



Provincialate : 4A Chestnut Drive, Singapore 679330.

Tel: 67621910

website: www.chij-sisters.org

Czech Republic

In 1998 a house was established in Brno to facilitate a discernment process for some Czech women. They had encountered the writings of Nicolas Barre during the process for his beatification (1999) and wanted to find out more. One of these young women discovered she wished to become a Sister. Following a period of Formation in England and Ireland, she made her first commitment in 2005 and is once more in Brno with another Sister.

God's ways are unfathomable. How true it is that God writes straight with crooked lines!

The story of our Institute in the Czech Republic is linked to that of the Friars Minim, the order to which Nicolas Barré belonged three centuries ago. Minim monks had settled in Vranov in the 17th century as our Institute was coming to birth in France. Their presence was marked by the many vicissitudes of Czech history and they had to leave their monastery several times.

After the fall of communism in 1989, a community of Czech monks returned to live in Vranov, near Brno. In their church was a copy of Nicolas Barré's Prayer of Abandonment. Some young women saw this prayer during the time of preparation for the beatification of Nicolas Barré. Their interest in it led them to ask questions about its author.

The outcome was that the monks put these women in contact with the Infant Jesus Sisters in Italy and they were invited to visit the country to see the life and work of our sisters there. They stayed for a period of three years, during which they had the opportunity to learn Italian, studying and working with the Sisters, especially in Calabria. These young women felt that our spirit had something to say to their own people. Their dream was to implant an Infant Jesus Sisters community in their own country.

Concrete steps were taken in 1998. It was decided to buy a house in Brno and to spend some time discerning where the future lay. A group of young Czech women came to live there, and members of the Central Team and others came to stay and support them and begin a time of deeper discernment with them.

It became evident to two of these Czech women that religious life was not their calling. One young woman, Veronika Reháková, wanted to continue and went to England, where she experienced various forms of ministry and community life. She made her first commitment in February 2005 as a member of the province of England and Ireland. She then returned to the house in Brno with a Sister from Ireland, and carries on her ministry mainly as a teacher. Sr Veronika took her final vows in Oct 2011.

It was with great joy to announce that, on 26th October 2013, Sr Klára Malinakova, 30, pronounced her first vows as a IJ sister, offering to God her whole life, while being aware that this step goes beyond her understanding. How to express something so intimate, so untranslatable, so difficult to communicate as the



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mystery of God's call and a person's response? Yet the celebration, abundant with images, colours, sounds, words and taste, spoke in a way that could not have been imagined.

The Liturgy of the Word offered a first series of "food" for our senses. It aimed straight to the heart of our being human – love and relationship. The Song of Songs was read by a married couple as a dialogue between the two Beloveds who search and long for each other and whose love is strong and unquenchable "like a flame of God".

Psalm 42 led us to the running streams where the soul, like the deer, thirsts for God. Then the passage where at the house of the Pharisee, a woman, so filled with love and gratitude, anointed and kissed Jesus' feet.

It was out of this context that Klára pronounced her vows.

Then through bodily movement, Klára went on to express all that was going on in her heart. In her long colourful dress she danced her 'yes' to God, supported by four young women in the background. This moving expression danced to the words of "Take Lord and receive..." was her response to the call from God: "May I have the pleasure of this dance?"

The prayer that all Sisters be drawn into the unquenchable flame of God's Love and to have the courage to respond and dance to the rhythm of the Spirit of God was made. The day did not pass for Klára without her thoughts going to Peru where she had spent some time. She invited anyone who wished to offer her a gift to do so in the form of a contribution for people in need there.

Adapted from Sr Veronika Reháková's account

[Sr Klara's experience in Peru](#)

In March 2013, I got an opportunity to spend ten weeks in Peru as part of my novitiate experience.

The first six weeks were spent in Mi Peru, a marginal part of Lima. The community there, three Sisters and one candidate, Elizabeth, is in charge of the local school for about 3,000 pupils.

I felt that the spirit of the Institute there too. I helped with English lessons. The school area was for me an oasis of a healthy, green environment and friendly atmosphere, located among the desert hills and the homes of the poorer people. At first touched by the poverty around, I then pondered: Who really is the poor one? The one who doesn't have enough, or the one who never has enough?

When I moved to the peaceful calm of the Andean Mountains, in Ocongate, a small village at an altitude of 3,600 metres, I found the place where it was not important WHAT you are, what you have, what you look like, what you can do, but WHO you are, what is in your heart.

I could also feel a very strong connection with nature and the rhythm of the day. I had arrived in the autumn, so the mornings and the late afternoons were frozen and silent with temperatures around 2 or 3°C. I had to be wrapped in plenty of layers since there was no central heating there. But as soon as the first rays of the rising sun came over the top of the mountain, it was like the waving of a magic wand, life was bursting all around,



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birds started to sing, a shining deep blue sky spread over their heads and the people started to feel the flow of a new energy. In the middle of the day, temperatures often rose to around 15°C and the sun was really strong - but only until the moment it hid itself behind the opposite steep hill. Then everything became still and cold again...

I could feel the effect of this rhythm on my body, but even more on my soul. It was a strong invitation to live the present moment, to be aware that I am part of this universe. I spent most of my time there with Carlota, the province leader, who is running a project to support small local farmers. The latter visits them and teaches them how to grow vegetables in greenhouses so they can supplement their basic diet of potatoes with more nourishing food.

Even though the people sometimes don't have even the simple things they really need, they seem to live their life more meaningfully, unlike the rich and never satisfied Europeans.

The popular Andean melody "El Condor Pasa" has many different texts, but these few lines of one Peruvian version express many of my feelings:

*I found a peace, a friendship
with my brothers and sisters.
The whole world was passing me by
So different!
I didn't meet any borders,
only a human being I saw
who is both my brother and my sister.*

I pray that this experience won't fade in me but will continue to bear fruit and be the beginning of something new...

From Sr Klára Malináková's account



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2017 Update



In their community garden L-R Srs Georgina, Klara and Veronica

The Czech Republic became a District within the Institute in January 2017. The needs there include faith formation, personal spiritual accompaniment, retreats, listening to others and the building up of safe, open communities.

Sr Veronika teaches Religious studies in the diocesan grammar school, Biskupské Gymnázium. She also helps prepare University Students for Baptism and Confirmation. Once a month she lectures in Church History as part of a Theology course for catechists and other interested adults. Her other activities include adult ongoing formation, retreats, and accompaniment for individuals, families and groups such as a *Young Mothers Support Group* and support for "Logos", a local group of Gay and Lesbian people.

Sr Veronika is at present studying for a doctorate in Dogmatic Theology, at Charles University in Prague.

Sr Klára has been employed for the past two years as a research worker in the field of "Spirituality and Health" in the Faculty of Theology, in Palacky University in Olomouc. At the same time she studies for her doctoral degree there. She is also a student of the University Medical Centre of the University in Groningen. Her study/work involves research, teaching, supervising Ph. D students, writing articles and often travelling to other universities both inside and outside the Czech Republic. She spends many hours counselling or in spiritual accompaniment of individuals and an adult prayer group in the local parish.

Sr Klára is also attending a qualifying training course in psychotherapy, which is a valuable tool both for spiritual accompaniment and her work at the University.



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To answer the great need for faith education in a country marked by over 40 years of Communist Regime, the Sisters decided to focus on the development of spiritual accompaniment. This initiative began as an “intervision group” for religious interested in this mission. It developed into a “Spiritual Accompaniment Course” which is the first of its kind in the country and is now offered under the Theological Faculty of the Palacky University in Olomouc. There are already more than 100 people who have attended this course. They are mostly Religious and Priests who themselves are responsible for Formation. The animating team now includes Klára, Veronika, and two priest-religious.

Sr Georgina's ministry:

Brno is a University City, which attracts many students from around the world, to study full time or on Erasmus exchange. Since the fall of the Communist Regime, in 1989, many international companies have moved in and they need workers from abroad. Sr Georgina's mission is to help answer the needs of many of these young workers and students who are often alone and isolated because of distance from home and the difficulty of language .Many gather together each week in an international English speaking Catholic Community, which Sr helped found in February 2006. Known as “The Upper Room Community”, www.brno-esc.eu , it welcomes people of all faiths or none who join them for one or another of the activities..

Sr's work involves supporting sick members in hospital, befriending young women from Africa, South America and Asia who marry into Czech families with little or no preparation or language, teaching English to wives who accompany their husbands on work contracts in Brno, as well as coordinating the many programmes which the Community has put in place... Mass in English each Sunday, children's liturgy, a social group, preparation for marriage and support for young married couples, preparation of adults and children for the Sacraments, on-going religious formation and prayer groups. In recent years the group has been able to welcome people from Syria and Iraq too.

Gathering for Lectio Divina: 5 friends, 5 nationalities (Sr Georgina 2nd from right)



To learn how the Infant Jesus Sisters arrived in Lišen on the outskirts of Brno in 1999, click this link: [Czech Republic community](#)

Infant Jesus Sisters, Singapore (founded in France, 1662, established in Singapore 1854)



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Czech Republic

Visit to another World

As the delegate for the Czech District to the Council of the Institute (CI), I was invited to visit the community in Myanmar on my way to Malaysia. Sr Rosemary was also going there to continue her work on *Child Safeguarding*. To obtain our visas we needed to pass through Bangkok. I was also invited to spend a few days in Singapore on my way back. So, I found that my simple journey to the CI suddenly included four countries. I am grateful that I was allowed to accept these invitations especially as I am preparing for my Final Vows in September and it gave me an opportunity to see something of our IJ life and mission in Asia. I had been told that all of these countries are completely different, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality. Coming from Central Europe, all that is further east of my continent was simply Asia of which I knew nothing at all. In a way, I felt like *The Little Prince* visiting different ‘planets’, different worlds. Staying a while, catching a glimpse and moving on again. Let me share with you some of these glimpses of a new world seen through the eyes of a fresh traveller.



The first ‘planet’ I landed on was called **Thailand**. Bangkok was full of IJ Sisters, as they happened to have a provincial meeting at that time. In spite of their busy schedule, these kind Sisters took time to care for all our needs, managed our visas and even took Sr Rosemary and myself to a local Buddhist meditation centre. This peaceful place set in vivid greenery was like an island of calm in the centre of the busy city. I had to admire the great work that resulted from the sincere effort of one woman, Venerable Mae Chee Sansanee, who decided to devote her life to this mission. There are now 60 other women joining her in her life, searching for deeper meaning and harmony in their own lives and spreading it to others around them. The whole complex keeps growing through the flow of contributions from the steady stream of visitors. This was for me the fruit of one dream, honestly searched and

patiently followed. Time in Bangkok fled too quickly and I did not have as much time as I would have wished for a deeper sharing, but I was very touched by the glimpses of the mission of the Sisters that I was given. I found their courage and hard work, both in Thailand and in their mission outside, across the border into a poor area in Laos, very encouraging.

The second ‘planet’ was called **Myanmar** and we spent eight days there. It consisted mainly of a stay in the community apartment in Yangon, full of visitors coming and going. These included mainly the IJ Sisters working in the other parts of Myanmar and in the PSIE (Pyinya Sanyae Institute of Education) training college where the young teachers prepare for their future work. I was deeply touched, from the very first moment when we entered the school, by the young teachers gathered in the



entrance hall, welcoming us with beautiful singing. As arranged in advance, I animated a three-day programme for them focused on prayer, the 'examen' and discernment. Even though, especially at the beginning, we were struggling a bit with understanding each other's accents, I felt that the three days of my teaching were mutually enriching. I liked the morning prayers at the school and I found the ability of these young people to stay together in silence for the half an hour at the beginning of the day very impressive. I found this ability, so lacking in my own country, inspiring. On the other hand, trying out some other ways of prayer was a profound experience for some of these young people in Myanmar. At some moments I had goose pimples, when they shared with me their experience of meeting God while praying Psalm 139 in a contemplative manner during personal *lectio divina*. I could feel God's power. Our environment, our backgrounds were so different and yet, there was the same God at work, touching human hearts in such a familiar manner.

The second deep experience for me was a visit to Thilawa, a small place in the middle of nowhere about a one-hour car journey from Yangon. The PSIE started a Montessori training course there, led by Martina, a young teacher deeply committed to her work. A lovely house stands in the middle of a bamboo forest, near the more or less elaborate houses of local squatter families. And all the 11 students were there, just sitting on the floor, taking their notes. Everything was very simple and, in a way, I felt as if we were in a retreat centre, far from the busy city life, with silence all around. This place touched the same string in my heart as the meditation centre in Bangkok: That even in the midst of nothing, in the jungle of our everyday lives, something beautiful could be born, if at least *one* person carries that dream further. I saw many more things in Myanmar, e.g. I experienced a Union Day at PSIE training college that helped me to understand better the

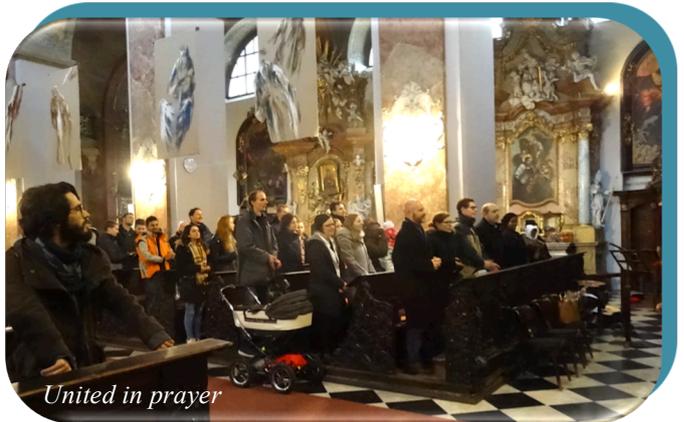
cultural diversity as well as historical background of the country, and, of course, I cannot omit the golden centre of this 'planet', the magnificent Shwedagon pagoda that took my breath away and left me speechless. However, what stays with me most strongly is the golden heart of the local people, struggling with courage and patience, to bring love and life to a country so much tested by continuous violence.



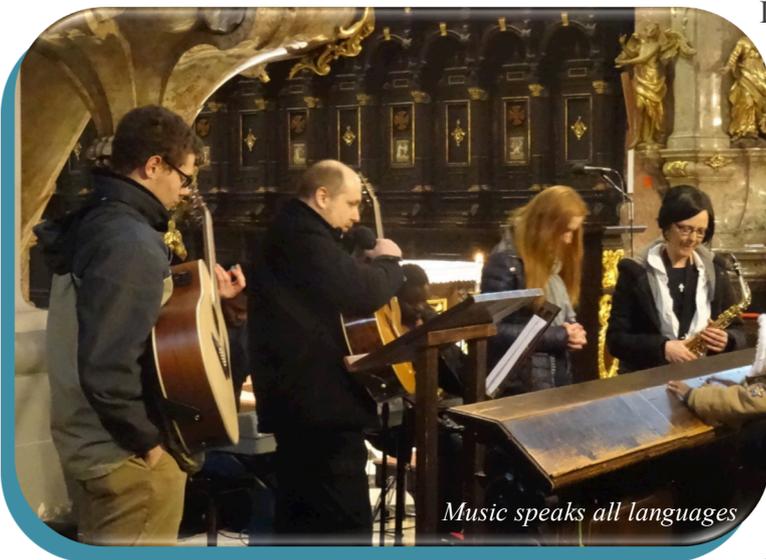
The third 'planet' was called **Malaysia** and my experience was really international there because it hosted IJ Sisters from all over the world. Near the centre of the 'planet' stands the comfortable *Saujana Hotel* which became our home for two weeks and witnessed our listening and the weaving of our dreams. I can't express how strong this experience of an international meeting was for me, so I won't even attempt it here. Let me just show you something of this 'planet'. It is full of trees and really tall buildings, and people. These people are mostly Muslims, though this 'planet' is multicultural and you can find many other religions here as well. On Sunday we visited a local church. Seen from outside, you might not easily guess that it is a church, because of some government restrictions, it does not have a tower. But when you go inside, you can feel the gust of life. Only 4% of the population in Malaysia are Christian, but this parish was so extremely vibrant and spontaneous that it brought tears to my eyes. We also visited our local community in Cheras. The little archive there gave me my first real insight into the history of IJ Sisters in this part of the world. In

News from the Czech District

What's new in our District? A very small effort by our English-speaking Christians in Brno to befriend each other. Here in Europe, the Protestant Reformation is usually dated to the 16th century. In the Czech Republic, however, there was a reform movement initiated by a Catholic priest, Jan Hus (b.1361). Jan was burned at the stake as a heretic on 6th July 1415. His death was followed by bitter civil wars until, at the famous Battle of the White Mountain in 1620, the non-Catholics were defeated and re-Catholicization was enforced by the Habsburgs. The fact that Hus was burned at the stake by the Catholic Church in 1415 and that Catholicism was re-enforced, goes a long way towards explaining why, for some people here, being Czech and being hostile to Catholicism are practically the same thing. In recent years, Catholics and others have been studying Hus's case and his influence. Their studies culminated in a three-day symposium dedicated to Hus in Rome in 1999, when Pope John Paul II issued a historic apology for his "cruel death" and praised him for his moral courage. It helped to heal at one level. However, since Catholics are the largest of the Christian Churches present in the Czech Republic and they have not been proactive in seeking good relationships with the others, ecumenism is not moving forward very much.



So, with these events in mind and aware of Pope Francis' efforts to promote ecumenism, it came to us in the "Upper Room Community"* to do something new to build even a little footbridge between English-speaking Christians of all denominations in Brno.



Last year, we invited representatives of several Christian groups to gather for a preliminary meeting and were delighted by the open attitude of all who came. In May 2017, each community contributed to a simple prayer service followed by a barbeque and games in the pleasant grounds of one of the Churches. Encouraged by the atmosphere at this event, all were invited to come to the Jesuit Church this year to celebrate Christian Unity Week, 2018. We feel that real friendships and mutual acceptance are already growing. The first steps towards true dialogue have been taken. Plans are underway now for a follow up at Pentecost

2018. The important thing, as Pope Francis tells us, is to start a process that will have its own life and momentum one day. Our prayer: "Father, may all be one..."

*Georgina Clarson IJS
georginaijs@gmail.com*

* 'The Upper Room Community' is the Catholic international English-speaking Community that I helped to found in Brno over 10 years ago.