

STTC Newsletter - February 2023

Solidarity Teacher Training College, Yambio, South Sudan



Holistic Education at STTC

The objectives of the College are to prepare competent, highly motivated and committed teachers, equipped with skills for peace building, respectful dialogue, and conflict resolution. The holistic education offered at STTC is in accord with the National Professional Standards for Teachers in South Sudan (September 2012). One hundred and forty students (80 male and 60 female) reside in the college dormitories; a further forty-five are non-residential Diploma and weekend (mode 2) Certificate students. In addition to the academic teacher training, the students are involved in organizing prayers & choir, mindfulness/meditation, gardening, cleanliness around the campus, taking care of the sick, conducting sports and games, organizing traditional cultural activities, conducting debates & forums, learning about sustainable-agricultural products, caring for the library and teaching resources, and more. It is a great model of all tribes living together peacefully as one family.



Sr Mumbi's Visit

STTC welcomed Sister Mumbi Kigutha, CPPS, the new president of Friends in Solidarity. After participating in the events organized for Pope Francis in Juba, Sr Mumbi, who resides in Chicago, USA, arrived in Yambio and spent a week at STTC to get to know more about the college and the programmes. She received a warm welcome from the staff and students with their typical singing and dancing. Sister Mumbi was so impressed with the students' commitment to their learning alongside their involvement in outreach programmes like offering computer education to local children and tuition in English to women from the neighbourhood. Above all, she was impressed with their commitment to living together across tribes and languages in solidarity with each other. The heartfelt prayer of Pope Francis in Juba is the core mission of STTC: 'Let us work tirelessly, dear brothers and sisters, for the peace that the Spirit of Jesus and the Father urges us to build: a peace that integrates diversity and promotes unity in plurality'.



Laudato Si' Movement

Conscious of our mission in the college and as future teachers, the Environmental Club takes the lead in reminding us of God's Creation through reflections and prayer services at Assembly and practical exercises in caring for the earth. All are challenged to 'invest in our planet' every day in a little way. The reflection-sharing by tutors and students on care for the environment is very encouraging. Constant reminder about saving water, avoiding the use of plastics, taking care of health and hygiene, collecting and disposing properly of waste, planting trees and flowers and watering them, and kind treatment to animals were among the responses. STTC's Environmental Club has changed its title to 'Laudato Si' Movement'.

Open University Course

STTC, with the help of generous sponsors in Ireland and in the US, provides opportunities to selected students to pursue Open University studies. The students do BSc Environmental Science, BA Early Childhood, and BA Primary Education. Sponsors meet their fees on a module-by-module basis. So far, one STTC tutor (male), 3 female STTC graduates and 2 current female STTC students are taking Open University modules. Two new students have been chosen from the current group - Zakia John and Annet Kajogo for BSc Environmental Science. Both students will undertake a single Open University module while completing their STTC studies. On Saturdays they work with Sr Jacinta Prunty alongside those who have successfully completed their first Open University modules at STTC.



Care for the Orphans

Whenever the students get opportunities to help people who are in a very poor condition, they don't hesitate to extend their helping hands. It is easy for them to understand and feel for those who are in need as they have experienced themselves some poor and risky conditions in their lives. Recently they came across a group of about sixty orphan children at Nzara, a nearby village, who were rescued from Tombura, a place that witnessed violence a year ago. They are the children of parents who have been killed and displaced elsewhere. STTC students visited the village not only to provide some relief materials but spent time with them. The visit was a consolation for the children; the chance for play and conversation with an adult whose focus is them is what all children need.

STTC Board Meeting

STTC Board meeting was held at the college convened by Fr Jim Greene, the Executive Director of Solidarity. Br Chris Soosai, the Principal, presented the report of the college elaborating various activities, regular Certificate programme (Mode-1) and weekend programme (Mode-2); Diploma in Education; outreach programmes (computer course to the children & English course to women); residential life, Open University course, pastoral support to the neighbouring parish, employees' welfare, and affiliation process. The Principal also shared the challenges and strengths of the college. The Board members discussed and proposed concrete action plans for the future. Important decisions have been taken to improve the infrastructure with more classrooms and large lecture halls, and to extend the Inservice programme (Qualified Teacher Status) to all the dioceses in order to train more teachers who are already in the teaching profession without recognised qualifications.



School Practice

Final semester STTC student-teachers undertook class teaching in the neighbouring primary schools. They managed the challenge of diverse settings - under the mango tree, in the church, in crowded classrooms with and without walls, roofs, benches and desks - thus demonstrating an ability to cope in school contexts that reflect the current reality of South Sudan. The student teachers applied the classroom management strategies they have studied that support effective learning and inclusion. The current group were especially creative in making teaching aids, bringing colour, variety and fun to the learning process. Bright pictures of local scenes, number cards, sentence strips, cubes, abacuses of various design, dress-up clothes, hygiene items, even a fishing pond were among the resources used to enliven the teaching. The final school practice is assessed by external examiners as well as STTC tutors; the Year 2 Semester 2 group was assessed by Professor Sibrino Barnaba Forojalla, Dean, School of Education, University of Juba, and Mr Zikino Thomas Zaniwe, Deputy Director for Basic Education, Ministry of Education for Western Equatoria State. The eagerness of the children to learn was remarked on by all, student teachers and observers.



Safeguarding Session

Within days of arrival to STTC, new students and tutors are given very full and explicit instruction on the Solidarity Safeguarding of Minors and Vulnerable Adults policy. Br Chris Soosai, principal, took the Year 1 Semester 1 students and the new tutor through the policy over two days, in clear and simple language, covering physical, sexual and emotional abuse. This awareness-raising and training in safeguarding policies and procedures takes time. To understand with the intellect is not enough; true compliance requires a profound respect for the dignity of all persons. This is lifelong learning. From the active engagement of the new students a good foundation now appears to be in place. Periodic briefings and updates of training will, we hope, help all to fulfill their responsibilities in this regard, and make the college itself a safe and happy place where all reach their potential.

Reconciliation Session

The reconciliation evening session held by Sister Mumbi was, for the students, a highlight of her visit to STTC. She shared on trauma, reconciliation and forgiveness. Among the points recalled as especially valuable by some senior students was her reflection on the role of counsellor: 'Sharing our difficulties and what pains us, to tell it out so your heart will be empty, you will forget the problem as you have shared'; 'holding on to problems will isolate you'. Trauma healing needs counsellors. In reconciliation, a mediator can help. The sense that you need not carry the pain alone, that there are others to whom you can, and should, talk, featured prominently in the feedback. The skills of counselling - building a relationship of trust and confidentiality, 'so that people will come without fear, not retreat', focusing on that person, 'express your care and readiness to help' - are applicable to the teacher role as well as to the students' own lives. In her closing words she spoke of how, to succeed, you must face challenges. However, do not to give up on life. Education is key, she urged the women in particular. Sr Mumbi was speaking to their reality.



Celebrating South Sudan's Diverse Cultures at STTC



Cultural Day was celebrated in the College on 10 February. The student-teachers, who come from different tribes and states of South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, were proud to exhibit the richness of their cultures through traditional songs, dances, art and drama. Solidarity focuses on peace and reconciliation and the promotion of unity among the diverse peoples of South Sudan. Appreciation and respect for the diverse cultures of South Sudan is embedded in all programmes of the college. The students displayed their excellent traditional dances and songs, and their ingenuity with costumes and props. It was delightful to watch how the students join with other tribes to learn their traditional dances and music. Throughout the practice sessions as well as the day itself, there was a great sense of unity and fraternal love.

