

## SR ELIZABETH FERRIE

I was baptised Elizabeth Ann but to most people I am 'Liz'. I'm the youngest of three and brought up in the Catholic Faith - the Church's Social Teaching played a big part in my father's life and therefore shaped our growing years. I first met the Vincentian Family through the Priests of the Mission (Vincentians) who taught me from age 11 - 14. I even went on a school trip (Vincentian Pilgrimage) to Paris; we were introduced to the Rue du Bac and St Lazare, though at 14, Paris had other 'highlights' for us! My later years at school were with nuns. When I decided I wanted to train as a Nursery Nurse, Sister Teresa, the Headmistress suggested I applied to the only Catholic Nursery Training College in the country. And whom did I meet in Mill Hill, North West London but the Daughters of Charity.



I enjoyed my two years training and found the Sisters to be women who enjoyed sharing time together. I saw them at prayer and I saw them work hard. They laughed, they listened and, oh yes, they could be firm but always just. I found myself becoming attracted to this way of life and yet there was also reluctance - I'd always thought I would get married and have a family. One day the Matron of the Nursery asked me outright if I'd ever thought of becoming a Sister. I felt it was the gentle push I needed to answer the call that had been niggling for sometime. I knew I had to try. My friends at home were incredulous, my family more supportive. I was 19 years old: it is now 40 years ago but the memory is fresh.

My first years of service were working with young children in nurseries and residential homes; after 12 years I trained as a General Nurse and worked with the elderly for a few years before spending one year in Ethiopia partly working with young women in Formation and some work in a Clinic. On returning to the UK I have had many different ministries - a Pastoral Worker for Adults who are Deaf, a Care Manager in a Residential Home for elderly people with Visual Impairments, a Co-ordinator for a Visiting Project for older people. For the past few years I have worked as a Volunteer for different projects supporting Asylum Seekers and Refugees. So often my hands are tied by restrictive government policies. I have come to learn that my role is to BE - to be alongside as a friend, a companion.

It has also been my privilege to return to Africa three times to work with GOAL, an Irish Humanitarian Organisation. I have been to Southern Sudan, with Rwandan Refugees in the Congo and in Niger - each time for a few months, caring for malnourished children. I also spent six months in Bethlehem working with our Sisters in their Maternity Hospital and Crèche. My life is so much richer for all of these experiences.

Have I regretted the decision made forty years ago? No, I feel each day brings me a fresh start, another challenge. I have certainly been stretched and done many things I never thought possible. I love being part of a company of women, here in my own Province and throughout the world, who share the same passion to serve, with humility, simplicity and charity those most in need and in turn to learn from them what hope and dependence on God really means.