

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Here in Madagascar, the first cases of Covid-19 were reported on March 19th. Two of us were in Tana to accompany Mother Anne-Marie to the airport. On their return to Ampibanjinana, they spent fourteen days in a hotel [or “guesthouse”?] before returning to the community. Thank God, none of the sisters nor the workers were affected by the sickness.

In the beginning, the community was fearful, worried. We must go out to Fianarantsoa to do the marketing and deliver milk 3 times a week. We take many precautions. However, until the month of June, the progress of the sickness on the island seemed under control. The government has taken things seriously in hand; the marketing and large-scale distribution of an artemisia-based herbal tea are having real results. Many people are healed of the sickness; there are relatively few serious cases. Since June, with the cold of winter, the situation has changed very quickly in a bad direction: cases of contamination became more and more numerous. The official numbers seem well below the reality.

In spite of everything, and in a land where the people must confront significant sanitary challenges, the most difficult one is confinement. Many workers of the informal sector are without resources, the closure of schools leaves students idle and the teachers are not paid. The internet is very undeveloped: a tiny minority of students can follow courses online. Christians suffer for being unable to gather together any more in church for five months. We have the chance to celebrate Mass 4 times a week thanks to the brothers of Maromby. It is a great privilege which encourages us to live the liturgy with renewed fervor. But we feel that we are cut off from the members of the Church; it is painful. The absence of the faithful usually come in great numbers [and] make us feel that we are all together truly members of the same Body. Many beg us to open the door for them.

From an economic point of view, the situation of our country was already very gloomy before the pandemic; things are getting worse. We have almost no more orders for biscuits, the guesthouse [hotel?] is empty since the end of March, therefore little money is coming in. With our workers, we are trying to develop crops and livestock to deal with this. We are very grateful to our “mother” and “father” houses who have generously provided their financial assistance to us. Thanks to this help we continue to pay our workers who come to work each day. More and more people knock on our door to ask for help. We can't respond to everyone. The cancellation of the regular visit of Maromby, the delayed arrival of 2 workers who were due to come in June to help us, the cancellation of the annual inter-monastery meeting and that of the General Chapter...all that isolates us more. Since last Sunday, August 23rd, a relieving of the confinement is slowly beginning, hopefully...

However, there are some positive points: the curfew has reduced insecurity; masks, frequent hand-washings, introduce new hygiene habits that will protect the population from the coronavirus, but also from many other sicknesses in the future, we hope. The confinement develops a relationship different than the previous relationship. We pay more attention to each other; we feel more responsible for one another.

August 25. The Sisters of Ampibanjinana