

FMDM Zimbabwe



In 1952, FMDM sisters travelled to Bulawayo at the invitation of the Bishop. They established Mater Dei hospital and branched out to Hwange Colliery Hospital and other mission fields.

Eight communities were established in the North West of Zimbabwe where the predominant language is Ndebele namely the Convent of the Annunciation and St Francis Convent in Wankie, Mater Dei Convent within the hospital and later adjacent to it, San Damiano, Idumba likaFrancis, La Verna in Victoria Falls and Fatima Mission in Dete. This area is prone to drought due to the hot dry climate and poor soil and in the present economic hardship facing Zimbabwe is characterised by many struggling families who have to work very hard to make a living from their land.

As Franciscans we feel privileged to have been and continue to be in these places working with the local people, who show such resilience in very difficult circumstances.

1. Bulawayo

Mater Dei Hospital

The pioneer sisters involved in the building of Mater Hospital in 1952 used the two top floors of the building as their convent until 1971 when they moved into the convent built next to the hospital within the grounds. In the year 2000 they sold their convent to the diocese to become a Discipleship and Evangelization Centre and it is now used as a centre for Optometry and Dental training.

San Damiano

In 1999, the previous administration of Mater Dei Hospital, who was also a devoted and loyal friend of the FMDMs, Mrs Joan Kirwan, immigrated to England to be with her family, leaving her house to the Sisters. This was a welcome development as the other communities came and stayed there for Chapter of Mats and other business in town. Following the necessary renovations, this house became San Damiano Convent, and the first community of Sisters took up residence on 15th January 2000. This convent became the Regional house for many years and as the numbers of sisters dwindled it was eventually closed in 2010 and handed over to the AMR sisters who reside there to this day.

Idumba likaFrancis

The Sisters in Bulawayo had been asking for some time, to have a small community in Bulawayo, especially for those who are not directly involved in the hospital. After much

discernment at Regional and individual level, a house in Tshabalala Township was purchased in February 1994 called Idumba likaFrancis, meaning the small hut or shack of Francis. It was a small loving home to Srs Denise Boyle, Antonia Traynor and Rosemary Keegan for three years but due to changing ministries it was sadly handed over to the AMR sisters in 1997.

Mater Dei Convent

In 1999 after much discernment the land was purchased for the building of a convent for the residence and care of the elderly sisters which is but a stone throw from the hospital and in 2000 Mater Dei Convent was opened. Over the years it has been home to Sisters such as Sheila Mahoney, Mary Rose, Isabel Courtney and Patricia Madigan whose mission included helping to establish and work in the preschool at the local Christ the King Parish as well as being involved in the pastoral activities in the hospital, being part of the various administrative boards, and visiting the Elderly at Ekuphumuleni Home.

To date the convent remains the home for many sisters following the closure of all the other convents and also boasts of a thriving market garden which supplies the local Malindela community with fresh vegetables.

2. Hwange

Convent of the Annunciation

In 1955, the Convent was established and the pioneer home to our sisters who were providing staff for the Colliery Hospital as well as deeply engaged in nurse training for locals. Over the years it was home to sisters Juliet Hasslacher and Teclar Mukuli who took on roles in administration as matrons, sisters in charge, tutors for the nurse training school. Though it changed locations from the Colliery premises to number 18 Coronation Road in 1992 the name of the convent stood the test of time and the mission continued.

The new convent was located near a diocesan hospital called St Francis where Sisters Elvine Msimuko, Beatrice Pius and Emily Bwalya were engaged in physiotherapy and nurse aiding. Many more sisters passed in and out of the community and were very influential in the growth of the faith in the local community to the point of being the sole source of spiritual material for the diocese. After many years of FMDM presence the convent was closed in 2016 and the property is still under the FMDMs.

St Francis Convent

In response to the 1989 General Chapter mandate was ministry to the materially poor and marginalized. After prayer, research and discernment, it was decided to open a Centre for AIDS Counselling, Education and Outreach in Lwendulu Village, Hwange. Sr. Frances Woolman was already an AIDS Coordinator for the Hwange Diocese and initiated the Centre named "Lubanco House" which was officially opened on 31st March 1993. Sister Frances Woolman was the Co-ordinator / Administrator of the AIDS Programme and Sr. Phyllis Hoey as Head of Education.

The Sisters involved felt it was desirable for them to live among the people they were serving so Hwange Colliery willingly provided a house in "O" section which became St. Francis' Convent. When the sisters were assigned to other Missions and with few sisters, the convent was closed and they moved into the Convent of the Annunciation within Hwange.

Victoria Falls

Since 1983 the FMDM Zimbabwe region has been privileged and proud home to the FMDM Novitiate for Africa situated in the beautiful town of Victoria Falls. The first group of Novices was admitted in 1984 to what is now called La Verna convent. Postulants from Nigeria, Zambia and Zimbabwe come to Zimbabwe for their two years novitiate – a time of deepening relationship with Jesus Christ for a passionate and joyful living of the Gospel as FMDMs. The novitiate is also an opportunity for the novices to continue in a more intense way to discern her vocation to the FMDM way of life. The congregation through the formation community creates to this end, a desert environment of quiet and solitude.

Fatima Mission

This mission was established in 1989 and the sisters were involved teaching in the local government school, evangelisation and pastoral ministry. Over the years, Sisters have taught in Fatima Secondary School – Sr. Clara Beards, Sr. Helen Doyle and Sr. Yeyani Nyoni.

In 1919, Sr. Elizabeth Miller took over from Sr. Cora Veale and was instrumental in starting projects which were handed over to local people. This involved necessary training so that the local people could be fully self-reliant.

Our Sisters helped in the growth of the Parish by assisting in sourcing funds for the building of outstations, running Missionary Childhood Congresses and conducting daily Rosary Prayers in the homes of the local faithful.

Sadly in 2019 we had to close Fatima Mission due to lack of sisters. However there is a deep sense of fulfilment that the sisters had helped to accomplish in this local Mission.