

## IHMs In Action



Sarita Manavalan and Sister Kate crushing millet in Botswana

Sister Kathryn T. (Catherine Ann) Pierce, IHM, expected to be a classroom teacher for many years, but working in cross-cultural settings changed her mind.

Sister Kate taught in both the Catholic and public school systems in Puerto Rico for 14 years while earning a master's degree in cross-cultural education. After she left Puerto Rico, she lived in the south Bronx.

"I intended to prepare to go to Tanzania for mission work," she recalls. "Instead, while serving on the IHM Vice Provincial leadership team, I became acquainted with the Maryknollers when I was studying for a degree in liberation theology and scripture at their School of Theology.

"When I completed my degree, Tanzania and Uganda were at war, so I wasn't able to follow my original plan. The Maryknoll Society asked me to work in its newly created Center for Mission Studies. They provided a basic outline but I had the freedom and responsibility to decide what the center would do."

The center initially focused on easing the transition for those who planned to minister in a different culture and those returning to their home cultures. As the center evolved, Sister Kate added programs about cultural diversity and acculturation, developed for international priests and religious entering ministry in the United States.



Sister Kate spent 27 years with Maryknoll cross-cultural services. When Maryknoll closed the center in 2006, she moved the office to Detroit and, with the support of a 12-member board, the work continues as [Intercultural Consultation Services](#) (ICS).

Sister Kate takes ICS programs overseas twice a year, but spends most of her time traveling throughout the United States preparing religious groups and others for intercultural ministry.

"Before people can effectively minister in another culture, they must be very aware of themselves and their own cultural biases," she says. They need to spend time reflecting on and discerning their call."

Respecting cultural diversity, learning cross-cultural conflict management and developing skills for intercultural living and working are critical components to Sister Kate's ministry. Equally important is helping people who are returning to their country of origin – what she calls their "passport country."

"When I came back to United States, I really didn't give much thought to how I'd changed after 14 years in Puerto Rico," Sister Kate reflects. "I learned firsthand how important it is to spend time on the re-entry process and ask the question, 'Who am I **now**, as a result of my experiences?'

"After spending years away, your country of origin isn't 'home' anymore," she explains. "You have changed. Your family and friends have changed and you see your country from a different perspective. It can take two years or more to re-create it as 'home' as you honor your intercultural experiences."

*In 2000, Sister Kate received the Mission Award from the U.S. Catholic Mission Association for her dedication and commitment to cross-cultural mission issues.*