Brazil Reflection, Part 4

By: Margaret Magee OSF

This is the fourth and final installment in a series reflecting on our life and mission in Brazil.

Feliz Páscoa! Happy Easter! This final reflection of my recent travel and time in Brazil picks up on Easter Sunday morning in Ceres, Brazil. We enjoyed a quick overnight visit, hospitality, and sharing the experience of the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil with our Sisters Aparecida, Rosimeire, Maria Ângela, and Ângela Teresinha. On Easter Sunday morning we were nourished with breakfast and the company of our Sisters which fortified us for the two hour drive back to Anápolis in time to join the Sisters at Mâe Admirável, our Sisters from the other local communities, the friars and friends in a festive Easter Sunday noon meal. It was evident that great care and attention was given to the preparation and decoration of the dining room tables at Mâe Admirável by our Sisters Solange, Stella Sabina, our novices and aspirants. We feasted on the delicious meal prepared by Sister Paula and her staff and enjoyed the relaxing conversation and presence of one another on this Easter Sunday afternoon.

Later, Pat Klemm and I enjoyed a refreshing swim in the pool at Mâe Admirável. We were joined by our novices, Eloenia and Cleise, and the aspirants Ádrea, Lilian, and Cleidiane. Erin Baird and Pat Tyre joined us poolside. It was a wonderful time to relax, to chat, and to be together without a meeting or being on schedule.

On Easter Monday morning, Erin Baird of Allegany Franciscan Ministries (AFM) and Pat Tyre made a visit to the NACRI. The NACRI was started by the late Sister Teresa Sweeney, and Sister Iosta de Freitas Campos recently served as the Administrator. The NACRI is a community center for children and youth in a very depressed and poor section of Anápolis. Our Sisters no longer staff it, however they continue to serve on the board. The NACRI is now a ministry of Nova Aliança, a Franciscan community of lay men and women, married, single, and Diocesan priests. The community of Nova Aliança was founded 25 years ago with the assistance of Sister Teresa Sweeney. The NACRI is currently celebrating its 25th Anniversary. Pictures and more information on the NACRI can be found on their Facebook page at: https://www.facebook.com/nacri.alianca/

Later Monday morning, we attended the inauguration of the State Emergency Hospital in Anápolis (HUANA). Some years ago, Sister Rita Cecilia Coelho, Adminstrator of Santa Casa de Misericórdia, Anápolis, assumed the administration of this Emergency Hospital. HUANA provides emergency and urgent care services for the people in the city of Anápolis,as well as in 56 municipalities throughout the state of Goiás. Having visited some of the small rural hospitals and clinics in our travels reinforced, for me, the reality of the need for good and expanding healthcare facilities like Santa Casa and HUANA. This inauguration ceremony honored the recent work done in expanding emergency and urgent medical services and significantly increasing the bed capacity at HUANA. This event was a real testimony to the leadership and commitment of Sr. Rita Cecilia and of all our Sisters who have served through the years and continue to work at the hospital and serve on the board.

Our final afternoon brought us to our formation house, Convento Porciúncula, which is just down the street from Mâe Admirável. Solange Oliveira, formation director, and Stella Sabina Cunha, regional treasurer, share in community and the mentoring of these young women in formation. This year we are

blessed to have two Canonical Novices, Eloenia Soares da Mota and Cleise de Sousa Canté. We also have three women who are aspirants (postulants), Ádrea Cândida Barreto, Cleidiane de Souza Nascimento, and Lilian Rodrigues Jesus.

Spending time in conversation with these young women filled my heart with deep gratitude and a refreshing memory of how God invites us into discernment and the beginnings, the stirrings, of desire for an unknown and unimaginable journey into what our Franciscan-Clarian communal life and ever unfolding spirituality can become. Each woman shared her story of how and where she encountered our Allegany Franciscan Sisters and the events that prompted and encouraged them to take the first steps that hopefully will lead to a full and final commitment of vowed life and gospel living. Their presence, their enthusiasm, their smiles and openness to experience and discern life in community is, for me, a visible sign that God continues to invite, to love, and to incarnate hope in our world today. May we hold in our prayers, these and all the women in discernment and the various stages of formation in Brazil, Jamaica, and in the United States. We are blessed!

This experience and time in Brazil, compared to past trips, was for me very different and transformational. I have been fortunate over the years to have had opportunities to travel and spend time with our Sisters in Brazil. Often these trips were for much shorter periods, with days filled with meetings and Assemblies, always enjoyable but limited in time to really spend and be more immersed with our Sisters and in all that Brazil and her people have to offer.

In the past, I've often mused that the extent of my travel to Brazil has been flying into an airport, being driven to Mâe Admirável, sometimes with visits to our local houses and the Santa Casa hospital, ending with a return trip to the airport for the journey home. Yes, I've always enjoyed these visits and especially time with our Sisters; however, I never felt that they were opportunities to be immersed in the beauty of the land, its people, and the many cultures of Brazil. Interestingly, in past visits I have had an inner sense that even though I've always felt deeply connected with our Sisters, I sensed that the country of Brazil, its land, its trees, fields and even the night skies filled with familiar stars seemed so vastly different and foreign to me.

In this journey, with its many travels and experiences, I felt a kind of coming home, of being at home, and sensing the deeper connections between the North American and Brazilian realities that I had been blessed to traverse. Ronald Rolheiser, in his book, The Shattered Lantern, best captures, for me, this deeper connection. "The word humility comes from the Latin root humus which means soil or earth. Its primary connotation comes from that. To be humble is to be earthy, connected to the soil...to be earthy is also to feel your dependence and interconnectedness with others and with the earth...The humblest person you know is not the person who lives a timid life but the person who lives a life that constantly acknowledges its limits, its vulnerability, its interconnectedness, and its radical incarnate character."

The gift of this experience and the opportunity to write and share these reflections has been a personal invitation to enter more deeply into our Franciscan-Clarian call to grow in vulnerability and to humbly be open to explore interculturality with its potential to foster deeper communion and to make visible the radical incarnate love of Christ.

I hope that you have been able to capture the beauty and spirit of the Brazilian people so connected with life, beauty and all of God's creation. In truth my deeper hope in writing and sharing these reflections has been twofold:

- for those who may not have the opportunity to visit Brazil, may you glimpse and imagine through my words and pictures the deep encounters and transformative opportunities that have touched something deep with me,
- for those who have visited, have spent time in Brazil or may go in the future, may we together find new ways to reflect on and share our experiences so that we deepen our connectedness as Sisters, Associates, Partners in Ministries, and with the many people, organizations and networks with whom we are connected.

In our journeys, wherever we may travel and encounter one another and others, may we free ourselves to explore what is new and different with curiosity, humility, openness, trust, goodness and love. Obrigada! Gracias! Thank you!

"Instructions for living a life. Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it." - Mary Oliver

Editor's Note: Since this reflection was written, aspirants Lílian Rodrigues de Jesus and Ádria Cândida Barreto made the decision to leave the Formation Program and return home. Let us continue to hold them in our prayer as they discern God's call in their lives.