

January 2025

From AJLTC Gulu, Uganda

Dear friends,

Thank you for your support and prayers. January is a long month, and we have very much appreciated your prayers to keep us sustained in Christ.

All is well here. None of the college bureaucracy is sorted yet – neither registration, nor land boundaries, so please keep praying. The Diocese Coffee cooperative is now certified, so work can begin towards the coffee mother garden. Also Simon has almost achieved permission to arrange for a borehole to be drilled on the Diocesan Land. He has a letter of no objection from National Water! The final stage is a letter of permission from the Ministry.

I thought that it is high time to introduce you to some of the people among whom we live – about fifty students and twelve staff. I hope in a few sentences to sketch some of the challenges and joys of their lives.

Let me start with Stephen who is a second year student. His business is as a mason (which is how builders are referred to here), so he is always looking for more work which I can give him on the compound to enable him to make a living whilst he also studies. Like many workmen he is enthusiastic for a new project, but not a natural completer finisher. I was amused as I supervised his parish placement last month that his Parish Priest made the same observation. Stephen is now aware, and willing to work with this self-knowledge. Whilst he was in the first year, and his wife was expecting another child, he went on the parish 'poor list' which is the equivalent of using a food bank I suppose – the family received monthly food parcels from the church. It is hard for the family as our students are often also the bread winners.

Then there is Philda, also a second year whose family consists of a mother and an older, married sister. Her mother suffers from significant medical issues. Without a father figure there is no one to bring in any support for the family. Fortunately Philda's fees are paid by her Diocese (Nebbi, west of here). She is asking me for work so that she can earn money for soap and exercise books and other necessities of life. I will find her some weeding and light work around the compound for which I can pay, so that she keeps some self respect whilst benefitting from the generosity of a supporter.

Frederick is a delightful and hard working first year student, with a keen faith. But a neighbour allowed his cows to feed on Fredrick's maize crop – so he has very little to show for the hard work of growing a couple of acres of maize. (People will often test the patience of Christians, expecting them to freely forgive such wrongs!) He has also come back looking for work, and because he came on time, whilst others were slow to return, he has had some days in the field down by the water source making bricks. This is extraordinarily hard work requiring physical strength – mixing mud, putting the mud into moulds, laying the bricks to dry, turning them, and then stacking the dried bricks into a kiln and burning them for twenty four hours. It is a useful way of making fees money because it can only be done at this time of year, and the college will use the bricks for the construction of its planned new classrooms.

Charonne in the third year has come back with Horeb, her son, who is still breastfeeding and now walking well. The students generally are delighted to have a youngster around, and college is more of family with a shared child. He greets me putting his hand in mine with a lovely smile.

Melki is an enthusiast for life, and has embraced Farming God's Way/ Forward in Farming (you can find it on You Tube – basically no dig gardening). If someone is going to ask a question and probe further in class it will be Melki!

Andrew who is very bright, but having been poisoned sometime back, is often unwell. (Poisoning is a not unusual a problem here. There are plenty of natural poisons available and jealousy and anger are rife in the communities.) He is a natural leader and evangelist. I pray for his healing, but wonder how God uses him more effectively in his weakness.

Ronald makes his living as a carpenter, and makes kitchens. He is always generous with his skills to help in the college. He is making new 'ministers chairs' for the new chapel. These are being paid for out of the Sunday collection.

Samson Lolo lives on the border of the national park so it is hard to grow food crops because the elephants come out and eat the maize. Elephant are as determined as squirrels only bigger, and more destructive. (In some places they are kept at bay by 'bee fencing' as a swarm of bees is one of the few things that does deter them.)

Innocent who is the chapel warden, and loves playing the local harp. He is often to be found in chapel making music and worshipping God.

And colleagues at the college.

David, the administrator who comes in almost every day, and keeps an eye on the stores, manages the accounts, the exam results, advises me where to buy things and how much I am being cheated for when I am given a price for anything.

Rev'd Jane, the Academic Registrar who is the other full time employee of the college; does some teaching, and sorts out the placements for students. Jane also works as the local prison chaplain, and has a regular ministry in the different prisons in town. (It is normal here for full time people to have more than one other job. Three full time jobs is not unusual.)

CT our caretaker, who spends much of his day sweeping up leaves, but also weighs out the daily allowance of food, looks after the dog, and generally keeps the place running smoothly. He has been at the college about 25 years, and is that 'heart of the community' character that all good institutions have. If you really want to know what is going on you ask CT, who will smile knowingly, chuckle and tell you at least what he thinks you need to know!

Jacqueline and Jenny, our cooks who prepare sweet tea in the morning and beans with posho for lunch and supper. They keep the students fed, and commandeer help if there is extra food such as green vegetable to prepare.

These are just a few of the individuals who bring colour and purpose to our days here. They come back to college full of stories of God at work in their homes and villages, of churches planted and missions run.

This is the dry season, so we don't expect any significant rain before March. Term has started and the students are delighted to see progress in college development. At the weekend we worked together to move the bricks which had dried towards the place where they will be burnt and we

hope to dig the foundations for the new classrooms before Easter. But not until after some rain as the ground is extremely hard at the moment.

Simon is continuing with the coffee and cocoa plantation – watering each plant twice a week to help them through their first dry season and mulching with crop residues and pig manure. He has almost got permission to drill a borehole in the place where he hopes to establish a poultry project next January, and is praying for funding to come through from a government agency (long on promise and short on delivery – the same the world over) for an expansion of the coffee plantation via a ‘mother garden’ (from which cuttings are propagated).

Do continue to pray for the registration of the college. Some students have not come back because we aren’t registered yet, which is going to be a problem both for the viability of the college and the on going ministry of the church.

We are also very grateful for a new garage on the college grounds in order to keep the car we have been loaned safe.

Let us know how we can pray for you, and do keep in touch

With love from Sarah and Simon