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# SPIRITAN NEWS

November/December 2001

N° 139

CONGREGAZIONE DELLO SPIRITO SANTO - CLIVO DI CINNA, 195 - 00136 ROMA

## NEWS FROM CIRCUMSCRIPTIONS

### Spiritans in the Seychelles

A year ago, four confreres set out for the first time to the Islands of Seychelles. They were not on a tourist trip: they were going as missionaries! What is this local church which had suddenly become part of their lives and missionary enthusiasm... and what has happened to them since then? Why is there a Spiritan presence in the Seychelles in the first place?

#### The Country

The Republic of Seychelles, consists of an archipelago of 115 islands, scattered across the western Indian Ocean, about 1,000 km northeast of the island of Madagascar and almost on the equator. The climate is hot and humid. The population of the Seychelles is 83,000 and most of the people are of mixed French and African descent; Indian and Chinese minorities are also present. The total land area is 455 sq. km (175 sq. miles).

Only three of the islands are inhabited: Mahé, Praslin and La Digue. Most of the population is on Mahé (73,000) while Praslin has far less (8,000) and La Digue only a few (2,500). Around 85% are Catholic, 8% Anglican and the rest are Muslims, Hindus and those belonging to sects. It is a very young population: 30% under 15 and 64% between 15 and 65. School is free and obligatory up to 16. Medical services are free but there are also private hospitals.

#### The Church

The first missionaries who came to the Seychelles were the Capuchins from Savoia who in 1863 were entrusted with the evangelisation of the country. In 1880, it became an Apostolic Vicariate and in 1892 the diocese of Port Victoria was erected. In 1922, it was officially entrusted to the Capuchins of the Province of Switzerland. There is no doubt that they did great work in the Seychelles, especially in building of churches, schools, colleges, agriculture etc. However, their numbers decreased and they finally decided to retire from the country.

In 1984, the country had its first local Bishop, Mgr Felix PAUL, who governed the diocese until 1997 when he had to resign because of sickness. Mgr. Xavier Baronnet S.J., who until his nomination was the secretary of the Episcopal conference of the Indian Ocean, succeeded him as Bishop of Port Victoria.

The Brothers of Christian Instruction and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny made a large contribution to the education of children, but at the time of the coup d'état in 1977, the

Government took over all the secondary schools. The brothers left the Seychelles in 1998. A local Congregation of sisters was founded by a Capuchin, Père François, but their numbers were never very large. Bishop Baronnet worked for their fusion with the Filles de Marie of the island of Reunion who subsequently opened a mission in the Seychelles.

At present, there are 7 secular priests of the diocese, 2 others from Holland and India and two Jesuits. At first glance, this would seem to be sufficient for a population of 80,000 Christians, but the reality is rather different. There are some who are sick or on mission abroad and the geographical reality also puts things into a different perspective. There is a great demand from the people for the sacraments and other services which are necessary to keep Christian life alive. Most important of all, there is a need for training, catechesis and re-evangelisation - areas that have been somewhat neglected in the past.

In asking the General Council for help in 1998, the bishop was certainly concerned about the unmanned parishes in the diocese. But he also felt that a religious congregation could contribute much towards the renewal of the diocese and its spiritual life, as well as creating a greater cohesion between the clergy and the bishop. The General Council reacted positively to the request in view of the pressure from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the considerable interest shown by the Indian Ocean Foundation (FOI). However, the FOI made it clear that it would also need the collaboration of other circumscriptions and the East African Province said it was willing to contribute to the effort.

Before taking on the mission, a delegation of three confreres - Fr. (now Bishop) Denis Wiehe, Fr. Gérard Guillemot (then superior of Mauritius) and Fr. Rogath Kimaryo (General Councillor) - visited the Bishop to discuss the modalities of the proposed Spiritan presence and work in the diocese. It was also an opportunity to have a first-hand look at the mission itself.

#### Arrival of Spiritans

The team arrived in the Seychelles on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 2000: Justi Tarimo (EAP), Fredo Ramanandraibe (FOI), Gérard Guillemot (France) and Lucien Pochon (Switzerland). They received a warm welcome from the Christian community and set to work with enthusiasm to meet the many challenges ahead.

They soon realised that the unity of the clergy amongst themselves and with their bishop was crucial to the success

of any renewal of the Church in the islands. They have paid great attention to this and close relationships are already being built up, especially through inviting each other to meals and other shared events and celebrations.

There is much to be done at the pastoral level in the parishes. Some were without resident priests for a long time, with the inevitable fall off in practice and joining of local sects. Considerable repairs have to be done to the presbyteries and other Church buildings. In many places, they have come up against a strong resistance to change and a lack of cohesion in the Christian communities. Many are happy for things to continue as they always have been and fear that people will no longer come to Mass if there are changes. There is a crying need for Christian instruction at all levels. The confreres have begun sessions on the liturgy, but there is a similar need for bible-study courses and training in leadership. It will all take a long time; they will have to move forward with the patience of the Seychelles tortoise!

As so often throughout our history, a considerable tension is being felt between the urgent pastoral needs of the diocese and the fundamental Spiritan commitment to community life. Already, all four of the team are parish priests and living on their own: one is on the island of Praslin, an hour's



*F. Ramanandraibe, G. Guillemot, J. Tarimo and L. Pochon*

boat trip from the others. They come together frequently, with the encouragement of the bishop, but once again, pastoral considerations are taking precedence over the common life. It is a dilemma for Spiritans world-wide which continues to haunt us.

The appointment of Fr. Denis Wiehe c.s.sp. as coadjutor bishop of Port Victoria was widely welcomed in the islands by people and clergy.

## NEWS ITEMS

### THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE SPIRITAN SISTERS

The 12<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Spiritan Sisters took place at their Mother House in Rue Plumet, Paris, from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, 2001. Forty delegates took part, from 15 countries where the sisters are living out the missionary charism of their foundress, Eugénie Caps. Their task was to focus the aims of the congregation for the years ahead.

The Chapter re-elected their Canadian Superior General, Sister Andrée Boutin, for a second mandate of six years. The new General Council is made up of Sisters Christiane Dhu-

maux (France), Maria Emilia de Matos Vitorino (Portugal), Maria José Arandia (Spain), and Francisca Varela (Cape Verde). It is a young council, a sign of hope for the future. They see themselves as joyfully prophetic, determined to launch out into the deep in their search for the will of God, getting close to all men and women, especially those who are considered of no importance: those excluded from society in the north, those forgotten in Africa, the West Indies and Brasil.

### MEETING OF MAJOR SUPERIORS

Eleven major superiors met at the Generalate in Rome from 16-22 September to get to know each other and the Generalate Team.

These were 6 Provincial Superiors: Frs Donald **McEACHIN** (US East), John **McFADDEN** (England), Patrick **PALMER** (Ireland), Peter **MARZINKOWSKI** (Germany), Piet **MEEUWS** (Holland), Remi **PEETERS** (Belgium); 1 District superior: Fr. Peter **LAFFERTY** (South Africa); 3 group superiors: Frs Edward **OKORIE** (Guyana), Michael **WALSH**, (Zambia), Peter **CONATY**, (Mexico); and 1 Foundation superior: Fr. Heinrich **KUCKERTZ**, (SCAF).

Each Superior gave a presentation on his circumscription and got an outline of the thinking of the General Council. They also had discussions with the General Council on their particular concerns and problems. The Superiors had the opportunity to visit the various departments of the General Administration. On the day of the outing, the superiors and the generalate community had an opportunity to recapture the spirit of unity and peace of Francis of Assisi by visiting



*From Left to Right: H. Kuckertz, P. Palmer, J. McFadden, P. Lafferty, D. McEachin, P. Conaty, E. Okorie, R. Peeters, P. Marzinkowski, M. Walsh and P. Meeuws*

the valley of Rieti. The photo was taken at the Franciscan shrine of Poggio Bustone.