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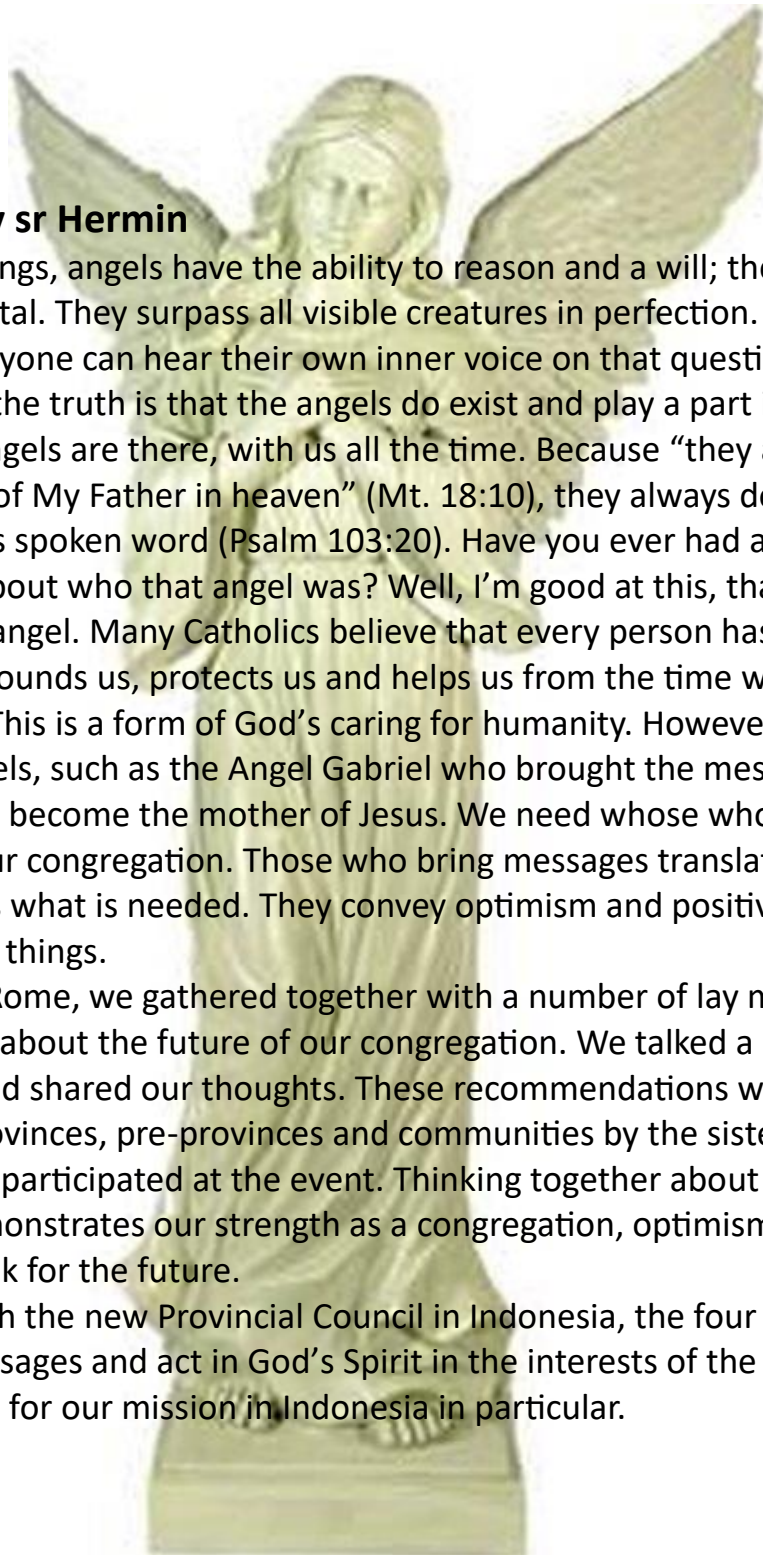
Reflection by sr Hermin

As spiritual beings, angels have the ability to reason and a will; they are persons and are immortal. They surpass all visible creatures in perfection. Who believes in angels? Everyone can hear their own inner voice on that question.

Nevertheless, the truth is that the angels do exist and play a part in our journey or lives. The angels are there, with us all the time. Because “they always look upon the face of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 18:10), they always do His bidding, obedient to His spoken word (Psalm 103:20). Have you ever had an experience and thought about who that angel was? Well, I’m good at this, thanks to my kind guardian angel. Many Catholics believe that every person has a guardian angel that surrounds us, protects us and helps us from the time we are born to when we die. This is a form of God’s caring for humanity. However, there are also other angels, such as the Angel Gabriel who brought the message to Mary that she would become the mother of Jesus. We need those who bring messages in our congregation. Those who bring messages translate the Word of God and tell us what is needed. They convey optimism and positive views about many different things.

At Nemi near Rome, we gathered together with a number of lay members to think together about the future of our congregation. We talked a lot about our experiences and shared our thoughts. These recommendations will be taken back to the provinces, pre-provinces and communities by the sisters and lay members who participated at the event. Thinking together about today and tomorrow demonstrates our strength as a congregation, optimism and a positive outlook for the future.

I hope that with the new Provincial Council in Indonesia, the four sisters will be bearers of messages and act in God’s Spirit in the interests of the congregation as a whole and for our mission in Indonesia in particular.



Working visit to Belgium



It is easy for the general council to visit the sisters in the Belgian province. On 31 March the council members left for Zonhoven by car and they were warmly welcomed by sr Marie-Louise. Sr Annie was also present. They discussed the developments concerning the reconstruction of St Catherine's, where the sisters live in the care home. They also talked about the decreasing size of the province and its transition to post-province.



After an enjoyable luncheon, the sisters from the province came to the provincialate to enjoy a cup of coffee with delicious cake. The general council had prepared a photographic brochure showing images of each (pre-post) province. By means of the photographs they spoke about all the parts of the



Congregation. The sisters were very interested in the developments in the various countries.

Because it was Easter, the general council gave each sister a basket with chocolate eggs. After the evening meal the council returned to 's-Hertogenbosch.

Working visit to the province of the Netherlands

The council gained experience from using the photographic brochure in Belgium, and then used it again during the visit to the Dutch sisters. During an entire week, from Monday 4 until and including Thursday 7 April, meetings took place with the communities in Tilburg. The encounters were different but there was always a warm welcome.



The sisters were curious to find out what was happening in the remainder of the Congregation.

Based on the photographs they tried to get an idea of the situation. All the Dutch sisters were pleased to hear that what had been started in 1832 in Tilburg now had developed into a worldwide organisation with a future.





Like the Belgian sisters, the Dutch sisters also received chocolate eggs. The general council was treated to beautiful bouquets of flowers.



Working visit to the Philippines

Sr Josephine and sr Elisângela travelled to the Philippines for a working visit from 22 April up to and including 12 May. It was the first working visit since the outbreak of the pandemic that the two sisters of the general council carried out. Of course, during the pandemic contacts also took place between the general council members and the sisters in the Philippines. But nothing can replace a face-to-face meeting. The two sisters visited all the communities and of course held talks with sr Amy.

In Marikina, Srs Elena, Jessica and Annie work in the child care centre. Sr Annie deals with the finances. During the visit, 5 students had lessons online. The school year ends on 8 July and starts again on 22 August. So far ten students have registered for the next school year. Some parents want to register their child as soon as face-to-face lessons recommence. Hopefully more children will be signed up for the next school year. The school has space for 60 children and receives an annual licence from the government. Because the size of the building does not quite meet the requirements of the ministry, the school does not qualify for a permanent licence.

The sisters in New Manila have their daily activities there and are doing well. The third community they visited is in Lupao. Sr Cathy works as a social worker in an orphanage of the diocese. She is very happy there and is gaining a lot of experience. Perhaps there will be opportunities to involve her in the further development of the Centre for people with a physical handicap.



It became clear that the sisters intend to focus in the future on the child day care centre and the centre for people with a physical handicap.

All the sisters are very curious to see the results of the project in



which three countries are exploring whether it is possible to work intensively together. That cooperation might lead to the formation of an international province.



ICC 2022

In April 2020 an ICC had been planned about Mission and Spirituality. The date was a few weeks after the beginning of the lockdown and therefore everything had to be cancelled. When it turned out that this year it was possible to meet again on an international level, a new ICC was organised immediately. The topics of leadership and cooperation were added to those of spirituality and mission. Four main themes which are important for the future of the Congregation.



We searched for a suitable location, and decided on the SVD in Nemi, 30 km South of Rome. Br Broer Huitema

CMM and Anne Stael were prepared to facilitate the meeting. We were welcomed there from 6 until 15 June.



Sr Hermin Bu'ulölö opened the meeting on Tuesday 7 June. Because it was the day after Pentecost, the central focus was on wanting to understand each other. She explained, that "Pentecost inspires across borders." "The Spirit blows wherever it wants, is in movement, dynamic and cannot be confined within the walls of a convent, church or culture. In the coming days we will search for ways to make our spirituality visible in our mission and in our communities. As religious, we are not able to do this by ourselves.

We need others to collaborate with us. Then our spirituality will be carried on and we will be able to look forward to a future full of hope."

Covid-19 has changed our life. How can we go along with those changes without losing sight

of our values like trust in God, compassion and simplicity? Do we note new chances and opportunities? The objective of the meeting was to be able to exchange views about this, to share experiences and to come up with new ideas.

Sr Hermin emphasized that it was a pity that the Indonesian participants invited to the meeting, were not present, as they had not been granted a visa. After all, Indonesia is the largest province of our Congregation.

Spirituality

Each participant had brought an object that symbolised her personal spirituality. On the basis of these items, and the texts about the SCMM spirituality in the Constitutions we reflected about how we could keep our spirituality alive. It became clear that the most vital European sisters are still involved in external organisations that help others, and they had experienced that connectedness was an important element in passing on the spirituality. In Brazil the sisters and associated members live their lives among marginalised people, and they are not afraid to take a political stance whilst trying to give people back their dignity so that they will find hope again. The sisters in Timor Leste experience their spirituality in their mission with the core values of simplicity, compassion and trust in God. The sisters from the Philippines also said that compassionate love is expressed in the mission and in community life, by listening to each other and by forgiving each other's errors.

Audience



The excursion already took place on the second day. We were taken to Rome, where we attended the audience with Pope Francis at 9:00 a.m. There were loud cheers when the Congregation was given a personal welcome.

After the audience everyone was free to visit the St Peter's Church, look at Rome, buy souvenirs or

It was to be a warm and well-spent day.

Mission

All participants had been asked to prepare a presentation about the mission in their own country. We heard impressive stories, such as the battle for social justice in Brazil, sharing joy and sorrow, the counselling for projects for young and older people in the Foundation and in the Centre Dom Hélder Câmara, the experience of having to



cooperate with others, the flourishing Movement of Mercy and the inclusion of the Associated Members in the Congregation.

The Dutch province focuses on sisterhood and looking after one another. All the sisters are elderly and now their role is to support others. They dedicate their efforts as volunteers to various activities and as sponsors they co-finance promising projects of groups of people who are at the periphery of society. The charism is propagated via the Vincentian Movement, the Movement of Mercy, The Inspired Association and the Barach group.

The situation in Belgium is similar to that in the Netherlands. The mission has also been phased out and several sisters are still involved in voluntary work in the parish or the diocese and in the institutions that used to be part of their own projects.

The sisters in the Philippines work in the parishes and carry out pastoral visits. They do this in cooperation with lay people. Several sisters work in a school and one of the sisters is a social worker in an orphanage of the diocese. The pandemic had blocked a number of projects and it is very difficult to start up again.

In Timor Leste the four communities are active in society. It is important to visit families and sick people, but they also provide clean drinking water and food. They look after 41 children in the orphanage between the ages of 5 and 15 years. The pandemic put everything on hold, but gradually things are going back to normal. For instance, the hospital has reopened and meetings are being held where new candidates are being recruited.

In conclusion, we see a group of strong women with attention for people in the margin of society and who are searching for new ways.



Laudato Si

Some years have passed since Pope Francis published *Laudato Si* (2015). The text presents his ideas about the vulnerability of the planet and the poor, as well as his conviction that everything is interconnected. He calls for a different approach to the economy and progress, and demands attention for the dignity of all creatures. At present, after having experienced a few years of the pandemic, we all realise how this message affects our mission and spirituality.

In The Netherlands and Belgium, the sisters use sustainable materials for the new construction, and they limit the use of plastics whilst surplus food is processed into compost. Individually the sisters use energy sparingly and try to minimise their consumption of goods. They are proud to have switched to a more sustainable way of life.

The sisters in Brazil raise people's awareness about how things can be done differently. At school, children learn to deal carefully with nature. PET bottles are cut in half, for instance. One part is used as a flowerpot to grow seeds and the other half is turned into toys. At the pastoral service for the young a project has been started to turn car tyres into rubbish bins. Tins are turned into toys and recyclable products are reused. They join forces and try to cooperate with other organisations to develop new projects. For instance, they have obtained a deal with bakeries: whoever arrives with a fabric shopping bag to buy rolls, will receive an extra one.

There is already a lot that you can do yourself. That is also the experience of the sisters in the Philippines. The communities separate waste and ensure materials are reused. By doing these things in a deliberate way and by discussing it with people in the environment, you also raise their awareness about the necessity of sustainability.

Sr Sofiani adds that the sisters in Indonesia also give a high priority to sustainability. They try to use as little paper as possible, to be careful with energy, separate waste and avoid plastics. Pupils at the schools and in dormitories are made aware of caring sustainably for our planet.

Each country contributes in its own way towards a more sustainable world.

Leadership

Leadership is an important theme that has many facets for discussion. During this ICC, servant leadership of yourself as an individual and of the community/country was emphasized. Br Broer gave an introduction, depicting the ideal image of servant leadership, a model. The practice is more problematic. Yet elements like authenticity and accountability play an important role. Each human being is responsible for him/herself, for what you do, but also for what you do not do. As a servant leader you try to make the other person stronger. Many sisters work in education and their most important task is to support young people in their path in life. That is difficult; when are you doing things right?



Sometimes, you need to be nice, but at other times being nice is not right. Sometimes you have to act immediately, sometimes you need to wait a bit longer before you act. There are no simple answers. Listening and distinguishing carefully to what is important, is part of leadership. Mission also needs leadership. The members of the individual countries discussed together what their strong and weak points were. This will determine the points of concern for the coming years. Or perhaps we should say that it showed a lot of ambition. This varied from increasing the number of sisters to expand the mission, to learning to speak good English, from developing the cooperation with laypeople to the professionalisation of sisters.

Connectedness

We heard repeatedly that the involvement with laity is of importance for the future of the Congregation. In the USA, the sisters have been working for years with an involved group of Friends. Sr Mel Ryley and Dana Sullivan both had recorded a video message about their experience as a sister with the Friends and as a Friend with the sisters. From Indonesia we received a video message from Elisabeth Ghozali, Friend of the Mission. The Netherlands and Brazil attended the meeting with involved delegates: Henny Spooren and Sylvania Tereza Batista da Silva. They spoke of their local experiences, as did the sisters present. Sr Marie Thérèse Croke had also sent a letter about her experiences in working with laity.

All the different stories demonstrate that the type of connectedness differs from place to place. The associated membership that exists in Brazil is the strongest type of connectedness. Statutes have been drawn up and the associated members make a solemn promise every year connecting them again for a period to the Brazilian province. On the other hand, there are also



countries without any structure for connectedness.

It is expected that in the future the number of lay people with a connection to the Congregation will increase, and this means that the charism will be propagated in a different way. It does mean that guidelines will need to be set up.

International cooperation

We have celebrated together. Various topics have been discussed and experiences were shared. We heard wonderful ideas. Can we structure our cooperation? The cooperation amongst sisters and between sisters and laypeople as well as the deepening of the spirituality.

In Timor Leste the sisters would like to learn English in the Philippines. They would also like to take advantage of the knowledge of the Indonesian province in various fields. Learning English as a common language is also a wish in Brazil. They are already working hard on it with the help of the Philippine and American sisters.

The Belgian sisters would like to continue their meetings with the Dutch sisters. After all, they do not have a language barrier, which makes it easier to discuss common topics. Several countries feel the need to structure the connectedness with laypeople.

The different ideas demonstrate that the sisters and laypeople need each other at any rate.

The future

Religious life is developing. Globally the number of vocations is decreasing. Young people no longer choose to live as religious. They no longer want live according to our life style. However, the Brazilian sisters have found that the laypeople want to be closer to the Congregation, that they want to be connected to our spirituality. These laypeople are married and have their own families. That is a new form of religious life and a model that has potential in Brazil. There are also developments in the Netherlands. In the area of Church social welfare, people from different religions cooperate. Many people are interested in new churches and join groups like San Egidio, Focolare or Chemin Neuf.



That means that vocations still exist, but in a different way from those in the past. The sisters in Indonesia and Timor Leste expect vocations to increase in the next ten years. The sisters in the Philippines hope for an increase in numbers, but at the same time they want to focus on closer collaboration with laypeople. Once the childcare centre grows again and the centre for people with a handicap has been professionalised, people with an interest for the SCMM will return. In ten years', time, not many sisters will be left in the Netherlands and Belgium. Will the groups of laypeople carry on without the sisters?

The situation in every country differs as to the involvement of laypeople and new vocations. Yet new forms open the doors for the propagation of our spirituality. The laypeople and sisters inspire each other in communality.

Provincial chapter in Indonesia

The members of the general council had only just returned home, or sr Hermin and sr Sofiani left again for Indonesia where the provincial chapter was held in Medan from 1 July up to and including 6 July. As usual they reviewed the past four years. On the last day of the chapter the provincial council was elected. Sr Donata Manalu is the new provincial superior. She will be supported in her task by sr Blandina Zagötö as vicaress. Sr Teresa Seingo and sr Alfonsia Saing are the two other members of the council.

We wish them a lot of success in their coming period of office.



The 60th anniversary of the presence of our Congregation in Brazil



On the 11th of May, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the presence of our Congregation in Brazil. We celebrated together with our associates, all the members of the Movement of Mercy, adults and young people, our collaborators and the people of our communities. The mass was celebrated by our friend Father Jean. In the mass, in the moment of thanksgiving, we remembered all the sisters who passed through here, stories were told, lived facts and emphasized the contribution of each of our

sisters in the construction of the Kingdom of God, in the fight for justice and dignity for all. We ended in a very Brazilian and northeastern way, with forró, ciranda and quadrilha, celebrating the life and giving of each of our sisters. We thank God for all the good he has given us to accomplish. May our Mother of Mercy inspire us to follow her Son.



Joys & Sorrows

In the past months two sisters have passed away:

06 May	sr Ansfrida van Loon	Tilburg (The Netherlands)
24 May	sr Florensia Fau	Telukdalam (Indonesia)
16 July	sr Rosa Hermans	Zonhoven (Belgium)

Several Sisters have celebrated a convent jubilee:

40 years	7 June	sr Stefani Murwani
25 years	25 July	sr Rosemarie Malisngoran
		sr Rita Gheru Leko
		sr Hubertine Nino
		sr Yahana Sembiring
		sr Patrisia Sitanggang
		sr Damiana Marbun
		sr Clementine Wailaba
		sr Benedikta Marbun
		sr Fidelia Giawa

On August 14, sr Constansa Lowette is turning 101 years old.



Have a nice summer!