



## Message from the Community

Welcome to the **Second Edition** of our Africa newsletter, and thank you for continuing to take an interest in our communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Rwanda.

We have been increasingly aware of the situations for the poorest people in those countries through the presence of our African sisters with us in England since the start of this year. Sister Agnes comes from Rwanda and is currently studying in Paris after having spent nine months with us. Sisters Thérèse and Véronique are both from the Eastern region of the DRC and are still with us for some months. They are gradually getting to grips with English and you can now have significant conversations with them about their country. Thank you to everybody who has welcomed them warmly,

shown them hospitality and taken an interest in their countries.

We were pleased to have them with us for our Triathlon of fund-raisers this summer, and pleased that they were able to meet so many of you, their friends and benefactors.

These last few months have been difficult ones for them as they have watched the growing unrest and violence in their home area from afar, and we have shared with them their deep concern for their sisters (especially those based in Goma) and for their families who live around Lake Kivu.

Please continue to pray for all the people who are living in fear and deprivation in the area around Lake Kivu, and please pray for our many sisters who live closely with the people in greatest need in that area.

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## Background to the current unrest in DR Congo

The context in which our sisters in Africa are working, was brought into focus recently, when we watched the news of the M23 rebel group seizing control of the DR Congo city of Goma, from local army troops whilst UN Peace Keeping forces stood by.

The recent conflict in this part of Africa has been called Africa's first World War, the world's deadliest conflict since WWII, involving seven nations. Despite a ceasefire in 2003, sporadic fighting has continued and people in the east of DR Congo are living under constant threat of attack by rebels and the army, yet it rarely makes the news.



*DRC – central African country which has been in conflict with many countries on its borders*

There are complex reasons for the continuing unrest including conflicts over basic resources such as water, access and control over rich minerals and other resources, as well as various political agendas. Numerous exiles from the

genocide in Rwanda are now living in DR Congo, discontent to be there; a situation which only exacerbates the civil unrest.

DR Congo is a 'wealthy' and very large country. It is rich in diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt and zinc and has supplies of coltan, used in mobile phones and other electronic gadgets and cassiterite used in food packaging.

The conflict has been fuelled and supported by various national and international corporations and other regimes which have an 'interest' in the outcome. There are suggestions that arms, from outside the DR Congo, are being given to the rebels in return for minerals.

The consequences are multifold: millions have died (estimated 5.4 million) not only from physical violence but hunger and disease (normally preventable); many children have been affected – the child mortality rate has soared, many have been orphaned; sexual violence continues to be prevalent in the region and unspeakably brutal – described as the worse in the world; the country destabilized.

The new rebel group, the M23, has become increasingly active in eastern DR Congo in 2012. The government has repeatedly accused Rwanda and Uganda of involvement and the fears are that a wider conflict could reignite. The M23 is made up for the most part of ethnic Tutsis, the same group which dominates the Rwandan

**OUR COMMUNITY:** There are two communities of our sisters in Goma who live among the people, giving direct assistance to the very poor. Their presence and prayer give people hope. The situation is very delicate for the sisters and all the people. There is famine, not much money and everything triple the price at the market. In the town people are continuing to flee insecurity. *S. Véronique/S.*

## Nutritional Centre in Mirhi, DR Congo

The Daughters of the Resurrection have been working towards raising enough funds to build a nutritional centre in Mirhi, DR Congo. It is intended that the centre will provide a facility to feed orphans and homeless families in the area.

The DR Congo has one of the highest child mortality rates in the world. Rates of acute malnutrition remain unacceptably high and as a result, high rates of growth stunting persist (43% of children aged 6 to 59 months are stunted).

*“It is a paradox that in this country – which has a tremendous potential of agriculture, mineral resources and manpower – children continue to starve,” - Sylvain Malamba, a nutrition specialist at UNICEF*

Malaria and diarrhoeal diseases – major causes of child death in DR Congo – also contribute to malnutrition, which in turn leaves children vulnerable to other diseases. Insufficient quality and quantity of food, poor infant feeding practices (only 37% of children in DR Congo are exclusively breastfed) and preventable diseases (18 per cent suffer frequent diarrhoea) together form a vicious cycle.

With this background information, we hope to demonstrate the importance of the nutritional centre.

As a result of your fundraising and other donations, the sisters have commenced work on the centre, ahead of schedule and we have received the following photographs, showing their progress.

We hope to have more photos and reports in our next Newsletter.



*One of the Mirhi sisters – showing progress with the nutritional centre*



*A workman at the Mirhi site – the building taking shape*

The sisters pass on their gratitude to all the fundraisers and to those who have prayed for them.

## Interviews

We are grateful to S. Véronique and S. Thérèse who agreed to be interviewed and to reflect on their stay in England so far.



*S. Veronique and S. Thérèse*

### **What is the reason for your visit to Europe?**

There are several reasons for our visit to Europe:

- 1) To learn English, as it is the official language of the Association
- 2) To deepen our knowledge and understanding of the canonical life of the Order, its history and its government
- 3) To help prepare the way for the future of the Order, with increasing numbers of sisters in

Africa and a decline in the Northern Hemisphere

- 4) To gain experience of leadership

We have already learned a lot about the life and government of each Priory around the world and about the life of the Association, what it is and how it functions. We have taken part already in two Association meetings. We listen, watch and take part.

### **Apart from the obvious, what are the notable differences in Community life here, compared with DR Congo?**

Here there are endless possibilities. In the Congo, we are totally channelled into helping the poor deal with the absolute basics of daily life and survival.

The support the Community gives to people here is 'moral' and spiritual. In the Congo it is much wider – it is material, moral, spiritual.

Here the State helps all, in Africa the State abandons all.

In the Congo our Community houses are in general much smaller and more remote from each other. We have 200 Sisters spread over approximately 22 houses. So you can have 6-8 Sisters on average living say 50km

apart but not good transport links (no vehicles, relying on local transport – which can take you all day to get to the next village), bad roads, dangerous journeys. Communication is difficult – often no email, sometimes phone contact but not always and difficult to get around.

Here, there is easy and frequent communication and Community meetings. In Africa, we cannot meet regularly. Our local Chapter is only every three years and even then, we cannot all get together, so as you see it is very different and ‘communion’ more difficult to achieve.

Here the average age of the Sisters is higher than in the Congo. The sisters here are very experienced. In the Congo we have different levels of experience and education and many in training.

Living in community though, is much the same! We follow the same Constitutions and the Divine Office has the same importance.

### **How do you retain your ‘hope’ particularly in view of current events in your home territory?**

Our hope is at a spiritual level, through our belief in the Paschal mystery.

At the level of passing on this message to the people – it is difficult to know what to say to them. The people are shattered, the whole country destabilised. Our presence is what gives them hope.

*Sister Véronique pointed at a photograph of orphans:*

Here, let me give you an example.



These children were found by our sisters at the side of the road. They are orphans. Three of them are from the same family. The others have joined them. The Sisters took them back – bathed them, tended to their wounds (they had cuts and bruises all over), fed them. One or two of the children now attend school. There are many children like this. We do what we can to care for them. The ‘Resurrection’ moment for us is when we see them smile again.

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Charity No: 229288

luncheon for about 70 people in his garden on what was one of the very few sunny Sundays in the summer!

## Fundraisers

During the summer we held three major fund-raising events, all of which aimed at raising money to help build a nutrition centre near our Priory in Bukavu.

The sisters at the Priory are already supporting the many orphans and under-nourished children who live in the forests and fields around them, and have decided that the need is so great that they want to build a purpose-built centre to feed and support these children on a regular daily basis.

The summer fundraising made a stunning £7,000 which has already gone to the Congo and is being used to help build the centre. The sisters have found another benefactor in Belgium to support the centre, so this means that with that money and ours, the building is already under construction.

There was a Triathlon of events during the summer, echoing the Olympic theme and we would like to thank Tom Willis who once again masterminded the summer concert at Stock Church and also a summer



*Garden Party at the Willis'*

Our third leg was a Quiz Night which was so well supported by nearly two hundred people.

We must also thank New Hall whose fundraising efforts have supported the continued development of the Literacy Centre in Rwanda (Senior School) and the Primary School, Ecole Mère Hadewijch, at Muresa near Bukavu (Prep School).



*S. Agnes at New Hall school*

Thanks too go to the many individuals who have found creative ways of contributing funds – running marathons, baking cakes, holding a coffee morning etc etc.

Here are some photos and information about other individual initiatives, which perhaps might give others inspiration!



*Many of the Wisdom Group, Melbourne contribute up to £1 each per month for our communities in Africa*



*Kate and Maddie raised £40 in their latest fundraising venture. They asked their Headmaster if they could raise money for the Congo Nutritional Centre at their school 'Enterprise Week'. They sold homemade posters, cards and cakes*



*Claire van Helfteren who ran a Triathlon in Sept 2012 to raise funds for the Congo - Sprint Triathlon 400m swim 20km bike 6km in 1hr 27 mins (a personal best!)*

Finally, just a reminder about the Giving Machine, mentioned in our last Newsletter. Please think about using it for any last minute Christmas shopping and, of course, with any internet shopping throughout the year. It costs you nothing, is simple to use and raises money for our charity which this year will go to the Nutritional Centre.

Think too about making the Daughters of the Resurrection your chosen charity this coming year. The money will go DIRECTLY to help those in need in eastern DRC and Rwanda. (Charity No: 229288).

You can use the DONATE button on your website.

[http://www.canonesses.co.uk/shop-\(plusdonate\)/](http://www.canonesses.co.uk/shop-(plusdonate)/).

With huge gratitude, love and prayers.

## S. Moira's visit to Rwanda

In the summer of 2011 the Priory of Rwanda was born, with its main house at Masaka which is in the midst of banana plantations outside Kigali.

A year later the Priory held a week-long Chapter to look back over the progress of the Priory in those months and to plan for the future. I was asked to visit the Priory on behalf of the General Council, and to lead some sessions of the Chapter.

The situation I found was one which pleased me enormously and I marvelled at the growth of understanding and responsibility amongst the individual sisters and at the strides forward they have taken to ensure the stability of the Priory and their generous service of the people around them.



Four sisters have started to work with orphans and in a school in a new community in Kabuga near Gitarama.

The Literacy Centre at Masaka has developed well and has daily groups coming for literacy, numeracy and dress-making lessons. They are hoping to add more practical sessions for the local people who are largely unschooled and unskilled.



Last year the other Priors of the Association gave Rwanda a cow as a traditional gift to celebrate this new beginning. I was pleased to meet not only the cow (named 'Solidarity') but also its first calf (named 'Prosperity') and to learn that it is soon to give birth to another calf!



As part of my visit I accompanied the sisters on a full-day pilgrimage to the Marian shrine of Kibeho to give thanks for the blessings of this first year of our new Priory.

*S. Moira*