

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL

WOMEN'S DAY 2021

**“WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP:
ACHIEVING AN EQUAL FUTURE
IN A COVID-19 WORLD.”**

We celebrate the inspiring Mary Ward women and girls around the world shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Dear fellow members of the Mary Ward family,

On International Women's Day 2021, we are delighted to be able to welcome you to this publication and to commend it to you. When we ourselves read it we were simultaneously heartened and encouraged by what we read – and also humbled by it. We were humbled to read what the Mary Ward family has been doing in every part of the world from A[lbania] to Z[imbabwe], in responding to the most pressing need of our times, which of course is the Covid-19 pandemic. In this publication, you will read stories of creativity and of resilience but most importantly of solidarity in the face of the pandemic and the suffering it has brought about, in particular for women and children. We were immediately struck by the parallels with Mary Ward's response to the needs of her time, for example by visiting the sick and those in prison, without thought of the risk to her own health or safety. We see in these stories mirror images of Mary Ward's own actions and the living out of the Just Soul virtues of freedom, sincerity, justice and felicity.

What we read in the following pages are responses to the invitation of Pope Francis in Chapter 2 of Fratelli Tutti to contemplate the parable of the Good Samaritan – and then to act accordingly. As he says in #67: *"The parable eloquently presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our broken world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan"*. That imitation of the Good Samaritan can take many forms. You will find some very concrete and moving expressions of it in this publication.

At the same time we do not want to forget the many members of the Mary Ward family who also imitate the Good Samaritan in other ways. We think, for example, of those who care for our own frail and elderly members, and those who are frail and elderly themselves, whose contribution to "binding the wounds" of our world is their prayer and their "acceptance of loneliness, sickness, failure or difficulty of any kind", through which they also "bear witness to the living Christ" (IBVM Constitutions Vol 2, 2.14). We are encouraged that across the globe there are many courageous women and men, both within the Mary Ward family and beyond, who, as Good Samaritans of our time, are faithfully serving God's people, both in general and in the very particular context of the current crisis threatening all who share our common home.

On this International Women's Day we are all invited to unite ourselves in solidarity with all women throughout the world who serve God's people. We know that they are often the first to respond to needs and in the context of the pandemic are often carrying the burden of caring for family and loved ones, to which some of the stories in this publication give witness. These stories and others not told in this publication give us cause to hope that Pope Francis' desire for a different world after the pandemic is possible. We invite you to read these stories and be similarly encouraged.

Yours ever

Jane

Jane

Noelle

Noelle

Felicity

Freedom

Justice

Sincerity

BAGMANI DEVI FROM BIHAR - INDIA

I am Bagmani Devi from Kamarpur village in Buxar District of Bihar, India. When I got married, I was illiterate but my husband taught me the Hindi alphabet. When the CJ Sisters from Chirag came to my house I was so embarrassed and shy as I didn't know how to speak. But they had confidence in me and my husband supporting me, and with great fear I started teaching the 'Balwadi' children.

At night I learned what I had to teach the little ones in the morning. The sisters were so encouraging that I began to gain confidence. Slowly I began to be vocal.

I helped the women to form the Self Help Group (SHG), became its leader and started conducting meetings. It was a big leap in my life. Seeing my performance with women I was given a chance for training in Kurji Hospital. As a result I became an 'Asha' (village health worker) but writing reports and conducting surveys was a big challenge.

During Covid-19 times I made a survey of all the migrant workers whether they came from Delhi, Mumbai, Punjab, Hariyana etc and reported to the block. I also made a list of those who had no ration cards among the residents and migrants and gave to the block. It really took time and energy in COVID-19 time to do all that.

Today I am happy and proud that I managed it all, not only that I have learned to give injections and take blood pressure. All this became possible because of my Chirag Sisters.



ALINA FROM ALBANIA

Single moms can be true heroines, and they find the strength they need when they look into their children's eyes. This is the case of Alina, mother of three, who experienced domestic violence and human trafficking. Her life has been tough. She had to be both a mother and a father for her children, go to work, cook, take her kids to school, help them with their homework, take them to the doctor, play and watch TV with them, answer all their questions, and most importantly, protect them.

But Alina made it! She knocked at every door possible to seek support if needed. She only needed a helping hand, never asking for a ready solution.

When she came to Mary Ward Loreto Advice and Service Centre (ASC), her life had once again collapsed. She had serious health problems and had lost her job. She could not afford to pay the rent, she had been kicked out of her apartment where she and her children had been living for a year. In tears, she explained that because she had received support from service providers in the past, those doors were now closed to her.

Alina received emergency accommodation support, healthcare for her and her children, food and clothes, vocational training and coaching for employment, psychological support, and service referrals.

And here she is now, healed and again strong, working in a company, making her living and being a dedicated mom. She does the best she can to provide a better future for herself and her children.

A NURSE WORKING TO HUMANIZE THIS INHUMANE SITUATION, SPAIN

Maria José, a nurse on the Covid-19 ward of a hospital in San Sebastian, north of Spain, tells us how hard it is for her to go to work during the pandemic. She has to work long hours in protective suits, a lot of sweat mixed with tears of helplessness. Many days, when she returns, she sees empty beds, which have been vacated during her hours of rest, beds that are immediately reoccupied.

However, the most difficult part for her to bear is the knowledge that for many of these sick people, she will be the last person they will see in this life. With this in her mind, she tries to accompany these ill people the best she can and treat them with dignity and love in their last hours. She spends many minutes, maybe hours, of the time she does not have, making stops in her busy work, to try to humanize this inhumane situation, every day.

But these moments are also accompanied by discharges of the healed, in which the happiness of a job well done, of having achieved an extension in someone's life, of new opportunities for these people... give meaning to life. Also accompanied by some smiles of farewell, of thanks... all that recharge the worn-out batteries and help María José and her mates at the hospital to continue working day by day.

She reminds us what Mary Ward said, "Do not let a day go by without heroically overcoming yourself."

A MARY WARD WOMAN'S EXPERIENCE DURING COVID19 BY ANNE ADHIAMBO - KENYA

Anne Adhiambo, 40, is a widow and the only breadwinner for herself and her daughter. She is a dressmaking staff at Loreto Neema (outreach ministry of Loreto sisters in Eastern Africa Province). She has worked at the project for the last 13 years. Her story reflects a resilient and focused woman, who is able to rise above challenges and create her own self-worth.

“Before the Covid-19 virus hit the country, life was normal. My daily routine entailed waking up at 5.00 am, prepare my daughter for school, get breakfast ready and set off for work. We usually make school uniforms, bags and mats. I also do printing on T-Shirts and tracksuits. I would work hard and meet my daily target. In the evening, we would again start our journey back home. (My daughter's school and my place of work are within the same compound). We get home around 6.00 p.m, I ensure she has done her homework and set her things for the next day. We prepare and have supper then retire to bed.



When the pandemic hit the country, I was filled with a lot of anxiety and fear. Schools were closed as the government made efforts to contain the spread of the disease. The project heavily relies on schools as we supply uniforms. This meant our work was affected. I became very worried on how life would be. Would I lose my source of livelihood as we also had to close down the workshop?

During the month we were home, it was challenging to adjust to a new routine. I live in a single room. I would stay up in bed until 9.00 am just deep in thought wondering what next. There was no opportunity to visit friends or even move around. Also the food prices had gone up. However, I am grateful to Loreto sisters especially those in charge of Loreto Neema. Even when I was not working, they supported me and I was able to pay rent and buy food. We found a way to manage the little we had ensuring we had all meals.

I resumed work after one month. Although the situation was not so good, I had the courage. I was able to finish on the pending work before the rest of the staff resumed 2 months later. I also helped in distributing food to the needy especially our clients at the project. A noble gesture extended by the Loreto family in eastern Africa.

I would wish to say that, COVID is real and is important to take precautions. Above all, we should remain prayerful and hopeful. I am optimistic things will change for the better as we adapt to the new normal. I am happy that I am able to work, put food on the table and take care of my daughter.”

LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

CLAUDIA VALDÉS - CHILE

Maybe for many people the pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the further lockdown was an opportunity for many women to have more time at home and share more with their children and family. For others, it was the precise time to see themselves in complete vulnerability in front of one whom they thought was their companion for all their life.

In the beginning, I blamed the stress due to the lockdown; after the uncertainty of keeping his laboural income and finally, I blamed myself for not being the person whom he needed in his life. It all started with hurtful words, which gave way to more and more frequent assaults like pushes and blows. I even saw myself "violated as a woman". Every day, this was increasing, and I was decreasing, I felt worthless, unprotected and without anyone to ask for help. There was no longer anything else he could do to me. This is what my life would be like.

But one day all changed, I asked God to give me a last impetus to fight, let me feel that it is better to live...and one morning God answered me in a way I never expected. My daughter, with her eyes covered by the fear to have to repeat her mother's story, was the reason for me to stand up and raise my voice. It will be not easy, but it will be worth it. I could not allow her to see me each day kissing the floor caused by the maltreatment of her father, the same maltreatment that justified me. That day I raised my eyes and dressed with all the dignity I always had, and the violence had overtaken. I packed my things in my suitcase, without thinking, full of uncertainty, fears, dreams, and hopes to give to my daughter. I had the deep conviction that women are strong, and that nothing and nobody can steal my joy, and God's dream for us is the call to happiness. Now, no one will hit me again.

The pandemic gave me the chance to free myself of the oral and physical violence of the virus. I am not the first and hope I am not the last woman to see myself with love and respect. Now, I have become, little by little, a voice for other women, close to me in the silence of their homes who raise their cries for help. It is just learning to see their eyes.

MARIA MERCEDES METRAILLER - ARGENTINA

When I was asked to write a piece concerning resilience and women, I asked myself why anyone thought of me. Then I began to review the idea of resilience, and there I found the answer. I recognized myself as a resilient person.

During this pandemic, when many people were very frightened - and this really changed my life - we had to stay at home in our family unit and for online work. ... In my personal experience, I learned not to give up helping others by being frightened but to trust more in God, leaving our lives in his hands and prayed a lot for doctors, nurses, and healthcare personnel.

As a member of the Friends of Mary Ward Cerrito, I learned about the founder of the Congregatio Jesu, initially, when I was a teacher and later, when I was a dean of the Secondary Institute D-200 Mary Ward. There, being in touch with the sisters in the Congregatio I discovered Mary Ward to be an incredible woman: strong, sure in her convictions and her faith; a woman who was ahead of her time and I can say, nowadays, an example of resilience. She knew how to deal with so many difficult situations not even conceived in her time; but she did it trusting always in God and what she felt He was asking from her.

FORTUNATA ROSSI AN ITALIAN IN ROMANIA DURING COVID19

Fortunata Rossi, an Italian volunteer and co-worker of our Maria Ward Social Center, together with her husband Tonino, brought hope to the Romanian communities during the pandemic as she has done for 25 years since the center's existence. The pandemic struck unexpectedly all over the world. The lonely elderly, the parents who had to feed their children but who were uneducated and did not have a stable job, immediately felt the pain. They sighed and hoped to receive help. The harsh restrictions imposed from the very beginning generated, especially among the day laborers, a critical situation. For them, a struggle for survival had begun.

Fortunately, there were devoted people around who helped directly. This story is about Fortunata, a lady from Italy, who at the beginning of 2020 was at the Maria Ward Social Center in Radauti, Romania. Due to the restrictions, she could not return home to Italy for a long time.

The poorest were knocking at the gate of our center asking for help. At the same time, we had to suspend the educational activity carried out with the children enrolled in our program for the prevention of school and family dropout. But our activity as sisters from the Congregation of Jesus intensified overnight. And right in the middle of us were Fortunata and her husband, Tonino, who over 25 years ago laid the foundations of our center.

From the early morning till the evening we were unloading from cars the products we received from donors. Then we were preparing the packages and afterwards we were distributing them to those in need. With an indescribable energy Fortunata was helping in every activity. It was overwhelming for our entire small team but people receiving our help showed us an indescribable gratitude.

We managed to support both the families of the children enrolled in our center's programs and those who asked for help. In just one month, we helped more than 400 children from more than 150

vulnerable families, and more than 250 elderly people. We reached three elderly homes and two orphanages. We donated more than 26 tons of food, hygiene products, medicines, and baby products to beneficiaries from 14 localities. In all these activities, Fortunata was everywhere and showed empathy and care for the poor. Although Fortunata knows very little Romanian, she transmitted through her eyes all her sincere affection and those in need felt it. During all this time, Fortunata also took part in a miracle of life: she was the godmother of a child from a poor family.

For all the sisters in our Center it was a joy that we were able to bring relief to those in need and we believe that we acted exactly with the mission of our founder, Maria Ward, "to love the poor, persevere in the same, live, die and rise with them". And the first months of the pandemic showed that Fortunata adhered to this mission too.



SANCHAYITA FROM KOLKATA - INDIA

Sanchayita is a senior school teacher and a devoted member of the Mary Ward family. During this COVID-19 Pandemic, she had to play the role of a responsible navigator in the tumultuous journey of life. Her contribution to her family is commendable. She hails from a middle-class family of four members, including herself, her daughter, her husband, and father-in-law whom she called Baba. When the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus was reported in India, the lifestyle of all families underwent a change. Sanchayita's family was no exception. Being a dedicated teacher, she adjusted and readjusted to make the virtual classes effective and at the same time she turned hard with her domestic course. She had to look after her 80 plus Baba – a widower, plus her husband and daughter. Little did she know what was in store for her.

Covid-19 hit the family in October 2020. The senior most family member, her Baba, a retired Professor Mr. P.K. Dey was then diagnosed with a urine infection. At that time, it was the festive season in Kolkata and no doctors were available for love or for money. Her husband had no other alternative but to hospitalize his father on 23rd October. A covid-19 test was done on the same day and was detected positive. He was immediately shifted to an isolation ward and the family could no longer reach out to him. It was his kind room-mate who made the communication between him and his family members possible. Sanchayita and her family made their regular hospital visits but unfortunately her husband too developed covid-19 symptoms and was tested positive. Fortunately, she and her daughter tested negative. Without wasting time, she got her husband admitted in a city nursing home on 29th October. Now, the entire responsibility fell on Sanchayita's shoulders. However, it was her college going daughter who confidently stood like a pillar by her side.

It was after a couple of days or so, her most adorable father-in-law showed signs of recovery and she felt her prayer was answered. The hospital discharged her father-in-law on 31st October. Mr. P.K. Dey was a strong-minded person with a positive outlook. He bravely returned home, his sweet home. Sanchayita and her daughter diligently with the help of a nurse began to take utmost care of him. Both mother and daughter kept by his bedside, reaching out to him at every moment, doing all that was needed. Little did they realize that the dark cloud did not disperse. They could feel the blue sky but could not eradicate the gloomy cloud. To their utter dismay, his condition began to deteriorate as his oxygen saturation level came down below 50. She and her daughter kept oxygen cylinders ready and time and again monitored it whenever required with the hope that her Baba would recover.

Meanwhile, her husband was gradually recovering, and the nursing home decided to discharge him on 4th November. But unfortunately, on 3rd November late night, the ultimate blow fell on them. Despite their relentless effort, her father-in-law left for his final journey at 3.30 am peacefully without a stir. Now, the mother and daughter plunged in deep sorrow and a pall of gloom hung over their happy and peaceful family.

Their next phase of struggle was how to disclose the sad news to his only son who was dearer than his own life. It was with the aid and advice of her husband's attending doctor, Sanchayita revealed the news of the unbearable and irreparable loss to her husband in the nursing home. Her husband, Mr. S. Dey, was discharged on the fateful day but was advised not to attend the funeral of his father as per Government protocol. Sanchayita, like most dutiful and loving woman, performed all funeral rites as desired by the Almighty and perhaps by her father-in-law, who loved her no less than his own daughter.



BERNIE BOLAND IBVM UNITED KINGDOM

One of my ministries is as a hospital chaplain in a multi faith team in a large teaching hospital. Most of the staff I have interacted with over the years are women who have given of their gifts in the health care ministry in a variety of ways. During the Covid-19 pandemic I have been able to be with non-Covid-19 patients who are generally older and fragile and miss their families visiting them - in a sense at the margins in these times. This also gives me the chance to touch in with the staff on the ward and we can both support and encourage each other. It is good to connect with staff, women with families, and hear the reality of life today where they balance a life of care for family and giving their all for others. Truly they are women who give much.

SUSHEELA DEVI AND ROHINI RAMAN FROM BIHAR - INDIA

I, Susheela Devi with Rohini Raman a staff of Chirag have helped in distributing forms to migrant labourers and filling them in. I deposited the forms to the Data Operator through Vikas Mitre so that they could get a payment from the government of Rs 1,000 in their accounts. According to government orders I helped fill forms for ration cards for those migrant workers who had no cards and most of them got the ration cards. Those who tested positive for Covid19 were sent to quarantine centers and I helped to give food and other needed help. I have helped in getting job cards, Ayushman Bharat cards for migrant workers. I have helped with pension payments for those migrants who were not getting the pension. It gives me immense joy that I have been able to help many of our own people in their hour of need although it was very challenging at that time - leaving the children and going to the villages to take surveys and the such.



MARIA APARECIDA ZINONI PSYCHOLOGIST AND NEUROPSYCHOLOGIST FROM SÃO PAULO - BRAZIL

March 16, 2020, 6:30 am

- Good morning Bruno. God bless you.
- Good morning Mom. I have a photography class today, don't forget!
- I'm going to stop by Grandma's before coming home. Take care of yourself. Stay with God.
- Amen. Bye, Mom.

Everything happened like every other morning, except that we had news about a virus that had affected many people, leading them to death. The newspapers reported 600 cases in 30 countries, and two cases of contagion in Brazil.

When we arrived at the school, we received the news that the governor of São Paulo had announced the suspension of classes. Fear began to hang in the air, and I thought it was better to bring my mother home. They also cancelled the photography classes indefinitely.

This is how a new cycle began.

I have two sons, Eduardo, who is a doctor at the Hospital das Clinicas, and for a while on the front line with COVID-19 patients, and Bruno, who is 27 years old and has Down's Syndrome.

My mother turned 90 during the pandemic. I am an only child and has divorced since my sons were young. I am 61 years old.

The feeling was that life left me again with a great challenge, to support and care. I became completely reclusive, working online, dedicating myself to projects and care, without leaving home. My mother and Bruno needed care because of their vulnerability, in case they caught the virus it could be difficult, and I am responsible for them.

During this period, my mother had a serious anaemia, I started to notice some changes in her due to her age, and I was not prepared to see this, after all she is the only person who has followed my entire history, since I have no siblings and my father is deceased. I started to hear about her regrets, very old things that she tells almost every day, as if they had just happened, and I saw her saddened by that. All this she mulls over in her memories, but now she is having the opportunity to speak out.

On the other hand, I see Bruno simplifying life, being happy and teaching us to laugh at small things, taking me by the arms and making me dance to Tarantella or some Portuguese song. All of that was also in him, but now my arms are always closer.

There is Eduardo going his way and making me miss him a lot, it is still hard to deal with the distance, but this is also part of the learning process. Since I was home, I decided to bring to our routine some typical foods made by our grandmothers, as a tribute to our ancestors, who are responsible for being here and their memory strengthens us.

I am Maria Aparecida Zinoni, psychologist and neuropsychologist at Santa Maria School in São Paulo - Brazil. I look to Mary Ward for the strength to follow my path with determination and courage.



FATUMA EKAL: LEADERSHIP AND RESILIENCE - KENYA

Fatuma Ekal is a mother of 4 from Turkana county in Northern Kenya. In her words, she is lucky that her parents took her to school, a lot of girls of similar age were not as lucky. She grew up in a pastoralist community and so, generally a lot of girls were married off, thankfully things are changing for the good. She went to boarding school for both primary and secondary school, and she says the Ursuline Sisters impacted values in her. She is currently the Principal of Our Lady of Mercy Girls in Kakuma, a government school but one that is Catholic sponsored in Turkana county.

Like the rest of the world, she experienced the COVID 19 pandemic as an extremely difficult time, with the uncertainty that came

with it; especially when the schools were closed. On the one hand was the safety of her immediate family. On the other hand, there were her students most of whom are local Turkana girls and she had to start thinking about them. From her motherly instinct, she was aware that she and her teachers had to come up with some support for the candidate class. They quickly formed WhatsApp groups to which they sent class work with topics and questions for the candidates. However, she was aware that this exercise, while so desperately needed it would not be accessible to all because some parents either did not have phones or/and access to internet. Her heart would go out to majority of them who come from extremely challenged backgrounds.

Her own experience of growing up in a society where schooling was a safe haven for girls who would otherwise have been married off, she is concerned about the welfare of the girls and will often restrain herself from sending them home for school fees in the fear of losing them. As a mother she has embarked on getting scholarships for them from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as well as the County Government to whom she is eternally grateful. Resuming school after 9 months of break necessitated by the pandemic, she was aware that some of the girls reported back to school pregnant, two had actually delivered and a few had been married – these they have followed up and brought them back to school. She is fully committed to the girls going all out to ensure that becoming pregnant does not stop them from completing high school education. With the values she acquired through Catholic education, she has formed the girls to be each other's keeper, this includes sharing what they have with those who do not have for example basic toiletries which is very touching because some girls from poor backgrounds come back to school without the basic needs.

And she definitely has a big heart. Her school reaches out to the girls from the expansive Kakuma camp to access education. UNHCR for example sends some girls both host community and refugees to her school.

FAITH - THE STRENGTH TO GO ON SARAH, GEORGIA, ALEXANDRA AND OLIVIA UNITED KINGDOM

It can be hard to comprehend the true impact of Covid-19, as its affects are so varied. Some families test positive and sail through symptom free, whilst others are forced to witness, helpless, as a family member of seemingly perfect health, declines quicker than they had ever imagined possible. Those are the families who live in a traumatic limbo for weeks or months, as hope is drained and they are ultimately devastated beyond repair.

That is what happened to a loving family in Manchester, UK. Husband Liam and wife Sarah lived happily together for 40 years. Devoted to each other and committed to family life, they raised three daughters, Georgia, 26, Alexandra, 24 and Olivia, 21, who all attended Loreto Altrincham. It was hard to find a more selfless and hardworking man than Liam. A highly intelligent and hugely successful lawyer, he was cherished by all fortunate enough to cross his path. Humble, yet effervescent. Calm, yet the life and soul of a party. Strong, yet gentle and loving. His four ladies were his everything.

Aged 58, a fit and healthy man, after three weeks in hospital, God called him home.

The loss of Liam is painful and profound. Sarah and their girls have been left with an immeasurable void. They now face an uncertain future without the head of the family, the one that made them feel like they could conquer the world, the only man to provide them all with everlasting love and endless support.

With a loss so deep and sudden, you would forgive Liam's ladies for retreating from society and struggling to get out of bed in the morning. Yet, they have been blessed with faith. A faith instilled in them from generations gone by. The family always went to Mass and it is from their beliefs and their local church that they find the strength to go on. They know what has happened doesn't make earthly sense, but they know it must be part of God's plan. They know their suffering is overwhelming, yet they know it must have a heavenly purpose. Most importantly, they know that separation is temporary, and they will all be reunited again in God's eternal kingdom.



*“With real strength and courage,
do what is seen to be good
in all circumstances
in which we are placed.”*

Mary Ward



BRACING THE PANDEMIC BY CAROLINE SHOBHA GAHLOT FROM JHANSI - INDIA

"A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."

Proverbs 17:22

2020 - A consequential year when Covid-19 hit the "Pause Button;" soon we hit the "Rethink Button", embracing a new revolution in our lives. Values of Global Collaboration and Solidarity gained momentum to invent a vaccine. Love and kinship blossomed uplifting one another in their crises, nature rejuvenated, opening the hearts of mankind with greater understanding about climate change while the world switched to Innovation and Digitalisation.

I am a Teacher in St. Francis' Inter College, managed by C.J sisters for over 30 years and an active member of 'Friends of Mary Ward'. I teach grades 10, 11 & 12. Mother Mary Ward has been an inspiration to me as bracing adverse challenges was her strength. I too strongly believe in using adversity constructively to grow. My age is no bar, my spirit is optimistic and my faith in the Almighty is strong. As I coped with the initial lockdown phase, keeping my students and myself safe was the first priority. So, when introduced to Zoom, the digital platform to educate students, daunting at first, I quickly put my learning hat on and incorporated this new way of teaching.

My vocation calls me to uphold my students, distracting them from the mental stress Covid-19 was inflicting on their young minds. I began spending time in guiding, motivating and listening to them through prayer, stories, positive quotes and online classes. I encouraged them to channel their energy and skills by expressing themselves through poetry, story, and art. One student opened a publishing unit - 'Heart and Pens', another wrote a book - 'How're You On The Inside'. I urged students to join Pratyek as Climate Warriors, promoted home gardening, tree plantation in their vicinity and motivated them in joining educational webinars to enrich their interactivity and knowledge.

To upskill myself, I enrolled for an online course on 'Environmental Sustainability' preparing PowerPoint presentations for the first time ever. I was privileged to be part of 'Virtual Consultation' on the occasion of the UN 75, organised by Sister Cynthia- the IBMV/CJ-UN Representative, linking my present students and Alumni on a virtual conversation, articulating their views on the Global crisis. I conducted my first ever motivational talk at the Virtual Friends of Mary Ward Meet of the Bangalore region, participated in the Inter-CJ School Competitions for teachers and won prizes for Speech and Quiz.

Faith in God and strong family values has helped me through this period. I appreciated family time during lockdown, watching movies, reading books, playing indoor games and having discussions with my sons. My aged mother is happy to see us all together especially as we tune in for daily Virtual Church Services and Bible Study. Covid-19 has proved a catalyst for change - helped boost productivity while maintaining a good work-life blend. It lifted my soul to a better Vision and Version of Myself - a blessing in disguise.

VIVIANE BOZOLAN PORTO TEACHER - SÃO PAULO - BRAZIL

Casting all anxiety on Him, because He cares for you (1 Peter 5.7)

In my 46 years of life, born and raised in a Christian home, perhaps never has a biblical text been as strongly experienced as this one last year (2020/2021).

We have been experiencing moments of instability, insecurity, uncertainty and losses. As I looked at the world situation, I often felt discouraged, as if I were being sucked into a deep abyss.

In the second week of social isolation, in front of a medical team in a field hospital, I came across the fear and the challenge of overcoming this “damn” disease.

Body pain, tiredness, fever, shortness of breath, loss of smell and the sensation of having a horse's paw on my chest constantly persisted for almost ten days. The nights were endless, the silence of the dawn was frightening and nothing hurt more than being isolated inside my own home, without being able to caress my husband and son.

As a teacher in the education system of the Congregation of Jesus, being able to teach my classes, see my students daily, even from the distance, and share my experiences with my fellow teachers were fundamental to winning this battle.

However, much was yet to come. First, the news came from relatives of acquaintances or friends of friends who were sick. As time went by, that distance was narrowing until I went through the most difficult test of this pandemic so far.

On January 22, 2021, my aunt was admitted and two days later my uncle was also taken to the hospital. Both shared the same space in the ICU, without her knowing that, while her clinical picture gradually improved, his worsened.

The medical report arrived only at the end of the day. The wait was paralyzing and very distressing. Some days were exciting and others not so much. While research on the evolution of the disease always pointed to a very poor prognosis, what kept me going were prayers and faith in the Author of life.

At eleven o'clock on the eleventh of February, my heart leapt with joy! I received the long-awaited news that she had won the battle, was discharged and could return home. And in less than thirty minutes, I received another call: my uncle would also return home, but, in his case, Father's home. Although we are aware that, biologically, we are born, live, age and die, we are never truly prepared for loss and separation.

So, how can we move on?

I know that, during my journey, a lot of storms will still come: stones, obstacles and traps, typical of life. But, to stay on the path, it is necessary to continue, to reframe life, to value what really matters and not to care about what is ephemeral. Live and love!

NEW WAYS OF TEACHING DURING A PANDEMIC BY SR IRENE GUNDAH C.J - ZIMBABWE

Last year 2020 I was teaching at one of the private schools in Zimbabwe, St Ignatius college. The COVID-19 era period proved to be a blessing in disguise. The introduction of virtual classrooms for both academic and other curriculum activities helped me as a teacher and also students to be more familiar with Zoom, google classroom and other features. We got the opportunity to practice different functions such as sharing screens from the computers, drawing on white boards and typing on a chat screen.

It made the teachers and the students more creative as we also made use of online images. Our technical skills were developed even though virtual classrooms are not best for some students who lack self-motivation, and many children have working parents who are trying to make ends meet and some who are essential workers and are thus left with no assistance at home, but the benefits were more. We got exposure to take online classes. We learned more than I could have imagined. It took me out of my comfortable zones and out of comfortable zones one can learn and experience unimaginable things.

We were not only limited to teaching our own students, but we could engage other students from different backgrounds since we were not bound by location. An introduction of virtual clubs has helped to address the social and emotional needs and child safety concerns for students. Most students complained of boredom as they were missing school. During club times we had time for social interaction.

I am currently working at our first ever High school in Zimbabwe as CJs. However, my experience with our newly built Mary Ward High School which opened its doors to the first group of learners in 2020 has shown me the difficult experiences that many schools are undergoing due to the COVID-19 induced lockdown measures that have been put down to curb the spread of the novel Coronavirus. Sadly, many underfunded schools have not done a proper job or worse still some have done nothing in trying to introduce online lessons for the students. Half of the first term is gone; no learning is taking place.

What pains more is we do not know when schools will be opened. The students are so eager to learn but we cannot begin due to incapacitation. The school faces lack of digital resources coupled with lack of teacher experience with technology. Thus restrained finances have hit the country's intellectual development. This is a big blow to the country as schools are supposed to be teaching 21st century skills if we are to develop our country. Thus transition into digital classrooms has only benefited elite schools and left many school children from less privileged backgrounds out.



*“It seems right that,
according to their condition, women also should
and can provide something more than
ordinary in the face of the common need.”*

Mary Ward

EMILY FARAHAT DEAN - TORONTO, CANADA

Teresa Dease once said: "We should act like travellers who make no account of the distance they have gone but of what remains until they reach their journey's end." This past year has been quite the unexpected journey! Though the residence ministry of Loretto College faced many challenges as the pandemic accelerated in March 2020, the community spirit revealed grace and resiliency, remaining focused on the care of the undergraduate students and Sisters in residence that call Loretto College home.

Now that the student residence has reopened, the Deans, staff, and student leaders of Loretto College are finding meaningful ways to build community, promote mental health and wellness, and keep connected in a virtual space. As Dean, I remain committed to responding to the evolving needs of the College community as we navigate this extraordinary- but hopeful- journey together.

COMMUNITY AND COMMUNION DURING A PANDEMIC BY SR. DANIELA MARE CJ - ROMANIA

Immediately after Covid 19 was declared a pandemic and we were in lockdown, the lectures of the Catholic Faculty in Bucharest where I teach went online. It was a great novelty, the students had to face the impossibility to meet on sight, but somehow because we had to continue our studies, we all adapted quickly. If until then we as professors were telling students to turn off their phones at classes, now we were asking them to help us log in to different platforms, to form communication groups, to keep our courses going on the best IT networks. Their skills in this field have suddenly become essential for us in order to be able to continue lectures in this form. Now we see each other on the screen, but we miss each other more.

During 2020 Holy Week, I found a book that helped me a lot to prepare myself for Easter. I got so passionate about it, that each day I started taking photographs of chapters on each day of the Holy week and sent them to a number of about 15 people in my WhatsApp agenda, both Catholics and Orthodox. This led to a new way of doing Spiritual Exercises as a group, although it was not my initial plan. On the Catholic Easter Sunday, the Orthodox Holy Week began, so I found another material to send to my Orthodox friends on my agenda, and at the same time, I found myself sending meditations on the resurrection to Catholics. Only after two weeks, we could say together with one voice, "Christ is risen!"

From the beginning of the pandemic, I also created the "solidarity phones": I decided to call at least two or three people every day to find out how they are, especially if I knew them in a state of vulnerability. Two of them are former students of the IBVM schools, closed by the communists in 1948. One of them took me by surprise one day, by calling me before I called her, just to ask me if I am okay, if she could help me with anything, and started giving me advice on how to keep up a good immune system. At the same time, she helped neighbours and friends who were no longer leaving the house by shopping for them. "Education in the family and in this school" is the background of my motivation she said with tears of gratitude in her eyes.

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Our gratitude goes to all the admirable women who allowed us to showcase their stories of leadership and resilience, especially during the time of COVID 19 pandemic. We are deeply indebted and hope that through their stories many women will be encouraged and inspired.

We would also like to thank our UN/JPIC Province Representatives, IBVM/CJ Sisters and colleagues who assisted in the creation of this booklet.

We pray for women all over the world, that they are safe, respected, acknowledged and included.

Janet, Cynthia, Adina and Pauline



*There is no such difference
between men and women that
women may not do great things.
I hope in God it will be seen that
women in time will do much.*

Mary Ward