



Keeping in touch

Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

OVERSEAS AID INCORPORATED

November 2013

TWENTY YEARS OF EDUCATION AT MAPUORDIT, SOUTH SUDAN

Combini Primary School, Mapuordit opened its doors (but there were no doors) on April 14th 1993 – twenty years ago this year, 2013.

The raid on Yirol by government forces in 1992 began the trek to Mapuordit – a bush area where the displaced people settled, having fled their homes, leaving all possessions behind. Mapuordit was chosen because there was a well – the only water supply – ropes used to fetch the water up.

OLSH sisters came to Mapuordit when the school was two years old and I followed the next year 1996.

The school began in 1993 with 200 pupils, but the numbers rapidly increased, the pupils kept coming, walking long distances on empty stomachs – no matter how hot, no matter how wet, no matter how sick, no matter how hungry. They were starved for education.

The teachers, with little education of their own, taught from text books and received only food in remuneration – all committed to the education of the young.

The classrooms were bamboo huts – grass roofs, dirt floors, and a log to sit on if you were lucky. A few bamboo sticks separate classrooms, but they sure didn't separate the noise.

I taught in those classrooms for many years, with termites eating away the building and snakes dropping down from the roofs. We survived the war years, with the sound of "antinov" overhead, sending students flying into the bush – urging us "to hurry". But no bombs ever landed on Mapuordit – an oasis amid neighbouring bombarded areas. The air strip was bombed while Fr Michael was

actually in the air. The plane had to return to Loki where Michael was stranded for weeks, while we were marooned at Mapuordit.

But education went on. In all my years of teaching I have never seen such eagerness to learn as in those early days at Mapuordit. Nothing could keep them away, questions rained down on us in abundance, while dictionaries were consulted for meanings, which had first to be ratified by the sisters before they could be believed.

Secondary school opened in 1997 – a giant step in faith. We started with literally nothing but the impetus which drove us to open was to save the year 8 leavers from being drafted into the army. (There was no such thing as freedom to enlist).

I was never a secondary teacher but I became a secondary maths teacher by default with no qualification except that I was good at maths at school so I set about relearning everything I had forgotten as I went up a grade each year to Form 4 – with no teachers, willing or able or qualified to take the higher classes. I taught English too which wasn't quite the trauma of mathematics but when Wendy arrived in 2001, I discovered a gifted English teacher.

Fr Michel Barton stayed at Mapuordit for nine years, in 2002 leaving the leadership of the schools to me. "In the realm of the blind, the one eyed is king." I describe my time in charge of the schools as one of "Survival" – an attempt to keep education alive in a country where everything played second fiddle to war. It paid off to some extent as ours was one of the very few schools that function with the result that many

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are tax deductible**

Ametur House **Port Moresby PNG:** Sr Marlene Dewar

Ametur House provides transit accommodation for HIV positive patients coming into Port Moresby from rural villages to receive anti-retroviral medication. There are many women and children who have nowhere else to stay in Port Moresby. The children are especially vulnerable if their parents don't get medication for HIV/Aids. OLSH Overseas Aid has been able to contribute to the running costs of Ametur House.



Permission has been given to use this photo.

Safe and secure accommodation for rural people needing medical attention in Port Moresby.

Mapuordit Gardens – **South Sudan:** Sr Rita Grunke

A project that brings much hope and anticipation are new gardens awaiting early rain so that ploughing and seed bed planting may commence. One of the gardens is being funded from our Overseas Aid. Thankfully we are able to provide a borehole with hand pump and this will ensure a continued water supply for ongoing irrigation throughout the dry season. Our soil is wonderfully fertile and completely unused by the most starved people on the planet. When I return to Mapuordit on Thursday I go equipped with seeds for planting; Prior to ox-ploughing, which will take place as soon as rains have blessed the land, many days were spent clearing bush and shrubs. Several weeks ago fruit tree seeds were planted, orange, guava, mango; these will be ready for transplanting at the beginning of the wet. Joseph, a well trained agriculturalist, will oversee the garden projects. *(edited from a letter sent in July)*



Mango Seedlings.



Satellite school garden.



Tomato plants.

Piggery – **Rabi Island FIJI:** Sr TeitiruaTangata

Youths on Rabi Island, thanks to OLSH Overseas Aid, were able to create an income-generating project by constructing a concrete piggery. This piggery is designed to fund some of the social needs of the young people on Rabi Island.



Youths helping with the building.



Piglets entering their new home.

Support of Ex-Students of Holy Family: Sr Marilyn Lee

Government social workers sometimes send back from Holy Family many orphan children before their applications for grants are processed. They return to extended family or older siblings without any economic sustainability. We have built and furnished suitable secure dwellings for these young families to live, and provide support however needed until they can be independent.



Land fencing and foundations



A new door provides more security for this young family

GIFT CERTIFICATES FOR CHRISTMAS

Gift Certificates are available for those who wish to use their donation as a gift for others.

Use a form printable from the website or, alternatively, contact OLSH Overseas Aid on 02 9663 3599.

Gift Certificates can be for any amount and any region.



Twenty Years of Education at Mapuordit, South Sudan - continued from page 1

Government positions in the country as well as top NGO jobs are now held by our ex-students.

We rejoiced in the high points of our history – the end of the war, the first free elections, the referendum, independence, the birth of a new nation, South Sudan.

Education took on a new lease of life throughout the country and definitely at Mapuordit with the arrival of **Sr Philippa** to take the secondary school into the future – this being time for progress.

The development sped up, including adult education under the leadership of **Sr Wendy**, while a network of satellite schools spread far and wide, more needy than our own, but rejoicing the T.L.C. of **Sr Rita**.

Today our old mud huts are gone, replaced by permanent buildings and the Mapuordit school compounds are second to none in the country. The primary has a Sudanese Director, **Lino Deng Dut**, who has been on the staff since the day the school opened, and next year the secondary will also move into Sudanese leadership.

All eyes are now fixed on higher education and many of our past students are at the catholic university which is an inspiration in itself. To look at it is nothing (borrowed second hand quarters) but this university is led by an 82 year old Jesuit priest (the third university he has established in developing African countries) and he is a

marvel. Most other universities are closed down more than they are open due to tribal clashes. Our focus now is on Teacher Training and tertiary education, helping as many as possible to realize their dream.

Another plus for education in South Sudan is **“Solidarity”**, which has taken off like a rocket. 200 religious congregations around the world (including ours) are members of Solidarity and contribute either finance or personnel or both. Currently there are 32 full time volunteers – religious from around the world, with many other short term helpers, working in health education, teacher training, pastoral, agriculture and leadership. **Br Bill Firman, De La Salle** from Australia leads the teacher training program. After initial growing pains, Solidarity is now functioning well, and achieving great results.

So much other development has taken place over the past twenty years, but this account is my story of “twenty years of Education in South Sudan” and we are truly grateful to **“OLSH Overseas Aid”** and **“MSC Mission Office”** for their continued wonderful support without which we would have achieved far less.

Having come a long way over the past twenty years we have still a long way to go so we ask for the support of your prayers as South Sudan continues its journey from infancy to adulthood.

Sr Mary Batchelor

Volunteering with the OLSH sisters in South Africa



Sr Christine Martin asked one of our ex-students, who came on mission, to write about herself. Here is Jessica Rafferty's response:

Graduating from OLSH Benteigh in 2004, I went on to university to study a Bachelor of Health

Science, Paramedics and then a Masters in Public Health. Throughout my life I have dreamt of aid work in Africa and after completing a few years in the workforce, I decided to follow this lifelong dream. I found many commercial volunteer programs but struggled to find a grass roots program that I believed was beneficial and sustainable. I reached out to the OLSH sisters and everything fell into place from there. With my backpack and a lot of enthusiasm I arrived in South Africa in May 2012. In South Africa the OLSH sisters have programs aimed at supporting orphaned and vulnerable children and those who are HIV/Aids affected. I have been fortunate enough to experience all facets of the OLSH initiatives but have particularly been involved with an orphan and vulnerable child outreach program and a skill based education program. To the surprise of many, including myself, I found myself overseeing a sewing skills centre! In this program,

orphaned and vulnerable young woman who have had limited education and employment opportunities are taught machine sewing as a stepping stone before being assisted to set up and run a small sewing business. I have also very much enjoyed the outreach program visiting young people in the village offering social and practical support. I have been privileged to have been welcomed into the South African OLSH community, the homes and families of wonderful people and the local community in Tzaneen (they know me by name at a few of the shops that I frequent almost daily). I have begun to learn the local African language, Sotho and Afrikaans. I take this opportunity to thank the OLSH sisters for allowing me the opportunity to visit them in South Africa, with special thanks to Srs Merrilyn Lee, Lee Davidson and Christine Martin.

A note from the Sisters:

Jess became a 'Jill of all trades' for us on mission and she certainly was a great help. Another valuable contribution she left was a teaching manual for Basic Computer Skills and another for tips on Financial Management. It was of real benefit to have Jess assisting us for some months and she was a credit to her family and the OLSH spirit. Jess helped with the church fete where the sewing centre sold their goods and she was also very happy to assist with soccer skills!



Christmas Cards

We still have plenty of our beautiful OLSH Overseas Aid Christmas Cards. They are \$6 for a package of 6 cards, with \$1 postage per package. Please contact the office on 02 9663 3599 if you wish to purchase, or download a donation form and specify that you want cards.



Would you like to make a bequest in your will to OLSH Overseas Aid?

If you would like to include the work of our Mission in your will, we will gladly advise your solicitor of the specific terms of the bequest. Alternately, Michael O'Dea AM of Carroll and O'Dea Lawyers, would be happy to advise you at no cost. He may be contacted directly at 02 9291 7104.

Or would you like to request mourners at your loved one's funeral to donate to OLSH Overseas Aid in lieu of flowers? Both these things can make a significant difference to the way we can help the people in need.

The OLSH Overseas Aid Incorporated Annual General Meeting was held 15 April 2013 and copies of the 2012 Annual Report are available on the website. If you would like a hard copy please contact the office. See details below.