

## Message from the Community

Welcome to the **Seventh Edition** of our newsletter.

The General Chapter of the worldwide Association of Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre took place this summer. The occasion afforded the opportunity to meet with a number of our African sisters and to hear first-hand accounts of their work in the Congo and Rwanda, as well as other parts of the world.

As our communities of sisters in Europe are declining, the African communities report growth in their numbers and in the work they are engaged with to help the people around them.

This year we report on the inauguration of the new school in Masaka, Rwanda which opened its doors in January 2017.

We will update you on the work of the sisters in Kindu, DR Congo as they work towards the opening of an independent Priory in the next few years.

We also report on the work of the sisters in Dunkirk. As you will no doubt be aware, similar to the situation in Calais, the refugee camp in Dunkirk was raised to the ground by the authorities. This has resulted in a large number of refugees, including many children, fleeing to the forested area near to the port and further complicating the efforts to assist and care for them.

Also in this Edition we are delighted to announce that we have two new Rwanda volunteers who will travel to Rwanda in 2018

to teach English. We are hugely grateful to our 2017 volunteers Jackie and Marilyn who returned in July – you can read about their experiences on page 11. We have been blessed with such a wonderful set of volunteers so far.

As always we take this opportunity on behalf of our African Community to thank each of you for your support, whether it be financially, in friendship or in prayer.

With love from the Community



**'Le Chemin de l'Espoir'**  
Stained Glass made for GCXI  
(by S. Mary Stephen) based on the  
design of window in Mirhi –Bukavu Priory

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## **ASSOCIATION GCXI – meeting our sisters from DR Congo and Rwanda**

The Association General Chapter took place in Belgium in July. Delegates from around the world were present. The theme of the Chapter was 'Finding hope in fragile places'.



This was borne out not only in discussions about the work our sisters are involved in but also in the reality that as the Pories in the northern hemisphere are diminishing, there is the hope of more new Pories being established by our African sisters.

The first of these is hoped to be Kindu, DR Congo where Sister Anne-Marie, pictured below, established a new mission house with 6 other sisters in 2013.



Sister Anne-Marie was accompanied at the Chapter, by Sister Jeanne-Françoise, a nurse, who works alongside her in Kindu. A report on their progress in Kindu will follow.



*S. Magda (Tongerlo) greets S. Anuarite*

Sister Anuarite, pictured above, and Sister Justine also joined for Reflection Days. They are both from the Congo and have recently set up a small community in Dunkirk. A short account follows later in the newsletter.



*Delegates from DR Congo –  
S. Gilberte, S. Véronique, S. Floride,  
S. Jeanne-Françoise, S. Anne-Marie  
and S. Thérèse*



*S. Georgine, S. Jeanne-Françoise, S. Gilberte and S. Véronique*

Pictured above in the foreground, Sister Gilberte, currently studying in Goma, reported on the growing problem of ‘filles-mères’, young girls who fall pregnant and are then abandoned by their families and by society. Sister Gilberte’s academic study highlighted this growing issue not just in Goma but across the country. She also reported that many of the young mothers she interviewed had never been allowed to speak about their experiences and struggle.

Each of the Priors had been asked to bring a symbol of hope in fragile places. The painting below came from the Rwandan Priory.



Painted in the shape of the country of Rwanda, footprints lead along a path from darkness into light.

There were 3 delegates from Rwanda. Sister Marie-Rose and Sister Languida, pictured below (Prioress and Sub-Prioress) and also Sister Béatrice accompanied them.



The sisters opened a school in Masaka earlier this year, a sign of hope for the local children. The inauguration was held in October. It is called l’Ecole du Christ Ressuscité.

The sisters have a health centre, a school, a crèche and workshops which promote the education of young women in particular, to help them learn the skills they need to get work and establish themselves independently. Sister Marie-Rose also plays an important role in the reconciliation process post-genocide.



*A final photograph together, after the closure of the Maarssen (Netherlands) Priory*

## KINDU

### Update on the Community in Kindu

A recent letter from Sister Anne-Marie expresses her deep gratitude for all those who are helping them financially and through their prayers.

Their mission, in Kindu, is to look after the vulnerable and the poor. She says “to show the people there that they have not been abandoned”.

The area is extremely poor, under-developed and the climate hot and humid.

From their original 7 sisters they have now doubled their numbers and are growing as a Community. They are delighted to announce that their 4 ‘aspirants’ – young women interested in joining the Community – have moved to the second stage of becoming ‘postulants’, so they have really begun to sow the seeds of a new Priory. They also have one young woman in the noviciate in Mirhi-Bukavu who is due to take her first vows and will join them in Kindu in the near future.



*Postulants at Kindu 2017*

A novice mistress, Sister Jacqueline Kadorho, has been appointed in Kindu. She will train the novices whilst the other sisters are busy with their various responsibilities in the community. Having

the postulants is a great joy but it also means that they have to work even harder in order to feed and clothe them whilst they are being trained.

In her description of life in Community in Kindu, Sister Anne-Marie describes two main practical challenges of their living accommodation. One is the lack of electricity and the other that they do not always have running water.

The sisters were gifted some small solar lights a couple of years ago which made a huge difference to them as it meant they were able to pray together after dark, but as the Community has grown there aren't enough to go round. The house in the town is supposed to have electricity but since June this year the street lighting in the town has been cut off and there have been regular power cuts. The lack of lighting limits the time they can pray together and for the younger ones to study.

At their first house which is situated away from the town, they constructed a system of tanks to gather rainwater (see 2016 newsletter) and so Sister Anne-Marie hopes in time they will be able to replicate this at their house in Kindu, in order to provide running water.

As regards their work, their current focus is to finish the health centre, so the sisters can take care of malnourished children, pregnant women, provide primary care to all and educate in matters of health.

The health centre in Kindu is entirely financed by the fundraising of this Community in England. The Kindu sisters are most grateful for all the monies raised and future funds will go towards fitting out and stocking the centre with medical supplies.

### Update on the Health Centre

Work has begun to construct the health centre at Katako, Kindu. Pictured below are the earthworks, preparing the foundations.



Once the foundations were in place, a ceremony was held, attended by the chief of the town and the local priest. The foundation stone was blessed and Sister Anne-Marie laid the foundation stone.



Sister Jeanne-Françoise, who has been nursing in Kindu since their arrival, is overjoyed that the building of the health centre has commenced. She was shocked at the level of care in the local hospital, saying that there is a lack of training in patient care, for example how to care for pregnant women, and to manage the care of the dying.

Patient numbers in the maternity unit where she has been working have increased year-on-year since 2013 from 4 or 5 to 63 this year and although they don't have official surveys, anecdotally she is told that it is because the women feel they are now treated with respect and care, and they trust the sisters.



*S. Jeanne-Françoise talking to S. Moira*

Her concern is that there have been unnecessary deaths and complications due to lack of education about health matters and she is full of hope that the sisters will have more control over this once they have their own health centre. The sisters will be able to offer primary healthcare services which is so important as there is often no doctor available.

Once the centre opens their challenge will be to keep it stocked with medical equipment and drugs as they get no monetary assistance from the State or Church.

Their urgent needs are beds; medical equipment; a lighting system powered by solar panels (due to the lack of electricity) and a fridge to keep medicines in.

## Update on Education – Kindu

Sister Lea Mbaha (pictured below) works in teaching and is the inspector of Catholic schools. She has been warmly welcomed by teachers, students and governors alike.

Sister Lea is in great demand. She has started a two-year tour of all the schools in the area, training and advising the teachers and carrying out inspections.



Sister Lea travels a lot but is somewhat restricted by poor resources - no portable computer, or printer and the only means of transport is by negotiating lifts on the back of a motorbike. She hopes in time she will be able to get her own motorbike to facilitate visits!

The sisters in Kindu say their progress is 'slow but sure', however, hearing their accounts of what they have achieved in such a short time and with such scarce resources is remarkable. They are seeing signs of hope: small gardens are appearing in the local area near to where they live as people 'copy' them and are beginning to grow their own food! They are encouraged by the increase in people coming to them for advice, particularly pregnant women and girls, and their skills workshops are increasing in numbers. It seems that their discreet but active work is touching the hearts of the locals and making a real difference to them.

## DUNKIRK



*S. Anuarite pictured in the centre*

Our two Congolese sisters in Dunkirk, Sister Anuarite and Sister Justine share modest living accommodation in Dunkirk. They work with local groups and with the parish.

Their main mission is to care for the migrants who were originally in the makeshift camps in Dunkirk and are now living in and around the forested area near to the port.

The sisters are gradually adapting to life in Dunkirk and have made many friends. They help in the parish, visit the sick and in particular work with the Emmanuel Community serving the migrants in the area. They go out to the forests on a regular basis to offer food, clothing and blankets. Working with the displaced people gives them great joy and we are told the sisters' gentleness and warm disposition is greatly appreciated by the migrants.



## TEENAGE MOTHERS IN GOMA, DR CONGO

One of the Congolese sisters, Sister Gilberte, has taken part in some academic research involving teenage mothers in the town of Goma. She has written a paper based on the research project, with the aim of increasing awareness of the situation.



*S. Gilberte who carried out the research*

The aim of the study was to better understand how the level of education affects the socio-economic vulnerability of teenage mothers (so-called “filles-mères”).

The hypothesis was that:

1 The level of education of these young women was lower than average and that it would be the principle cause of their socio-economic vulnerability

2 The main issues that they suffer from would be:

Social: abandonment and rejection by their family and the so-called “husband”, discrimination, lack of self-esteem, failed marriage, abortion attempts and suicide

Economic: poverty, dependence, lack of work, lack of care for their children, begging, prostitution

The teenage mother (“filles-mères”) phenomenon is a problem which is on the increase in war-torn areas of the Congo. The “filles-mères” are a specific category of young girls, for the most part adolescents, who have given birth to one or several children and are left completely on their own to bring up their children. They live alone, rejected and abandoned by the child’s father and their families.

Following repeated wars in DR Congo, there are many pregnancies outside of marriage, following sexual violence; poverty; consequences of war.

Once pregnant, the young women are rejected and abandoned by everyone around them. Their pregnancy is regarded as bringing shame on them and their family, as a sign of poor education, even sometimes as a ‘curse’. They are discriminated against and stigmatised.

Being left to fend for themselves they fall into a cycle of poverty; desperation, guilt and a complete lack of self-esteem. Many attempt abortion and suicide, and do not know how, or are unable, to care properly for their children. Once they are pregnant or become single parents they are not allowed access to mainstream education. As they are poorly educated, they are unable to get jobs and thus find the means to support themselves and their children.

At best, they become dependent on charity. Their only chance of help, is to go to what are called ‘recovery centres’, however the recovery centres are unable to cope with increasing numbers so the situation is becoming desperate.

Sister Gilberte’s research took a sample of 38 young mothers, some from the

'recovery centres' but most from the local neighbourhoods.

The method used to collect data for further analysis, was by interview and direct observation, using a survey questionnaire with 9 questions relating to their level of education and to their socio-economic difficulties, as well as any work they had, what they earned and how they spent what they earned.

Talking to Sister Gilberte, it was apparent that the direct interviewing process was the most harrowing part of the research, for both the girls and the interviewer. But says Sister Gilberte despite feeling physically and mentally fatigued by the process she was happy that at the end of the interviews 'a new life had been born' and that hope returned as the young women regained some of their self-esteem.

The girls were interviewed individually and they were asked to share openly how they had coped with their situation. There were no questions, no interventions. The girls were just allowed the freedom to tell the interviewers whatever they wanted to and their job, as interviewer, was to listen. Sister Gilberte and team then asked the girls' permission to write down what they had said.

The experience of interviewing the girls, Sister Gilberte said, was very moving. They had to deal with a whole range of attitudes and emotions. The hurt is immense, she said, like a deep wound which opened every time the 'filles-mères' began to talk, so much so that once they had started they could not stop.

The girls, for the most part, opened up to the interviewers and the whole process

took a very long time. They said they had trust in the fact that Sister Gilberte was a sister and wanted to help them. It was the first time that they had been able to talk about their experiences and the process was extremely worthwhile for the interviewers as it allowed them to experience their fragility.

The research hypothesis was proven but the real issue is how to deal with the issues it exposes!

The young women had found hope at last in being listened to but Sister Gilberte was clearly troubled by not knowing when anyone will have the resources to be able to help them. So as not to discourage them, she was only able to say, "We'll see" ...

Gilberte's full report, in French, can be found on our website and she is happy to give any further information via [projects@canonesses.co.uk](mailto:projects@canonesses.co.uk).



*S. Gilberte*

## INAUGURATION OF THE SCHOOL IN MASAKA, RWANDA

The official inauguration of the Community's school in Masaka, Rwanda took place in October 2017.



All the children, staff, parents, various dignitaries attended, as well as the Rwandan Community and guests from Priors in Belgium and England.

The celebrations started with a mass and then an official opening ceremony.

Sister Teresa Lenahan was present and gives us the following eye-witness report!



Children from the nursery school began the procession with other young dancers, in inimitable Rwandese-style, leading all the sisters and priests from the Priory to the place of celebration.

Many of the sisters had worked hard into the night, decorating the marquee. The air of excitement was palpable – the moment had come.

Novices, from the Community, led the singing – everyone joined in with enthusiasm. The event was indeed a time of thanksgiving. We could all see the splendid building of the school and most importantly the energy and enthusiasm of all associated with the new school.

The youngest children led all of the dancing. It was truly a school event.

After a pause for refreshment there was the blessing of the school. Dignitaries from the Department of Education accompanied the group.

As they moved through the school they 'tested' the building was fit for purpose. Computers were switched on, cupboards opened, toilets flushed! The Holy Water travelled from room to room.

The time had come for entertainment and speeches. Starting with Sister Marie Rose each had words of congratulations, encouragement and challenge for the future.

The children performed playlets, demonstrating the values of the school. Mainly performing in English, they really enjoyed their place centre stage.

Then followed older dancers and when the end was in sight, a vote of thanks was given.

The nearly continuous rain did nothing to dampen spirits, umbrellas were at the ready. The storm took out the electricity amplification but people were then just quiet and attentive.

Afterwards there was a splendid meal prepared by the sisters and the big clear up began. At 9.30pm under the cover of darkness the marquee, once stripped of decoration, was dismantled and driven away.

On Sunday morning all that was left were chairs and the Rwandan flag!

All of the sisters speak of 'our school' whether they work there or not. Several of the younger sisters are eager to gain the qualifications needed to work in the school as it grows and develops and its ease of location for the Community can only help.

There are currently 4 classes of primary children, and 3 classes (nursery-aged children, 3 – 6 years old) and the capacity is 12 classrooms which can each accommodate 35 children. We wish the Community every success as they grow and develop the school.



#### Our Values

- Discipline
- Excellence
- Solidarity
- Wisdom



## RWANDA VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

### Volunteers - 2017

Our two volunteers Jackie and Marilyn returned to England in July this year. We met with Marilyn shortly after her return, but as Jackie lives abroad, and is soon to return to Kigali, we have had to communicate by email.

Both Jackie and Marilyn appear to have enjoyed their experience, despite understandably missing some home comforts.



The first comment from both was that it was a delight to teach the postulants, novices and sisters. The sisters in turn have also expressed their gratitude to the volunteers. When we met three of the sisters at General Chapter, it was clear that there is a continuing desire to learn more and they are looking forward to the next volunteers arriving.

Being more seasoned travellers both Jackie and Marilyn managed to see a bit more of the country, including spending some time at the Community's house in Kimihurura, which is situated close to Kigali.

The volunteers spent 3 months each in Busasamana and Masaka, with a week

together, travelling and comparing notes on their 'students', before they swapped location.

All the classes were of mixed ability, beginners and elementary, which presented its challenges but many of the students reached at least the TEFL pre-intermediate stage after six months.

We are currently looking to source some more relevant teaching material as the volunteers discovered that the TEFL books we supplied appear to be more suited to students studying in the UK. This did not deter Marilyn and Jackie – they just became more creative with their lesson planning.

The volunteers had fun teaching the sisters a lot of songs which all enjoyed, and Marilyn introduced the sisters to the 'recorder'! She had taken several with her from England.



In Busasamana, the volunteers taught in the morning and afternoon with lesson preparation between the sessions and before dinner in the evening. They also spoke English at mealtimes and indeed at any other opportunity.

Jackie who is very familiar with Rwanda, having lived there, says she would walk

into the village to get handouts printed and enjoyed interacting with the village people.

It took a few accompanied walks before the sisters realised she was OK to be allowed out on her own; they were very caring.

All the students were eager to learn English, and they enjoyed the classes together, though some were quite tired in class as they work so hard during the day.

Surprisingly for some perhaps, Busasamana can get quite cold and wet and Jackie, even though she knows Rwanda well, was surprised to have to put on several layers on a few occasions - including socks, fleece, scarf and a couple of blankets. She was in Busasamana from January to April and suggests the next volunteers take a hot water bottle just in case!

Another essential piece of equipment is a torch as there are power cuts. It makes one realise how much we take for granted being able to charge up computers, phones and other electronic gadgets! The wifi generally is not good and the mobile phone system is the preferred and most effective means of communication (much cheaper than Europe we are told). People buy a USB stick which gives them a month's connectivity to the internet. It appears most people prefer to communicate via Whatsapp including the sisters!

In Masaka, the volunteers taught the novices 2 hours in the morning, in the afternoon the sisters had their class. Some of the sisters struggled to get to class as they are so busy with their work in the community, but there were regular attendees!

As an Anglican and non-French or Kinyarwandan speaker, Jackie didn't attend too many RC services but Marilyn enjoyed attending even the very early morning prayer with them.

In conclusion, the 6 months was very enjoyable for Jackie and Marilyn and they both hope in turn that the members of the Community got as much from the time, as Marilyn and Jackie did from spending time with them.



*Thank you Jackie, Marilyn and Sarah for your work in Rwanda in the past 12 months*

### **Volunteers – 2018**

We are delighted to have two more volunteers who will travel to Rwanda in 2018. They are both called Valerie! They make their own introductions below.



*Valerie Nazareth*

Until recently I was working as a lawyer for the BBC. In 2016 I decided to leave the

BBC so that I could do a course in Biblical Studies at Jesuit college. While I was at college I met several nuns and priests and seminarians, and the experience of studying in this environment had a big impact on me.

Before I look for another job, I decided that I wanted to do some volunteering abroad. I finished my biblical studies in September and since then I have been studying a course designed to help me teach English, so that I am better prepared for my time in Rwanda. Although I will miss my husband and my two children (who are now grown-up) I am really looking forward to going to Rwanda and spending time with the sisters and novices.



*Valerie Francis*

Having read about Sarah Stevenson's Rwanda experience in the last newsletter, I can wholeheartedly relate to her journey from my own teaching experiences in Madagascar. At 51 years of age my life is so very different to how I expected it to be.

My life right now is spent mostly taking care of, and enjoying time with my mum.

I spent my younger years working in the UK public sector, as well as raising my two

beautiful daughters who have now grown up and started building their own lives.

Over the years I have enjoyed many different working experiences in a few different fields but the field I have enjoyed the most is volunteering – so here I am again.

I spent six months studying for my TESOL and began teaching in language schools in Colchester and Cambridge from June 2011. Feeling very keen to combine my teaching with my love for travel I went on to apply to English in Action and began working in schools across Europe. As I built up more confidence, I decided to apply further afield to connect with more diverse cultures and learn more about the world and so I spent 3 months volunteering with Azafady in Madagascar – a place that I connected with, forming bonds with friends I will never forget in a country full of colour, music and vibrancy.

After this unforgettable trip, I wanted to explore more of Africa; so when the invitation to apply to teach in Rwanda arrived in my e-mail inbox this year I just had to take it! I'm so excited to learn more about Rwanda and develop new connections. I know it will be another important part of my life. I hope that I can bring new teaching ideas to enable the sisters to improve their skills and their confidence and I hope to learn from the sisters too!

We wish both Valeries all the very best for their time with our Rwandan Community.

We hope to be recruiting again next year but, in the meantime, if anyone is interested to know more please contact us via [projects@canonesses.co.uk](mailto:projects@canonesses.co.uk).

## FUNDRAISING

We are grateful to all those individuals and groups who have raised funds for our sisters in Africa over the last year.

Those who have bought 'Christmas giving' gifts; shopped at our Africa 'shop'; bought raffle tickets etc and also those who have organized events such as Quiz Nights and suppers for others to enjoy.

We make particular mention of Tom and Margaret Willis who hosted a lunch for the final time in their garden. This year's event raised £2,000 and was a major contributor to the building of a health centre in Kindu DRC.



## THE GIVING MACHINE

Don't forget about the **Giving Machine** when you are internet shopping throughout the year. It costs you nothing and is simple to use, see the guide on our website:

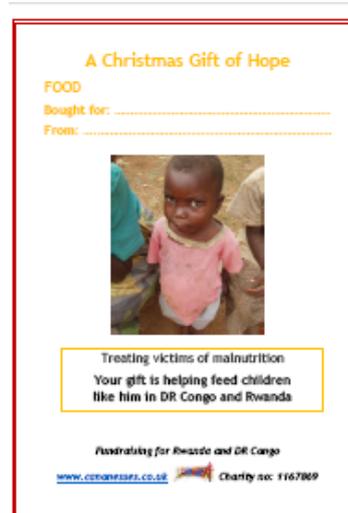
<http://www.canonesses.co.uk/news-events/africa-newsletters/>

Alternatively you can donate directly via our website:

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

Contact us:  
[crssuk@canonesses.co.uk](mailto:crssuk@canonesses.co.uk)  
[www.canonesses.co.uk](http://www.canonesses.co.uk)  
Charity No: 1167869

## CHRISTMAS GIFT GIVING



Sincere thanks to all who bought gift certificates or gave donations last year. We are pleased to report that we raised £1,025 excluding Gift Aid.

We hope you will consider buying Gift Certificates for Africa this year. See <http://www.canonesses.co.uk/news-events/africa-fundraising/> for more details.

Money raised from this initiative goes directly to the sisters in D R Congo and Rwanda for the work they are involved in, which we report on in our Newsletter. 100% of the proceeds go directly to Africa.

To purchase any of the 'gift' certificates go to our website SHOP:

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

Select and pay for the item you want, then we will send you the Gift Certificate in the post. We have left a space on the Certificate for you to fill in who the gift is to and then you can give it or post it to them.

THANK YOU!