



St. Francis Family Helper Programme

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Dear Friends,

**Wake up and open wide your door, today
I want to be with you.**



Warm greetings from all of us in St Francis Family Helper Programme. We wish you a Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year 2019, if you celebrate these feast days with Christians and we wish all of you Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Jehovah Witnesses, and all other believers and non-believers, an abundance of Peace in everyday of your lives. May 2019 be better than 2018 for you who are reading this message.

“God comes to meet us and make us active sharers in the life around us so that we will not be afraid to meet, raise up and embrace the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned”. As Christians, we believe, that in celebrating Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ, we are invited to be messengers of hope and hospitality for all those bowed

down by the despair born of encountering so many closed doors, closed hearts and closed minds.

A lot has been happening in St Francis in terms of opening our doors to receive, to give and to celebrate. We would like to thank all of you so much, friends, donors and collaborators for your continuing generosity and support in our work. Without you, we could not have carried on with our work, and in fact, if you were not there we would not be here.



Gerlinde and Sr. Christine

Amazing how time passes and how so many events occur in a year. Last year at this time we asked all our friends, readers, spiritual communities to pray for the recovery of Gerlinde Vetter. Thank God and all the nurses, doctors, well-wishers and close friends, she recovered very well and was able to return to work in Africa. However, due to a variety of circumstances the decision was taken that Gerlinde would, from November of this year, make her base in Germany, while continuing with her consultancy work in Africa. Here we take the opportunity to thank her once again for having used all her professional skills to make not only St. Francis Family Helper Programme a much better organization but many other organizations throughout a

number of African countries. We very much hope our professional relationship will continue as we always improve with good help at our back. Over the many years since “St. Francis” and Gerlinde first met we have developed a friendship and a trust which adds another dimension of truth and challenge to any work she does with us. Thank you Gerlinde and thanks to Misereor without whom we could not have received all this support.

Many good things, events, people have entered our lives in the last year and we will mention some of them here, although whenever one starts naming names, there is almost always someone or some group which will have been left unmentioned and so we take that risk but do not wish to neglect any of our supporters in any part of the world.



Nangina Group members being shown garments made by students of St. Francis Tailoring school.



Nangina Group members in the tailoring school

In August of this year we had the visit of Nangina, a German group (named after a village in Kenya where this group of people from Germany give an amazing amount of support, financial and otherwise). The director of Nangina, Friedhelm Rittberger told us how the group started when Christine and Mary went to Witten in Germany to celebrate 30 years of Nangina’s existence. Friedhelm was a teacher for many years and prepared young boys and girls for Communion and Confirmation. 30 years ago, after one Confirmation ceremony, a young boy said to Friedhelm “so now we are confirmed Christians what extra can we do to show we are serious and committed”? What an amazing question and what a more amazing outcome. Of course, it also brought more work for Friedhelm! He contacted a German nun whom he knew, someone who worked in Africa, to come along and talk to the boys and girls, telling them about their work in Kenya. This simple question and Friedhelm’s response gave birth to a wonderful youth organization from the archdiocese of Paderborn, and this group has continued to enroll more youth each year, young boys and girls, who go around to Catholic churches every weekend talking about their work and asking for donations. They have donated large sums to a hospital in Kenya, to St. Francis Family Helper Programme, to an organization that assists disabled children and to other needy groups. Some of the early boys and girls are now grown men and women, with their own families, their professional careers and yet they continue to support Nangina in different ways. The assistant director, Katherina Strizke has been with Nangina for many years, used to be an altar girl for Fr. Tillmann in his village of Bamenohl and it was he who first introduced us to Nangina.

To keep the youth active and informed Nangina organizes trips to Africa every few years. They came to us in August and St. Francis was very happy to host them and to show them what their donations were used for –a ceiling for some classrooms during the construction stage of our building, furniture and CCTV equipment for our counselling rooms and some offices, and school fee money for a number of our counselling

students. They all brought African fabrics which they had purchased in Kenya and made a large order for clothing which our teachers and students made in a few days and nights!

Christine and Mary had the great pleasure and good fortune to meet many of Nangina's friends and supporters in Germany during the 30-year celebrations. The opening ceremony was of course a Mass of Thanksgiving during which time the Germans had a chance of seeing Sr. Christine do a dance from Burundi during the offertory procession and Fr. Joseph a Ugandan priest co-celebrant, receive the offertory gifts while dancing! Later on, in the celebrations, Christine danced another Kirundi dance and to show off her years in Africa, Mary joined in, even though our bodies simply do not have that rhythmic undulating movement that Africans seem to be born with. We had the pleasure once more of spending time with Friedhelm's 99-year-old father who is fully alert, sociable, hospitable, smiling and great to be around.



As if all that were not enough from Paderborn, we still had the great blessing of welcoming Bishop and a number of parishioners from the Archdiocese. After the days of celebration with Nangina in Witten, Mary and Christine were warmly welcomed by Peter and Nanni Gehlen and Fr. Tillmann in Finnentrop. They were introduced to the new German partner Peter Bergmoser who has taken on the role that Peter Gehlen filled for 30 years—liaison officer between St. Francis Uganda and all the German sponsors, signatory on our German account,

correspondent and hopefully an advocate on our behalf in our search for more sponsors and donors.



Nangina Group members in the sand tray room with Sr. Christine. Friedhelm is standing on the left.

From Finnentrop we went to Aachen and Munich to meet staff of Misereor, Kindermissionswerk and Missio Munich to discuss our projects which they fund. Everywhere we were met with very wonderful hospitality and where some of what we were doing was not totally clear we were able to give explanations.

As if the above were not enough, another visitor from Paderborn, Bishop Matthias König and a number of his friends and parishioners visited us with our Archbishop Paul K. Bakenga and Bishop Lambert Auxiliary Bishop of Mbarara. As Paderborn Archdiocese supported us in the building of our Institute with large sums of money we wanted to give them a big welcome. We prepared a banquet "fit for a king" and invited a group of drummers and dancers from Burundi, residing in Mbarara, to welcome the visitors and entertain them with their beautiful performance.



Unfortunately, the hired vehicle on which the visitors travelled had a breakdown on the road causing them to be a few hours late, not only for the prepared meal here, but for the next port of call, Queen Elizabeth National Park, which closed gates at a specific hour.



His Grace Archbishop Paul K. Bakyenga, Bishop Matthias König, Bishop Lambert, parishioners from Paderborn and welcoming team from Hoima and Mbarara.

As they had booked rooms at the park they literally flew in here, ate part of the food, (the rest had not even been served), and flew out again!! We could not even show Bishop Matthias what the money had been used on! The staff who feasted on the feast after the departure of the visitors had a great time. They even managed to finish the wine and beer!

When our Archbishop got very ill earlier this year it was Paderborn Archdiocese, with Bishop Matthias that supported his recovery. We are very happy to have our archbishop back in good health once more after a long waiting period.



Mary welcomes Archbishop to St. Francis after his long illness. Bishop Lambert 3rd from left and Christine standing!

From its foundation over 30 years ago to the present, St. Francis Family Helper Programme has had an incredible number of wonderful celebrations and causes for celebration. We have made many new friendships, we have welcomed volunteers and visitors from many countries of the world and possibly from all continents. We have received funding from many individuals and organizations which has enabled us to render services in keeping with our vision and mission. Next year in January we shall have a very special event which in a way is like the culminating and crowning event of all these years. 7 monks and nuns from Plum Village in France, (the foundation of Thich Nhat Hanh, a world spiritual teacher) + a photographer and film maker from the Netherlands will come to St. Francis Family Helper Programme to direct 2 retreats of 5 days each. Why and how did such an event happen? Thich Nhat Hanh and the community of monks, nuns and lay friends initiated a Wake-up Schools Project in Plum Village which is spreading to all continents in the world. The monks and nuns hold retreats and offer training in mindfulness to people from all over the world and they have training centres in many countries. Sometimes the individuals, couples, families and groups come to them.

In wonderful occasions they go out to countries with their message of happiness and freedom from suffering. When Christine and Mary went to Plum Village for 3 weeks in June 2016, they met the Wake-up Schools group, entered and shared their vision of bringing child centred liberation education into primary schools in Uganda and thus eliminating violence and abuse of children. Plum Village responded by inviting us to be part of this Wake Up Schools movement, and then offered to visit us and help us make a difference to our schools. The Vision of Wake up Schools, is formulated by Plum Village.

Vision

“Wake Up Schools supports educators to bring the practices of mindfulness and applied ethics into their own lives, so they may be happy and free, and so they may in turn share these practices with colleagues and students in their school communities.



With mindfulness, teachers and students can experience more peace, learn how to take care of difficult emotions and create conditions for a happy school and a happy world.”

Thich Nhat Hanh and Katherine Weare of the UK have written the book *Happy Teachers will Change the World*. Parallax Press of California is donating 500 of these books and paying part of the shipping costs. Gail Wallace and family are paying the remainder of the shipping costs to Ireland. The Irish Embassy is working to try and get the books from Ireland to Uganda. We did not want to have the books shipped to Uganda as we feared too long a delay or worse still disappearance of books.



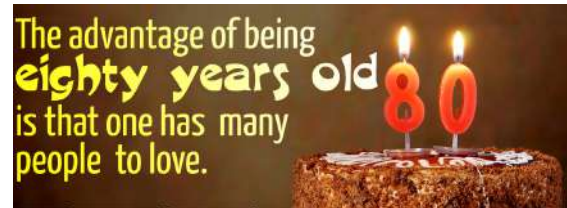
Wouter Verhoeven, a filmmaker from Holland, who made the film “Wake up Schools” (watch it free online) will make another

Thich Nhat Hanh has returned to Vietnam to end his days in his root temple.

video, whose making will be supported by buyers, viewers and well-wishing donors. Presently he will volunteer his work but hopes to make a “mindful livelihood” out of the production. As soon as it is ready for viewing we shall inform all our friends and supporters who might then wish to buy the video or pay for online streaming. These retreats are, above all, for educators so we will have about 100 or 140 teachers and then our staff, students, external

facilitators and some friends who want this training. We would love to publish it and leave it open to the world but we do not have enough space, we are providing food and accommodation as the primary school teachers who earn less than 200 EURO per month, would not come if they had to pay, and we are hiring caterers and hiring mattresses and blankets.

The Irish Embassy will give some of the money for food and the White Fathers have donated local transport costs, food and accommodation for the monks and nuns in a nearby Poor Clare Monastery. We owe much to the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers), not only for this huge support for our retreat but for many other services. Frs. George and Fr. John Tappesser continue to pay school fees for many children and Fr. Tillmann has raised so much for St. Francis that we believe we would still be at the building stage without him. All three have also translated our annual letter on different occasions.



Fr. Tillmann celebrated his 80th birthday in style in Germany and in Northern Ireland with Eleanor Hayes, Gerlinde, Mary (also an 80-year-old birthday girl!) and Gerlinde’s friend Hildegarde. They stayed in Eleanor’s beautiful north Antrim cottage and celebrated in Eleanor and Paul’s beautiful house in White Strands near Ballycastle. If you want the best host in the world get Eleanor!

**Some news from inside the organization
We welcome new Staff**



Sr. Adeodata Ahimbisibwe

Sr. Adeodata is a Daughter of Mary and Joseph and is working in the Counsellor Training Institute as an instructor and Assistant Registrar. Adeodata studied counselling at diploma level in St. Francis and went on to do her Master's in Counselling in Nairobi, where she has just graduated.



Kato Ali Sempa studied counselling in St. Francis many years ago. He was followed by his brother Rukundo, who was blinded by acid and supported by Helmut and Gertrude Uhl and Helmut Schmidt of Gengenbach, Germany. We are happy to welcome him back as an instructor some years after the completion of his Master's Degree.



Sr. Mary Nevis is a Daughter of Mary and Joseph, has trained in the tailoring school and also trained under Valerie in Rwanda.

She will work in the tailoring department, specifically to develop with other staff, a Production Unit. For this unit, we have selected 4 of our best students who finished this year.

Thanks to Valerie Kae Ken (Canadian tailoring and development consultant) and Fr. Ivica Peric (Headmaster of the Padri Vjeko School in Rwanda) Nevis was able to spend 2 months in this school being tutored by Valerie and having her skills improved. She came back with over a hundred good samples which she made which will guide her in decisions about quality. Thank you Ivica. Thank you Valerie.

We thank Philomena Maloney and her friends (all Irish) who have generously supported the beginning of this production unit. We hope to be able to offer a wide variety of clothes and furnishings and welcome your orders whenever and however you make them.

Tailoring School

We started the year with 80 students, 45 in first year and 35 in second year. 35 students



Students enjoying a boat trip on the River Nile.

did their final examinations, and we are happy to announce that they all passed with first grade.

As is the norm in our department, every year we take our students on a tour to a textile industry, and to the source of the river Nile. This year we did just the same. Our students were happy and excited to visit those places, for exposure and to learn more about the textile industry. Students were able to see different machines in the factory, to observe the weaving process and to see how design for colouring with dyes is carried out. This is

different to the tie and dye which our students do when dying batiks. The tour guide took them through a lesson about the origin of cotton fibre and how this is blended with other synthetic fibres. From the factory, we visited the source of the great river Nile which caused great excitement when they went (most of them for the first time ever) on a boat trip. As they did not know how to swim the excitement was made keener by a fear of drowning! They all wore life vests so and the boat ride was very short so there was no real danger! Perhaps we shall arrange a different tour another time where we can expose them to the fashion industry through visiting the shops and boutiques of Kampala city.

We received this letter from a recent graduate student of the Tailoring School.

" Dear St Francis, I write just a few lines to let you know how thankful I am to you. Thank you very much for the sponsorship you offered me. If it had not been for your



Students displaying their garments

support, my plans would never have materialized. Thank you so much. I want to let you know that your support wasn't in vain because I am now an expert in sewing dresses, shirts and school uniforms. Thank you for making my future bright because I know what the future holds for me. There is



Children spent many hours at St. Francis sharing and studying in groups

nothing so precious I can give you but just this gift of a bag, it is small but full of love. I promise to always pray for you. Lastly, I will always remember you. Thank you!"

Child Sponsorship Department

Currently, in the Child Sponsorship Department, we have 125 children all together; 78 females and 47 males.

Of these 32 are in Primary school, girls 18 and boys 14, 67 are in secondary school, 44 girls and 23 boys and we have 16 females and 10 males in third level Institutions.

During holidays, all our sponsored children meet at St. Francis, and we have different activities organized for them. They get a chance of knowing each other as one family. We would like to express our appreciation to



Play activities were organized for children in lower primary to help them relax during the short holidays.

you all who are supporting these children in one way or another. We always talk about your generosity and faithfulness to your sponsored children. You have really helped these children to make their dreams becoming a reality. Amongst those whom you have supported over the years, who left and graduated there are bank managers,

nurses, teachers, tailors, electricians, doctors, hairdressers, counsellors and business people. Thank you ever so much and God bless you.

Child protection laws prevent us from telling you some of the really sad stories of children who are physically, emotionally and sexually abused. This abuse is too widespread and has really a traumatizing effect on the children. A number of these children end up in our counselling department or in the child sponsorship department, all seeking a variety of interventions. When the children do not have parents, they are always more vulnerable and often just to be kept in homes of relatives, they have to submit to abuse of various kinds. You would most certainly be grateful and happy when your donations go



to help some of these very vulnerable girls and boys.

During the holidays the children love to play in our well equipped play room.

Visitors

In February, we were glad to welcome

Dr. Chakara Ali, who visited us very briefly at our office. We were extremely happy to know that he could spare some time from his busy schedule to come check on us. Ali and his wife, Dr. Jane Whitehurst are very generous sponsors and have been for many years.

Saying Farewell

Fr. George Pelz M.Afr. came from Tanzania to work in Uganda for a few years, and has now returned to Tanzania to the people he knew so well. During his stay in Uganda, Mbarara to be specific, besides sponsoring

many of our children, he always helped us to translate our annual newsletter and other documents from English to German or vice -versa depending on what we needed. For that we were always very grateful.



Fr. George cutting his farewell cake at St. Francis.



The tailoring department made a shirt for him and he likes it

Sr. Janvier: It was sad to say farewell to Sr. Janvier from Burundi after her 2 months volunteer work. She is a DMJ novice and left us in July. She was very friendly, cooperative and hard working. She is French speaking but tried to learn and speak good English and even greetings in our local language (Runyankole) as many of our parents prefer speaking their own language.



Sr. Janvier (second left) posing for a photo with Sr. Christine (second right) and other DMJ sisters after receiving their certificates in participatory adult learning methods a course offered at St. Francis.

Celebrating Marriage!

On 25th August, we celebrated a beautiful wedding of one of our staff in the department, Kevin Tumuhaiwe, to her longtime fiancé Emmanuel Baingana. It was a beautiful day. The wedding vows were exchanged during Mass in the Nyamitanga Cathedral, followed by lunch together with the bride and groom in the gardens of a hotel in their home area.



The beautiful couple on their wedding day

Counsellor Training Institute (CTI)

We have already shared news of the retreat which is what we most look forward to. All the present students of the Institute and many of the past students will attend this training to continue their desire to lead a mindful life and to help others do the same. Our BSc. Students are preparing for a number of their final examinations in March,



New Baby participated in her mother Jacqueline's exams by being very quiet and cooperative

and to prepare they sat for a set of mock examinations in November.

All who do the training love it because it is a journey of self-discovery for themselves and this is always exciting even if it is also painful at times. We have trained a number of social workers and development workers in the past year in both Personal and Group Transformation and in Participatory Adult Learning Methods. Perhaps the most occupying projects, during holiday time especially, are the training of primary schools teachers in child centred liberation education, in child development and in personal transformation. The education officers and inspectors of schools are supporting us and want this project to succeed which is a very big affirmation and encouragement. The Irish Embassy has a child project in Northern Uganda and the Irish Ambassador suggests that we have some joint meetings to share experiences and learn from one another.

We train catechists and their spouses in two parishes and amongst the training modules which are effective in bringing about change are those on gender, communication styles, family violence, conflict resolution, alcoholism and as in all our trainings we focus on self-growth on personal and group transformation. These trainings are having positive beneficial influence on the catechists and their families, and consequently on the Christian communities with which they work.

Dear Readers, we got very caught up in a spate of intense work and our newsletter was late in being written, translated and sent out to you. Thanks to Fr. John Tappesser for translating the newsletter although he is no longer working in Uganda. He is now living in Cologne. Thanks to all those who visited us in the last year. They came from many countries and their visits always enrich us.

We would like to thank all the people who visited us from Europe this year. From

Ireland:

Finbar and Maggie O'Brien (Former Irish Ambassador to Uganda; Brian Lynch; Maggy Jackson.

Germany our greatest supporter since our foundation:

Annika Rachor; Sarah Holzmann; Felicitas Tauber; Emma Wieland; Julian Tump; Rouven Speith; Justus Wieland; Louis Bneitsohl; Carina Droste; Frederike Fehrentz; Carola Mihelstrab; Friedhelm Ribberger; Katharina Stritzke; Philo Malony; Bishop Mattias König and his group; Mrs Dorothee Zimmermann.

England:

Vanessa & Martin Mason; Dr. Chakara Ali

Amsterdam

Lucy Kobusingye

Netherlands

Annelien Peetus; Kristel

United States of America

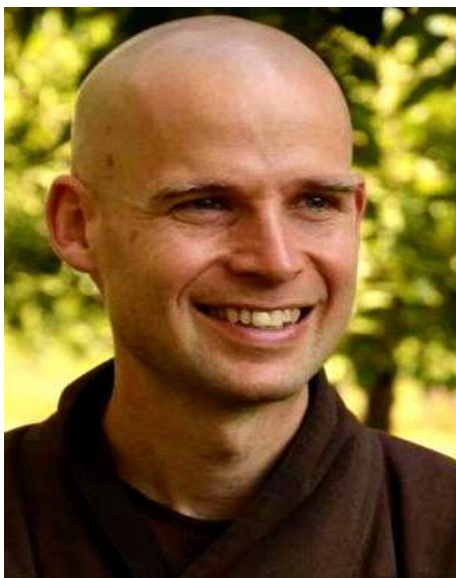
Dr. Mary Coleman

In January we will welcome a team from Plum Village some of whom you see below.

Other Vietnamese attendants went with him and some elder brothers. We are his continuation if we keep practising and keep faithful to our mindfulness trainings.



Brother Phap Dung



Brother Phap Luu



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

Sincerely

Christine Ntibarutaye

Mary Moran

Thich Nhat Hanh, has returned to Vietnam to end his days in his root temple where he lived as a young monk. He was accompanied by Sr. Chan Khong who was among the very first members of the Order of Interbeing, a group of "engaged Buddhists founded by Thay before the war in Vietnam.