

PLEASE SUPPORT THE PARISH PROJECT!

PROJECT? WHAT PROJECT?

Providing solar generation equipment for a parish centre (primary school and hospital) in Butare, Uganda.

WHOSE IDEA IS THAT?

The PPC considered that the parish should support a Catholic development project in the Third World. Fr. Charlie Barne SMM, an acquaintance of Fr. Jamie, in Uganda was asked to send us his wish-list of projects for funding. The Butare project is at the top of the list.

WHERE IS BUTARE?

Western Uganda, south-west of Kampala (the capital). West of Lake Victoria towards the border with Rwanda. It is in the Archdiocese of Mbarara. You won't find it on the map, but the nearest major town is Bushenyi.

WHAT'S IT LIKE THERE?

Very remote. Butare is over 50 kilometres from the nearest sizeable town. It is quite high, nearly 2000 metres over sea-level (that's a lot higher than Ben Nevis, about 40% of the way up the Matterhorn). There are very few roads and they are in poor condition; there is no piped water; and, of course, no electric power. (That's where we come in.) At night, it is pitch dark – there is no lighting, of course, and no residual, spill-over light from towns or roads. Once the sun sets, it is not only dark but very cold.

WHAT'S THE BUTARE PARISH CENTRE?

Six Sisters from the Order of Our Lady of Good Counsel run a primary school and a hospital. Education (especially for girls) is the key to many problems in Central Africa and the Sisters have nearly a thousand pupils in their school. The hospital (it isn't *really* a hospital; there are no such things in remote rural Uganda – it is a primary health care centre), in the course of a year, treats over 4000 outpatients, over 150 in-patients, conducts nearly 450 ante-natal consultations and delivers nearly 50 babies. As in many parts of Africa, HIV/AIDS is rife and immunity of the population to many diseases is low. (In Africa, AIDS is not just associated with homosexuality or promiscuity; most of the adult population is affected and the disease now “comes with the territory”.)

WHY DO THE SISTERS NEED SOLAR POWER GENERATION?

Conditions in Butare are grim. The Sisters teaching in the school have to prepare lessons and mark books with no heating by the light of a paraffin lamp (which gives off about 40% of the light produced by a Camping Gaz light). Sister Christine, the headmistress, tells us that at times it is so cold that the lamp-glasses break – and sometimes there is not even any paraffin. She says that *even some Sisters* have at times made excuses to leave Butare because of the arduous conditions. Those who remain have no choice but to endure them.

In the hospital, things are more serious. Of those 50 babies delivered in a year, the law of averages suggests that half of the births (perhaps two or three a month) take place in the hours of darkness. Imagine having or delivering a baby in a freezing cold room, by the light of a paraffin lamp – *if* there is any paraffin.

Other treatment in the hospital is hampered, because the Sisters have difficulty in keeping vaccines and other medicines at the correct temperature, in the absence of reliable power supply to their refrigerators.

HOW WILL THE SOLAR GENERATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

There is plenty of daytime sunshine. The solar generator will be used to charge batteries in order to provide electricity to light and heat the school, hospital and the accommodation for patients and staff. It will enable refrigeration and other medical equipment to be used reliably.

HOW MUCH ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

£3,500 (a little over \$US6,000). That will pay for the purchase, transport and installation of the solar generating plant.

WHEN DO THE SISTERS NEED THE MONEY?

As soon as possible. We have said that we should try to raise the money by Easter 2007 at the latest, but the sooner we are able to do so the sooner the patients, pupils and Sisters in Butare will feel the benefit.

ISN'T IT RATHER A LOT OF MONEY?

Not really. We think that there are about 100 people/family units in the St. Anne's congregation. Over the period between now and Easter, we are asking for just over £2.00 per person/family a week. That's about two litres of petrol, less than a pint of beer or a packet of cigarettes.

WHAT ABOUT MY EXISTING PLANNED GIVING?

We don't want you to interrupt that, but please think if you can give a little to Butare as well. Also, between now and Easter, there are two penitential seasons – Advent and Lent. Many people make additional, sacrificial gifts during those seasons – if you do so, please make Butare the subject of your giving.

Fr. Charlie tells us that the Sisters in Butare are overjoyed that we are going to help them. Please do not disappoint them.

Thank you very much indeed for your generosity.

If you want to know more, talk to Malcolm Forster, Paddy Lark or Catherine Pearson.