



Cluny Sisters in Ghana in the Province of West Africa

Sister Regina Brunelle

Strong family ties supported Anne Marie Javouhey, the founder of the Cluny Sisters, from the moment she first became aware of her call. Her whole enterprise quickly became a family effort as she set about repairing the ravages of the French Revolution upon both the family and the Christian Faith. It's no wonder then, that Cluny Sisters world-wide are so interested in supporting Christian families to the point of making it one of the four key areas of our global concerns ministry.

The sisters in Barra, Ghana noticed the effects on the family of migration and emigration in their area. Unemployment forced men and younger folk to leave to find work and a better way of life, leaving the women and young children behind. Although existing ministries through the school and Cluny Associates already provided good options for supporting families, the Sisters felt more was needed.

In response, they began "Javouhey Family" as a way of helping people who remain become part of an extended family when their other family members are forced to leave the villages. Monthly meetings for adults, youths and children forge new relationships among them as participants delve into the story of Blessed Anne Marie's family. What made it strong enough to withstand the challenges of the Revolution? How can this family become a model for them two centuries later in a very different situation and culture from their own? What role did the faith of the Javouhey family play in giving them strength and the capacity to resist the negative effects of their political reality? They reflect on how the Javouhey family lived Christianity: their virtues and values; their practices of prayer, Scripture reading, and Sunday liturgy; their outreach to the poor and abandoned. Special celebrations like the feast of Blessed Anne Marie on July 15 are opportunities for

the children to impress their elders by expressing their gifts for drama and song in a play after Mass, followed by a traditional African meal together.

Secondly, the sisters decided to increase their visits to families in the outlying villages as a way to become more aware of the many problems facing families today and perhaps help them deal with some of them. Mario's story is a case in point.

Mario went blind as a young child. He would come to the door of the nursery school in his village but always refused to go inside. Having made friends with the Sisters, his family eventually allowed them to bring him to the school in Barra. He is now in Grade 5 and doing very well. "How did things go?" the Sisters asked after the National Exam. "Like drinking water!" Mario replied. In fact, he did very well. Unable to get him into the Serrekunda School for the Blind for lack of a place to stay, the Sisters found him a Braille teacher locally. He is well on his way to becoming a self-reliant young man able to care for himself and his family.

The Barra Community's decision to focus on the family has transformed its ministry. Not only does this focus uncover real needs that can often be addressed, but especially it is *the* opportunity to express solidarity with the people with whom the Sisters share their lives. They cannot always solve the problems raised by dire poverty, disease, or bereavement, but SOMETIMES they can help! More important, though, is the effect of their commitment to the people among whom they live.

Responding to the General Chapter's call for a deeper focus on families, the sisters decided to find yet other ways to support them.

Thanks to Sr. Christine Fefegula, principal at St. Matthew's School in Barra, the school, permeated by a joyful atmosphere that fosters commitment,

[Continued on Page 7](#)