



# NEWSLETTER

*Sisters of Social Service*

October 2020

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October 15, 2020

## Letter of the General Moderator

Dear Sisters!

***We are one Bread, one Body, one Spirit. Amen!***

Just a couple of weeks ago you received a letter from us explaining the preparation process leading up to the Chapter 2021. The theme of the Chapter is unity and in the preparation we want to make sure that everyone will be heard; that we can share and exchange thoughts, dreams, desires, and concerns regarding the life of our Community. Unity does not mean uniformity; it does not mean that diversity has no place. Unity means that we all have the same Center that is Christ; that we are nurtured by the same spirituality and are moved by the same values and the same principles (our SSS charism). Unity means that if we are solidly grounded in all that unites us, we are not afraid of the differences, of the diversity of gifts, of the different ways of seeing and understanding our reality. Unity means that we engage in conversation, in sharing, and communal discernment with the presupposition of our shared values and of the goodwill of every SSS; and we are willing to embrace our differences, to listen together to what the Spirit wants to tell us through each other, and through the reality around us.

So now, when we start our cross-district small group gatherings, open your ears and hearts to the wonders, to the richness of gifts in your sisters whom you might not have known well before, but now she is with you in that virtual sacred space to share, to dream, to discern together.

***We are one Bread, one Body, one Spirit. Amen!***

## News from the Generalate

As you could read in the Federation News the ***Formation Forum*** was held between July 17 and 19. It was in hybrid form: some of us were present physically at the Generalate House, but most of the participants joined us via zoom.

The Formation Forum became a Federation event because Sisters Chris Machado and Marie Lindeman from California could participate in the afternoon sessions. It gives us reason to rejoice because now they have a group of women in California who are in formation.

Srs. Agnes and Zsuzsa were able to go to Cluj to be present at the elective ***District Assembly in Romania***. It was very well prepared by a long online process facilitated by Sr. Magdi Kóvári. Unfortunately four sisters could not come from Miercurea Ciuc due to the last minute fact of two of the having tested positive with the virus and the other two needing to be quarantined; nevertheless the quorum was still sufficient to have the assembly and the elections. Sisters who could not be physically present joined the

discussion and the deliberations through the internet. The only thing they could not do was to cast a vote.

On August 27<sup>th</sup> Sr. Ildikó Homa was elected district moderator. Her assistant is Sr. Csilla Gábor, and the councilors are Srs. Magdi Fülöp and Anna Farmati. On the following day the chapter delegates were also elected.

Because of the second wave of the Covid the Hungarian District Assembly was postponed for next spring.

On September 23-24-25 we had our **Extended Council Meeting** with the District Moderators. Although the meeting has a long tradition by now, this time it became a learning experience for all of us because it took place via zoom. It was a “virtual” meeting in that sense that geographically we were sitting in different places; however, it was still a sacred “space” because we entered togetherness with the help of the Holy Spirit, who again made sure that **we are one Bread, one Body, one Spirit.**

The District Moderators shared their joys and concerns about life in their districts. Then we talked about Chapter preparation, starting with our desires regarding the kind of a chapter we would like to have in 2021. This was followed by a discussion about the plans for the preparation process and the CAST conference. Communication was another topic: how to use proper channels to provide for the timely arrival of “official information” before the same would go around on our social media.

Agnes gave a report on the Federation Delegate zoom meeting which was followed by a brain storming about how we would imagine the celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> jubilee on different levels. At the end of the meeting the prayer intentions of the districts were posted and a “virtual exchange” of the rosaries took place.

**The Chapter Delegate Meeting** was also held with the help of zoom on September 26-27. Although technically it was a bit challenging, our pioneering spirit surpassed the obstacles! Sister Kate DuVal SSND our chapter facilitator, who is accompanying us in the preparation process quoted someone saying that this video conferencing is “strengthening the muscle of presence”. And indeed, it demands more effort, more attention to stay active in that virtual space of the meeting. Nevertheless it was a good experience to start to work together with all the delegates (and substitutes) on the chapter preparation. We hope that by the Chapter we will truly become **one Bread, one Body, one Spirit!**

The next step of chapter preparation is the cross-district group gatherings. It is an integral part of the chapter preparation and has to be a priority for every sister! I hope by the time you read this Newsletter your group will be on the way to schedule its gathering. I pray that these gatherings become experiences of our oneness in our charism and sisterhood.

In this Newsletter you find the prayer intentions and the prayer partner districts.

Pentecost never ends! We continue the sharing of our jubilant sisters: Sister Vilma Rojas Bicet (40) from Cuba, Sister Erzsébet Czúcz (40) from Hungary, and Sr. Maria Lugosi (60) from Buffalo share their vocation/life stories.

## 2020 Prayer Intentions and Prayer Partners of the Districts

**Buffalo Delegation (Hungarian District prays for them)**

1. To keep growing in the deepening our relationship with God and with each other on our journey
2. Making discernment and decision on the ways of letting go
3. That sisters have the proper care what they need

**Cuban District (Romanian District will pray for them)**

1. To maintain peace and hope in the midst of our situation – and to offer the same to the people
2. Vocations
3. New formation team

**Hungarian District (Cuban District prays for them)**

1. The upcoming District Assembly and especially for the elections
2. Finding the proper person to be the new treasurer
3. Vocations

**Romanian District (Slovak District will pray for them)**

1. Vocations for the District
2. Freshness – to be able to break old habits
3. To be able to find in the „here and now” how we can live our SSS charism in our dioceses

**Slovak District (Buffalo Delegation will pray for them)**

1. New vocations and formation
2. Our place, community and future in Martin
3. That our community life may express God’s love

**Generalate (hope all will pray for us)**

1. To continue to foster unity and the deeper living of our charism
2. Chapter preparation/chapter 2021
3. New life in the districts
4. Polish foundation

United in our vocation

*Sister Agnes Pataki*

## **Vocation Stories of our Jubilarian Sisters**

### **Testimony of Sr. Vilma Rojas Bicet (Cuba), celebrating her ruby jubilee**

More than forty years ago I got to know the SSS through Sr. Veronica (Fusté Chacón). She was God’s instrument: her simplicity, her spirit of service and immediacy inspired in me the desire to listen to God

and to serve Him. Sister Veronica accompanied the process of my vocation and a great part of my life as SSS. I give thanks to God for her life-witness which helped me a lot.

During these forty years of consecrated life in our community I was able to experience the joy of the soul which surrenders herself to God's will; during all these years I have persevered to make my motto true: "availability and service". I also have lived good moments and have crossed great difficulties. In all of these I could experience God's grace and my love for the community which has allowed me to remain faithful throughout all these times.



During these years I have served God at the parish community of Santa Teresita (Santiago de Cuba); I established several mission houses<sup>1</sup> which belong to the Saint Joseph the Worker community and I was able to bring God's word to female prisoners. The way I experience all these ministries was like God was doing all these marvelous deeds in which He asked for our collaboration.

The community of the SSS has been something great for me: the companionship and the witness of each sister who was walking before me gave me the motivation in life. Seeing the dedication and the sacrifice of their lives awakened in me the desire to be better each day, and to be faithful to the One who had called us.

### **Vocation story of Sr. Erzsébet Czúcz (Hungary), celebrating her ruby jubilee (40 years)**

I was born in Fonyód<sup>2</sup>, on July 23, 1947. My parents, Stephen and Maria were hairdressers. I have an older sister, Maria and two younger brothers, Stephen and Andrew. We lived in great poverty. My grandmother, who had no income, was taking care of the household. My grandfather from my father's side also lived with us; he was paralyzed due to a stroke and he had no income either. In 1951 I got ill with polio; as a consequence my walking became pretty much impaired. I was often treated at a central hospital for musculoskeletal disorders in Budapest. When I was not hospitalized, I had to go there for monthly check ups.

Very early, in my family we have learned how to share; this has stayed with me throughout my whole life as I always tried to help others.

I attended high school in my hometown. After graduation I studied applied mathematics at the university in Budapest. Finishing my studies I started to work in the Computer Center of the National Planning Institute in 1970. I stayed with them until April 30, 1987. I became a volunteer at the Red Cross: I was organizing blood drives, cancer screening, cardiologic tests. In March 1987 Benedictine Fr. Felix called

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<sup>1</sup> These are houses in the countryside (in the mountains or the farm lands) where there are no church buildings. Some house owners allow that the "mission team" celebrate liturgy and give catechesis to people in the neighborhood. Usually the "mission" includes attention to the social/material needs of the poor as well. Sister Vilma with her team founded over 20 such mission houses around Santiago.

<sup>2</sup> A town next to the lake Balaton in the Western part of Hungary

me that they needed badly my work in their office in Pannonhalma (monastery, boarding school for boys, nursing home for elderly religious, museum complex). As I just became a disabled retiree, I accepted the offer. So for three years I worked in the office of the Benedictine Abbey: I did book keeping and created software for the kitchen. In 1990 Archbishop Szendi invited the SSS to Veszprem to start a local community there. I went with them to work in the office. In 1992 I returned to Budapest because Sister Eva Kontra<sup>3</sup> invited me to work in their newly established nursing home. From that year on I also started to do the book keeping and the cashier's job at the Hungarian District and the work became too taxing for me. After six years I made the decision and chose the ministry in my own community. From that time on (1998) my full time ministry was the office work at the District center. I retired in 2018; now I gladly volunteer to transfer into computer typing old SSS text (e.g. old documents which were copied by indigo) This September I moved to the Saint Joseph Home of the SSS in Csobanka, where I can live in community again!

### ***Now about faith and vocation:***

My parents baptized me; I received first Communion and I was confirmed; however, I received these sacraments without real preparation, when I happened to be at home and not in the hospital. At times I participated in the Mass, but the way I remember it, I was not a happy camper. My parents were hairdressers and they had to work on Sundays, their day off was Monday; this way they were not able to attend church on Sundays. In my adolescence I turned away from God. In the hospital I got acquainted with Éva Kontra,<sup>4</sup> who was working there and was an underground Religious. For my high school graduation I got a Bible from her in the mail but I hid it, because I was ashamed of it before my parents. For my university studies I went to Budapest, where I met her several times, we went to the movies etc. I had a friend, a young man who used to spend the summers in Fonyód; we met many times; he was talking about faith, religion, Bible. Also in the dormitory several of my room mates were practicing their religion so we discussed, debated a lot. This is how God was looking for me. I was a third year student when my friend announced that he would take me to see a priest. This was the time I got to know Fr. Charlie Futó<sup>5</sup>. He became my confessor for many years. With Suzan, one of my roommates we wanted to do some good deeds, so we volunteered at the Association of the Blind. Later Fr. Charlie invited me to help with his ministry with the deaf. After having completed my university studies I participated in religion classes for adults at another parish, then I joined a Bible study group. This latter I enjoyed very much.

Through "divine organization" I got acquainted with Sr. Agnes László. She was working at the same place where I was. She invited me to the Chapel of Christ the King<sup>6</sup>, then to visit Fr. Zsigmond<sup>7</sup> in Csobánka: there was Sr. Tarzicia<sup>8</sup>; she also invited me to see "aunt" Viktória<sup>9</sup>. I liked all these visits. In the Christ the King Chapel – nicknamed "Kriki" – I got to know several sisters. In 1975 Sr. Agnes Sztrilich offered me

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<sup>3</sup> A sister from another religious community whom Erzsi had known for a long time

<sup>4</sup> The same sister

<sup>5</sup> Very famous spiritual guide – over the decades many of our sisters were supported by his wisdom

<sup>6</sup> it was a place where young women seeking religious vocation gathered with Sr. Agnes Sztrilich - it was disguised as religious classes for adults

<sup>7</sup> he was a Benedictine monk, friend of the SSS – the communist system did not allow him to stay in the monastery; he was a country parish priest

<sup>8</sup> Elderly sister – now deceased, she was ministering at the parish and the rectory

<sup>9</sup> Sr. Viktória Wágner – she „midwifed” the vocation of many of us during underground time

an opportunity to spend the Easter Triduum in Pannonhalma. There I fell in love with Benedictine spirituality, with everything that was Benedictine. During the summer I spent two weeks of vacation time in Csobánka; I talked a lot with Fr. Zsigmond. By that time I started to ask God about the purpose of my life for which He had created me (because until then I was only thinking about marriage). I begged the Lord to show me what He wanted of me and I made a covenant with Him. I started to wear the golden ring I had received for my confirmation because otherwise I was not fond of jewelry. In the fall of that year with Agnes Sztrilich we went to Alexanderdorf, a Benedictine monastery of nuns in East-Germany for two weeks. I asked the nun in charge of guests to pray for me so that I can discover my way in life. The consequence of this trip to East-Germany was that on December 5<sup>th</sup> I was cited to the office of internal affairs and I was interrogated for three hours. I was accused that in that Benedictine monastery I handed over secret documents to the West-Germans (because I was working at the National Planning Institute). Then they started to talk about Agnes Sztrilich and the Society and Agnes László. I was given a description about the SSS. They told me that it was founded by Mary Slachta. I did not know better, so I did not correct them. They promised me that they would make sure that I would be fired from my job, they would force me to move back to my hometown and I would need to work in the fields because the post office would be a position of trust (what I did not deserve) unless I sever my relationship with the Benedictines and the SSS. It was very difficult and scary. I took a vacation. And I knew then that this was God's answer to my plea in Csobánka. Beginning with January I started to meet Agnes Sztrilich regularly. The Benedictine spirituality (family spirit, liturgy, ecclesial spirit, Ora et labora, stability) and social work were very attractive for me.



On June 2, 1976 I applied to the SSS and two days later I could be present at the Pentecost Mass<sup>10</sup>. This was the beginning of my novitiate. (The previous 3-4 years of getting to know each other was my pre-entrance and candidacy – but I was not aware of that.) The place and the method of our days of recollection were very varied.

1978 was a very difficult year for me. In October I planned to go to Alexanderdorf (to the Benedictine nuns in East-Germany). Before traveling I discussed with a priest some difficulties. He recommended that I read Hosea 2: *“(14) I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her... (19) I will betroth you to me forever”*. With these words in my heart I started out to East-Germany. On October 15, the feast of St. Teresa of Avila the Gospel for the Mass was the royal wedding – come to the wedding feast – *and Jesus was the Groom and I was the bride...* At that moment I truly recognized that this was my life, my vocation. The following year I asked that I may take my vows. My motto was slowly taking shape. Come to the wedding feast! Come, my beloved, my beauty! Come, Lord Jesus! “Come!” – back and forth. I received the permission to take my vows with the condition that I “struggle through” the big Dogmatic book written by Fr. Előd Sch.P. (Because I did not receive any formal education in catechism; nor did I attend the long distance course of theology<sup>11</sup> .) Somehow I was not able to get started. Then in

<sup>10</sup> It used to be at the church of the Central Seminary in Budapest; a perfectly public Mass, where sisters gathered – of course no uniform, no outside signs; for the sake of staying clandestine; after liturgy it was forbidden to congregate around the church

<sup>11</sup> This was an underground possibility in the late 70-s, later it became official in Hungary

mid-November I broke my ankle so I had to stay at home. I knew that this was the time given me for this study. God figured this out real well. Three months in cast. Without the possibility to attend Mass. But the Blessed Sacrament was with me in my apartment.

At the end of December 1979 I moved to my apartment in Bercsényi Street. It became the place of our weekly (secret) group reunions; several times we had days of recollections here and couple of times there was Holy Mass too.

On Pentecost 1980 I took my first vows. My motto: "Come...!" After taking my vows we went to church for Mass. A priest friend was celebrating the Mass. After the liturgy he came out, looked at me and said: Lizzy, you look like a bride! (I had a white blouse and a red wind jacket on me). He was not aware that I just took my vows.

I took my final vows in 1985. Before it my ring was broken. During those years we received the ring for final vows. I knew why my ring was broken: it was the one I used when I made my covenant with God in 1975 – but this time Jesus made his covenant with me forever.

We celebrated the final vows only low key, without Mass. Only the priest (Fr. Miklos), Sr Agnes Sztrilich and I were present when I pronounced my final vows on May 11, 1985.

I desired community life. This was the reason I went to work to Pannonhalma to the Benedictine abbey and later to Veszprém. When the large community house (Emmanuel House in Budapest) was established I was the third sister to move in, in April 1996. I lived there for seven years. However, it was pretty far from my workplace and in winter time I was not able to commute; therefore I moved back to my apartment. I missed real community life.

I give thanks to God for the vocation, for His faithfulness for holding me up for forty years. I give thanks for the community, for this new "family" where I was gifted with many sisters, with a home, spirituality, liturgical prayer, ministry, and much graces...!!!!

The years of my unbelieving youth did not leave me unscarred. They often haunt me. I experience periods of dryness and emptiness. But the "betrothal" at Alexanderdorf keeps me faithful. This is the reason I am still in the community. I hope FOREVER!

## **Vocation story of diamond jubilarian Sr. Maria Lugosi (Buffalo)**

*I Have Loved You With An Everlasting Love (Jer 31,3)*

I was born in Hungary, the second of five children in our family in 1937. When I was eight years old, my father sent me to the nuns to prepare for my First Communion. They taught me very carefully that my Creator would come into my heart. I firmly believed that and did experience the personal presence of my Creator during my First Communion. I felt like a little queen, and I knew that I belonged to Him.

At 14, I first heard the concrete call to consecrated life. One thought kept returning to me: All things pass away, only God is eternal. But everything seemed to block my choice for God. In the schools, at the time, a great persecution of religion was in process. The cross of Christ was taken off the classroom wall, and religious education was forbidden.

My Mother took me aside and she opened the Bible to St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13 and said: "Maria, learn this Hymn of Love by Heart! If you keep it, you will be happy in your life. Remember, now remains faith, hope, and love, and among these the greatest is love." I decided to become a theologian, to learn about Christian faith and professionally to be able to defend it."

In high school, I joined a Bible-study group secretly organized by the Sisters of Social Service. During this time, I received a copy of the book *From the Desert to the Center of Life* from our group leader. In it, Sr. Margaret, the foundress of the Sisters of Social Service, wrote about her vision of having a group of contemplative sisters who would always remind the active ones of the "One Thing Necessary".

Reading this, I said to myself, "This style of life would be excellent for my theological endeavors." After graduating from high school, in 1956, I went to Budapest to meet Sr. Palma, the novice mistress, who accepted me and enrolled me in the "School of the Lord's Service". Meanwhile I started my studies in the Academy of Music. However, in October of the same year, the Hungarian Revolution broke out and I was sent to the United States for my novitiate with a group of other underground novices of the SSS. By the time we arrived to the US, the revolution had already failed. I started the novitiate in Buffalo but soon our group of novices was transferred to Syracuse to minister at the House of Providence, where we worked as "group mothers" for children coming from dysfunctional, broken families. I worked there for nine years. In 1960 I made my first vows. I chose my motto from Jeremiah: ***"I have loved you with an everlasting love."***

While working in Syracuse at the same time I studied at Lemoyne College, earning a BA.

While in Syracuse, I became an American citizen and took my final vows in 1967.

I was subsequently given the opportunity to earn a master's degree in Religious Studies from Canisius College (Buffalo). This was followed by a long period of studying abroad. I studied theology in Regensburg under the direction of Professor Joseph Ratzinger, (who became later Pope Benedict the XVI.) and earned a licentiate. After this I pursued doctoral studies in Sacred Theology at Gregorian University in Rome. Upon returning to the US I served as an Associate Professor of Sacred Theology for five years in Yonkers, NY (for men who as late vocation wanted to enter the seminary), following this I was an instructor at Canisius College, and at area high schools. I also used my musical talent serving as organist in a downtown church. As my "retirement years" came I tried to live out my desire for contemplative life – living alone, praying the Divine Office, Holy Rosary, other prayers – offering them for my community, my home country and for many other worthwhile intentions. During those years I had two groups of faithful people who regularly came to my house for mini-theological courses and days of recollection with adoration.

Now that my health is very weak, I am living in a nursing home. There I can follow Christ in a very new way by partaking in his suffering.

Still, I know myself being loved personally with an Everlasting Love and I try to return it with an undivided heart.



Sister Maria