

FRIENDS OF AHOTOKUROM NEWSLETTER

June 2009 Edition 18

Sister Monica

One of the **Stars of Ahoto** is **Sister Monica**, the 'Quiet One'. She is a Dublin woman born and bred and has been a member of the Daughters of Mary and Joseph for 42 years. Having spent 31 years of that time in Ghana she is a jewel in the community of Ahoto. By profession she is a midwife; by life, a totally dedicated, gentle, caring lady who loves life and all that it brings. Her faith is deep and spirituality flows from her in her total care of all those in need. She is treasured by the congregation but especially by the community of Ahoto and surrounding villages.

She celebrated her 60th birthday this year, but, to those who have lived with her for 27 years she is ageless. That black hair is now grey, but her sparkling eyes remain full of joy and she exudes happiness and generosity.



Sister Monica

Teaching English

When Lucy from Kent was working as a volunteer at Ahoto she was helping by teaching the Special Needs Children in St Elizabeth's school. In spite of have no training in teaching languages; she also agreed to teach **Alima** English. Alima is a house-mother in Child Care.

When Alima was 15 she was sent from north Ghana to marry and care for an older man who had leprosy. He already had 2 children from his deceased wife and they had 2 further children together. By 20 she was left a widow with no income and 4 children to care for. Ahoto came to the rescue and

employed her as a house parent in Childcare and this has completely changed her life. Alima was very shy at first and secretive about her lessons, probably embarrassed that she was a late learner. She was set homework daily and after a few months could understand and join in English conversations and even spell many words.

Alima achieved her goal of visiting her family with something to show for herself.

Well done Alima and Lucy!

News Bites

The Sisters are trying to upgrade **St Clare's** (the elderly persons' home) to provide everyone with more personal space.

In **Childcare** in recent months they have cared for several motherless babies following the death of mother in childbirth. These have all now returned to their respective homes with cartons of milk and sterilising techniques given to their minders who have been trained and supported to adapt to their baby care role. Thankfully, all are doing well. All the children in Childcare attend school with even the young ones attending morning classes with their carers. Small upsets are always prevalent and usually come in the form of tummy upsets, colds, and malaria.

The **Training Centre and Special Needs Unit** are thriving with new admissions every term. The students are improving their linguistics and their confidence is growing every day. The centre is always a hive of activity with noise and music spilling from their classes daily.

The Sisters are also busy at **Enyindakurom** with renovations to the buildings that include painting, replacing mosquito nets and looking into the possibility of attaching a shower area to the houses. They have been working to obtain pre-paid meters to make electricity available to all the families at least for a part of the week. All are very pleased that 94% of the children in this village attend school regularly.

In **Kuful** village a pre-school has been set up. The furniture team made the doors, desks and chairs. The volunteer students from overseas teach the

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children: thus available resources are maximised to the full.

New Football kits for Kuful

Leeds Carnegie University Ladies football team kindly donated two complete new team strips for the neighbouring village of Kuful. Whilst it was a wonderful gift, it produced logistical problems getting them there! Emma Chetham brought them from Leeds to London. Jeanne Dippenaar, somehow got them from London Gatwick to Limerick without paying excess baggage. Mark Mantey then collected the parcels and divided them amongst 9 Irish students to carry them from Limerick via London Heathrow to Ghana.

Well done, and thanks to Leeds Carnegie Ladies and all the Couriers.



Kuful First team in their new team strips
(no-one in the team seemed to notice or to care that the word "ladies" was on each shirt)

There are many more stories of activities at Ahotokurom on our website Please take the time to look at

www.ahoto.org

To make a donation
Please send cheques/postal orders made payable to 'DMJ Friends of Ahotokurom'
The Treasurer
2 Century Road, Rainham, Gillingham, Kent
ME8 0BG

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Squatter Camp to Model African Village

God's intervention in Enyindakurom....

Some say '*coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous*'. As we write this newsletter we reflect back on a series of coincidences that resulted in such remarkable change....that they were surely guided by the hand of God.

It is **10** years now since we commenced work on our unique self-build housing project to re-house 80 families affected by leprosy. These people lived in the poorest of conditions out in the 'bush' hidden away from the communities they felt rejected from. They had set up a 'camp' as they had nowhere else to go when they were discharged from hospital.

Their leprosy had left them disfigured and disabled. Though now cured, they had been rejected by the families many had left as children. They were despised and feared, most had no education, could not find work and the poverty they lived in compounded the sense of rejection and helplessness.

Then from amongst them came a young boy who saw his people's pain and could not tolerate the way they were treated. Mark Mantey was born into this camp. Both his parents had leprosy; they had met by '**chance**' at the leprosarium, drawn together by a shared understanding of what each had suffered. His mother was from Togo, she had been married before and when her leprosy was discovered she had been sent away, rejected by husband, children and parents. His father came from a respected family in the North East of Ghana.

The only leprosy hospital in the whole of West Africa was in Ankafu, Ghana several days journey away. It was here that they met, married and bore five children together.

Mark's father had dreams for his children. He wanted them to be educated and to escape this life of poverty. It was a sacrifice but Mark went to school, he himself sold firewood to

contribute to the fees. As Mark grew, so did his passion. He dreamed not of escape, but of making a better life for his people.

At this time, another '**coincidence**' occurred. The DMJ Sisters were called to join the Franciscans to establish a place called Ahotokurom (meaning village of serenity). They were called to minister to the people of the **Camp**. They met Mark as he grew to teenage years and they saw someone with potential. They nurtured him, trained him and later employed him to help in this ministry.

By '**chance**' the DMJ sisters had links with the DMJ sisters in Emmaus, West Wickham where the headquarters of the Southwark Diocesan Youth Service was.

Mark, now in his late 20s was sent over to do the part time youth workers training course. Here, by '**chance**' Mark met the youth service team led by Fr Douglas Bull.



Typical House at Enyindakurom
before Rebuilding Project
(see our next newsletter for pictures "*after*"
rebuilding)

Fr Doug was invited to Ghana, and he was moved to do something to help. By '**coincidence**' he was about to start a new role as Chaplain at Christ the King 6th Form College. Immediately he recognized the benefits that could be gained by harnessing the students' desire for justice in our world and channeling their energies into a community project. The students raised funds to build a community centre and so right at the heart of the community the 'camp' had achieved its first concrete structure – a place for first aid, basic education, meeting up and celebrating mass.

By **chance**, Trudy Kilcullen, whom Mark had also met through the youth service, was to visit Ghana. So Fr Doug asked if she would mind meeting the elders,

getting a report on the project and taking a few photos for all at Christ the King. **Coincidentally**, Trudy was aware that the British National Lottery had announced they were going to make overseas grants and so she had taken an application form out to Ghana with her.

When Trudy visited the camp she asked the elders what they saw 'as the next project' and they pointed out the terrible living conditions in which they survived. Buoyed by the confidence gained by completing the community centre – a dream was born. If it had been possible to build their own community centre; they could build their own houses – if only they had the resources. And so the lottery form was duly completed!

The catch - it had to be submitted by a UK based registered charity....but hey, the DMJ Sisters were part of the English Province which luckily was a registered charity - so Friends of Ahotokurom was formed!

Then came the biggest **chance** of all! The lottery was overwhelmed with applications. How could a small community based project, delivered by poor unemployed people with leprosy, who only had a track record in building a community centre, compete against the big charities like 'Save the Children' and 'Christian Aid'. Against all odds, the news came through – we were successful!

That was just the beginning. All those coincidences, all the chances continued over two years as the houses were built. Little did we know what would be achieved, not just the houses but the reintegration of a whole village back into society. Eighty families, hundreds of people impacted, lives changed.

It is now 10 years on! In the next few editions - we plan to bring you the Good News stories of Enyindakurom. To report on the real change achieved and to remind ourselves – that truly this is the work of God.....

For further information on
any of our activities please
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