



Marianist International Volunteers

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MIV news from: **Brazil**
Bangladesh
Togo
Peru

Correspondence

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Marianist International Volunteers

Dear friends of the Marianist Family,

The MIV is happy to share its latest news with you, which we hope you find of interest, and once again needs your collaboration to help us circulate this material, either electronically or in printed version.

The following are the MIV volunteers in 2007, some of whom share their stories with us in this newsletter:

Name	Origin	Destination	Mission
Ciro	Colombia	Brazil	Education and information technology
María	Spain	Kenya	Education and youth ministry
Carmen	Spain	India	Street kids
Jane	Malawi	Bangladesh	Rural development
Sébastien	France	Congo	Education and information technology
Jean-Emil	Haiti	Congo	Education (librarian)
Ernest	Congo	Peru (?)	Home for boys
Nathalie	France	Togo	Education, religion

It is important to note that the MIV has always given the priority to those prospective volunteers who better comply with our requirements of previous formation and experience, personality and recommendations. We have had to turn down several candidates, who would have almost doubled this list, but they would have probably been a source of conflict, which we always want to avoid. Other good candidates, on the other hand, have found some last-minute difficulties to join the MIV, but they will always be most welcome to join us when their time comes.

The goal of this Newsletter is, as usual, to reach as many people as possible who, inspired by these stories, may also take the plunge and join the MIV later. As you can see here, volunteers come from all corners of the world, their placements and missions are also very different, and their age-range goes from 26 to 38, although we've had candidates in their 50s and even in their 60s. Therefore, age is not an issue here, since the MIV benefits from the energy of the younger volunteers, and the maturity of the more experienced ones.

Once again, we will greatly appreciate your collaboration in helping us circulate this material to all the people in your towns and countries who might be appealed by the MIV and its mission.

Hoping that the MIV may help respond to the needs to strengthen the values of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in our world today, I extend my greetings to all the readers of this Newsletter.

José Luis Pérez
MIV Coordinator



The MIV in Brazil

My placement as a volunteer was in the Marianist school Caritas, which takes care of very young children to the age of 8. The day started in the Marianist house with community prayer and breakfast. Every day, I would go to school walking, or by bicycle, to work from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. I

worked as a computing teacher, and I did some design projects. At the end of the day, some students remained until 6:00 pm to take Spanish classes with me on Tuesdays and Thursdays. During the day, many unexpected chores would crop up, such as helping out in the kitchen, in sports activities, in

coaching classes, and paper work in the office. On weekends, I would take part in lay meetings and Marianist activities. Community life was an essential component of my social work, as it helped me feel God's presence and guidance in my mission. Many thanks and greetings to

all the people in the Barracao, and particularly to the Marianist community. Blessings,

Ciro Duarte / MIV Volunteer from Colombia in Brazil (2007)



Ciro with other coordinators of the Barraçao program.



Ciro surrounded by the kids of the Barraçao program.



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An MIV year in Bangladesh

Safia Begum is only seventeen years of age, an orphan living in rural Bangladesh. She has two children of her own and two young brothers to care for. No any stable income and no husband, with really no choices for survival.

In prose this may appear fictitious, yet this is the life many young girls of her age go through everyday in

this South-Asian country; fending for their siblings.

Working as a volunteer social worker for the Institute of Integrated Rural Development (IIRD), a developmental non-governmental organization, in Bangladesh for one full year has never been easy. Nevertheless it has offered me a wider perception of

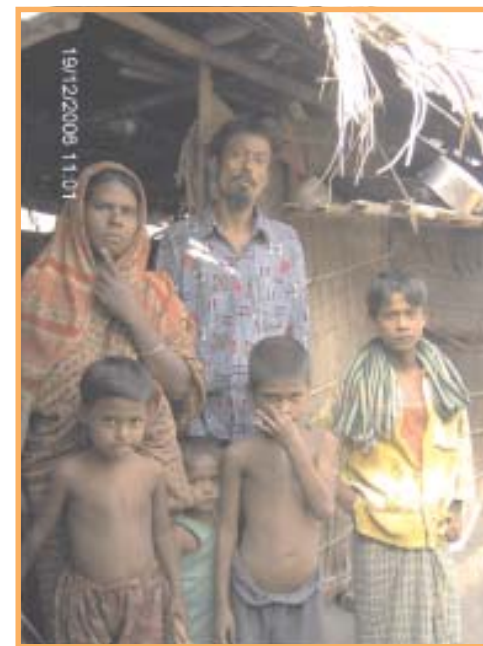
the levels of poverty in many households in rural Bangladesh. Poverty I have never seen before in my whole life, not even in Africa where I come from, and Safia's story is just one such encounter.

My work as a volunteer, involves teaming up with IIRD social workers and other field staff with whom we visit households of our beneficiaries commonly referred to as development partners (DPs) with the aim of assessing their poverty levels. Through these assessments, we get to learn how IIRD can assist them accordingly. This helps to have a project that is DP

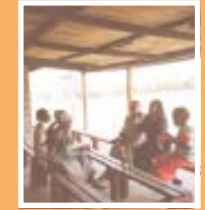
driven by giving them the choice on own areas of interest in relation to per household's potential. Most of the DPs, we have visited would like to rear cattle, poultry, goats or practice horticulture and sericulture.



Safia (squatting) with her two children and two brothers during a visit by IIRD's social workers.



One of the development partners' family of seven children in front of their grass-made house accommodating about nine members.



Others want to run small hawker businesses as an income generating activity. The organization focuses mainly on empowering the women to be more active as they are considered to be the core of the family in terms of family activities. However, women in Bangladesh just like those in Africa face some problems that hinder their full participation in development activities. There are some customs and practices like dowry (where a young woman pays a man a lump sum of money for marriage), early marriages, domestic violence, unplanned child-bearing, gender inequity, and religion. Since most of our DPs have an income of less than a dollar per day, it becomes almost an impossible task for those who have a daughter to raise financial amounts of over 300 dollars to marry her off. Should they fail to raise such a huge amount then they have no

option left than to marry her to a very poor man, and the poverty circle continues. This development is proving costly on the project too as whatever little given to or earned by the development partners, is eroded away in terms of savings. They would ensure to save every penny they can, sometimes for as long as 15 years to give their daughter a decent marriage. Maybe a girl like Mafuzah, aged 13 could be the lucky one amongst thousand of girls in her situation. She was due for marriage when we visited her family. After initiating family counseling which is still on going about the consequences of early marriages Mafuzah has now gone back to school (class 4) and is closely supervised by the social workers. She is happy and her parents are happy too. We believe that Mafuzah and her family could be the role model for the so many girls and families who believe in

early marriages. Most families in the rural areas do not plan for their households in terms of child-bearing. The maximum number of children in a family I have come across is nine and the average number is seven. Bearing the income levels here, it is so difficult for them to properly manage their families and more also for IIRD to work with them effectively. Male chauvinism is one aspect women in the rural Bangladesh have to face in their families. This does not spare girls as well. This makes women feel so inferior to doing

anything on their own and very few can make a decision. A woman who is successful and powerful in the village is frowned upon by male folk. Most men discourage women from participating in development activities like small businesses just as do the religious beliefs. These are some of the challenges we are addressing through awareness programs like Gender Equity, Family Planning, Health and Personal Hygiene, HIV/AIDS, Dowry, Domestic Violence, etc. Community response has not been as encouraging as we would love but





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gradually things will change for the better.

Recently an HIV/AIDS training was conducted for our social workers, who are expected to directly impart the message to the communities.

There is still no adequate information on issues relating to HIV/AIDS scourge and as a result most Bangladeshis are ignorant of

the pandemic and a few who know, the information is full of misconceptions. It was amazing to hear from the social workers who attended the training that it was their first to discuss HIV/AIDS issues at a group forum.

We are also working hand in hand with the government health providers to address family planning

awareness and in the provision of services for the same. There still remain pockets of resistance to our messages especially from men who regard it as interference with the way they run their families. But those who

understand have seen the benefits of having a planned family.

There are different programs that I am involved in including empowering the Social Workers to prepare them for their work. Last week we organized the Trainer of Trainers (TOT) workshop in KIDP. This training will help the social workers involved in numerous programs with our development partners, work with

them accordingly at field level.

They are being prepared to give good guidance and training to the DPs in our partnership with them to implement CIDA/CHF programs in Chandpur district of Bangladesh.



Jane with social workers and GIS (Geographic Information System) officials, measuring some DP houses and other structures in the same area.



Jane with the family of Eunos Ali, IIRD's Director of Administration.



Working with IIRD as a volunteer needs self initiative and always being a self-starter. This is one of the challenging experiences that I have learned to practice since I joined IIRD. Cooperation and team spirit is so necessary if one needs to work in harmony with everyone at IIRD.

Briefly the above are some of the activities I have been involved in with IIRD for the past one year. This past year has been a year of successive activities both at work and in my personal life. While I have stressed a lot on the development work with IIRD, I would not close this chapter without mentioning something about the other side of life, i.e. spiritual and social.

IIRD volunteers are privileged to have Father William at hand who frequently nourishes us with spiritual food of mass every week and counseling. He introduced us to the

Holy Cross Brothers, with whom we participate together in spiritual and social gatherings, mostly initiated by William. Mass is celebrated at the Holy Cross Brothers Chapel, which usually ends up with breakfast prepared by the brothers and our association with them is an excellent fellowship.

Brother Augustus Surin, sm from India visited IIRD and the volunteers in February, 2007. His visit was a very great blessing to all, especially to me as a Marianist. I received a lot of counsel and guidance from him. You may as well note that in Bangladesh there is only one religious marianist (William) and a lay marianist (myself). Having Surin with us brought great joy.

Living together as a family with fellow volunteers brings wonderful graces into my life. However every family has its unique problems and hardships but this is never a setback

especially because the brotherhood we share in Christ Jesus outshines our differences. The common goal for us, which is total support to the super work of IIRD for the poorest of the poor Bangladeshis, overpowers any setback that try to emerge in our fellowship. Patience and focus has always guided me through these past twelve months and I have been able to stay peacefully and joyfully with other volunteers.

Currently we are five volunteers plus one Bangladeshi woman whom I share room with. One volunteer

left. In all we have stayed seven of us in one house, which we normally call the United Nation's house, because of the collaboration that exists despite the different countries and the seven different cultures we have are from.

Jane Mbale / MIV Volunteer from Malawi in Bangladesh (2006-2007)





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A year as an MIV volunteer in Togo

After finishing my studies in Classic Languages, I traveled from France to Togo, and I was warmly welcomed by the Community of Marianist Sisters at the Adele School of Kara, where I shared their life rhythm for a whole year. Soon after my arrival in September, I had the impression that I had always lived there! The

Marianist Brothers and Sisters, my colleagues, the students, and my new friends of the Notre-Dame de Toutes Grâces Marianist Lay Community, all of them fraternally supported and accompanied me during this year of service. My "mission" was basically centered on the teaching

profession, and here I need to be extremely grateful to those who confided this job to me. With the guidance of the Virgin Mary, Mother and educator, I took my first steps as a teacher, enthusiastic about the knowledge and life values that this profession gave me the chance to transmit. I taught Human and Religious Formation to high-school freshmen at the Adele School (FMI), French to the seniors at Chaminade School (SM), and Greek and Latin at the young University of Kara. I strongly believe in the strength and truth

about the Marianist pedagogy, and it is in this spirit that I deeply learnt to love and respect my students, as I looked forward to their academic success and human development, so they could better



**Baptism of my
god-daughter,
Nathalie
Dogo, in June
2007.**



**With a
University of
Kara student,
on the campus
basketball
court).**



serve their own country, Togo, and feel the joy of living under the protection of our Lord. This MIV year has given me the chance to give a little of all that I received. It also helped me see the essential in my life, what makes me feel really happy and fulfilled, and the way I'd like to live. With the support of my

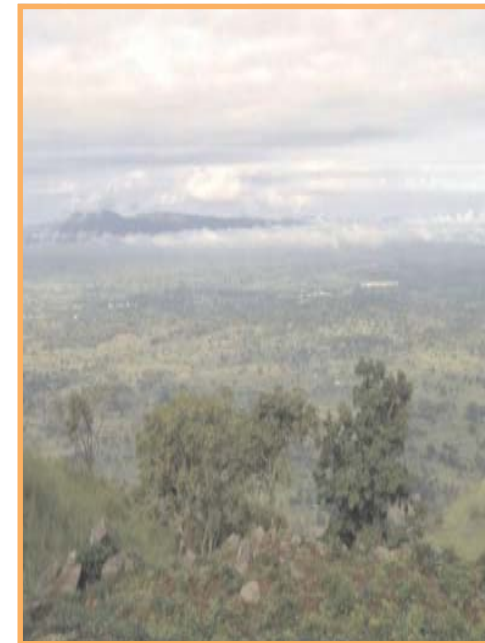
experience in community life throughout these 10 months, the energy I received in my times of personal and community prayer, and the wonders I saw in the universality of the Catholic Church in general and the Marianist mission in particular, I decided to join the aspirancy to religious life with the Marianist Sisters. May

many other young people from all over the world get to know what the Marianist International Volunteers' program has to offer, so they can apply their profession to the service of the different Marianist missions around the world, and receive abundant human and spiritual blessings in return!

Nathalie Requin /
MIV Volunteer from
France in Togo
(2006-2007)



Some
Chaminade
School
students, here
visiting Adele
School.



The Kara
prairie, seen
from the Lama
Mountain.



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New MIV placement in Peru

During the month of July, a very friendly group of Marianist lay and religious from Peru came to Argentina to take a course on “Vocational Ministry” in the city of Buenos Aires.

The MIV Coordinator has had the chance to meet in person the Directors of the two MIV placements we currently have in Peru: Bro. Phil Melcher SM from El Callao, where two University of Dayton alumni volunteered back in 2004, and Ms. Gabriela Ratz MLC, permanent volunteer in Otuzco, where two other MIVers volunteered in 2005 and 2006, from Chile and Argentina respectively. This meeting was very enriching and profitable for all parts, since we could share our concerns and ideas about Marianist volunteers, the strong points, the weaknesses, and the challenges for the immediate future. Fortunately, this kind of personal meeting is

much more productive than electronic communications, which are sometimes very slow and impersonal. In addition to this, we have discussed the possibility of opening a new placement for MIV volunteers in this very dear and enthusiastic country for the shared mission of all members of the Marianist Family. This new placement will be a Center called Thomas Helmer, located in the city of El Callao as well. It’s a home for street kids, or for kids with dysfunctional families, and now, due to an unexpected growth of this Center, thanks to an enormous donation received from Spain, they are in great need of Marianist volunteers. Therefore, they will be more than happy welcome MIV volunteers from anywhere in the world, and for an undetermined period of time, adjustable to volunteers’ availability.

We hope that the Lord will awaken further Marianist volunteers’ vocations, and that this new venture in Peru will be supported by the MIV in particular, and by all the members of the Marianist Family in general, so that more Marianist volunteers in the future may offer their the gifts and talents to this extraordinary work in Peru.

José Luis Pérez / MIV Coordinator
Santiago Valencia SM / Thomas Helmer Center Coordinator

The MIV offers the possibility to volunteer for six months to a year or two in pastoral ministry and/ or development projects animated by the Marianist Family in different parts of the world, such as the ones presented in this newsletter. For further information, contact the MIV Coordinator, Mr. José Luis Pérez at joseluisperez@sinectis.com.ar

