During the 400th Jubilee of the Foundation of the Congregation of Mary Ward in 2009, various Friends of Mary Ward in Albania were beginning to gather informally to prepare for this great year. Albania was invited to send some representatives from the lay people associated with the IBVM mission, to join the International group in Rome, who were celebrating this anniversary.

As a preparation for this celebration, a small group of three lay Friends, followed the path of Mary Ward by praying as a group, the Spiritual Exercises in daily life, over a period of 7 months, prior to the celebrations in Rome. Rome was wonderful and really opened the life of Mary Ward to the three first friends who went to this international meeting. Soon after this, IBVM in Albania was invited to take part in a summer school on Women’s Spirituality. This was organised by a European Catholic Women’s Foundation called ANDANTE. At the final session of this meeting each country group was invited to make a commitment to one action which would develop the spirituality of that nation.

The Albanians suggested that the first group of The Friends of Mary Ward was initiated back in Albania. From this time until the present this group, called The Friends of Mary Ward, have been meeting monthly to share prayer, the spirituality of Mary Ward and Ignatius of Loyola. Recently this group has developed new ways of working. The group have formed their own teams to lead the monthly sessions and have made a commitment to take on mission and integrate this into their daily spirituality. They have supported families in need and led retreat days and evening sessions of prayer. It has been a wonderful new development.

**The Friends of Mary Ward Mission:**

*The Friends of MW mission is praying and reflecting together as a group, having mini social projects and doing voluntary work to help people in need. All of this is in the light of the charism of Mary Ward.*

“I hope in God it will be seen that women in time to come will do much.”

Mary Ward [1617]
The Friends of Mary Ward in Albania is a prayer directed group with a Christian and Gospel base. It shares a common leadership and is drawn into social action. The members follow the charism and mission of Mary Ward.

This spiritual group, pray, reflect and share together their thoughts and the ways in which God is guiding them through their feelings and insights. The Friends of Mary Ward have made a commitment to integrate their mission into their daily spirituality. A group of volunteers follow the mission of Mary Ward and lead social activities to help people in need, to serve “wherever the need is greatest”.

**FMW Activities**

The Friends of Mary Ward meet monthly to reflect on the life and spirituality of Mary Ward. During our joyful gatherings, we share, sing and pray together. Some of the themes covered recently have been Mary, Mother of God, The Trinity, Trust and Right relations with God, discernment and the whole of creation. The group also organizes Days Out and short Retreats, such as:

- **Reflection at the beautiful Eufemia church in Albania.** Silence for contemplation was what the group enjoyed mostly in this harmonious and pleasant space.
- **Retreat and Day Out at the lake, Pogradec, Albania.** This day was mostly spent on thoughts about the future of FMW, focusing on doing volunteering work, helping people in need.
- **Retreat at the peaceful Convent in Nenshat, Lezhe, Albania.** An entire day dedicated to prayer and reflection on the mission, actions, future of FMW in Albania.
- **Helping 5 poor families, Shendelli, Sarande, Albania.** This volunteer activity was made possible through the charity of more than 50 people seriously engaged to give out dozens of packages with food supplies for these families in very bad living conditions.