



SSpS MISSION

Called by the Spirit ~ Embracing the World
Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit
Paraclete Province — USA and Caribbean
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Focus on Mission

As I pen these words, I am inspired by the words of Fr. Matheus Ro, SVD, in his homily on the feast of our Founder, St. Arnold Janssen, SVD, on January 15th. St. Arnold was the founder of 3 Mission Congregations: Society of the Divine Word (SVD) in 1875; Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (SSpS) in 1889; Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration (SSpSAP) in 1896.

Fr. Matheus related the Scripture readings and the life of St. Arnold focusing on 3 facets that shaped his life and vision: PRAYER - OUTREACH - TRUST.

St. Arnold's life was rooted in a spirit of PRAYER developed and nurtured within the family circle. Before going to bed, the Janssen Family gathered for evening prayers that concluded with his father reading the Scripture passage from John's Gospel 1:1-18 ("In the beginning was the Word...").

St. Arnold REACHED OUT to others, expressing interest and concern as well as a deep desire to spread the message of God's love to all people, especially to those who were unfamiliar with God's Word in lands beyond one's comfort level, where the darkness of faithlessness prevailed. The desire blossomed into the foundation of the 3 Missionary Congregations through whose arms of love, compassion, and mercy embrace the poor and marginalized in more than 70 countries of the world.

The strength and courage that enabled St. Arnold to plant the seeds of love was in following the call of God and TRUST in God's Will! "If God wills it..." were words frequently on his lips.

In Baptism, each of us is called to mission. Faith is planted in our soul, nurtured by prayer and strengthened by trust in God's will to blossom in service and love for others. May the articles in this issue of SSpS MISSION be a source of reflection and encouragement for you to follow YOUR call to mission.



Sr. Mary Miller, SSpS

Arnold Janssen
constantly displayed a strength of spirit
that could only have had its deepest roots
in his spirit of faith
and in his love of God.
He placed all his trust in the providence
of the heavenly Father.

(Decree on the Heroicity of the Virtues of the Servant of God,
Fr. Arnold Janssen)

Prayer...

“The Prayer of the Heart”

The following article is based on the work
After Starez Seraphin of Mount Athos by Jean-Ives Leloup

The “Prayer of the Heart” is described here by way of a story about a young philosopher who came to Mount Athos to be instructed by Starez Seraphim in the art of the “Prayer of the Heart”. When the young man asked Father Seraphim to talk to him about the “Prayer of the Heart”, the Starez said, “Before we talk about the prayer of the heart, learn first to meditate like a mountain”. He was shown a great massive rock formation. “Ask the mountain how he manages to pray. Then come back.”



Praying Like a Mountain The first instruction he received concerned his “grounding” and being rooted in his way of sitting. To sit down like a mountain means to become very heavy, heavy with much Being. He had great trouble remaining in this position in which he found his greatest firmness. One day he sensed what it meant to meditate like a mountain. He was present with all his weight, motionless. He had become one with it... The most difficult thing for him, though, was to spend the whole time of prayer “doing nothing”. He had to learn anew to just be there without a plan, without a goal, without design and intention. This meditating like a mountain had changed his thoughts. He learned to see without judging, as if he conceded to everything that grew on the mountain had the right to be there.

Later, the Starez led the young man to the remotest corner of the garden where among the many weeds one could see a few flowers. “From now on you should not meditate like a mountain, but like a Poppy flower. Do not forget the mountain though.”

Praying Like a Poppy Now the young man learned to bloom... to meditate means to first “sit”; the mountain taught him that. But to meditate also means to have “direction”. This the poppy taught him: to turn toward the sun, to stretch toward the Light from his deepest self, until all energy of life surged that way. The poppy also taught him that a flower needs a strong stem to stay in the direction toward the light; so he started to straighten his spinal cord.

The mountain had conveyed the idea of eternity; the poppy on the other hand showed him the transitory nature of time. In fact, the poppy also taught him a lesson in its quick withering and its delicate and fragile being. Thus, the young man learned to meditate without intention — in the pure delight of being and pleasure in the light.



Then, Father Seraphim took him to a small bay on the ocean. “Your heart has to become like an ocean. Learn to meditate like the ocean.” What might the rushing sound of the waves have to teach him?

Praying Like the Ocean The young man had learned the right way of sitting and keeping a steady direction; he had found a good posture. What else could still be missing? What was it the rhythmic splashing of the waves wanted to teach him? He was invited to connect his breath to the big breathing of the waves - inhale - exhale breath comes - breath goes ...to let himself be carried by the waves of breath, by the waves of the ocean. He recognized that to meditate is deep and peaceful breathing. It is giving yourself to the coming and going of your breath. He perceived that the depth of the ocean remained still, even when the surface was moving with big waves. Thoughts come and go like foaming waves, but the depth of our being remains unmoved.



Was there at the depth of his breath not “Ruah”, the Pneumatic, the great Breath of God? “those who listen attentively to their breath”, Father Seraphim said, “are not far from God. Listen to what there is at the end of each exhaling, and what there is where our inhaling begins.” To be sure there were some seconds of stillness deeper than the coming and going of the waves; there was something akin to the resting bottom of the ocean.

Praying Like a Bird “Sitting right, be upright and open toward the light, breathing like the ocean, all that is not enough yet. You have to learn to meditate like a bird.” the monk said. He led the young man into a small cell, close to his own hermitage. There were two turtle doves.



He found their constant cooing very attractive for a while, but soon it got on his nerves; just when he was about to fall asleep they started their tender cooing at each other. He asked the monk what it all meant and how long this game was going to continue. Mountain, poppy, ocean - all that was fine, although one would have to ask what was Christian about all of that - but to impose these cooing turtle doves on him now was really a bit too much.

Father Seraphim explained to him that in the Old Testament the word to “meditate” had the Hebrew radical ‘hag’, the original meaning of which is to ‘murmur in a low voice’. “that is why I sent you to the doves. You have to meditate with your throat. You can use your throat not only for breathing, but also to repeat the name of God by day and by night. When you are happy, you are humming a little tune continuously, almost without noticing it. Meditating is cooing like a turtle dove, simply letting the sound of your heart rise up in you.

Choose a holy word for yourself and repeat it within. Let it harmonize with the rhythm of your breath. When distracting thoughts come up, gently return to the sacred word, breath deeply, remain seated, upright and motionless; and you will experience the beginning of peace God gives to those who love God. You don’t always have to repeat that holy word with your lips; it happens within and its vibrations can reach deep within you.”

The repetition of the word filled the young man more and more with respect for all existing things, but also with admiration for the mystery hidden deep in all creatures. Then father Seraphim said, “Now you are close to the art of meditating like a human being. I want to teach you meditating like Abraham did.”



Praying Like Abraham Until now all the Starez had taught him was in the purely natural realm and it was healing. Mountain, poppy, ocean, birds, those are part of creation. The human person is reminded that s/he has to traverse the various levels of being again that make up the cosmos before s/he can proceed. In many ways humans have lost the connection to nature and the cosmos. This has resulted in all kinds of difficulties, sickness, anxieties, and the feeling of alienation from the world.

Meditating like Abraham brings us to a new understanding. We enter into a new relationship of the heart. We are connecting with a 'you', the great 'Thou'. This meditating like Abraham means to recognize the presence of God in all manifestations in this world. It also means to stand up for people, to clearly recognize their reality and yet trust in the infinite mercy of God. (Genesis 18:22-33) This kind of meditation frees us from our propensity to sit in judgement and to condemn even though we experience all kinds of evil things.

"To meditate like Abraham takes us further still", Father Seraphim said with great effort, as if he wanted to spare the young philosopher from the experience he himself had gone through and could only remember with deep emotion. "It can lead to sacrifice...." (Genesis 22:1-19)

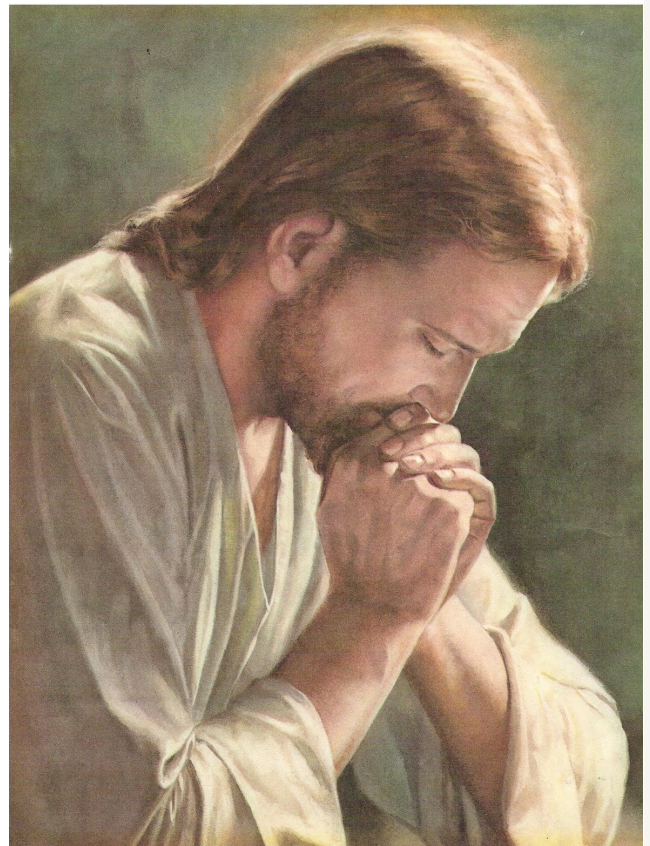
"Meditating like Abraham takes you to a total surrender of self and of all that is most dear to you. Find what it is you hold most dear, what identifies you - for Abraham it was his only son. If your trust in God, who surpasses all understanding, is strong enough to sacrifice that then everything will be given to you a hundredfold. To meditate like Abraham doesn't mean anything else but to carry God in your heart."

Those who pass through the depth of meditation, learn to understand that nothing belongs to the ego, everything belongs to God. That is saying 'Good-bye' to the ego and discovering the true self.

Praying Like Jesus One day the young man came to Father Seraphim with this question: "Father, why do you never speak about Jesus? How did he pray, how did he meditate? In liturgy and in sermons we hear about Jesus all the time. In the Payer of the Heart, we are to invoke His name uninterruptedly. Why are you not even mentioning that?"

"Only the Holy Spirit can teach you that. You must become a son if you want to pray like the Son. You have to live as intimately with God whom Jesus called his Father and our Father. Only the Holy Spirit can accomplish that in you. The Spirit will remind you of everything Jesus taught. The Good News will come to life in you; and the Spirit will teach you how to pray.

The way Jesus prayed includes all the forms I showed you so far. Jesus is the Cosmic Person. He meditated like the mountain, like the poppy, like the ocean and like the doves. He meditated like Abraham in his heart without borders and limits, full of love for his executioners and enemies... 'Father forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.' Maybe you find it absurd to call the God of the Universe, the Transcendent, the One-Without-Name by the familiar name "daddy" (Abba). You might even smile about that, and yet this is the way Jesus prayed. This simple word said it all. How frighteningly close heaven and earth really are!



God and the human person became one! Maybe you would have to be called "Daddy" at night in order to know and understand something like that. That's why I'd rather not say anything about it until the Holy Spirit stirs the feeling in you and gives you the insight that lived in Jesus. Then this word 'daddy' will arise not only from your lips but from the depth of your heart."



Sent on His Way The young man stayed a little while longer on Mount Athos. When he returned to France nobody found anything specially spiritual about him. Life in the city could not erase the lessons his Starez had taught him. Whenever he felt pressured for time, he would sit like a mountain on some coffee shop terrace. When pride and vanity came up in him, he would think of the poppy and how all flowers wither and his heart could rise to the never ending Light. When sadness, anger and disgust would grasp at his soul, he would breathe deeply like the ocean, and direct his breath toward the great Thou, he would call God's name and pray softly "Kyrie eleison..." When he saw human suffering or was shocked by their wickedness and his inability to change them, he meditated like Abraham. When he was slandered and accused of all sorts of evil-doing, he was happy to pray like Jesus did. He looked and comported himself like everybody else. There was no aura of holiness around him, he even forgot himself that he was practicing the "Prayer of the Heart". He was just eagerly seeking to love God every moment of his day and to live in God's presence.

This article was selected and composed by Sr. Anneliese Heine, SSps, and published in "Gheist und Anfrag", a magazine published by the SSps in Germany.
It was translated from the German to English by Sr. Agathe Bramkamp, SSps.

The picture depicting "Abraham" is the work of Sieger Köder.

God's Hiding Place

A long time ago the angels got together to ponder how they could hide WISDOM, the greatest treasure in the universe, from abuse by human beings. It would be very bad if the human beings were to discover WISDOM of the UNIVERSE before they were mature enough for it.

Therefore, the angels went in search of a secure place they could hide WISDOM long enough for the humans to only find it when they were mature enough for it. After a lot of thought, one of the angels suggested: "Could we hide WISDOM on top of the highest mountain on earth? It will take years before any human is capable of climbing that high." After thinking about it for a long time and discussing it extensively, the Council of Angels realized that human beings would soon be able to climb any mountain; therefore, WISDOM would not be securely hidden there. After a while another angel came up with another suggestion: "We could hide WISDOM at the deepest spot in the ocean. Only a few people can dive that deep. They would need special equipment and oxygen supplies to reach that depth." After a long discus-

sion, they came to the conclusion that this place would not be good enough either, since people are capable to find WISDOM there also.

Again, the Council of Angels withdrew to do more research for an ideal hiding place for WISDOM. After several days, an angel came up with the idea, "How would it be if we hid WISDOM in an animal or in a flower?" They thought about the pros and cons of this suggestion and again came to the conclusion that those places also would not be secure.

Finally, God brought forth God's own suggestion. "I know what is to be done. Let us hide WISDOM of the UNIVERSE in the very heart of human beings. They will search for it there only when they are mature enough for it, because they will have to go within the depth of their own being."

The angels were thrilled with this solution. They proceeded to hide WISDOM of the UNIVERSE deep within the very heart of human beings.

Sr. Maria Gabriele Morbach, SSps
translated by Sr. Agathe Bramkamp, SSps

Outreach...

Remembering Sr. Therese Mary Martinez

*a small woman
with a big heart and arms,
who embraced the immigrant
and the migrant!*

April 7, 1930 - January 8, 2019



On hearing of her death, many who were touched by her presence in their life commented: "She was a humble servant of the Holy Spirit who empowered others to do good and to be better people." She was my mentor." "Pope Francis would like her!" "I knew her to be an amazingly selfless, dedicated, warm and hard working person." "I don't know anyone who worked harder and was more devoted to her cause. She never let her many health issues interfere with her determination to help others." "She taught me so much about acceptance, love, family, compassion, patience and much more."

Who is this amazing woman with a big heart and arms who reached out to embrace the poor and marginalized, the migrant and the immigrant? Sr. Therese Mary, (Maria Martinez) and her twin sister, Carmen, were the eleventh and twelfth children welcomed into the Martinez Family on April 7, 1930, in Dallas, Texas. Her parents, Gregorio and Ygnacia Martinez, were immigrants from Mexico. Although some of the 18 children in the family died in infancy or at a young age, family life was steeped in love for God and a strong faith in God's providence and care. Growing up in this large family was never dull! Love and care for one another was fostered.

Maria (Sr. Therese Mary) attended elementary school through the 8th grade; however, after her father's death in 1943 and her graduation, she went to work at a sewing manufacturing company which was making clothing for sale. For five years, she diligently worked to help support her mother and family. She learned a lot about sewing which served her well in her early years of religious life.

Responding to earlier desires to be a religious Sister, Maria sought admission to our Congregation, the Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit, in Techny, Illinois. She entered the community in 1950. After three years of postulancy (pre-novitiate) and novitiate, she professed the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience on August 15, 1953. Initially, Sister's gifts with the needles of sewing, embroidery, knitting and crocheting served her and our missions in the sewing and embroidery department making Church vestments and linens to be used in the various religious services of the Catholic Church.

In April, 1958, Sr. Marie Therese Mente, the mission treasurer, and a helper went to Des Plaines in search of a Mexican family which had been receiving clothing from the convent mission department. After literally circling around the area, they found not only the family but a

whole settlement. They could see that clothing and food were both needed and used. After sharing their story with the Community Leadership, the Sisters were encouraged to investigate the spiritual needs of the settlement. Sr. Therese Mary, who could speak Spanish, went along.

Within a few weeks, she and a few other Sisters made arrangements to provide religious instructions for the children. The first 'classroom' was outside in the open, under a tree, behind a shed. By September 1958, through Sister's efforts, with help from St. Alexis Parish in Des Plaines and generous benefactors, space was available in the parish school and the school bus was used to gather the children for their religious education classes. That first year, Sr. Therese Mary and four other SSpS Sisters provided religious instructions for about 152 children. This marked the beginning of a lifelong apostolate for Sr. Therese Mary! She never retired – or tired of her love for her mission apostolate among the Spanish speaking and needy persons she met and helped over 60 years of missionary service.

Although her 'formal' education ended with 8th grade, she continued to accomplish great things! From the start, one of her objectives as founder of "Little Mexico" was to assist Mexican American families purchase their own homes throughout the Chicago metropolitan area. Buying a home meant more involvement than going to a real estate office and helping the family contract for home purchases. It involved helping the family interpret legal and mortgage documents with banks, Little Mexico established a credit union where families could obtain loans for the down payment without interest. The record for collection on those loans was 100% effective! Over the years of her ministry through "Little Mexico", Sr. Therese Mary assisted more than 200 families with their home purchase.

Sr. Therese Mary also helped in other law related areas: traffic violations, adoptions,

business transactions, business developments, and problems related to documentation. Many people were helped to prepare and obtain their driver's license. Little Mexico provided a re-sale shop for clothing and other items in Wheeling, IL and with the assistance of Sister, families were frequently referred to a near-by food pantry. Anyone who needed help or consolation, Sr. Therese Mary endeavored to go the extra mile to help. She would never give up!

After almost fifty years of serving the Mexican American communities in the north suburbs of Chicago, the Corporation of Little Mexico was



The Spirit of Little Mexico lives on as The Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters continue to serve the people of Wheeling and nearby communities through its Holy Spirit Life Learning Centers (HSLLC).

dissolved and the building site re-organized as a satellite location for Holy Spirit Life Learning Center, another ministry of the Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters which continues to provide services and educational programs for immigrant families.

After years of various health problems which never deterred her mission of service to others, she succumbed to a final illness. On the morning of January 8th, Sr. Therese Mary's life, lived for God, had been generous to the end.

She embodied the words of our SSpS Religious Constitutions: "If we allow God to guide us throughout our religious life, and grow in oneness of life and mission with Christ, we will become heralds of joy and signs of hope." Her "sincere desire to be of help to others in a way she thought God would want" echoed throughout her long life!

(From the Eulogy for Sr. Therese Mary Martinez prepared by Sr. Priscilla Burke)

In Mission with Migrants in El Paso

Responding to an appeal from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious for volunteers to help in the service of migrants at the Mexican / American border, Sisters Selvi Raj, Skolastika Wea, and Maria Theresa Nguyen spent two weeks in El Paso, Texas, to help provide short-term hospitality to refugees and migrant families. Here are some of their stories....

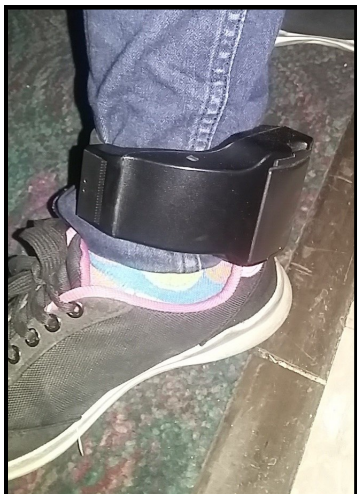
Annunciation House in El Paso provides hospitality to a great number of refugee families being released by ICE. The three of us were assigned to work in one of the temporary centers called "Messa Inn". Our task was to help connect the migrants with their sponsors in the US and provide accommodations while in El Paso. The majority of families arriving at the border have relatives and friends in the US who gave them financial help to pay 'coyotes' to lead them to the border. Most of the refugees we met came from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and a few from Cuba, who fled violence, corruption, poverty, and threats of many kinds to their family in their home country.



(ll-r) Sisters Skolastika, Maria Theresa, and Selvi at the Messa Inn Center

I had direct contact with many refugees while completing the intake form. Many of the migrants were mothers with young children or fathers with their children; but they were not 'whole' families (parents and their children). I wondered 'why?'. A father came with a 1½ year old child and a mother with a 3 month old baby. I learned what a desperate strategy it was to be able to cross the border. For the safety and future of their children, the parents undertake that perilous journey in the hope of something better.

Watching the people getting off the bus that brought them from the immigration office to the shelter, I was struck by the complete silence and the great fear and sadness in their eyes. In that silence, I was reminded of Jesus' silence before his judges. While talking with one woman, I asked her about the silence. She replied, "we thought they were taking us to prison". She continued saying, with tears in her eyes, "no one should go through this experience". For her the hardest part was not the suffering she endured during the journey but the dehumanizing experience of the immigration procedures.



In the first days of our ministry, I noticed that most of the women and men brought to the center had an 'instrument' attached to their ankles. I cautiously asked a man if he could show me what he was wearing. He did so and immediately a woman standing next to him also volunteered to show me the instrument. I asked their permission to take a photo. The anklet is a control mechanism which indicates their whereabouts. **It is a GPS fixed on their body!** This incident made me question our Christian values: Jesus proclaimed liberty to captives and to set the downtrodden free. But how do we set the downtrodden free? We speak about respect and freedom, of human rights and dignity, and here we fix our desperate sisters and brothers with gadgets of control.

This experience in El Paso helped me to better understand the situations of the migrants and the refugees. I thought the words "undocumented" and 'illegal' referred to those who crossed the border without anyone noticing, but here the people arrive and the security cameras detect them and information is sent to the border patrol. They are picked up and brought to the immigration office. Their connection to someone in the US is confirmed and immigration issues a document with the name and address where the migrant is supposed to be located. The document also has a date for a court appearance where it will be determined if the person entering the country without documents can remain or not. The human suffering of these people invites me to solidarity with them as my sisters and brothers.

Trust...

Looking Backward Can Lead Us Forward

Recently, I was interviewed regarding my life as a missionary! As I recalled my life experiences, it came as a surprise to me that the experiences were all very positive. When I reflect on some aspects of those experiences, I realized that I walked through some painful relationships, some very hard assignments, and other difficult situations. Sometimes there were tears and disappointments!

As I look back, I realize God always used these experiences for something very positive down the road of my life. Unknowingly, I learned that God always does the most loving thing for each of us.

As we make some of the initial decisions in our life, we have no idea where they may lead us. We are called, like the Disciples, to leave all and follow Christ daily. That can be scary because we don't know where or how the path will lead. We just follow the Spirit's voice.

In her life, Mary was challenged with the words, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." (Luke 1:35) What must have been her first reaction? Do I believe that I can get through those seemingly impossible times with the help of the Spirit?

The only answer appears to be: Trusting in the love of our God, all things are possible. Let us keep that hope and joy in our hearts!

Sr. Pat Snider, SSps

Directress of the Holy Spirit Missionary Association

In Mission with Migrants in El Paso, continued....

My experience in El Paso's refugee shelters was life-giving! There was work to be done! It was hard work that required patience and flexibility in this time of need.... People in need of our love, care, and support. I was touched by their hunger, the abuse of human rights, the destruction of the environment, calamities, and endless sufferings from families' separation. I was challenged to affirm hope in the midst of these realities. I was called to serve despite the difficulties and obstacles.



Sr. Maria Theresa
with Adair Margo,
wife of the Mayor

On one occasion, I met a beautiful woman. She brought a few jackets and clothes to the shelter and we exchanged e-mails. That night it was cold and our storage of coats and jackets for the children ran out. I sent her an e-mail asking her to find us a donor to help these poor children. I knelt and prayed. Through the life-giving Spirit, I hoped my prayers would pierce the clouds of heaven!

Do you believe in miracles? We believe that together, through God's love, it can happen. A few days later, a van stopped at our shelter and delivered 15 boxes with the label "Operation Noel"! The boxes were filled with new coats for the children. I was speechless and full of wonder.... "Who was the donor?" This beautiful woman wrote in a note: "Sr. Theresa, the donor was my husband, Dee Margo, the Mayor of El Paso, through his annual charity. 'Operation Noel'" and signed Adair Margo, the wife of the Mayor. By the end of the week, another delivery... 17 boxes of coats were sent to the shelter. Praise the Lord! God wants that we find true life, life in joy and abundance. Truly that was a joyous event in my life! Let us try to restore tolerance, compassion, and mercy in our so-called humanity and re-acknowledge that human support with which we are all born.

The story doesn't end here! The "Operation Noel" jackets followed me to the El Paso Airport! On Christmas Eve, I departed El Paso for a visit with my family in California.

While waiting at the gate, I met two refugee families. We hugged, laughed, and shared joyous tears. We recognized each other through the jackets! **(See photo on front cover.)** Nothing could bring more joy to life than fulfilling my last task. I helped them with the boarding tickets, got them to the plane, and we said our last farewells. Even though I cannot speak Spanish, the language of LOVE said it all! Love is a way of life. Love is a part of who you are, so that when a person encounters you, they will feel love. I have given all: my time, my talent, and my life of service. Giving connects us to others, creating stronger communities and helping to build a happier society for everyone! In return, I received many blessings! - Sr. Maria Theresa Nguyen

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