

OUT OF AFRICA

UGANDA PILGRIMAGE: FIRST AND LASTING IMPRESSIONS By Martha Slobig, Twinning Committee Member

How did our pilgrimage to St. Paul's in Mukono affect me? I think in Africa, I finally saw clearly who we are and why we are here.

Sr. Joan Chittister has said, **“We are made to be part of a people. We live in the arms of God together; we are responsible for one another; and God relates to us as one.”**

On our first day in Mukono, we boarded a mini-bus for the subparish of Kirangira. There were the nine of us from SFB, two young men from St. Paul's parish and three women from St. Paul's Women's Guild. Later in the week, we were joined by several seminarians. Soon we would be calling our new friends by name: Tom, Ida, Florence, Fred, Francis Xavier, Simon Peter and others.

Leaving the excitement of our drive that first day on a busy two-lane highway, we pulled onto a dirt road. Bouncing over ruts and potholes through lush vegetation, we reached the village and met Theresa. She is the chief instructor for the demonstration farm, a project of the St. Paul's Women's Guild. Here people from other villages come and learn better ways to plant, compost and harvest. The farm also held her home and she was accompanied, as we walked around, by other women of the village. They grasped our hands and welcomed us with great smiles, proudly pointing out things like bananas, vanilla beans, roosters, hens, goats, cows and pigs.

The most appreciative followers were the children, whose numbers grew as we walked. They followed shyly, and eagerly posed to have their pictures taken. Blessed with digital photography, we tried to take photos of them all. How they loved seeing themselves in the display window!

Everyone belonged. Everyone related to, touched, laughed with, played with, and talked to others all morning long. Everyone seemed to feel responsible for everyone else. The big kids carried the small kids, tended their hurts, listened to their needs. These children are outside from dawn to dusk and roam freely. No one seemed worried about their safety or even their whereabouts! But someone was always watching them. They belonged.

The first message I heard in Africa was: Enjoy your life, your family, your friends. Do what you love to do, but do it in a way that helps others. **“Because we were never meant to live for ourselves only. We live in the arms of God together, and God relates to us as one.”**

And the second message from the people of St. Paul's was: **“Tell our friends at St. Francis Borgia that we love them; we will never forget them and we pray for them.”**

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