

# CONECTA



20 years of presence  
in Asilah

# In this number

This Conecta is a special issue dedicated to the celebration of two decades of presence of the Institute in the mission of Asilah, Morocco.

Last November 10th and 11th, a large group of religious, friends of the Institute and volunteers from the Mary Ward Foundation traveled to Asilah to celebrate and share not only the past, but also the present and the future of this mission intercultural and interreligious, as Elena Cerdeiras points out.

There were days full of magic and emotions that do not fit into these pages, but you can access some extra information clicking in these videos, photos and the beautiful full text that Piedad González Cano gives us, "Asilah in the memory".

To see the photo albums, [click here](#).

To watch videos on the Youtube channel, [click here](#).

To see the text 'Asilah in the memory' in Spanish, [click here](#).

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**Cover picture:** Colorful rugs exposed in a street of Asilah. Photo by Víctor Arias.

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# WE HAVE CELEBRATED 20 YEARS IN ASILAH!

Last 10th and 11th of November the IBVM celebrated 20 years of presence in Asilah, Morocco. The celebration was a time of intercultural coexistence and joy for the gathering.



A group photo of the attendants to the celebration, at the Hassan II Cultural Center.

There are moments in life that concentrate on themselves all the experiences that take place in the daily routine with a lower intensity. And it seems that this is what happened on November 10 and 11, 2017 at the Catholic Mission of Asilah, when celebrating the twenty years of the presence of the IBVM in Morocco. In our small community we had been preparing each act and moment of these days with care and affection. Maybe that's why we can explain that the result of the celebration, without forgetting the last act of Sunday morning, was in my view, so positive and a source of enthusiasm.

Messages of positivity and joy from those who have attended,

especially from outside of Morocco, keep coming to us. Although we had some failures, they were surpassed and compensated by the good will and the joy of those who attended. Hence, we cannot help but be grateful for the presence of so many people coming from outside and also from within Morocco with the joy and the good atmosphere that was breathed.

To summarize, I want to mention some key moments that helped to become aware of what has been done and lived in Asilah throughout these twenty years: saving details when mentioning the different acts, since there will be other people who will take care of them:



**The first meeting** of all the people -who had arrived from the previous day to that same morning- took place on Friday, in the Kanisa Center (church in

Arabic). There the visitors had contact with the women in their classes and were able to verify the esteem that these women and the teachers have for the work done there every day. We do not forget the testimony of some teachers, former students of the center, as well as those working in the Moroccan Attadamoun Association. At this time the celebration was



Teacher Fatiha Bouhrass, with María L. de Haro, during the presentation of the projects.



inaugurated. The morning ended with visits to the various places of social projects although some were postponed to the next day.

**The conference** on Moroccan women and the problem of migration in North Africa by the president of Women in Conflict Zone (MZC, Spanish acronym).

**The group's friendly dinner** in a restaurant with a Moroccan menu.

from Rabat for the occasion, followed by an inter-religious act.

The **celebration** of the Word and liturgy of the Eucharist on Sunday morning

before the great group returned to Spain.

On Saturday afternoon, we had the **conference on 'Ecology in the Koran'**, by Terraz Mounia, a Moroccan journalist who came

And in the midst of everything, the **great atmosphere** of friendship, coexistence, encounter, and fun that did not cease to exist at all times.

All this makes us feel very grateful and we only wish that it was an encouragement to continue working alongside this people. / **MARÍA LÓPEZ DE HARO**



Terraz Mounia talked about 'Ecology in the Koran'



# «WE CELEBRATE THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE MISSION»

Elena Cerdeiras, provincial leader of Spain, talks about the encounter and the meaning of the presence in Asilah.



The three members of the Community of Asilah, together with Linda, provincial leader of Mauritius, on the beach of Asilah. From left to right, Clotilde de Maroussem, María López de Haro, Linda Charles and Lissiane Magdeleine

Celebrating 20 years of the Asilah mission has been a very hopeful experience. We thanked for all the people of the Institute who have been there, especially for Piedad and Victoria who embarked on the unknown path twenty years ago. But my feeling was that we also celebrate the present and future of the mission.

Asilah, today, is an international mission of the Institute. In the community are María López, from the province of Spain, and Lisiane Magdeleine and Clotilde De Maroussem, from the province of Mauricio. The whole Institute is involved in a reflection that we call Co-creating our way, I believe that this mission is to realize what we think the future may be: three Ibvms, no matter from

which province, committed and carrying out a mission that makes



*Linda and Elena, leaders of the two provinces that currently integrate the mission of Asilah, Mauritius and Spain, celebrated the 20th anniversary of this "adventure" of the Institute, with special enthusiasm for the future.*

sense in today's world, because it responds to challenges such as interculturality, interreligiousness, women's rights and the right of every person to dignity.

The celebration was an occasion for Linda and myself to meet, leaders of both provinces, with the community. We dialogued and shared to try to build the present and the future together. It is evident that our religious life has meaning since it is a life for mission: the presence of Christianity in a Muslim world, walking like human beings, without our origin, our beliefs, our culture or religion, preventing us from seeking a better world for all humanity. / **ELENA CERDEIRAS CHECA**

# THE PROJECTS OF IBVM IN ASILAH

On November 10<sup>th</sup> there was a visit to the projects developed in Asilah by the IBVM, with support from the Mary Ward Foundation. These are mainly focused in education and training of women.

One of the moments most valued by the people who traveled to Asilah was the visit to the IBVM projects there, which are supported by the Mary Ward Foundation.

They provide basic and professional training to women in the most deprived areas of Asilah with literacy classes and basic training, on the one

hand, providing them with tools so they can cope with greater autonomy and improve their quality of life and that of their children and families. And on the other hand, with occupational training workshops



The teacher Rahma Benssalmoun, with some students, in a training workshop.

in the textile sector to access a job in a sector that captures 76% of the industrial workforce of the city of Tangier, or to create their own workshop to provide them with income necessary to live with dignity and autonomy.

All this is carried out by local teachers, who are in charge of giving classes and encouraging women for their training.

**Ana Garrigues** talked about these workshops with several volunteers from the Mary Ward Foundation and this is her story:

«Having a coffee with Elisa Zambrano, Ibvm, and Pilar Fuentes (one of the volunteers of the Mary Ward Foundation), we were commenting on our trip to Asilah.

It is curious that one of the things on which we all agreed (even said with the same words) and that moved us more, has been the impressive joy that women transmitted from the workshops and literacy classes. Their faces, at all times, reflected satisfaction for the



A moment of the encounter with some of the women we work with.





"Learning to read helps us gain independence on a day-to-day basis," they told us.



The workers of Attadamoun: Maka El Moueden, Rafika Tligui and Asmae El Garzouzi, explained to us what their projects are.



These were days of reunion. In the picture, Macarena Fdez. De Bobadilla and Ana Gimeno, who were for a time in the Asilah mission, together with Fatiha Bouhrass, Maka El Moueden, Rafika Tligui and Professor Ihsane Díaz.

work they were doing.

Both the teachers, who were previously students of the same projects, and the students who attend the classrooms -young and old- spoke to us, with confidence, of what this learning meant for them: their independence, economic in some cases, but basically independence in their day to day, by not having to ask anyone to read for you the poster that is on the opposite sidewalk. But also, they told us that this time together allowed them to share experiences, happy and bitter moments, dreams and hopes.

The projects carried out by the mission in Asilah mean that people who have not had any opportunity for education, as girls, can now do so through literacy classes; or the French and English and Spanish classes; and people who in principle would have very little chance of entering the labor market, can access it now through sewing workshops. In addition, this basic training will make those, who are mothers, understand that education is very important and encourage their daughters and sons to study thinking about their future.

And all this from the mutual respect to our different beliefs and cultures, which made possible that in all the moments which we meet, we felt equals, chatting and interacting as so. Although it may seem a trifle, for me that is very important». / **ANA GARRIGUES WALKER**

# WOMEN IN THE NEW CARTOGRAPHY OF MIGRATIONS

**The conference of Milagros Ramos, president of the association Women in Conflict Zones, dealt with migrations in the north of Morocco, with a special look at women.**

*Women in Conflict Zones is a Spanish NGDO that works in several countries of the world with gender and human rights approaches. In Morocco, its work goes around 3 axes: strengthening the public education system; improving participation of civil society; endogenous productive development and migrations. In this field of migration, it is working on a project to alleviate the suffering of sub-Saharan women and children in northern Morocco. From her experience in this project, and her knowledge of the reality of Morocco, where she spends a good part of her time, Milagros Ramos told us about the new "mapping of migrations", the externalization of borders and the trafficking mafias, and other people who take advantage of the situation.*

"Migrations are not a new phenomenon, because it is consubstantial with the human



By clicking on the picture, you can access to the main part of the conference of Milagros Ramos and María Llinás (FMW) introduction video

species and I would say that all species seek support for their life and in that search, it is necessary to leave our habitual living space to find the resources and opportunities that in the communities of origin do not exist

**"Neither promises nor good intentions feed the world, we need facts and we need them now"**

or are denied to them."

"The developed countries are maintaining the poverty and extremism that, among other

issues, causes migration. Spain is not doing much to strengthen the weak economies of the developing countries." "If the situation of all migrants is vulnerable, that of women is even worse." "We in Europe are scandalized by the jumps to the fence of Ceuta. Meanwhile, instead of investing in those countries

from which migrants leave in search of a better life, we continue to cut direct international development aid to the neediest populations, we do not promote integration, we nurture inequality and even dare to question and even demonize International Development Aid, with the pilgrimage and disgraceful that here there are also needs."

"From civil society it would be necessary to pressure our governments to make a gender-sensitive roadmap that guarantees the rights of migrants."



From left to right: Mila Ramos, María López, Ibvm, Noelle Corscadden, Ibvm, and María Llinás, FMW.



## «MY IMPRESSIONS»

Several people among those attending the Asilah celebration wanted to share the impressions they brought from this exciting trip to the mission of the IBVM.



this visit since I did not know the place. They have also told us that there is another reality there of poverty that I have not seen but that I am aware exists».

For **Estíbaliz Rubio**, volunteer of Mary Ward Foundation, the trip was not only about getting to know Asilah,

Sometimes, two days can seem like a week and a flying visit becomes an experience and memory for a lifetime. This is the case of these days in Asilah, according to those who were there. Many people have told us in private, and some have written down their feelings.

**Juana Pecharromán, Ibvm**, reflects on the teachers whom the Institute works with: «I was impressed by the closeness of the young women who work in the mission, their sympathy, their love for the nuns, their wanting to be close, how welcoming they are, the work they do there with the classes of dressmaking and computer science. It seemed to me that a great social work is

done, also supporting health and education. As for the cultural aspect, I felt the invisibility of women in the streets, with their sometimes-hidden faces... but I also thought that it is necessary to see it like enriching experience, living next to the different. That is a part of their world, it is their life, their culture and their customs, they cannot live it in any other way.



On the other hand, I found that Asilah is a clean, beautiful, bright place, the blue and white colors are beautiful. There was a cozy festive atmosphere. I thank for

but also be able to know all the work the Institute does: «I came back delighted with the experience. What I have found has been a happy religious congregation without prejudices. Open to the world, eager to solve big problems with small gestures. I was also struck by the strength of the women in the workshops, the great step that should be to

accept the help of the Catholic mission in Morocco, skipping the prejudice of being helped by religious for the improvement of their situation and formation. In addition, his gratitude was palpable for being able to function in the world, being able to know what he puts

on a sign in the street. In relation to children, I was happy to see that education and its improvements are promoted. It is

an aid that contributes both to volunteers and children. We spent a very close time playing with them. As a volunteer it has been useful for me to visualize the effort involved in carrying out a project on the ground, but I have also seen that it is a task that is faced with great enthusiasm.

What I have seen these days has been joy, positivism, faith and much complicity and enthusiasm. I have also discovered people that I have very close to, but with whom I had not had such a good opportunity to get close. On this trip I shared with them confidences, feelings and helped me to see them from another point of view. I have enjoyed, lived and shared a great experience. And I can only say: Thank you! I have been very happy».

**Flora Magro, Ibvm, says:**

«During the whole week end we enjoyed a lot. The welcome was wonderful and everything was very well organized. The time was perfectly distributed and we did not have time to get bored!



On the other hand, it seemed to me that all the events were fantastic, the conferences were very interesting, I think they enriched both those who are there and those who visited and we have returned to our homes with what we have learned.

The last time I had been in Asilah was 8 years ago, and on this trip I have noticed a tremendous change in the city. It's much

cleaner, even people on the street look more cheerful than I remembered».

On her behalf, **Ana Serrano** tells us: «It was a weekend to give thanks, remember and pray for all the

people who have dedicated their time and part of their lives to this Mission. The joy because most of them were there, did not stop me from missing Piedad, Salud, Concha,

Louisa, Angie... From those early years when the Mary Ward group



I admire the enormous work that the sisters do day by day there.





from Gibraltar got us the enthusiasm to collaborate there in our own way, those work camps that so many former students have gone through and any time when you ask whether it is good for you to go and you are received with joy.

Undoubtedly these two days have been the fruit of what the Institute does there and its 20 years of presence. There are projects that reached the age of majority since two women accepted and trusted to go there.

That generosity has been the one that has marked the path to its successors and the one that has inspired many others in the experience and feelings of sharing mission. Thank you very much and ...Lets go for the 25!».

### Colorful rugs



Walking through the Medina with a group of volunteers I realized that our trip to Asilah had been much more than the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the presence of the IBVM in Morocco, it has become:

- A few days of tasty meeting between religious, volunteers, sympathizers, participants in the actions of the projects, Moroccans, etc.
- Group cohesion of those who believe in social transformation through commitment.
- Not just a celebration of what has already been achieved, also in a future momentum.
- An extraordinary intercultural coexistence (like colorful rugs).

Volunteering in international cooperation has a special merit since the actions it carries out do not have an closed and immediate "reward", you collaborate with projects that are many kilometers away and that it will be difficult to know first-hand.

That is why it is so important to participate in the training sessions that the FMW offers us, the communications through the web, the magazine, etc., the meetings with people who come from the countries in which the projects are developed, and how this time, have the fortune to know in situ what we are betting on !!Congratulations!!

See you in Asilah in 10 years... or maybe earlier.

*Víctor Arias Torre*

*Responsible for volunteering at the Mary Ward Foundation*

# A VERY SPECIAL CELEBRATION OF THE WORD

*In the course of the celebration, Macarena Fernández, Ibvm, pronounced some beautiful words that gathered very well the experience of the joy of celebrating in communion, united to very close people, even if they are of another culture and another religion.*

**Macarena Fdez.:** «These two days have been an explosion of energy for the celebration of 20 years of presence in Asilah. We know about the fragility of this mission. We know that from the beginning we could not count on a large community. This is what it is, a small lit lamp that wants to witness the peaceful coexistence and friendship between two so different cultures. Between two religions that look to God from different perspectives but that recognize him from their compassionate and merciful being».

On her behalf, Cuca Marcellán, member of the Board of the Mary



Ward Foundation, shares the excitement that she lived during this celebration.

**Cuca Marcellán:** "The celebration of the Word of Sunday seemed to me an exciting act and the perfect way to close three magical days in Asilah.

I must admit that I was very touched as we read the gospel readings and sang. When we prayed the Our Father by the hand, I shed few tears and by the celebration of peace I completely bursted into tears and I felt totally happy.

Reflecting on this, I came to the conclusion that there is nothing better than feeling communion with other people united by the same desire. At that time we were a group of people united by the desire to leave our reality and provide a bit to improve the lives of women and children

we had the good fortune to meet. Love humanizes us and there, love was palpable».

## ASILAH IN THE MEMORY

One of the two pioneers of the mission of Asilah, Piedad González Cano, has wrote a beautiful piece entitled "Asilah in the memory". In it Piedad remembers with love and joy her first steps with Victoria Lassaletta, in this project in which the Institute embarked with great enthusiasm two

decades ago. The full version of it is being translated into English, and will be distributed as soon as is ready. In the meantime, can be seen [here on the web](#), in Spanish.

