

# A Perspective from a Canadian Volunteer at CALLS

by Sr. Betty Rae Lee on behalf of Presentation Sisters' Volunteer Ministry

For those who do not know our location, Dominica, aptly named the Nature Island of the Caribbean, is situated between the French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique and is spectacular in abundant rainforests, rivers, waterfalls and volcanic mountainous terrain. Because of the latter, the early Carib Indians called the island, Waitukubuli, "*Tall is her body*" and Christopher Columbus, because he landed on a Sunday, gave the island its current name, Dominica. The people, who speak English and Creole, are the island's best advertisement; they are faithful, friendly, musical, humorous and resourceful.

While the Presentation Sisters from Canada came to Dominica only in 1993, our ancestral connections go deeper because Nano Nagle, our foundress, sent catechists from Ireland to the West Indies back in the 18th century to support the faith of the Irish emigrants who came to an unknown land to avoid starvation at home. Is it any wonder, then, that Newfoundland, whose people had traded with the West Indies over many centuries, would hear that Dominica needed our presence? This call came to us through the Christian Brothers in Dominica who told us that there were unmet needs here and that maybe we could assist. We are grateful to the Leadership Team of

the day led by Mary Dower, pbvm who had the vision to leave the known and move towards unfamiliar shores.

And so today, Marie Roche, pbvm, Jean O'Neill, and I carry the flame from wonderful women who have ministered here since 1993: Sisters Marilyn Costello, Paula Delahunty, Marilyn Doyle, Shirley Hogan, Sarah Hynes, Carmel Kelly, Frances Pennell, Sylvia Staples and Corona Wyse.

Living in this island paradise is not without its challenges. Being here calls us to soul search who we are as women religious and as Canadian nationals. Daily we realise how so many of us, not all, in the rich North have too much while our brothers and sisters in the South often do not have basic essentials of food, shelter, medical care and social programs. Being here increases our commitment to address globally the root causes of poverty and to care for Earth and for those made poor.

Since January 2009 we much enjoy being a presence and providing loving service at CALLS, where our trainees and toddlers find a 'home away from home' a place of safety, love, boundaries and compassion. With careful nurturing, their spirituality grows, their coping skills are enhanced, their skills are developed, their work ethic is improved and their academic progress increases.

As the testimonials in this 20th anniversary magazine reiterate, CALLS is a success story. Despite numerous obstacles—insufficient funding, inadequate number of personnel and lack of space, among others, the amazement is that so much works well. At CALLS we see fidelity to the mission statement and the Gospel in action. Mrs. Olivia Douglas, Director, a woman of faith and vision, is ever faithful to the founding charism, staff and volunteers genuinely care and contribute to CALLS and the dream of a 'second chance' for youth receives support from within and outside Dominica. Our best assets, our babies, toddlers and trainees may be considered by some to be disadvantaged yet they are tremendously advantaged in their resilience, their determination and their ability. With encouragement, they reach heights that they themselves and others would never have thought possible.

Yes, our Presentation community contributes to CALLS. Yet, we receive so much here because we are among people who have every reason to complain but who find joy, even exuberance, in the midst of hardship and whose hearts are largely filled with gratitude and love.

Miracles happen here.

God bless you all on this special occasion.