

PARTNERPLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



Gillian Rose - Bangladesh January 2017

Bollobhpur Hospital
PO Kedargonj
District Meherpur
Bangladesh

Gillian Rose is an
Ecumenical Partner of the
Church of Bangladesh Group

Christmas 2016

You chose the virgin Mary full of grace
to be the mother of our Lord and Saviour;
Fill us with your grace
that in all things we may accept your holy will
and with her rejoice in your salvation____

Dear Friends in Scotland



Monday 19th December 2016 and I am in the classroom invigilating the final midwifery examinations as I put pen to paper to bring our Christmas greetings and thanks to all who have been alongside us during the year.

Advent season's 4th Sunday has flown by and Christmas day is very near and obviously my greetings will arrive very late but better late than never and we hope you will all have a wonderful and blessed time together as we celebrate yet again the birth of a very special baby many many years ago in a stable at Bethlehem.

As a midwife I always ponder over those words in Luke's Christmas story – "and she brought forth her firstborn son, and laid him in a manger", as giving birth to a first child is not as easy as those few words seem to suggest, and I wonder and hope that the inn-keeper's wife or some other kind soul came to help Mary and no doubt the animals in their stalls surrounded her with their love and warm breath. So far off and yet to near as we help mothers to give birth to their babies at Bollobhpur Hospital every day.

It does not seem long since I signed off my last newsletter and I hope everyone received it and is up to date with our news.

December 1st brought the lighting of the Advent candle and a candle lit procession around the village. Each house had a lighted candle at its gate and many stars appeared on Bollobhpur's horizon including the beautiful Christmas star our Babu has swung high on a bamboo pole over the hospital gate.

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And stars are no longer the stars of previous years, frames covered with yellow cloth or paper and it up by a lightbulb inside. Now stars are a medley of coloured light bulbs flashing off and on in rhythm to light the wise men in their search for the child. Yes, it seems that Bangladesh is no longer behind in any way, every kind of electrical device seems to be available, even in a village like Bollobhpur.

Thursday 8th December brought forty one girls from all over Bangladesh to sit the entrance examination for training in our nurses training centre next year. It was all great fun fitting them and their guardians in, getting them all fed and organised. The girls not only sat the examination and appeared at the interview but they also visited the hospital and made friends with those already in training and visited some historic sites nearby.

The aim of bringing them together to see the hospital and the sort of work they will be doing and to make friends, is to try to reduce drop outs from training, which is becoming all too frequent in the age of mobile phones and quick and easy short cuts, and easy availability of false certificates on payment!!

December 16th 2016 and Victory Day is being celebrated all over the country again, the day in 1971 when with the help of forces from India, the Pakistan army was finally defeated, paving the way to independence for Bangladesh, previously a part of Pakistan.



As usual our girls put on a variety evening for their patients and attendants with competition for song, dance, poetry reading and drama, all centring on the happenings at that time. Again the entries are of a high standard, and it is hard for the judges to decide who is the winner. The first prize in patriotic song went to a very surprised Papri, a third year student at the end of her training, who had never sung in public before! The dance was easily won by first year student Sheila, depicting a grey haired widowed mother in a widow's white clothing, at a railway line, waiting and waiting for the son who never returns from the war.

The dramas were realistic and hilarious with booted Pakistani soldiers, cooking pots for helmets on their heads, being mown down by the wiry Bengali freedom fighters. Afterwards simple prizes for everyone and the ward is put back to rights and the patients return to their beds. Indeed an evening to remember.

Saturday 17th December brought our end of the year Christmas community health meeting. And this meeting is special in that all the teaching on different health topics during the monthly meetings is brought together in drama, as each group has a different subject to prepare and bring out the health message through their acting. We saw how big black mosquitoes bite people in the daytime and spread Zika Virus. Another group had us in stitches showing the perils of marrying girls off at too young an age.

Another group showed how easy it is to get heat stroke from exposure to the hot midday sun, and how to treat it. And another drama reminded us how easily diarrhoea is spread by lack of cleanliness.

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The meeting ends with tea and cake and then there is the lucky dip with presents for all, ending with a time of prayer and thanksgiving for all the blessings received through our community work during the year. Again an afternoon to be remembered.

Wednesday 21st December and a sad day for us as we had to say goodbye to Monju in the early hours of the morning. You will remember Monju who trained as a nurse here and who was diagnosed with insulin dependent diabetes during the first month of her training. Her son Mark was born here and the family had returned from Dhaka to spend their holidays with us here year by year. Monju lost her sight to her diabetes several years ago but has coped with life well since, independently running her own household. She returned to us recently, very ill and anaemic but with 4 units of blood transferred and careful treatment she returned to Dhaka for Mark to finish his school year and sit for his end of year examinations, the programme being that they should return to spend Christmas with us as in previous years.

But in those six weeks in Dhaka it became apparent that her diabetes was gradually destroying her kidneys also. Her husband Lazar at his wits end as to what to do. I bought the family to Bollobhpur by private car and the junior nurses were with her day and night giving loving care and she was surrounded by prayer. But God's plan for her was different and she died quietly, of complete kidney failure, in the midst of us in the quiet hours of the night, in the hospital that she loved, in the hospital where she had cared for her tiny 1.3kg son Mark, the hospital where she had spent most of her holidays.



And in the morning, according to the Church's tradition, she was carefully washed, dressed in the new clothes her husband had brought for her to wear on Christmas day, her face beautifully made up and lain in the hurriedly made coffin for all to see and grieve over, with candles and incense sticks adding to her beauty, before Lazer and Mark took her to the family home in Khulna for burial. Mark was eight years old in October and not able to take in the enormity of what had happened. Monju was just 35. Please remember Lazar and Mark as they remake their lives.

Christmas Day and the students run the wards with me alongside while the trained staff have the day off to spend with their families. We have a new Christmas baby and a new arrival for one of the incubators. And in the background, the off duty girls are cooking a succulent chicken curry to eat with their midday rice. We are not able to join the Christmas morning service but were able to go to the evening celebration on Christmas Eve and receive our Christmas communion then.

And after the night duty girls took over the wards, the others disappeared to the kitchen to roll out and fry mounds of lucheas (fried breads) for their breakfast in the morning and a huge pan of tasty lentil soup bubbled alongside on the stove, while others made last minute additions to the beautiful decorations they had made and put up in the wards and departments. And as the church bell rang out at midnight they erupted from their hostel to sing carols around the compound to bring the message of Christmas to their mainly Muslim patients and attendants on the ward.

Monday 26th December and our M.P. arrives with other 'high ups' to open the Christmas mela (fair) a tradition of Bollobhpur's church family and already stalls have sprung up all around the playing fields and vendors are dispersing hot sweet tea and snacks as the weather has turned cold and scarfs and mufflers have come out of storage!

We are busy in out-patients attending to the waiting patients but are pleased by a surprise visit by our M.P himself, who is interested to see our elderly inmates of the Geriatric Ward. It is strange

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that care of the elderly brings many visitors to the ward; obviously this is not common to Bangladesh, where the elderly are often neglected and uncared for, and the health or other government services have no provision for older people. And it has been a great joy to me to be able to put elderly care into action, and our community workers take care into the village homes as well. Indeed our Superintendent of Police suddenly arrived from Meherpur recently with friends and family bringing two sacks full of gifts for them to eat and to use. We are grateful indeed.

Tuesday 27th and Wednesday 28th December brings our Senior girls in from the village clinics and a new group go to relieve them from their operation theatre training in Rajshahi. And on Friday 30th they congregate in the office to say their goodbyes and receive their certificates, for their training is complete and they will be leaving us in the morning. And it will be no time at all when they are letting us know of the new work they have started in hospitals and clinics and community programmes all over the country.

And in no time at all a new group will be arriving to start their training and all will move up a room in their hostel and start another year of their training.



Sunday January 1st 2017 and with grateful thanks to God for the privilege of stepping into another new year I bring my letter to a close.

Last night saw us saying goodbye to the old year in a lighted church then emerging a long candle lit procession to encircle the playing field, and finally to gather around a huge bonfire lit for the occasion, whilst the more able dance and sing as they circle around the fire, candles held high. I have the newest of students with me and they are thrilled.

And today New Year's day, the church bell is ringing and according to tradition, everyone, young and old, gathers for the sung parish communion service, sitting squashed together on the floor as the church building is not big enough to hold everyone on such an occasion, and the congregation spills out into the verandah and the paths.

A lovely tradition, everyone beginning the new year together in the beautifully decorated church, praying and praising together and seeking blessing and guidance for the days that lie ahead. I am humbled to be able to be there amongst them.

So I close with our greetings and New Year's blessings and thanks for continuing alongside us. May God's riches blessings be with you all this New Year.