

"MY VOCATION IS TO SERVE THE POOR"

A BIOGRAPHY OF SR. NANCY PEREIRA, FMA



SR. THERESA THOMAS, FMA

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22. VIDES International

Solidarity Work without Frontiers

“Thanks to Divine Providence, which is mirrored on the faces and in the hearts of those who support the Universal Soul, *VIDES* International does all it can to help poor and marginalized people in Italy and abroad, without distinction on the basis of race, culture or creed, because for us the human person comes first and we are concerned about his or her dignity, opinions and suffering. Let’s work together, so that one day nobody will talk of a First, Second or Third World any longer and all will have their daily bread, drinking water, freedom and respect for their dignity,” says Swami Roberto, the founder of “Anima Universale”.

Help for the street children of Latin America and Asia

Our beloved Sr. Maria Grazia Caputo, fma, has known us for many years, ever since she was the Director-General of *VIDES* International in Rome. Currently, she is the permanent delegate of *IIMA (Istituto Internazionale Maria Ausiliatrice)* and *VIDES* at the UN Human Rights Office in Geneva.

She is involved with a project called “Educational Strategies for the Reception, Accompaniment and Rehabilitation of Street Children in society in the light of the Children’s Rights Convention.”

VIDES International, *BICE (Bureau Internationale Catholique de l’Enfance)* and *IIMA* have started a joint pilot project for the formation of 10 defenders of infancy rights, who will

work for and educate the street children of Latin America (in Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic) and Asia (in India, Nepal and the Philippines).

Sr. Caputo has always received help from Anima Universale, which co-operates with *VIDES* International, a body that promotes women's education and development. *VIDES* is an NGO with consultative status at the United Nations. It promotes development projects worldwide in order to restore dignity to poor and marginalized women. *VIDES* operates through its own network of organizations and national groups of volunteers. It also sponsors the adoption of children at the Salesian Sisters' missions. The organization has sponsored 30 children since 2001 at Salesian Sr. Nancy Pereira's mission in Bangalore, South India.

Education and Development in India

Anima Universale helps Sr. Nancy's *FIDES* organization in Bangalore. Pope John Paul II described her as "the entrepreneur of poor people." Many Italians have come to know about this extraordinary sister, thanks to a feature film produced on her life and work entitled "**A Simple Gift**", in which the famous Italian actress Virna Lisi plays the role of Sr. Nancy. The film was telecast in Italy by the RAI 2 television channel on the 27th of December 2000.

Our Help: Since 2001, Anima Universale has been co-operating with Sr. Nancy by sponsoring 30 children who live in a slum near Bangalore. Thanks to our support, they can attend school and build a better future for themselves and their families. Moreover, Anima Universale contributed to Sr. Nancy's *FIDES* project and has helped to make one of her dreams come true, namely, the building of a family-house for orphans, where many children rescued from loneliness and hunger are already living. Sr. Nancy accompanied

some of our members when they visited these children and their hearty welcome amazed us, to say the least.

Sr. Nancy promotes interventions in the poorest areas of Bangalore, in order to enable those people to send their children to school and help young adults to start small enterprises through savings and self-financing schemes. She also educates women on nutrition and personal hygiene, in order to combat infant and maternal mortality. She has formed anonymous support groups to fight the plague of alcoholism and promote the spread of moral values like respect for all, brotherhood and solidarity.

In India at Sr. Nancy Pereira's

In July 2004, Bro. Osvaldo Ristuccia, the president of Anima Universale and Dominique N spent a week in Bangalore at the Salesian Mission *FIDES*, founded by Sr. Nancy. Thanks to Divine Providence (and therefore to all who support Anima Universale) a small financial support was given to Sr. Nancy to help her meet the needs of poor families living in slums. These Anima Universale members also met the 30 children whose education they have been sponsoring for several years. The children are growing up healthy and are making progress in school. They welcomed their 'uncles,' (as they called them) with a big party. The Anima Universale representatives, in turn, were overwhelmed by their great affection and spontaneous gratitude for the help they had received.

Sr. Constance accompanied the Anima Universale members when they visited the villages in which Sr. Nancy and her Sisters work on *FIDES* projects. The people there welcomed the team joyfully with the typical Hindu ritual greetings, visitors to India receive. The Sisters of *FIDES* through their devoted work have already enabled more than 3,000 families to become self-sufficient,

both from the economic and the hygienic-sanitary points of view and they are extending their work to cover other extremely poor villages.

On Sunday 4 July, those present at our Leini Ashram to attend a *darshan* were immensely pleased to hear the voice of Sr. Nancy herself, who called up to greet Swami Roberto and thank him all for the help given. She stressed that Divine Providence had come at the right moment to meet the mission's urgent needs. "Thank you and may God bless you all," she said. We have many vivid memories of our previous visits to Sr. Nancy's mission.

Sr. Nancy Visits our Centre at Leini

On 28 September 2001, Sr. Nancy returned our visits and she was looked after by Swami Roberto. She met a group of faithful Anima Universale supporters in our Ashram at Leini and we all recited a prayer for peace together. On the occasion of this extraordinary and wonderful meeting, many people gave Sr. Nancy a donation for her great work to help the poor. Later on, Swami Roberto and some Anima Universale members accompanied her to Leini's Town Hall, where she was felicitated by the Parish Priest, the Mayor and many citizens.

After her return to India, Sr. Nancy sent us the following letter:

My dear Bro. Roberto and all the other brothers, especially Andrea, Carlo and Franco,

I am very late in thanking you all. Up till today, I used to go to bed every night saying to myself, 'Today too I was not able to write the e-mails I had to send.' I have just now found the time to do so. Pardon the delay.

I thank each and every one of you for the great concern and care you showered on me when I visited your centre. Thank you for picking me up from Verona and escorting me to Biella. Thank you for the grand dinner, the meeting and, above all, for your generous contributions. It was a wonderful and mighty display of Divine Providence. Thank you for everything, dear brothers.

Thank you dear Brother Roberto, for all the donations and the special gift you gave me. As promised, I am praying for you. I too solicit your generous prayers for us.


Vostra Sorella,

Sr. Nancy Pereira

VIDES INTERNATIONAL, SPAIN

June 2009

Our beloved friend Sr. Nancy Pereira, founder and Director of *FIDES*, entrusted Sr. Sheela Jacob with the task of conveying her gratitude to all of us and particularly to Swami Roberto, whom she remembers with great affection ever since she met him in 2001. Swami Roberto gave Sr. Sheela a small donation for the new *FIDES* project. According to the draft, this money is sufficient to pay for the excavation work and the concrete needed to lay the foundation of a large building to accommodate a multi-purpose hall and classrooms for the new *FIDES* School. This building complex will help the FMA Salesian Sisters to conduct educational programmes for poor slum families living in Bangalore on topics like sanitation and hygiene; professional training courses; English-language courses; group activities for young people; and much more.



MY VOCATION IS TO SERVE THE POOR: A glimpse into the life of Sr. Nancy Pereira, FMA leads to admiration and imitation. Along with a strong character she had inherited a spirit of charity and almsgiving from her father.

The dedication to the welfare of the needy poor of the locality wherever she was sent and lived manifested her passion to live her love for God in practice. ***“Love your neighbour as yourself”*** was out-lived by this great soul. In her we find, one who loved the needy poor more than herself. Least bothered about her food, clothing and other comforts she sought to feed and clothe her needy fellow-being. She made sure to maximize the practice of the words of Jesus ***“whatsoever you have done to the least of my brethren you have done it to me”***. Her life long desire to serve the poor

was manifested in her tireless effort to bring light and life to thousands of women in various parts of South India especially in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra and Kerala. She lit the torch of hope in the down-trodden of the society. ***“It is better to teach them to fish rather than to give a fish in hand”*** with this idea she became a life sustainer by facilitating jobs through Self Help Groups. Education of the poor children was her passion. She travelled around and wrote to her well wishers bringing awareness in them to help educate thousands of less fortunate children in the southern states of India.

Pope John Paul called her as ***“The Indefatigable Entrepreneur in the cause of helping the poor”***. Europe had honoured her with a number of awards for the humanitarian works accomplished. In spite of all the honours bestowed on her by various agencies of Europe and the Italian Television RAI Uno she said ***“I do not count on achievements”***.

May the reading of the biography of this valiant religious inspire us to be life lifters of the society, may it urge us to greater commitment to humanity.



Sr. Theresa Thomas, FMA is a Salesian Sister of Don Bosco. She is a member of the INK Province of Bangalore. Matriculated, graduated in English Literature and qualified as a teacher from the University of Madras, she worked as a teacher in the various schools in Madras. She had worked in the Diocese of Madras as the youth animator and in the Province of Chennai as the Catechetical delegate. Having completed the missiology course in the Urbanian University – Rome, she worked as a missionary in Kenya – East Africa for three years. She had worked as the editor of the Province's News Letter. At present she is the Directress of the VTC at Kattappana and the Delegate of the Salesian Family for the FMA Bangalore.