

# Creativity through Crisis

December, 2020

## Loreto Eastern Africa Engagement during Covid-19 lockdown

### Inside this issue

A voice from every community

A voice from some ministries

Voices outside the province

What next after the pandemic  
(Reflection)



As we soldier on in the journey, let us all stay safe and realize that this pandemic is an opportunity for us to contemplate with gratitude the presence of God, to be thankful, practice charity and also live simplicity of life

*(Pauline W. ibvm)*



## Editorial

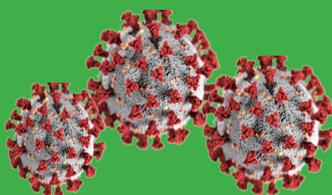
During the unexpectedly tough times of Covid-19 pandemic, creative engagement became the only means of exhibiting the inbuilt talents, and gifts that had not been explored due to the limitations of space and time. The challenging times became a blessing in disguise enabling the sisters to be more innovative and more creative like no one had expected.

Earlier in March (when the first case was reported in Kenya), everyone's interest was 'how many cases were reported at the end of each day'. As days went by, this became less exciting and everyone started concentrating on how to cope with the reality, rejuvenating ourselves and finding practical ways of surviving the pandemic while getting engaged in productive activity.

This newsletter is a glimpse into the wondrous experiences of sisters putting to use their giftedness and creativity as a way of living through the tough months of Covid-19 lockdown. Being on lockdown did not lock creativity. These activities kept everyone optimistic and hopeful that we shall overcome some day, we shall live to tell the story.

Thank you sisters for contributing to this newsletter by sharing both the reflections and pictures.

## Communications



During these months, much was going on as each member gave her contribution to the support of the community. First, the community set aside a day of prayer dedicated to those affected and infected by Covid-19. It was also an opportunity to bond more as a community, a time to talk to the elderly sisters tapping on their wisdom and a time for the elderly to be rejuvenated by the full-time presence of the young.

# Where would we be, were it not for the mercy of God!

## A voice from Msongari Community

Our reality as a community is that of vulnerability especially at such a time when the world is grappling with a terrible pandemic. Ours is the community with utmost vulnerability, comprising of a mixed group of sisters; some in the evening of life, some in the afternoon and a number in the morning of life. During the Covid-19 lockdown, the most engaging activity that each one got involved in, was taking care of the other and encouraging the observation of safety measures such as; masking up, sanitizing, social distancing, not shaking hands, not hugging, and other restrictions which directly impacted on our social life in the community. Msongari community whose doors have always been open to anyone at any time became restricted to visitors, a "no mask-no-go" zone, as members endeavored to adjust to the reality of working from home, except in unavoidable circumstances like shopping and health matters which needed one to visit a hospital. The safety measures applied to each and everyone in the community, including showering from head to toe and changing garments each time one went out, wearing of face masks which eventually became fundamental clothes that one could not forget. Living without shaking hands and hugging became just normal. The whole experience of Covid-19 has changed life in many ways. As we respond to the immediate demands of the lockdown world we also need to be preparing for post-lockdown. As we look back at how it all started, we are left with one question; will all this be reversed after the pandemic?



*Community gathered for faith sharing*

"Sister nurse" in collaboration with the community leader gave her best to the care of the sick and elderly sisters while other younger sisters also had quality time with the elderly - feeding them with news updates, friendly conversations and prayer ministries at night. Some got involved in recreation activities like playing scrabble, Zumba, sports and the virtual challenge of "Jerusalem" dance.

Adjusting to the online working became a new lifestyle. Once we accepted that embracing the digital means was the only way forward, then we realized that our social life with members outside Msongari community was elevated to a “soft copy relationship” Sisters attended online masses, webinars and other online workshops, online retreats, virtual learning and interaction with global communities. This also encouraged members to become more tech-savvy than before, so as to fit in the new normal. Flo Lau says: “We’re lucky to live in a digital world with access to a lot of inspiration, content and tools.”



*Our sisters supporting each other*

The entire community was not left behind during the season of creation as members deliberated on practical ways to get involved. There was a commitment to say the season of creation prayer, an initiative to nurture the old custard apple tree using microorganisms by Betty, a talk on the beauty of God’s creation by Caitriona, community faith sharing on creation and a tree planting exercise on the last day.



*Sisters participating in an online mass*



*Tree planting to mark the season of creation*

More creativity was enhanced by online sources when Sr. Rainer decided to learn from YouTube how to use plastic bottles to grow pineapples. This she did by keeping pineapple heads each time the community had pineapples for fruits. First, she had bottles prepared by cutting off the top parts. Then she cut out the bottom part of each pineapple head, shaped them to fit in the bottles, put water into the bottles and put in the pineapple heads. This was to enable the development of roots. These were then kept out for sunlight to get in, adding more water after every three days until the roots were fully grown. Finally, they were transferred to the ground and are now doing well, waiting for fruits to cup out.

Close to nine months down the line, Msongari community delights in God’s mercy. Where would we be, were it not for the mercy of God! We could only adhere to what Mary Ward said; “do your best and let God do the rest”. May the Lord bless us all and cleanse our world.



*Pineapple sucker with developed roots*



*‘Sister nurse’ at work*



*Betty W. observing the social distancing safety measure*

# Interconnectedness of Creation: Life Amidst Covid-19

## A voice from Eastleigh Community

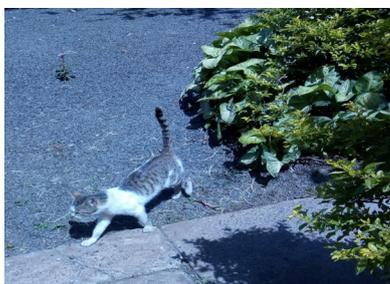
*“For from Him and through him and for him are all things. To him be Glory forever Amen.” Romans 11:36*

The Covid-19 Pandemic has challenged us (and continues to challenge us) in ways we could not have imagined. Every aspect of our daily lives has changed. When the rate of infections went up, our neighborhood was greatly affected. The government issued cessation of movement orders. For us, this meant working remotely or not working at all. We had to find ways to keep ourselves busy. Community members came up with self workout routines as well as cleaning schedules. As things eased up in the country and in our neighborhood, there was no better work than setting up a home vegetable garden where we planted *sukumawiki* (kales) and spinach. Thanks to one of our community members who saw the potential of utilizing a particular space within the compound for the garden. We also planted flowers.



*Healthy spinach in our little community garden*

It has been an opportunity to keep our minds and bodies active and well fed. The vegetables are blooming and we are already enjoying them. Though limited in space, the garden has brought recreational, health and economic benefits. It has taught us much about sustainable use of the resources around us leading to self-sufficiency. As we tend to the garden and remove the weeds, we are also in touch with our own lives. The same way weeds decrease yield and reduce quality of the vegetables, so does the negative energy that creeps in us. If not weeded out, it chokes life out of us.



*We give Glory to God by the very existence of nature (God's perfect wisdom and love)*

In addition, the pandemic situation has transformed our cook into a Chef. He has also found his slice of creativity. And in what better way other than bringing the Terrific Tuesday right at home. As restaurants remained closed reducing the chances for community outing, we have been enjoying home-made pizza as well as bread, scones, hotdogs, kebabs and milkshakes. As we share these meals together, there is a sense of community, spreading a little joy to each other and easing some anxiety.



*Some of the meals creatively prepared: Terrific Tuesday in the community*

As we soldier on in the journey, let us all stay safe and realize that this pandemic is an opportunity for us to contemplate with gratitude the presence of God, to be thankful, practice social charity and live simplicity of life.



*“All the things in this world are gifts of God, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily” First Principle and Foundation (St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises, 23)*

# Growing in Awareness of the God-given World of Nature

## A voice from Kangemi Community

The year of the Coronavirus Pandemic – Covid 19, the year we will say in years to come, when we found the days moving into weeks and then into months of lock down, a time when our schools and even our churches were closed and when the national broadcast seemed to focus on the daily increase in Covid cases or deaths as well as a deteriorating economy wreaking havoc across the world.

Yet it has also been a time when we have been challenged to call on our inner resources and to be creative. Here in our Kangemi Community we set aside daily one hour to pray for the end to the virus and to beg for Gods help for all the infected as well those affected by the virus. At the outbreak of the virus in March, Sr Mary, realizing the importance of keeping healthy, set about experimenting with the natural foods of ginger, honey and lemons to create a nourishing drink which has kept us all well. She has continued to produce large bottles of this juice regularly in spite of her intensive online academic studies, over a faulty internet and sitting for her final academic exam, as well as seeing that all the protective measures were in place for the reopening of School.

A second priority was to find ways to reach out to the poor, by creating another vegetable shamba. Seeds and seedlings were bought and planted immediately. Sr Angeline saw to the creation of a “kitchen shamba”, above the house, by blocking off a special section of ground. Both this upper as well as the lower shamba have continued to support us daily with fresh vegetables and fruit and twice weekly bundles of vegetables for some needy poor. Thanks also to the generosity of some benefactors we have been able to continue giving Food Vouchers to St Joseph the Worker Parish for Kangemi poor.



*Kangemi Community enjoying home-made Health drink known to the community as “Our Anti Corona Virus Juice”*

### **Creating a special fenced in Rabbit Shamba to protect and provide food for our Rabbits:**

In January 2020 we inherited about 10 Rabbits which due to lack of knowledge and “Rabbit Family Planning” have now increased to 50 wonderful and beautiful rabbits of various sizes and colours. Four new Rabbit

hutches/ houses have been built. The two latest have been double sized hutches and the names, St Francis Boys Hostel and St Teresa Girls Hostel will speak for themselves. We have been able to help some depressed, bored or needy youth also by giving two rabbits each to lavish care on. We also plan more healthy rabbit suppers for the community and potential buyers.



*Sr Angeline Creating a Kitchen Shamba*



*Sr Angeline and Teresa (Novice) Caring for the Rabbits*

During the past months of Lockdown we have found new calls on creativity. Our community has also followed a number of short courses online and engaged as well with the reading and activities suggested by them e.g. Laudato Si Animator programme, Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) patronized by Pope Francis. We have also followed on line programmes on Self-awareness, Emotional Intelligence in Ministry and Liturgy, just to mention a few. Our four Community members also enjoyed our Salesian priest-directed 8 day online retreat.

During the Covid 19 Lockdown one of the most sought after skills has been Computer skills. WEB IN AIR programs and classes have increased and multiplied. We have become familiar with “Zoom Technology”. Yet the Internet does not often work. Our Sr Rose-lyne has often been called to the rescue both at home and in the Nairobi area.



*Our animals experienced the tender love and care*



This period has also helped us to bond more closely together as a community since most of the time we have been in the house. We also had extra time to work on small projects such as reading, writing, reflecting and to enjoy music and discussions, not leaving out the usual community responsibilities.

It has been a time when we have learnt that the world is truly one in many ways and a time when we can see the beauty; the value of our God created natural world more clearly as well as to feel challenged to use our creative gifts to make this wonderful world an even better place in which to live.



*Sr Rosaline is regularly called upon to share her computer training and skills to help solve Computer challenges and problems*

# The centre of creativity

## A voice from Valley Road Community

Covid-19 crisis has been a strong driver of creativity and innovation. Indeed, we can already observe abundant creativity and innovation that have emerged both at individual and community level. All this was because the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an abrupt change in routines and ministry engagement hence requiring us to think of creative ways we could engage ourselves.

We shared quality time in prayer, communal interactions and celebrations



*We planted, harvested, and prepared meals as a community; we enjoyed the fruits of our labour*



*We made candles, decorations using bottles, and word art decors*

# The principle of taking “self-care”

## A voice from Manila

The Global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has had significant and far-reaching consequences in the worldwide economy and people’s normal lives. The initial uncertainty about the virus and the rapid changes that were happening left most of us on edge. This unprecedented global challenge forced many to look for creative ways to cope, most times indoors as a result of the imposed lockdown in many countries. Fear, depression, anger, anxiety, and worry are some of the emotions that most people experienced and could still be experiencing even if at different levels. The pandemic, like any other pandemic, calls for creative ways of responding. Some respond by tapping on the inner reserves, the level of resilience that is found in each one of us. One strategy that a person can use to foster resilience in times of crisis is to identify ways that will work for him/her. For example, creating and maintaining a balanced way of life could be an important way of coping with the crisis. Getting enough sleep, eating well, doing physical exercises, and maintaining normal and meaningful rituals, are some other ways that put balance in our lives as we respond to a crisis.

When a strict and complete lockdown was imposed in Manila, I went through a whole range of emotions; including extreme fear and anxiety over the whole situation created by the pandemic. Being far from home/province intensified my “bag of emotions”. Staying in my room most of the days felt like being in prison. I am generally an indoor person, but going out from time to time does help to be in touch with the world out there. The pandemic took this freedom away from me. I sometimes felt depressed. The pandemic also interrupted the smooth flow of my studies. It slowed down the completion of the semester. Having in mind the principle of taking self-care, I came up with creative ways that helped me live a meaningful life in these uncertain times.



Reconnecting with oneself in these indoor times, enabled me to tap on to my inner strength. Getting in touch with my talents and hobbies; such as listening to music, watching good movies, and engaging in physical exercises have helped me relax my mind and therefore distracting my mind from negative thoughts and emotions.

“Every cloud has a silver lining”. Covid-19 pandemic, as bad as it is, has many lessons and opportunities that we can all learn from. In my case, I have made use of the time at hand to enhance my cooking skills by learning and trying out new recipes; I have learned to connect with nature; I have been helping out in the chapel, especially in creating and enhancing sacred space for prayers. I have been able to have more time for physical exercises, which have helped me to keep fit but also to cope with stress. Last but not least, I have also made use of the extra time that I have to enroll in other courses and to attend talks on webinar that have greatly contributed to my personal growth/development.



My prayers intensified, and this helped me overcome the challenging experiences. Apart from keeping my routine of personal prayer, I valued the experience of frequently coming together for prayers as a community. Praying together every morning was a way of connecting with others in the community. Sharing our fears, concerns, anxieties during faith sharing/communal reflections, enabled me to have a deep connection with myself, others, and God. This encouraged me to navigate the emotional turbulence that I was experiencing.

I will end by saying that “life challenges are not supposed to paralyze you; they are supposed to help you discover who you are”. (Bernie Johnson Reagan)

A.M.D.G



*My creativity in the kitchen*

# Busy before and during the pandemic

## A voice from Abundant life Centre - Isinya

**A**bundant life centre – Isinya has been busy before and during the pandemic, given the various activities that take place at the centre.

This year we had 14 zoom meetings, TFGM Effective review for Nakuru and Ngong Regions, Child safeguarding trainings including seminars in Primary Schools, secondary schools, for young adults and residential seminars at Isinya.

The onset of covid-19 did not bar us from carrying on with life and ministry, by thinking of other ways different from planning for groups since there were

restrictions on travels and also organising seminars and workshops.

We invested our energy in working online as well as attending to the gardens. When we received two candidates and two novices, our joy became complete because they came in with more gifts and the energy of youthfulness.

This increased creativity at the centre and thus increased produce in our farm products.



*Community members taking care of tomatoes in a green house*



*Wide view of Abundant Life Centre - Isinya*



*Exercise - a health lifestyle*



*Sr. Ephigenia taking care of flowers*



*First fruits of our green-house*

# All is Gift and Grace!

A voice from Lukulu - Zambia

Here in Zambia the total cases stand at 16,971 and 350 deaths (as per November 2020) and seemingly the curve is on downward tread. Thankfully there is no reported case yet here in Lukulu. We remain safe and well but unfortunately there is a growing complacency towards the virus which is worrying in case of new spike. We can only hope for the best.

As a community, we were able to make a donation of much needed hand-sanitizers to the local hospital which is very poorly resourced and lacks such basic necessities. We have also been able to give emergency food relief to some of the families who are struggling most due to increase in basic food prices as a result of the pandemic.

Schools in Zambia opened as early as June especially for the candidates sitting for their exams this year. The rest reopened in September. To maintain social distance, the students in some schools are forced to go to school on alternate days, two or three days in a week. Others like in our school, have two shifts, morning for candidates and afternoon for the rest. The work load for the teachers has doubled, some teaching as many as 42 lessons in a week!

In order for the teaching staff to teach effectively by facial expressions, face shields come in handy though with rising temperatures fresh air tends to be much sort for commodity! All is gift and grace!



Teachers with face screens preparing for lessons in the staffroom at St. Columba's school.

# Appreciating diversity in our gardens

A voice from Limuru Community



It amazes me how much we appreciate diversity in our gardens. The more the variety of vegetables, fruits, flowers that a garden holds, the more self-sustaining, beautiful and productive the garden is and the more the value the owner attaches to it. Limuru community celebrated the Jubilee of creation by thanking God for the daily beauty we experience from our flower garden and the potted plants in almost every part of our house. We appreciate the wonderful weather and space to Grow and nurture these plants that constantly remind us of God's providence and care as we water them and remove the weeds.

Our beautiful Vegetable garden over years proved a reliable source of nourishment not only in our community but even beyond. We thank the Lord for the fertile soil, the favourable weather, the energy, and the human power. We are all His creation.

As a community we deepened an understanding that the diversity of creation brings about beauty that is beyond our imagination and that is absolutely pleasing to God, since all He created was good.



In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the needs of the people around us, We the Loreto Limuru Community planned to reach out to 26 needy families using the funds from the province to communities. The needy cases in our localities were identified through inquiry from the immediate neighbourhood and snow balling. This outreach was highly appreciated by the beneficiaries.

One of our observations was that the women were greatly affected by the pandemic and its side-effects especially in Limuru area.

# Looking at life from a different and creative perspective

## A voice from Matunda Community

**C**ovid-19 Pandemic came with its own disadvantages whereby all schools were shut down as soon as a case was reported in our country. As a community, we felt that propagation of faith among the youths was dying too, since all gatherings and interactions that enhance the growth and strengthening of faith were prohibited. As the days went by, we realised that the propagation of faith begins from the house (Charity begins at home) in our case, with my sisters in the community. This became a new insight and so we began to serve each other just the way we could do in our ministry. It was the time to learn, understand, encourage and bond with each other. It was also a time to explore our gifts and talents thereby learning from each other. We did different services like gardening, beadwork and crocheting-until now we still enjoy the work of our hands. We thank God for the time of Corona lockdown since without it, we wouldn't have looked at life from a different and creative perspective. As a community, we all attest that every moment we spend together, is fantastic. We convey heartfelt gratitude to the entire Loreto family and especially the Leadership team for constantly checking on and encouraging us at all times.



# Worked and lived in great hope for a better tomorrow

## A voice from Mombasa Community

**I**ndeed, the covid-19 lockdown has been a time for creativity; we ventured in our kitchen garden and planted different kinds of vegetables. This garden has been able to supply us with vegetables, pawpaw and oranges. We also planted tomatoes, beans and maize. We enjoyed the harvest and sold the surplus raising money which helped us in buying seeds as well as maintaining the shamba. We did a lot of cooking and enjoyed different dishes prepared by different sisters.

Since visiting a hairdresser was prohibited, we discovered another hidden gift amongst us i.e. hairdressing and we tapped on it.

We spent more time praying for the world's different situations and especially the current pandemic. We also had more time for spiritual reading which strengthened

our relationship with God and community members.

Through the covid response funds given by the province, we managed to help some needy cases in our area. We attended online talks organised by AOSK and that deepened our faith and our understanding of religious life, the vows, community leaving and prayer.

Online teaching was very engaging and through it we managed to support our pupils by availing some counselling sessions in additions to the normal subjects. This engagement kept our pupils busy and alert, despite the boring lockdown.

During the lockdown, the greatest spiritual gift to one another was the gift of hope. This is the time we have lived in great hope for a better tomorrow, a hope that is worthy to be shared by everyone.



A section of Mombasa community garden



*Hard work pays!  
Keeping our environment green yielded fruit in abundance.*

## A fruitful Lockdown!

### A voice from Karinde Community

The period of lock down bore several fruits in Karinde Community. Being a students' house, it meant that online studies became the order of the day. As a community we decided to set aside Wednesday as a day of prayer and adoration for the world and for all those affected, infected and had died because of corona virus.

the hand of God to see us through these challenging times surrounded by uncertainties.



Support staff enjoying their cup of tea after faith sharing



We also decided to create time for our support staff and share our faith, once every fortnight. The word of God became a source of hope and encouragement to all of us. We were able to provide a cup of tea after every sharing and this made us bond, realizing that we all needed

Through the donation given by the Province, we were able to visit and distribute foodstuffs to the vulnerable living in the neighboring slum. We also shared the same foodstuffs with the Resurrection Garden Community.

Sr. Sophie giving food donations to the rector of the Resurrection Garden



We took time to care for our flowers and garden and this was quite therapeutic.



*Community members distributing food to the people*

The lock down also gave some of us ample time to publish in academic journals. We became more aware of our helplessness without God and we continue praying that God in his own time will deliver us from this pandemic.

LORD JESUS SAY AMEN

# COVID-19 has not changed what I do as a nurse; at the same time it has changed everything!

## A voice from Rumbek

At the beginning of the pandemic, I was given the freedom to choose whether to come back to Nairobi or stay in Rumbek. After my discernment with greater freedom, I chose to stay and be part of the community even in odd times. I became more aware of Mary Ward's invitation "to love the poor, persevere in the same, live, die, and rise with them" a saying that gave me a lot of strength.

Being in the front line as health personnel was not easy but God's grace has been sufficient. I have been holding onto the spirit of Mary ward of "doing my best and leaving God to do the rest". We have been involved in creating awareness in the community since the health guidelines posed a lot of confusion and misunderstanding among the community members. For instance, culturally as a sign of care, love, respect, and belonging; shaking of hands and staying together are values. The restrictions of Covid-19 such as wearing masks, not shaking hands, and observing the social distance went against the culture which values community gatherings and personal interactions. We, therefore, started by creating awareness around the boreholes targeting women and children, whereby we provided hand washing equipment and soaps. As the pandemic spread more rapidly, we involved the local leaders and encouraged them to help the community put into practice the health guidelines (since to the locals, the virus was only for the foreigners hence they were not observing the rules). We felt the need to offer more preventive and curative services to the community hence our clinic gate was opened for all who needed the services. This meant that the patients would be many, observing the guidelines would be a challenge to manage, thus we set up four tents outside the clinic.



Sister at work; dressed in full body protective gear



Patients observing social distance



Attending to patients under a tent

As a result of COVID 19, challenges to other health issues like malaria and pneumonia continue to be overwhelming. Our small clinic receives over 400 patients daily, implying that the medical staffs are overstretched. Therefore, there is a need for more medicine and personal preventive equipment which cannot be easily sourced in the country.

Besides, the pandemic, the people of South Sudan are so used to tragedies in life especially with endless violence, such that to them, coronavirus was not one of the biggest challenges to be worried about. Moreover, the country in general lacked preparedness for the pandemic in terms of facilities, test kits, personal protective equipment, and quarantine centres. For example, there is only one intensive care unit, with a bed capacity of 24, and four oxygen machines. There is only one testing center and all these are in Juba.



A team fully dressed in Personal Protective Equipment



Health team during their relaxation moment

Working in a health care facility requires a remarkable amount of flexibility. Each day is unpredictable and in some ways that is part of the appeal. This routine of unpredictability has been infinitely magnified by a global pandemic. In many ways COVID-19 has not changed what I do as a nurse and at the same time it has changed everything. It has forced us to change our daily routines and no longer allows us to care for our patients in the same ways as before.

## New learnings - impact of Covid-19

### A voice from Nyakato - Tanzania

**W**e are most grateful to God for bringing us this far. It has not been easy because things never went as planned both individually and communally. The Covid-19 situation left me in dilemma, afraid and anxious, not knowing the next move or what to do even in the present situation. However, the situation drew me closer to God who is more powerful than us all.

As a community, we saw it better to be working from home especially in reaching out to our pupils and students. We taught them online and gave exams through the same. I learnt certain soft skills on the job. E.g. working as a secretary especially typing exams which I had not trained for was somehow challenging. Nevertheless, I managed and in the process, I learnt more that I can't take for granted.

Other engaging activities included cleaning our compound, and preparing meals for ourselves since workers could not come to work for fear of the pandemic, praying together, attending the annual retreat, taking care of our sister who is a vulnerable adult, visiting a children's home and donating some food staffs and clothing to them. These and many others were a joint effort of both the community and the primary school, something which became a way of coming together in gratitude for God's protection.

While this has been a very trying moment in my ministry, I am proud to say that I have seen this pandemic bring out the best in us and our local community. Our staffs have been reassigned responsibilities that are not typical of their jobs and everyone adapted without complaint. COVID forced separate units to work together and in doing so has created a more cohesive clinic environment. The overwhelming support and gratitude from the local community and patients means so much.

I am incredibly happy and lucky to be able to do what I do. Working in health -care is a privilege and I am grateful for the opportunity to direct care for patients, particularly during this time. During this period, I have been able to understand in details the saying of a nursing lecturer, "Reflective practice is not something that is on and off. Being a reflective practitioner is something that you are and it is especially useful in times of stress, extreme situations and uncertainty"

Personally I kept myself busy by writing songs and reading more about religious life, the constitutions, meeting for discussion with Sr. Mariana and doing some art work on our notice board. I went an extra mile of planting some grass and flowers in our primary school with some workers in order to make our compound beautiful. I also spent some time covering and arranging children's books.

The pandemic period taught me to be more reflective, stand with others and encourage them especially the people we serve and being that beckon of hope to those who were despairing after losing loved ones to the pandemic. It is my prayer that we continue working together, supporting each other. Our life is in the hands of our Lord and so we ought to do all things for the Greater Glory of God.



Sisters visiting a children's home with some food donations



*A joyful visit to a children's home*



*Sr. P. Boase having quality time with a student*



*Sr. Naomi covering text books for the pupils*

## Extra Ordinary Conversations amidst the “Pandemic”

### A voice from Obuasi - Ghana

*2020 is not the year to get everything we want, but the year to appreciate everything we have*

**Sounds of Hope** -The period existed and many discovered the need to reconstruct social and family ties that were left broken before Covid-19 Pandemic. Within the walls of my room were few gadgets that reminded me of a call given by the Holy Father Pope Francis on “using every means possible for evangelization”, especially social media where the world is today. The world of social media has been a world known for moral degradation, this time the social media has transformed to a global village where many meet, sit and listen to each other at the comfort of our homes.

**Restoration** - I carried out complete counselling sessions to a set of couples whom I met online as we attended online Mass services during the hot days of Covid-19 lockdown. I glory in the Lord for granting these two families healing and voluntary re-union.

**Social and Civil Discussion** - Building on the Spirit of Mary Ward to empower the minds of young people, I engaged in discussions that were facilitated by the Institute of Africa Leadership and Governance (South Africa) where issues affecting the young generation due to poor leadership in the Continent of Africa were laid open and voices of young people were heard through several virtual meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. I am convinced beyond reasonable doubt that, the lucky ones in these conversations went back to their various institutions having a new perspective of what they hear and see from their leaders in their respective countries.

### Key Points

- Admonishing selfish leadership systems in Africa
- Lamentation on misused resources in Africa
- Lack of involvement in decision making among youths and the poor
- Leadership regimes that yield no fruit for generations
- Leaderships that facilitate more on widening the gap between the rich and the poor other than bridging such gaps
- Religious role in addressing social and civil issues in Africa

Conversation with Mother Earth and interior Journey- “we are all connected” is a common phrase to the activists of Justice Peace and Integrity of creation. This phrase would not have meaning any other time than during Covid-19 pandemic. The celebration of Laudato Si encyclical unveiled realities of those left behind, the cry of mother earth and of the poor. This is a continuous cry for restoration, rehabilitation and nurturing of our common home. Celebrating Jubilee year of the earth was indeed practical, and I marveled at how God used the period of this Pandemic to remind humanity that the earth was created for all creatures, it was a period for some to stay at home while creating space for other creatures to thrive. The closure of this Jubilee gave birth to yet another Encyclical FRATELLI TUTTI- we are all brothers, (we are all sisters); a document which was signed by His Holiness Pope Francis on Oct 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 in Assisi. My time dedicated to these conversations compels me to call upon each one of us .....

Loreto Eastern Africa, December. 2020

With these words, Saint Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel....., I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance and declares blessed all those who love their brother “as

much when far away from him as when he is with him”  
FRATELLI TUTTI.

School at home- the pandemic period continues..... I continue to acquire skills and tools significant for the service of my brothers and sisters both far and near, IT SHALL END WELL

## Vocation to the test of experience

### A voice from the Novitiate Community

As we get a progressive initiation into the life of the Institute, we in the novitiate community have had a chance to explore our creativity and generosity during the uncertain times of Covid-19 pandemic. It's hard to think creatively in times of anxiety and stress, yet the months of lockdown would be difficult to survive were it not for the creative engagement in our day-to-day life. It was during this time that we discovered the talents among us. We learnt from each other how to do a bit of crafts work, knitting, playing the guitar and preparing decorations.



Above: Beaded serviette holders

Below: Novices having their guitar lesson



During the week of Laudato Si, we discerned on how to take care of mother earth within our environment and we came up with a brilliant idea of erecting gabions along our river bank so that the river does not erode the land, for both are very important to us. This activity engaged each and every member of the community.



Using cement sacks and soil to make gabions for the river bank

Through the generosity of the province, we reached out to twelve families in Gatina (an informal settlement in Nairobi) with food donations. It was so touching to see how desperately people were – in need of any kind of assistance especially food stuff. We witnessed people crying with great appreciation on reception of the small donation.



All these and many other experiences left us with many lessons among them;

...that we humans are fragile by ourselves, our strength lies in being part of a community

...Sharing is caring.

...Sometimes we need to remember how important kindness is.

...We need to remember that we have been given a gift called life and that we should appreciate it.

...Everything can end tomorrow.

# The experience of Covid-19 pandemic has brought the “creative self” in all of us

A voice from Loreto House Community

*“Jesus saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick”... asks his disciples to give them something to eat.” (Matthew 14:14-16)*

Reflecting on Jesus’ example of response to a situation, ‘a crowd that has followed him ashore’ this calls for reflection on our response to today’s needs amid Covid-19 pandemic. We, the Loreto House community saw the current context of Covid-19, moved by our desire to share what we have with the vulnerable of our society, we gathered together and like the disciples, we asked the question – how can we feed all these people with what we have, but Jesus’ challenge woke us up! – Go! You give them something to eat! How can we do this with the little we have – ‘5 loaves and 2 fishes’? Jesus says to us – bring what you have – and indeed we brought what we had, foodstuff and other items to cushion vulnerable families to two different congregations directly involved with the most vulnerable in the society. Similar to the disciples assisting Jesus feed the crowd, these sisters assisted us in the distribution of the items.

Journeying forward we are all left asking ourselves - What lessons have we learnt from this one act from this reality of Covid-19 pandemic and what more do we need to do to bring about social change.

A change that all may claim their unique space and enjoy the fruits of our common home. “May justice be our shield and defender and may we live in unity, peace and liberty and plenty be found within all our borders” (Kenya National Anthem) from the South to the North. The poor and vulnerable will always be with us but how we see, judge and act is what makes the difference.

As a community, the experience of Covid-19 pandemic has brought the creative self in all of us. We have perfected our skills in farming, cooking and information technology.



*Packed food items which were distributed to the identified cases*



Some of the food harvested from our community garden

We have carried each member of the province and the institute and their families in prayer in a very special way these days; have been challenged to care and compassion for each other anew. In suffering together with the rest of our society we have been challenged to ask deep questions and the greatest of this is: “Who is my neighbour?” and the reflection from Pope’s Francis Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” gives us insight to this question; it is the invitation to be the good Samaritan among our sisters and brothers.

Other two families living in the informal sectors in Nairobi were also provided for and indeed it was like feeding the 5000 thousands plus people and having twelve baskets full of left overs; for the joy and smiles and laughter of children, restoration of dignity to mothers now preparing meals for their families, ‘thank you’ from a priest who ministers to the prisoners who shared that the donation given to the prison made the prisoners feel loved and not condemned; when they too received some items. These will forever be etched in our minds and hearts.



We have carried each member of the province and the institute and their families in prayer

# Creative Engagement during Covid-19 Period

## A voice from Kiambu Community

It has been a time of deepening our faith in God; we learnt to trust in Him even when we cannot see clearly, and to live a day at a time. We have gone through transformation and are being transformed to the new normal. We have also learned not to take things/each other for granted and the bond is overwhelming.

The community has crocheted various works such as scarves, caps and baby wear.



We used this time to improve our hand-printing by making cards for different occasions and learned various letter printings guided by one among us and also making use of a certain book as a resource.



We also planted variety of food stuff and enjoyed eating healthy from our garden. We took time to beautify our compound to an extent of widening our entrance, Rose flowers are in plenty and the rains have favored us massively.



This environmental activity did not only benefit our compound but we went an extra mile by clearing the path from the road to the river heading to the Parish Church since it had become very bushy and insecure/lonely. This act of going an extra mile was deeply acknowledged and appreciated by the whole community around us.

We shared skills/talents and enriched one another i.e. Altar and room decorations, for occasions hence our chapel and birthdays being very colorful.



During this period, we nourished ourselves with diverse cultural/local dishes prepared in style and with love.

We not only enjoyed the dishes but also learned how different rites of

passage were performed in our cultures, the dress code of our people, other social interactions etc

Many of us are musical so we used this period to better our singing and trying our hands on some musical instrument. Our Music class catered for both Liturgical and Cultural songs. We were greatly enriched in all dimensions as far as music is concerned.

It was amazing to see the whole community including our Macharia adventuring into soap making. Team work was evident as one read out the procedure; others prepared the ingredients while others stirred to have the desired texture of the soap. The joy at the end of the exercise could not be contained. We were amazed at having our own home-made soap while developing the skill is an asset.



Talk of variety of exercises, some kept fit by playing football, marathon, hide and seek in the house, Yoga and walkouts. Some brave ones ventured for long walks outside the perimeters by strictly wearing masks all through and ensuring distance as they walked along the road or in public.

During this period, we had opportunities to bond with our staff that remained in the compound and shared in both their joys and sorrows as individuals.

Some of us became more Digital as they learnt the use of zoom for either attending meetings or lessons. During this time, network of relationships increased as we met many people in the digital world and realized that the world became a village.



*Different zones of creativity*

# Living in the Community of Earth: Deepening Passion for Growth and Transformation

A reflection from Loreto Neema

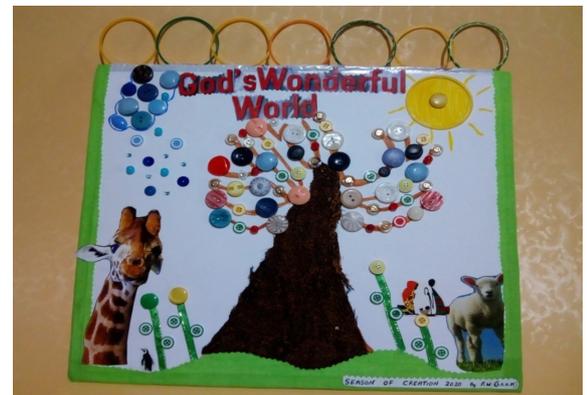
*“For we are His handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them”. Eph 2:10*

In the midst of the pandemic, I have been reflecting on how much transformation we have seen in different areas; whether at home, workplace, businesses, school and generally in the world around us. In as much as we need to take the Covid-19 Pandemic seriously, it does not mean we have to let it break us. As we deal with disruptions, uncertainties and anxieties, we have a chance to be creative and fill up the time we feel bored, overwhelmed or even frustrated. We are called to fully embrace the situation. As a people of faith, we can emerge from this pandemic more empathetic, grateful, positive and focused.

This period has been an opportunity to use time and space to remember and relearn ways of creating that were overshadowed in the times we got too busy. I have been inspired to renew my relationship with God and with creation. There is joy in learning something new and showing simple kindness to those around using in creative ways.

Part of the artistic outlet we have engaged in is making cards, wall décor, and show piece souvenir using available material at the project (buttons, ribbons, thread, tissue paper roll, decors, old birthday/Christmas cards, magazines, calendars, and pieces of cloth). The theme was Recycle, Renew, Beautify. It is an inspirational activity and it does not require expensive material. It is also relaxing and motivating.

As we have had extra time on our hands, we endeavored to also venture into learning new designs for bags, crocheted souvenir, hand-woven kiondos and beadwork.



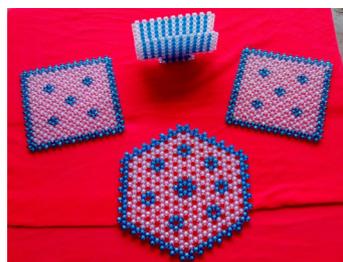
*Show piece souvenir (made using recyclable material; buttons, pieces of cloth, magazine cutout, lace, rings, decorations & cardboard)*



*Cards made using available materials at the project (e.g. buttons, lace, thread, decorations, and cutouts from old cards)*



*Crotchet souvenirs*



*Beaded Mats and serviette holders*



*Hand woven 'Kiondos' (traditional African basket)*



*Padded partition to protect the laptop*

# Loreto Sisters and Youth Transformation

Impacting on the lives of youths in Kuwinda informal settlement

*“Give a man a fish, and you’ll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you’ve fed him for a lifetime.” (Lao Tzu)*

Transformation is a gradual change. This beautiful story narrates how with a token we can touch and transform lives of our young people who have the potential but lack the opportunity to be economically productive. With just a little boost, they feel empowered to start small and then move up the ladder. My encounter with the youths in Kuwinda informal settlement taught me how far little funds can go in such informal settings. With tools, the youths have turned wastes into wealth right where they live. When people reclaim their sense of dignity as human beings, they blossom and put their creativity into action. In June 2019, Loreto Sisters gave us a small donation which enabled us to buy working tools for the youths in Kuwinda informal settlement to clean their compound. The youths are available and actively participate in the cleaning which is done once every week. Given that they do not have jobs; they generously devote ample time for the good of their community. There is an old saying which states: “Give a man a fish, and you’ll feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you’ve fed him for a lifetime.” (Lao Tzu). The youths cleared the garbage area of the settlement and elevated it using the tools for car wash. Later, they used the same tools to plant and sell seedlings of different species.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, they up-scaled their project to recycling water bottles into on-sitter sofa sets. They use the bottle tops to make curtains and the small ring around the top for making skipping ropes. The products have turned out to be attractive, effective, long-lasting, comfortable and affordable.

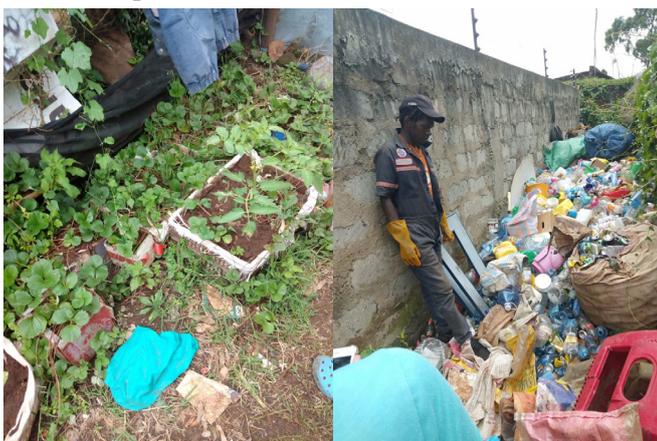


On sitter plastic sofa



Kibarazani office made of plastic bottles

The impact made by Loreto’s small funding has transformed the lives of the young boys who were idling and wasting away in the informal settlement. We provided tools, motivated the young ones and now they have become entrepreneurs with the little education they had. I visit the youths from time to time to see their progress as well as have quality conversations with them.



Seedlings for sale

Collecting water bottles



A visit to the Youth

New working tools

They have also constructed their own office using water bottles. Outside the office is the car and motorcycle wash which used to be the garbage area of the informal settlement.

While society laments loudly over the social menace of miscreant youths, with correctional centers filled to capacity; the situation and story would be different if small efforts such as this were made here and there to equip our young people to transform their lives and hence their communities. *By Jackline M. IBVM*

The youths also started rearing pigs although these did not pick as expected.



# WHAT NEXT AFTER COVID-19 – ‘THE NEW NORMAL’

Reflection by Sr. T. Wamũyũ Wachira (IBVM)

***Jesus saw the crowd; Jesus judged the situation and was moved by compassion and fed them***

**See** - What lenses are we wearing to see the reality of our local and global world? What do we see when we look at this world? It is indeed not difficult to respond to this question when this reality of Covid-19 is glaring at us but what next after Covid-19 or what is now becoming the new normal?

Will I, we, wear the lenses that the disciples wore that made them see a people that are a burden and need to be sent away to fend for themselves? or

Will I, we, wear the lenses that Jesus wore that made him see a hungry people in need of food and compassion?

**Judge** – How does this make me, we, really feel? A sense of Poverty? Helplessness? Desperation? Shame? Pity? Guilt or am I, we, overwhelmed?

How did this make the disciples feel? Angry? Annoyed? Disturbed? Helpless? Challenged?

How does Jesus feel? Compassion for the crowd.

**Act** – How do I, we, respond? Pretend everything is ok? See this as not my job? ‘Wish the challenge away’? Try to solve everything by myself?

How did the disciples’ act – they were impulsive – “send them away”! Unwilling to try – we cannot feed all these people? Doubtful and lack of trust – how can 5 loaves and 2 fishes feed all these people?

How does Jesus act? Challenges the disciples to come up with a solution – You feed them! And indeed they find a solution even though it may not solve all their problems. Jesus asks them to share their solution and together with the disciples and the crowds they are able to solve the problem.

Our today’s reality of Covid-19 calls for care and compassion for all especially those suffering different forms of vulnerability in our communities and society. We are invited to be in solidarity and communion with each other and indeed to be a people of hope. Jesus came that all may have life and have it more abundantly (John, 10:10). Our God is indeed enough for us all (Mary Ward)

