

## **Love Beyond Borders >> from Angola to Singapore**

Who would have thought, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that a tunnel could be dug between Motherhouse and St Nicholas Abbey within 3 months?

Who would have thought, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that 17 sisters from the Province of Angola-Mozambique would journey across 2 continents and an ocean to learn English?

Only audacious hearts that love beyond borders would dream such dreams and inspire others to turn them into reality!

When Sr Susan Chia was elected into the Congregational Leadership Team in 2009, we, in the Province of Singapore-Malaysia were ecstatic. Through Susan, we learned more about Good Shepherd ministries and people in other continents. By the time we learned about the Democratic Republic of Congo and of Angola-Mozambique, we were grappling with the reality of losing Susan to cancer.

While we continue to miss her physical presence, our memories of Susan cause us to continue to bring to life her vision and fortify and inspire us to take up our role in that vision, a vision that was far-sighted and audacious, driven by her deep love for the poor and her conviction that formation and capacity-building of both sisters and lay mission partners are critical for the future of the mission and the Congregation.

At sessions facilitated by Susan, she listened to the experiences of the Angolan sisters and was deeply moved by the plight of the poor, how the people of Angola struggled to emerge from 40 years of civil war. She also heard about how the sisters felt isolated from the Congregation because they could not speak one of the 3 official languages of the Congregation. All news and correspondence to and from the Congregation, and all international meetings are in English, French and Spanish. Susan wanted the sisters of Angola-Mozambique to learn English so that they may be connected to the Congregation and the rest of the Good Shepherd family worldwide. Susan's vision was for the sisters of Angola-Mozambique to come to Singapore to learn English, broaden their outlook and experience the love of the Singapore branch of the Good Shepherd family. Susan firmly believed in loving beyond borders.

It would not have been a first for the Province of Singapore-Malaysia. An inaugural program in June/July 2015 had brought together 14 sisters and 2 lay partners from 6 Asian countries. Encouraged by the happy results of that program, and in spite of her declining health, Susan pushed strongly for Singapore-Malaysia to host the sisters of Angola-Mozambique. Inspired by her zeal, her faith in us, and her joy when we committed ourselves to make it happen, we worked towards our goal.

And so it came to be, that barely 3 months after Susan's passing, 17 sisters from Angola-Mozambique travelled across Africa and the Indian Ocean to Singapore, in Asia, to immerse themselves in a 5-week program to learn some English, "some" because it is impossible to learn a language in 5 weeks. It was an immersion program and not a course. What is the difference?

The immersion program was designed to be holistic. It fostered the learning of English through more than just lessons. Over 5 weeks, the sisters of Angola-Mozambique,

- attended English lessons and actively participated in activities
- experienced art therapy and produced 2 works of art each
- reflected and shared at sessions facilitated by Sr Lucy Chia

- visited Marymount Convent School and Good Shepherd ministries
- participated in the Peace Prayer Outreach walk to pray and reach out to women at risk in the red-light district of Singapore
- went on outings to Orchard Road, Parkway Parade, SEA Aquarium, Southern Ridges Trail, Chinatown, Gardens by the Bay
- learned to get around by public transport
- learned of Singapore's multi-cultural and multi-religious society
- tasted a great variety of Singapore food
- enjoyed meals hosted by Good Shepherd Mission Partners and many more prepared by Sr Lucy Chia
- sang at the Church of the Holy Family, Church of the Holy Spirit, Church of the Risen Christ and Church of St Ignatius
- were enfolded in a safe and loving environment at Good Shepherd Place
- made many friends and are now able to hold a simple conversation in English



The sisters were surrounded by English-speaking teachers, art therapists, facilitators, volunteers and caregivers who ate with them, laughed with them and journeyed with them. We strove to live out what St Mary Euphrasia taught, *"It is not enough that you love them, they must feel that they are loved."* We lived out partnership between sisters and lay; a collaborative partnership built on a shared vision and mission.



The 5-week immersion program closed with a joyful Eucharistic celebration, where the sisters proclaimed the readings in English, led the Universal Prayers in English and sang in English, Kimbundu, Latin and Portuguese. At the concert after the Mass, friends and supporters admired the sisters' works of art that were displayed on stage together with their personal reflections (in English of course). With their art as a colourful backdrop on stage, the sisters sang and danced, enthralling us with their natural musicality and rhythm. Their beautiful voices, weaving in perfect harmony and rhythm, touched us deeply and moved some of us to tears.



With the close of the 5-week immersion program, the sisters began an 8-day session on the Holistic Model of Formation and Leadership facilitated by Sr Elaine Basinger. The session was process oriented and involved presentations, individual reflection time and small and large group sharing. There was also much singing and dancing as part of each day. The sisters especially appreciated the opportunity to share with each other on a deep level allowing for closer bonding among themselves.



Words are inadequate to express our joy and gratitude for the gift of having the sisters from Angola-Mozambique here in Singapore with us. By God's grace, we were given the opportunity to love and be loved, and by opening our hearts and sharing our resources with our sisters from Angola-Mozambique, we have received blessings upon blessings.

Written By: Jane Marie Ng



**Acknowledgements:**

We thank Sr Joan Lopez, Province Leader of Singapore-Malaysia and Morene Sim, Chairperson of Restful Waters for their support of the program.

Special thanks to Sr Lucy Chia and Melina Ong, the pillars of the program and the principal caregivers, whose time and effort for the program had no boundaries. Their zeal and cheerful giving 24/7 lent another meaning to love beyond borders.

Heartfelt thanks to Jane Marie Ng, Director of the English Immersion Programme, all teachers, art therapists, facilitators, volunteers, caregivers, donors and benefactors who shared their time, talents, donations and the gift of themselves.

We also thank Almighty God for his love and blessings, and the gift of Susan in our lives.



*“Gratitude is the memory of the heart!”*