



December 2020

Dear Friends,

Sister Amala, the students and staff at St Joseph's School send you all Christmas Greetings.



And a **big Christmas thank you** to our many donors and supporters from one of our trustees Charly Cox:

In early November, St Joseph's asked us at the Friends if we could help with an unusual request. Sister Amala requested £500 to help a family who had experienced a crushing series of events, which threatened to leave them destitute. We unanimously agreed to help, and we think you'll understand why when you read Sister Amala's message of thanks, below:

"One of our nursery staff, herself hearing impaired, died last month, leaving behind four children. Their father had a good job and had bought land and started to build a house for them. But when his wife became sick he took leave very often and he lost his job. When he lost his job, he was only half way through building the house and he was not able to finish it. I asked him to help in the school farm so that he could earn something to look after the children two of whom attend our school. The other two are in the school next door. At midday all of them eat lunch in the school and they take some rice home with them. I promised him that every month I will give him half bag rice to cook at least a meal in the house. I also want to help him to finish his house by helping with a few bags of cement and other materials, so that they need not spend money to rent elsewhere. That is why I asked for your help. It is a very sad story. The eldest child is class 6 of school and the last child is just 3 years old in our nursery. This child is very smart. The two boys are in class 4. As long as I am here I will try to find money to educate them. Once again I say a big thank you for everything. God bless you. Sister Amala"

Reading this note from Linda, the Chair of the Trustees, brought tears to my eyes. Perhaps it did for you too? What was it for you? For me, it was the line “This child is very smart”. For all of us who have our own children, and for all of us who have been ourselves allowed to grow into our potential, the possibility that a child of three may have had that chance of developing their talent curtailed was particularly difficult to accept. I was also struck by Sister Amala’s recognition of the fact that just giving this family money would be missing an opportunity. Instead she created a job in the school farm so that the father could have dignity, security and a sense of purpose. She engineered a way for it to be normal for the whole family to be fed by the school, so that they didn’t feel a sense of charity, and she will help them to put a roof over their heads by buying materials, that rely on the father himself doing the labour, so that he is able to build his own house, something that is an enormous source of pride, no matter where you live. Another sentence that resonated for me was “I promised him”. When all around the family was being let down, St Joseph’s stayed by their side. These principles of dignity, purpose and community are central to the way that St Joseph’s looks after the children in its care. Sister Mary, and now Sister Amala, firmly believe in the potential of the children they teach, and they advocate tirelessly for their right to live a life of purpose and contribution in their communities. It is the school’s downright refusal to write children off, or lower the expectations of them because of their disability, that marks St Joseph’s out as different, and makes it a much loved place in its community and in Sierra Leone.



Sitting here in the year of Covid-19, perhaps this story resonates more deeply for us all? Maybe we can empathise especially with the idea of someone losing their job because they took time off to care for a sick relative? Maybe we can understand how hard it must be to get a new job when there just aren’t any? Maybe we can also imagine what a crushed dream feels like, even if for us it wasn’t building a house with our own hands? And certainly we all hope that we never have to tell a child that they have lost a parent.



It is incredible to think what a relatively small amount of money and a large amount of care, can do for a family. For many of us, £500 is the cost of our Christmas together. Yet this £500 has helped this family to stay safe and well and to ensure that their children continue to flourish. This is what St Joseph’s does, day in, day out. It helps children to flourish. And it does so with your help. All of us at the Friends of St Joseph’s thank you for the donations that you have made this year, that made this small gift possible. And we salute you, Sister Amala, for your ingenuity and thoughtfulness.

Charly Cox – trustee

The good news spreads far and wide

In 2019 a group of nursing students from the University of the Fraser Valley, B.C., Canada, led by their tutor Catherine Smith, visited Sierra Leone and stayed in the guest accommodation at St Joseph’s School.



Although they were working in various health organisations in Makeni the work that they witnessed being carried out at the school so moved them and stayed with them when they returned to Canada that they wanted to continue their support. They set about fundraising and were able to send



\$1,800 Canadian dollars to the school and they remain in touch with some of the older students. Another trip was organised for a fresh group of students in May 2020 but that had to be cancelled due to the global pandemic and unfortunately they will not have another opportunity to visit on this programme as they graduate this year. Kelsey, Claire, Emanjot, Lily, Cayley, Jessica, Alyssa, Nerisse, Courtney and Nicole were so disappointed and decided they wanted to do something for the school. So they have been busy fundraising and earlier this month sent \$1548 to help Sister Amala carry on her vital work.

The generosity of donors

A big thank you to all you generous donors who responded to our appeal for a new school vehicle and continued to respond to our Giving Tuesday appeal. It's a busy time of year even during all the Covid restrictions so thank you for taking the time out to show your support for Sister Amala and the school. We hope to bring you an update in the New Year about the new school vehicle. Watch this space! It's not too late if you've been meaning to get round to helping us achieve our target. Just follow this link: www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/friendsofstjosephs

Good news for the secondary department

The most encouraging news this term is how well the senior secondary students have done in their WASSCE exams. Credits in five subjects are needed for university entrance and five of the boys have achieved that – Michael (7 credits), John (5 credits), Abass (5 credits), Abdulai (6 credits) and Abdul (6 credits). Unfortunately for university entry one of the credits has to be in English Language which is difficult for the hearing impaired students to achieve. Sister Amala is fighting their corner and is having meetings with Father Joe, the vice chancellor of UNIMAK (the University of Makeni), as well as talking to the Minister of Education to see if something can be done.



Admin help needed!

You may recall from our last newsletter that Joe Manning, the Honorary Consul for Sierra Leone in Ireland, has recently become involved with St Joseph's School. He is working hard with Sister Amala to help her continue Sister Mary's legacy and is keen to find her a dedicated manager to help her secure future funding for the school by implementing robust management systems. A brief job description is set out below but a more formal job description and details of the application process will be sent out in the New Year.



“Management position at St Joseph’s School or the Hearing Impaired

St Joseph’s was started in 1979 and has established a good reputation as an innovative and progressive school for very marginalised children and young adults. The school presently caters for 250 students, 80 of whom are boarders. The students are taught vocational skills such as Carpentry, IT skills, Dressmaking, cookery and farming. The school also seeks to integrate the students into mainstream education.

Due to the retirement of Sister Mary Sweeney, the school’s founder, there is a requirement for an administrative manager.

The Role

- *Responsibility for day to day administration and finance.*
- *To assist/oversee the implementation of an appropriate governance structure.*
- *To present regular reports to the Board of Management.*
- *To present regular reports and financial statements to the main donors.*
- *To train a successor.*

The Person

- *Experience at administrative level, in education or social enterprise, would be an advantage.*

The Terms

- *The position would be for a minimum of one year.*
- *Flights, accommodation etc would be provided.*
- *Salary would be in line with other NGOs operating in Sierra Leone”.*

If you are interested in such a position or know anyone who might be interested please send details to forthehearingimpaired@gmail.com and we will pass them onto Joe.

A Christmas message from Sister Amala:

To all the Friends of St. Joseph’s

“Joy to the world”. Yes indeed - Joy to the hearts and homes of all the Friends of St. Joseph’s. I pray that you experience this Joy every day of the year. There is a saying “tell me who is your friend and I will tell you who you are”. There is no St. Joseph’s School without the Friends of St. Joseph’s. I have no words to express my thanks to all of you for what you have done for our school, our children, our teachers, our non-teaching staff, the parents and the poor people in our community who enjoy every bit of your help especially during the Coronavirus pandemic. Your help is so appreciated. You bring JOY to people’s lives, light into their darkness of hunger and respect to their human dignity. May the baby Jesus bless you and crown you with dignity. When the whole world was suffering and undergoing many problems and experiencing such poverty, just like the poor widow who gave everything to God, you saw God in the poor and gave everything to feed them. May the baby Jesus bless you abundantly and grant you all your heart’s desires. May He wrap you with His love, peace, happiness, and always keep you safe. May He open the windows of heaven for you and pour down his blessings.

I raise my two hands up to heaven and thank the Lord with tears of joy that you are contributing to the purchase of a new school vehicle. It is not easy to get this huge amount of money and you are turning our dreams into reality.

“When I was a stranger you welcomed me into your home”. The family of Unisa who lost his wife (one of our hearing Impaired assistants in our Nursery School) was left with four children and was moving from house to house because the family couldn’t pay their rent and had been evicted. Your contribution will help him to finish building his small house. He and his children are very grateful to you. The School is feeding the children and we have given him a job to look after the school garden.

The Friends of St. Joseph’s are the living Bible. In difficult times when I was down and struggling to take a step, you gave me your shoulder to lean on by encouraging and helping. Whenever I try to think of where to turn, I hear the knock at my door from the Friends of St. Joseph’s telling me you are there to help me. I cannot forget your kindness. May the Babe of Bethlehem bless you richly.

Dear Friends: may the Christ child who came into the world that first Christmas Day grant you many blessings at this Christmas Season and throughout the New Year.

God bless you. Night and day I think of you all and pray for you all.

We are going to celebrate our Christmas by sharing our rice with the hungry, our joy with the children by giving biscuits and sweets, our love with unwanted orphans by giving clothes and by our smiles to those who have lost their peace of mind. We may not have things to decorate the street or road to welcome Jesus but we have pure hearts and charitable minds to welcome Jesus to be born in our hearts and in our lives. Where there is charity there is love, and where there is love there is God. May the Babe of Bethlehem bless us all.

Sr. Amala

If there are any ways in which you could support the school and the wonderful work by Sister Amala and all her staff, through donations, through fundraising activities, or by raising awareness among friends and family, we would be really grateful for any ideas or help. You can donate or set up a fundraising page at: www.virginmoneygiving.com/charities/FriendsofStJosephs

With all good wishes for a safe and peaceful Christmas from Linda Freestone (Chair) and the Trustees.

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