

Visit to Irundu 31st July to 17th August 2011

The St Matia Malumba Health Centre III

Finally numbers are picking up again after a good harvest in July. The disastrous harvest in January left many people too poor to send their children to school or to come to the Health Centre. Not an easy problem to address, as if you start giving free medicines then no one will pay. Through the efforts of our nurses when they go on Outreach many more people have been persuaded of the benefits of ante-natal care so our clinics are very busy. We have about 60 births a month so we have made a real impact on infant mortality and maternal deaths. Patients come from a government clinic (often perched precariously on a boda-boda just before giving birth!) because they get such poor attention there and they really appreciate the kindness of our staff and the quality of our equipment. They also bring their prescriptions to us as the government clinic only gets supplies of medicines every three months and they have usually run out by the end of one month. As with India, Africa has a brilliant health service on paper but a useless one in practice. Our laboratory assistant and other members of staff are being trained by an NGO backed by USAID (United States Agency for International Development) so we shall shortly apply for a licence to prescribe ARV (antiretroviral) drugs. Through the Diocese we have been approached and approved by a Dutch NGO which invited us to apply for funding so we have asked for funds to run a full mobile service. We have had some funding from generous parishioners but we must follow up every offer of funds other than from Worth so that the clinic does not depend on us for ever. We also receive an amount of funding from the government which has to be spent as they dictate – accounting for this requires masses of paper work but we can't have the next tranche until they are satisfied.

Micro-credit

We made 5 start-up loans, 43 ox-plough loans and 1 individual loan. We have had a few problems re repayment of capital but everyone, mainly the other borrowers, won't let us give up! There was a good harvest in July so things are much easier now and I gather that since I left more has been coming in. I am confident that the capital fund provided by a generous parishioner will remain in tact. I appointed an administrator, Bosco, who has been working since the beginning of July. He is well qualified to do the job and he knows Irundu because he came right at the start to explain micro-credit to our farmers. He is dividing his time between overseeing the Health Centre and running the micro-credit.

Friendship House/Visits

Unfortunately the house inverter was tampered with by a guest, not one from UK, so we ran out of both water and power again! Costly. We are always having to replace door locks, handles, cistern parts, taps, etc. because everything is of such poor quality that it gets broken very easily. Fr Peter had a very successful visit in June and is planning to return next year with 30 or so students from Worth School to help rebuild a classroom – wonderful. George led a group of six later in June – I hope they were comfortable in the house and achieved what they set out to do. Sadly Rosemary is not able to come in November having started planning her visit a year ago. Fr Aidan's cousin, Pat Devlin, is coming in October for a month to prepare a programme for the parish of Irundu in respect of two Diocesan initiatives: Adult Literacy and Gender Domestic Violence. Pat is well qualified to do this and will expect to return for much longer periods in the future to implement her programme. Fr James is coming in November with four parishioners and Joe O'Dwyer is hoping to come out in Nov. at some point. I need to know dates of visits please so the house can be booked – from time to time we receive enquiries from priests and nuns.

Vocational School

Things are going well here and the students were doing exams whilst I was there. It's so very different from our system – students drift in during the first fortnight of a new term; they may do 3 terms then be absent for various reasons and re-appear a couple of terms later to finish the course – the important thing is that we keep track of them and ensure they get the education eventually. Our carpentry workshop is well used and fortunately our generous donor knows a thing or two about carpentry and the importance of having space to

use potentially lethal machinery safely, space to store wood when it is seasoned and space to work on large orders of furniture including, of course, our benches before they are taken in one delivery to a school. There were no vocational students before we sponsored them and this is helping to show others the value of a practical training which leads to a job. Thank you to everyone who has kindly supported this scheme. It would be hopeless to sponsor the academic students because we have about 60 or so paying students so if some get it free then no one will see any reason to pay. The land which we opened up for our demonstration garden is now being used to grow maize for the school together with a variety of other crops. Despite what Tom would have you believe he hasn't worked on the land for over two years and all the credit should go to Michael and Juliet who have worked really hard to keep this land productive. Tom organised our demonstration garden but then virtually disappeared for 2 years returning in Feb this year to help with the micro-credit – he leaves at the end of September. As always things are not always what they seem to be.

Sales of Tea Towels, etc

Jenny has beavered away on her sewing machine with her new idea once sales of jewellery were exhausted. I was able to take out a further £110 which has paid for one VVF operation – the balance will be used for club foot ops. as and when a place is available. All Jenny's hard work is very much appreciated by the patients going for life changing ops: children who were excluded from society are able to go to school, women who have been shunned by the community for years can return to the fold.

Benches

Paul and Helle had the idea of 'Change for Irundu' and have continued to keep us in tins for nearly 4 years. I took out a further £362.42 which is enough for 15 benches. To date our generous parishioners have collected £5,884.79 - enough for 227 benches. Thanks to Paul & Helle's initiative we have made a big improvement to many of our 17 schools under the jurisdiction of our parish.

Pen-Pals – no movement on this.

House groups – no movement on this.

Food for Thought: I swear Fr Stephen knows everyone who's anyone and on my last day we had meetings with the Ministry of Water and Environment. The first one was with the Commissioner for Rural Water Development and this led on to one with the Assistant Commissioner who is responsible for water for production. They advise the Government as to what schemes to promote and hopefully back them with grants, etc. They are advocating intense cultivation of high value crops, (eg. cabbages, tomatoes, sweet corn, capsicum, egg plant) in about one quarter of an acre; apparently you can grow 6,700 cabbages in that area! An added advantage with all year round irrigation is being able to produce food in the off season. Our biggest problem is our water source but Fr Stephen and I came away with lots of ideas which we shall discuss and explore in more depth on my forthcoming visit. If we could help farmers with irrigation it would make such a difference to everyone. I wonder if anyone heard the Radio 4 appeal on Sunday 18th September? It gave me an idea: schools in the developing world where pupils grow food for the benefit of their local communities – cash raised helps support more and more children into school. Certainly an idea worth exploring for schools lucky enough to have access to water so irrigation of crops may not be a problem.

The highlight of my last trip was attending the ordination of our first home-grown priest, Anthony Mugalagala. Gosh, they know how to celebrate! Anthony was led into the compound by a brass band – that got us all dancing! About 60 or so priests processed in followed by the Bishop. The whole service was a wonderful mix of praying, singing, clapping and dancing and you got a real sense of appreciation and pride that one of their very own parishioners had chosen to devote his life to God and the service of others. Finally after a 10.00 am start all 500 of us were given lunch around 4.30. The place was heaving with priests and nuns the night before sleeping wherever we could find a space. A Salesian college has specialised in providing tents and speaker systems but we weren't prepared for the price: an all night disco! What with that out the front of the house and the cooks clattering around all night out the back sleep was in short supply but

clearly spirits were not dampened! A huge amount of organisation and work went into the preparations by Fr Stephen and his parish council and praise was heaped upon them. Next day we went to Anthony's village for his first Mass – another big celebration this time hosted by his family. I know Anthony's father well because he was one of our first micro-credit borrowers and has continued to have loans for oxen ever since. He is even gradually building his own brick house.

As always I was the sole representative from Worth at the Ordination. It's very disappointing that visitors never time their visits to coincide with such an event or the annual parish open day which is a really good occasion to mingle with the parishioners, to get to know the Bishop and some other priests in the diocese and to learn more about the Church and life generally in Uganda. We still know very little of daily life in Irundu for children or adults.

Cynthia Haynes