

# SSJs Note 20 Years in Brazil Missions

In December 1964, the Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph began their work in Brazil.

Vatican II was still in session. From the beginning of the Brazilian venture, the council's visions and new directions were to have a great influence on the Sisters' activities.

Added to this was the prophetic stance of the Latin American Church at Medellin in 1968, and at Puebla in 1979, which urged Christians to opt for a stance alongside the poor. There also was the Conference of Brazilian Bishops consistently taking stands denouncing injustices and offering new pastoral directions.

"Such a dynamic Church has demanded corresponding changes in our missionary presence," said Sister Katherine Popowich, a member of the first group to arrive in Brazil. "In response," she said, "we have taken new directions in ministry, have moved into formation of Brazilian candidates for our congregation, have expanded to new and needier areas, and have assumed lifestyles in the midst of the people."

In the beginning, the Sisters took on leadership roles — as school principals in the public school system, in pastoral activities, and in health and social works. Gradually, however, they have moved towards identifying and developing the leadership in the people.

At present there are 12 Sisters of St. Joseph from Rochester and three Brazilian candidates who live in three states, in four dioceses,

...the Church in Latin America is searching for its own identity, an identity it may never have had, built as it was on European traditions. The challenge of the missionary today is to help in this search, not as one who has all the answers, but as one walking with the Lord in the very way He Himself walked — the way of compassion, dedication and humility.

— Sister Rosalma Hayes  
(on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the founding of the missions, 1974)



Sister Katherine, left, and Sister Suzanne relax at the edge of Araguaia River, where Sister Suzanne washes her clothes and her dishes.

spanning thousands of miles, working in a variety of ministries.

In Goias, they work in solidarity with the laundry women (women who wash the clothing of the rich, beating the fabrics on rocks by the river) and rural workers in their organizing efforts to achieve just wages and proper working conditions.

In the large cities of Uberlandia and Goiana, the

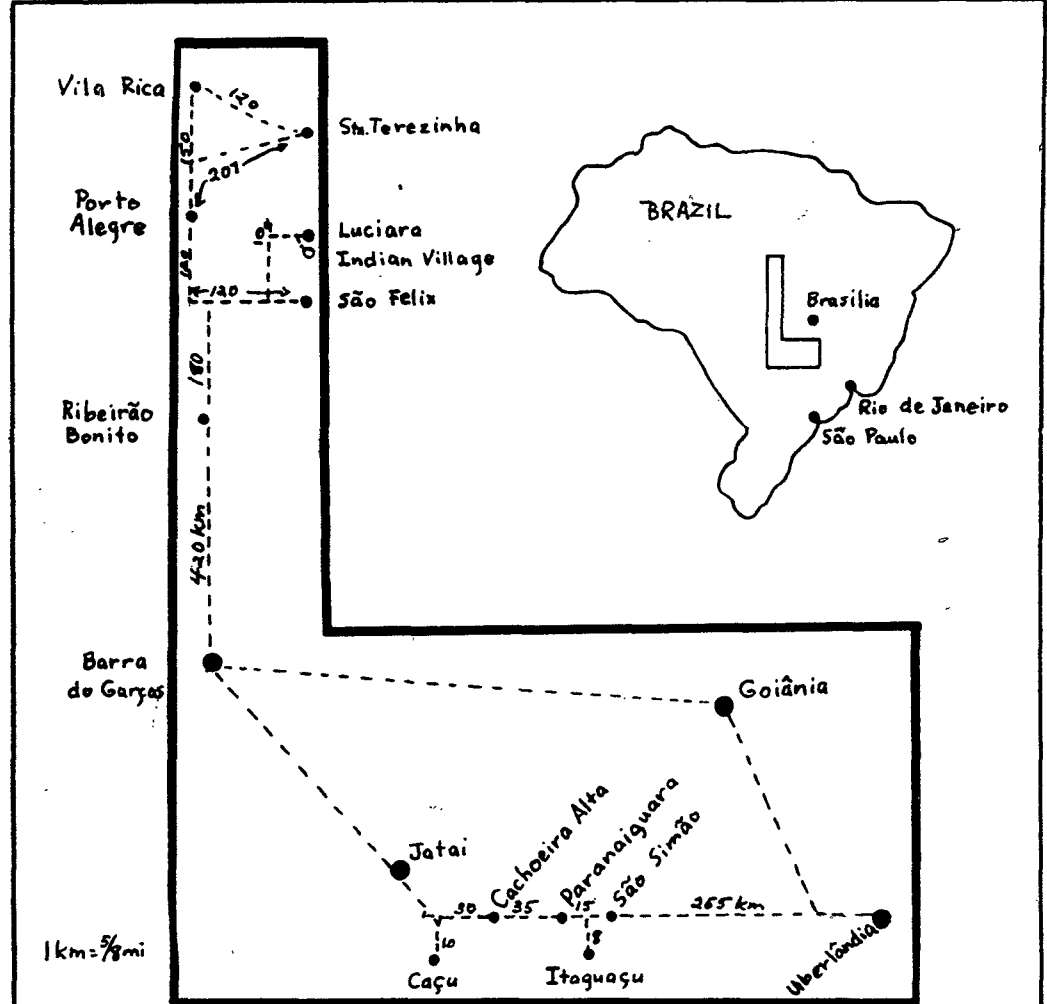
Sisters have worked with neighborhood associations to establish daycare centers.

In Matto Grasso, the Sisters have accompanied the squatters in their efforts to legalize titles to the land that has been long cultivated by them.

In general, the ministry at this time seems to consist in accompanying the people in their efforts to organize, all the while trying to respect the people's own initiatives.

The Sisters from Brazil report that at "all levels of the Church we encourage participation of the people through reflection groups and assemblies. They are becoming more involved in establishing criteria for baptism, confirmation, religious education programs and topics for group reflection."

Sister Katherine further commented that "from the very beginning we have felt caught up in the dynamism of



## Sisters in Brazil

The Rochester Sisters of St. Joseph and their missions in Brazil are: Sisters Catherine Foos, Elaine Hollis and Katherine Popowich, Uberlandia; Sisters Dolores Turner and Ellen Kuhl, Goiana; Sisters Marlena Roeber, Maureen Finn, Patricia Frisk, Cachoeira Alta-Cacu; Sister Barbara Orczyk, Itaguacu; Sister Christel Burgmaier, Paranaiguara; Sister Jean Bellini, Ribeirão Bonito; Sister Suzanne Wills, Vila Rica. In addition, the three postulants are Joane Alves Mendes, Anadir Pereira da Silva, and Ireny da Silva.

this Church that is reflecting the realities of our times and creating new responses, new relationships within this reality. Many times, we have felt stretched and stripped as we sought to grow into newness with this Church, with our people."

A celebration of the 20 years is scheduled to take place Friday, Dec. 7 in Paranaiguara, Brazil.

Sister Elizabeth Anne LeValley, superior general, and Sister Rosalma Hayes, first superior and director of the congregation's mission in Brazil, left Rochester recently to be present at these ceremonies.



Sisters Jean, left, and Marlena ready dinner in the backyard of the house at Cacu.



Anadir explains some of the medicines to her friend Fatima.



Sister Ellen visits a neighbor who spins thread.



Sister Jean Bellini stops to chat with a laundry lady in Ribeirão Bonito.



Sister Ellen, left, teaches in a rural school.

## Words of Friends

Following are words of testimonial from Brazilians who have known the Sister-missioners:

Roseno (a teacher in Paranaiguara): "I feel their lives are much more within the reality of the world, much more inserted among the people. And this does not take them away from God."

Iraci (who in 1965 met the Sisters as a very poor woman whose husband was quite ill): "Initially, they had campaigns to help the poor; I was one of the poor, so I came to know them. They are the way I thought of religious, helping the needy, inserted among the people. They announce the gospel in a practical way, that is, they treat everyone equally, respecting the rights of each one."

Gercina (who in 1965 was a second-grader in Paranaiguara, and is now president of the Worker's Party in Uberlandia): "After the youth groups, our relationship began to change; not so much a receiving relationship as a mutuality, and exchange of friendship, books, ideas. What has remained with me from this time is a love for humanity. I learned this from them."

Antonia Dias (who was a child of 8 in 1965): "...I remember the day they arrived at the Chapel in Palmito; the women all in black; I was fascinated. I had never seen a Religious... When you first came, you were more reserved — probably due to your own culture; now that is so different. You are people with the people. It has been a beautiful transformation that I have accompanied closely... your desire to be with the people... You organized works, then let the people take over — literacy programs, schools. When you arrived, few people were conscious of the socio-economic situation of the country. You gave them an awareness of their rights and duties that they did not have. Your influence in evangelization helped the people to see a world wider than Cachoeira Alta."