all the wrong reasons- poverty, overpopulation, natural disasters, conflict, oppression of women, poor education? Did ignorance play a part or was it a heightened sense of adventure and an opportunity to experience a very different world? Or was it perhaps something very simple?

I travelled to Bangladesh (Dec/Jan 2013-14) for two weeks for just one reason- to visit my dear friend Sr. Gracie Gomes in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I met Sr. Gracie when she came to Melbourne to study for her Masters in Educational Leadership at Monash University in 2008. Gracie spent a lot of time with me, experiencing my world and we became close friends. Before she left Melbourne to return to Bangladesh, Gracie asked me to one day come and experience her world.

Sixteen months ago I was able to take up that offer. Not really knowing what I would see or do resulted in me going with a very open mind and an open heart. Wide-eyed and trying to remain slightly inconspicuous (a rather difficult task since on most occasions not only was I the only fair woman in sight but I was significantly taller than everyone else!) I arrived in Dhaka. Seeing my friend for the first time in a number of years was an indescribable moment -a mixture of extreme excitement and absolute relief that I had finally made it.

The next two weeks were an incredible blur of celebrations and exploration of Bangladeshi culture and included the attendance and participation in a family wedding, the final vows of four young Sisters in addition to meeting family, friends, the RNDM Sisters and teachers from St Francis Xavier Greenherald International School. The hospitality afforded me was astonishing and humbling. My two weeks disappeared and it was time to return to a very different world with a vastly different perspective on a whole range of subjects. Saying farewell to my dear friend and my many new friends was only made easier by the knowledge that I would return again in 12 months for a longer stay.

Kate and Sr Gracie Gomes



Celebration of Final Vows



My recent visit enabled me to deepen and broaden the relationships I had made on my first trip and to learn a great deal more about this fascinating and beautiful country. I was also able to spend time teaching at SFX Greenherald which was a wonderful opportunity both professionally and personally. Furthermore, I was ecstatic to be part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations for six Sisters, travel to the holiday island of St Martin off the southern tip of Bangladesh with the RNDM Sisters and visit several of the RNDM Missions including the beautiful and peaceful Diang and the dynamic port city of Chittagong. The Chittagong mission was of particular interest for me because it was the first one established in the region. Having participated in the 2012 Pilgrimage of the Heart through France and England, I was eager to continue following in Euphrasie's "footsteps".

Kate with two of the Sisters celebrating their Golden Jubilee



Kate with Novices, Chittagong



As I arrived in Chittagong via a small CNG vehicle, the view of the extraordinary and expansive port was mind-blowing. The whole area reeked of dried mud and fish and the narrow streets were filled with the bustle of street stalls and people going about their daily business. I reflected that perhaps what I was seeing was not too dissimilar to what Euphrasie and the sisters saw and experienced on their first day. The day I arrived was quite warm despite being the middle of winter but Euphrasie arrived in mid-summer. I wondered how they coped in their heavy northern hemisphere clothing. As with my arrival, the Sisters were joyfully welcomed and cared for with generosity and compassion.

Very quickly Euphrasie and the Sisters set about learning the language and starting a school but they soon had to do more than that. Young girls were expected or forced to throw themselves on the funeral pyre when their elderly husband died. They sought protection and assistance from the newly arrived Sisters and thus the mission in Chittagong, and later throughout the province, expanded from education and care of children to caring for and empowering women. I was delighted to visit the young children and babies at St Peter's Orphanage and St Benedict Crèche, the Novitiate, and experience the extensive renovations of the original buildings.



St Peter's Orphanage Chittagong



St Benedict's Crèche Chittagong



In 1971 Bangladesh achieved nation status (following the War of Independence from Pakistan); no longer was it West Pakistan. Prior to 1971, Bangladesh could not feed itself despite a very fertile environment. High child mortality rates, poor water quality and limited access to education added to the woes of this young nation. In the 40 years since, much has been achieved including; free education for children up to Year 10, a growing manufacturing sector, huge numbers of students gaining University qualifications, trade links with many countries and one of the busiest ports in the world. There is, however, still a huge amount to do. Bangladesh is an emerging country and although constrained by political issues, I found a community fiercely proud of their heritage and striving to improve the living standards of their massive population. The RNDM Sisters have been key contributors to this incredible turn around. Throughout the busy and complex province they relentlessly work for justice, the empowerment of women and the provision of education for all children regardless of religious tradition or social status.

Where to now for me? I had originally visited Bangladesh to be with and experience the world of my close friend Sr. Gracie. I couldn't wait to return last Christmas and yes, I would go back tomorrow if I could. I now have many new friends, a significantly more informed opinion of a much maligned country, and a heightened sense of the richness of other cultures and how we, in the "lucky country" use or misuse resources. But I also have a very heavy heart because I miss everyone so much and I can't wait to return once again.

Kate with some of the staff at SFX Greenherald



SFX Greenherald afternoon free-school



# Visitation 2010

*An angel was sent: YES*

Message received: A Match: YES

*Mary set out and went with haste...*

Gillian set out: 700 air miles

*Elizabeth exclaimed with a loud cry  
Blessed are you!*

Ernie greeted her with joy  
Is it true? You are willing to do this?

*And Mary remained with her...*

And Gillian remained until they both recovered from the successful kidney transplant

*And then returned home*

Life's journey continues, in Love

*The story of Mary and her cousin as told in the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke*

The story of a young mother and a family as told by June Lenzen RNDM  
*Canadian Province*



*and Mary remained with her...*

Mary In the House Of  
Elizabeth (1917)

Robert Anning Bell



## Vietnamese picture of the Visitation



*Explanation of how the Vietnamese picture of the Visitation came into being:*

*by Sr Mai Trinh Nguyen RNDM, who was the Province Leader of Vietnam when the picture was commissioned.*

- Who was the artist?

In 1993, Sr Thien An and I came to see Mr Mai Nhon and asked him to paint a picture of Euphrasie Barbier. We were very delighted and pleased with the picture of Euphrasie when we received it from Mr Mai Nhon.

- Why did you ask for the picture of the Visitation to be painted?

In 1996 in order to prepare for the General Chapter, we again asked Mr Mai Nhon to paint another picture of the Visitation in the context of Vietnamese culture. We shared with him about the Visitation in the Bible (Lk 1: 39-56) as well as in the book



*Straight Is My Path* which was written by Sr M.Benedicte Ollivier, RNDM. We offered Mr Mai Nhon the Bible and the book *Straight Is My Path*.

According to Mr Nhon, at first he just read the passage of the Visitation in the Bible. However, to be able to have a grasp of the Visitation, he read through the whole Bible, particularly Jesus' life and his missions. Although he could not understand clearly Jesus' teaching and his parables, he could imagine what Jesus wished to do and experienced. After getting some inspiration, Mr Mai Nhon started to paint Mary and Elizabeth in the context of Vietnam.

- What did you think when you saw the finished picture?

I was really amazed when I received the picture. It reflected truthfully Vietnamese culture. In the picture there were two Vietnamese women in their typical clothes of the North of Vietnam. They looked simple and gentle. They were greeting each other joyfully. I could see Mary entering Elizabeth's house with her happy face towards Elizabeth. Elizabeth in pregnancy welcomed Mary with great joy which was brought by Mary.

I could also see a typical house in the countryside of Vietnam which was made by earth and thatch. There were also some bamboo chairs, bamboo tables, sticky rice cakes and a bamboo basket hanging above the stove in the house. In front of the house, there were a hen and her chicks searching for food.

I could see the beauty of radiance, love and joy in the picture. The picture reflected truthfully the content of the Visitation in the context of Vietnamese culture.

- What did some of the other sisters think?

They loved and valued the picture.

Some words from Mr Mai Nhon:

*"Dear Sisters*

*I thank you for giving me a great opportunity to paint the two pictures. It was my privilege. I am neither a professional artist nor a catholic. I have painted the pictures according to your ideas and stories. You are very good directors. I am very pleased and happy when I know that you have valued the pictures very much."*



# Reflection on the Visitation:

*Sr Carmel Eberius FNDM, Rome*

To appreciate the atmosphere of joyous expectation and simplicity radiating from Mary, we have only to open St. Luke's Gospel. Indeed it is impossible not to be fascinated by this young girl who "set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah" (Lk 1:39)

A messenger of joy, she bears within her a wonderful secret which she wants to share with her cousin Elizabeth. As Mary and Elizabeth meet, they thrill with joy because of the mystery about to be accomplished through them – it is the announcement of Salvation.



For Mary, the Visitation is also a mystery of humble service – she simply wants to help her cousin Elizabeth; she is completely given to others. Mary has an abundant capacity for giving and receiving in joyful, discreet service which Euphrasie also recommends to her Sisters.

Mary has a place apart in the spirituality of our Congregation. When after the first General Chapter (August/September 1867) Euphrasie tries to define the spirit of the Institute, she states that "it can be none other than that of Mary", and she develops this thought by dwelling in contemplation on Mary before and after the Incarnation and after the Ascension. To grasp profoundly Euphrasie's vision, it is helpful to place this text side by side with the preliminary chapter of the first Constitutions explaining the name of the Congregation:

"By placing themselves under the title of Our Lady of the Missions, the sisters wish to honour in a very special way the Divine Missions which were the sole object of Mary's deepest aspirations and which this holy Virgin glorified by the intensity of her love and adoration, her perfect fidelity and unstinting devotedness."



Did Mary go alone across the hills to visit her cousin Elizabeth?

Many pictures show the encounter between these two women, yet there are some that include both Joseph and Zachariah as well; the two men who must surely have wondered what has happened to the women that they came to love.

Both puzzled, confused, yet also spoke a “Yes”, though in the case of Zachariah a little hesitantly.

As the two women meet the child in the one recognises the child in the other; he leaps for joy just as later he points to the one for whom he has come to prepare the way: “There is the Lamb of God... follow him I am not the one... of whom the prophets spoke.”

How must these two women have felt at that moment of encounter, not aware of what would await their sons yet open, open to God, to the Spirit alive in them? They spoke their “Yes” which was full of trust in this God who made the impossible happen in the life of Elizabeth, who invited Mary to be part of God’s plan of salvation which would lead her ultimately to stand at the foot of the Cross and watch this child of hers, this son, die abandoned even by the Father who sent him.

Mary stayed three months, what did these two women talk about during this time?

Did they wonder at the mystery taking shape within them?

Did they pray together?

Did they laugh and cry at the sheer wonder of their God?

Did they prepare things for the birth of Elizabeth’s son?

What did Joseph and Zachariah do in this time, did they question, wonder what this was all about? What it would ask of them?

Or did Joseph return home without Mary to carry-on with his carpentry....



## THE VISITATION WINDOW

*Sr Margaret McInerney RNDM*

The visitation window is in the Chapel of the Province House in Nairobi. It was the gift of the architect Tony Gleason. The Window was made by the Kenyan artist Simon Kitengela. The artist drew a number of sketches and the Sisters were asked to choose and make suggestions. It ended as a composite.

In the background is Mt Kenya.

The visitor in Kenya always carries a basket (on the head).

I will share my personal reflection written soon after it was erected. I loved this window which faced directly to the east, so as the sun rose it became visible.

'I come carrying a gift – fruit of the earth  
Simple gifts,  
Sign of life shared,  
Work of human hands.  
I come carrying within  
The Christ waiting to be born  
Sign of life given to me,  
Of Eucharist,  
Life to be shared with others.

I recognise  
The Christ within you.  
I welcome you  
With outstretched arms  
I share my joy –  
The child in my womb leaps with joy –  
Your joy is mine.

This moment of greeting  
Under the shadow of the mountain  
The spirit hovers over this place  
God becomes incarnate in this land.

I am Mary  
I am Elizabeth  
In the here and now.





## Responses

We invite your feedback on this our second Volume of the RNDM Reader.

We would love to hear about any items you have found to be significant or helpful.

Please send suggestions and comments to the Province Office  
Email: [rndmsecaus@olm.org.au](mailto:rndmsecaus@olm.org.au)

*Or write to:*

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HIGHGATE WA 6003

*It would also be very much appreciated if you would notify the office of any changes to your contact details.*



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