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La Casa Degli Angeli

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La Casa Degli Angeli

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"On September 2013 I moved from Rochester, NY to Thailand. It had been a long process of reflection and pondering on the direction my life was going, and finally I strongly felt that I would steer my life's vessel towards the eastern part of our shrinking planet. I landed at the airport of Bangkok and moved immediately to a hotel. My first duty was to learn Thailand's language needed to obtain a working license."

LA CASA DEGLI ANGELI



Suor Angela Bertelli



“Angels” in the Casa degli Angeli

On September 2013 I moved from Rochester, NY to Thailand. It had been a long process of reflection and pondering on the direction my life was going, and finally I strongly felt that I would steer my life’s vessel towards the eastern part of our shrinking planet. I landed at the airport of Bangkok and moved immediately to a hotel. My first duty was to learn Thailand’s language needed to obtain a working license. Although it was a difficult task, I managed to do sufficiently well to obtain my license and begin my work as a freelance consultant in the field of jewelry. Not long after I began to frequent the Catholic Church of the Salesian Sisters Foundation of Thailand situated on 124 Saladaeng Road where I met Fr. Carlo Velardo. My weekly conversations with him led to the discovery of *La Casa degli Angeli* (The Home of Angels). The first time I visited the **Home of Angels** was together with a good friend in February of this current year, 2016. I returned there recently to collect more information about the place itself, its founder, and the charitable, humanly dignified work performed there by simple, courageous, patient people who love and care for disabled children, special angels of God.

Suor Maria Angela Bertelli left Italy for Thailand in the year 2000 and lived in the slums of Bangkok for a year and a half while waiting for other sisters to join her. Thereafter she spent 3 years in a Catholic Parish working with people suffering from tuberculosis and AIDS. But let’s go back a bit to trace her life before the year 2000.

Maria Angela was born in 1959 in the little town of Santa Croce di Carpi in the province of Modena in northern Italy.

Up to the age of 17 she lived a normal life studying accounting and piano and frequenting the local Catholic parish.

As she felt the need to “**do something to help others in a concrete way**,” she studied nursing for 3 years and soon after she worked in a hospital emergency room. At age 20 she joined the **Congregation of the Missionaries of Mary** in Parma taking her first vows in February 1987. These sisters wear simple everyday clothes as they minister to people in need, especially the derelict largely neglected by societies around the world.

At age 24 she traveled to New York to learn the English language and take courses to become a physiotherapist. In January 1993 she took her perpetual vows in the Cathedral of Carpi and left to work as a missionary in Sierra Leone, where in January 1995 together with six other Sisters she was kidnapped by the guerrilla group, *United Revolutionary Front*. All of them were released after 56 days of imprisonment in extreme conditions of living and constant danger. Her missionary life continued for the next 5 years until she was assigned to Thailand.

Donated by the Catholic organization, **Caritas of Venice**, to the Catholic Diocese of Bangkok, **The Home of Angels**

was completed in 2008; Suor Maria Angela lived in it while she took care of children suffering from very grave physical handicaps. She strongly believed that providing accommodations in the Home of Angels or nearby to the mothers of these children would help the children, the mothers themselves, and all the volunteers who work with them at the Casa degli Angeli.

Suor Maria Angela has just recently been recalled to Italy for a period of rest, prayer, and spiritual recharging most need after so many years of dedicated work to the special children of God. A new team of 3 sisters has begun its work at the Home of Angels filling the void left by Suor Maria Angela.



The main aspects thought out by Suor Angela for the House of Angels

1) The support for the children and their mothers is based on each individual case, starting with the emergency hospitalization of the child always accompanied by his or her mother. Orphans are helped and accompanied by loving professionals. The mothers are not only the necessary unconscious

needed support for their children, they also receive a “hands on training” through the whole process that gives them a new understanding on how to behave in similar delicate and stressful situations when these will happen again.

2) To reach an understanding, through an in-house helpful training provided by professionals in the native Thai language, that the young mothers coming from slums require special help and guidance for a true integration in the House of Angels. The integration is matured when the mothers learn to trust each other as they help with each other’s children, and work together with the volunteers in the House of Angels. Fears and courage are to be separated and understood as sources of balancing the mental strength of children and mothers in order to fight and win these adversities of nature. Some of the specific goals are: a) hospitality/assistance in general and training about physical therapy as appropriate to each case; b) facilitation of cooperation with hospitals and specialists; c) management of ordinary service at the Angels’ Home (i.e. food preparation, cleaning-hygiene, working schedule); d) sessions of education/formation of the mothers/helpers to assist the children in their special needs (every mother is

also trained in helping any other child); e) responsibility sharing in ordinary management of the House and its (ordinary) budget; f) spiritual care (with daily prayer and witness toward visitors and students); g) organize projects and manufacture together objects as a source of self-help/financial self-support for the future of the mothers.

3) The service of physical therapy (not so easy to get, quite poor in quality and not yet so frequent in many hospitals) has been insured, taught to the mothers and regularly updated, as far as possible, by the Xaverian Sister in charge (as physical therapist and registered nurse). In these last years, having met the well-known and esteemed **Mother Nok** and her project **Baan Mae Nok** (*which gathers together about 20 mothers/families with disabled children*), mothers and volunteers at the Home of Angels have been invited to the training offered by her. This is conducted under the responsibility of Japanese trainers coming regularly to Thailand to instruct the mothers. This cooperation, which ensures some competence and updating for the mothers (even when the Sister in charge is absent), continues rich in esteem of one group toward the other with full respect of each one's identity, whether Buddhist or Christian. At the Home of Angels all are truly thankful to God for this opportunity! They have to consider that, since the assistance of our abandoned children is full time (i.e.24/day 365/yr.), it requires caretakers at night and holidays, too. Moreover, sometimes the mothers need to take a leave for personal needs or medical check-ups or a hospital admission of their children. It is not rare the case when a mother asks to leave temporarily her child in the care of the other mothers at the Angels' Home as necessary: in fact, it would be very difficult and costly to find a baby sitter able to take care of a child with special needs (tube-feeding, suction, etc.).



One day, during a monthly retreat when Matthew chapter 25 was read (“Come blessed of my Father...because I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink...”) after some time of reflection **LIN**, a Thai mother normally shy, spontaneously shared with the group what she was feeling: “When I arrived at the House of Angels I was very hungry and very thirsty, a stranger

without a house. I did not have money to buy clothing or other things because I could not make it to the end of the month with the salary I was earning. I was a stranger to all of you, alone and sad, distressed, without anyone to whom I could say all that I was feeling inside. There was nothing other than a lot of darkness in my life and that of my son Phum. I did not know where to go or what to do. I was at the end of my human existence...” Her eyes full of tears, with a knot in her throat, after receiving a handkerchief from one of the other mothers, she continued, “Here God, God himself gave me hospitality and did all that is said in the Gospel today, He gave me to eat, gave me to drink, gave me to dress, gave me a house, your company, which is like a family; gave me all and allowed me to stay with my son Phum. Now I am finally serene, because I can see my son growing well and getting better health.” She concluded by saying, “But when will I be able myself to do the same freely for another human being who needs all this as God has done for me? How can I return what God has done for me?”

Thai and Foreign volunteers coming from Italy and other countries (Belgium, Brazil, France, Spain, USA, etc.) joyfully share their time and skills with us. Since the opening in the year 2008 we at the Home of Angels have hosted more than 150 of them (average stay from 2 – 3 weeks), mostly young people aged 18 – 25, but also families, couples during their honeymoon, elderly people who generously participate in every activity of care and prayer with us.

We can certainly affirm that, *among Buddhist and Christian mothers*, **the interreligious dialogue** happens naturally while they are working to concretely meet the needs of their dearest children: the same needs for all! All find themselves brothers and sisters of the same human family and become part and witness of the gratuity of God the Father's love towards all.



4) Suor Angela Bertelli is firmly convinced that the best results can be reached by taking into consideration, consulting and calling upon the mothers to be part of this process, **since they are the “essential power” and “vital beating heart” of the Home of Angels’ special feeling**: without them nothing could be done.

The little chapel in the Home of Angels

Our earthly life is the fruit of thinking; from great minds like those of Galileo Galilei, Nikola Tesla, Einstein, Caravaggio, and Michelangelo (and the remaining normal humankind on our planet,) we are all part of the same tree of life. **Suor Angela Bertelli** is a special branch or leaf in this tree: with her direct involvement in the life of many needy children, and risking her life for others, she has set before us with **full of determination** the path of love that leads to God. It is up to each individual member of “*our club*” called humanity to follow and reinforce the link of the chain of love. To detour from it and embark on the path of the unknown, will lead to the darkness of our soul and the impoverishment of our God-given thinking abilities. **The Word of God is living only when followed by tangible constructive actions toward the realization of its meaning.** I personally feel the need to thank Suor Angela for having shown me the asphalted path of love. Thank you.



Antonino DiSalvo

