

## Responding to the Signs of the Times (Continued)

born. As Peter says, “The reason I admire the sisters so much is because they represent continuity and I would like to help them continue!”

**Collaboration:** This is the new model for mission and ministry. In many cases, it is no longer necessary nor effective for religious communities to found and run multiple outreach ministries and schools on their own. In collaborative efforts, we can partner with other religious congregations, organizations and foundations and expand the mission beyond what any one of the collaborators could do alone. This is what is happening in Andhra Pradesh with the Divi Seema Foundation, local women and Cluny Sisters.

Peter Winchester founded the Divi Seema Foundation to help improve the lives of the poorest people in these areas. He does that through supporting the work of Cluny Sisters. With the involvement of the sisters who provide accountability, the foundation assists at a very practical and local level with the assurance that funds go directly to the neediest. Through observing, listening to and reflecting with the local women, the collaboration extends to those who are actually in need. It is their voice that is most important, for those who have the need are closest to it and understand it best. As those in need collaborate, they can also hone skills and avail of assistance to solve their problems. They become empowered.

**Empowerment:** One aspect of empowerment of the local women involves coordinating women’s saving account groups. It only takes 10 or 15 local women to agree to deposit a small amount of money in a common fund. The Divi Seema Foundation then matches those savings allowing the women to take out small loans, create small businesses, and better their lives. Currently, there are approximately 3,000 women involved. The sisters run nursery schools and child care to enable the mothers to work, and older children to continue their education.

The Divi Seema Foundation also supports the sisters in their work of empowering children through the hostels and education they provide along with the Children’s Parliaments. In this program focusing on education, awareness and cooperation, children learn to cooperate with one another, voice the needs they see in their villages or towns, report those needs to



Photos: Courtesy of Divi Seema Foundation

Sister Grace Antonysam with Peter Winchester

their parents who take them to the local government agencies to advocate for action.

The foundation also supports the sisters’ nutrition programs which encourage better diets and raising vegetable gardens. In this collaborative effort, the women then help one another and share the fruits of their labors.

This relationship of encounter, collaboration and empowerment has to date made a difference in approximately 6,000 families. To really get a better idea of this dynamic relationship between the local women and children, the Cluny Sisters and the Divi Seema Foundation, watch the trilogy of films available at <http://www.diviseemafoundation.org/film/>

Divi Seema (16:13 mins)

Benefits of Cooperation (5:37 mins)

Divi Seema: Voices of Women (22:43 mins)

Their latest progress can be seen at: <http://www.diviseemafoundation.org/contact-dontations/>

Their latest newsletter is available at: <http://www.diviseemafoundation.org/newsletter/>