

MAPUTO: MOZAMBIQUE. My last visit was twenty years ago. Nevertheless the faces of Joanna and Felicidade, whom I had met then, were familiar among the welcoming Mozambican sisters. The city now has fine buildings and roads a marked contrast to the state of devastation just after the civil war that I had witnessed last time. I noticed a Radisson Hotel just completed, not far from where we were staying on the coastal road. Palm trees, beach, Indian Ocean, small fishing boats and some leisure craft were nearby. I was glad Mary Jo and I had arrived in time to enjoy a little of this before work began.

The Province was well represented, with Kate Nolan translating, Kathleen O’Keeffe, and Marie France. Margaret Fielding, in Scotland, was translating the minutes via e-mail. It was good seeing the greetings from the Province on the notice board. Thanks to all who sent them.



Kathleen and Barbara



Kate and Felicidade at the translation desk.



*Terezinha, Christine (facilitator)
Madeleine (Mozambique) in foreground*

The pace of the meeting was reflective. We had been previously sent this quotation from the UISG meeting:

Religious life finds itself today in a situation of deep searching, of creativity and pruning. The Spirit who dwells in us, continually quenches our thirst with water from the Fountain that is always replenished. We are drawn and inspired by love, which calls us to fill situations of darkness with prophetic light and to dwell courageously in new horizons. The future of Religious life lies in living fully our mystical yearning with our traditional calling to prophecy.



Ritual of planting of seeds

As we began with a ritual of planting seeds, Terezinha invited us to attend to this focus on the future of Religious Life and attend to the new that is emerging within and about us. The sharing of Institute statistics and Institute and Province planning rooted this firmly in the soil of our present and projected reality. Our NEP evaluation of our plan had been based on the responses we had received from Communities last October, so everyone seemed particularly present at that time.

Other topics that were discussed were Volunteers, New Foundation and Criteria for Mission (page 6 General Chapter Document 2007) and a proposed New Members meeting. Throughout the meeting there was a sense of deepening the Vision and Commitments of the last General Chapter and some initial discussion regarding the next General and Provincial Chapters envisages us continuing further. At one point we were asked to name some common growth, new life points and what still stays with me is the tremendous richness and growth of different forms of collaboration, networking and relatedness that is among us, a potential that is still emerging like the seeds we planted on the first day.



The seeds have grown

The General Council will be communicating information and conclusions by letter and the web and I hope that Mary Jo and I will have a chance to share some of this with you informally soon, although most of the follow up will be taken on by the next Provincial Council in September.

I shall miss the companionship, inspiration and sense of Institute solidarity of these EGC meetings, a time of privilege and hard work made lighter, this time, by sharing it with Mary Jo!



Mary Jo, Marie France, Terezinha, Ana Helena, Barbara



MOZAMBIQUE *Mary Jo*

Barbara and Mary Genino



On the first night of our meeting, many of the Sisters of the Mozambique Region came to welcome us to their country, with singing and prayer, showing us what was important in their culture. They dramatized a poem about the uses of a ‘capulana’ (wrap – ‘chitenge’) in their own homes and then gave each of us one as a present. Their warm welcome marked our time in Maputo. On our free afternoon they had a special surprise for us - they took us round Maputo on an open ‘train’ (see picture) to see the sights and to visit the Regional House.

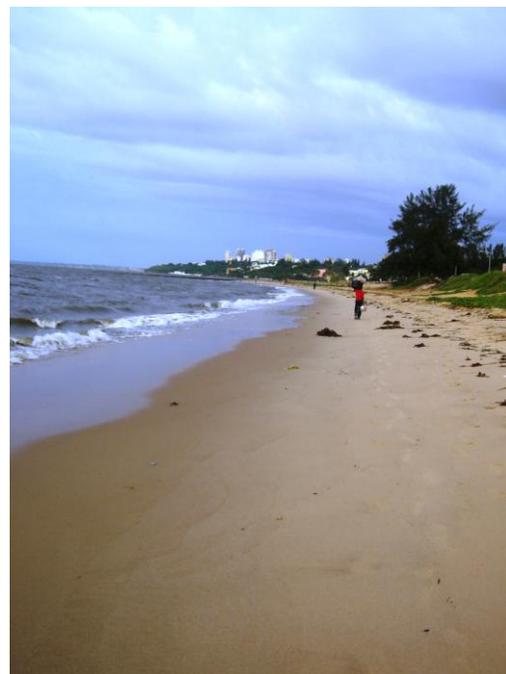




We also visited the 'airport' community and the pre-school near there where Sr. Celma works. The children (3-5 years of age) were crowded together in small rooms, with no books, paper, pencils or toys. They sang for us (at the top of their voices) and gave recitations of little verses they knew by heart.

At times I thought I was back in Brazil, with the lovely beaches, the street markets and the Portuguese style architecture from Colonial times, the contrast of the houses of the poor with the new mansions being built along the coast, as well as the mosquitoes and the loud music from the parties at Kaya Kwanga, where we stayed.

Sophie entertains the children



We had a two-day visit to Momemo, a place where families had been housed after the floods, where a group of Sisters have set up various projects, including a school, clinic, technical school (teaching building, mechanics and bread-making, as well as other professional skills), an orphanage and a conference centre. The orphans welcomed us with hugs and joined us later for Mass, leading us in the singing and adding liveliness to our celebration as they rearranged all the chairs so more could fit in!

While we were there we had input on the history and present reality of Africa, Mozambique in particular, from two Government ministers (both female - one was Luisa Diogo, ex-Prime Minister) and from Sister Esther Lucas, the

President of the Conference of Religious Women. They were proud of how Mozambique



had recovered from the two wars and the part that women had to play in the rebuilding of their country, especially in the economy, through small businesses. Women make up 39% of Parliament but they feel that there is still discrimination against women. Our own Sisters are trying to respond to the great need for the education of girls, but say that there is no government support for the hostels for girls from rural areas that they run in Quelimane, Gurue and Inhazonia. They all said that the Church and Religious are very important in the development of Mozambique and in the work for Peace. There are still huge problems which affect the whole of Africa, such as 'land grabbing'. Huge tracts of land are being

taken over by multi-nationals, where raw materials are being used for their profit and the local people are receiving no benefit. One of the other problems is health, especially HIV/Aids. Mozambique has one of the highest rates of death from Aids and the latest life expectancy figures give 48 years of age. We felt the sadness of the Sisters who have lost two Sisters in their 40's within a year of each other (Lucia and Assunta) as well as many family members. Just after we left we heard the news of the death of Ana Mò, who was their first Regional (and had been the first Mozambican postulant.)

I had been to many EGC meetings in other Provinces, but it was different not being a translator- Kate was in my place! I was glad Barbara was there and I was being introduced gently to new responsibilities.

MADONNA HOUSE

After reflection and dialogue with those involved, the Provincial Council has decided to change the living arrangements of the Pastoral Sisters, namely Deirdre Kavanagh and Paula Murray. From mid July they will be living in 37 Castle Oaks and organising their daily and weekly arrangements for their ministry in Madonna House accordingly. Of course there will always be the possibility of staying over- night should there be a pastoral need and they will only be minutes away.

Sr Sheila Cronin facilitated a meeting with the Community at which Patsy Butler (on behalf of the Council) and Anne, the Manager, were also present. It will take some adjustment but we would particularly like to thank and affirm the Community on their wisdom and openness to cope with the “ new” in the many changes they have experienced, knowing that some, for example their lovely new chapel, have been more welcome than others! Their welcome and life-giving presence to one another, the staff, visitors and other Sisters in Ferrybank is appreciated. We know that the Province and Institute can count on their prayers.

Recently Sara and Susan of the John of God Health Management Service conducted a review of the arrangements there on behalf of the Provincial Council. They stated that Madonna House is “running extremely well, with a very cohesive team who communicate effectively to ensure the care of the Sisters is paramount. All strive to ensure this remains the Sisters’ ‘home’.”

So we have a lot to be thankful for to Anne and all the Carers and other staff. Special thanks too to the RSHM from Grianán and Castleoaks who come regularly providing opportunities for leisure and reflection, helping out and simply joining in the every day happenings and celebrations.

ARROWSMITH HOUSE

A warm welcome to Mrs Kay Andamson on her appointment as Manager in Arrowsmith House. Kay started at the beginning of May. She is a nurse and comes with considerable experience in caring for the elderly having managed her own care home for ten years. She lives in Southport.

Mrs Chris Clowery has now returned to her former home in Yorkshire and a new job. We wish her well and are grateful for her dedication to the sisters in Arrowsmith over the past 2 years?

Patsy, Martin, now assisted by Madeleine, continue the Pastoral Care together with the other sisters from Seafield who help out and accompany the sisters in various ways. We are fortunate in having a number of carers who have been in Arrowsmith for many years who really know the sisters well.

Sara and Susan, from John of God Management Services have given us valuable assistance in reviewing current arrangements and the roles and responsibilities and recruiting for our new Manager. They, together with Sharon and Patsy, conducted the interviews. Sue will continue to have an ongoing role as Chair of the Board of Management.

LONDON AREA REFLECTION GROUP 27th May

Barbara

Somehow Manor Park Community made space for ten of us to meet and eat. Our discussions revolved around the theme of Future Religious Life using some material from the UISG and listening to an excerpt from a CD from the day given a Heythrop, recently, by Gerry Arbuckle on Refounding Religious Life. Please contact Breda Byrne if you would like to borrow this CD.

The next meeting will be in Upminster on 16th September.

On Monday 9 May we celebrated Marie Paule's golden jubilee in the Mother House. That morning we prepared the aperitifs and Marie Jean took us for a final choir practice before Mass at 10.30am. It was celebrated by Father Charles Vernazobres in the round chapel. After Mass, we enjoyed the aperitifs and a lovely meal provided by a local caterer. As Marie Paule had wanted, the celebration was a simple one, with only the Béziers RSHM present, but each of us appreciated it very much. When they went home, the La Devèze community ended the day with a special prayer service which Lucienne had prepared.



The jubilee was also marked in the parish on Sunday 15 May, the feast of the Good Shepherd and World Vocations Day. All the RSHM went to the 10.30 a.m. Mass in the church of Our Lady of Reconciliation in la Devèze. The celebrant was Father Claude André, the parish priest. During Mass he prayed for Marie Bernard, who had been buried two days before, and baptised a little seven year old handicapped boy. There was a special prayer also for Marie Paule and, at the end of Mass, Fr André presented



her with Pope Benedict XVI's recent book "Jesus of Nazareth" on behalf of the parish. The Mass was beautiful, full of life and active participation and one got a real sense of community. Afterwards, everyone was invited to share an aperitif which had been prepared by our sisters, in the adjoining room. Around the walls Marie Paule had put up colourful posters, including photos of our founders, the noviciate in Brazil and our ministries today in different parts of the world. During the refreshments she also handed out leaflets about the Congregation to make us better known.

The jubilee was, indeed, a joyous occasion, marked by prayer, simple sharing and conviviality.

Thank you, Marie Paule.



A HAPPY MILLENIUM GROUP IN NODDFA Teresina O'Byrne

From Ireland North and South, from England North, South and West, we joined the Millennium Group members in Noddfa 16-19 May. We were twenty-five in number and for the best part of four days we lapped up the welcome, hospitality and good food of Noddfa and enjoyed the “catching up” element of being together.

Maeve asked for prayers for Sean on the first day, and it was with great sadness that she and we learned of his death on Monday night and we said goodbye to Maeve as arrangements were made for her early return home.

We welcomed Kathleen Connell who unfolded to us the mysteries of OUR JOURNEY IN FAITH AND TIME 1890-1926 which she is preparing for publication as Book 4 of our Sources. Some of it rang familiar to us more ancient of the group, but some things left us Ah....ing and Oh....ing. Was there a Novitiate in Ferrybank as well as Seafield before 1938? Did the Portuguese Province try to go it alone at one stage? I think most of us knew that Portugal had to disband Community living for a time, which seems to have led them to make foundations in Brazil 1911. We can look forward to reading it all in book 4.

We enjoyed the usual outings to beach, waterfalls and beauty spots, as well as trips to the shops. We even had the opportunity to attend a Male Voice Choir Concert in Llandudno. And with all this we saw the arrival of the Queen on Irish soil, and we did not miss a step of her itinerary.

We thanked Bernadette for her organization over the past years, and when her job was up for grabs, people looked at Clare with expectation, and Clare, although surprised, agreed. With prayer that we would meet at Noddfa in 2012, we set about our preparation for the road home.

