

LEGHO - CELEBRATING AND RENEWING OUR RELATIONSHIP

Last week-end, at our Sunday Masses, we listened to three St John's parishioners speaking about Legho: first, Linda McGhee offered an overview of the relationship between our two communities since 1984; then Sheila Tansey and Bethany Burgess reflected on their experiences during their visits in 1999 and 2016.

1) Linda's Overview

'Legho village, in Tanzania is home to around 2500 people who make a living from small scale farming and from growing coffee to turn into much needed extra cash.

The parishioners of St John's first heard of Legho when two Tanzanians came to the parish : The first was a doctor who arrived in 1983. She was here to train as a surgeon. The second was a priest here to pursue his studies in Edinburgh. Amazingly, though Dr Sybil M'Buya and Father Paul Uria, hailed from a country 12 times bigger than Scotland both happened to be from the same locality - the small village of Legho.

Both spoke warmly of their community, stirring people's interest in new ideas that stemmed from Vatican 2: principally the idea of developing small faith communities of lay people based on the concept of the Church as family. In East Africa this was expressed through the setting up of Small Christian Communities and on one of the many hills in Legho, stands a monument celebrating the establishment, in 1978, of the first of the Small Christian Communities in Tanzania so Legho was right at the heart of this movement.

There are 23 Small Christian communities spread across the village. They meet early every Saturday morning to share Gospel readings and to put Gospel values into practice by offering each other practical support in times of need.

Not surprisingly then, as parishioners heard more and more about this example of faith in action St John's Parish Council voted in 1984 to establish a connection with Legho village.

The relationship was from the beginning based on mutual respect and cultural exchange. It was never an aid project where we would take on the role of benefactors. However, we live in the 6th richest country in the world, while in Tanzania at least half the population lives below the poverty line earning less than 2 dollars a day. So there have been times when practical gifts have been appropriate.

Over many years these have taken the form of:

- funding a community tractor,
- contributing to the bricks and mortar of the church building,
- repairs to the tractor,
- installing electricity in the primary school,
- building toilets for the infant pupils in the primary school,
- more repairs to the tractor,
- kitting out a classroom with pupil desks and chairs,
- recently, through Pamoja fashion, providing sewing machines to support youth enterprise

●and yes ... repairs to the now rather ancient tractor.

Symbolic gifts, such as the beautiful cross recently sent out from St John's (with the support of St Mary Magdalene parishioners) to mark Legho becoming a parish are equally important in cementing the friendship between the parishes.

The relationship, which Monsignor Rae once described as a 'mustard seed', has been nurtured through many visits over the years both to and from Legho. Some parishioners will remember the visit of the first chair of the Christian communities, Michael Henry who knelt before the altar in St John's together with Canon Rae, of Maria Beda who came as the women's representative and of John Lyimo who came here as a young man and later returned as Chair of the Legho communities.

From the Scottish side, visits have spanned the generations:

- the first youth group visited Legho in 1984,
- followed in 1999 by a more middle- aged group
- and then in 2005 by a 'seniors' group who lived to tell the tale!
- 1999 saw the first link between schools - namely St John's Primary and Legho Primary which led on to the linking of Holy Rood High School and Lombeta Secondary School.

The relationships which have been built up over more than 30 years have been hailed as models of success and sustainability both by educationalists such as HM Inspectors and by organisations such as the British Council.

The secret of this success to date, lies in the prayerful, thoughtful foundations laid by Monsignor Rae, Mike Knox and the first Legho Steering Group. It is also rooted in the generous hospitality shown over the years by many families and parish groups, by school pupils and by school staff both in St John's and in Holy Rood. Such hospitality has smoothed the way for visitors from Legho experiencing the culture shock of city life in Edinburgh, while on trips to Legho, this has been matched by the warm welcome extended to those of us who found ourselves trying to adjust to rural life in an East African village.

As for the future, contact is becoming easier through mobile phones, exchange visits are becoming more manageable with the expansion of electricity, running water and the building of 2 Community Centres, joint educational projects are being embarked upon between the schools. With the support of Father Jock organising events such as this weekend's celebrations and the future prospect of further parish trips to Legho, the relationship will undoubtedly continue to grow, flourish and enrich the lives of both communities.'

2) Sheila Reflects on the Impact made on her by her Visit in 1999

'Having been involved with our Legho Relationship from the first meeting, my husband Pat and I decided to sign up for the first visit to Legho by some of the "Non-Teenage" members of the Parish.

So In 1999, we set off with some trepidation, and any pre-conceptions, together with (amongst other things) a life-size statue of Our Blessed Lady which was contained in a large wooden box (lovingly constructed by Canon Rae!)

Our experiences during the following three weeks, changed our ideas, our attitudes, and our lives forever.

Although conditions were, at that time, fairly primitive, the people of the village were so welcoming and very pleased to meet us. They opened their homes, their arms and their hearts. What little they had, they shared, and gave to us gladly.

Everywhere we went, we were met with friendship, generosity, and love.

We were guests of honour at the Silver and Golden celebrations of the local convent of sisters.

We were also invited to the wedding celebration of a young, local couple from the village.

We were shown round the district hospital in Kilema, followed by a tea party hosted by the sister from the convent.

No matter where we went, the people surrounded us, just to say, “Karibu!” which means “you are welcome!”

It was a life changing experience – and I’m so happy that we were there.

We would recommend anyone who may be considering making the journey to “Go for it!” and enjoy the experience as much as we all did.’

3) Bethany Describes Her Visit to Legho in 2016

‘Last summer myself and 11 others – 9 pupils and 2 teachers from Holy Rood High School - arrived in Tanzania. Our time there was split between different things. For the first week we stayed in Maua in a retreat centre run by nuns. Whilst there, we were joined by members of different Makutano groups who were employed by Twende Pamoja. (Makutano groups are Youth Groups set up by Mike Knox in this part of Tanzania).

During our stay in Maua, we walked down the road to Lombeta Secondary School where we taught ICT lessons to the year 1 and year 3 students. This threw me because I think that for people who live in our society, we take these things for granted and, yet we were teaching these students – some of whom were much older than us due to the way the school system works in Tanzania – how to turn on a laptop. We stayed in Lombeta for the entire day and had lunch with the pupils. School lunches in Tanzania is a bowl of *ugali*, which is a thick, tasteless porridge like meal. After lessons we went down to the lunch hall with all the pupils and some teachers. This time was spent doing different activities, such as a brief lesson in ceilidh dancing or sharing songs together – we taught them the cup song from the film Pitch Perfect.

The second week was spent visiting different primary schools and doing a little bit more exploring of Tanzania. The primary children were very excited to see us, but were very shy to talk. In each of the primary schools we shared some of the songs which were written by Makutano members. When we visited St. Ursula’s Primary and Secondary Schools, I was shocked at the high level of English all pupils spoke, even the primary children, who were able to hold conversations with us. Quite a contrast compared to the children from public primary schools.

During this second week we travelled to Legho, and though we only spent a day there it is one of the times I will remember most from my trip. I remember getting the bus up to Legho and seeing the difference compared to the other places we had been. When we arrived in Legho I remember thinking that the village and the surrounding area was very green, lots of trees and plants everywhere. That’s one thing that was quite striking, other places that I had visited or stayed were

more developed and quite urban in comparison – more buildings and roads than nature. This was especially evident when we visited the primary school, where the playground was simply a large area of grass which surrounded the school buildings.

When we were at the primary school, we were introduced to the teachers who were all very friendly, and then taken into the hall, which was essentially a concrete room with no windows and wooden benches for the children to sit on, to give a short talk to introduce ourselves to the pupils. And as we were leaving the primary all the children were running after us and getting told by their teachers to go back to classes, but when we were walking back we realised that we had been followed quite a long way by 2 young girls. They were eventually taken back by one of their teachers.

Walking through Legho was quite different as well, there are no pavements or roads like we see here or even in the larger cities, just a vague dirt path in amongst the trees. One of the Makutano group who stayed with us during our stay in Tanzania, Peter, lives in Legho and so he took us to his home and introduced us to his family, and during the times we were walking to or from somewhere he would always stop and chat with whoever passed by us. That really amazed me, because that isn't really the sort of thing that would happen here, you might see one or two people who you know when you're out and stop to talk with them, but he knew everyone who passed us. This just put into perspective how communal their society is, in comparison to our own.

We had been invited to lunch at the priest's house, so after our visit to the primary school we drove over. I was surprised when I saw the house as it was quite a contrast to the others I had seen while I was there – big, white and quite new. While there we were introduced to the Makutano group from Legho, who were all very friendly and very talkative.

For the last few hours of my duration in Legho, we walked up the mountain, which was quite a task after just having eaten a huge lunch. At the top we came to a clearing where we were able to see across a plane of grassland, and I have to say that that is my favourite memory from my entire trip to Tanzania. There were no roads or buildings, just grass as far as you could see, and two mountains just to the left. It was amazing.

Despite only being there for such a brief time one of the things I loved about my visit in Legho was how peaceful the village seemed. It was a great escape from the towns and cities which we spent most of our time in, and that is one of the reasons why it was probably the best part out of my whole trip.'

Finally, just to repeat what Bethany's Mum Tracy, the new Legho co-ordinator for our parishes, wrote in last week's newsletter:

'If you are willing to pray/contemplate/mull over the way forward for our link, we would be very grateful....please forward any suggestions on to Father Jock /Tracy Burgess/ the box at the back of the church.

Please also give names and contact details if you would consider being part of a new initiative - The Legho Renewal Group.'