



# They call me a saint

**“They call me a saint,”** says Revd Maria do Carmo Moreira Lima, NMA for the Methodist Church in Brazil. She adds, “Although I try and demystify this notion, I look to lead them in the best way, as if they were my own children.”

Maria’s ‘children’ are young people held at three young offenders’ institutes in Belford Roxo, in the state of Rio de Janeiro, and Bangu, a neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro City. In a country where the age of criminal responsibility for some crimes was lowered from 18 to 16 in 2015, the work Maria does with these young people is essential for showing them the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

The environment within these institutes often does not foster rehabilitation and restoration, so part of Maria’s work has been to be an advocate for young offenders and seek an improvement to their living conditions. Since last year Maria has helped improve the diet offered to young offenders, fostered better relations between them and their officers and encouraged the building of a family reception centre where young offenders’ mothers and families who come to visit can be received.

Violent and often fatal gang warfare that takes place outside of young offenders’ institutes frequently continues inside when rival gangs are forced to live together. “A major challenge is to develop pastoral work with different gangs at the same institution,” says Maria. “Employees are afraid that detainees will act with violence, but they have shown me great respect and they have had exemplary behaviour in all activities.” God is using Maria as a shining light in a violent, dark environment to bring peace, reconciliation and hope.

# Hope for Teens

**Hope for Teens** is a programme managed by Methodist Church Ghana

Hope for Teens started in 2012 to help girls who had dropped out of school due to lack of funds or teenage pregnancy. This vocational training and support from their peers offer hope, new skills and knowledge to improve their standard of living and their life expectations.

Dr Bunmi Olayisade, World Church Relationships Partnership Coordinator for Africa tells us, "As at March 2016 during my visit to Accra, there were 18 female students in catering, sewing, bead/hat making and hairdressing classes under the National Vocational Training Institute Certificate courses.

"Joanna Akyeampong is the Programme Coordinator with a passion to help these vulnerable girls. She teaches them etiquette and good discipline in addition to their skills. She is an active member of the Methodist Church and works with other trainers. She hopes a few of the promising students will eventually become trainers so as to inspire other participants.

"I had the privilege of speaking with the girls and their instructors and they were very inspiring and grateful for the opportunity. The quality of their displayed work was very good and a few of them mentioned pursuing their career at the Police Catering department which was good news. One of the girls wanted to start her own tailoring business if her relatives could buy her a sewing machine.

"I believe this programme will go a long way in alleviating poverty, empowering young ladies, discouraging exploitation of vulnerable girls and promoting the church's positive influence as it shares the love of Christ in word and action in its society."



# Inter faith dialogue in Pakistan

A story from Steve Pearce, World Church Relationships Partnership Coordinator for Asia and the Pacific.

Pakistan is not an easy place to be a Christian. There are 192 million people living in Pakistan, 97% of whom are Muslims. It's a difficult place for many Muslims too. Shia Muslims are outnumbered five to one by Sunni Muslims, while the Ahmadi Muslims form only two per cent of the population – and the law says they are not Muslims at all.

Poverty is also a problem, with 60% of the population living on less than \$2 a day. Most women are illiterate (around 55%) and girls continue to get less access to school education than boys.

Islam and Christianity are both religions of peace, yet conflict in Pakistan is frequent. Often it seems that religion is a cause of dissent rather than harmony, even though the Holy Koran teaches: "Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion" (109:6). Similarly in the Bible we read Micah's vision of peace, when "... all people will walk every one in the name of his god..." (Micah 4:5 KJV).

Understanding each other and talking together is a matter of life and death in this situation.

Jennifer Jag Jivan shines like a star in what sometimes feels like a dark place. She is passionate about dialogue and through her work at the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi she helps Muslims and Christians to understand each other a little better and find ways of enjoying each other's presence in Pakistan, rather than resenting it. Every single small encounter in this work can change many lives. Sometimes it feels even more powerful than that, as this encounter shows:

At a recent three-day training workshop on peace-building, two individuals from one of the big Islamic organisations attended. One of them approached Jennifer to request her to give inter faith and peace-building training to others in his denomination. Some of those religious leaders each have responsibility for as many as 200 madrassahs (Islamic religious schools), and hundreds or thousands of followers.

A request not without danger. But if you shine like a star, good things will happen.

