

Thanksgiving for the 50 Years of the SNDs in the Amazon Region Acre, Brazil



“Together sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and celebrate with all your heart the praises of the Lord. For everything, give thanks to God the Father” (cf. Ephesians 5:19-20).

On March 25, 1971, seven Sisters from the Holy Cross Province arrived in the State of Acre, in the Amazon Region, at the invitation of Bishop Henrique R uth who had requested SNDs for the mission. The pioneers’ journey from the South to the North of Brazil took almost a month as the travelers depended on a vacant seat on a Brazilian Air Force (FAB) flight. The missionaries were accompanied by Sister M. Odete Weschenfelder, Provincial Superior at the time, and by Sister M. Reinoldis Hachm ller.

Four of the pioneers - Sr. M. Nelda Luiza M helecke, M. An sia Maldaner, M. Thereza Costella and M. Inete Della Senta – health care workers, stayed in Cruzeiro do Sul and began their ministry at the General Hospital of this town.

The other pioneers - Sr. M. Beatriz Gato, M. Clarinda Canci and Maria Gentil Magagnin – who were teachers, went to Tarauac , where they began their ministry at the Instituto S o Jos , a diocesan school where, for many years, the sisters served as principals and teachers.

Alongside the hospital and school ministries, the Sisters were engaged in catechesis and other pastoral and evangelization ministries. Little by little, the missionary paths broadened and the Sisters began to use boats to carry out small trips of evangelization to nearby communities. Later, together with a priest and committed lay people, the Sisters took part in the 'desobrigas', which consisted of long journeys along the rivers, transforming the boat into a home, riding donkey back through the forest, sparing no efforts to evangelize the people, thirsty of the truths of the faith.

During these 50 years, 54 Sisters of Notre Dame have served in the Amazon mission, 19 of whom are now deceased. The presence, ministry and witness of each Sister in the Amazon mission has also helped to awaken vocations to religious life. Currently, the Holy Cross Province has 9 native Sisters from Acre.

The 50th Jubilee Celebration, postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, became a reality on July 3, 2021. In his homily during the solemn Eucharistic Liturgy, Bishop Flávio Giovenale, Bishop of Cruzeiro do Sul, highlighted that from now on the invitation is to love more, starting from Jesus' question to Peter: "Do you love me more than these?"

Gratitude to the good God, to Saint Julie Billiart, to the generous people of Acre and Amazon, to the Congregation, to the Province and to each Sister of Notre Dame who has been part of this mission for half a century in the Amazon. In the missions, there is a place for everyone. A missionary experience broadens horizons, a statement that becomes even more true after the Amazon Synod.