

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



Gillian Rose - Bangladesh July 2015

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Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday 31st May 2015 and the year is rushing by and it is high time to put pen to paper again to bring up up-to-date with news from Bollobhpur. It is a cloudy day as I write, and a brisk breeze is bringing relief from the high temperatures that 'El Nina' is bringing, with my wall thermometer registering 40°C on my verandah.



I thought this was hot until the daily paper brought news of temperatures soaring to 50°C (122°F) in parts of India, with the horrific loss of life that this is bringing especially to the vulnerable and the poor. Actually, such high temperatures are beyond imagination and I can only thank God that in this forgotten corner of rural Bangladesh we are so very, very fortunate with our weather.



Obviously we experience violent tropical storms with thunder and lightning and gale force winds, but hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, flooding etc, events that bring so much death and destruction to so many people in so many areas, such events are unknown here and it is rare that crops in the fertile fields are lost or destroyed by pests or other diseases. God is good and on the whole people lead good clean lives. HIV or AIDS are diseases unheard of in the area, and with the improvement of sanitary facilities, diarrhoea is also no longer a scourge of the hot season, and hospital

admissions for diarrhoeal diseases have dropped dramatically.

But to recap; Lent was on the horizon when I signed off my last letter on February 15th, a new set of student nurses had arrived and were settling in and the incubators were full of new babies.

Wednesday February 18th brought another Ash Wednesday with the early morning parish communion service, the church was packed to the doors and spilling out onto the verandah, everyone filing up to the altar rail to receive the sign of the cross in ash on their foreheads, and to be reminded once again, "Remember, you are a sinner" – a fact not easily forgotten by the majority of us!! And after the service, out to our village and clinics and different areas of work.

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Monday 23rd February brought us another new and beautiful baby calf, this time the first issue of one of our elderly cow Junu's offspring. We were concerned for her wellbeing but she delivered easily by herself and we were pleased.



February 26th & 27th brought final examinations for the new 2nd year group. They had studied well, eager to commence midwifery classes with me, and most of them passed well. Since then we have started classes together and they are going to the antenatal clinic and to the maternity ward to learn from their seniors.

Monday, March 2nd and coming out of the hospital chapel I was rewarded by the sight of a brightly coloured Hoopoe, his long curved bill busily searching the ground for grubs, his beautiful pink, white and black plumage brilliant in the morning sun. Michael, our laboratory technician and I stood watching for a while, marvelling afresh at the amazing beauty and diversity of God's creation. This is only my second sighting of a Hoopoe in all my many years in Bangladesh. And it is not possible to express the enormous delight these things give me.

Saturday March 14th brought our monthly community health meeting, with everyone gathering together to share monthly reports and learn something new together to take back into the community. Today, our Sister Nilsury, brought relevant teaching on gall bladder diseases; for gall stones and other problems are no longer uncommon in the rural villages and our community workers can help and advise people to come early rather than too late to seek help and treatment. Also they promote healthy living and prevention of these and other illnesses.

Lent has brought the weekly Friday Lenten services in the church and a prayer meeting in every house in the village. We invited the "Earthen vessels" group to lead a prayer and praise meeting, all gathered under the lychee tree, staff and students and patients and their attendants all worshipping together in the candle lit darkness, a moving and memorable time, and a wonderful preparation for Holy week and Easter. Also a time of witness to our majority Muslim patients.



Thursday April 2nd and it is goodbye to classes today as all join together to create a beautiful Easter garden under the mango tree in front of the out-patients department. It is all there – the Kidron brook, the olive trees, the three crosses on the hill, the empty cave with the stone rolled away. Again a witness to what we are and what we believe as we live and work and serve in this majority Muslim area.

And at 6 o'clock in the evening, the bell is ringing and we all go to church for the Maundy Thursday communion service of remembrance, and during the reading of the gospel, Billiani our parish priest, strips himself of his vestments, girds a towel around his waist and begins to wash the feet of the twelve disciples who have gathered together for the Passover meal. And after his feet are washed "Judas Iscariot" gets up and goes out and "it is night".

And all is vividly brought back to mind as we experience anew how it all began, those many years ago in that upper room at Jerusalem and we receive the sacrament together and feel our lives have been changed.

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Good Friday April 3rd brings the three hours of devotion at every church in the Church of Bangladesh and I am again, as in the past two years, at Kejura parish for the two weekly general clinic there. And after attending to the patients we go across to the tiny parish church to join the three hours at the foot of the cross, sitting on the floor together, as different people from the parish bring teaching on the precious “seven words” that were spoken from the cross. Always a very special time.



Easter eve brings the service of light when everyone brings candles to light from the Pascal Candle, ready to take the light out into the village streets to proclaim the joy of the resurrection. But it is windy and pouring with rain and the candle lit procession is confined to the darkened church for “Christ is Risen. Alleluya”.

The girls return, some to the wards for night duty and the others to their kitchen to knead and roll the traditional festive fried breads, while a huge pan of savoury lentils is bubbling away on the fire – their choice for their Easter morning

breakfast.

Easter Sunday begins with Easter carols around the Easter garden as, their cooking complete, the girls spill out into the grounds to sing and dance and welcome the new day. For Bengali carols are repetitive, with one leading and the others following repeating the same two lines many times, before progressing to the next lines. And this is accompanied by dancing in a circle, clapping, with banging of drums and cymbals and someone has brought a plate and spoon to add to the enjoyment!!

And after a good time I direct them firmly in the direction of their hostel, as they need to go to bed to be up in time for the morning parish communion service, and those who are on morning duty must be on the wards by 7 o'clock.

Easter Day I am on ward duty with the students taking responsibility for the work all the trained staff having a special day off to spend the festival with their families. We have a new Easter baby and the incubators are full of small occupants and there are several new admissions to keep everyone busy.

And a succulent chicken curry is being served to our geriatric patients with their midday rice, and the girls are enjoying it too, with all, except the afternoon duty staff, retiring to to their beds to sleep it all off. God's arrangement of our lives is awesome if you think about it carefully. He knew that his people needed high days and festivals and holidays, and that life could not be one round of working days with no change of relief!!

But to get back to work!!!

Monday April 6th found our driver Rintu taking five excited girls to Rajshahi Christian Hospital for their operation room experience not by car though but by bus as we still have not dared to put our hard earned vehicle back on the road again there are still sporadic petrol bomb attacks, though hopefully we will try a trip to Khulna next month. This month the Khulna clinic change is also by bus, Babu taking the group in the morning and returning with the previous girls in the evening. And Rintu has also managed to make the return trip too and the returning girls are full of what they have seen and learnt. We are grateful to Dr Aniplya at our diocese in Rajshahi city hospital for making this training available to our girls.



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Monday 13th April brought the new preliminary training school girls final examination, but sadly this has been an unstable group and five have already dropped out of the previous 18 starters. But those who remain pass the examination well and on Sunday May 3rd, during the parish communion service they filed to the front to receive their new cap and uniforms and to repeat the Nightingale Nurses oath, with its promise of leading good lives and upholding the standard of nursing.

Saturday April 25th brought of course the “earthquake”. We were seeing the women attending the antenatal clinic when suddenly everything began to shake. We could laugh about the experience but how horrific for those at the epicentre in Nepal. May God preserve us from such happenings and grant quick relief to those who have lost so much.

May 1st 2015 and a flurry of building materials have flooded in to the grounds as US have generously donated an extra building for our overcrowded students, and we are trying to see how and where we can fit it in without overcrowding everything. We are grateful indeed to them for their thoughtfulness and generosity. Thank you so very much.

Saturday May 9th brought a welcome speaker from the Leprosy Mission to our community health meeting. We did not realise leprosy was so common as we do not see it or maybe recognise it in our area. We were grateful to gain more knowledge to take into the community. It has been all change in the clinics with the seniors coming in to the hospital to prepare for their final examinations next month and the newest case nurses going out excitedly to relieve them.

The fruit season has come to an end with the lychees stripped of their fruits. These will fetch a high price in the city markets and although two good storms brought down hundreds of still unripe mangoes from the trees, baskets full of the juicy fruit are being shipped daily to the capital and we too are lucky in having friends with fruit trees and are able to enjoy them too.

Monkeys have been very low on the horizon this year – maybe the fruit harvest has been better over the border in India and so they do not need to come to search for food here. And in the wards, suicidal poisoning cases have been frequent admissions and though all have recovered and gone home to their families, it is a black spot for the neighbourhood and we are lost for an answer as to how to combat it. There are so many different reasons, many trivial and no real reason at all.

Monday May 25th brought goodbye to our patriarchal cow Junu, now 18 years old and a mother of sixteen. She had lost most of her teeth and could not eat properly and we decided it would be foolish to keep her on to old age. And being a big cow she fetched a good price, well beyond our expectations. She has provided fuel for the biogas plant, manure for the garden and a sturdy calf every year. We miss her.

And to finish on a new note, the river Boirab, which flows at the foot of my garden and behind the hospital is being deepened and widened and this for a stretch of many miles as far as Meherpur. The government is hoping for a deal with India to receive a greater supply of water but I wonder whether India has enough water for itself!

It is Sunday again as I close and no sign of my dogs coming for Sunday baths, despite the intense heat!!

With our greetings and thanks.

