

# Joys, surprises and humblings

**The joys –**  
 The warmth of the welcome was almost physical, like a great tidal wave.  
 The lunchtime feasts – but where were any kitchens?  
 The school children – mischievous, smiley and cheerful  
 The singing – we knew some of the hymn tunes;  
 Sharing their 12<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations

**The surprises –**  
 Viana is a big town and not just a suburb of Luanda;  
 not having to make sign language as we had an English interpreter with us every day; the comfort of the guesthouse;  
 discovering that in one week we had more contact with ordinary Angolans than foreign aid and government workers;  
 tea with the British ambassador in his garden;  
 the women tailoring us perfect fitting African-style outfits by just looking at us;  
 the very fashionable outfits of some youth – but *where* did they buy them?  
 the traffic – gridlock and getting worse by the day;  
 the rubbish everywhere *except* the presidential palace;  
 a sound system at church

**And the humblings –**  
 The generosity of the gifts  
 The money they must have spent on giving us the best  
 The offertory collections - truly sacrificial and cheerful giving  
 The care – every detail of our programme thought through.  
 The respect given to us, our thoughts and opinions  
 Being the first woman priest to celebrate and preach in Angola and knowing how important this was to some of the women present  
 Their energetic and determined youth group  
 The strong and faithful Mothers Union  
 Their faith – knowing that to be touched by the Holy Spirit is to be changed for life  
 Building their church, building the community  
 Feeding a roomful of street children and those with no one to look after them during the day  
 The lack of cynicism

—Rev Elisabeth Morse

**All Saints' visit to our  
sister parish in Angola**  
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# All Saints

## F U L H A M

October 2005



All Saints -  
All people!

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**Following the MAP: your input  
is needed on vision, change,  
demolition and new growth**  
PAGES 8-9

# In Angola

**Four All Saints representatives pay a life-changing visit, pages 12-13**

*THIS MONTH, A QUARTET OF DELEGATES VISITED OUR SISTER PARISH, ST AUGUSTINE'S, IN VIANA, /*

## 'On the road, young men sell everything from screwdrivers to tinned tuna'

So many people have asked me about our visit to Angola and each time I have struggled to find the right words to describe our wonderful experience. When Father Joe asked me the day I got back I responded, 'Deeply humbling, incredibly uplifting...' This seems contradictory, but I discovered that Angola itself is very much like this; so diverse and full of contrasts.

One such contrast was between Luanda, where we stayed at night, and Viana, where St Augustine's is situated. The daily car journey in between, although only 8km, was often very long due to heavy traffic and much time was passed staring at the world outside our window.

Luanda bursts at its seams; it 'houses' one-third of the country's population. It's surprisingly smart in parts, with high-rise business centres and low-rise shacks side by side. Closer to the centre, the bustling capital is dotted with neat parks and attractive green verges. Some areas rival the Caribbean for beauty with attractive

BY NICKI THOMPSON

beach-side restaurants, bars and villas.

On the outskirts of Luanda, the scene changes. One block of flats caught my eye. Huge sections of the exterior brickwork no longer exist. Still, a family sits around a table together sharing a meal, oblivious to the traffic the other side of their invisible wall. Washing lines decorate the building like bunting.

As you leave the city, all that's visible beyond the railway track along the road to Viana are hundreds of crooked rectangular corrugated roofs like a poorly made patchwork quilt stretching into the distance. On the track itself, shoeless children play, surrounded by the community's rubbish. Older boys kick a deflated football around with determination. A steady stream of women, in traditional fabrics of every colour, cross the dusty russet earth with large, awkward bundles on their heads.

In the foreground, about as close to the cars as you can get without actually

being run over by one, hundreds of young men hope to strike a deal by selling their wares to drivers. And the items on offer are such a weird assortment: anything from screwdrivers to lightbulbs and from tinned tuna to car speakers. The roadside is littered with rusty, mangled, upturned vehicles, often charred by fire. They seem to have been there forever.

Approaching St Augustine's parish, we turn off the main road onto a narrow, potholed track, passing homes which may well belong to members of the congregation. One such home had the chassis of an old car turned on its side as its front wall. Another had a beautiful display of plants in stone pots outside its simple doorway.

On our first visit there we could hear from a distance, long before we saw, our hosts' vibrant welcome of singing and clapping. As we turned into St Augustine's, the sound of their amazing voices was practically deafening. So much so, I doubt the memory will ever leave me.

## 'The welcome never wavered and their sense of faith gave us a vision of what faith can be'

Before we got off the plane, we nervously covered ourselves with Deet to fend off the giant mosquitoes I envisioned darting through the plane doors. But once off the plane – and not reduced to bloodless husks – we were out in the open in Luanda and met Mario, our host from the bishop's office.

At the hotel, which was basic – but miles better than all the habitations we had passed coming from the airport – we chatted with Mario. He got to work reading through Elisabeth's prepared sermon, which he was due to interpret at the service the following day.

We checked in and went to meet the bishop, who was incredibly warm and friendly. He welcomed us and went through the full plan for our stay which

BY JONATHAN WHEELER

they had prepared. We were to meet all sections of the church and school as separate deputations. Youth, PCC, Mothers Union, school, daughter churches (Galileia and Grafanil) and finally an afternoon devoted to 'touristy things.' It was refreshing to see the intentions of this last part written so clearly.

We went straight to the most amazing welcome we have any of us experienced. Going along the route to Viana, along the un-tarmacked, uneven roads (goodness knows how any cars survive out there), we came to St Augustine's. It was lined from the front gate to the church with two rows of singers. We

were ushered into the school and everyone introduced themselves. The fact we didn't speak Portuguese, although not a problem, did hamper the amount of information we were able to get out of people.

From introductions, we went into the church for a surprise concert in our honour. All the choirs from different parts of the church sang a song each and we even did a short hymn ourselves, as Elisabeth had printed out lots of well-known hymns in case we needed to perform.

The lunch that day (and every day) was very impressive. A team of women cooked dishes in their own kitchens and then brought them to the church. The little things really touched us, such

ANGOLA. HERE ARE THEIR STORIES



## ‘The children’s drama about the Marburg virus was funny – despite the serious topic ’

BY ELISSA DOUGLAS

At the school, the children: they had obviously been learning some English for our arrival and those that could, rushed to us at every opportunity to ask, ‘What is your name?’ and then say ‘Nice to meet you.’ They are an enthusiastic and happy bunch who seem to love being at school. We arrived the weekend before school started, after a two-week break, so it was quite refreshing for me to see the same confusion and noise that we experience on our first days back in London.

On the Tuesday morning, the children put on what I can only describe as an extravaganza of an assembly. We were welcomed with singing, dancing and clapping (not the first time we had been greeted this way) of such joy and warmth that it was still slightly overwhelming. The headteacher, Paulo Barry Domingos, introduced us to the staff and children and then the performance began. Children recited facts about the history of Angola and told us how excited they are about the link developing between our two schools.

We were treated to a drama about the Marburg virus and its effects on the community. This was hugely funny for all concerned, even though the topic was serious. We were amazed at their acting ability; they managed to be funny and serious at the same time and seemed remarkably unselfconscious.

Then, dancing was followed by gym Angolan-style, which consisted of a huge old tyre propped up by a brick. The boys ran, used the tyre as a springboard, somersaulted in the air and landed on their feet. It was entertaining and highly skilled, although part of me was screaming, ‘health and safety risk!’

The assembly ended with a demonstration of one of their playground games, played in teams with sand, bottles and a ball. I will endeavour to teach this game to the children of All Saints at some stage.

The school is a thriving community and the school council is keen to make improvements and keep developing. At this stage, there are five classrooms, all with corrugated roofs through which the rain leaks in summer. Two of the classrooms are finished with desks and blackboards; one requires more building work; and the rest all require more furniture.

They are incredibly under-resourced, with the children supplying their own pencils and notebooks. The school had some Portuguese textbooks that date back to before the war. Currently they offer primary education from nursery to year eight in two sessions each day. They are very keen to set up a secondary school because many of the children cannot afford to go to the government-run schools.

Most of the teachers work for a very small wage provided by the church. What needs to be thought about in the future are the resources the school requires, including up-to-date textbooks in both English and Portuguese, finishing the school building, improving large equipment (such as desks and blackboards) and setting up further education possibilities. The country as a whole needs advice and help to set up a standard national curriculum that will help all schools.

as the special coffee cups and plates they had obtained for us.

The Sunday morning service was a huge two-hour affair, with large numbers of guests from other parts of Luanda arriving to visit and lots of singing. Throughout the week, the strength of welcome never wavered. Their sense of faith, which was expressed in their singing and suffused through all their lives, was powerfully strong and we have all brought back a vision of what faith can be.