

## ROSCREA SISTERS IN UGANDA (Continued)

In 2000, in response to the growing need for primary education in Uganda Coloma Primary School was started by the Daughters of Mary and Joseph Congregation. Sisters Eileen and Mona Maher were asked to spearhead the beginnings of the school. It was a great joy and a great challenge to be part of the creation of a far seeing institution which would change the lives of many in Uganda and ultimately bring about a transformation in society.

Being a boarding school it had many demands and challenges eg we expected about 40 children on the first day but to our great surprise 58 turned up. We had only purchased 40 beds so for the first week the children had to sleep on mats and mattresses on the floor. We were short of desks, chairs, tables but with good will and a bit of fun the school began and has yearly continued to grow and develop. In fact our first classroom was financed by the people of Roscrea and is known as the "Roscrea Room"

From the outset the school priority was to give an educational opportunity to orphans and children from vulnerable homes. Now with approx 300 children, over one third are receiving support either fully or partially depending on their circumstances. Much of this sponsorship is thanks to the people who have very generously assisted us and the children in Coloma Primary School. The vision of the school is to give a holistic education in a conducive environment. Thus much emphasis is put on sustainability and care of the environment. If we had such a thing as the green flag I'm sure it would be flying high!

Apart from the ordinary subjects the children get a practical training in agricultural (80% of the population work in agriculture), hand craft, mat and basket making, pottery knitting, sewing and crochet. By the time the children leave the school and if they have no means of going further many could begin their own small home industries in these areas. Sports is very big in the culture. At the beginning there was a sports field but with many big termite mounds. These can be as big as 2m X 2m x 3 m. We struck an agreement with the local village that the young men could use the field every weekend if they dug out the mounds and flattened the field. For some weeks it was a sight to see 30 men arriving each evening with axes, hoes and shovels to do the job. We have ended up with a super playing field.

At the moment 3 classes have completed the school and with good results. We hope to maintain this good standard. The children study hard as they know that the only way out of poverty for them is through education. The days are long. Class begins at 8.30 until 4.00 with a morning break of half hour and lunch for one hour. After school there are extracurricular activities and 2 hours evening study.

The food is good but monotonous according to European standards. Daily the children get maize porridge for breakfast and maize and beans for lunch and supper. This can be varied with bananas and beans occasionally. During the wet season they get greens and fruit when it is in season. The younger ones get a cup of milk daily if it is available. We try as far as possible to feed the children well but sometimes there is a lack of money and other times the food is not available.

The plan for the school is to have about 600 children but as yet financially this is not possible as extra children means extra dormitories, classrooms, dining rooms, staff houses etc and as the school is still developing so it will take time.

Next week I will share the great role of Roscrea in this whole school venture

Sr Mona Maher