

Dear Sisters and Friends

It's been some time since we've been in touch and given you an update on the movements and events among us here in Tanzania. We greet you now as we move into the Advent Season, this holy time of expectant waiting. Indeed, the world is in a period of expectant waiting just now – waiting for the discovery of an effective vaccine to fight the Corona Virus. Perhaps it is very near. Let us pray that the people of the world will soon be able to meet and greet one another again without fear, and that life may return to some kind of 'normal' for people everywhere.

Here in Tanzania Covid 19 seems to have bypassed us for the most part. The markets are as thronged and busy as ever with no sign of 'social distancing'; almost no one wears a mask; there is no sanitizer to be seen at shop doors and schools and churches are functioning as usual.

Sr. **Mairead** returned from her time at home on Sept 15th to smiling faces and a warm welcome - even hugs! She continues to divide herself between the Novitiate in Dundani and the community in Maji Matitu. While at home she spearheaded the fundraising effort to provide an independent source of water for the new pre-school at Dundani. It was estimated it would cost about €5,000 to build a rainwater harvesting storage tank and water tower, to provide tanks and a pump, and guttering round the school building (the drinking water will be sourced from the main house). Thanks to the generosity of so many Sisters in Ireland and England, her family and

friends the money was raised. It has just arrived in our Bank account here and work has already started.



**Heri
na
Baraka
kwa
Noeli**

Sr Monicah's first Vows

On 13th October we had the joy of celebrating **Monicah's** First Profession at the Novitiate in Dundani. Her parents and some family members came from Kenya to be with her. It was not an easy journey for them as they had considerable difficulty getting through the border due to Covid 19.

Unusual for Africa, it rained all day but that didn't dampen anyone's spirits. In African culture rain is a big blessing and a sign that God is with us. There was singing and dancing, speeches, laughter and gifts as we ignored the thundering rainfall outside. Monica was also joined on the day by our neighbouring Sisters and friends from the parish. We thank God for her and ask Him to bless this new member of the Congregation.



A day to remember: Sr Monicah and family celebrate her First Profession.

Tanzania/Cameroun Seminar We have been invited to host the Seminar and preparation for Final Vows next July. This will involve three Cameroonian Sisters, and our own Sr. Schola. We were delighted to agree. It will be a truly international experience and will help us develop closer relations with Holy Union, Cameroun Region as we aspire to in our Strategic Plan.

Visitors

Sadly, this year, due to restrictions in travel, we have not had the opportunity to welcome to Tanzania our Holy Union Sisters nor our volunteers and benefactors Agnes Hurley, Eilish Tracey and Helen O Connell who for the past 3 years have given incalculable support and encouragement to all our ministries.

Sr. **Marion** is much missed and much talked about among us as to when she might be returning. Marion, when the time is right, God willing and Corona allowing, you will be welcome again.

What a year it has been!

What did we all do during the Corona Lockdown?

Well, Tanzania got off lightly compared to most countries, with few infections and few deaths. There was no testing done on the whole, except at a few selected centres. Schools and colleges and even Churches were abruptly closed down for over three months. While on-line learning is still not really an option here we did try to provide ongoing study plans for the students for the duration. On returning to 'normal' the school day was lengthened, Saturday morning teaching became mandatory and the term was lengthened by two weeks to complete syllabi. The Fees are slow to come in as many people have lost their livelihoods. More people than ever are in need of food and basic health care.

The pandemic coincided with our strategic planning. This exercise was sponsored by Mísean Cara (Ireland) and ably facilitated by a Mr Eamon Brehony. He helped us to look critically at our overall Mission, to evaluate all our systems and policies, and then evaluate our ministries, one by one.

It took a lot of time and was an education for all concerned. We had to do a Verification of our Registration and discovered we had arrears of dues and penalties to pay! We discovered flaws in Title Deeds and were able to make timely corrections. We decided it was time for us to become Registered Trustees of Holy Union ourselves, rather than continuing to depend on the Archdiocese and this is a work in process. The plan commits us to drawing up policies for personnel, finance, safeguarding etc which will serve us well as we continue to grow.

The closure of schools and the presence of our student sisters gave us quality time to work on these issues together. As well as that we were preparing for a siege, maybe a famine! So we laid in bags of rice, beans, sugar etc and the sisters took to farming and gardening with a will, Cassava, sweet potatoes and Maize were planted and



Strategic Planning group

A Nasty Accident

Sr Annette writes:

I was coming home from school a few months ago, in great form and as jaunty as you like when a motorbike came up suddenly behind me making a lot of noise and I swerved to avoid it.

Then, I skidded on the sand and fell heavily on to tree roots and couldn't get up! I'd suffered a fractured femur. The following day I was operated on and got a bit of metal and screws put in... its slow to heal. At least it feels like years to me and I'm most impatient with the slow progress and the tedious exercises. But I shouldn't complain. I could have been killed... there are so many fatal accidents with motorbikes and very serious injuries. My Sisters have looked after me very capably, with great good humour, common sense and immense kindness. I'm extremely grateful to them, while I look forward to being fully independent soon and being able to use my two legs properly again!



*Not going
anywhere!
Sr Annette
on her
stationary
bicycle*

the banana shamba well extended. Other sisters took to the design and sewing of face masks, while still others researched local medicines and brewed up extraordinary concoctions, designed to keep us safe. Sr Agatha's bitter lemon and root ginger proved to be the most popular.

Our novice Monica would normally have been given some school work for her apostolic experience. Since there was no school experience to be had, she was given instead an exercise in entrepreneurship. She took charge of 100 day-old chicks. Their feed was carefully monitored with much greenery and vitamins from the farm. The grown cocks proved proud, popular and profitable. The layers are now producing well, many of the eggs having two yolks!

Teacher Training

Sr. **Emiliana** writes about her Montessori teacher-training in Msimbazi Centre, Dar es Salaam.

I have been doing this course for two years and have recently graduated. I fully appreciate the congregation for giving me this opportunity so as to be able to work



with God's children. Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let the little children come to me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven'. The skills and knowledge I have gained at this Training College will enable me to teach the children very well and to draw out their talents. Part of my training involved painstakingly making learning tools and

equipment. I'm very proud of what I have produced and look forward now to using it in teaching.

As I progressed in the Montessori method of teaching I came to realise it was not by chance I was there. I felt it was absolutely God's plan for me so as to witness to God's love and care for children. In other words, I am called by God to educate children using this special approach of Maria Montessori.

I am now very sensitive to childrens' needs and as I support their growth I want to be a loving and committed Montessori teacher in whichever school I will be assigned to. I have used the two years of my studies to prepare myself academically, spiritually and psychologically so as to care for children for the glory of God. I'm looking forward to doing my part in the education ministry of Holy Union in Tanzania.

New Kindergarten for Dundani

Bethlehem community in Dundani is our Novitiate house. It is surrounded by a good area of farmland. The Sisters grow rice, cassava, bananas, potatoes and all kinds of vegetables. There are many fruit trees especially mangoes, pawpaw and citrus fruit. Passion fruit and pineapples are also grown and the plot has well over a hundred fruiting coconut palms.

Since we came to Dundani in 2016 the Sisters have been busy developing the house and farm and providing initial formation for Holy Union candidates and novices. Now, in response to the request of the local government to support education in the area, the Sisters have a new project. Most of the people in Dundani are Muslim and they don't take their children to kindergarten as the few that exist are very far. Early childhood education has not been provided by the Tanzanian government until very recently, and many schools are still lagging behind. Children who do not manage to go to kindergarten are at a big disadvantage when they join a primary school at the age of 6 and then join classes which are hugely overcrowded.

Over the last 20 years Holy Union has contributed a lot to pre-schooling, in Mbagala, beginning in Maji Matitu, then Saku, Churwi, Holy Union Montessori, the new school Marten Lumbango and now hope to lead the way in Dundani as well. Thanks to our donors, a large classroom, offices and toilet block are already in place. Our Sisters in the AngloHibernia Area have generously contributed to a rainwater harvesting storage tank, pump and water tower, which will provide water for the toilets and cleaning. (it may also serve the adjacent cow house). Gradually the project is taking shape. Srs. **Benedicta** and **Dostea** did a training in local fundraising last year and are now inviting help from companies to help with the finishing: ceiling boards, tiles, painting and furniture. We also want to build a store and to make a play-ground. Unfortunately, due to the recent General Election the economy is not stable and industries which might support us are slow to respond. But we are hoping all the same to get started in 2021.

Given the extraordinary challenges of this year, it is wonderful to have got even this far!

Sr Dostea



The new Kindergarten

Holy Union Pre and Primary School

The school was established in 2004 with 36 pre-school pupils and two teachers. Sr **Dostea** was the first principal. In 2013 following the repeated requests of parents, unhappy with the overcrowded state system of primary education, we managed to open a new class for primary school with 42 pupils. Since then, the school has grown and we have enrolled many more children, employed more teachers and non-teaching staff.

Building the school on a slope was a huge and costly challenge but today, Sr Mairead's design is constantly admired by ourselves and by visitors to the school. Sr **Agatha**, the present Headmistress, never tires of improving the school, inside and outside, resulting in a most attractive teaching and learning environment.



Graduation: Cardinal Pengo with Sr Agatha and pupils

Good results are obtained in grade four and seven national examinations and the pupils do well at district and regional levels as well. Last year the first grade seven graduation took place with 33 pupils. On 11th November this year, the second graduation ceremony (with 29 pupils) was presided over by the retired Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Polycarp Cardinal Pengo. He recalled for us his own primary education when the schools during the colonial period were very few and far between. His enthusiasm for quality Christian education is boundless and he praised the school highly.

Our focus is to continue to serve the school community with quality education and a supportive environment so as to better all pupils' standards academically and socially. Special thanks to all our benefactors abroad whose contribution to Holy Union Mission enable so much good work to be done.

God bless all of you. **Sr Agatha**

Bring your own chair. The new church for Maji Matitu is still under construction but Sunday Mass already attracts several hundred.

Working with our Local Church

Sr Glory writes: Holy Union Sisters work with and support the local church. When our sisters first came to Tanzania in 1973, they worked in Moshi, Morogoro and Dar es Salaam, mainly in education but also in the diocesan development office.

At that time most of the churches were built by missionaries with money from abroad. Not so today. More and more the church is self-reliant in personnel and gets support for building from the local Christians. Zachem parish has two big outstations in Maji Matitu and Chamazi. In both of these our Sisters teach catechism and prepare children for the sacraments. They work with catechumens and prepare adults for marriage. They are active members of the Parish team and deanery. They teach religion in the primary and secondary schools. In a new situation there is much to be done to build up the culture of the Church and our Sisters are active in calling the people to pray the Rosary, the Evening Prayer of the Church, the Stations of the Cross in Lent, Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and various devotions. They help to organize the Holy Childhood society and encourage the various choirs.

The mission of Holy Union impels us to cultivate good relationships among ourselves and with all others. In this way we give witness to the joy of the Gospel. Faith surrounds us with the knowledge of God's love for us and for all the world.

In these unusual and worrying times, through Holy Union sisters, may the local church be a source of meaning and strength for the youth and all the people.
Sr Glory



Matumaini: Sr Fides writes

As we are approaching the end of the year, it has been a great time to assess ourselves on the achievements/successes, and our failures in the 2020. We began this year well by putting emphasis on improving the health of those who had malnutrition, and increasing our efforts in the Physiotherapy. The most wonderful plan we had was the visit of some well qualified volunteers from abroad to share some ideas with us. They were to come between June and August. We were also to increase our efforts in local fundraising.



One of our Local Pre and Primary Schools came to donate some food to support our Centre

In March we felt like our dreams were going to collapse due to the outbreak of COVID 19. It was very sad for all of us, the workers and the parents when we decided to close down the Centre without knowing exactly the day or month we were going to resume. We sat together as a staff and looked for a right way to reach out to the children while they were at home. We came up with some ideas like to supply nutritious flour for porridge. With a lot of precautions we asked the mothers to come one by one to collect the flour whenever they were in need. Also we arranged for them to come to the Centre in small groups for their general monthly assessment.

Support for families in need

Our small group assessment meetings have helped us to get to know our families better. I would like to share with you some of their stories.

Mama Indris (not the real name) came with two children, a girl of 8 years and a boy 6 years. They were born well and they were doing well both but because of some reason they just changed. The first born got this problem when he was in the age of 4 as well as the second child. Mama didn't know why. She went to hospital but she couldn't manage with the cost of the tests which they recommended. She had some medicine but she was getting more confused with what they were telling her. When she came to us we applied for a health insurance so as to be able to access the treatment. It took three months to get it. As soon as we got it we started treatment at Muhimbili Hospital. The Health Insurance did not cover the child's MRI scan so we paid for it, but unfortunately the boy died on 15th November before his results were out. His sister is still receiving treatment in Muhimbili Hospital. Our Physiotherapist thought it could be Muscular Dystrophy.

These are the twins. Their mother has no one to look after the other child when she comes to the Centre, so she brings both of them. Here he is trying to support his twin brother to help him to sit properly.



Mama Peter is a young woman aged 23 with a child of three years with a problem of Hydrocephalus. The husband committed suicide last year and left her alone with this huge responsibility. She went to stay with her Aunt who is a young woman married to a man, a casual labourer with 3 children.

The life isn't easy for either of them. Peter's mother is a hard-working woman. We gave her a small amount of money and she sells powder soap. One day her seven year old cousin saw Peter's mother doing massage on the child, so he went and did the same — and broke his leg! The poor child and the mother were in trouble again. The child still has a P.O.P on his foot. Peter's mother cannot do business neither can she come to the Centre.

A women's group (WAWATA) will support mama Peter to do a sawing course and encourage Mama to bring her child back us.

We have had many sad stories of this kind; however this year we had more time to reach out to the poor than last year. Perhaps we didn't succeed in our plans as we had arranged but still we are proud of all we were able to do this year.

Innovation in Debrabant High School

In order to save the A level programme in Debrabant we decided to apply for a public/private partnership (ppp), with the Government. Our students had become fewer and fewer since 2015 when the government of President Magufuli decided to take 90% of the Form 4 graduates to their own mostly ill-equipped and overcrowded schools. This would leave only 10% of students to be competed for among all the private schools.

Since there is no local government A Level College in Mbagala we suggested taking the local girls who qualify, if the Government would pay our teachers and provide a capitation grant. Thankfully, the Government welcomed our proposal and the programme will start in January 2021. Part of this pilot scheme is a component of elearning for which our school is very well equipped.

This kind of ppp is commonplace in many countries but is a major innovation in Tanzania. We will work hard to make it successful and to achieve our goal of providing excellent and affordable higher education to Mbagala students, especially girls.



Debrabant High School

Preparing for Tomorrow

Greetings from **Sr Eugenia**. These days I work with ASEC, the African Sisters Education Collaboration. This organisation ensures that all sisters who are ready and able can benefit from courses, improving their skills and education so as to be able to do their ministries more effectively. My task is to access these sponsored courses for Holy Union.

In 2020 **Srs Benedicta** and **Fides** spent a month improving their computing skills. This year they did a month's course in Accountancy and Administration respectively. Next year they will complete with another month's course in the same subjects. There has been a very positive feedback so far from these short courses and a bonus is the contacts and friendships the sisters make with women religious from all over Tanzania. Shortly, there will be a course offered in Counselling and its yet to be decided who will go. Maybe myself, as my work in Debrabant Secondary, apart from teaching, involves counselling students, many of whom have home and personality problems.

I am also the supervisor of the Boy's hostel. Although we're basically a day school there are some students who come from too far away and we've decided to offer a limited number of places, a maximum of 40 boys. This is still an experiment as we try in every way to recruit enough students. I make sure the boys are well fed and well behaved. Little by little I'm improving the service and expect there will be greater demand next year.

To broaden my spiritual life and understanding I am in a Justice and Peace group, mentored by **Sr Caroline Njah** from Rome. **Sr Glory** joins me in the Zoom gatherings, where Sisters from Holy Union Cameroun also join us. We are deeply exploring Pope Francis' 'Laudato Si'.... what we learn we will share with our students on how to care for our planet and care for one another.

Formation: **Sr Dostea** writes: Bethlehem community (the Novitiate) continues to grow in numbers, life and is bustling with energy. Just now here are three Aspirants – **Epifania**, **Signifrida** and **Witness**; four Pre-Novices – **Modesta** (just finished the Catechetical Course in Sanya Juu and will become a Novice in December), plus **Agnes**, **Asunta** and **Lucy** who are starting the 2nd year of the Sanya Juu Programme. And last but not least, **Sylvia**, our first year Novice. Please pray for all of them in this time of discerning their vocation to Holy Union.

Sr. Schola is presently attending a Course in Arusha as part of her formation for Final Vows in August 2021.

Sr. Alice is doing a Diploma in Theology in Nairobi. She is finding the course challenging but most rewarding.

Social Work Training



Sr Jesca writes from the Institute of Social work at Mwenge College in Dar es Salaam: Social work, for me, is the intervention and interaction I have with people in need, enabling them to have hope and to cope with their

lives. I am in the 2nd year of a Diploma course supported by ASEC and Holy Union Sisters. We study society's family problems: drug and alcohol addiction, child abuse and gender-based violence. We study awareness-raising, and show families how to be more supportive to their children. We acquire good research methods by observation and conducting interviews to get real information about problems.

We also learn about social service organization management and what is available to people in difficulty from the government, its NGO partners and Church services. My field work in Mwanza this year was concerned with the care of the mentally ill in rural societies. I learned a lot and discovered that the best care was given by the Catholic church. I am happy learning social work and helping people with very difficult life situations.

My Experience of Rome

On 24th January 2020 I travelled to Rome to take part in a course organised by the Major Religious Superiors for Religious Sisters experienced in Formation work. Sr. **Emerentia** travelled at the same time from Cameroun and we were privileged to stay with the Sisters of the General Team in the Casa Generalizia. Sr. Teresa and community made us welcome and saw that we had everything we needed.

The month of February was very busy as we travelled to lectures and got to meet our fellow students from all over the globe and our teachers. There was little time for sightseeing but we were awed by the magnificent architecture of Rome, the amazing decorated buildings and palaces and especially the great Churches, with colourful windows and endless statues; so different to Africa where you can walk many miles before you see a church! We had hoped to explore the history of Christianity but we hadn't bargained with Covid 19!

Italy was suffering badly from the pandemic. Instead of Church bells we were hearing the sirens of ambulances. We were soon being told to stay home and get organised to study online. There was much to learn and to adjust to. The Formation Course itself was very good, it showed the reality of religious life in our time. It challenged each congregation to see how we respect each one's culture. It gave us the opportunity to think about how our Charism



and the spirit of our institute would have to stretch and adapt to meet the many needs of life today. And we, Formators, would have to be more sensitive to the modern culture our postulants are now part of. I'm grateful to the Congregation for giving me the time and opportunity to reflect well on the changing horizons of religious life.

Despite the corona I found it an enriching and valuable experience. **Sr Dostea**

Farewell 2020

And so we come to the end of an extraordinary year. What will 2021 bring? Let us pray it will bring the Vaccine, an end to Covid 19 and a fresh understanding of our vulnerability on this planet. We thank all our friends and donors for their support and encouragement which is so essential to our mission. With your help we do our best to comfort and look after people in need, distressed families, marginalised children and youth, while working through the schools to promote their long-term development. As Christmas approaches, may the memory of Christ, born in poverty in a stable, inspire you to continue your support in the coming year.

With best wishes and prayers from the Holy Union Community in Tanzania.

LEARN MORE ABOUT US/CONTACT US:

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Online donations: <https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/> (search on 'LSU')

In Ireland: lsul@eircom.net (Mrs M Kenny/Tanzania Mission Fund)

Happy Christmas to Everybody!

