

Community of
St Mary the Virgin



St Mary's Convent, Wantage
Our Overseas Links 2019



Malagasy mother and child

Community of St Mary the Virgin, St Mary's Convent, Denchworth Road, Wantage OX12 9AU

Dear Friends,

What a privilege it was to be invited by the Anglican Sisters' religious community in Madagascar - the Society of the Servants of Jesus Christ, FMJK, founded in 1985 - to attend the Solemn Profession for Life of Sr Isabelle & Sr Odette. It was a pleasure to have our Associate Michele Foot accompany me for the week, and both of us were delighted by the Sisters' friendliness & generous hospitality. When we left we both felt that we had stayed much longer than seven days: we had absorbed so much enriching experience.

Their simplicity of life and worship I found very challenging & the service of Profession followed by Holy Communion was inspiring. It was a joy to be able to join the Sisters as they 'processed' into the church singing a spiritual song & gently swaying to its rhythm, and also to be part of such a large gathering of deep devotion. Many, many people received Communion; a large number of them were young mothers or fathers carrying a baby in their arms; then there followed another long line made up of young people who were each given a blessing. The whole unhurried experience of praying and singing and listening - trying to intuit the Malagasy meaning, including the notices and speeches - altogether lasted 5 hours. We felt gathered in and blessed by the sustained sense of worship.



It was also a joy to be able to wander in and around the rural area where the Sisters are living and working, as we walked on red earth with its pot-holes and crevices, which yoked bullocks pulling heavy wooden carts negotiated much more skilfully than we did. Many local people gave us cheerful smiles and greetings and made us feel welcome. It was impressive to see the Sisters working with individuals from a well-filled waiting room in the local dispensary, whilst other Sisters were cooking on charcoal and serving a midday meal to a large group of needy, hungry children. This is fitted into their daily rhythm of corporate daily prayer on behalf of the church and world, as well as combined with the cooking and cleaning, washing and gardening that is entirely dependent on the limited rainfall to supply their water tank. There are 3 young women in the Community's novitiate – those learning to live the religious life – one of whom teaches in a local primary school. All conveyed a sense of deep commitment to the life of prayer.



Hasina Convent, Ambohidratrimo



Malagasy farm land

As we Sisters CSMV enter into Advent to anticipate the gift of new birth in the Spirit for each one of us, I want to give thanks for the courage of the people in countries that CSMV has had strong links with; I want to continue to be mindful of the imaginative caring, with limited resources, for young and old who are deprived of the many conveniences and comforts that it is so easy to take for granted in the West. May Christmas awaken us to new ways in our own neighbourhood or work place or church life of bringing care and support to those feeling isolated or lacking a sense of self-worth.

With kind regards,

Stella CSMV



Pineapple crops



Sr Isabelle (left) and Sr Jacqueline (right) with a dispensary patient

Thank you to all who have kindly contributed funds to support the overseas work referred to in the 2018 edition.

If anyone would like to visit any of the projects or to offer to be a volunteer, especially at Epiphany School, Pune, please do contact Sister Stella at St Mary's Convent and she will put you in touch with a key person.

The Society of St Mary the Virgin in Pune, India

Henry Khisty Administrator SSMVI and Associate of CSMV



Sister Stella and the Chair of Trustees
Alastair Hunter on a visit to Pune in
November 2017

Good wishes and Greetings to all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. All our Board members join me in sending their good wishes to Sister Stella, Mr Alastair Hunter and Sister Valeria and the entire community of CSMV. It gives me immense pleasure to present the Annual Report of SSMVI and its Units for the year 2017-18. At the out-set with a heavy heart I regret to inform you that our honourable Chairman Mr. B. W. Roberts passed away on 12th April 2018. His funeral service was held in St. Mary's Church, Pune on 14th April 2018. Various heads of institutions and his past students, friends and family offered rich tributes to Mr. B. W. Roberts. Our Society also organized a condolence meeting on 27th April 2018. May his soul rest in peace. Our Society members Rev. Sojwal and Dr Mrs. Onawale are still unwell and confined to the house. Kindly remember them in your prayers.

The schools reopened on 15th June 2018 for the new academic year 2018-19. All the schools did extremely well in the Secondary school certificate examination.

A brief report of the activities of all our Units:

St Hilda's Pre-Primary, Primary and High School

The above mentioned are Marathi medium schools for girls.

- a) The Pre Primary section has 30 students, it is managed by the Head and a teacher.
- b) The Primary school is Government aided and consists of classes from 1st to 4th. The strength of the school is 147. At present 7 teachers are managing the affairs of the school including the Head Mistress.
- c) The strength of St. Hilda's High School is 467. The school faired extremely well in the Secondary School certificate examination. 106 students appeared for the exam and 81 were declared successful. The total passing percentage was 71.2%. Arpita Waghmare came first in the school with a score of 85.2%.

Mrs. Kalpana Kalkoti retired on 30th September, 2017. Mrs. Martha Gaikwad has been appointed as Head Mistress with effect from 1st October 2017. The teachers constantly strive to stay updated by attending various workshops and training programmes. The school organised various programmes during the year like Yoga Day, Independence Day, Republic Day, Thanksgiving Day etc. The school is conducting many competitive exams every year for enriching the knowledge of the children. We are grateful to our Donors and well wishers

for their generous donations. We have installed an E learning system in all the classes with the help of Amphenol Interconnect India Pvt Ltd. The computer room was renovated and a printer was donated by Mr. Jan Soblam. The teachers and other staff members contribute from their own salaries and pay for the transportation and uniforms of the students. We plan to upgrade the technology in Science Laboratory, Computer room and classes.

Epiphany School

The strength of the students is 720. The school achieved excellent results in the S.S.C. examination. The percentage of passing is 98.18%. 55 students appeared and 54 were declared successful. Prasanna Sonawane came top with 88.4% marks. The school along with magnificent academic results showed remarkable progress in various extra-curriculum activities. Four school teams took part in "JUST FOR KICKS" - a prestigious all India Football league tournament for both boys and girls. The School took part in "Voice and Choice" a reputed student leadership competition held in Pune. The school won the competition making our student-council one of the best student bodies of the city. The students of Epiphany took part in a broadcast of All India Radio, where they recited poems about the importance of respect and love towards parents.

We have undertaken the work of roof-repair and are painting the entire building internally and externally. M/s Amphenol Interconnect (I) Pvt. Ltd has funded the entire cost of the project.

St John's Home for Women and Children



St John's Home takes care of elderly Women and children. At present there are 18 elderly women, and 4 children are being taken care of in the crèche. During the last year 5 residents of the Home passed away and 3 residents left the home due to serious illness. Some institutions have sponsored a few of the residents.

Daily prayer meetings are conducted in the home at 8.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. Every Thursday at 7.00 p.m. a Holy

Communion Service takes place for the residents who are house bound. A team of Doctors from "Help Age India" visit the Home once a fortnight and provide medical help to the residents. On 8th March 2018 "World Women's Day" was celebrated by Helpage India in St. John's Home. Capita India Pvt Ltd and St. Mary's Girls School help the home in many ways.

St Mary's Convent Shanti Sadan School, Lonavala

This is an English Medium co-educational school. The total strength of the students is 227. The school is managed by 20 teaching and non teaching staff. 21 students appeared for the S.S.C. examination and 17 were declared successful. The passing percentage was 81%. Ashraf Halwari stood 1st among the students with a score of 85.8%. As I mentioned in my previous report the strength of the students is not increasing. The reason can be attributed to the stiff competition from nearby schools which provide better facilities. However efforts are being made to increase the number. The former principal Ms. Veena Parmar's extension period ended on 31st May 2018. We have appointed Mrs. Ruth Dussa as the new principal of the school.

St Michael's Hostel

This is a hostel which takes care of girls who are under-privileged and belong to the marginalized class. Many of them are orphans, street children and children of single parents. At present there are 138 girls but the admission process is underway and the number will certainly increase. This year 12 girls appeared for S.S.C. examination, 10 were declared successful, the passing percentage was 83%. We renovated the hostel building last year and this year we have been able to renovate the kitchen of the hostel with the help of M/s Amphenol Interconnect (I) Pvt Ltd.



There is a success story of Aaishwarya Ghagre. Her mother died when she was 4 years old. There was no one in the family to take care of her, and so her father admitted her to our hostel. Kindernothilfe, Germany sponsored her. Aaishwarya continued her education and passed 10th and 12th std successfully. Thereafter she completed her General Nursing Midwifery Course of three and half years and at present she is working as a nurse in the State of Rajasthan. She has become self reliant and independent. This is the success story of Aaishwarya.

In conclusion I would like to express my sincere thanks to Sister Stella, Mr. Alastair Hunter and all the sisters of CSMV Wantage for their support, guidance and prayers. I would also like to thank our late Chairman Mr. B. W. Roberts, Secretary Dr. Mary Samuel, Treasurer Mr. N. J. Waikar and all Board members for their constant help, guidance and encouragement. The support of SSMVI Community and God's blessing has enabled me to shoulder the

responsibility assigned to me with utmost honesty and sincerity.

I thank and praise God for guiding and leading me to uphold the legacy of CSMV Wantage enshrined in SSMVI Pune India.

October 2018 update

The renovation of the St Michael's Hostel is complete. Last year we renovated the old building. This year that work was completed along with the kitchen area. Secondly, we have repaired and painted the entire building of Epiphany School.

The funding for both projects was provided by Mr Robert John, who is Director & CEO of M/s Amphenol Interconnect (I) Pvt Ltd. The company have also gifted us a Christmas tree and sports medals for the girls. We are extremely grateful to him.

Henry Khisty

Epiphany School, Pune Sangeeta Kadam, Principal

Epiphany School caters for students from low-income families, who lack access to the same educational opportunities as others. The students have difficult backgrounds where they are battling financial and emotional crunches. Epiphany High School not only taps these students of immense potential, it aims to develop and culture the social and emotional growth of the students. They are encouraged to develop their skills, along with their knowledge, so that they can contribute positively to their families and their communities.

Along with magnificent academic results, the students show tremendous performance in various extra-curricular activities in and around Pune.

Four teams from our school took part in Just for Kicks, a prestigious all-India football league tournament for both boys and girls. Regular coaching and various training sessions were conducted to train the teams for the league tournament. The boys, continuing their previous records, gave a tough fight to the finalists. Both the girls' teams were lauded for their immense growth. The entire school was inspired by the girls' perseverance and determination to do well in this tournament.

Voice and Choice, a reputed student leadership competition was held in one of the Teach for India schools, where numerous schools from the city took part. The student council of Epiphany did an excellent showcase of their analytical skills by critically thinking about the problems in the school and finding relevant solutions regarding the same. We won the competition, arguably making our Student Council one of the best student bodies of the city.



Tiffin or lunch boxes at Epiphany School



Epiphany's school library housed in a corridor

Design for Change, a worldwide competition which equips children to be aware of the world around them, enabling them to use their skills to design a desirable and sustainable future. Amongst 1700 schools who competed for this coveted title, Epiphany came first by not only identifying a problem they saw in their surroundings, but by actually planning the course of action and putting their plan into action. They showed exemplary skills of empathy, planning, creativity, critical thinking and communication during this project.

The students of Epiphany were broadcast in the All India Radio (AIR), where they recited poems about the importance of respect and love towards parents, an emotion that seems to be dwindling in today's generation. This was the students' way to pay tribute to the unconditional love of parents, grandparents and elders. This highlighted the importance and value of relationships in our lives and how they enrich us.

The students debated, discussed and enacted street plays emphasising social issues, which were shot by Doordarshan, the official broadcasting channel of India. The entire school worked together to put up a good show. This two episodes will be broadcast at the end of 2018.

These activities help in enabling the students to mature and explore their creative sides along with building self confidence in them. However, due to the limited resources and size of the school, it is difficult to realise the true potential of the students. The paucity of resources and basic facilities in the school hinder the complete utilisation and growth of the students' talents and skills.

Sangeeta Kadam

Botswana

August 2017 - March 2018

Dear Sister Stella,

Here once again is something about the people we have helped over the last 8 months. We cannot be grateful enough for your care and help, it makes a lot of difference to a lot of people.

When I wrote in August, I was about to leave Botswana for a couple of months, leaving behind me a very handicapped woman, Senwelo, who had had two strokes. I had only been gone a week when she died. I really could only thank God when I heard the news, she was almost totally paralysed after the second stroke, totally dependent on unwilling family members, and very depressed. The money (P700) I had left the family for needs while I was away, was of course used to help with funeral expenses.



Gabane Community Home Based Care Day Centre

We have continued to make monthly donations to the Hospice in Gaborone (P1500/month) and to the Gabane Community Home Based Care day centre (P3000/m). I have a paper copy of a letter written to you by Pearl Ncube, the manager of the Hospice. She writes "On behalf of Holy Cross Hospice, I would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation for the support that you have provided to HCH during our care for people living with terminal illness. We would like to acknowledge the significant support that you provided by contributing to the operational needs in 2017. ...Your willingness to support the Hospice makes a difference not only in the lives of our patients but in the organisation as a whole".

The other day care centre in Mogoditshane, which we had supported (with P1500/m) in 2017 and before, has a change of manager and of purpose, so we have stopped our support there. They no longer give priority to orphan children on the basis of need. It is now a regular commercial day care centre .

Our friend Bushy, continues looking after his four children on his own since his wife's death. He gets Mikel to the physio for treatment for his TB spine when he can, though the extra fuel cost of the journeys is beyond his very limited income. So in December I gave him P600.

A lady in Gabane, Mma go Oarabile (traditionally one is called by the name of ones oldest child), is the only member of her very large family who is working, since her daughter was retrenched in October. The year end came, and there was no way she was going to manage to feed her family. P250 is not a fortune, but it helped her a lot.

An unemployed Zimbabwean friend, who needed to go home for her 6 monthly check up and medication for her HIV condition, needed help with the fare. I gave her P400. One might ask why she goes all the way to Zimbabwe for the check up. Being a foreigner she would be charged more than the bus fare to Zimbabwe if she went to a Botswana hospital! In this case it was a real mercy that she went. She has a blind sister in Zimbabwe who exists on a small disability pension and had been on her own since her son left to find work. My friend found her living in a small shed, having been turned out of her own house by someone taking advantage of her helplessness. My friend has been able to see the matter through the local court, though I won't find out whether successfully or not until she comes back here. The village where the blind sister lives is beyond mobile phone reach.

Lastly, another lady in Gabane; I've known her for years, unemployed (though probably past retirement age, in which case her government pension is P420/m) and separated from her grown son's father. She is a kind hearted person. Years ago she took on the care of an abandoned child for some months. A couple of months ago she came to ask me for a mere P100 as she had taken on the care of two orphaned children from her extended family. Knowing P100 would go nowhere with 2 growing children's food and school needs, I gave her P 1000 which I trust made life a little easier, at least for a while.

None of all this would be possible without your help. To everybody who is part of Wantage Overseas, may I say a VERY grateful thank you, and great thanks and praise to Him who motivates you all!

June 2018



Margaret joins staff and students at Gabane

Once again I'd like to share how we are using some of the money so generously sent by Wantage Overseas.

The period since I last wrote has only been 3 months, there is not much to report.

We continue to pass onto Holy Cross Hospice P1500 a month. They have long hoped to run an inpatient unit but the major funding needed has never been forthcoming, so they do what they do well, providing a caring meeting place for patients able to walk there from the surrounding suburb, and visiting non-ambulant patients at home. There is a 3 days a week nurse, social worker, a visiting doctor, art therapist, cook and receptionist. The manager, Pearl Ncube, told me that the number of home based on-ambulant patients is increasing and the walk-in patients who come for treatment and a

bit of social time are getting fewer. They are hoping to clarify why this is happening.

The other place receiving monthly help is the Gabane Community Home Based Care centre. I was able to get some up to date news yesterday from Mma Leburu, the day-centre Coordinator. They used to have about 50% non fee paying orphans and about 50% not-orphaned children in the day centre pre-school. This is changing slightly, with fewer orphans this year and last. This is probably because of the free availability of anti-retroviral drugs (ARV's) which are now reaching the young parent generation more widely than before. Mma Leburu says that the centre is well respected by the council and the big Princess Marina Hospital in Gaborone, and a number of children with physical and speech problems are being referred. Last year 6 very malnourished children were brought in by the Council. Over the year they have all gained weight, grown, and are in size and brightness now on a par with the other children.



A member of the staff team at Holy Cross

Except one: Kgoketso is a little girl in a family of six children and only a mother. The social worker is trying to help but reports that it is an uphill battle. Little Kgoketso is frequently dressed in just a little cotton dress (In winter it is well below 1C in the morning till around 9am) and very often obviously unwashed. At least she has the preschool with its generous meals, but Mma Leburu says that she sees Kgoketso going downhill in the school holidays.

Another little girl, Bofelo, who graduated from the preschool to primary school at the end of last year, is also worrying Mma Leburu. She was the youngest of a single parent family with two older siblings with special needs. There is now a new baby. Mma Leburu makes sure Bofelo comes to get a meal after school each day, and thinks it may be all she gets to eat.

The preschool must be a life saver for these two little girls and as well has a good name in the village. Mma Leburu says that she frequently gets good feedback from primary school teachers, and parents and social workers speak well of the preschool. Good to hear!

The P3000 of Wantage Overseas money which goes there each month is well used by a responsible organisation.

So as always, a very heartfelt THANK YOU to Wantage Overseas and all your supporters for the help. It is much, much appreciated.

Thank you and God bless,
Margaret Taylor

Irene Homes Pretoria, South Africa

As always it is a great pleasure to send you news of our work and life at Irene Homes.

What better way is there to kick off our annual report to CSMV than by sharing how we celebrated Mandela Day on 18 July this year. We had strived to answer the global call to action that celebrates the idea that each individual has the power to transform the world and the ability to make an impact.

We brought 21 children from a Children's Home, ranging from 9 to 18 years of age, together with 14 of our ladies who are intellectually disabled, to celebrate their diversity of experiences their viewpoints, their backgrounds and life experiences.

The words of one of Irene Homes' ladies, the 61 years old Glenda Chiappero, sum it all up: "We respect them for who they are, we shared with each other stories about ourselves and now we encourage them to visit us so that they can see what we do and how we live. It was a privilege to meet them in their world."

And Vuyiswa Mbode, a 33 years old resident, said, "I spoke to the one teenage girl at the Children's Home. We spoke about our backgrounds and I said to her we cannot change where we come from, but we can change what our future looks like."

Yes, it is all about reaching out, caring, developing and celebrating what is right with the world.

From our Workshops' side

In 2016 a dynamic, ongoing process of change started in the various workshops, the aim being to improve the quality of services being rendered and to facilitate growth in our beneficiaries as well as in our staff. It has been a humbling and yet rewarding experience to witness the growth and improvement in the beneficiaries' abilities and levels of functioning, as well as to see how the staff members were willing to embrace change. The focus of the workshops shifted to align with Governmental statutory requirements, whereas St Nicolas and St Teresa focus on therapeutic intervention and Contracts on vocational rehabilitation in a Protected Workshop.

Our main aim in the workshops is to empower our beneficiaries to reach their full potential and therefore they are exposed to different activities



in order to teach them new skills in all the different areas of their lives e.g. arts and crafts, physical, fun, kitchen, life and social skills, personal care, work skills, etc. Activities that form part of the therapeutic programme are: physical activities, board games, kitchen activities, self-care, weaving, embroidery by hand and machine, sewing, needlework, knitting, crocheting, beading, leather work, braiding, different activities with paint, card making and various talks on such matters as health care, life skills and so on.



From our Residential and Health Care side

Residential programmes work with persons whose specific needs are best addressed in a structured environment and therefore, as at the workshops, the programmes in the houses and at the clinic must allow for each resident's needs to be optimally addressed.

Programmes are also run in the houses to develop as far as possible the residents' abilities to live together as a family. They are encouraged to learn new skills, such as baking and so on, and to generally play and have fun together.

Residents are encouraged to participate in activities outside the facility in order for them to be competitive, to grow and to normalise their own lives as far as is possible. These often involve residents taking part in sporting activities, such as athletics and golf, as well music and speech festivals.

Sadly one of the residents, Miss Gwendolyn Van Der Merwe, passed away in April 2018, after a short illness. Gwen was a resident of Irene Homes for the past 13 years.

Persons with intellectual disabilities disproportionately have more health problems than the general population. Further complicating the matter is that people with more severe disabilities often cannot verbalise health complications they are experiencing. A substantial part of the work done by our Nursing Sisters (as well as staff in general) is observational as well as of an educational and preventative nature so as to pick up potential problems as soon as possible.

As part of our ongoing planning to ensure good and effective care and development for

our residents, we have just completed a Resident Vulnerability Assessment. The assessment indicates a 'vulnerable profile' for each of our 88 residents' needs over the next ten years. This will allow for us to plan ahead and adjust aspects within our programmes and services as we move along.

Conclusion

When I observe and listen to staff at Irene Homes talking about our residents, discussing programmes or procedures, planning policies and strategies, laughing and crying at times, I realise that no one can work or interact with persons with intellectual disabilities, and stay the same. They change you. It is not the working hours, or the pay cheque at the end of the month or how you had to struggle to get an appointment for a resident at a hospital or anything to do with the obstacles and challenges that you had to face that determine the change.

The change might lie within that moment when you realise you have an amazing job, or that it can be the worst job on another day; it is about the emotional toll it takes from you on the one hand and the unconditional love and acceptance you receive even on days when you know you don't deserve it; it is not about the way members of the public stare at you and your residents when you walk through a shopping mall; or the fact that you want them to apologise that they stare; you also cannot pin point it to the strong bond you have with them or the fact that they are teaching you all along while you thought you were teaching them; it is just there, one day just there, when you forgive yourself for something you have done, when you realise tomorrow is another day, I don't have to do it all today, when you walk slower, ponder over a flower, take in the moment that you realise that you are blessed with the simple joys you encounter every day. Then you ask, so when did I change? They change you. And that is good.

Kind regards and lots of love from all of us at Irene Homes, Pretoria, South Africa.

Estelle van Schoor, CEO.



Madagascar

Visit to Convent Hasin, 23-30 October 2018



Sister Stella and I left a chilly UK at 6.40am on a Tuesday morning and landed at about 10.30pm in Antananarivo international airport. Having negotiated some long airport queues and retrieved our luggage - both bags had to change planes in Paris but had made it - we emerged to a wonderfully warm welcome from an excited Sister Isabelle and Father (Papa) Emil who had brought a taxi to the airport to meet us, despite it now being near midnight.

We skirted the main town on some amazing rutted tracks to the Convent in the village of Tsinjohasin, in Ambohidratrimo - a country area just outside the capital. A lovely couple who act as door keepers and gardeners were up to let us in and on the refectory table was tea, coffee and local cake to welcome us again! Bed eventually around 1am.

From that time onwards we experienced generosity and hospitality that was all encompassing. We were invited to share in the Life of the community: the worship with wonderful singing by the Sisters, the daily activities and to share stories with the seven Sisters, two novices and one enquirer who make up the community - which was founded under the guidance of Canon Hall Speers in 1985. He was also present to lead the two sisters who were making their Life Profession - Isabelle and Odette. Sister Stella had been invited from CSMV, which had been supporting and continues to support the Sisters of the Society of the Servants of Jesus Christ (FMJK), and she had wondered if I might accompany her. The sisters follow a regular pattern of prayer with meditation, Eucharist or morning prayer, midday prayer, evening prayer, compline and at 9am and 3pm prayer for the World and the Nation. Much of the hymn and psalm singing is known by heart and there are long prayers expressed freely



The Sisters preparing food to feed those who don't have enough

by all the Sisters. Indeed we were aware of the story telling history of the people where in Malagasy many words translate into a few English ones.

We started the following day with Eucharist at 6 am, followed by silent breakfast, at the end of which the sisters broke into animated conversation and we received 'three kiss' greetings and welcome. And then in turn around the table each Sister shared their 'programme' for the day - it could be going to market for today's food, cleaning, getting water from the well (no running water at all), cooking for lunch and supper, working at the dispensary in the



Sister Fanja, Sr Fanja's brother and his wife and son Ishmael and Michele



Sr Stella passing a bullock cart

village (Monday-Saturday) gardening, and providing food for 35 village children known to be in need (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) and visiting in the village. Stella and I fitted in and helped where we could but also took walks around the village.

It was a bit like walking back into past times - carts pulled by pairs of Zebu (a breed of African buffalo), endless fields of rice and other foods set out in a patchwork pattern, with streams running through, village women washing the clothes in them and laying out the clothes to dry on grassy banks while children - mostly bare feet - played and worked too, other villagers walking with bundles on their heads, young men pulling cartloads of bricks and others hand-ploughing fields with pairs of Zebu; many little make shift stalls selling produce and lots of meandering dogs. All the people we saw greeted us with "Salaam", or "bonjour" and occasionally "hello" but little English is spoken in the villages. Although education is technically free most village people cannot afford it as everything else - compulsory uniform, books, pens etc, have to be paid for and cannot be afforded by the poor majority. We called into the dispensary where two of the sisters work every day except Sunday - medical treatment is VERY limited. There had been a series of clinics in the villages around but now this one is the only one still operating in the area, and people walk a long way to attend. It is hard to explain the order and simplicity that appears out of apparent randomness. Life is certainly simple and limited to the daily round. But there seems to be a peace and acceptance among the people and certainly a strong connection with the church.

There was a significant amount of building going on in the local area. We were told it was mainly for Chinese workers employed by companies that the Chinese were setting up in Antananarivo. The countryside is changing and I fear the area will have been engulfed by



Sr Stella meets Ishmael

Antananarivo in another ten years. It is a very crowded busy city - dense traffic, that crawls through streets packed with small stalls and shops, people pushing carts, carrying bundles, loads of crowded mini buses with the conductor hanging out of the back door through which you enter the bus. The roads are better than the bare earth rutted tracks of the areas outside Antananarivo, but the crowds and the busyness are extreme - yet there is patience and a good humour most of the time!

I loved the bit of Madagascar that I saw - my experience was very limited but I understand the coast a the north and the south all offer different experiences and different types of lemur - my only chance to see any lemur was the zoo where the Sisters organised an outing the day after the Life Profession service. The service on the Sunday in a church in Antananarivo was very lovely - the church was packed (400 communicants) at the first service of the day, still going as we arrived. Our service, led by the Bishop in Antananarivo was the second service at 9.30am and again a beautifully dressed, packed church, witnessed the very special Life Profession of Sister Isabelle and Sister Odette in the context of the Eucharist with four choirs singing at different points. The service lasted about five hours (including notices and many speeches) but at no time did it seem long. After this we moved to a restaurant - I think about 200 of us - for a feast! A very happy day - great joy and sense of humour and singing throughout.

As we left on Monday, six Sisters accompanied us to the airport at 9 pm, even though they must have been so tired. We bid them a very fond farewell and continue to pray for them as they carry out their calling to prayer and undoubted service.

Michele Foot



Fr Hall Spears, Fr Emil, Sr Stella, Sr Isabelle, Sr Odette, Postulant Lina, Sr Georgette, Sr Fanja, Sr Jacqueline, Aspirant Rojt, Novice Irene, Sr Voahangy
(Sr Earnestine not present)

COMMUNITY OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN

(Registered Charity No 240513)

St Mary's Convent

Wantage, OX12 9AU

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