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'Hope&Joy' in South Africa: The beginning of the program

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Oct. 11, 2011 NCR Today

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Earlier this year, I was invited by our community of Daughters of St. Paul in Johannesburg, South Africa, to take part in a two-year program running up to the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second Vatican Council.

Pope John XXIII announced his intention to call for a council Jan. 25, 1959, a mere three months into his pontificate. He convoked the council on Oct. 11, 1962, and Pope Paul VI closed the council Dec. 8, 1965.

The program is titled "Hope&Joy," drawn from the opening words of the final document of Vatican II, "Gaudium et spes," or "The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World." This document was not envisioned or planned before the council convened like the others, but emerged from the work and input of the council participants, and, one might surmise, their associates and consultants and the Holy Spirit. It was promulgated on Dec. 7, 1965, one day before the end of the Second Vatican Council. (I am not sure yet why they chose hope and joy rather than the exact translation "joy and hope.")

I arrived in Johannesburg on Oct. 2, and on Oct. 5 began a series of presentations and workshops on media, communication, culture and evangelization in the modern world, since these themes describe the charism of the Daughters of St. Paul. This series is sponsored by my community as their contribution to the "Hoe&Joy" initiatives being carried out but a network of laity, religious communities and clergy who are dedicating time and resources to re-launch the "aggiornamento" begun by Vatican II.

In a couple of days I will interview Raymond Perrier, head of projects for the Jesuit Institute in Johannesburg and the father of "Hope&Joy." The fact that this project seems to be the only

one in existence in the world one year out from the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Vatican II seems quite remarkable to me ? especially when Perrier himself was born a year after the council ended. I met him Saturday at the "Hope&Joy Festival" and I am looking forward to this interview.

This is my third visit to South Africa. In 2004, I came for an international meeting of SIGNIS [1], the world Catholic organization for communication in Cape Town. I arrived a few days early in Johannesburg and gave a lecture series at St. Augustine College, the Catholic University of South Africa, and spoke to groups of Catholic school teachers and laity on media literacy education, or media mindfulness, as we like to call it within the context of faith formation.

At that time I visited Soweto, the township where the end of apartheid (pronounced apart-hate) began. Soweto has now turned into a major tourist attraction, and rightly so, especially if one wants to trace the events that led up to Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1991 and universal elections in 1994. It's extremely moving to make that pilgrimage to Soweto. Today, there are 20 Catholic parishes alone in the old embattled township created for blacks.

In 2007, I returned to participate in the World Summit on Media and Children in Johannesburg at the Nelson Mandela convention center and a SIGNIS meeting on media literacy education. I also had the privilege to speak to graduate students and catechists about faith and media.

The truth is, I fell in love with South Africa after seeing Richard Attenborough's 1987 film, "Cry Freedom". It stars Denzel Washington as Steve Biko and Kevin Kline as Donald Woods, the journalist who came to believe in Biko and who became a major force in bringing down apartheid. That movie rocked my world and changed my vision of meaningful discipleship as a Daughter of St. Paul.

I read the book "Biko" written by Donald Woods (1933-2001), a Catholic, and then went on to read everything he had ever published. I even managed to invite him to come and speak to our provincial house and novitiate community gratis when he was on a speaking tour in the US in 1990. He was amazing.

Visiting the prison on Robbin Island in 2004, where Nelson Mandela and others were imprisoned for so long, was sobering and inspiring. Our guide was a former prisoner.

I feel privileged and blessed to have had the opportunity to visit South Africa three times; it seems like a miracle to me.

Up next: A little bit on the culture of South Africa and its recent changes.

Sr. Rose Pacatte, NCR's film reviewer and media critic, is traveling in South Africa this month. Periodically, she will be sending stories from South Africa and reflections on her trip. Below is a slideshow of photos she's taken on the trip.

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[1] http://www.signis.net