



St. Francis Family Helper Programme

P.O. Box 869, Mbarara, Uganda

Email: christinentibarutaye@yahoo.fr

Tel: +256 794 532508

Email: marycarmelmoran@konnexion.com

Tel: +256 782 393700

Dear Friends,

Greetings to all of you from the St. Francis Family Helper Programme! We would like to wish you, your dearest family and friends a Happy Christmas and a New Year of blessings! Looking back on the past year, 2019 has been a very successful and enjoyable year for us, and we have so many great memories to cherish. However, while we celebrate the achievements of the past 12 months, it is time to welcome the New Year and embrace what is yet to come. Let's connect with one another and wish each other well for the New Year! From all of us here at St. Francis, we hope the year 2020 is bigger and better for you than the year you are waving out!



Visitors to St. Francis 2019

Plum Village



This year at St. Francis began in a unique way for us in our Christian and mainly Catholic community. About two hundred primary school teachers, a number of religious sisters, a few priests and all our staff attended

a training in mindfulness/awareness offered by monks and nuns from a Buddhist monastery of Plum Village in France. Before we write about the retreat let us try to take away the fears that some people hold when they hear the words “mindfulness” or “Buddhist”. Mindfulness is simply being deeply aware of the present moment. The reason we invited primary school teachers to attend was because of the violence against children in many primary schools in Uganda. Often, teachers yell at children in the classroom to “pay attention” but do not actually teach children how to be attentive, how to be present with and aware of themselves, how to act with consideration of others, and how to be happy in a sometimes very harsh environment. This was the focus of the retreat - teaching us in a variety of ways how to pay deep respectful attention to ourselves, to others with whom we work, to nature, the planet, to all human beings and all living creatures. This teaching is in no way contradicting our Christian or Catholic doctrine, and in fact if we read the writings of our patron, St. Francis of Assisi, or Teilhard de Chardin (Jesuit scientist), we will find the same principles and code of ethics that we discussed during the retreat.

In practicing the mindfulness, one cultivates an insight of interbeing, or connection to all others on the planet, removing all discrimination, anger, fear and despair. All we have to do is look around at our present world where war, racism, greed, destruction of the planet and discrimination at all levels of society exist to know that we must look for a better way. Many of our spiritual leaders of the past have been inviting us to a life of more awareness and more love and compassion.

While the monks trained us in better ways of paying attention, of listening deeply, of being aware of our thoughts, words and actions, they in turn enjoyed the singing and dancing while we celebrated Mass each evening with a few Missionaries of Africa and a few Ugandan priests from the Archdiocese.



Celebrating Mass during the retreat

After our mindfulness training and retreat, five young people from St. Francis were invited to Plum Village, France for an international meeting of youth but unfortunately, only one person obtained a visa so the other four were deeply disappointed. Barbara was lucky because she had already been to Europe and therefore was not

suspected of wanting to enter Europe for illegal reasons. Barbara writes, “I do not know how to describe everything but let me start by saying thank you to everyone who intervened to see me reach safely in such a peaceful



Barbara at Plum Village

place and for such wonderful practices which I had never dreamt of experiencing. It was really a great learning for me. For the few days I was there, I enjoyed the peaceful environment and the nature in the house where I was warmly welcomed by Sisters and some volunteers.

At first, I really felt so lonely and all of my thoughts were back home, thinking that I was even wasting my time. I missed my friends and the others who were not able to accompany me. I reached the “lower hamlet” – name of the house where I was staying - on Tuesday when the retreat was starting on Saturday. But I think it was only on Sunday when I started to feel and know what was really happening. On the third day of the retreat they called it a “lazy day” it was the day that I went into myself for the first time in my life. I got a chance of visiting myself and thinking of only me after a long walk down in the forest. In lower Hamlet I had

time to practice mindful walking and when I reached the middle of the forest, I sat down for almost 30 minutes without thinking about anything else but myself, breathing in and out following my breath. This exercise is done in St Francis, every morning but I have never done it in the way I did it in Plum Village. It made me realize the need to deeply practice mindfulness exercises and it was a big insight to me. From the lazy day insight, I continued really enjoying the practices of meditation and working together in my “family”. Because of large numbers of youth, we were divided into groups which were called families and we always joined these families for some of the exercises.



Barbara with international youth group

‘Enjoyable time in the happy farm’

In Plum Village I had an opportunity to visit the organic farm which the monks, nuns and many volunteers from all over the world cultivate. They call it “Happy Farm” because of the love and care with which the “farmers” work! I actually ate raw, sweet corn and was amazed at myself and the different ways of eating a vegetable which is a staple diet in parts of Uganda.

Many thanks to Plum Village Sisters and Brothers who invited me to experience such a wonderful time, and especially to Sr. Phuong Fleurette, Thao, Brs. Bao Tang, Phap Dung, and Phap Luu among others. Also, to my beloved Mary Moran and Sr. Christine; if it were not for them, I might not have got a chance for being aware of such healing practices as I experienced in Plum Village and St. Francis FHP. May you be happy, may you be well, and may you keep smiling.”

Mrs. Maya Schmitt

In October we received the visit of the Ugandan desk officer from Missio Munich, a funding agency for pastoral activities in various countries of the world.

We were very happy to welcome Maya on her very first visit to this part of the world and to St. Francis which has been receiving funding from Missio for many



Maya and Sr. Christine

years. As is traditional with first time visitors we stopped at the equator and took a souvenir photo on our way from the airport and Kampala.

After arriving in Mbarara, Maya visited the offices of St Francis and met the team of the Missio project, where Sr. Adeodata, the team leader gave an overview of the

activities completed in 2018 and 2019: Empowering the catechists, so that they might fulfill their mission in the best way possible, is our main objective. For this to occur, the catechists must undergo some sort of personal transformation, by addressing the elements in their lives that are prohibiting change and development.

Change is envisaged possible for a catechist, not in isolation, but in a family setting. For this reason, the training is designed for both the catechists and their spouses, so they can follow the training together, searching for solutions to the challenges they meet both



Gifts offered to Maya in one parish presented on a large stick

at family and community level. The transformation testimonies given by the participants during and after the course are exciting! Success stories from those who completed the training tell how life became much more meaningful and positive for them. The fruits of their transformation are visible to all who know them, as their attitudes change quite considerably towards such factors as gender roles, spousal relationships, the use of violence in conflict resolution, parenting styles and ways of working in the Christian communities which they serve.



To remember her visit to Kishariro, the parish priest asked Maya to plant a tree

Maya visited Kishariro parish, Rushanje parish and St Kalemba Catechetical Training Centre, where St. Francis had given trainings in Personal and Group Transformation, and Participatory Adult Learning Methods. Those living in the parishes were happy to welcome her to their communities, and openly shared their experiences of transformation throughout their training. Parish priests within these communities witnessed the changes which they spoke about.

During her visits to the parishes, Maya was received with very warm hospitality. She was given gifts of food, goats and chickens, and in Kishariro, she was asked to plant a tree as a symbol of her visit. As she

could not take all her gifts back home to Germany, she donated them to St. Francis, but requested that we send photographs of the offspring of pregnant Mother Goat after giving birth.

At St. Kalembe, Maya was welcomed by songs and Kinyankole and Kikiga dances and shown around the buildings constructed with the support of Missio Munich and Aachen. The summary of what the catechists and their spouses had learnt during their training in Spiritual Development and Personal and Group Transformation, was shared through their speeches to the guest of honor.

St. Francis FHP Departments

As most of you, our readers, know there are three units/departments in St. Francis Family Helper Programme organization. The counsellor training institute, the child sponsorship department and the Vocational Training Institute (formerly called the Tailoring School).

Counsellor Training Institute

Volunteers

At the end of October, two volunteers/friends, Sorcha and Evan, arrived from Ireland to work with the students of the Counsellor Training Institute. They will stay until April. They have completed degrees in



Evan and Sorcha

Psychology in Limerick University, and they are helping our final year BSc students with their research projects, they are teaching some topics to other students, and they are getting immersed in another culture where they are also receiving a lot. over the next few

months and we hope they enjoy their stay here. Below, they write about their experience so far:

“Although we have only been at St. Francis for a few weeks, we feel very settled here already. Everybody has been so friendly and welcoming and has made our time here so enjoyable. Not only are the Ugandan people and staff at St. Francis so warm, gentle and kind, but the food, landscape and culture in general is amazing, and we look forward to exploring the Ugandan way of life more over the next six months. We are excited about gaining invaluable experiences here while hopefully contributing to this very impressive and wonderful programme as much as we can. The compound is more beautiful than we ever expected, and we are so happy to be here. Thank you to everyone for making us feel so welcome so far.”

A sponsor and friend, Simone Lindorfer introduced Mary to Hannah Nennmann a psychologist from



Hannah and Philip

Austria who then introduced us to Phillip Merschroth from Germany. They are both trained clinical psychologists and came to volunteer their services for some time. This is what they write:

‘You are going to do what?’, was the reaction of a friend of mine that looks at me unbelievably when I told her that I was planning to spend my summer as a teacher at a Counselling Training Institute in Uganda. ‘Are you sure you are up for this?’ she further inquired...

At the beginning, I had to battle with a lot of self-doubt, I wondered if I was fit to teach psychology classes in East Africa at the age of 24, freshly out of University. But these doubts disappeared the second that I entered St. Francis for the first time and had the opportunity to meet both my students and other people. I immediately

felt at home in the wonderful atmosphere that surrounds the whole place and I felt valued and taken seriously. After having taught the first course of psychological testing and assessment in cooperation with a friend, I was certain: Yes, I am up for this and it is incredibly fulfilling!”

“I was amazed by the depth and high variety of knowledge St. Francis offers to her students. As I am myself planning to begin my training as a psychotherapist in Germany in the future, I find that the curricula are comparable in their demands. Offering learning experiences within a small group size I was able to interact with my students in class and have discussions about various topics which I greatly enjoyed. Working with adult students and teachers was both challenging and rewarding. Being able to work in my field of qualifications, with people who are training to work in their communities made me feel deeply grateful.

I was able to form relationships that I hope are going to last for a long time. The beautiful landscape, the astonishing variety of flora and fauna and the wonderful people made living here incredibly easy. Mbarara and its surroundings offered a wide variety of activities and wonderful places to go like Lake Mburo, Lake Bunyonyi and Queen Elizabeth National Park. St. Francis creates a really safe environment for its live-in staff members. Having travelled through Rwanda during my time in St. Francis, an opportunity that I am extremely grateful for, one is constantly reminded of these extreme social and economic differences which can lead to intense feelings of frustration, helplessness and anger, but can also strengthen one’s own focus and motivation when seeing the opportunities that the projects of St. Francis help create.

All in all, I am deeply grateful for the valuable experiences that I had during my time here which is going to nurture me for a long time. I am already looking forward to my return!”

Philip stayed a shorter time in St. Francis but while he was here, he gave very valuable help to the students of research as this is not our strongest area and we are always grateful for external support. Thank you, Philip and Hannah, for all that you gave us. We remember you with love and gratitude.

Johanna, a former volunteer, describes how her relationship with St. Francis has developed over time

and the positive impact it has had on her life:

“Four years ago, I, Johanna, began my relationship with Uganda. I visited several projects in Africa with a group from a German organization, called Nangina, which has given funds to St. Francis and which also introduced me to this organization in Mbarara. What happened? I entered the beautiful compound with the impressive building and thought: ‘Wow, that’s an environment in which I want to study!’ But of course, it happened differently. In the evening at supper time, I got to know Mary Moran and we started talking. She discovered that I was a German Kindergarten teacher who would become a teacher for vocational schools. I discovered that there was a primary teachers’ training about non-violence which needed some facilitators. Mary proposed that I could come and teach about children’s needs and rights and about appropriate communication with them. Half a year later, I booked a flight to Uganda to become a facilitator, for nearly three months, before I had to return for my further studies in Germany.

“What I learned and experienced about life and work in Uganda:

From my time here, I learned several future styles for my teaching work in school. The principles of Liberation Education which include class discussion and small group discussion are still my favorite methods because in them, the students can feel free to speak out whatever is on their minds.

Any new ideas I had at St. Francis were taken with great excitement. I was allowed work with the primary teachers, with the staff at the Child Sponsorship Department, and with the children during the summer holidays. I could share my points of view and was listened to. Everyone had an open ear if problems arose. On the other hand, people shared their opinions with me and showed me the Ugandan way of doing things.

Uganda also had a great influence on my lifestyle in Germany: Firstly, my view of time has developed: In Germany, everyone works fast and takes short breaks. But here, there is no need to rush all of the time. You keep the fun in working while being more productive if you take your time, enjoy your breaks and spend time with colleagues. Secondly, my door is open to everyone who wants to step by, needs to rest or is hungry. I try to live by the same hospitality culture that

I experienced there. And finally, my clothing is more colourful, and I still love putting on Ugandan dresses. Often this conjures a smile on the faces of people nearby.

Three years have passed since I visited St. Francis the last time. And now I am typing this article for the newsletter in the child sponsorship office. I still feel the deep connection to Uganda, I have met those who remained friends over that long time. My feelings are all mixed up: I am so happy, very excited, lucky, and sad because I have to leave again. But I know that I will return, and it won't take three years again, because I am already a little bit Ugandan and I could always find meaningful work here at St. Francis."

Fieldwork

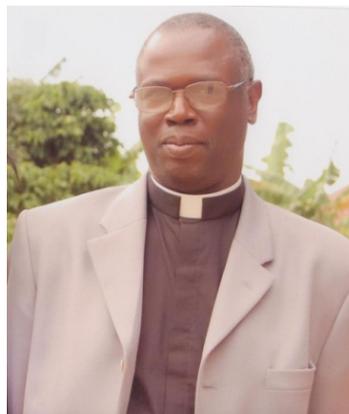
In November, a team from the Counsellor Training Institute (CTI) team went out to two districts to carry out a survey about gender-based violence and violence against children to prepare for a new project which hopefully will be funded and where the organization can be assisted to help stop violence in a few districts, later spreading wider to other parts of the country. Despite the sensitivity and complexity of this issue, families are very open to talking and expressing their desire to receive help. We are grateful for the work carried out by the CTI team here at St. Francis.

Trainings

St Francis continues to train primary school teachers in preventing violence against children in both the schools and homes in the districts of Ntungamo, Rubirizi and Lira. We are grateful to the Chief Administrative Officers, District Education Officers, inspectors and all other government leaders who are facilitating these activities with us, and to those who fund our trainings. Teachers who have undergone the trainings have responded positively and have shown their appreciation to St Francis through letters of gratitude. Below, a note of appreciation from a teacher who completed the training:

"I am one of the beneficiaries of the mindfulness course which took place in Mbarara from January 7th-18th 2019. I am also a beneficiary of the Personal and Group Transformation training and Liberation Education training, which I completed in August. During and after the courses, I have achieved a lot. To share with you, it has been a stress for me trying to pay my children's

school fees. But since this course, I have been very happy. Although I still have the same issues, I'm dealing better with the stress. The stress had brought violence into my family, but now, surprisingly, you will find us at the same table conversing and sharing with open minds and smiles to one another!"



Congratulations!

St. Francis Counsellor Training Institute (CTI) congratulates Rev. Fr. Dr. Ruhangakampaire Didacus for his silver jubilee of his Priesthood. He himself says, "Lord, I give you thanks for having held me

worthy to be in your presence and minister to you." Rev. Fr. Dr. Didacus is one of our lecturers at St. Francis Counsellor Training Institute, from Mbarara Archdiocese. We thank you so much for giving your time to our students.

St Francis Vocational Training Institute



Certificate of Accreditation to certify St. Francis Tailoring School as a Vocational Training Institute

We are happy to announce that St. Francis Tailoring School has been promoted to St. Francis Vocational Training Institute by the Ministry of Education. This is a huge achievement which we have worked so hard for! We are also starting a Level II Certificate so that our students who have completed a Level I Trade Certificate can progress and so

our tailoring school can continue to grow. As we prepare to implement this promotion, we are hopeful to start our Level II certificate programme in February

2020. We are determined to give good skills to our young ones, therefore, those who complete both Level I and Level II of our programme will have become much more proficient and independent. We still have to create the new syllabus.

Enrollment

At the moment, we have 83 students --45 in Year I and 38 in Year II. We are hoping to enroll more students in the near future now that we are beginning a new upgrading certification programme. We are very happy with those Irish people who bought our ‘Angels’, which enables us to buy 1,000 Euro’s worth of equipment. We are making more angels with the lovely fabric which another Irish donor from Falcarragh sent to us.

Student Achievements and Graduation

We are so proud of how hard our students have been working. They are capable of making clothing for men, women and children, as well as household furnishing goods. Also, the students work very hard preparing for a ‘School Day’, included in our programme, where they make various items such as angels, schoolbags, coin bags, etc., which will be displayed and sold by the school. Mary brought many angels to Ireland, sold some, gave others as gifts and everywhere the children loved them.



First Years Using a Treadle Machine

In November, the Year II students completed their final exams and graduated with their Level I certificate on the 6th of December.



These students are very happy to show off their designs. Hopefully they will come back for a third year.

Child Sponsorship Department

Currently, there are 107 children benefiting from the child sponsorship programme. They are currently on school vacation until February. During the school

holidays, the Child Sponsorship Department organizes activities for the children who benefit from our programme. Academic debates, computer lessons, reading, career guidance and group discussions on various topics, such as personal hygiene, are just some of the activities organized for the children.



Children who are beneficiaries of the Child Sponsorship Programme



Achievements

We are delighted to announce that this year, four students who are involved in our sponsorship programme completed their studies in vocational institutes. They qualified in different professions: Nursing, Medical Laboratory, Tailoring and Design, and Primary Teaching. Three out of the four graduates are already in the workforce, while one is preparing and searching for work. One of the graduates, Ainembabazi Margaret, completed Medical Laboratory with high grades, and immediately got a job with one of the best hospitals in Uganda, Mulago Hospital. After completing their studies, they all came back to express their sincere gratitude for the support that their sponsors and St. Francis have provided for them over the years. This support amounted to much more than school fees as often the children needed medical care and or counselling services.

Challenges

In our department, we have many children with special challenges. These are children who do not have a specific place to call home, are under the care of elderly grandparents, or whose parents are in desperate and difficult situations. Such families are really very happy when St. Francis manages to find sponsors who actually often act as surrogate parents to some of our sponsored children. As school fees have gone up tenfold since our project began, it is not easy anymore to find families who can donate 500 Euro a year for fifteen years to educate a Ugandan child.



This lovely brave woman in the picture above would bring shame to any of us who wanted to complain about life. She is totally disabled and has to be carried out of her bed to be placed on the ground and carried into bed again in the

evenings. She sits by her door each day and neighbours come to greet her and bring her gifts of food as she cannot cook for herself and waits only for the holidays



when Agatha her granddaughter is on leave from school. Agatha is now 17 years old and has been getting on pretty well in school. However, the future is still not clearly mapped out for Agatha as she does not know what she will do when she completes her A Levels.

Volunteers

We are very grateful for EIRENE, a German sending organization, and their coordinator, Iris Bildhauer, as this year she recruited Katherina Batzing and Nina Jochum, two volunteers, to spend one year with us at St. Francis in the Child Sponsorship Department. Katharina began working in the Child Sponsorship Department in September. She is helping



EIRENE coordinator, Iris Bildhauer, and Sr. Christine

us in many things in the department, for example filling documents, taking part in home and school visits, translating information from English to German, and more. However, Nina has returned to Germany, as while she was here in Uganda, she received an

acceptance letter to study medicine back home. Nina, we wish you well in your studies and the door at St Francis will always be open for you.

Katharina writes about her experience in Uganda so far: "When I got off the plane at the beginning of August, I stepped on Ugandan soil for the first time. My year in Uganda, which I am going to spend as an EIRENE-Volunteer at St. Francis, had begun. Before I continued my journey to St. Francis - my place of assignment in Mbarara - I spent a few days with other volunteers at an orientation seminar in Kampala. Together we gained our first experiences in Uganda,

such as using the BodaBoda (local motorbike taxi service). We ate matoke and other Ugandan foods, and we also got some useful tips for our Ugandan everyday life.

As the days drew closer to going to Mbarara for the first time, I became both excited and nervous. But my nervousness was completely unnecessary because I received



Katharina on the BodaBoda in Mbarara

a very friendly welcome from the first time I arrived at St. Francis. Also, I was very impressed by the complex here. Although I had heard stories about the beautiful compound, I had not expected such a large building and idyllic area. In my first week, which was an orientation week, I was introduced to the work of St. Francis, in particular the work of the Child Sponsorship Department. All my questions were answered, and I was able to get an insight into my daily work routine. Not only was the friendly complex and the quiet environment of Nyamitanga exciting, but the staff of St. Francis were also so exciting that I felt well received from the first day. The orientation week flew by and after the first seven days it was time to say goodbye. For the next four weeks, I attended a Runyankore-language course in the bustling city of Kampala. The month was a rich experience for me and apart from that, I learned some basics of the local language. I also learned, for example, about life in my Ugandan host family, travelling by “matatu”, the Swahili word for the local 12-seater taxi, and observed life in the capital city.

When it was time to go back to Mbarara, I was pretty happy. Finally, my time at St. Francis really started, I got to know the staff and I am able to use and improve my Runyankore. And now I am here, living in the St. Francis guesthouse and working mainly in the Child Sponsorship Department. I am learning new things in the organization every day. Now I am looking forward

to my upcoming 12 months whereby I can get to know my colleagues better, become part of the St. Francis Family Helper Programme and discover Uganda.”

At the end of September, EIRENE informed us that another German volunteer could provide services to St. Francis two days a week. Jannis was welcomed into our community with open arms, and every Monday and Tuesday he teaches English to tailoring students of the tailoring school.

All year round, St. Francis FHP welcomes volunteers from EIRENE organization. It is a very rich experience for both partners. We thank you Katharina and Jannis for the work you do and will continue to do for St. Francis Family Helper Programme.



Volunteers from l-r: Johanna (a former volunteer), Hannah, Jannis, Nina and Katharina

Farewell!

On the 21st of November, St. Francis said goodbye to a member of staff who had been with us since 2013. Richard, who had worked as a watchman at St. Francis for six years, has returned to the north of Uganda for family reasons. Richard, you will be dearly missed by all the staff here, and we wish you the best of luck for the foreseeable future. The door will always be open for you here at St. Francis.

At the same time we welcomed Mary Moran back from her time in Ireland. She had spent a few months looking for some badly needed funds as well as doing some other work for St. Francis looking for volunteers for the Counsellor Training Institute.

This is now Mary writing! I will write a separate letter to all those wonderful people who so wholly supported me during my time in Ireland. I was welcomed everywhere I went and am enormously grateful for the experience. All I can say is Thank you, Thank you, Thank you. Love Mary

End of Year Evaluation for the whole organization

The very last exercise for the staff of the organization for this year was a Misereor sponsored, externally accompanied evaluation of the various departments. This was done in the way of reviewing the 5-year strategic plan which was made with Mrs. Gerlinde Vetter 2½ years ago. In that plan our strengths, weaknesses and elements to correct were clearly stated. During this review it became apparent how much positive growth had taken place in some departments and projects while the shortcomings were once more highlighted. This is one of the last assignments of Mrs. Gerlinde Vetter and we are enormously grateful and blessed to have had her support for the last 23 years in different capacities.

Our organization is far from perfect but if we have anything to be proud of it is most certainly the support that a number of organizations and individuals have given us since our foundation and one of these special individuals is this German consultant. Thank you Gerlinde. We wish you a happy retirement and we await your next visit as a free agent flying where the world invites you.

Now we think it is time to wish you once more a very Happy Christmas and a really Blessed Happy New Year. We thank you most sincerely for your support all through our organizational activities. Without you we cannot exist. Without you we would have to close our doors and we would no longer be able to give the assistance to the more disadvantaged members of our society. We want to be your messengers; your ambassadors.



Board of Directors of St. Francis



Staff of St. Francis with Gerlinde Vetter

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

Mary Moran

Sr. Ch. Nibautaya