



## St. Francis Family Helper Programme

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Dear Friends of St. Francis



*Sr. Christine and Mary at Miceal's Fountain*

Since 1984 we have been writing annual Christmas and New Year newsletters to all our friends, relatives, donors, supporters, well-wishers in many countries on a few continents, giving news of our various activities in our four departments (Child Sponsorship, Counsellor Training Institute, Vocational Training Institute and Administrative). We have had many contributors creating these newsletters, with photographs documenting comings and goings, successes and disappointments.

As is the case globally, this year has been very different for us. It was on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, when we received a communication from the Government, that because of COVID 19 Pandemic, all the schools and institutions, all the places of worship, markets, hotels,

bars, various businesses not directly offering essential services had to close and all public and private vehicles as well as our famous or infamous boda-bodas (motor cycle taxis) had to cease movements. We were given just a few days to effect all government protocols. There was a training going on in St Francis for the staff of different organizations from within Uganda and outside from Zanzibar and South Sudan. Within a few hours everything changed. Afraid of being stuck or unable to travel students immediately left and within two days all staff had also gone. It was a strange feeling to have a complete shut down as in a time of war or natural disaster. Since then, the staff has not been back to work and the most devastating part of that is that we were unable to pay salaries after the month of April.

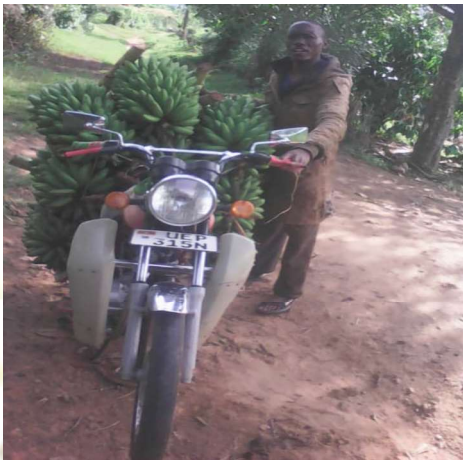
We are not a welfare state so unlike countries of Europe, North America, Australia, Japan etc, the government did not give unemployment benefits. This meant an immediate shortage of food for all those living in towns and cities and an inability to pay for essential medical services. It meant great stress for all members of our staff. Many, it is true, were able to go back to their villages and find some food. However, they were short of cash for other necessities. Those with chronic illness suffered the most perhaps as they could not afford medication. Some deteriorated and this affected their ability to find alternative work. It was a chain of occurrences which followed one another, and we could only observe rather than control. We had one or two generous friends who stepped into the vacuum and gave a small donation every month, for each member of staff just to ensure some bit of cash income. The lucky people were those who were able to do any type of alternative income generating work. Valeriano Mukwasibwe, our tailoring

instructor was one such person who carried on some private tailoring business at home.

A few other teachers got involved in farming and selling some of the extra produce.



Mukwasibwe Valeriano making masks



Hassan a tailoring instructor Carrying bananas in his motorcycle for sale in the market

Below Jovita head of tailoring

is digging in her field to produce food.



We had volunteers from Germany and they were all requested to go back to their country.



Katharina Barsing who will translate this letter working with sponsored children before her sudden departure.

We had volunteers from Ireland on compassionate leave who could not return. Tears, sadness, partings, loneliness at having to say goodbye to so many friends, insecurity about the future as well as ignorance about the nature of the virus were our conditions in those days. Now we are much wiser about how to protect ourselves but when the year begins and we reopen St. Francis we have many concerns about safety.

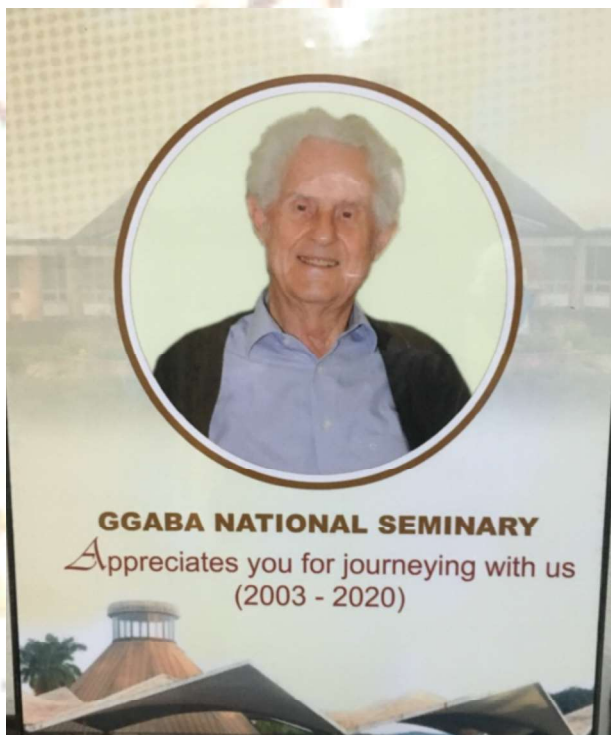
The need for safety, distancing, respect for one another brought its own personal hardships which people all over the world have been experiencing. "I, Christine, was unable to have friends to celebrate my birthday in May, which for a family person like me, was difficult, lonely and sad. Then when my sister Caritas was appointed to Burundi from Uganda, although she came to say goodbye to me, we were unable to shake hands, hug or kiss as we usually did. Mary was unable to go to her brother's wake or funeral in Ireland. Ferdi, although in Germany, when his sister died, was unable to attend her funeral or cremation. We were unable to attend the funerals of our good friends here who died of COVID 19." No single experience which we share is new in any way to our readers. This is what we are hearing from every corner of the globe and this is why so many cannot follow the restrictions if it means keeping away from family.

We are hearing all sorts of alarming stories coming from Europe and the United States. Here we also have



growing infections and increased numbers of deaths but we are not hearing accurate statistics on a regular basis. The hospitals are overcrowded, testing kits are not widely available, and we are advised to look after our own safety, to self-quarantine if we get sick with any of the Corona symptoms, to steam, use lemons and ginger in our drinks, eat healthy food and keep away from other humans.

I, Mary am in Kampala now. The driver and I came to here to help Fr. Ferdinand Tillmann, move from Gaaba National Major Seminary after 17 years of teaching here, to Lourdel House, the provincial house of the Missionaries of Africa in Uganda. He will spend some time there before taking up any other appointment.



Fr. Ferdinand Tillmann has certainly been one of the major supporters of our organization for the greatest number of years. It would take a separate newsletter to list his contributions so perhaps we shall do this another time. When the driver and Mary arrived from Mbarara they went with Fr. Tillmann to Nsambya Hospital to have Covid tests—all three who were going to be spending quite a lot of time with one another over these weeks of moving house. They spent a few hours in the hospital waiting for the test.

Nsambya Hospital was started by the Irish Franciscan nuns who ran the hospital for many many years. I, Mary, have been a patient there on more than one occasion. However this was my first visit for quite sometime and especially since Corona came to our planet. On this occasion I was shocked, impressed, humbled and in awe all at the same time, and driven to pray for both the sick and their carers. The test took place in the emergency ward, I think, and it was terribly busy with nurses, doctors, patients and patient family carers, all moving up and down in the small visible space. On the public corridor there was a desk. That was the "station" of the medical personnel. Some were sitting at the desk doing paper work. Others were coming to it for something or other and then going back to a cubicle of a sick person. In a small cubicle near the testing space, a woman in agony was crying and screaming and it felt as if her limbs were being cut off without anaesthetic. They do not have enough strong pain killers available in hospitals. I personally have had to intervene in the case of a friend in agony who was given something too mild for her post-operative pain. When I asked for stronger medication for her we were told we would have to get a prescription and buy it privately in a pharmacy. This makes everything so much more unavailable for poor people, the majority of our population. I have witnessed the resilience of Ugandans in the face of incredible suffering. I have watched them suffer silently with pain that I could not even begin to imagine without reaching out for some drug. Perhaps God or life has given a special pain threshold to those people whose lifetime of reaching out has not brought reward but more disappointment.

In the hospital I could not prevent tears from coming for this woman as she lay sobbing and crying and screaming by turns, while nurses and doctors went in and out of her little cubicle. I was absolutely blown away by the courage of the doctors and nurses. I could hardly stick the atmosphere for an hour. I am very very conscious of how people are suffering in hospitals at this time and how over-worked doctors and nurses are. I wish something could be done to help them. In this country they are also underpaid. They were cheerful, calm, offering service as if all of this chaotic pandemic context were normal—I suppose it has become so for many! Ever since that visit I pray each

day for both the sick and suffering and for those who are looking after them. They are really very special people and deserve our greatest respect and gratitude. I am grateful I had that time in the hospital as it deeply impressed me and I cannot forget the experience. Listening to the awful rise in infections, deaths and overwhelm of hospital personnel in the UK, the USA (especially Los Angeles County, Ireland the rest of Europe is really tough and more so when those put in positions of leadership, like Trump and his followers, have in fact done nothing to control the spread of the virus.

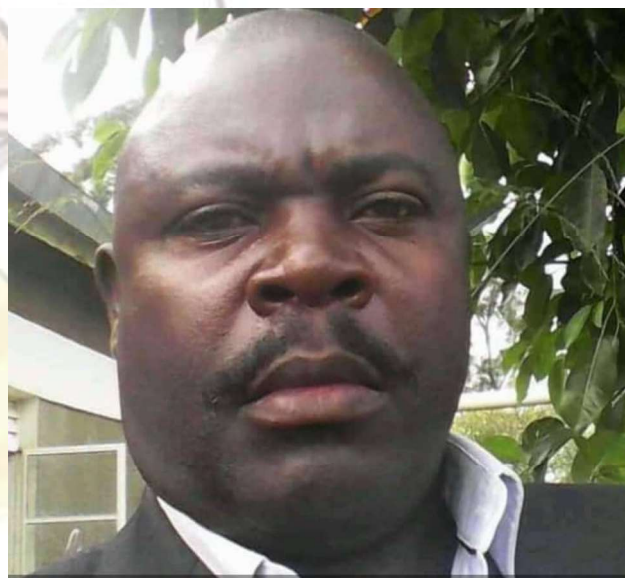
I was not the only person being touched by what I saw and heard or to become deeply moved. One Ugandan male associate of mine tested positive when he went for a "routine" test as he is working in the public service sector. As he had no symptoms whatsoever, was not feeling sick in any way, he was shocked with the results of the test and became silently sad and depressed. However when the hospital asked him to go back for treatment, he saw those with very serious symptoms suffering deeply, and his sadness turned to compassion for those who were finding it difficult to breathe and gratitude for his own condition, for which he could afford to get treatment, vitamins, good food, steaming and quarantine. Seeing clean air in our atmosphere, being able to breathe freely have now become symbols of wealth and happiness. Seeing green grass, beautiful trees, clean water, and hearing bird song, denote the existence of our treasures, before they also get infected and disappear. COVID 19 has brought its own special awareness and new consciousness into the lives of those who wish to "wake up, grow up, clean up and show up" (Ken Wilber).

We reopen St. Francis at the beginning of January 2021, with all staff coming back to plan for the future of our departments. We face very serious decisions. Uganda does not yet talk of vaccines in the sense of alerting the public to any definitive plan. We do not have stable electricity, so if refrigeration is a condition for a vaccine, the logistics of distribution and administering, in this mostly rural population, without electrification seem as difficult as organising trips to the moon. Many people have not taken the safety precautions seriously enough. Many are

asymptomatic and as testing without showing signs of illness is not possible without paying a lot of money, we cannot ask them to get tested. We do not have boarding facilities for all our students but may have to turn classrooms into dormitories as we cannot have students coming and going everyday. I usually enjoy teaching and working but I am not looking forward to interacting with classes until we get a vaccine.

We do not usually talk about American politics in our annual newsletter but this year is also different even in this area. The best explanation I have read explaining the choice of Trump, is described by Ken Wilber, in a 90-page e-book entitled "Trump and the Post Truth World". Trump did not create the context. He became a perfect manifestation of a world which had begun to reject universal values, objective truth, or communal and global consciousness.

Just now as I write, we received the news that one of our external facilitators, John Bosco Tumusiime, went out looking for food for his family, was knocked from



the boda-boda by a taxi and died on the spot with 3 others. JB has been with us in various training sessions. We went together to Dodoma in Tanzania to facilitate a training for 20 days.

JB was a kind and appreciative person and always anxious to do a good job and be of help to others. We send our deepest sympathies to his wife and children. We have had quite a number of deaths of friends and family members in these last months and I do not



think that anything except war has exceeded the number of times in a day when death is discussed. We lift the phone “have you heard????” and then we wait, wondering “who now?” Yet, there are still people all over the country who do not yet believe this is something to be taken seriously. The country is preparing for elections and life is going on as if everything were normal.



*Staff who returned to work Jan 2021*

For us in St. Francis, it is not at all normal and we cannot return to doing things as we were doing them. One major, major change which must be introduced is the construction of sleeping quarters for staff and students. For the last 25 years all our students have found their own accommodation and have come to us as day students. With Corona, with new strains entering the picture and with warnings from researchers telling us we can expect new viruses in the future if we keep cutting down the habitat of wild animals and if we keep taking wild animals into our food markets for home consumption and for export. HIV/AIDS, SARS, EBOLA, COVID 19 and ???? to come, are all the result of our own human interference with nature. Change is required both on the side of subsistence communities who are simply trying to eke out a living and on the side of importers who like exotic dishes on their expensive tables. Consumers must be the first to change and we are often the most difficult to convince.

When we finished the building that we completed two years ago, I for one, did not think we would be thinking of any further construction during my lifetime. Unfortunately it has become a requirement now to

have hostels for students and sleeping quarters for staff if we are to keep safe and if we are to continue operating two training institutes. I am not at all keen on entering classrooms, full of students who come from the communities on a daily basis. Young Africans really have a strong immunity and therefore many can be going around with no symptoms but still positive carriers of the virus and passing it on to others.

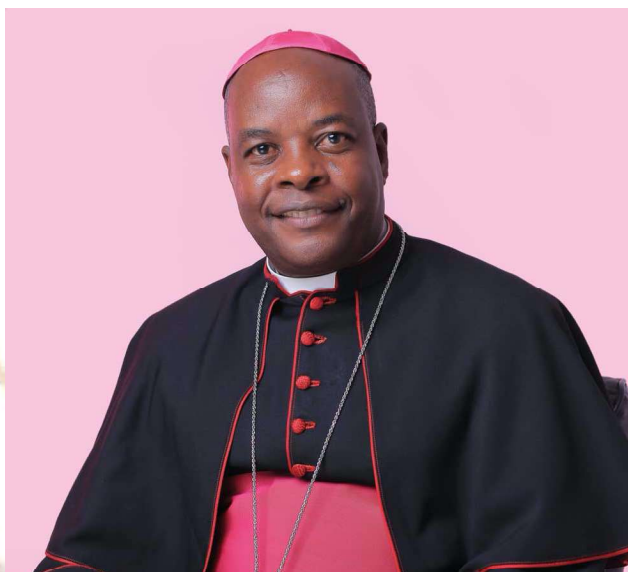
We have two large community projects—one for training couples and one for training primary school teachers. Both projects are aimed at eliminating violence in the schools and homes of the districts in which we work. Violence and incest have increased during our various lockdowns, especially with millions of students at home instead of away in boarding schools.

These projects are funded. Originally we were supposed to train 60 adults in one hall. Now because of keeping distance we have had to replan the number of people we can train in one session, the type of space we can use for training, the timetable, manner in which we can plan meals, accommodation etc both for trainers and participants. The logistics of keeping safe in such surroundings have obviously become more stringent, demanding and more stressful. We hope and pray we can manage for this coming year without casualties and further deaths of colleagues.

One of the great events in our Archdiocese in 2020 was the appointment and installation of our new **Archbishop Lambert Bainomugisha**, on 25th April 2020, when Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Archbishop (now Emeritus) Paul K. Bakyenga, who had reached the retirement age of 75 years, on 30 June 2019. Bishop Lambert was installed as **Archbishop** on 20 June 2020, at Mbarara Cathedral. Under “normal” circumstances this would have been a huge celebration for all of us.

We would all have been invited to attend a very joyous liturgical celebration, with well prepared singing and dancing, with speeches, representatives from all parts of the various Churches as well as government dignitaries and then of course eat chicken and drink beer making the great occasion memorable in true African tradition. COVID 19 put a stop to all these

former normalities. With social distancing, the ceremony was small. None of us in St. Francis



*His Grace Archbishop Lambert Bainomugisha*

attended except on radio. Even more difficult for everyone in the archdiocese who is impacted by such an event, is the fact, that because of a lot of infection within our districts and archdiocese, the new Archbishop could not perform all the usual expected rituals of meeting all the priests, religious, lay leaders, archdiocesan organisations, making new appointments, plans, announcing new strategies etc etc. More recently, two parishes were closed after the death of two priests, Fr. Paschal Beitunga and Fr. Irenaeus Karenzi. This followed government regulation. It is not an easy time for any new leaders within the Archdiocese and we at St. Francis offer our support in whatever way we can during this special critical period.

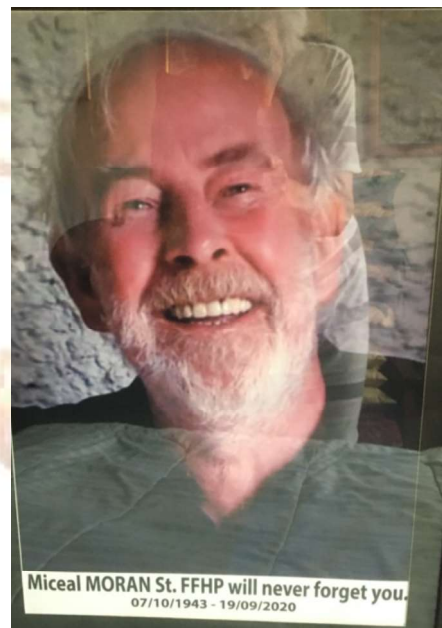
Micheal Moran who came to Uganda many times over the last 20 years, who supported St. Francis financially for even longer, made many friends in our organization and left his mark on the garden, fountain and "crazy brick path" which he designed and supervised.

The last time he visited he got a serious heart attack, was hospitalised in Nairobi for a month before being flown home, and since then suffered other attacks so we knew he was living on borrowed time. Nonetheless we were all saddened and shocked when we received the news that he collapsed and died on

one of his favourite beaches in Rosstown, Ireland on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

As the funeral Mass was live streamed a number of our staff and friends came to the service and afterwards Sr. Christine organized another

memorial service and placed a picture of Micheal near the flower beds which he planted. Many people offered condolences in the form of writing beautiful words about him. Sr. Rosette organised a picnic near the falls of our local Rwizi river, a celebration Micheal would have enjoyed. As our sister Eileen remarked "Micheal lit a candle in the world but sadly he could never see the light of his own worth." We all miss him.



Another shocking death was the sudden passing of Frank Vuciri who a former staff member of St. Francis. He was the acting director

for a number of those years before he left to take up a job as a lecturer in the university of the Archdiocese. Only after his death did we hear that he had a tumour



*Frank while he was acting director of St Francis*



on/in his thigh for at least a year, but as it was not painful he did not deal with it immediately. He may have shown it to some doctors but no biopsy was performed and no diagnosis was made in time. When the tumour grew after about a year, he went to doctors who suggested an operation to have it removed. Then when he went to hospital for the operation the doctors changed their mind as perhaps they had come to realize the seriousness of the case and the risk of performing an operation and spreading the cancer. He went to a private hospital where the doctors suggested amputation of the leg. As they could not guarantee recovery after such a drastic intervention he asked to go home and "think about" what to do.

While he was at home the tumour burst and then he was admitted again to hospital where the doctors told his wife to expect the worst. It had now become impossible to contain the cancer. When we went to visit him, he was in a coma and never recovered consciousness. It was sudden, shocking and reflective of health care for the poor in developing countries. We do not expect to see equity of services or goods in our lifetimes on this planet but we still hope and pray that before our planet dies through our harmful practices, there might be an age of global justice, equity, sharing and caring.



Barbarh left, Jovita, in pink, making giveaway speech. Jovita's husband on right (Guardians/surrogate parents of Barbarh).

Some news to celebrate was the wedding of our accountant Barbarh Mukundane in mid-August. We attended the pre-Church traditional "give away"

ritual for Ugandans. The two families meet formally, there is an exchange of gifts, speeches by the bride's family with recommendations on how they would like



Left: Reverend Stuart Amanyia, groom, ready to accept his bride

their girl to be treated in her new family, new clan, sometimes new ethnic group. The fiancé and his family remain at one table while the bride-to-be is at another table.



She came to greet us and have a photo taken. During the rest of the ceremony we kept social distance we did not take part in eating or

drinking but wanted to observe from a safe place for a short time. We wish Barbarh and her new husband a very happy life together and we are grateful that Barbarh will not give up her job at St. Francis.



Cakes are an important part of these marriage ceremonies





*Barbarh receives wedding gift from staff on return to work*

Mary and Christine were supposed to have gone to Europe together in June, to meet donors, to make a retreat in Plum Village in France and to spend sometime with family members and friends in Germany, Holland, Belgium and Ireland. As Covid put a stop to these plans, Mary made an online retreat with Plum Village, which resulted in her becoming part of an online Sangha meeting every week on Zoom. Christine, Mary and the staff of the CTI followed an online training with Vernice Solimar (of California). Vernice designed a training, especially suited to the



*Ray planting a tree to remember his time in St. Francis.*

needs of our psychosocial trainers, at a professional and personal growth level. We do not have pictures of these events.

Dr. Ray O Donnochada from Ireland, spent January and February, 2020 with us in the Counsellor Training Institute, leading the required revised writing of the two course books for Diploma and Bachelor's in Counselling Psychology. Both books were presented to our accrediting university before he went back to Connemara but due to COVID 19, they were never approved. We were not invited to the required Senate review meeting and therefore the books have not been sent to the Higher Council. Nonetheless, the essential work was completed by Ray, a feat for which we remain sincerely grateful. Thank you Ray and we shall inform you when we get the green light.



*Ray and the staff of St. Francis*



*Arigye Odomaroh*



In August 2021 we hope to begin two new degree courses Diploma and Bachelor's in Education and Counselling. Mary, Bena, Katto, Odo Arigye and Sr. Rosette Kyogabirwe, will write the course books in January 2021, with Mary and Odo leading the team.



*Sr. Rosette Kyogabirwe, DMJ, Teacher CTI*

Odo will then leave St. Francis to take up a new position as director of Education in Kabale Diocese.

In the Child sponsorship department, we foresee some suffering and anxiety, as owing to COVID 19, to change of country policy in one funding organization and to the death of some sponsors, the department will be short of quite a sum of money. At this stage we do not know how to replace that money and we greatly fear having to inform some students that we will not be able to pay school fees as we had been doing. This is heart



*Dorcus Ninsiima, sponsored by St. Francis, completed her studies as a nurse, and is now working in Kampala with Covid 19 patients and others.*

breaking for both students and for St. Francis as we do not like breaking commitments, even if they were based on assumptions which have now changed.



**Felix is happy to receive school needs and return to school after almost a year at home.**

#### **Vocational Training Institute:**

We should be rejoicing and celebrating as many good things are on the radar for the former tailoring school, now elevated by the Ministry of Education to a Vocational Training Institute. In effect this means that we can apply to be registered to award Diplomas in Tailoring Construction and allied subjects—to date we have been awarding Certificates. In order to prepare for a Diploma, and advance from a two-year programme to a three-year we needed more equipment. We were indeed blessed that the Little Smile Foundation of the Netherlands which granted us 35 laptops at the beginning of 2020, gave us a further grant to purchase necessary equipment and materials for the Diploma course.



Some of the laptops granted by the Little Smile Foundation of the Netherlands

Wouter Verhoeven introduced us to the Little Smile Foundation, founded by his brother. Wouter is a film maker, especially for Plum Village, France and accompanied them to our organization in 2019, made a film which will come up sometime in the near future.

Our big draw back as mentioned at the beginning of the newsletter is the fact that we need a proper hostel to board all of our students and this needs to be designed and constructed. If any of our readers knows an architect who would be willing to design such a hostel, we would be very grateful. We shall then embark on a fundraising for the new construction.

#### Administration Department:

During the long closure, Sr. Christine, kept the office open for work as usual and also kept the actual buildings and compounds clean through keeping on a few staff and recruiting the services of Norbert Twine and his fiancée, who got married and celebrated their small wedding on the compound of St. Francis.

Norbert had a motorcycle so helped with shopping as well as various other important services like paying electricity and water bills and keeping St. Francis secure. During the closure Sr. Christine supervised the outside painting of our building—long overdue—, the painting of our guest house, the outside painting of the tailoring building, and the painting of Mary's "house" or apartment. Monthly finance returns were made and kept up to date by Barbrah and Christine, who also kept up to date with all required reporting to various funding agencies. The administration department did not close down when the rest of the

organization was in shut down mode, but kept on working eventhough there were no salaries available. From August the psychosocial team with Mary also went back to work, preparing training manuals, for the training with parents which will begin after the Ugandan elections in this month. This team was fortunate as they received funding from Germany for this new project



Norbert and his Beautiful Bride

#### Board of Directors and All Departments:



throughout the year. We are grateful that apps like Zoom, WhatsApp and Skype enabled us to speak to one another, see one another, share deeply with one another. We hope and pray that by this time next year all of you and us will have been vaccinated and that we shall feel a bit more safe again in our environments.

Much love from each of us here in St. Francis!  
Sincerely,

Mary Moran

Sr. Ch. Mubantya

We wish to thank all of you who have been in touch with us



A few additional photographs coming in after the above had been completed!



*Betty our librarian digging during Covid Lockdown*



*Dr. Bobbie and Cissie Hultberg in Sweden still active for a better world, now working for awareness on climate change. Uganda and St. Francis owe a big debt of gratitude to this couple who trained development and health workers in psychosocial participatory methodology, always focusing on the needs and power of the people, not on outsiders or top leadership.*



*Paul, Emily and Nali de Ruijter visiting from the Netherlands. Paul's mother Goretti Nyabukye de Ruijter comes from Rwariire and Paul's grandmother is still living there. Paul came with his family to visit her.*



*Barbarh and Stuart (a pastor from the Church of Uganda) on their wedding day*