



SSpS MISSION

Called by the Spirit • Embracing the World

Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters | USA & Caribbean | FEBRUARY 2021

The Year of St. Joseph

*Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust;
with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself
a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy,
and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen.*

Prayer to St. Joseph - Pope Francis

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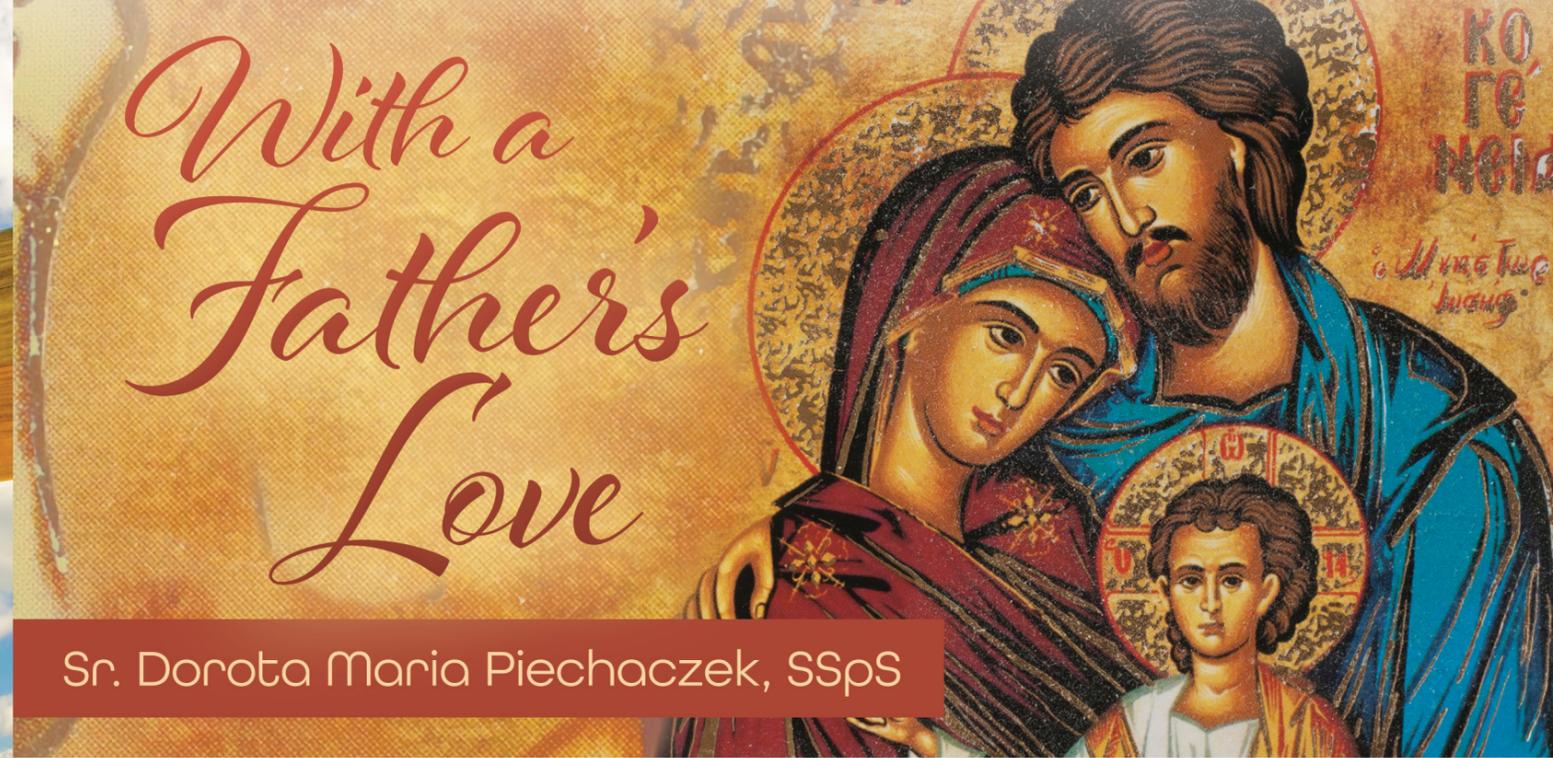
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Focus on Mission...

How are we on our personal journey of mission? Remembering that through baptism we are created in the image of God, called to follow the example of Christ in love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness in the particular circumstances of our life, we are MISSION!

To help us on our mission journey, Pope Francis dedicated the year December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021 the "Year of St. Joseph". Through his Apostolic Letter, "Patris Corde" (With a Father's Love), Pope Francis reflects on St. Joseph (Patron of the Universal Church) in his unique role as a "beloved father", a "tender and loving father", an "obedient father", an "accepting father", a "creatively courageous father", a "working father", and a "father in the shadows". During this year, we are encouraged to "go to Joseph" with our cares and needs, for he is a loving father!

Pope Francis also dedicated the year 2021 as the "Year of the Family". He invites us to reflect on another letter he wrote, "Amoris Laetitia" (The Joy of Love). In it he identifies some important words important to every family: "please, thank you, and I'm sorry"! "If these words are present in every family" he says, "the family will be in good shape."

I invite you to walk with St. Joseph as we journey together in MISSION this year of 2021! Through our stories of "life and mission" this month, we wish to express our gratitude to each of you as you accompany our missionary Sisters with your prayers as they minister in these times of the coronavirus pandemic. Let us also pray for peace and justice in our country. May we honor the contributions of our sisters and brothers of color with a grateful celebration of "Black History Month"!

- Sr. Mary Miller, SSpS

As you receive this issue of the SSpS MISSION, we are already over two months into the "Year of St. Joseph" declared by our Holy Father Francis from December 8, 2020 to December 8, 2021. The eyes of your heart might still behold the silent, tender, caring presence of St. Joseph from your Nativity set or a Christmas card. The title of the Pope's Apostolic Letter by which he proclaimed the Year of St. Joseph, takes inspiration from such an image "Patris corde" "With a father's love".

When I first heard these descriptive words about the person of Joseph, a sacred picture which I saw many years ago came to my mind. The title of the picture was "First Steps". There it was, the toddler Jesus between the supportive hands of Mary and Joseph. Their eyes totally focused on their Boy and their postures leaning toward him. As any parents, they were proud of the progress he was making. Such a delightful, warming, down to earth depiction of the Holy Family!

The Apostolic Letter proposes a similar image, St. Joseph who is close to us, who is like us, how we can be like him! The singular source of St. Joseph's greatness is that "he was ever ready to carry out God's will". He was much more a witness of the events of God's plan of salvation, than an object of them. Therefore, we don't have his words, yet his actions have spoken to the earliest believers and through the centuries to the Church. St. Joseph is the man "called by God to serve the person and the mission of Jesus." I would like to propose that we pick up our Bible and read one of the

accounts of the life of Jesus, preferable by Mathew, pay attention to the role of Joseph. How quickly he goes unnoticed! Yet Jesus grew up, experienced the world of family and village life, being loved 'with a father's heart'.

Pope Francis makes a strong link between the life of St. Joseph and the current situation of the pandemic. Humanity (each of us) lives in a situation of uncertainty which calls us to exercise an attitude of acceptance, patient and hope-filled waiting. (Joseph learning about Mary being pregnant, having to flee to Egypt.) An important aspect the Pope calls our attention to are the many often unnoticed people, who like Joseph, courageously serve us during the pandemic. Essential workers in a variety of jobs and services courageously carry out their duties so that life can go on. Their sense of responsibility and faithfulness benefit all of us. The Holy Father remembers those who are shut up in homes, the suffering and the dying. St. Joseph was always the protector, the one to 'go to' in need, desperation, and bewilderment. He was the provider for the Holy Family and thus the Protector of the Church. Joseph provided for Mary and Jesus being the "shadow of Father's love". He is known to take care of our needs. He cares for and protects the Church, reminding us that we too are called to do the same as we tend to the poor, the immigrant, the sick because: "As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

From Tribulation To Triumph!

Sr. Sneha
Joseph, SSpS

My name is Sr. Sneha Joseph. I am a member of the Mission Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS). I was born in a small village in Kerala, the southwestern area of India. I was blessed to be the last born of my parents with 3 brothers and 2 sisters. I am the only religious in my family.

It was my childhood dream to become a religious sister who would travel far and wide, to serve the poor and needy, and God chose me to be a religious missionary sister. The choice of my professional training was nursing. On completion of post-graduate studies in nursing, I volunteered / opted to serve the people in the devastated war-torn country of "South Sudan". Though it was very discouraging and disheartening, it was the life of our Co-founders who waited 14 years to become religious sisters that encouraged me to stay on. There were constant threats to us as members of an international / inter-congregational community, but we ignored such thinking for "if we are destined to die here, so be it". Sr. Veronika Racková, one of our sisters, was shot and after a few days passed away. I worked in South Sudan for seven years, educating the traumatized and aggressive South Sudanese who became compassionate and efficient nurses and midwives, and whose care reduced and would reduce the mortality rate and improve the health of the people in the country. In 2014, with a sense of pride and satisfaction, I returned to India after the graduation of two groups of students. In 2016, I became the Executive Director of Holy Spirit Hospital, Mumbai.

It was on May 13th that I contracted the COVID-19 virus which shook me and I thought my end has come. I was mentally prepared to die. I battled for life in the hospital for 18 days. A week after recovery, I was back on duty. I learned that Convalescent Plasma (plasma of those recovered from COVID-19) can help in the speedy recovery of a COVID patient or even prevent death. Having gone through it myself, I knew first-hand the sufferings and the agony COVID patients undergo. I decided to donate plasma which is part of the blood. One can donate plasma only after 28 days of recovery. Thus after a month, I checked the level of my COVID antibody, serum protein and hemoglobin, the values of which were exceptionally great. Hence, I became an eligible candidate for plasma donation.



As a child, I had a passion to serve the poor and I grabbed the opportunity to do something for the patients affected with COVID-19. My desire was to help the poor who will not be able to pay for plasma therapy. Thus, I chose Nair Hospital, a government-managed institution in Mumbai, where most of the very poor patients are admitted. A maximum of 10 patients have benefitted from my donation on July 25, August 11, September 9, October 26, and my fifth donation on December 9. Two people can benefit from a single donation of 400ml of plasma. It sure was a miracle, adding that God's grace unfolds in real time. My blood-type is "AB" which is a universal donor for plasma unlike blood.

It was on November 1st 2020, that I was honored as a 'COVID-19 Warrior' by Governor Bhagat Singh Koshiyari of western Maharashtra State for being the first woman in the country to donate plasma 5 times. "I am proud of you and thank you for your selfless service to society" said the Governor.

Further comments regarding this event were noted by Saji Thomas, a freelance journalist based in Bhopal, India. He writes regularly for Matters India, a portal that collaborates with *Global Sisters Report* and focuses on religious and social issues. The following quotes are from his article in *Global Sisters Report* used with permission.

Dr. Sister Beena Devassia Madhavath, Ursulines of Mary Immaculate, who heads the Sister Doctors Forum in India, expressed appreciation for Sr. Sneha's courage and generosity: "Many people have fears and misconceptions about donating plasma, but Sr. Sneha had no problem", says Madhavath, who is also the Assistant Medical Superintendent of Holy Family Hospital, Mumbai. "It is really a humanitarian work. ... All sisters in the country are really proud that one of us has done a marvelous work for humanity."

Dr. Praveen Nair hails Sr. Sneha Joseph as a self-driven person who is committed to helping the poor. "When I informed her about the opportunity and importance of donating plasma, she identified the government hospital

and started donating plasma" said Nair, the head of the microbiology department and infection control at Holy Spirit Hospital Mumbai. He added that "she always maintains that her mission in life is to serve others, especially poor people in a time of pandemic. She ignored offers from private hospitals and chose the government hospital since poorer patients flock there", he explained.

'Ramesh S. Waghmare, a doctor and associate professor of the blood bank at Nair Hospital who facilitated Sr. Sneha Joseph's blood donation, defines plasma therapy as a medical procedure that uses the blood of a recovered patient to create antibodies in those infected with Covid 19. The doctor lauded Sr. Sneha Joseph for donating plasma multiple times when other survivors have been reluctant to support even once. The Catholic nun, he added, has expressed willingness to assist them in the trial by giving



her plasma unconditionally. "We are all indebted to her."

Another admirer of Sr. Sneha Joseph is Alwyn D'Silva, Auxiliary Bishop of Mumbai. "She had a very bad attack and suffered a lot," said the prelate, who shot a video of the sister donating plasma to encourage others to follow her example. "It is very rare for a woman to take such a step, but she realized the pain and suffering of COVID-19 patients and that helped her walk the extra mile." The prelate said he has found Sister to be "a very humble" person. "She does it not for any fame. Many others work in Catholic hospitals, but she has become an example not only for Christians but others, too. Her life gives us a clear message: What we get, we need to give back."



Sr. Natalia D'Souza, community leader of Sr. Sneha said "she is very patient-oriented. We are definitely proud of her. I don't find such zeal in others. How many millions got infected but how many have donated even once? That's her nature as Executive Director of the hospital; she would at times bend rules to help people."

There is a purpose to everything happening in our lives, we may not be able to figure it out immediately but later it will dawn on us, yes this is what God wanted from me. I believe that it was God's plan that I contract the disease so that I could gain new insights into my religious life and my desire to serve the neediest is fulfilled. I am truly happy.

"I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." - John 10:10

Portions of the above article, including the pictures are "reprinted with permission from Global Sisters Report. The complete article can be found at: <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/coronavirus/news/holy-spirit-sister-who-survived-covid-19-donates-plasma-save-others>.

Missionaries Among Migrants

Jacek Gniadek, SVD

"When I left for Greece, I knew I wouldn't go to Lesbos, a Greek island 20 km from the Turkish border. Initially, I planned to visit Greece's largest temporary detention center for migrants from Afghanistan and Syria. After the Moria Camp burned down completely on the night of 8-9 September, I had to change my plans."

During this year's holiday, I met Sr. Ewa Pliszczyk, SSpS in Poland. Sister has been working with migrants in the Greek capital for two years with the Jesuits. She is the community leader of "Community in Movement". The Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) had not yet established a local community in Greece.



In October 2016, the Congregational Leadership Team decided to establish a community in Greece to temporarily help refugees during the migration crisis.

Their intended area of mission is where the Eastern Mediterranean Migration Route passes by sea across the Mediterranean from Turkey to Greece. The original purpose of the SSpS Sisters was to work in the camps of Lesbos and Samos, where the largest refugee camps are located. When it proved impossible for them to rent a house on the islands, the Sisters began working with the Jesuits in Athens. This decision proved providential for them, because today refugees are being transferred from the islands to mainland Greece.

There are four Sisters temporarily in Athens, who came from Argentina, the Philippines, Ukraine, and Poland. They live in a Jesuit led Polish parish, where the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) headquarters in Athens is also located. The SSpS Sisters, like recruiters, live and work in international communities where the example of one's own life bears witness to the universality of the Gospel message.

The community there is not only four Sisters with different characteristics, but also four Sisters from different cultures and experiences of Church. Sr. Leoni Pregunta, SSpS, from the Philippines, previously worked as a missionary in Brazil; Sr. Carmen Elisa Bando from Argentina had worked in Taiwan. Three times every day they meet for common prayer. Hence they draw spiritual power to work among people "on the way". This is what the Church's instruction "Erga migrantes caritas Christi" says about migrants: "The Church, being God's pilgrim people herself, is called to build a new history with the migrants."

Pope Francis in his 2020 message for the Day of Migrants and Refugees, which was dedicated to internally displaced persons, reminded Christians of the fundamental truth that Jesus is present in the needy.



In his message, the Pope gives a series of tips that we should follow in our relations with refugees. Since the beginning of the migration crisis, this relationship has been expressed with the help of four well-known verbs: accept, protect, promote and integrate. The Sisters in Athens make use of the Pope's counsel. They try to get to know the refugees and to understand their fate. They try to get closer to them in order to serve them.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, the Sisters lived in a JRS house on Filis Street in Athens. Now they teach English to immigrants who have already received asylum and stayed in the Greek capital, renting apartments near the Polish district. The Sisters also conduct art classes for migrant children. Not everyone manages to enroll children in Greek schools. In the afternoon, the Sisters overlook nearby Victoria Square, which has been a gathering place for new migrants in the Greek capital for five years. The square is surrounded by bars and restaurants. There are not a lot of people in them. Tourists this year did not come to Greece because of the coronavirus restrictions imposed on the airline. Because of the virus, the Greeks themselves are afraid to go outside. Also, they are not attracted to the area by the presence of migrants spread out on cardboard boxes, in the shade of trees with young children and bags stuffed to the brim with all their belongings. They come here from camps on the islands and nod for a few days. They know that the place is regularly visited by the police, who take refugees to camps near Athens. It is in this square that they feel for a moment in the wild. Leaving the overcrowded camps on the islands brings them slowly closer to their destination; however, the bark still remains a great unknown for them.

In September, there were about 150 mooching migrants, mostly from Afghanistan, around the

monument to the mythical Theseus rescuing Hippodamia. The Sisters come to the square several times a week, in the afternoon, to give them a flame of hope. Sister Leoni distributes leaflet information to tired migrants about the JRS's headquarters, where they can enjoy a shower, use the washing machine, and receive first aid. Sr. Eva goes to the square to play football with the boys. "It's a good opportunity," she says to me with her eyes pounding on the ball, "to see who's sick and walks in shoes that are too big shoes to give him the right size shoe. Sr. Viktoriya Kovalchuk, SSpS makes colorful dolls from pieces of used clothes with the girls. She sits under a tree with them. "Adults don't let me sit on the sidewalk," she says, smiling, "they're about to bring a cardboard box or blanket. Today we made 25 dolls", she added.

On the streets of the Polish district, you can hear "Farce" everywhere, a variation of the Persian language used in Afghanistan and actually serving as a "lingua franca" among different ethnic language groups. Working with the JRS is about accompanying migrants. The Jesuits also invite refugees themselves to work with refugees. Mohammad, who is originally from the Pakistani part of Kashmir, works in a clothes warehouse with his sisters. The territorial conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has been ongoing since 1947. Twenty years ago, Mohammad was granted political asylum in Greece, which became his second homeland. He learned to speak Greek. For the Sisters, he is a great help, because he also speaks in "Farce". Migrants knock on the door and immediately feel at home at the entrance.

Sr. Eva observes and sees that not everyone is a refugee. Most of them are economic immigrants. They dream of a better life for their children, especially for girls. The Taliban are no longer in Afghanistan, but the fate of Afghan women has not yet changed. People have always migrated in search of better conditions and reason will remain so until the end of the world. There are about 110,000 migrants in Greece which includes refugees from Cameroon, which has been on the brink of civil war since 2017, where separatists from the so called Republic of Ambazonia have declared independence and are fighting to become independent from the eastern, poorer part of the country. Half a million people had to leave their homes.

The second day after arriving in Athens, I went with Father Pierre Salembier, SJ for Sunday Mass in French for Cameroonian refugees. On the way to church, we talked about the migration crisis in Europe. Even though Poland is not affected by the Baltic migration route, it has other migratory challenges. The armed conflict in Donbass between pro-Russian separatists from eastern

Ukraine, supported by the government in Moscow, and the forces loyal to the legitimate authorities in Kiev cause lack of economic stability in Ukraine. This conflict, which has been going on since 2014, has contributed to the great migration of Ukrainians beyond their country's borders. As there is no mention of armed conflict in Cameroon in Poland, the Western media don't report about the conflict in Donbass and about more than one million Ukrainian immigrants in Poland.

In the Church of St. Theresa of Lisieux, run by the Assumptionists in Athens, a Mass in English is available for immigrants from Nigeria. In addition to the pastor, who is a native of Greece, there are two priests from Congo and one from Spain serving in the parish. While there are only 40,000 Greek Catholics, the total number of Catholics in Greece is over 200,000. All the others are foreigners. At St. Theresa of Lisieux there is also Mass for Filipinos in Tagalog and in Spanish and Italian.

Originally, the SSpS Sisters wanted to open two communities. One in Morocco to accompany migrants from Africa trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. This plan did not come to fruition. One could say that at first glance the Sisters' ideas seem unreasonable. The Divine Sower also behaves unreasonably in the parable of the Sower (cf. Lk 8:4-15), which was read in Church the day after my return from Greece. No reasonable farmer scatters grain along the way of rocks and thorns. This is not how a good farmer does. Grain is rare. God calculates in a different way. He is infinite Love. He never gives up on a person. He sows everywhere and waits for the human heart to open to the action of God's love.

"Do migrant children know who I am?" says Sr. Viktoria during an evening conversation at the end of the day, "While playing in Victoria Square, they sometimes take my religious cross and look at me and say "Sister."



MAY OUR LENT GIVE US EASTER EYES!



Perhaps our Lenten journey this year could be struggling with some questions that would give us these Easter eyes. As Bishop Klaus Hemmerle wrote "I wish each of us Easter eyes, able to perceive in death, life; in guilt, forgiveness; in separation, unity; ... in the human, God; in God, the human, and in the 'I', the 'you'." (The God Who Won't Let Go, Peter van Breemen, SJ)

To deal with this challenge, we need to be very attentive to what we see, hear and feel in our relationships and how we respond. We need 'new eyes' that show forth hope, joy, expectation, new life and lots of love.

"We must dare to be love in a world that does not know how to love" as Charles de Foucauld once said. In our relationships, we need to see beyond the externals; each person is a mystery developing as God brings forth day by day the marvels of God's creation, which each of us is.

Sometimes, we are gifted with a friend in whom God's presence is so obvious by the inner growth taking place that we can almost watch the

transformation taking place. We can sense that person's pain also because new growth usually demands a price to pay. Then we can appreciate those words in scripture, "Unless the grain of wheat dies..."

A friend of mine, who has been married for 50 years, told me that her husband is constantly revealing a new side of himself which makes their love grow deeper each day. That is looking at someone with "Easter eyes". What a witness to me.

During this Lenten season, let us ask ourselves the questions which Jesus asked:

**What are you looking for?
What do you want me to do for you?**

Do I dare to be love in a world that does not know how to love? The Spirit of Love lives in us - let us free that gift that God has given us. Let us be that fire, that light, that can change the world. Come Holy Spirit, transform me into the disciple that can see You in my life and in the lives of my neighbors.

Sr. Pat Snider, SSpS

Holy Spirit Missionary Association, Directress

THANK YOU

Dear Friends and Mission Supporters,

Your friendship, generosity, and love are special gifts, graciously given, happily accepted, and deeply appreciated! Over the past year, during this time of Covid-19 the work of mission has presented new challenges throughout the world. Your prayers and generous support have enabled us to meet those challenges!

At Holy Spirit Catholic Pre-school in St. Kitts (Caribbean) you made it possible for our Sisters and school personnel to provide on-line instruction plans for parents and children. In addition, Sisters Edel Maria and Arnolda took on the challenge to address the many demands to provide and meet the country's sanitation and safety measures so as to provide in-person classes and maintain the protocols to protect children and staff from the spread of the coronavirus.

In Jamaica, Sisters Barbara and Yuliana also equipped the school with sanitation stations in each classroom. At Christmas, they were able to bring joy to over 100 children from Bamboo River, Church Corner, and Brown's Gully. At an out-door gathering, the children received a Christmas gift bag filled with some necessary items i.e. flip-flops, glass and plate, as well as a toy, game or other items. Families were given bags of food.

In these very simple ways, through your generosity, the lives of many are touched! Thank you for your prayers, love, and support!

Gratefully,
Our Sisters in mission and those among whom they serve



Remembering Sr. Francetta Kunkel, SSpS (1926 - 2021)

At the time of her death on January 6, 2021, Sr. Francetta Kunkel was in her 74th year of religious profession as a Holy Spirit Missionary Sister. She began her teaching ministry at our nearby St. Norbert School (Northbrook, IL) prior to her mission service of 25 years in Ghana. The gratitude of her students followed her throughout her life. On her return to our Paraclete Province (USA), along with community service, she

engaged in vocation ministry, mission education in schools and colleges, mission collaboration through the annual diocesan Mission Appeals, and communications. For many years Sr. Francetta was the editor of our SSpS MISSION Newsletter. Her dedication and enthusiasm for mission and her numerous memories of mission service in Ghana lit the "fire of love" in the hearts of many. With love she served and with love she was welcomed into the embrace of God's eternal life!

Dear Mission Friends and Supporters, we wish to assure you and your loved ones of our daily prayers of support during this time of the coronavirus pandemic. May our loving God be with all who are suffering and protect medical personnel, health-care providers, and first responders as they carry out their daily responsibilities. We invite those of you who can to join us in mission through your generous financial support for the Mission Ministries of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters.

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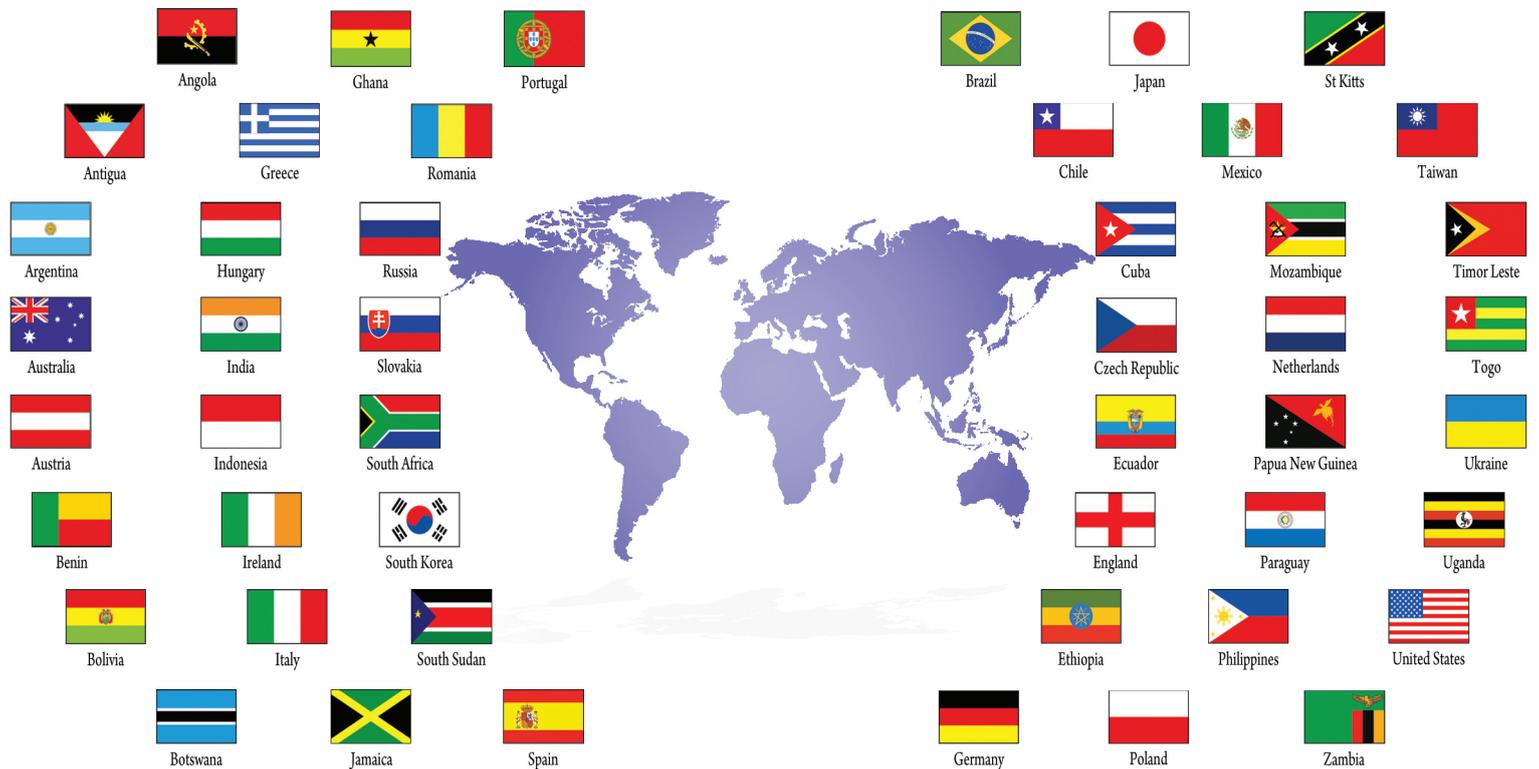


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