



Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time C
August 4, 2019

**Reflections and Photos of our
Mission Trip to Uganda**

For those of you who may not be aware, eight Ascension parishioners and I joined with 20 Blessed Trinity parishioners and their pastor, Fr. Pat Sheedy, along with Sr. Juliet (a Uganda sister) on a two-week mission trip to Uganda, June 23-July 7. I only went for one week.

Each of the 30 missionaries was asked to bring the bare minimum so that their checked and carry-on luggage would have clothes and other items that could be left behind in Uganda. In addition, at the airport, Sr. Juliet handed each of us Ascension travelers an additional 50-lb suitcase of God knows what to take with us. So all 30 of us checked in two 50lb suitcases each of “stuff.”

Fr. Pat and parishioners of Blessed Trinity Parish in Ocala have been traveling to Uganda for the past 13 years. This outreach mission started when Sr. Juliet asked some children at Blessed Trinity to help some people in her native land to build a church. When Fr. Pat heard about Sister’s request, he felt that the effort should be a parish outreach. Thus began a marvelous and most wonderful story. During the 13 years, this outreach has led to a beautiful Central Campus called Blessed Trinity parish. The home campus in Nalweyo has:

- ◆ a beautiful Church that can seat about 800 people
- ◆ a *boarding* primary and secondary school with about 1,200 students, grades 2-12
- ◆ a beautiful Adoration Chapel (see photo pg. 7)
- ◆ facilities to house and feed the boarding school Students. Our team stayed in the teachers housing area
- ◆ facilities to house many of the teachers
- ◆ a rectory for four priests

30 Sub-parishes

In addition to all of the above facilities at the Central Campus, there are 30 sub-parishes, or outstations. Each of the 30 sub-parishes has a Church and some kind of a school. One of the sub-parishes is now called Ascension Parish.

In addition to the churches and schools in the 30 sub-parishes, there is also an orphanage for about 35 children, as well as a clinic where, amongst other things, mothers can give birth.

At this weekend’s Masses, you heard from one or more of those who traveled with me to Uganda. In addition to their witness, I asked my fellow pilgrims from Ascension to share some of their reflections with you.

**Reflections of
George & Terri**



During our time in Uganda, we experienced the incredible beauty of the country during our two-day Safari Trip and the incredible poverty of the families whom we visited with.

We all know that one key to lifting children out of extreme poverty is education. As educators we spent most of our time in the high school on the main campus which in many ways looked like our schools here. This, of course, was not the way with the “schools” in the sub-parishes.

Ascension parishioners gave us over 40 electronic devices to take with us to share with the high school on the main campus. The teachers and students received their electronic gifts with much gratitude and enthusiasm.

We were overwhelmed by their requests to try the electronic devices and learn how to use them. We spent days working to train them on how best to use these devices for the good of all. We were blessed to accompany a woman from the Ocala parish who has gone on three of these missions as the IT person. Spending several days in their very rudimentary technology lab at the Blessed Trinity School, we saw students and teachers mastering new technology so rapidly it stunned us. Their hunger to learn, to grow, to become was humbling.

In contrast to the boarding school on the main campus, the schools at the sub-parishes were very sad to look at (see photo of a mud school on page 7). This “school” only had a blackboard on the wall. But the handwriting on the board was beautiful.

We also visited our newly adopted Ascension parish which also has a “school” of about 200-250 students. This mud-walled school had poor facilities and a few teachers with, at best, a high school education. It was a very joyous day when we took our 200 Ascension T-shirts to our sister school. Both teachers and students were very excited. The T-shirts gave the children and teachers a new sense of identity.

Some wonderful women of our parish feverishly stitched over two hundred colorful bookbags with pencil holders and change holders. We gave both of these to the school children and made sure the children of the orphanage in the Ascension Parish had a bag. We were able to fill their bags with a few toys, dental care tools, pencils, pens, and a little candy.

Visit to orphanage. The children in the orphanage approached us with such deep need in their eyes, looking for acceptance and love, few with shoes, most with deep



wounds on their feet. Two of our nurses spent a day washing small feet and dressing so many unnecessary and infected wounds.

As I (Terri) watched on handing them dressing and ointments, I saw Jesus, right there in that tiny sad place in Uganda. I know the children were hurting from the measures the kind hands were taking to address horrendous wounds, and yet they never squirmed or made a sound other than to gaze at the heads and hands who were offering comfort, saying to them, “You matter, just as you are.” I have wept into my pillow many nights remembering that scene. Our group was moved to go to town with a collection we took up to buy shoes for those little feet. We were able to buy each child two pairs of shoes.



In the picture, I (Fr. Eamon) am speaking to some of the orphans. In the background is the beginning of a facility for which we gave \$25,000 from our last fiscal year’s tithe. Some of the adults present, like the young man in the background, was an orphan at this place, and is now, I believe, a worker at the new facility.

We can do so little in the face of such overwhelming need. We could do so very little to make a difference, but we did what little we could. We had to remind ourselves over and over that we might not be able to make a huge difference in the face of all the need, but what we could do in that time and space might make all the difference to that one child, teacher, or parent. I will forever remember small injured feet as my call to be Jesus.



**Reflections of
Rob & Christina Light**

Simply stated, the Uganda Mission was extraordinary! From our perspective, the tone and tenor of our entire experience were set during the first real “work” day when we both accompanied and assisted Father Eamon on his mission travels to three sub-parishes and an orphanage. A pastor from Blessed Trinity Nalweyo, Fr Henry, escorted us in a small sedan. At every stop, we were greeted with the congregation lining the road, singing and dancing until long after we entered the parish and began Mass. The parishioners receive the Eucharist only once every four to six weeks. At the end of each Mass, a parish leader and school Principal gave a detailed report of their *Achievements* for the past year and *Challenges* for the coming year. *Achievements* consisted of pastoral achievements (number of marriages in the Church, numbers of Baptisms and First Communions, etc.), and a detailed account of how they used the money received in the past year. The *Challenges* part of the Report consisted of a request for more financial aid to do some more things, e.g., buy musical instruments. When Fr. Eamon announced that Ascension would give them a \$1,000 for some requests, all present broke into great applause. The sense of accountability for financial assistance was wonderful to behold. Finally, the parishioners sang and danced as they brought forward their gifts for the poor, the second collection of the day, and received a blessing from Fr Eamon. These gifts included avocados, mangos, maize, eggs, coins, banana stems, chickens, and a goat!

The third sub-parish of the day was Ascension, named for our beloved Ascension Parish of Melbourne, FL. Ascension (Uganda) is a humble campus, even compared

with the two previous stops, consisting of a basic church and a small mud hut enclave for a school with a borehole for a well. Many of the children had typhoid, malaria, or parasites. Despite the poverty and male dowry requirement, 56 percent of adult parishioners are married couples. We have never witnessed the pride in adults and excitement in children just to hear we're a married couple. This sentiment was prevalent in everyone we encountered for the rest of the Mission. The smiles, singing, dancing, charitable giving, and reverence during Mass were beyond humbling ... all evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence at work with love immersing us all!

The Holy Gospel of 14 July 2019 (Luke 10:25-37) focused on the parable of the Good Samaritan and the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself. Loving our neighbor (humanity) is only possible through loving God and vice versa. The power of this commandment was manifest while sharing in Holy Communion with, performing acts of mercy for, and living faith in action among our Ugandan brothers and sisters. This mission was truly a holy experience that left an indelible mark for love of charity on our hearts, minds, and souls forevermore. Thanks be to God!

Reflections of Ruiz family (Francisco, Margi & daughter Victoria) Margi writes:

I feel blessed that I was able to spend two weeks in the presence of two saints! What Father Patrick and Sister Juliet have accomplished with God's grace and the support of so many is absolutely mind-blowing! They are completely changing the future of so many in Nalweyo, Uganda, and doing it all for God's glory!



The trip was long...but we arrived to a very warm welcome. Kids were running alongside the bus singing and dancing and holding signs for all of us, "YOU ARE MOST WELCOME." There was not a dry eye on the bus. The great thing about the mission trip was that there were many different activities going on every day, and you could participate in any of them and learn different aspects of the mission. Victoria and I were able to

participate in some of these activities, and Francis spent most of his time at St. Mary's Health Centre Kakindo.

The *clinic* is small but offers many services to the people of Kakindo. While they do not have doctors, they have very smart and talented nurses and medical assistants. They have a couple of rooms to see patients, a laboratory and a pharmacy. They also have several rooms to admit patients, if needed. The most exciting part of the clinic is the new maternity ward. It is beautiful and it is run by three midwives who rotate to have someone available 24 hours a day. They can only do natural births right now, but they are hoping that when construction is over, they can have a doctor who can perform C-sections in the new surgery room.

Francis really enjoyed his time helping the patients. He saw many cases of malaria, typhoid, tumors, and even helped deliver babies!



Here are some of the things that we accomplished this year: visited all 30 sub-parishes for missions, supported two medical clinics, took pictures of all students at Blessed Trinity School, built tables and benches, and visited the orphanage. As a team, we pooled money together and went shopping for orphans. Each orphan received two pairs of shoes, socks, and some clothing. The Ascension team went back to Ascension sub-parish and handed out uniforms and took pictures of all the kids there to start a sponsorship program, and Father blessed a new Church. A group of us went on a Safari (amazing!). We also broke bread and worshipped together every day. But the main thing we did was love the people of Uganda—to let them know that we see them, and we are sisters and brothers in Christ and will continue to love them even from the other side of the world.

We felt very grateful and extremely blessed to have been a part of this team and I pray that God will allow us to go again. Victoria Ruiz and children. Ascension Chapel in the background.



Reflection of Sue Pickles

Each of us took turns visiting several of the 30 sub-parishes with Fr. Eamon or Fr. Sheedy over the course of the two weeks. What we found there was both uplifting and humbling.

The joy of the children and the adults as we drove up to each Church radiated through their beautiful smiles.



We were greeted with joyful welcoming songs, chants, and dances as we drove up to the parish. Their phrase, spoken in carefully rehearsed English, "You are most welcome," proved to be more than just words. We felt welcomed from the moment we arrived. At one Church, we were greeted with the tossing of flower petals, at another, palm fronds.

We then had the honor of celebrating Mass with them in their native language. Mass was filled with beautifully harmonizing vocals and drums, the perfect complement to the celebration of the Eucharist. The Churches Fr Sheedy has assisted them in building were both simple, yet beautiful, with concrete floors, high ceilings, and open stained glass windows to let in the breeze and the light.

After the Eucharistic celebration, dozens of Christians lined the center aisle with gifts for the visiting priests. These gifts ranged from avocados and mangoes, to chickens and the ultimate gift, a goat. We were humbled by their generosity. I was reminded of the story of the poor widow in the church whom Jesus commended for giving all she had (Mark 12:41-44).

I've never felt more at one with the Holy Spirit than during these celebrations. We were truly in the presence of holy people and learned so much by their joyful celebration. We truly felt "most welcome" by our brothers and sisters in Christ. "

A Long Journey. It took us three days to get to our destination. We left Orlando on Sunday at 2:30pm, flew to D.C. and then to Brussels, arriving in Kampala (Capital of Uganda) Monday at midnight. As you might imagine,

it took us a good while gathering together 60 suitcases. We then went on a short trip to a Bed & Breakfast Retreat House run by Sisters as their way to make a living. After a midnight meal, we were all ready for bed.

Tuesday morning began with a 7:00am Mass followed by breakfast. We then started our eight-hour trip to Nalweyo arriving about 5:00pm to a most wonderful welcome. You would think the Pope was on the bus! The students at Blessed Trinity lined the road the last half mile of our journey running and singing alongside the bus.

The children welcoming us



All 30 of us would have seen a card with our name and with the words "YOU ARE MOST WELCOME."



Children at Ascension School Uganda, wearing the uniform tops donated by our Melbourne Ascension School. One of the teachers exclaimed with joy, *“Now we are a real school!”*



The teachers at Ascension School. Probably, no one has more than a High school education. One of our goals is to get these dedicated teachers more training and do a total make-over of their school.



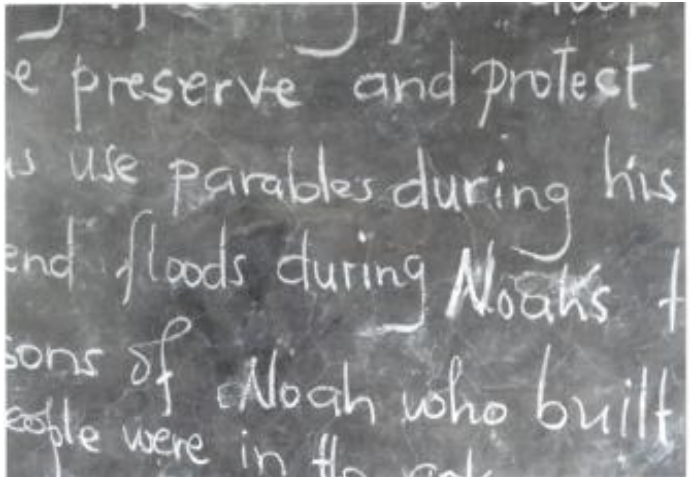
Getting a photograph and name of each of the children at our Sister parish school. Hopefully, we can start a sponsor program for these children. More on this at a later time.



This is a beautiful Adoration Chapel on the main campus. Parishioners from all the sub-parishes are expected to help keep vigil with Jesus 24/7.



During my short time, I visited six parishes. Here I am with Fr. Henry who was my driver and translator. As you can see from the pictures, some of the schools were very sad to look at. The one below had nothing in it but a chalkboard. But, amazingly, the chalkboard had beautiful hand writings on it.





Computer lab at Blessed Trinity High School, Uganda. Teachers learning how to use the technology donated by Ascension and Blessed Trinity Churches.



The first graduating class from Blessed Trinity High School. They all began here as primary students. They achieved some of the highest scores in the country on their qualifying exams for universities. Two of the graduating students spent the last school year at Blessed Trinity High School in Ocala



We had a most glorious three-hour Liturgy on the one Sunday we were there. We celebrated, amongst other things, the first graduation of their new high school, with robes from Blessed Trinity High School in Ocala. During the Mass, the graduates came forward with a lovely dance. Two of the graduates carried a basket. When they arrived up front, a little child emerged from the basket. I forgot to ask *why* they brought forward a small child in the basket. Perhaps it meant that the child and all children are dedicated to God.



Each sub-parish we visited gave us a huge welcome.

Looking into the eyes of children like this little girl was *one* of the many blessings we received.





Fr. Henry is one of the associate pastors at Blessed Trinity. He is only ordained two years. At the end of our second day together, he showed me a letter from his bishop stating that he was being moved and made a pastor about one hour away from his current parish. I told the young priest that I would like to see his new parish. He told me that he was not sure *where* it was located. But he called the priest who was currently in charge of what was about to become a new parish. So on my way to the airport, Fr. Henry took me to his new parish. It had a Church with no pews, just some benches. It had a priest's house that had no one living in it for years. The photo above was taken in the school of Father's new parish. It was, if I remember correctly, a one-room school with a few benches. Father asked if we could help him get started. I told him we would. How could I say 'No' to this very young priest who was being asked at a very young age to take on a lot of responsibilities.



Last year when I announced that I planned to travel to Uganda in June, I also put in the bulletin information about Blessed Trinity's Sponsor Program. At that time I decided to join the sponsor program. \$200 for an elementary student, \$250 for a High School student. During my visit, I was introduced to the five students that I sponsored.



During our time in Nalweyo, Fr. Pat dedicated and blessed a new church at St. Rita's parish (Rita was his mother's name). The excitement of the children and the adults on this occasion was huge.

A water pump is a huge blessing anywhere in Uganda - but especially in a remote area. This water pump is on the main campus.



Ascension Chapel
Uganda



Closing Comments

During my 47 years of priesthood, I have been on a lot of mission trips, twice to our Sister Diocese in the Dominican Republic, twice to Haiti, twice to Lima (Peru) and once to Guatemala and Calcutta. What made this mission trip special and unique was witnessing upfront the HUGE difference one parish is making in one area of our worldwide Church.

I am glad I volunteered to “go and see” what Fr. Pat and his wonderful people are doing in Uganda. I know that the eight Ascension parishioners are also delighted that they went.

During my visits to the 6 sub-parishes, I promised the people that we would help each of them in some way. Frankly, it was almost impossible to visit a parish and school and *not* promise to help. In the coming months, I will let you know some ways you can join in this wonderful outreach to a church family in a faraway place. I am especially drawn to help Fr. Henry get started in his new place.

With my other travelling companions, I am very grateful to all of you who contributed in any way to the gift-giving that we took to Nalweyo.

Glad to be back with my church family,

Le Saran



**23 OF THE 30 MISSIONARIES WHO TRAVELLED
TO UGANDA**