



St. Francis Family Helper Programme

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**Dear Friends of St. Francis Family Helper Programme, in various corners of the world,
from Africa, Europe, North America, Canada and Asia,**



It is with gratitude that we send greetings to you all and wish those who celebrate it a very Happy Christmas. For all our friends

and supporters, we pray that 2024 will bring us more peace,

wisdom, joy, happiness and good health. A lot has happened this year of 2023 in St Francis and we would like to share news of these events. Don't forget that most of you, our readers, are among the ones who make these events happen, because of your generosity and support of all kinds.

In 2023, St Francis opened on Monday 9th January. The day was given over to reflection, mindfulness exercises and a staff meeting to share about the past and plan for the future.



All the staff were present and they participated in a walking meditation, where focus was placed on the beauty of nature and how love of nature can contribute to our health and happiness. After the



walking meditation, the staff gathered for a meeting to begin the New Year 2023. This year of 2023 has been a very special one for St. Francis FHP in many ways. We celebrate 40 years of its existence, which is quite a lifetime for a small NGO begun on a school campus to help keep children from dropping out of school because of poverty. You will read some of the happenings that have been part of our lives.

News from the Departments

Counsellor Training Institute:

To date the Institute has focused on Certificate, Diploma and Degree training in Counselling Psychology. However, owing to high demand from various sources, the Institute organised short courses for individuals from various professions. Two of these were: Guidance and Counselling; and Leadership, Management and Transformation. Both courses took place in the evenings (5-7pm) after working hours and lasted for 1 month. 52 students enrolled for Guidance and Counselling and all completed the required hours and received a Certificate. 35 adult men and women enrolled for and completed the course in Leadership. On the day where they received their certificates many of the participants mentioned how the short courses had positively impacted family and work relationships

and quite a number enrolled for the longer Diploma or Degree.

In November, our affiliating, accrediting University, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkosi, awarded Certificates in Counselling Psychology to 2 students, Diplomas to 3 students and Bachelor's Degree to 9 students.



Above they are cutting a celebratory cake in St. Francis. This conferring of degrees is always a major event for our students, many of whom struggled with issues of time and money during their years of study, juggling spousal and parental duties, with professional work of teaching in primary schools and study time at St. Francis during holidays or weekends.



New plans

St. Francis has submitted a new course of studies--Degree in Education, Guidance and Counselling, to our accrediting university for approval. This is a long and laborious process and goes through many steps with the Curriculum Review Board, the Senate and the Higher Council for Education and it

is a big deal when final approval has been granted. The Institute is also planning to start a Master's Degree in Counselling Psychology.

Under the umbrella of the CTI are three field projects funded by Misereor, Kindermissionswerk and Missio of Germany. Each funding period lasts for 3 years.

The Misereor funded project works with parents/couples to help them deal with the big issues which cause much suffering: little or no dialogue and communication between spouses, gender inequality, unequal distribution of family resources, of labour in the home, violence, alcoholism, hierarchical decision-making and parent/child conflict. At the end of 3 years evaluations are carried out and these clearly show enormous changes in family situations. The work is very demanding and all facilitators have experienced burnout in the constant demand for their counselling and psychosocial services.



An MoU between Government Leaders and St. Francis as the Misereor project enters a new district to work for three years.

Kindermissionswerk funds the training of primary school teachers in Personal and Group Transformation and Child Centred Non Violent Education. Violence against children is still widespread in schools and homes of Uganda where adults still believe in the old saying "Spare the rod and spoil the child". Some children suffer enormously and lose not only their own self-esteem, but love for learning and pursuit of knowledge.

In April, 2023, two of the staff of Kindermissionswerk, the desk officer Teresa Braun and her colleague Susan visited St. Francis for the first time and stayed for 3 days. Like many newcomers to the country they loved passing the Equator and having their photographs taken.



L to R: Susan, who works in communications, Sr. Christine and Teresa, the desk officer from Kindermissionswerk

During their visit, which for them was both a “come and see” visit as well as an assessment and evaluation of activities which they have been funding for several years, they had many meetings.



Meeting with the head teachers and their wives from the schools trained in Rubirizi and Ntungamo districts.



Meeting with some of the children from primary schools where teachers had been trained. The children spoke of the many changes in the behaviour of the teachers.

They held meetings with various other stakeholders; children being sponsored by St. Francis and Kindermissionswerk, some of the 800 teachers who were trained from schools of Ntungamo and Rubirizi, parents whose children attend the above schools, facilitators who give the training to teachers and the administrative staff of St. Francis FHP. Next year the project will move to two new districts of Mitooma and Isingiro.



Gerlinde Vetter, consultant leading the evaluation of the Teachers’ Project.

Missio, Munich funds the training of Catechists both in the Catechetical Training Centre as well as in parishes of the Archdiocese where catechists have been working for many years to assist parish priests and to work in areas where it is not possible to have a permanent priest.

Thankfully, in carrying out end of project phase evaluations, it has been found that the recipients of the trainings have been very happy with the transformative experiences which have helped change their lives for the better, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and professionally.

Sr. Rosemary Kamahoro works in this project and recently she and Benardette attended the “commissioning” (equivalent to graduation in lay institutes) of 88 new male and female catechists.



Above Photo: Commissioning Ceremony before Catechists are sent out to parishes or Eucharistic centres

ST Francis Vocational Training Institute

Currently, the institute has 72 students on the full



On a trip to the source of the Nile in Jinja

time programme of Fashion and Design, and 8 on the weekend programme. 37 students have registered with Uganda Business and Technical Examination Board (UBTEB) and 17 with the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT).

Graduation day 2/12/2023

21 male and female students graduated with two Certificates, one from the Ministry of Education and one from the Institute. Sue Horrocks was the guest of honour and handed out the certificates.



Students modeled their final examination garments which each one designed, cut to a self-made pattern, sewed in a fixed amount of time. Some will return to complete a Diploma.

Parents attended the graduation and expressed pride in and gratitude for what their sons and daughters had achieved.

Sue Horrocks was the guest of honour and gave out the certificates

Sue was very happy to be wearing a Ugandan Kitenge Dress.



TRIP TO JINJA

Earlier in the year, students and staff made a trip to Nyanza Textile Industry Limited (NYTIL) in Jinja, where students witnessed the conversion of raw cotton into fabric in all its stages and where they were able to experience what it might be like to work in a big industry.



Above they are seeing the raw cotton after initial sorting and cleaning, being prepared for the spinning stage. An instructor is explaining the many cleaning steps after cotton is picked.

Child Sponsorship Department

We are grateful to God, this year is ending well. Sponsored children and the staff in the department are well and healthy. The sponsored children study

in many different schools and this year 10 of them completed their studies to the level which St. Francis pays for. Generally speaking, we do not pay for 3rd level education as it is too expensive and it is difficult to find sponsors who can pay the high costs. Those who wish to continue must find other ways of raising the funds. In some rare cases, sponsors express a desire to pay university or college fees for the child they sponsor.

Because of the generosity of our benefactors we were able to provide school needs and other personal requirements to our sponsored children, offer psychosocial support and counselling when needed. During our school visits, all our sponsored children were doing well in schools and our visits always encouraged them to work hard as they felt loved and cared for.

We are very grateful to all our sponsors who are still supporting us. We would like to let you know that your donation changes the life of a whole family and the generations that follow. May God continue blessing the work of your hands.

We also give thanks to sponsors who take time to write to their children because it makes the children feel very happy and loved. We hope our sponsors enjoy reading letters from their sponsored children because they write every holiday.

Unfortunately, the Child Sponsorship Department has continuously faced the challenge of few sponsors and an increased number of children in need of support for education. Currently we have a total of 68 children on the programme, but the applications in the file are over 100. There was a time when we were sponsoring the education of more than 300 children. Fees were much less than they are today. Yet the needs and conditions of vulnerable children do not change. Many such children come from single or no parent families where orphans are left in the care of aging grandparents. Some of our sponsors who have been supporting us for many years have reached a stage where they themselves need care and can no longer pay school fees for children in Uganda. We are constantly in search of new sponsors. At a time on the planet where so many tragedies are occurring in front of our eyes, it is definitely more difficult to draw focus to our small world in St. Francis.

As you read this article, if you feel inspired to join us to help change the life of one very vulnerable

child, kindly do not hesitate to contact us. We have a well-established system that leads to building a personal and close relationship between a sponsored child and her/his sponsor. This gives the sponsor satisfaction as he realizes the benefits of the sponsorship, and at the same time, the sponsored child gets to experience a caring helpful adult in his/her life which many have lacked. They exchange letters, cards and photos etc. It is amazing how both feel happy about the relationship.

A Volunteer's Experience in Uganda Sue Horrocks

Last winter, I approached my friend Valerie about wanting to engage in a volunteer experience in Africa. Since I have known her, she has been going to Africa and had not only made an impact on a number of communities, but had always spoken of her experiences with such passion. She right away put me in contact with Mary Moran and my journey began. As a mental health professional in Canada, I was intrigued and moved by the work at St Francis Family Helper Programme and especially in the Counsellor Training Institute.



On October 27/23 I arrived in Kampala quite late at night, having met Mary in Amsterdam and spent 12 hours on a plane getting to know one another better than on our zoom calls between Ireland and Canada.

Welcomed in Entebbe by Sr. Christine, Agatha, Edmund and offered flowers like VIP's.

We were exhausted and headed to her apartment, but at that time I was too tired to appreciate all that was before me. However, the next day, and the days following while we stayed in Kampala, my world began to be turned upside down.

When I arrived at St. Francis, I was impressed by the warmth and kindness of everyone I met. I attended the graduation of students who attended the short courses, of the counselling programme and was deeply moved by the commitment of everyone and the joy that filled the celebration.

I had offered to teach Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to students of the long term programmes, and was excited to have two separate classes. At first, I was nervous, but the students, my teaching partner Rebecah Williams and Benardette the director made it a wonderful experience right from the start.



One of the classes. Rebecah and I are in front

I particularly loved the breaks in class that were filled with Ugandan music and dance. We all worked very hard and I taught for 84 hours in 16 days. The students who attended expressed their great satisfaction as they were feeling confident in their ability to use CBT in their professional and personal lives.



2nd class with Bena on the front left

Fortunately, my trip to Uganda will also be remembered for other opportunities that I had, including passing the Ugandan Equator, doing Gorilla trekking in the volcanic mountain chain that

separates Uganda, Rwanda and the Congo, spending a weekend in Kigali, Rwanda and making a safari to visit Lake Mburo National Park. These all added to what was already an amazing trip.

Coming to Uganda for six weeks has been a transformative experience. I am grateful for my Ugandan family, Agatha whose smile brightened every day, Sr. Christine whose positive and warm energy was always appreciated, Edmund the wonderfully informed driver who made it possible to see not only Uganda but Rwanda as well, and Rebecah Williams who made me laugh, became an instant friend and awesome teaching partner. Most importantly, Mary Moran for feeding me, answering my never-ending questions about Uganda, inspiring me to do the best job possible, and being the only reason why I was able to come to this beautiful country. Without her I never would have left Canada. I return home, leaving a piece of my heart at St. Francis, hoping to return one day, forever a better person for having stepped outside my comfort zone and come to a place where the people are beautiful and their smiles are heartwarming.

Celebration of 40 Years Anniversary of St Francis. Handing over of Roles and Responsibilities and New Leadership in the Organization.

His Grace Lambert Bainomugisha with the Board of Trustees, Board of Directors, Management and all the Staff of St. Francis had a thanksgiving Mass at 2pm on the occasion of the 40 years Anniversary of St Francis Family Helper Programme, begun as a small project in 1983. During the Mass, his Grace thanked Mary Moran for the work she had done in Uganda for many years.



Board members & Staff of SFHP with his Grace, Lambert Bainomugisha

Sr. Grace, Regional of Africa Region of the DMJ's, also chairperson of Board of Trustees also spoke. "On behalf of the organization, we would like to congratulate Mary Moran the Foundress of St Francis Family Helper Programme for her distinguished and outstanding services to St Francis. No word can express our gratitude for your big heart which accommodates everyone."

Mary Moran has expressed her desire of retiring, to the Patron of St Francis and to the entire Board and it has been granted but it is not easy to step in her shoes. We keep adjusting but still we think we don't get there. Mary is just unique, we can't replace her but we have to say in humble ways, "let us do what we can, and the rest we put it in God's hands". Thank God Mary has accepted that anytime we need her support, she will remain available as long as God gives her more years on this earth.



Mary's Speech

Your Grace Archbishop Lambert, Members of the Board of Trustees, Members of the Board of Directors, Staff of St. Francis and Visitors, I celebrate today as a day of Thanksgiving and a Day of Passing on the Stick, which is important in every institution of Church and Government.

In ideal situations, it is not just a job that is being passed on, not just a responsibility or a title, but a mission of continuation and commitment. This is what we hope for in St. Francis, even if we don't always succeed.

However, my main source of joy and gratitude today is that we have been blessed in the quality,

commitment and fidelity of many of our leaders. I especially thank Sr. Christine Ntibarutaye and the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, who accepted to take over the leadership and ownership of St. Francis Family Helper Programme on the 30th June 2015.

I thank the Board of Directors who have backed up the management of the organization through good times and hard times and who gave undivided support to Sr. Christine and the management. So often, people from inside and outside Uganda asked me "when are you going to retire from St. Francis. I always had the same answer—"when we have the right people in place". Then as the director of St. Francis Counsellor Training Institute, the same questions were asked, and the same answers given. We had to find someone who was academically qualified to run a 3rd level Training Institute with a good record. We had to find someone with integrity who would manage that tight line between doing a job to support one's family, therefore needing a living wage, but also someone who could commit to the mission, traditions and ethics of St. Francis Counsellor Training Institute.

We needed someone with people skills and management skills and who could oversee the various community projects in the CTI.

We needed someone who could be incorruptible when it comes to the nepotistic tendencies of many organizations in this country, as well as in my own country of Ireland, where it is not what you know but whom you know. Whether in the Church or government we are not freed from the temptations of power, privilege and money. Yet today, as we do formal partial handovers for the first year of Probation in the CTI, we hope and pray that the choices which we have made, were and are the best choices for this organization, for this Archdiocese and for this country.

My gratitude goes to the staff of the organization, without whom there would be nothing to talk about. It is not the leaders who win the battles but those men and women who go to work on a daily basis and who bring success to the tasks assigned to them. My last word of deep appreciation and gratitude, goes to the person, without whom, we as St. Francis FHP would not be able to function—that is our gracious Archbishop, His Grace Lambert Bainomugisha. Since the day I met you, Your Grace, as the chancellor of this archdiocese, you have never been other than gracious, kind,

supportive, and I am very aware of the support you have continued to offer this Organization, the way in which you have honoured our mission in emotional, spiritual and material ways. Thank you! Thank you!

Meet some of our New Leaders

**Sr. Leonidas Komugisha,
New Assistant Director of the Organization
Assisting Sr. Christine**



Sr. Rosette Kyogabirwe, Assistant Director Counsellor Training Institute



Benardette Orikiriza, Director of Counsellor Training Institute



Katto Ali Sempa New Misereor project Team Leader



Rebecca Nabwire Williams, Assistant Registrar of Counsellor Training Institute



Deus Turinamasiko, new tailor in Production Unit



Akatukwatsa Annonciata, new cashier

Dear Readers

It is time to stop writing and to wish you the peace and compassion that may be required to face 2024 with optimism.

If we could do a global survey of 2023, too many people, men, women and children would talk about the deep suffering, despair, grief, displacement, death, disability, loss of family, loss of livelihood, loss of hope, through war or natural disasters, and we would read numbness, fear and incomprehension on many many faces. If we are not in despair and wish to spread love, compassion and hope what can we do in the face of such widespread anxiety and pain.

We return to the advice we received when we studied Transformational Leadership with Dr. Monica Sharma and Dr. Vernice Solimar (the latter came to Uganda to train our staff and the staff of the University of St. Joseph, at Mbarara). To push us towards positive activism, they reminded us to “Think Globally and Act Locally”.

There is ALWAYS someone whose life you can improve if you just look and listen. There is always someone to whom you can offer compassion and encouragement. We always have the poor and hungry with us. We need not fear not finding a way to make the world a better place.



Some of our sponsored boys and girls



Parents of Sponsored Children coming for a training on Stages of Child Development



Sponsored Children on a holiday workshop on how to set and achieve goal

Thank you again to all of you who have made the world of many Ugandans a better place. Thank you for continuing to support us.

We dare to wish you Blessings, Peace and hope in the year 2024.

Sr. Ch. Wilbur Tays

Mary Nava