

OUT OF AFRICA

UGANDA PILGRIMAGE REPORT: THE SCHOOLS

By Anne White, Teacher at SFB School

It is difficult to verbalize the indelible impression that our visit to our twinning parish, St. Paul, Mukono made on me. As a teacher at St. Francis Borgia School, I was especially interested in the diocesan schools, the teachers and the students we would encounter. Although the schools were on holiday, the staff and students not only came to school to greet us, but also put on beautiful performances punctuated by song and dance. The receptions we received from the children were filled with such joy and enthusiasm that it was humbling. The sincerity of their clapping, singing and joyful spirits warmed the soul.

The obstacles these children face just to arrive at school are beyond our comprehension. Many are barefoot, and some are caked in red soil, clothed in torn uniforms and with bodies haunted by empty bellies. It is hard to believe so many of them wear bright smiles. But in addition to the tasks they must perform for the family just to survive, and despite the fees parents must pay from their meager resources, the children still arrive. And the teaching staff exhibit tremendous sacrifice and dedication as they face hurdles of epic proportion.

Why are these impressions so important? I've come to realize that it is this spirit that will be the key to the future of our dear brothers and sisters in Uganda. It will be education that enables them to access the improving Uganda economy. Without these schools so many of them will remain illiterate and impoverished.

The faith of the Ugandan people is deep and rich. Their love for the Catholic Church is inspiring. I believe that it is this deep faith that keeps the parents, students and staff invested in these schools however humble they may be.

Thus, as we sat in a small classroom adorned with nothing but dirt floors, a chalkboard, and wooden benches, I felt the spirit of hope. As the children shouted with incomprehensible exuberance over the gift of a pencil, I realized that the harvest is truly plenty and I pray that the laborers will not be few. We are so blessed to have a twinning relationship with St. Paul's parish, as we have so much to gain and so much to give.

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