

## Uganda 2020

*Report prepared by Pat Stewart and Colleen Woods*

**Preparation (Pat):** What excitement and anticipation! The prospect of a visit to the Companion Diocese of Central Buganda in February 2020 appeared as a blessing five months after the death of my love, Fletcher. I had joined with 18 others from Rupert's Land in 2007 to visit our Companion diocese. I hoped it would not only be an opportunity to renew friendships, see the completed health centre in St. James' link parish which we had a hand in constructing, but also be a distraction from mourning and assist me in returning to the flow of life.

The objective of the Rupert's Land Diocese was to assess the environment of our Companion Diocese and make recommendations re: further visits from Rupert's Land to Central Buganda and what activities might shape such a visit.

During preparation, the 3 of us went: Rev. Alvin Jacobs, Colleen Woods and myself met with our Companion Diocese Committee for potluck and prayer in early January. We had already booked air tickets. Alvin was leaving in mid-January, returning mid-March, whereas Colleen and I were leaving February 12. I was returning 2 weeks later and Colleen was being joined by her husband Mike for another 2 weeks of travel in Africa. Colleen and I had collected some medical supplies and clothes which we could take in the second bag allowed on our tickets and so we packed hockey bags with the supplies.

The total trip, including 3 airport stops, was 30 hours. Colleen and I were on the same flight out of Montreal. We arrived in Entebbe late on Feb. 13, met by a driver and Alvin, and went to the DianWill Hotel. The next morning we were able to get currency exchanged and local sim cards for our phones by a helpful church volunteer who lived in Kampala. Then we were driven to Kasaka, the central meeting place and location of the cathedral and offices for the diocese. I noticed great improvements in the road system since my 2007 trip. We were provided with hospitality by Bishop Michael and his wife Jenfer for the 2 weeks we were there. An itinerary had been planned for us; however there was great flexibility to go with the flow and our requests were met. The Bishop had 2 cars and drivers available.

### Summary of Experiences:

- Monitoring of **water project**; construction provided by RL Diocese, at Kasaka (*Alvin*): Alvin would meet staff & check documentation of levels in a log book, water sales etc.
- Visits to **Health Centres** (HCs) at Kasaka, Buyama and Kyerima
  - The materials we had collected were delivered to Kasaka and Kyerima (highlighted an issue of no shelving for storage). We provided blood pressure machines to all sites. They had none. I went back to Kyerima HC additional times, as it was the project St James Winnipeg raised funds for, in partnership with Winnipeg Muslims. I provided a microscope for HC. The Health Centres need to be self-sustaining by charging a small fee

from clients & charging for medications, which they were. (However, during Covid-19 most people don't have the cash to visit clinics or buy medications).

- **Education:** Visit to Fisher Branch Kalagala High School. We had a wonderful tour and opportunity to see this impressive high-school in operation for approx 400 students. Luckily our own priest and the school founder, Archdeacon Mawiji guided us around the school and into classes and residence. I was quite moved to find 8 or 9 S.Sudanese refugees among the 57 students who could no longer pay fees but were kept on at the school anyway. The curriculum was broad, including art and higher level math. We ate lunch with Rebecca, the Bursar of the school.
- **Visit to Orphans** by Colleen. This project is supported by the Diocese of Rupert's Land. The childrens' clothes were not in very good shape and some had no money for uniforms. The outdoor kitchen where they attended school kept blowing over. The headmaster expressed frustration over the fact that there is no help for students to continue their education once they have graduated from the high school. The students were very bright and interested in Canada and expressed a desire to become neurosurgeons and teachers. The students' diet is very basic and I wonder about the possibility of a school garden to increase the nutritional value of their food.
- and a visit to a **Nursing Education** program at Mityana: The Nursing Education program provided information about curriculum, clinical practice (the education program pays the hospital for students' clinical learning) and salaries and levels of nurses. This was of particular interest to Colleen and myself as we are both retired nurses.
- Visit to Lake Victoria and the mouth of the Nile (*Colleen*).
  - "I visited Lake Victoria with my host from Buyama. I took a picture of several men fishing and really upset one man. The government does not allow fishing at the spot. He was convinced that my picture would cause his arrest."

China has an obvious presence in Uganda. China built the water treatment plant for example.

- Visit to the **Martyrs' Shrine** with Ret'd Bishop Jackson Matovu, hosting us at a hotel dining room for lunch; then a visit to the Bishop's retirement home at Mukono, where we met his wife and mother
- Drive to see lake **Fishers at work** with their catch (poorer catches are a result as climate change has affected the level of lake water). On the same trip we visited a school, with 700 students, established by Persis Mulondo (Persis now working on a safe toilet project—she has documented 90 residential toilets are a high risk for young children, as the holes in the cement floors are too large and a toddler could fall into it ---a forty foot drop---often leading to death). Mr and Mrs Mulondo provided a lovely meal for us.
- We all **attended church** at the Cathedral in Kasaka. Pat and Alvin also went to St James' link parish at St.Peter's Mayungwe —all of us spoke at all services we attended. Colleen attended All Saints' Buyama which didn't have a link parish in Ruperts Land and wanted one. Colleen would take the request back to St. Alban's, Kenora. She notes the following " I attended church at All Saint's Buyama and a baptism at a small daughter parish. The baptism took place in the front

yard of a small house. The poverty was overwhelming but a few days later I received a floor mat weaved out of plastic straws from one of the women whose grandchild had been baptized. Such generosity! I wish I could visit her again and share our “grandmother” experiences.” Further, Colleen spent a weekend with a host family at Buyama: “I arrived on a Saturday and was there until Monday. The relationship between men and women was interesting. The men sit together in the living room and the women sit on the floor in the dining area. After dinner on Sunday night one of the men started to sing and the whole group joined in. It was lovely. The family owned a business and seemed to be doing well.”

- Visit to office and family sites of **Agricultural Projects**—GODFA . This is a Swedish-backed organization for teaching & implementing more efficient and sustainable agricultural practices eg setting up methane cooking fuel from animal dung, instead of using charcoal

Staff expressed desire to meet with Bishop and share more about agricultural goals & activities but no progress in that regard, to date. GODFA's goal is 2 meals daily per family in the region.

**Meetings:** of Lay and Clergy reps from each link parish

On February 20 there was a meeting held of a clergy and a lay person representative from each link parish who gathered at Cathedral Centre at Kasaka. Each of us visitors brought greetings from our Diocese and link parish. Colleen did not come from a link parish, but the parish at Buyama wished to become linked and Colleen was exploring this option for St, Alban's, Kenora. Our presentations were translated into Bugandan language as were the Ugandans' presentations translated into English. Each Central Bugandan parish described the current status of the relationship with their link and hope for the future. Specific comments were documented & can be made available to each RL link parish.

Specific links brought up the following comments and concerns re Ruperts' Land parish partner:

- long delays in responding to communications (wish more prompt response)
- discouragement when no response
- previously vibrant relationship dropped to nothing
- some have fair to good email communications
- some Canadian contacts no longer contact their link parish
- would like more frequent communications
- those who have received gifts/projects from link parish are grateful

Suggestions were made about how to improve the relationship:

- Find a way to have prayer partners eg one-to-one parishioners
- more parishioner contact eg pen-pals (with young people); develop some activities that may bind commitments to one another
- ensure lay to lay contact and communication between link parishes
- for future visits, spend a significant amount of visiting time in a link parish, getting to know parishioners and issues in more depth

- Is there an interest in a relationship between retired priests?
- Ruperts' Land Companion Diocese Committee Chair should have lead for communications responsibility with Mr. Mulondo
- A few clergy said they would like to make the trip to Canada

### **Mothers Union/Women's Day:**

There seems to be a strong organization of women. There were about 50 who attended the meeting at the diocese centre, where they met outside. We sat in with them with someone translating quietly next to us. These women appeared to be listening intently and were quite engaged in animated conversation during the breaks. The meeting consisted of one presenter speaking for most of the day. There was an emphasis on social problems e.g. young people and pregnancy. It would be interesting to explore the role that PWRDF could play in this diocese, especially with the issue of maternal and child health.

### **Staying in the Bishop's household**

*Pat:* What wonderful hospitality! Sharing prayer--Prayer when setting out for the day; prayers before meals; prayers at bedtime. We often shared a debriefing of the days' events with the Bishop at dinner or later in the evening. Bishop was often on the phone late into the evening. Gender roles: As an observer from western culture there were notable differences. As guests we sat at a table with the Bishop, Jenfer, his wife, and a young student who lived with them, sat apart at another table. I did not see the practice of women kneeling when greeting husbands or the Bishop, as I did in 2007. Local economy: Evidently, if you don't own land & don't have capacity to grow your own food, you're dependent on a job. Nearly 50% of the population of 44 million is under 15 years of age. A large number of young men are unemployed and jobs can be quite precarious, day-to-day. There is not much of what we call a "social security net". The Diocesan material progress seems dependent to a large extent on maintaining a relationship with "the President" of the country. The Bishop recently got funding for 2 tractors and a maize mill, as well as a new large home from this source. Bishop's plan is to produce enough maize so that all school children in the diocese will get breakfast. The Church has a large number of schools (I think I heard 200). The Bishop had developed enough of a relationship with Rotary that they were planning to fund a maternity unit at Kasaka.

*Colleen:* "Pat and Alvin would be far more aware of the daily work that goes on in a diocese. As a layperson I was overwhelmed with the sheer busyness of the place. The church is everywhere, in the schools, the healthcare centers, and even in the local infrastructure, having input into the road being paved. The bishop is a very good administrator. He seems to have total discretion over the allotment of funds. For example he gave one family 1.2 million Ugandan shillings to pay the registration fee for school for their twin boys. The Bishop is also looking for partnerships from foreign countries for help. The day we left, someone was arriving from England to assess a certain project."

### **Personal reflections**

*Colleen*

1. I saw a country where everyone has to hustle to survive.
2. I expected to see churches overflowing; however that was not the case especially at the Cathedral. Church is something that seems to run all Sunday morning. It was the youth that had the “pulpit” early in the day with great lively music and dancing. I saw several school-age children, about 150, attend a service at lunch during the school day. It was full of praise and joy.
3. As Pat mentioned it is remarkable to hear the prayers that accompany every daily activity. It says to me that these people don’t take life for granted. They are thankful and trusting in God
4. I am still in contact with people I have met there. I feel that it is now much easier or meaningful to love them because I have had a chance to meet them. I am thankful for this.
5. The relationship between Muslims and Christians was profound. It truly represents that we are all God’s children.
6. The Ugandan people have great resilience and problem-solving skills. This is no backwater country in terms of current knowledge in education and agriculture; however they seem to be held back because of lack of resources.
7. I wonder if instead of going to Uganda I could have just sent the money that it cost me. I struggle with this. However I would be poorer for it in spirit and in friendship. It would be my hope that Ugandans could come this way, especially some of their youth. And it would be wonderful to see our youth go there.

*Pat*

1. My awareness increased on this visit, compared to 2007 visit, regarding day-to-day survival, how precarious jobs are in Uganda and yet the high expectations within the diocese for the tasks to be accomplished
2. It's a joy to be present in another cultural group as they express their faith through worship & music. It provides an insight into the diversity and Unity found in Christ. A few Muslims came to Sunday service and had questions.
3. I saw a Church with a lot of social responsibility for education and often health and social challenges. They have to maneuver a response to their society's needs in spite of an apparent dictatorship. The church leadership keeps trying to get the resources the people need. I heard at the women's meeting that youth need hope.
4. Friendship within more parts of the Body of the Church can be fostered through the CDC and lead to an increased common understanding of the Church in the world. My hope is more peace & justice. I give thanks for the opportunity I have had for these friendships and to gain a greater sense of Reality in the world---to me this is the face of God. But how engaged or how far can a parish progress in understanding without this face-to-face experience?

### **Current situation**

*Pat:* “I have kept in touch with some of my friends in Mayungwe and Kasaka. During Covid19 there has been an extended lockdown in the country. Many people do not have the means to make a living. There

is widespread poverty and hunger. Travel within the country has just opened up fairly recently. For the Health Centre at Kyerima it means patients have not been coming as they don't have cash for a visit. Fortunately the nurse there has continued to be paid by the Diocese, which means the Diocese must have some revenues.”

**Recommendations:**

1. Do not travel while at risk of COVID-19 i.e. probable delay until 2022.
2. Consider promoting young people to make visits e.g. 17-30 years, and having fund-raisers to help with costs. Have potential travellers involved a year prior in a planning process. Have travellers state their objectives and particular interests and questions to find relevant activities.
3. Consider all the effort and expense required of the Central Bugandan people to meet, plan and host travellers
4. We need to survey parish links here to see what Rupert's Land values in relationship to this Companion Diocese.