

Hello fellow St. Charles parishioners. First, let me thank you for all your prayers and support as I made my travels to and from the Rakai district in Uganda. Also, again, thank you for your generous donations to St. Agnes Vocational School and St. Joseph Model Junior School in Kyotera, Uganda. The schools are more than grateful for the donation of computers and a water tank. There was also some extra money left over after these had been purchased. Altogether we raised \$6500 for these causes. The Model Junior School (6-7 year olds) were able to purchase some swing equipment for the children to play on. The only toy they had to play with outside was a ball of banana leaves they knotted together about the size of a baseball. The school is so grateful for your help. They will send pictures once the water tank is fully installed as well as the swing equipment. St. Joseph model Junior school is the only Catholic School in Kyotera, which is mostly a Catholic town. There are many applicants to go to this school yet the school cannot accept them because they are already overflowing. They teach 3 levels. kindergarten, primary 1 and primary 2. They have 3 small classrooms for over 70 students. They have land to build another school block so they may continue to teach these students through primary 7. However they lack the funds. This building would cost \$45,000 to construct. The school is also in great need of school supplies and textbooks, they don't even have a computer. These educators care a great deal about the children yet do not have adequate resources to help them fulfill their potential. There are also students with special needs that are mentally impaired as well as deaf students. They do not have the resources to support them but refuse to turn them away as many schools in the area would. There is one more issue about St. Joseph Model Junior School I would like to address. Their kitchen has no security. It is made with some bamboo and banana leaves as well as some tin on the roof. This kitchen sits right by the road. There is no lock for this "hut-like" kitchen. Unfortunately there is much competition for students in Uganda. School terrorism has become a threat in the past few years. Many schools are boarding schools and their dormitories are set fire to. Many schools have had food poisoned as well. This school is under this threat with a kitchen that is not secure and so many students applying to go there.

St. Agnes Vocational School is now in its 9th year. The staff continues to work hard to make students prepared for a job in the "real world" of Uganda. It caters to students that are needy or orphans from the age of 14-21. These students have touched my heart. I taught English and Health to them and we held sports activities every day after school. I would run with them and some would beat me in their bare feet in skirts. Some would even wake me at 6am to go running. Others enjoyed the activities of netball and volleyball. Any extra sports items such as shorts, t-shirts, sports bras, shoes, cleats, socks, jerseys, balls, etc. are always in need. For the first time while I was there, the girls played football (soccer). They had a game and won 2-0. I have never seen so many excited faces and received so many sweaty hugs. These students I hold close to my heart and they are truly the biggest reason I will continue to return here as often as I can. I feel as though I have left my family behind and here a piece of me is missing.

Our donations helped this school purchase 10 new computer tables and chairs, 10 new computers, poles for volleyball and netball, and extra chair the school needed. The computer tables and chairs are complete. They will send pictures when the whole computer project is complete. The area on which we play volleyball and netball the staff

and students cleared themselves because I was going to arrive soon. The area was thick bush and brush. They slashed, dug, and pulled to make the area clear. They then placed the poles necessary for the games in the ground. The students did not have this before and they enjoy this change so much. They thank you. All students and schools on Biikira parish grounds (St. Agnes, St. Joseph primary and secondary schools) do not have any machine to keep the grass and weeds down. They have cows and every other day the children slash. When this chore is piled up along with fetching water, harvesting crops, laundry (all manual), sweeping, and many other tasks, it becomes exhausting to also focus on their studies. A mowing machine much like a riding mower in the US, would cost \$400. At this vocational school they ship students to 3 month internships where they train for their respective careers (secretary, hotel management). After this, they return to St. Agnes for a few months to prepare for their government examinations. If they pass, they can then start to look for work in their vocation. Fr. Paul, the head of this school helps them with this placement. The transport of these students is difficult when they lack a school vehicle. The one that they have access to is too small. A used bus would cost the equivalent of \$7000 US dollars. They could also use this for small field trips as well. One of the most incredible needs I saw at St. Agnes was the need for more books. The students need to know English there because it is the country's official language. However, this is a rural area and many of the students as well as teachers are much more fluent in Luganda, the original language of most of the country. I walked into what they called their library and what they had was a book shelf that was half full. Therefore, the students barely have any English reading materials. Fr. Paul has plans in the future, if funds allow, to construct a small library building, about the size of a classroom. To start this construction it would be \$5000.

During my stay I got to know many of the students personally. Some of them will soon be done at St. Agnes and wish to continue their studies at a University after. They fear they will not be able to because it is too expensive. Many of these students are brilliant. It would be like a valedictorian not being able to go to any college. A year of university studies costs only \$700 US dollars. My hope is to set up a scholarship fund so that these students can excel and make a difference. This is their way out of the cycle of poverty, higher education. They want this so much and I want to help make it happen for them desperately.

On Biikira parish grounds, where I stayed, there are many schools and places that need help. On this rocky dusty road off the main highway (full of potholes) there is Sacred Heart- a boys secondary boarding school, St Joseph secondary school- a secondary boarding school/ orphanage for boys and girls, St. Agnes- a vocational secondary for orphans, a teacher's training college- secondary boys, St. Joseph- primary boarding school, a nursing home for the sick and elderly brothers, a health center. The health center is run by Sister Christine, a nurse who is a strong intelligent woman who wants to become a medical doctor, but lacks the funds to get further education. The health center is in need of money and supplies for the many patients it has. Most of them suffer from malaria (especially the young.).

In the middle of all these schools and places stands the church. There are many local villages and homes that are off even smaller dirt roads that lead to this church as well. Sometimes after the days activities I would take a walk to reflect. Everyday I saw children carrying heavy loads of water on foot or on a bike. There is a severe water

shortage in this area and the parish would like to construct a well outside the church. The total cost for materials and construction is \$10,000. The local contributions are about \$4000. They have sent me the detailed proposal requesting \$6000 more to complete it. This well would benefit over 5000 people in the community if it could be installed. Water is so important! Even St. Joseph Secondary school and St. Agnes need a water tank. As I left, it was so dry, the kids woke at 5 am to start fetching water.

If you are interested in coming to Uganda to help any one of these places, they have a place for you to stay. The brothers, sisters, and priests will be happy to receive any visitors young and old. I can tell you that they take very good care of their guests. If you have any interest in returning with me next June let me know. My contact information is on the bottom of this letter. I can promise you this; if you go with an open heart, it will change your life. The hardest part of my trip was not mosquito nets, not doing laundry and taking showers from a basin, the different foods, or sometimes the stench from the poor sanitation. These were very small difficulties if at all. The most difficult thing was leaving.

I came home to a house full of things I didn't need or want anymore. I am currently working on collecting and shipping a large amount of materials to Biikira parish. I will be sending books, sports materials, clothes, school supplies., medical supplies and more. I have contacted some organizations to see how they can help in these shipments. If you have anything you would like to contribute, please let me know. If you know of ways to help ship these items, please let me know.

I am new to international aid. If you have any information on connections I can make, I would appreciate that information too. If there is somewhere that I could speak such as rotary clubs or other churches or organizations to help with these issues, please let me know. If there are specific grants of money you know of that I could apply for, please let me know. It is my lofty goal to fulfill all these needs I have listed by next June. I am not expecting that St. Charles gives all of this. You have already been so generous. I am looking to explore many other ways of raising funds as well. I know this is possible. If you are interested in helping in anyway, I would love for this to not only be my goal but share this goal with others too. This is an opportunity to see God's love in action. He doesn't need us but he lets us put our hands in so that we may experience his glory and love. If you cannot help by giving information or money, help with prayers. I felt your support and prayers all through my trip and I thank you. I blessed to be a part of this awesome family. We are al God's family. These are our brothers and sisters. We are called to this. Let us be one of Gods miracles from USA to Uganda.

I know this letter is a bit overwhelming. My trip was overwhelming and I wanted to express just that. Below, I have made a chart of all of the needs I have discussed and the amount of money they require if available. If you feel moved to contact me because you can help in some way in any of these areas, this chart makes it easier to organize communications.

I appreciate your time and attention. God bless you for all you have done St. Charles Parish! Well done! Jebale! I am proud to be a part of this family. Your love is felt half way around the world.

Sincerely,
Mary Fournier (616) 644-0483
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**Ways to Help Biikira Parish and the community near Kyotera in Rakai,
Uganda**

| Item | Cost |
|--|-------------|
| Textbooks and school supplies for all levels of school | |
| Sports Items, Shoes, Clothes | |
| Medical supplies | |
| Shipping costs | |
| New building for St. Joseph Model Junior School | \$45,000 |
| New kitchen for St Joseph Model Junior School | |
| Start construction of a library at St. Agnes | \$5000 |
| Mower | \$400 |
| Fund one year of university studies for a St. Agnes student | \$700 |
| Fund more schoolin for the head of the Health Center, Sister Christine | \$5275 |
| Transport Vehicle (bus) for St. Agnes | \$7000 |
| Construction of community well | \$6000 |
| Water tank for one of the schools | \$1500 |

With God, all things are possible.