

Ugandan Visitors ‘Overwhelmed’ by SFB Hospitality; They Overwhelm Hosts with Faith and Friendship

“We were in the parish hall at the reception for our Ugandan guests,” recalled Bob Slobig, who with his wife Martha had been providing lodging for two of the visitors - Mary Mulumba Plaxeda and Jim Kigozi Kimuli. “I introduced Jim to one of my married daughters. He smiled and told her: ‘I have taken over your bedroom, so you can't ever come back.’”

That little story captures the warmth, good humor, sharing, and gratitude on both sides for God's many blessings that marked this fall's two-week visit by the four pilgrims from SFB's twin parish of St. Paul Mukono in Uganda. Along with Mary and Jim, Boniface (Bonnie) Ssewava Kakooza and St. Paul's pastor Fr. Ignatius Kibowa made the trip, which covered late September and early October.

The arrival of the visitors had been long anticipated. Planning for their arrival began in 2002, but difficulties in obtaining visas from the U.S. Embassy in Kampala postponed their travel plans until this year. In 2001, five SFB parishioners spent a week visiting St. Paul parish in Mukono and surrounding areas.

Schedule Booked to Capacity

In keeping with the mission of the twinning relationship, SFB's Uganda Committee arranged for a full schedule of events that would serve to enhance the spiritual, cultural, and material ties and understanding between the two parishes.

At the center of the visit was a special concelebrated Sunday Mass, reception, and commemorative tree-planting on the parish grounds. There the representatives of St. Paul sang for the congregation and presented the parish with four gifts: a magnificent carved crucifix and statue of the Blessed Mother, a hand-woven mat, and a large decorative cloth.

They attended a Friday SFB School Mass, toured the school, visited with the parish staff, attended evening religious education classes, and met with the parish council and other parish groups.

Through the efforts of many SFB volunteers, the pilgrims were also given a thorough tour of Cedarburg, including City Hall and a visit with Mayor Greg Myers; the fire department; Parkview Elementary School and tour of the high school, led by Superintendent Daryl Herrick; Ozaukee Bank; Lasata Nursing Home; and a local dairy farm. They also enjoyed a Cedarburg fish fry at The Country Keg, tours of Holy Hill and a tool-and-die shop nearby, and numerous dinners at the homes of parishioners and committee members.

The four pilgrims also met Archbishop Dolan and Bishop Sklba at the Archdiocesan offices and had lunch with representatives of the World Mission and Parish Life offices.

Included in various trips to Milwaukee were visits to St. John's Cathedral and St. Josephat's Basilica, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee Public Museum, the county zoo, and Children's Hospital. One day they visited Repairers of the Breach and the House of Peace (two charitable outreach services to which SFB volunteers make regular deliveries) and Marquette University. Another day was reserved for a trip to Chicago.

The festivities and visits didn't stop there. After a celebration at St. Eugene's Parish in Fox Point (which twins with a Ugandan parish bordering St. Paul), Fr. Peter Ntege organized a reception complete with native Ugandan food. And because the pilgrims' tour coincided with Uganda's Independence Day on October 9, a commemorative program and party was held at St. Catherine's grade school in Milwaukee for Ugandans from the Milwaukee and Chicago areas.

SFB Contributions Making a Big Impact

For the past two years, SFB parishioners have been making bimonthly financial contributions to St. Paul. During one of two twinning meetings held during the visit, the pilgrims submitted a report that included an accounting of the monies sent to them. As outlined by Jim Kigozi at the meeting, the contributions have been used to:

- Purchase and install roofing and blackboards for a school building.
- Complete a parish rectory.
- Purchase schoolbooks.
- Provide 10 tuition scholarships for younger orphans and for two seminarians who have also lost their parents.
- Help finance the pilgrims' visit.

Near-term goals for St. Paul, which will be funded by future SFB contributions, include the continuation of the orphan fund and the establishment of a vocational school. The pilgrims also expressed the desire to provide parish catechists with bicycles to facilitate their travel over significant distances to the various schools, and as a recruiting incentive for new catechists. Finally, they are planning to improve the sanitary facilities at St. Paul's church to accommodate the growing parish's needs.

Blessings, Concerns for Both Sides

During the course of the visit, the pilgrims expressed their gratitude many times for the hospitality and friendship they received in Cedarburg. Words sometimes failed them, but their emotions told the story. SFB hosts had similar reactions to report.

"Thanks to the people of SFB, especially those who participated directly, I believe that our visitors experienced the same emotions that we who traveled to Uganda in 2001 experienced," said Tom Guskowski of the Twinning Committee. "I believe that they experienced more than hospitality and meaningful activities. They were surprised - as we were - by joy and love."

While praising the parish for the "outpouring of hospitality to our visitors," Karen Guskowski noted just one of the spiritual benefits received during the trip. "In planning

and living each day, our Ugandan friends have taught us this lesson: They do not ask ‘How do we squeeze God into our busy schedule?’ Instead, they make time up-front for the Eucharist and prayer and thanksgiving. The daily agenda comes second. Also,” Karen added, “they value relationships with people over the urgencies of time and schedule that we Americans frequently find ourselves contending with.”

Twinning committee member Mary Chemotti observed that, while the Ugandan pilgrims described many needs and concerns that are common to ours, such as providing a secure and nurturing home for one’s family, others are perhaps more pronounced on one side or the other. She spoke particularly of Mary Mulumba’s concern for the safety of Ugandan women against domestic violence, the toll that AIDS has taken on so many families, and the lack of universal education.

Mary also noted some of the things we take for granted that caught the attention of the visitors. “They commented on the numerous displays of cornstalks and pumpkins around downtown Cedarburg.” Mary said. “What is mere decoration for us was a reminder to them that America has such an abundance of wealth that we can use surplus food as decorations and not be concerned about it for providing nutrition.”

Yet, she added, they laughed easily and heartily with us every day, grateful for the opportunity to visit.

Looking Ahead

The visit was hectic but rewarding, and it had both sides looking ahead to build upon the blessings and successes of this visit. As of this writing, no specific plans have been made. But the following excerpt from a letter sent to SFB from Denis Lukwago Lule, Head of the Laity of St. Paul Mukono, dated September 9, 2003, reminds us of the grace and power of twinning and the path we must follow: “We very much appreciate your prayers to us; we have realized a lot of good things as a result. . . . We still remember very well the [SFB “twins”] wonderful visit to our parish, and the love and oneness shown are still shining in our hearts. And we shall always remember you.”

Now we, too, can say the same.

-Written by John Schauble for the *Messenger* parish newsletter, Advent/Christmas 2003.