



## **Ethiopia—Christmas 2010**

Dear Friends and Benefactors,

The word journey is running through my mind this Christmastide. The birth of Jesus begins with the journey of his parents from Nazareth to Bethlehem, then the journey of the Magi to worship the new born child and then our own journey through life.

Sadly I have to report the end of the earthly journeys of two special sisters. Sr. Bridget Harley died in Australia where she had returned after 38 years of teaching in Ethiopia and a few weeks later our much loved and respected Sister Dashe Bayissa died here in St. Mary's creating a shock wave not only in Ethiopia but wherever she was known for her love and care of disadvantaged people and her generosity of spirit. She is greatly missed and her life and example provides an inspiration for us all. May they rest in peace.

My own journey as the Provincial of the Ethiopian Province is also ending and I want to thank all of you for your prayers, support, encouragement and financial assistance throughout my nine years in office. You cannot imagine the difference your donations make to the quality and quantity of services we are able to provide to the most deprived in our society. May God reward you for your continued generosity especially when I know and well understand the financial restraints so many people are experiencing just now.

And where does the journey of your dollar, euro, pound and other currency donations end? It pays for education, medical services and care for vulnerable people from the new born to the elderly—you might say from the cradle to the grave—in 14 houses in Ethiopia.

Here in **Addis Ababa, St. Mary's School** continues teaching students from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This year there are 1600 students and they received a cup from the Ministry of Education for coming top in the area for School Leaving exam results. Similar awards were made to **Atse Tekle Ghiorgis** our school here for the poorest of the poor and to the school in **Bahir Dar**. One of many success stories concerns *Kidist* who comes from a broken family background, a bright girl she received a scholarship from St. Mary's where she studied free for four years, then graduated with a BA in Economics. Now she is back teaching (without pay) 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades and is continuing her studies for a Masters degree. When I went to congratulate her she said "what return can I give to a school which has made me what I am". This example of making the most of opportunities is very heart warming and it is one I hear often from sisters working in different disciplines around the country.

A year ago we took over the rerunning of **St. Mary's Clinic** from the Medical Missionaries of Mary. They had established a laboratory and centre for providing services to people affected by and infected with HIV/AIDS. We continue this work of awareness education, testing, counselling, referring for antiretroviral treatment, and giving social support for the neediest, providing food, shelter, school fees, medical expenses and transport for their families. The clinic is in this compound.

Our **Urban Development Project** in the City continues its policy of moving from one area—now referred to as sub-cities to another once the programme has proved its self-sustainability. It is currently surveying a new area to assess the special needs and thus how they will design a programme of activities.

Moving to the west of the country, to **Dembidollo** our primary Health Clinics in **Danka** and **Alecu**, the kindergartens and women's development programmes there and in **Samarro** are all running well. One new and exciting development is the service being given in the **Catholic Church Eye Clinic** opened in memory of Abba Philipos C.M. With the help of Sr. Evelyn a Daughter of Charity, three groups of ophthalmologists have come from the USA and Spain to perform eye surgeries for adults and children. These doctors are playing an important role in making people aware about the prevention and treatment of blindness. This year 180 patients have been treated and recovered their sight – their rejoicing takes one back to biblical times & the miracles performed by Jesus in restoring sight to the blind.

In **Bonga** they still feel the absence of Sr. Dashe. There are five pre-postulants in formation while the kindergartens and Women in Development programmes continue to be the hope of a better future. In **Jimma** thanks to the many donors who have stretched their hands, the original John Paul II kindergarten has been upgraded to include a 1-4 Grade Primary School. Parents are delighted with this development and the guarantee of a quality education for their children.

Down in **Welayta** after a long wait we have received the green light to continue training kindergarten teachers in the Montessori system. Apparently the government has given warnings to and indeed closed some colleges whose standards had dropped.

The new mission in **Bulbula** is growing slowly despite a lot of malaria and typhoid sickness among the children – there are two kindergartens and grades 1-3 school.

**Bahir Dar** is flourishing with a new Bishop appointed to help pastoral area. Our sisters are very happy to welcome him in a place which is predominantly Orthodox Christian.

In the northern capital of **Mekelle**, the **St.Vincent** and **St.Louise** communities serve the poor through education, medical and social services including a successful street children programm. Both houses celebrated the 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of our founders in great style. Indeed in September all the community houses throughout Ethiopia had special days for the poor and for parishioners and young people to celebrate this occasion.

2010 has been a special year for the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian family as a whole. **St. Justin de Jacobis House in Alitena** also welcomed our Vincentian Brothers who went on Pilgrimage to the North to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the death of St. Justin. Together they celebrated and thanked God for his life remembering specially the persecution he experienced as he preached the Catholic Faith among Orthodox Christians.

The sisters in the **Immaculate Conception House, Maychew** are doing excellent work with the children in their kindergartens. Recently there was a flood affecting some 150 families and thanks to generous donations we were able to help them with blankets and cooking utensils.

All these good activities are possible because of your generosity. May God bless you and your loved ones this Christmas and may the Stars that guided the Magi guide you in the right path during the coming year. May you have a Merry Christmas and Blessed 2011.

With sincere gratitude and best wishes.



Sr.Aster Zewdie d.c.



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