

## Report of the working visit in Italy: March 16-19, 2023

Thursday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, we (board members Elsbeth, Tanja and Eljo) left for Polpenazze, Italy, where sister Amatha is staying because of necessary check-ups after her brain surgery (5 years ago) and examinations of her thyroid gland.

Sister Michelle and Sister Maria live in the house there. They are studying in Italy. They also work at a school and for the parish.

We were picked up by Brother Angelo (a very good acquaintance of Sister Amatha from Sri Lanka, who is completing his priestly training), who is also staying in Italy for his studies. It was very nice to see and talk to Sister Amatha again. We received a very warm welcome in the hilltop house in Polpenazze, with a beautiful view of Lake Garda. A delicious meal, homemade pizzas, was waiting for us. We chatted for a while and then quickly went to bed.

The following days we talked quite a lot for longer periods of time. Sister Amatha also told Eljo, our new board member, all about her early days in Sri Lanka and about how and why she became a nun. For Elsbeth and me (Tanja) it was also nice to hear again.

*Amatha graduated as the best in her country. She then received a scholarship to study in Russia. But she knew already then that she wanted to become a nun. She also spent quite some time with the nuns learning everything. She left for Italy when she was 15 and trained as a nun there. She had met an Italian priest in Sri Lanka who had given her his phone number in case she knew someone who wanted to become a nun. She then contacted him. He helped her get a passport and arranged a plane ticket for her. Her parents were very much against her becoming a nun. Her father died when she was 12 years old. He was a minister and Buddhist at the time. Her mother worked in Dubai and she and her brother and sister lived with her grandmother. When she left for Italy, she wrote to her mother who then wanted nothing more to do with her. Fortunately, that all turned out well later. After her education she worked with street children in Italy. Via-via she came into contact with Bishop Gomez. He asked her to come to Sri Lanka to set up care for street children because it had become a huge problem. She returned to Sri Lanka in 2002 to care for street children in Mount Levinia. We came into contact with her through Mr. Jayakody. He was an acquaintance of Mrs. Milhous, who regularly travelled through Sri Lanka with groups as a tour guide. Mrs. Milhous was the first chairman of our foundation. Jayakody also worked in the tourist industry. Sister Amatha then took charge of our home in Pamunugama. She started with 15 children, mostly children who were orphaned after the tsunami.*

### \*Sister Amatha's health:

In the coming weeks sister Amatha will undergo blood tests, an MRI scan, an EEG and a puncture of her thyroid gland. Hopefully she will hear good results and will not have to undergo any new treatments. She will keep us informed.

\*Everything is going well with the sisters in Sri Lanka and in Italy. Sister Amatha is currently training 13 new sisters in Tewatte, Sri Lanka.

\*The walls around the house in Katupotha and Kelaniya have been repaired. The upper part of the outer wall in Kelaniya needs to be painted. Now it is black with moisture mildew. At the moment there are almost no workers available and the materials are very expensive. When she arrives back in Sri Lanka, she will ask what is possible and what the costs will be.

\*Fortunately, sister Amatha was able to buy all the necessary school supplies. A new trimester starts next week. The exams were postponed the last 2 years, first because of corona and now there is no paper in the schools due to the economic crisis. Schools are regularly closed for one or more days. The teachers, doctors and nurses are often on strike because they are only paid half their wages. And that while everything has become so expensive.

\* Every day some young children are cared for in the home in Kelaniya, which is led by the sisters. At noon they can have a meal. The children come from poor families.

\*A new 7-year-old girl has been admitted in Kelaniya this week and 2 new children in Katupotha. The necessary papers have been prepared by the sisters. The children have also been medically examined.

\*During the day, 3 children are taken care of in Kelaniya due to serious problems at home.

\* There is a leak in the kitchen in Katupotha, which needs to be repaired. Sister Amatha will ask for a quote when she returns to Sri Lanka.

\*The eldest girls living in Ja Ela are doing fine. They are very independent and can do almost everything on their own. Occasionally a sister goes there for a few days. They cook, clean the house and maintain the garden.

\*They regularly receive "sewing assignments", which they can perform at home on the special Lock sewing machines we bought for them. They also made all the school clothes and often make other clothes for the girls too. That's great to know. Two of the girls are beauticians and hairdressers. They often work in a salon. They also do the hair of the girls of the homes. At Christmas they also painted all the children's nails, in all kinds of colours. Nice!

One of the girls who has completed university, works in the old people's home of the bishop and there she does the administration. And one girl works as an airport employee.

\*Lanka, one of the first girls who was taken care of after the tsunami, has married. We helped her, financially, to build her house. She has also planted a vegetable garden so that she has her own fruit and vegetables. That is very nice, especially during these difficult times.

Situation in Sri Lanka:

Unfortunately, despite the IMF extending the first instalment of a EUR 2.9 billion loan, conditional on raising prices and taxes, the crisis is only getting worse. Food, petrol,

electricity, medicines, etc., are becoming more and more expensive. Medicines are also becoming increasingly scarce. Operations cannot be performed due to lack of anaesthetics. Poor children cannot go to school because they have no money for school supplies. Extreme poverty is everywhere. It is even known that entire families have committed suicide. A horrible situation.

The rice fields are disappearing because there is no money to use biological pesticides, as the law now requires them to do. Sons don't want to take over the rice fields. The same goes for the tea plantations. The fishermen are also having a hard time, because they don't get enough petrol and they can't afford it either. Many highly educated people move abroad. It's quite hopeless. The situation can only change if elections are held. But this government is not going to call new elections.

There is also a lot more theft now.

Fortunately, our children do not have to go hungry. They regularly make food packages to distribute to the people who have nothing or almost nothing. They also bring extra food to school for the children who do not have any food with them.

Kloetinge, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2023