

**Anne-Marie Javouhey and the Holy Will of God:  
A Spirituality for our Time ... Part 3**  
by Regina Brunelle, SJC

*In our previous articles on this topic, we have taken a look at how Anne Marie listened to God's call and lived it out. She found God in prayer, in those around her, and in the events in which she found herself. She believed in being in touch with her times, reading its signs, and responding to its needs by helping the most disadvantaged and by creating new structures of freedom and empowerment. In this interview with Sister Ruth Montrichard, a Cluny Sister of the Province of the West Indies, we see Blessed Anne Marie's love of children and her desire to give them a holistic education being realized in the Service Volunteered for All (SERVOL).*

On January 26, 1836, six French Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny disembarked in Trinidad to begin a long history of quality education in the West Indies. Like their founder, these women were convinced of the dignity and worth of each individual child. This conviction became the foundation of their successful methodology. Although there are fewer Sisters in the schools now, their dedication to forming the whole person through quality education is as vital as ever. One remarkable response to new needs in the West Indies is SERVOL, the brainchild of Fr. Gerard Pantin, CSSp. Very early on in the project Fr. Pantin sought the collaboration of Sister Ruth Montrichard, SJC. In 1993, Sr. Ruth replaced Fr. Pantin as director. She graciously agreed to be interviewed via e-mail by Cluny Connections.

**CC** Sr. Ruth, how would you describe Servol's philosophy?

**Sr. Ruth** The organization's philosophy of attentive listening, respectful intervention and lack of cultural arrogance entwines itself in every project. Servol never tells people what they should do or want. We always ask, "How can I help you?" And the response often develops into a project in which there is mutual respect and a system of working with people rather than for them. We never do for people what they can do for themselves; they must contribute in cash or kind to their own development.



Two happy SERVOL participants

**CC** In 1970, Servol was just a grassroots organization trying to help youngsters build a basketball court and run a primitive nursery school. How extensive is the organization today?

**Sr. Ruth** Servol now administers 82 Early Childhood Centers, 11 Skill-Training Centers, 20 Adolescent Development Centers, 9 Junior Life Centers and an Advanced Skill - Training Center. These skills centers range from basic carpentry to sophisticated electronics.

**CC** We know that every trainee accepted at a center must follow the Adolescent Development Program. Would you elaborate on this program?

**Sr. Ruth** The ADP is a pre-requisite for entering a skill-training course. It is a human development program which helps the many young people who enter the organization with low self-esteem and a sense of failure and hopelessness. All have dropped out of the school system or didn't do well in it. They come from one parent homes and situations of poverty and some have already flirted with drugs and criminal activity. The effect of this program on young people in three and a half months is remarkable. Because of its success, the program has now been adopted by other Caribbean Islands such as Grenada and Dominica (started by Sr. Reina Loe Sack Sioe, SJC), St. Lucia (started by the Presentation Brothers), the Bahamas (started by the Roman Catholic Diocese), Guyana and Jamaica (run by the Mercy Sisters) and as far away as South Africa and Ireland.

**CC** That certainly represents astounding growth! Is the ADP successful with every student?

**Sr. Ruth** Students deemed not yet ready to move into skills-training are asked to repeat the ADP in another center where they are given special help. Once trainees complete their ADP, they enter the skill-training center where they are given basic training in their skill. They are also given literacy and computer literacy skills and do a period of job training to help prepare them for the world of work. Many of them obtain full-time employment after their job training experience.



SERVOL trainees hard at work

**CC** From where do you draw staff to collaborate with you in this venture?

**Sr. Ruth** Most of the staff came and still come from the local communities in which the centers are located. Many of them were among the local population requesting a center. These dedicated women and men all go through a period of training in the Servol philosophy and methodology before beginning work with the young people. Servol administers an Early Childhood Teacher Training Center that caters to young teachers from Trinidad and other Caribbean Islands. Many of these come on scholarship. More often than not, these student teachers end up joining our staff.

**CC** Does Servol administer every one of the many centers scattered through the Islands?

**Sr. Ruth** Each Servol center is administered by a local Board of Education whose members are also an important addition to staff. They take the responsibility to work with us to empower the young people and adults of the different areas. Their efforts bring hope

and a sense of achievement to the poor and disadvantaged in the communities and empower them to climb out of the pit of poverty and hopelessness towards a future as responsible, employable and caring people.

**CC** What do you think is the secret of Servol's success?

**Sr. Ruth** What has most drawn attention to our organization is its collaborative methods. These have been praised by and applied in many countries. The methods have also resulted in wonderful support from a variety of sources. In 1994, the Inter-American Development Bank gave Servol a grant to enable the organization to set up three Hi Tech centers so that all Servol trainees could take advantage of computer literacy and electronics programs. This grant was enhanced by a further grant from Microsoft Corporation that enabled us to add computer labs to three of our skilltraining centers and upgrade our operating systems and software programs. Thanks to the Microsoft grant, all students can now follow basic computer literacy training.

**CC** One last question, Sr. Ruth. If you could have one wish about Servol come true, what would it be?

**Sr. Ruth** By her example more than by her words, Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey taught that the call of current events and situations bespeaks the will of God. Surely, she smiles upon this creative answer to the very real educational problems of many young people in the Caribbean and elsewhere.