

An African Adventure

Parishioner, Bridget Shepherd, reports on her visit to Uganda,
Summer 2011

Last year I was offered the opportunity to be part of a group who would visit



St. Charles Lwanga Girls' Training Centre in Kalungu, Uganda. The school is run by the Society of the Sacred Heart so is a sister school of Sacred Heart Fenham which I attend. We each had to raise £1500 to cover the cost of our fares and pay for the materials that we would use while working in the school. I would not have been able to raise the money

without the very generous support of the parish. Thanks for buying all those Christmas puddings!

Two weeks in Uganda scrubbing, cleaning and painting flew by quicker than anyone could have predicted. We managed to clean and paint four science labs and the chapel. Science labs are rather annoying as you can't just move the plumbing away from the walls so have to crawl under the dusty desks and not think about what is living under there. What's more the colour scheme was incredible - a lovely tangerine (because the local dust is orange coloured) or red oxide which stains everything including hands!



It wasn't only the cleaning that we went for though. We were there to experience a completely different culture and learn from them. We spent a



large amount of time simply chatting with our buddies who had been assigned to look after us and help us to adapt to this strange environment. Mind you, the strangest part was constant sun and there wasn't much they could do about that!. It was really comforting to have someone in this new situation who was there to help you, however understandably shy we all were.

We managed to spend a lot of time with our buddies. One highly memorable time was when we shared a meal with them. Unfortunately for us we were eating the local food, poscho and beans. Poscho is maize that has been.....well I'm not sure what is done to it but it ends up like a solid, grainy cake. The general consensus of the group was that we didn't particularly like eating the food once, let alone for every meal as the girls in the school do. We



we were also shocked at the living conditions of the girls as they were very cramped and there seemed to be holes in every mosquito net. We, who were taking our anti-malaria tablets religiously, mostly had perfect nets We felt highly guilty that our buddies did not have this necessity.

What made these living conditions more shocking is that the school we were staying in and working in was one of the better schools in Uganda. As a fee paying school, with fees of £120 per term (a large amount in Uganda that parents often have to pay in crops rather than actual money) this Sacred Heart school is of a high standard which is potentially educating Uganda's future leaders who will bring change to Uganda.

We visited the local Sacred Heart primary school, Kaymsansula, another fee paying, boarding school. We were treated to an amazing welcome to the new buildings of the school. It was, again, a very good school but when we were sent in to classes to talk about England and my partner and myself found just over 90 children sitting in our one classroom it put the differing standards into perspective. A good school still had massive classes that would



have been completely unacceptable in England. While they were very well behaved how could we engage all 90 children at once? On this occasion we taught the children songs, they danced for us and we each shared information about our own lives.

The visit to the primary school really put school into perspective for the whole group. Despite the conditions they lived in all the girls remained full of joy. The singing at masses (several opportunities to hear this were available) was incredible and put the singing in our English schools to shame. We all, as a group, wanted to take recordings of this singing back to England to teach the rest of our school what they could do. However, what we do know is that other girls from Fenham will go out to Uganda as this is an ongoing project. Who knows, more girls from our parish may well go out!

