

Visit Report – October 2008

Simon Sheldon, St Nicholas, Shepperton

In October 2008, 5 of us from St Nicholas, Shepperton, visited our link parish of Milange in the Diocese of Niassa. This first picture from Milange shows how fertile the land is there, with banana trees and a brick kiln. The Anglican church too is growing very fast here.

Since my first visit six years ago, the number of congregations has grown from 70 to 125. Chris and Sandy Swift were here to work – Chris leading a retreat for all the clergy of Niassa, Sandy to contribute to Mothers Union conference on domestic violence.

For Maggie Hammond as church warden, it was a return to Africa after 40 years and to support the link, and for Jane Davies, it was her first visit to Africa, the chance to see Rosa who had visited us in Shepperton. For me, I wanted to see how the two schools we have funded are getting on.



Brick Kiln and Banana trees on the edge of Milange, showing the red soil and lush vegetation.

On my first visit to the parish 6 years ago, we were particularly struck whilst visiting the lively remote church in Njema, by the enthusiasm and lively singing of the congregation combined with the complete lack of modern facilities. No health care, no schools and even drinking water from a hole in the ground. The church elders challenged us: 'If the church can build us a school, we will find the teachers.' It was a challenge that St Nicholas school and the-then headmaster Neal Adolphus embraced head on. They raised the £5,000 to build a school. Bishop Mark van Koevinger arranged for a two classroom school to be built. On this visit, accompanied by officials from the Department of Education in Milange, we were delighted to meet the head master and 2 other teachers of a well-functioning village school! Staggeringly for us, this simple two class-room school enables almost 500 children to receive an education up to Standard 5. They come in three shifts, and sit on the floor in classes of up to 80 children. Praise God that for the price of refurbishing a kitchen we have been able to contribute to setting up a school.

There are challenges. In the early years of independence, the state took over all schooling from the churches. It is taking time to re-establish a good relationship between church and teachers, but Father Austen Raja priest of Mongwe is visiting regularly. Also, the community would like a second building so that pupils can finish their primary school education up to Standard 8.



This is the two classroom school at Njema, in the parish of Mongwe, which was paid for by the pupils of St Nicholas School, Shepperton

Maggie and I were privileged to accompany Bishop Mark on visits to a number of churches, including this traditionally-built church at Mbesa. Bicycles are the BMW's of Milange district, all carefully in the church car park. Maggie's party piece of playing 'What a Friend we have in Jesus' on the comb and grease proof paper bridged language barrier in a way my paltry Portuguese phrases never could. In Milange, the Anglican church is the opposite of the church in London. It is for the poorest communities, past where the road ends and at the end of a bicycle track. The Anglican church meets their need for community worship following a set liturgy. The needs are for more clergy, transport and for building material for their churches. The challenge for the church is to keep up with the growth in numbers, in terms of training priests and the catechists.

In the meantime, Chris, Sandy and Jane accompanied Helen van Koevering to Chire for a Mothers Union conference. Jane wants to follow up links there by raising money for water projects. She has various imaginative ideas to send support to the women they met there. The type of ministry we were engaged in has challenged all of us in what it means to be church back here in Shepperton. The primary purpose of our link is to share as fellow followers of Jesus, to build relationships and to learn how to pray for each other. Carefully managed visits are a superb way to do this.



*Mbesa Church
Bicycles are the transport of northern Mozambique, used for everything.*

This is my favourite picture of the whole visit. On Saturday morning, the day before opening of the new school in Milange, we arrived to find hundreds of teenagers clearing the land around the new school for a football pitch. The church land was formerly a Portuguese-run tea garden, and these youngsters were enthusiastically digging up the roots of thirty year old tea plants. In church on Sunday morning, Father Bonifacio's 17 year old son was carrying the cross in the service. The youth choir sang enthusiastically through out the 3 hour service. In a young country with so little infrastructure, the Anglican church is playing a real role in helping to build for the future. We in Shepperton feel we are in an amazing position to help the church rise to this challenge.



All of Year 10 were busy clearing the land outside the new school of St Simon of Cyrene, Milange, the day before its formal opening. There will be a football pitch here on this site of an old Portuguese tea plantation.

This new school in Milange has cost around £30,000, one of 4 schools being built by the Diocese in each of the archdeaconries. Builder Paulo Chintinguiza of Nacala has constructed this four classroom block to a high standard. The windows are varnished. There is electricity in each room. There is a teachers' room and a toilet block. We in Shepperton are proud to have contributed around half of those costs, from a wide range of sources. The Bishop Wand Secondary school held a mufti day, the Rotary have contributed, proceeds of church fairs and music concerts and a sponsored walk have all helped to raise this money.

Building on the experience of the village school in Njema, both Father Bonifacio and Bishop Mark have worked hard to forge strong relationships with the Department of Education. Despite official government policy being that all schooling is provided by the state, this school has been opened as the Anglican School of St Simon. But something much more remarkable has happened. There is currently no education provision past

GCSEs in the whole of Milange county. The Bishop has agreed that the new school will be loaned to municipality to host the first 'pre-universitaria' Sixth Form College in Milange. Within five years, it will revert to the church, who will run it as a Church Primary School for children from the new suburb being built around the Church.



The Anglican School of St Simon of Cyrene, Milange, was opened on Sunday 12th October 2008 by the Mayor of Milange and the Bishop of Niassa. Funds were contributed by ALMA, including a substantial share from Shepperton.

Sunday October 12th was a great day. When I visited Milange in 2002, Father Bonifacio celebrated communion in the open air, with singing provided by choirs from neighbouring villages. Now, six years later, the Bishop confirmed dozens of people in the church paid for by Shepperton people, with worship led by the choir of Milange amidst great pomp and ceremony. After that great celebration, we were joined by municipal teachers, the mayor and hundreds of the students who have applied to join the new school in a flamboyant procession from the church to the new school. The agreement signed by the Bishop and the Mayor spoke of cooperation between church and municipality in education the people of Milange. Banners on HIV, eradicating poverty and improving schooling were flying. Reporters covered the event. We even opened a bottle of warm fizzy wine to celebrate the event.



Champagne to celebrate the opening of the Anglican School of St Simon of Cyrene by Bishop Mark van Koevering of Niassa and the Mayor of Milange. The school will open in January 2009.

Where to now? For Bishop Mark, the success of these two schools in Njema and Milange has convinced him that every parish in the diocese should have a church primary school. For ALMA and MANNA, there is a fresh challenge to seize this historic opportunity invest in building the infrastructure of the church . For us in Shepperton, there is the next challenge. What will happen to the 500 students of year 11 when they reach year 12? A second building will be needed to house them, another £30,000. For Father Bonifacio in Milange, the challenge to develop the large plot of church land. There is scope there for a larger school, a football pitch, a model farm, a training centre to serve the needs of the 120 churches. In closing, my thanks to Father Bonifacio and his wife for welcoming us in Milange and to the van Koeverings for sharing with us so openly.



Simon Sheldon, Chris Swift, Sandy Swift, Jane Davies and Maggie Hammond all from St Nicholas Church, Shepperton, visiting the Link Parish of St Simon of Cyrene, Milange in October 2008.