

Report from Accueil Marie Saint Frai, 2016. Alex Kilkenny and Ros Wood.

The great change for us at the Saint Frai was that Sr Catherine went off to the order's house in Egypt and was replaced by Sr Amal, who is originally from Egypt, but has been at various Notre Dame des Douleurs houses over the past decade.

Sr Amal had to learn all about the work of Saint Frai and the ever-changing population of stagiaires and hospitaliers around the place and conseillères in the office. She also had to get to know her new colleagues in the Hospitalité and in the Sanctuaries. By the time I arrived for my stage at the end of May she was well in charge and had started making a few changes. From a personal perspective, I loved working with Sr. Amal. She is devoted, friendly, sympathetic, energetic, enthusiastic, funny and very helpful.

The Holy Year of Mercy was a great theme which ran through all our work and prayer in Lourdes. Sr. Amal held little services in the Salon after goûter, as well as a weekly group visit to the Holy Door.

Sr Amal had a refreshingly pragmatic attitude to the mountains of bureaucracy to be found in all aspects of Hospitalité work and set about modernising where she could.

Saint Frai had a few weeks this last season with very few pilgrimages or none at all. This is likely to be repeated in future, and I should reinforce the message sent out after the Conseil meeting each year, which is to check with the office, by e-mail or phone, whether you are likely to be needed on your chosen dates, before you book any travel. Conversely, you can ask when there will be most demand if you can be flexible with your dates.

All this is tricky – for a few days during one of my weeks the Saint Frai was full on all 4 floors and we were all of 7 stagiaires in total, so we were all running around madly working on every floor. This was before one of the weeks when the Accueil would be nearly empty, so it is possible that people were put off, especially if they can only travel on certain days when EasyJet flies from their bit of Europe. As ever, we also ask you to stay over a weekend if you can.

The number of men doing their stages in Saint Frai is steadily increasing, so do think about joining us, even if your wife works there already, and encourage others to do so. Young people of 16-18 can do stages as long as they are supervised by their parents. We had a long discussion last February about insurance in this case, since the Hospitalité seems to assume we all have civil liability insurance that covers our offspring, as one does in France.

I am also asked to remind you that we should not ask to do certain work or work with certain people, but to have a bit of humility and do what we are asked to do. I know that sometimes it looks like other people pick and choose, but I can assure you that the planning of who works where has to take into account demand from the sisters, experience, formation, arrival and departure, language and so on. The conseillères in the office do not know everyone and are usually planning for the couple of weeks after they themselves depart, so are not likely to have any opportunity to show favouritism, even if they were so disposed.

The Hospitalité was still in a state of change this year, with Pere Horatio Brito replacing Pere Boisvert. The new Engagement ceremony seemed to go down well – congratulations to all of you who made your Engagement this year. After a little confusion, Consecrations were reinstated just in time for a few of our Saint Frai Hospitalières.

Profuse thanks to you all for your dedication and hard work and particularly to Ros who has completed her 12th, and therefore last, season on the Conseil. **Alex Kilkenny**

As I reach the end of my mandate, I would like to offer my thanks to all those who made my time in office so enjoyable.

Most importantly, I would like to thank all the Saint Frai Stagiaires. Thank you for your willingness to serve and the many chats we have had over the years. Along with the sisters and the lay staff, you are what makes Saint Frai such a happy place to serve. The sisters that I have worked with in the office have all been great in their own ways: Sr Claire Emmanuel, Isabelle (before she became Sr Marie Laurence), Sr Jean Gabriel, Sr Catherine and Sr Amal.

I would also like to thank my fellow members of the Saint Frai Conseil for their constant support, especially my fellow Brits: Ann, Myriame and Alex. Somehow we managed to stay sane as the discussions lengthened during the Conseil meetings.

I also received a great deal of support from those members of other services who were around in Lourdes and in Britain during my years of service. I would particularly like to thank all those in St Jean Baptiste who were so patient with me until I summoned up the courage to have my first bath two years ago.

So now it is time for me to step down. Or is it a step up? – I always told new Stagiaires that I was there to serve them and ensure that their time in Lourdes went well. The most important people in Lourdes are those who need the support and care of others - whether we call them Malades, Sick Pilgrims, Assisted Pilgrims, VIPs or any other term. Service is central to HNDL and the more responsibility one has, the more one needs to serve others. The apparent hierarchy is reversed.

Thank you all.

Ros Wood