

Newsflash

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MISSION TO BOTSWANA

A Familiarisation Visit

While in Africa for the Continental Meeting and other matters, three members of the General Leadership Team travelled to Botswana to view the site of our new mission there. Hyacintha Moopisa, Geneviève Bessières and M. Carmen Vilardell were in the country from 27 February to 5 March. They travelled from Gaborone to Francistown and from there to Masunga, where the mission is located. It is about 100 km from Francistown almost on the border between Botswana and Zimbabwe. The dot on the map gives a very approximate idea of where it is. The group was cordially received by Bishop Frank Nubuasah SVD, Apostolic Vicar of the Vicariate of Francistown. It was he who invited the *Holy Family* to work in the country.

(cf. Letters of Margaret and Council dated 16 December 2002 and 2 April 2003)



Country Profile

Location

Botswana is in Southern Africa. It is about the size of France or half the size of South Africa, its neighbour on the south. Its other neighbours are Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Population

The population of Botswana was just 1.7 million in 2001. The population is concentrated in the eastern part of the

country. An estimated 200,000 people live in the business and commercial capital, Gaborone.

The ethnic majority is Batswana (95%). Other ethnic minority groups, the Bakgatla, Bamalete, Bakalanga, Bangwaketse, Barolong, Bakwena, Batlokwa, Batawana, Basarwa and Bakgalagadi, make up 5%, including 1% white.

Religions

The religions of Botswana are indigenous beliefs (50%) and Christianity (50%). Some sources put the number of Christians at 30% or less. Catholics are a minority group. There is a small number of Muslims and adherents of the Bahá'í Faith

Languages

English is the official language. Setswana is the

national language. The minority groups also have their own languages. Setswana will present no difficulties for the sisters from Lesotho because of its resemblance to Sesotho.

Environment

An extensive and sparsely populated country, Botswana is divided into three regions. In the centre and southwest, the Kalahari basin is a desert steppe where grazing is only possible in certain seasons. The Okavango River basin in the northeast has a tropical climate suitable for agriculture. 80 percent of the population lives within a strip in the east, stretching along the railroad. The country has no access to the sea.

Nearly 17% of Botswana is protected wildlife area. The Kalahari Desert and the Okavango Delta are the two main features. The numbers of many wildlife species are declining. This trend is due to rapidly increasing numbers of cattle, the ever present drought and the proliferation of livestock control fences that impede the free migration of wildlife. Intensive cattle-raising is also rapidly depleting the soil.

Wood is the main household fuel for three-quarters of the rural population who use it for cooking, water heating and lighting. Over use of wood for fuel has resulted in land degradation and deforestation.

Education

There is a 70% literacy rate: male - 81%, female - 60%.

Economy

Traditionally, cattle raising

was the main occupation and still provides a livelihood for 80% of the population. Botswana Meat Commission. Botswana is the second meat producing and exporting country in the world. Subsistence farming predominates. The country is beginning to exploit its mineral resources: manganese, copper, nickel and diamonds.

The discovery of diamonds in 1967 dramatically changed the pace of development. There are three diamond mines in Botswana which account for 77 percent of the total export earnings and 45 percent of the GDP. These mines are jointly owned by the De Beers mining company and the Botswana government. By value of diamonds, Botswana is the biggest producer in the world, with an annual output of 15 million carats.

Recent History

Formerly the British protectorate of Bechuanaland, Botswana adopted its new name upon independence in 1966. Botswana's economic progress has been one of the success stories of the African continent, since the country was one of the poorest countries when it attained political independence. Today it is considered the richest non-oil producing country in Africa.

Type of Government

Botswana is multiparty democracy. Under the Botswana constitution, legislative power is vested in Parliament, which comprises the president as the ex-officio member and a unicameral National Assembly. Within the assembly is the speaker, the

attorney general (non-voting), 40 elected members and four members specially elected by the assembly. Elections are held every five years. A 15 member House of Chiefs advises on tribal matters.

Current Issues

HIV/AIDS

Experts estimate that 25 million Africans are already infected with HIV, the AIDS virus, and most of them will die within the next five to eight years. Botswana is the world's worst hit country with more than one-third of all adults carrying the virus. AIDS has sharply reduced life expectancy in Botswana which is now 39 years instead of 71 years as it would have been without the disease.

In spite of this, our visitors found a great reluctance on the part of all, including the Bishop, to mention the topic.

Botswana cannot cope on its own. Therefore, Western governments and drug companies are under pressure to intervene. The answers to this crisis are extraordinarily expensive. The drugs that prolong lives in the West cost £4,000 per patient per year. For Botswana alone, that would mean £1.5 billion per year. No African government can afford that.

Botswana and the World

The country's political stability has enabled it to play an important role in supporting UN peacekeeping initiatives, especially in Africa. It sent forces to Somalia, Rwanda and Mozambique between 1992 and 1995.

The
Founding
Community



L. to R. Brigitte Nziata, Rathiny Keethaponkalan, Victoria Mota Jr.,
Rajeswary Velautham, Mahali M. Fatima Khotle

Preparing in Johannesburg,

... with Margaret



... and Françoise



IN APPRECIATION and GRATITUDE

The community members would like to express their appreciation and gratitude for all the messages they received.

They feel supported and encouraged and have a strong sense of going to Botswana in the name of the Institute and being sent by it.

THE DATE TO REMEMBER

The community hope to go to Botswana on
26 May.

They will be accompanied by:
Colleen Moore, Provincial of South Africa and Eleanora Molai, Provincial of Lesotho.

Overview of the Catholic Vicariate of Francistown

(Adapted from Document on Strategic Directions on the Catholic Vicariate of Francistown, 2001-2004)

This year the Church in Botswana celebrates its seventy-second year of existence. For many years, the presence of the Church was limited to Kgale and the surrounding area. It took time for the Church to make its presence in Francistown. It was, in fact, part of the Vicariate of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) and Missionaries came from there to minister to the few Catholics who lived in Francistown.

The Passionist missionaries finally decided to settle there in the early 1950s and help establish the Church. From Francistown the Church

has grown to cover most of the areas of the Vicariate.

The Church of the Ghanzi District has its foundation in Namibia. The German OMI missionaries crossed over from Namibia-Aminus and Gobais into Botswana. The same applies to the Shakwe area. Missionaries from the Caprivi Strip crossed over to Botswana to minister to the few Catholics there.

The war of independence in Angola led to refugees coming into Botswana. Many of them were Catholics and had come with their faith; but due to the absence of the Church in the areas of settlement, they joined other Churches.

The Passionists took over the work of evangelisation of the whole country until the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) arrived in 1981. Between 1982 and 1983 the Passionists slowly handed the territory of the North over to the SVD and moved South.

Due to the growth of the Church in Botswana and due to the distance, a request was made to Rome to divide the Diocese of Gaborone. In 1998, the request was accepted and the country was divided into two.

Thus, the Vicariate of Francistown was born on 7 November 1999.

Area of *Holy Family* insertion

As Margaret mentioned in her letter (2 April 2003) it is a semi-desert area with much material, human and spiritual poverty. It has, however, been earmarked by the government for development. It is to be a new district with its headquarters not far from the mission site. The local government structures are already in place and functioning.

It is sparsely populated with the people dispersed around the borders of Botswana and Zimbabwe. They belong to the

Bakalanga, a strong though minority ethnic group. The sisters will have to learn their language, Kalanga.

Religion of the people

There are many Christian sects and the Catholics are a minority. The nearest High School has around 2 000 pupils of whom about 14 are Catholics.

Mission compound

The mission is staffed by Marianhill Fathers from Zimbabwe. The sisters will be working in partnership with

them. The church building is almost completed. The sisters' house is finished. It has four bedrooms, a chapel, a dining/community room, a kitchen and two bathrooms.

Expectations of Bishop Frank

The sisters will be expected to enter into the overall Pastoral Plan for the Vicariate. They will probably be engaged in pastoral work in every domain including youth work, aid to orphans, and presence in school for religious animation.