

**Report on the Partnership between  
St Stephen's Mpererwe, Uganda and St Cuthbert's Hamilton, Canada  
November 2009**



Eunice Bakker and Deborah Ssengendo share a warm greeting as banners are exchanged during the 2008 visit to St. C's

**The Biblical vision for partnership according to Michael Peers:**  
**“To look outward is to acknowledge that the horizons of God are broad and wide --- when we reach out, it is to try and grasp God’s leading and direction as well as to offer our own gifts and talents to others who may need them. Reaching out has a two fold meaning. It suggests both giving and receiving. ‘we offer what we have and know, and we receive what we need and seek...’\***

*\* Primate’s World Relief and Development Policy 2004 (www.pwrdf.org)*

**The above statement affirms what we have found to be true as our partnership grows. We continue to stretch as we seek to understand and to be understood, in a spirit of humility.**

The report which follows seeks to document the experience and learnings of a partnership between two congregations situated in very different parts of the world.

## **Report on the Partnership between St Stephen's Mpererwe, Uganda and St Cuthbert's Hamilton, Canada November 2009**

### **Introduction**

The following report highlights the first five years in the relationship between our faith communities and includes: a brief history, partnership principles, what we have learned, and next steps.

### **A brief history**

St Cuthbert's community's was first introduced to Dr Sam Luboga from Kampala, Uganda in the early 1990's while he was a visiting fellow at McMaster University and a colleague and friend of Dr. Vic Neufeld. Sam, and later his wife Christine attended St Cuthbert's, and a friendship was formed.

It was during that time that HIV/ AIDS was a developing health crisis in Uganda, impacting most families. Informal financial assistance for tuition was offered to the Luboga family to assist with their expanded family, which now included nieces and nephews, through what was called "the Luboga fund." Letters were received providing updates on family members. Vic, and later Sheila Harms, visited the Lubogas and learned of the work of St Stephens Mpererwe and the beginning of their Good Samaritan Program to assist caregivers and orphans. St Cuthbert's formed a Uganda ad hoc committee (Uganda Group) to talk about how to come alongside to help.

In 2002 through the Congregational Initiatives program at the Presbyterian Church in Canada, a proposal was prepared and submitted jointly and accepted for a one year, one time funding. The project took into account recognized development principles including prevention, and sustainability. Funds covered tuition, a garden project for the children to provide some income for sustainability, and education for the children and caregivers. During this year, Gwen Jamieson from St Cuthbert's spent a few months there working on her Social Work thesis researching "the lived experience of orphans". The Uganda group made the recommendation to St Cuthbert's Community to extend and form a new partnership, recognizing that the issues and problems related to HIV aids were ones that needed a longer term commitment.

The first 3 year partnership (2003-2006) was then formalized between the two communities, and renewed in the second 3 year partnership (2007-2010) in 2007.

The terms of the agreement are summarized below:

#### **Through its Good Samaritan Committee, St. Stephen's Church agrees:**

1. to distribute funds provided by St. Cuthbert's to assist children and youth in their academic activities, particularly in the completion of secondary school;
2. to work towards developing a community which provides training opportunities for children, youth and young adults in addition to their regular education, with the long term goal of assisting youth to develop skills which will allow them to be financially independent;
3. to continue to work on community development such that the community of St. Stephen's with the help of the Good Samaritan Committee, continues to acquire the capacity to care for AIDS orphans and seeks to share lessons learned with other local church communities and partners; to continue to document and demonstrate how church communities in two countries with economic, social, and cultural differences can collaboratively develop a mutually beneficial project.

#### **Through its Outreach Committee, St. Cuthbert's Church agrees:**

1. to increase its awareness and knowledge about the problem of HIV/AIDS in Africa through various learning opportunities available at St. Cuthbert's, and more specifically about the unique challenge of children orphaned by this illness within the community of St. Stephen's; (Input from advisory individuals to be sought)
2. to help facilitate learning opportunities for individuals from the St. Cuthbert's community to participate directly in the work of the St. Stephen's community;

3. to help facilitate opportunities for members of the St. Stephen's community to travel to St. Cuthbert's for the purpose of joint reflection and evaluation of the past 3-year partnership and planning for the next 3-year term;
4. to continue to document and demonstrate how church communities in two different countries with economic, social, and cultural differences can collaboratively develop and implement a project that is mutually-beneficial to both communities;
5. to invite other local agencies or organizations to become active in the proposed partnership through fund-raising and educational initiatives;
6. to provide ongoing funds through the general budget to support this project. Additional efforts such as fundraising and private contributions from individuals/agencies are also a part of the overall support plan.

### **How are doing in meeting these objectives?**

#### **St. Cuthbert's Hamilton:**

- has been able to sustain its contribution to the funding of tuition and associated costs.
- has continued to offer educational opportunities such as a book study and learning circles.
- has initiated the development of a proposal to the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Two individuals had a preliminary meeting with Mr. Lewis to discuss the proposal.
- had an article published about the partnership in the March 2009 Presbyterian Record (written by Nan Coolsma)
- arranged to bring two visitors from Uganda, the Rev. Sam Lwere of St. Stephen's and Deborah Ssendendo, Chair of the Good Samaritan Committee to St Cuthbert's in September 2008 to meet with the congregation and its committee.
- has been represented by individuals from St Cuthbert's at visits to St. Stephen's: Vic and Babs Neufeld, Sheila Harms, Gwen Jamieson and Jesse Guscott, Joyce Lock, Linda and Peter Kennedy, and Maggi Jamieson.
- has taken some initiative in sharing lessons with other congregations in Canada who are involved in similar efforts in Uganda.

#### **St. Stephen's Mpererwe:**

- has selected the primary and secondary students to receive funding for tuition, boarding, and other related expenses;
- monitored the progress of the children and youth and the success of its efforts, and made reports available to St. Cuthbert's;
- provided some support, in the midst of difficult circumstances, for the children and their caregivers;
- encouraged fund raising efforts involving the children and caregivers, an example being bead making;
- has graciously welcomed all the Canadian visitors;
- developed some links with local professionals and agencies to address concerns;
- has begun some sharing of experiences with other congregations.

### **What are we learning about the partnership?**

**1.** The partnership aims to avoid the **donor model**, which is one-sided and focuses mainly on the transfer of funds. It is our desire to focus on the relationship itself and what two faith communities, with differing cultural, social, geographies can learn from one another.

**2.** It is with that end that we have adopted as a key principle in the partnership the concept of **mutuality**. This **two-way learning** is the giving and gifting which can happen between us as we build upon trust. This is best fostered by mutual respect and open communication.

Below you will read more of the experiences of some of the visits between our communities and what we are learning.

**3. Communication** has proved at times to be challenging due to distance, language, access to technology and power shortages, and lack of timeliness due to other pressures. At times, email has been difficult but cell phone usage has helped somewhat and we have made some progress. We realize that **face to face communication is most desirable** for the strengthening of trust, and to better understand one another. Each time that we are together, the bonds are strengthened and we are mutually blessed.

**4. The need to educate ourselves** Understanding the importance of educating ourselves about development principles, we have held workshops and offered a book study, *28 Stories about AIDS* by Stephanie Nolan. These honest, often raw, informative stories capture the complexities of the psychosocial, cultural, and spiritual issues. The people's stories were often inspiring, showing courage, hope and determination despite tremendous difficulties. It is humbling to read such accounts.

**5. Regular face to face visits make a difference.** To that end the following visits have taken place:

#### **5.1 Gwen Jamieson's visit in 2004**

Gwen Jamieson, a member of St. Cuthbert's completed her Master of Social Work placement in the winter of 2004 for three months in Mpererwe, conducting qualitative research about the lived experience of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS within the Good Samaritan Orphan Aid Program. During this time, Gwen met regularly with the Good Samaritan Committee, held several focus groups with the caregivers, visited the children who are supported by the GSP at their schools and completed interviews with some of the children orphaned in the program. She also met with healthcare providers, teachers and community members involved in income generating projects in Mpererwe to gain an understanding of the issues children, families and their communities face with the growing number of orphans due to HIV/AIDS. Professor Mulindwa Innocent Najumba at the University of Makerere in Kampala supervised the research project from its inception and offered a great deal of support and insight into the barriers orphaned children and their caregivers face in this community. Gwen also connected with the UNICEF, TASO and World Vision offices in Kampala as well as the Mulago Hospital to gain some background information into the history of HIV/AIDS and orphans in Uganda. Toward the end of her stay Gwen started writing her Master thesis with the data collected and shared a copy with the Mpererwe community.

**5.2 A group of St Cuthbert's people,** Linda and Peter Kennedy, and Joyce Lock visited St. Stephen's on Easter 2006. Their visit included: meeting with the children and caregivers, some visits to their homes and one of the schools which included a discussion with the Headmaster, a meeting with the Good Samaritan Committee, attending worship, and several gatherings enjoying the warm hospitality of St Stephen's. We came home with a strengthened commitment to continue the partnership based on the people we met, the reports we were given, and the children and people who inspired us to come alongside. During one meeting with caregivers the question was asked, "why do you do this, what do you get from this?" It is hard to put into words how being in another's presence is a 'gifting' but this is a large part of what is 'given'.

**5.3 Maggi Jamieson,** a member of St Cuthbert's visited the St. Stephen's community in the fall of 2008 while completing a Master of Social Work field placement focusing on the role of caregivers. Approximately 30 caregivers, many of whom are single mothers and grandmothers, meet regularly at St. Stephen's for mutual support and bead making, an enterprise the group has initiated. The group supports the idea of participating in enterprise training and pursuing other initiatives in an effort to be self-sustaining. Other suggestions are that caregivers who demonstrate leadership skills hold positions within the group, participate in Good Samaritan Committee meetings and all caregivers contribute in various ways. Using this approach, issues that arise such as students' need for more scholastic materials could be taken on and managed by the caregiver group in addition to sustainability projects. This approach is supported by Professor Stella Neema of Makerere University Social Research Department who has studied community led initiatives in African countries and recommends with projects such as the GSP a high level of caregiver involvement and ownership as a means capacity building. The Good Samaritan Committee is aware of Professor Neema's suggestions for supporting and strengthening caregivers' capacity and is committed to focusing on this goal in the Stephen Lewis Foundation proposal.

Various members of the St. Stephen's community including caregivers, committee members and primary school staff have expressed concern about the academic performance of some children who are supported by the GSP. The various reasons for this and suggestions for ameliorating the situation began to be discussed during Maggi's visit and discussion has been continued by the partnership. One suggestion under consideration is the hiring of a project coordinator who among other responsibilities would provide support to children and caregivers around this issue.

As noted above the importance of maintaining regular face to face contact and communication between the two communities as a means of building a reciprocal and sustainable partnership is a learning that has been gained in the

past year and was confirmed by Deborah and Sam's visit to St. Cuthbert's and Maggi's visit to St. Stephen's. Stronger ties and increased understanding of each other's communities were gained as a result.

#### 5.4 Ugandan partners visit to Canada Sept 2008

St Cuthbert's Uganda group questioned whether it would be a good use of resources to invite two of our partners to visit us, or whether the funds might be better spent. Recognizing that only a few from St Cuthbert's would be able to go to Uganda and sharing the desire for as many as possible to meet some St Stephen's friends, the decision was made to bring our guests here. Since we did not want to use tuition funds for this purpose, through the generosity of a member and of a stranger, the gift of frequent flyer air miles as well as financial gifts from St. C's members offset the travel costs. It was hoped that the time together would deepen the relationships between our congregations, and would allow time for us to evaluate our program together as well as make plans for the future, including work on the Stephen Lewis Foundation Proposal.

The visit of Deborah Ssengendo, Chairperson of Good Samaritan and Rev Sam Lwere, priest of St Stephen's visit to Hamilton proved to be a great experience. The time away was a welcome break for Sam and Deborah to rest from the hectic demands of home, to experience a new culture, see some of the local area, and get to know the people and community of St Cuthbert's in a deeper way. We are very gratified that many people from St Cuthbert's participated in this visit: by hosting or sharing a meal, preparing a banner, singing special music, showing them around the area, including Niagara. They delighted being here, snapping pictures to show to friends at home. For many, the highlight of the time together was worship on Sunday morning and the presentation to follow. There was a great spirit of friendship, celebration and unity as we sang and praised God together. Eunice Bakker representing the Sunday school presented a beautiful banner with many hands which represented 'we are One in the spirit', and this was reciprocated by St Stephen's banner they presented to us which spoke of the fruits of the Spirit.

#### The key points that emerged at the evaluation meetings attended by both partners Sept 2008

1. The St. C's group is moved and inspired by Sam and Deborah's description of the work they and others undertake in response to the needs of the many children they care for. The burden they and the Good Samaritan Committee (GSC) bear is obvious. It is clear that the work is done faithfully and graciously, and they expressed their gratitude to God and to St Cuthbert's. The determined commitment, effort, creativity, good humor and quiet trust and faith inspire us.
2. St. Cuthbert's learned from Sam and Deborah that not all things can be accounted for in an annual planning process, that needs arise unexpectedly that call for an immediate response (illness, shoes, advice, transportation were a few examples), that require flexibility on the part of the GSC. Because there is often nowhere else for the children to turn, the children look on St Stephen's as 'family,' Sam as 'uncle,' and Deborah as 'mama or aunty.'
3. Concerns were raised that some of the students are not doing well scholastically.
4. St Stephen's has a lot going on apart from the Good Samaritan program. They have many needs and issues to deal with, and people are very busy. Rev Sam Lwere has 4 parishes. We have come to realize that this program is only one small part of a very large puzzle that needs to be attended to. This realization causes us to pause and reconsider what is the best way to proceed.
5. The need to develop a funding proposal which addresses the following identified issues:
  - The number of orphans applying to **The Good Samaritan** program is increasingly steadily, in particular the number entering secondary education and beyond.
  - The capacity of the St. Stephen's community to cope with the increased needs is stretched and inadequate, both in terms of numbers of care-givers and in terms of their knowledge and skills (competencies).
  - Rather than continually requesting more and more external funding to match increasing needs, a **significant change in strategy** is required—toward an explicit plan for strengthening capacity and self-sustainability. The capacities required include both expertises (knowledge) about caring for orphans, and knowledge and skills related to starting and maintaining a business enterprise.

The vulnerability and uncertainty that our church partners deal with daily was highlighted in a sermon preached by **Rev Cathy Stewart Kroecker** the week of their visit.

**“Sam described the budget they work with: the money from St C’s provides 30%; monthly and sometimes weekly offerings from the congregation provide about 15%; other individuals account for 5%. That’s 50%. Where does the other 50 % come from? Well, that wasn’t clear. That’s the unmet need. That 50% is the need that maybe sometimes is covered by miracles; maybe sometimes isn’t, maybe sometimes comes like water from a rock; maybe sometimes is just experienced as thirst in a desert.”**

#### **5. 5 Follow up meeting with Vic Neufeld and St Stephen’s April 09 in Kampala**

The following items were discussed and agreed to:

- a) A new accounting system is being established by Nicolas (the new treasurer at St. Stephen’s Hospital)
- b) Progress was made on preparations for a proposal to the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF):  
The 2 goals agreed to were: supporting and strengthening the capacity of the care-givers, and to explore the feasibility of creating a church related “business”. The previous goal to involve secondary students as “assistants” will be rolled into the other two project goals.
- c) Some specific ideas were discussed about each of the 2 goals which include:  
Supporting and empowering of care-givers which will begin with a “needs & interests” assessment event where caregivers would participate in the design of the program. Another aim will be to help them develop “entrepreneurial” skills which Christine Luboga will assist with. A long term goal would be that the orphans be supported both by a “collective” enterprise (like the business) as well as by individual house holds.
- d) Begin with the building-carpentry project as a pilot. Two carpenters at St. Stephen’s are enthusiastic about this pilot project, and interest has been expressed by Rick Hudspith from St Cuthbert’s. Both committees (Uganda & Canada) should look for other funding sources to support this development.
- e) Vic raised the concern (described by Maggi when she returned to Canada) about some children not doing well in school. This concern is also shared by the Good Samaritan Committee (GSC) who agreed to analyze this concern in more detail in particular the scope of the problem, the possible causes, and solutions.

#### **Recent visits and next steps**

1. Sheila Harms spent a brief time with the Uganda partners in June 2009.
2. Robinah Sebuggwaawo, Gloria, and Deborah came to Toronto in August 2009 to participate in a “Learning through Play” event. While here, Deborah met with some members of the Uganda group to work on the proposal.
3. Since we are into the second year of the renewed 3-year partnership there is a need to outline the plans for the remainder of 2009 and 2010.
4. The SLF proposal draft is now under review by the Uganda partners (Oct 2009) prior to being submitted, hopefully this year.

**St. Cuthbert’s Uganda group members:** Linda and Peter Kennedy (co chairs), Vic and Babs Neufeld, Sheila Harms, Joyce Lock, Nan Coolsma, Gwen Jamieson, Maggi Jamieson

**St. Stephen’s Good Samaritan Committee:** Deborah Ssengendo, (Chairperson), Rev. Sam Lwere (Parish Priest), and other representatives of the St. Stephen’s community.