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Dear friends,

It has been a while since I last wrote to thank you for donations for the mission of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in the Uganda/Kenya Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Thank you for your generosity.

If you specify a particular place for your donation, it is used for that. Donations that are left open for us to decide are used for school fees for needy children or for some other great need.

In this letter, I will share an account of our ministry in the northeast of Uganda.



In 2007, in Naai Village in Moroto Diocese, our Sisters began visiting people dying of AIDS in the hospital. With that, we did what we could for the orphaned children.

When free Anti-Retro-Viral (ARV) medicines became available, Sr. Maria Eugenia began working with a team on ARVs themselves to visit the sick in their homes and teach them the importance of taking the medicine faithfully in order to live a normal life. This work continues, and the project has grown by leaps and bounds, particularly in the aspect of caring for the children of those who have AIDS.

After our sisters acquired 400 square metres of land in Naoi, they got funding from Misereor in Germany to build the Choose Life Home-Based Care Centre. An Italian donor, Isiem Si Puo, paid for them to bore for needed water. The Centre opened in May 2013 and was blessed by Bishop Henry Ssentongo.



The big hall in the Choose Life Centre is used for meetings and also for the after-school and holiday program for children of HIV AIDS clients. There's a smaller hall for a group of clients who do tailoring. A kitchen and storeroom enable us to give a nourishing meal of posho—maize flour—and beans to those who need extra food to cope with the strong ARVs they are taking. The centre also has a small office (with space to keep clients' files), a counselling room, some latrines and a small garden to cultivate vegetables.

Last year, a sponsor enabled us to buy two plots of land—one very close to the Centre and the other a little distance away. On the land close by, we are building six units, primarily to accommodate volunteers coming from overseas to serve here for a few months. These should be ready by May 2015. Since we do not expect to have more than three volunteers at a time, the remaining units can be rented to people we know well and be a source of income for the Centre. We are very aware that we have depended entirely on the generosity of donors and need to find ways to support this project ourselves.

The tailoring women have cleared the plot of land a little further away and used it to grow aloe vera. They will harvest the oil collectively and share the profits. After that we will use the land to generate income to run the Centre and to grow food for those who come for a meal in the middle of the day. The Choose Life Centre is a very busy place. An NGO from Trent in Italy has recently installed solar panels and batteries, so now there is light when needed and the possibility of recharging the computer and the mobile phone.

Before I share several stories about this mission in Naioi, let me show you its location in Uganda in more detail. This is with the help of illustrations from Google Maps and a Wikipedia article about the [Karamoja Region](#).



*Naioi Village is in the **Moroto District** in the **Karamoja Region** of Uganda.*

Remember Sister Maria Eugenia? The Karamojong people have named her "Itae."



***Christine Napeyok** on the day the Centre was opened, sharing her story with those who came for the celebration.*

Back in 2007, when Sr. Itae was just starting the Home-Based Care project, she and Sr. Paulina were visiting the AIDS patients in the hospital, and they heard a weak voice calling "Sisters, Sisters." They went toward the patient and found an emaciated young woman at the point of death, with her six-year-old son caring for her. She had already lost a baby. She said, "Sisters, pray for me. I am dying."

They said, "You are not dying. Make up your mind to live and you will live. We will help you. Never give up!" She believed them and from that moment began to improve.

Her name is Christine Napeyok, and she has had another two beautiful children. Now she is one of the co-coordinators of the Home-Based Care project. Just as she was saved by the Sisters, she has saved many others, giving them the will to live by telling them her own story.



Stella is in the tailoring group. She too was at the point of death and slowly recovered. It is only recently that we have seen her smile and come to realize what a beautiful woman she is. She is hardworking and competent in everything she does—a treasure for the Centre.

Then there is Florence, who could not control her drinking. She has slowly become a pillar of strength in the group, and the other women look up to her.

In the School of Life—the children of the clients, for whom we have a special project—there are also wonderful stories to tell. Godfrey was a boy who came and went, as the spirit moved him, from the school he was supposed to be attending. Of course, he had terrible results. Then he began coming to the Centre in the afternoon, after school, for the coaching program offered by the team of educators.



*School of Life children acting in a play on World AIDS Day, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014.*

He became interested, then keen, as he felt the desire of the educators to help him. He felt loved. In school he began to understand what the teachers were talking about. Once likely to drop out, he now comes first in his huge class.

The educators are a wonderful group of young people. Most of them dropped out of high school somewhere along the line for lack of school fees, but they get good results because of the formation on the job they receive from Sr. Itae. The strong emphasis is on loving the children they are trying to help, not teaching with a stick. Each week the educators meet to evaluate what they have achieved with the children. They have become, on the whole, a united and creative group.

With love and gratitude,  
Sr. Jo, rscj