



Uganda 2013

Rich in joy and happiness, rich in generosity and love, rich in faith.

On 23rd May Simona Verdura and I set off on our journey to Uganda. We had been liaising with Fr Boniface, the parish priest, with whom we would be staying, but as we were the first volunteers from our parish to venture over to see him, I was undoubtedly apprehensive. I did not know where we would be sleeping, how we would be washing, what we would be eating, but I trusted Fr Boniface when he said “do not fear, all is gonna be ok”. It was more than ok, it was fantastic!

Fr Boniface had done everything in his power to make us feel welcome (from assembling a shower to buying tomato ketchup!); we felt at home instantly. Nothing was ever too much trouble for anybody, and we were well fussed after by the cook, Rose, and Fr Boniface’s secretary, Pross.

We stayed in the guest room of the temporary priests’ house (they are currently constructing a new priests’ house so that the current place they are living in can become a health centre). We had no electricity, but they put on a small generator at night. The compound of the parish included 2nd year postulants, who were around the same age as us and who immediately incorporated us into their family. Along with the nuns, Sr Lydia and Sr Constantine, they included us in everything they did: praying, singing, celebrating feast days, cooking and basket making to name but a few! They asked us plenty of times if we would like to become a nun!



We attended Mass every morning and the priests would translate the homily for our sake. The parishioners welcomed us with open arms, time and time again. There was a welcome celebration for us, where children sang and danced for us, members of the parish council were introduced to us and parishioners presented us with gifts of food that they could spare. We were overwhelmed by their generosity of heart. These people may be poor in terms of money and material things, but they are far richer in faith, love, kindness, generosity, joy and happiness than anyone I have ever met. I had fewer material things out there (though still more than many of the locals) and I felt satisfied with what I had. My priorities changed and choice was replaced with necessities. These people value the true virtues of what make us good human beings.



The other purpose to our trip was to teach children English, using fun methods, although we had no idea what the standard of English or teaching would be like. The national language of Uganda is English, but different areas of Uganda have their own languages. We were in an area where they speak Luganda.



The standard of the teachers was outstanding, and the children were very attentive. The teaching style was very strict (copying from the blackboard and repetition drilling), but despite this, many of the teachers were enthusiastic about our teaching methods (animated stories, songs and games), they joined in and practiced with the children in our absence.





Both the children and teachers work extremely hard, the school day can start at 7 in the morning until 9 in the evening for the older children. Teachers and children have a mutual understanding of how important education is (those who can afford to go to school are fortunate) and many of the teachers are working, dedicated, with very little pay.

St Kizito, in Father Boniface's former parish, is a primary school that has had sponsorship from Germany and Bedford has helped in the latter years. It has been Fr Boniface's project since 1998 and he has developed it immensely, it now has numerous classrooms, a nursery school, boys and girls dormitories and a dining room (though there are no dining tables yet). Not all of the children who attend the school are boarders, some go home in the evenings. The dormitories house the orphans who have no home to go to. Fr Boniface has done such a lot of work for St Kizito, but he is now in a new parish and he wants to transform the small schools there into established boarding schools like that of St Kizito.

His plans don't stop there, he is hoping to finish the new priests' house in the next 2 years and convert his current residence into a health centre. Malaria risk is high and many villagers can't get the treatment they need as the nearest hospital is too far. If this health centre prevents deaths, it will also in turn prevent orphans.

We raised a small sum of money, thanks to the parishioners of The Holy Child and St Joseph's and St Francesca Cabrini, in Bedford, which Fr Boniface will spend on buying sewing machines for the primary and secondary schools we visited. This enables the children (mainly girls) to develop skills to help them become self-reliant.

When we met the Bishop of Masaka (a very humble man), he told us that at the forefront of the church's mission in Uganda is engaging the youth. The women are very hardworking in all they do, but the men can become lazy and bored, take to drink and drugs and become susceptible to possible influences of civil war. Therefore, developing skills such as carpentry and construction equips the men with vocational possibilities.

Despite the many developments that have already been accomplished, there is still a lot of work to be done. Illness and hunger is still rife and there are many children not in school; some orphans but some whose families are just too poor to be able to afford to send them to school.

The schools in Fr. Boniface's current parish need to be better equipped with enough teaching staff, classrooms, dormitories and clean water wells.

Sponsoring a child costs as little at £240 per year (only £20 a month).

We would like to thank everyone who supported our trip, especially the Catenians for their generous contribution and our Lady of Guadalupe Guardians. We feel grateful for having had this opportunity to meet such inspirational people and will continue to fundraise for this cause.

- Rebecca Lland

