

had taken part in the immersion programme; fluent in Filipino, Yuka has been one of the many who have helped to ensure the success of the project.

Towards the end of each tour the Japanese group stayed overnight at the novitiate at Montalban, a visit where they could relax, pray and reflect. There they met the students and youngsters who had benefited from the money sent to the St Madeleine Sophie Foundation, which was subsidised almost entirely by the Japanese Sacred Heart students. The SMSF was then assisting three very depressed areas in the process of forming a CEB; the students, for their part, enjoyed visiting simple homes and meeting Filipino children and young people.

When completed, each visit was followed up with an analytic report in which the benefits were so clear and the change in individual students so marked, that in the nineties the project was opened up to all Sacred Heart students. Indeed several Catholic schools in Japan independently embarked on their own exchange programmes.

Japan and Taiwan

A Society bridgehead between two nations has often been forged by one individual, as was the case when Miyama Atsuko, a Japanese rscJ, was missioned for Taiwan in 1980. Her official ministry was the teaching of English, but it was hoped that in her person she would be a sign of reconciliation between the two nations. This she achieved, in part, at least, through her ministry of spiritual accompaniment. Her popularity spread by word of mouth, and extended to a large circle that included Catholics, Protestants and both lay and religious men and women.

From 1990 onwards Atsuko also made regular visits to the local leprosarium. Each Sunday a group shared the Eucharist with the twenty-five Catholic lepers, staying on for a meal and a discussion; the group was encouraging the lepers to voice their own aims and feelings, in the belief that with encouragement they could

bring about an improvement in their own lives. Commenting on this ministry Atsuko said, 'Lepers give me a balance in my life; they teach me how to appreciate kindness and give me courage to enjoy life fully, by helping me to see things from a different angle.'

Atsuko's ministry in Taiwan was not without cost.

At the beginning I experienced much frustration: I had no language, I was uprooted and confused. In community I sometimes felt that I was treated as a second-class citizen and that I was being exploited. Clinging closely to Jesus, forgiving and constantly being forgiven, I rested in the word of God. 'Love is always patient and kind . . . is always ready to excuse, to trust . . . Love does not come to an end' (1 Corinthians 13). And so I found support and affirmation to live my mission in Taiwan.

In 1998 Atsuko went to Shanghai where she gave an eight-day retreat to a group of religious who were the first to have made final vows since Communist rule was established in 1949.

Haiti and the USA

Virginia McMonagle, an rscJ from the United States, has also forged a transnational link, dividing her time between Haiti and San Diego University, where she was an assistant to the Vice-President.²

Virginia's involvement came about in collaboration with Father William Wasson.³ In 1986 this priest persuaded a reluctant Virginia to accompany him to Haiti, where he was going to explore possibilities. 'I went, I saw and I was hooked,' Virginia reported.

I was offered a year's leave of absence from the University, which enabled Father William and myself to open first an orphanage and then the Père Damien Hospital for 100 babies. The hospital rapidly expanded into an outpatient clinic with its own pharmacy, where free medicine was distributed; by 1998 this had

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grown to the extent that it was caring for more than thirteen hundred patients a month.

The hospital is staffed by twelve paediatricians, ten of whom are Haitian women; there are also volunteers from fourteen different countries who stay for between one and ten years. They nurse the children, teach them and above all play with them. Teams of doctors regularly arrive from the States to work with the staff; dentists pay annual visits to the orphanage, airlines and hospitals cover the expenses for any youngster needing surgery in the United States.

No words can describe the condition of the hundreds of babies that are brought to us. The parents often go to voodoo doctors first – we are their last resort. Many nursing mothers sleep under their baby's cot, and while the Père Damien is a place of tragic suffering, it is also a place of joy. We are all involved in loving these tiny creatures; we lose hundreds, but we save thousands. At Père Damien we live intimately with the mystery of life and death and eternity. There God walks, giving life, love, hope and, yes, eternal life also, to the little ones God takes to himself.

St Helen's Orphanage in the mountain village of Kenscoff is home to 500 children who live in small groups with a house parent. As so few orphanages will accept disabled children, more space is needed and we have a new handicap home under construction. We hold weekly liturgies in our outdoor chapel where the children's voices echo with the tom-toms through the mountains. The juniors attend our Montessori School before going out to local schools, while at St Helen's we attempt to prepare the young people for adulthood by running practical classes in sewing, typing, bakery, shoemaking, carpentry and dancing.

The celebrations commemorating the tenth anniversary in 1998 emphasised the international links that had been forged. Over a hundred visitors of thirteen different nationalities were welcomed by the children who carried the flags of each country represented. After Mass, celebrated by the Archbishop, two new

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kays (cottages) were blessed by our director Father Rick Frechette CP, and the day ended with a gala picnic.

Virginia concludes her account with both question and plea. 'What can be done,' she asks, 'to save this beautiful race?' Looking to the great rscj of the past, she finds her answer in education:

The United Nations can pour billions into this desolate country, but without education there will be no hope for these industrious people, who are eager to work and eager to learn.

Virginia's great longing is for the Society to make a foundation in Haiti, which is already well known to many; rscj from Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Mexico and the United States have all worked there as volunteers. Mater Admirabilis has a home on the island; the Sisters of Charity found her in an abandoned building and promptly installed her in their noviceship. 'Could she be the means of bringing the Society to Haiti?' Virginia asks wistfully. In 1999 Patricia García de Quevedo, who was then Superior General, announced that a community was to be established in Haiti. Virginia's dream was to be fulfilled at last.

Through Virginia a connection had been made with the Kenwood infirmary community in Albany, USA. The link was Elizabeth Shearman rscj, the Visual Arts Director at Kenwood. Virginia showed Elizabeth photographs of the orphanage, with its lines of drying rags, used for the babies' nappies. Shocked, Elizabeth persuaded the Albany rscj to raise funds to replace them; cot sheets and clothes for the children were also sent. In 1998 Elizabeth spent two weeks in Haiti, helping in the pharmacy of Père Damien Hospital where Virginia was based. Explaining why she came, Elizabeth said that she wanted to

see how we, in Albany, could best help . . . The small gestures we are able to make, we will continue. This is no more than a drop in the bucket, but hopefully it is a drop which will send out a few small waves for someone.