



A year of living in Sicily: the dream has become a reality

The Sicily Migrant Project of the UISG, born from the executive committee's desire to enact a symbolic gesture in response to Pope Francis' call and begun last December, is now a reality. A community of 10 sisters is involved in the three dioceses of Agrigento, Caltagirone and Caltanissetta with the commitment to **be a presence** among the migrants, and to **witness** in the local Church that it is possible to live together though being of different cultures, countries, congregations and charisms, and become a **bridge** between the local community and the migrant population.

For 9 long months the sisters have taken the time to build community within and be discretely involved, tiptoeing into the local reality, listening, taking time to observe, and study the problems of immigration and get to know the territory. It was a wonderful but austere time that required patience, perseverance, continuous attention to the small signs of dialogue and openness by the people of the place and the institutions, while making initial contact with the migrants along the streets.

They themselves are migrants in a foreign land ... but this very lived experience was the first step toward real integration and a truer understanding of the reality lived by thousands of brothers and sisters searching for a more dignified and human life. In fact, they are more sensitive and attentive to the suffering and difficulties of those landing in a foreign country, having personally experienced, and in a certain sense lived in their own flesh and blood, what it means to feel like the foreigner who is not always wanted or who is barely tolerated by some of the services in which they thought they could be involved.

Little by little the sisters discretely involved themselves in the reality and are now affectionately called “the sisters of the world”. They created relationships, setting up networks, walking the streets and meeting the migrants who do not have the right to be welcomed by the State structures.

Their speaking various languages facilitates contact and often allows the creation of gratuitous relationships, listening to the terrible stories in which the migrants landing along the coast of Sicily are victims.

The seed cast out in the phase of silent and hidden getting to know the situation is now beginning to bear fruit. Various doors are opening, even within some of the Institutions. In the three dioceses the sisters are being involved in **hospitals**, in **prisons**, and in the Caritas Listening Centers. They serve food at the soup kitchens for the poor, where work is being done for integration between the poor people of the place and the foreigners: people who have the need to be considered worthy of respect and consideration. Often the sisters are called to accompany times of prayer and reflection in some of the welcoming communities.

In Agrigento the doors to the **Center of Welcome** and identification were opened to the sisters to dialogue with the women and minors waiting to be relocated.

“The harvest is great and the workers few”... Jesus said to his disciples ... pray that God send workers to the harvest. Two sisters left us during the summer, but another two new sisters arrived: an Italian and one coming from the United States. They are all brought together by the same passion for God and humanity. They all come with years of missionary experience, but there are only ten... It would be great if the number would become 12 like the 12 apostles....

We hope this project does not remain an isolated one, but a stimulus for other inter-congregational experiences so that together we may respond to the challenges that the globalized world is imposing on mission today.

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