

Our parish pilgrimage to St. Paul Parish in Mukono, Uganda was outstanding in every way. We nine SFB pilgrims will never forget it. Our little delegation included a 13-year-old boy, a 50th wedding anniversary couple, two young moms, an attorney, a parish council member, and a 24-year-old young adult. And one old priest. It was ten days of shocking grace.

I say shocking because we were overwhelmed at every turn. The joy of the parishioners, the sound of the liturgical drums, the hard work of the Ugandan planning committee, the welcome from Fr. Paul Ssebitoogo and his parish, the extreme poverty of the majority, the exuberant children, the growing middle class, the growth of the eleven subparishes, the beauty of the land and the weather, the strange cuisine (I should say different), our visit with the bishop, our bumpy bus rides on mud roads, the people's unmitigated joy at receiving simple gifts, the holiness of the parish seminarians, the success of our piggery projects, the gratitude of the parishioners, the surprise sendoff at the airport, all are memories we want to share with you.

God moved our hearts and shocked us with the grace and blessings of this trip. We didn't know what to expect when we got off our jumbo jet, after two grueling 8-hour flights. But we were greeted by 30 smiling St. Paul parishioners who came to welcome us at the airport, with Fr. Paul and Fr. Ignatius Kibowa, former pastor.

Pilgrim Tom Guskowski said that the progress he saw in Mukono is quite remarkable, since our first SFB visit there five years ago. The piggery projects and schools in the subparishes are doing well, and people's lives are improving noticeably. I can't tell you how much good has been accomplished through your generosity.

While there are Catholic schools in some of the outback sub-parishes, there is no Catholic school in Mukono. What they call a school is what we'd call a garage, two rooms with red brick walls, a cement floor and a tin roof. What would you think if we took 1% or 2% of our Building Fund Appeal to build them a school?

We would like to schedule our next pilgrimage to Mukono in 2009. Think about joining us. It's a rough journey, but something you'll never ever forget.

*Father Tom Eichenberger*

-Written for the St. Francis Borgia parish bulletin, September 10, 2006.