

Report on the visit to Grenada in February 2015

This visit, from 31st January to 9th February, followed on from the visit to Guyana at the end of January. The group comprised Christine Knight, currently Conference President at St Laurence in Cambridge and formerly East Anglia CC Twinnage Officer, Stephen Hogg, Portsmouth CC Twinnage Officer, and Terry Brown, National Twinnage Officer. Terry travelled directly from Guyana to meet up with Christine and Stephen. We were met late at night at the airport by Mary Charles who is the Training Officer and a member of the Grenada National Executive. We were taken to our base for the week, which was an annex of the presbytery at Blessed Sacrament Church at Grand Anse, which is just outside St George's, the capital of Grenada, in the south of the island. The objectives of the visit were to develop our relationships with our Grenadian brothers and sisters, to encourage more correspondence between twins by collecting names and addresses of the local contacts and to discuss their ideas for sustainable projects that could be financed through the legacy that has been left for the work of the SVP in the country.

The next day, Sunday 1st Feb, we attended mass at Blessed Sacrament Church and were treated as special guests and asked to sit in the front row of the church. Also in attendance was Sir Anthony Bailey, Secretary General of The Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, who was visiting countries in the Caribbean to set up a Charitable Foundation. The mass was led by Bishop Vincent Darius and was a most inspiring event with a fantastic choir and enthusiastic congregation. In the afternoon we attended the AGM of the SVP in Grenada, which took place in a large hall next to the cathedral in St George's. This was an impressive gathering of about 180 members from around the Island. All present were handed a detailed 50 page document containing information about the conferences in each District and their activities, together with copies of the President's Address and Secretary's and Treasurer's Report. We found this to be a most useful document during our tour round the island during the next five days. This was a good opportunity to meet and get to know all the members of the National Executive at the beginning of our visit. The meeting also included a presentation by a guest speaker, Mr Fitzroy James, on 'Empowering Communities to Embrace Sustainable Livelihoods'. His Powerpoint presentation contained a great deal of statistical data, probably too much for his audience! However, he highlighted facts about 35% unemployment on the island, (40% among young people) and 35% of the population living below their poverty line. He also talked about the effects of climate change on the country, their financial crisis and the involvement of the IMF with their Government. Interestingly, he also talked about the lobbying to get a person's "Right to Food" written into their constitution. The meeting ended with a shared buffet and a chance to talk to SVP members.

We were up early the following morning to meet up with Bernard Alexander, who is the Eastern DC President, but also has responsibility for Carriacou, to catch the 8am internal flight to visit the SVP members on the island of Carriacou. This short flight nearly ended dramatically when the 10 seat plane burst a tyre on landing! We were met at the airport by Keturah (Kay) Benjamin and 5 other members, all wearing their SVP polo shirts – this apparel seems to be a feature of this part of the world. Carriacou is a small island with a population of around 6,000. However, there is not much rainfall on Carriacou, so there are no reservoirs or any piped water. The inhabitants collect water in the rainy season, July to December, from the roof of their dwellings and store it in tanks. This is a problem for the poor inhabitants because the cost of water tanks is beyond their means. The SVP members have been involved in funding water tanks for poor people for 30 years. We were taken on



Bishop Darius & Sir Anthony Bailey with Terry Brown, Stephen Hogg and Christine Knight.



Christine being handed a gift from twin to bring back to England for twin conference.



Carriacou members with recipient of Water Cistern system.



Grenada National Executive with visitors.



Visiting an example of a Water Cistern facility in the Windward area of Carriacou.

a tour of the island to visit some of the water cistern installations at 7 dwellings. The recipients were very grateful for what had been done for them, some are very old and the SVP members still visit them on a regular basis. We also visited the only hospital on the island, which at the time had only 2 patients, and we spoke to the doctor on duty. There is an old people's home next to the hospital which we were given a tour around. This had very basic accommodation for the residents.

The water tanks supplied by the SVP are around the island in the 3 areas where there are conferences, Harvey Vale, L'Esterre and Windward in the north. Windward looks out over to the small island of Petite Martinique, which also has a small conference. After a late lunch with our hosts we visited St Patrick's Church in Hillsborough, the main town on the island, to meet the new Nigerian priest and to take part in their District meeting. (This turned out to be the first of our 5 daily District meetings). The priest was invited to join our meeting. He was new to the island having arrived in post the previous week. (There are only two priests on Carriacou, both new Nigerian priests.) During the meeting we heard about the need for more water tanks on the island, which may be the subject of a project proposal in the near future. Since returning home we have heard that Keturah and the priest are hoping to start up a new conference based at St Patrick's church. Our flight back to Grenada was incident free!

The following day we were invited to a meeting of the National Executive which had been planned in St George's. Several members of the Executive had managed to get time off work to come and attend this meeting. The main item on the agenda was an open discussion about possible projects that they would like to propose to help poor people in different parts of the island. No formal applications were handed over on the day, but just an outline of their project plans. Some of the ideas covered were a) Providing wooden huts to cover pit latrines, b) The funding of summer camps for 4-16 year olds, c) Extending the cow project with other animal projects, d) Agricultural projects using half barrels, e) Baking and life skills for young women, f) Youth support project, g) Provision of cooking equipment to enable a conference to supply regular hot meals to poor people, h) After school club to provide poor children with an environment to do homework and learn computer skills, i) After school club to help children who can't read properly. Terry gave Margaret Wilson, National President, a project application form to enable her to put together any proposals with Elizabeth Peters, Project Officer. In the afternoon we drove up the west coast of the island to the village of Grand Roy where we were hosted to an open air meeting of the Western DC. The 6 conferences in that area all gave presentations on their work. We also spoke about the work of the SVP in our conferences in England, and we exchanged information and ideas. We also obtained some up-to-date addresses for twinnage correspondents. All the conferences gave us gifts of spices for us to bring back to give to their twin conferences in England. This happened at all the meetings we attended during the week, and gave us a logistical headache about how to cope with volume of gifts for our twins on our flight home. The Grenadian people we met everywhere were very warm, friendly, generous and kind.

On Wednesday an appointment have been made for us to meet Bishop Vincent Darius, in his office next to the Cathedral. Before this meeting we took a quick look inside the National SVP Office in the adjacent building – a very small congested space that had been run by the same volunteer for many years, and could do with a total re-organisation. The Bishop told us he thought the SVP could do with "Re-branding" itself. We didn't fully understand what he meant by this, but we thought he might have meant "re-invigorating" itself. He also talked about some of the local issues, included getting



Stephen & Christine outside Grenada SVP office.



Meeting with Oliver Joseph, Minister for Economic Development.



Meeting with Bishop Vincent Darius in his Office.



St George's District Council Members.

self-employed workers, like fishermen, to sign up to the new NIS (National Insurance Scheme). This would give their families some benefits in the future. It was proving to be very difficult to persuade them. From the Bishop's Office we went to meet Oliver Joseph, the Government Minister for Economic Development. He is an SVP member, but because of his work commitments he does not have the time to attend meetings. We had a general discussion about the project work of the SVP, particularly animal projects. Following this we went to see one of the people on the GRANS scheme, who are elderly people financially helped by the members. Joyce is now blind and lives at home with her son, and is cared for by him. He is a carpenter and works from home. From here we went to look at a Programme for Adolescent Mothers (PAM). It is funded by local beneficiaries and it is housed in an old building on the top of a hill – a nice quiet pleasant environment. Babies and toddlers are looked after in a nursery, whilst their very young Mums are finishing off their education in rooms nearby. SVP supply disposable nappies, baby clothes and food etc. to this project. This appeared to be a very good scheme and its aim is to equip these young girls with the necessary skills to find employment, as they are all from poor families. In the afternoon we visited an SVP building that had been especially constructed by SVP volunteers next to the Blessed Sacrament Church. It takes in

donations of food and clothing, and opens every other Saturday morning to distribute these to poor people. In the same unit is a meeting room which is used to run an after school club for very poor children. These children come from homes without electricity and running water. They have a clean pleasant environment to do their homework, have a meal and use the bathroom. From here we collected our overnight bag from our base, and went off to attend the St George's DC meeting attended by all the conference in this DC. Each of the conferences gave a presentation on their work, including one with a Powerpoint presentation that lasted 40 minutes! I found the most interesting one was the presentation by the representative from the Beaulieu Junior conference, Kadeem Strachan. His conference was clearly being guided very well and is doing interesting things. We had an open discussion about the work of SVP in Grenada and in England. Once again we were invited to share a buffet meal with our hosts, and again given gifts to take back to their English Twins! The day concluded with a 90 minute drive, in darkness, over very twisty and potholed roads to the NE part of the island for an overnight stay in readiness for the next stage of our visit.

We were now in the Eastern DC area around the town of Grenville and amongst the 'bread basket' of the island where lots of produce is grown, mainly fruits, spices and cocoa. Today we were accompanied by Margaret Wilson, as this is her area, and our first stop was to see a new wooden home constructed by SVP members, with materials funded by Twinnage, for a man who had been sleeping in a dilapidated shed. The new home needed furniture to make it comfortable as it only had a bed and a small table. We were to meet the man, Michael Lawrence, later in the day. We then looked at a Rabbit project, and then a Chicken project which had been running since we had funded it in 1992. Eggs are sold from this project to provide income, and the project is still running even though Hurricane Ivan had badly damaged the front of the henhouses in 2004. Some of the eggs are supplied to the Cadrona Old Peoples Home that is sited next door. There is also a vegetable growing project on the very fertile land adjacent to this home. One of the residents of the home is a GRAN supported by the SVP scheme. Unfortunately, this lady had been taken ill and was transferred to the hospital in St George's. We also looked at a project involving growing herbs and crops in half split barrels, a cow project and also a small wooden hut that was built by SVP members as a shelter for a homeless man. We had time to tour an agricultural nursery that supplied the whole of the island with young fruit and spice plants – not a SVP activity, but very interesting. After a lunch of the Grenadian national dish 'Oil Down' – a type of stew made by cooking in coconut milk – we also had time to visit the Cocoa Processing plant where Matthias Joseph, Twinnage Officer in Grenada, is the production manager. He was able to give us quick tour of the process, so we could see how the cocoa beans were handled from the tree to the large heavy hessian sacks ready for export – another part of our Grenadian education! We then moved on to our next meeting with the Eastern DC conferences in St Leo's Church. Again, all the 10 conferences gave a presentation on their work, and we had another question and answer session where could swap information about how things are done in England, as well as in Grenada. It was a very useful part of the whole visit to have this dialogue with individual conference members in each district over buffet suppers. It was obvious our visit had been carefully planned, although the timings were very flexible, and every opportunity was given to all their members to meet us. Now another journey in the dark down the east side of the island to a vacant presbytery at St Martin de Porres Church, Crochu where we were met by Leslyn Sylvester, another National Executive member, who made sure we were comfortable.

Leslyn returned the next morning with another Nat. Exec. Member, Hazel McEwen-Peters, who both accompanied us during our morning visits around the St David's DC area. We visited 3 SVP clients in



Michael Lawrence's old home.



His new home built by SVP members.

their own homes, one an old, now blind, ex fisherman who lives with his elderly sister, another blind man who is nearly 100 year old, who Leslyn gives a lift to mass on a Sunday, living with his son, and a deaf lady living on her own in her wooden home with her daughter's family living a few yards away. We then visited St Martin's Care Home, recently re-opened and funded only by local benefactors. The manager of the home, Maureen, is an SVP member and local members visit the home on a regular basis. We talked to a number of residents, including a lady of 103 years. From here we drove to 'The Gift of Love' Care Home which is run by Mother Theresa nuns. They only look after women at the moment but they have space to accommodate more residents and will be taking in men. The place was impressively clean and tidy, including the gardens. We met another lady who was to have her 100th birthday the following week. Three centenarians in one morning! We concluded our morning visits by calling on Hadrian Giddens, 94, who had recently retired from a lifetime of service to SVP and the church, and was proudly displaying his Long Service SVP plaque on his lounge wall. After a hectic few days we now had 3 hours afternoon rest! In the evening we met all the members of the St David's DC in a now routine presentation of the activities of each conference, a question and answer session so we could exchange information on any SVP subject, and the swapping of correspondent addresses. All followed by a buffet supper supplied by the members. As time was now getting late we stayed a 2nd night in the presbytery as it was still not occupied. They have the same problem in Grenada as we do in England – not enough priests. So, some presbyteries around the island are empty and mass is being said by visiting priests at the weekend on a rota basis. The Spiritual Director for Grenada SVP is Fr. Dermot Nolan, a retired Irish priest, and he travels around the island at weekends saying masses in places where there is no resident priest.

We were driven back to our base at Blessed Sacrament church by Hazel on Saturday morning. This happened to be Grenada Independence Day which is celebrated enthusiastically every year all around the island. The national colours had been on display all week in preparation for this day of celebration. All families were getting together to join in the festivities, including all SVP members, so we had a rest day with no activities planned for us! We decided we should not miss out on the celebration so we went to the National Stadium to join in with the fun. A military band with



Eastern District Council Meeting.



Part of our visit to “The Gift of Love” Care Home run by Mother Theresa Nuns.



A typical home of an SVP client in Grenada.



Hadrian Giddens, 94, a lifelong SVP member.

marching on the cricket pitch, in the company of the Prime Minister, was the precursor to traditional dancing in colourful costumes. We also listened to a roll call of citizens who had been given awards, and were surprised to hear the name of Margaret Wilson read out. She had been given an award for Services to Education. She had recently retired as a school principal. After mass on Sunday we were collected by Margaret’s husband, Adrian, and Bernard Alexander for a sightseeing tour of the NE of the island. We visited the Belmont Estate, an old colonial estate, to see cocoa processing. All their production goes up the road to the Grenada Chocolate factory. We followed this with an unofficial tour of the Antoine Rum Distillery that is using exactly the same process, and some of the same equipment, as when it started in 1785. We then sampled some of the produce from this process and did some socialising before returning to St George’s and having dinner with our two guides. Our visit concluded the next day. We have certainly developed good relationships with many of the members in Grenada, and gathered a significant number of additional correspondent addresses from the twins. Project applications are to be forwarded over the next few weeks.

Stephen Hogg

Portsmouth CC Twinnage Officer

14.3.15