

# PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



## Gillian Rose - Bangladesh November 2013

Bollobhpur Hospital  
PO Kedargonj  
District Meherpur  
Bangladesh

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

Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2013 and many weeks have flown by since I signed off my last letter to you all on July 14<sup>th</sup>. And today is not only the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity in the Church's year (and I heard someone commenting this morning that Christmas will soon be here!) but today is also the festival day of St Michael and all Angels, and my mind flies back to the same day in 1964 when I set sail from Liverpool docks for my first trip abroad, to what was then East Pakistan; Bangladesh was still to be born.



And a memorable trip it was, in a small one class liner, just three hundred and fifty or so passengers, most of us "Mission Partners", some on their first assignments as I was, others veteran "Missionaries" returning to their work after furlough. And I was blessed in being able to enjoy such a wonderful trip – I think this was the last trip that liner took before retirement, and from the 1970's all travel began to be done by air.



The 'Night Queen' in flower at midnight

We sailed through the Mediterranean Sea, watching the huge red sun sink into the water at sunset, through the Suez Canal watching the Nomads with their tents and camels, stopping at Aden to bathe in the hot sea water, then on again to Karachi, port city of West Pakistan where many disembarked to finish the journey by flying over India to East Pakistan. I personally have never been happy about air travel, though forced by circumstances to fly in later years, but this time I continued with the ship to the Indian city of Bombay (now Mumbai) and afterwards crossing India by train to Calcutta, three nights and two interesting days crossing the huge subcontinent

and a marvellous experience for someone who had never left England before.

At Calcutta I spent a few days with the Oxford Mission Sisters, finally finishing my journey by crossing into East Pakistan by train to Khulna, and then the long, slow trip, a night and a day, by river steamer, passing through the Sunderbans ('beautiful forest') and the waterways of this delta land, finally arriving at my destination; the Oxford Mission house at Barical, where I was to spend the first five years of my service abroad.

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Strange to say, as a schoolgirl, my aim was always to be a 'missionary' in Africa!! But the Lord led me along another path, and I am still, many years later, in the country of my first calling. And again today, as I remember the beginnings of it all, I give thanks to God for the wonderful life He has given and is giving me. Praise Him.

But to return to Bollobhpur a steady rain is falling as I begin to write, a wonderful cooling respite from three weeks of intense heat. Everything looks greener and fresher in the vegetable garden as if the vegetables and shrubs are as relieved as we are at the advent of the long awaited rain. The hospital has been busy over the past few months and is now into a few slack days giving everyone time to catch up on things.

But to recap.

Monday July 1<sup>st</sup> brought out Senior Sister Nilsury back to her duties again. Nilsury has been on study leave for three years and has completed her Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing at Kumondini Nursing College, a Hindu institution in the north of the country. We are not only happy to have her back with us for her wonderful gift of dedicated bedside nursing, an important part of nursing the sick that tends to get lost in this modern machine orientated age, but we are also proud to have been able to make further study available to one of our senior staff.

Nilsury will now take responsibility for much of the teaching in the nursing school and especially to see that the students put into practice on the hospital wards what they have learned in the classroom.



The newest group of girls

July 15<sup>th</sup> Monday brought another new group of girls, eager and fresh with their bags and bedding and happy to have gained a seat in our Nursing school. As usual they are a varied group, and this time the group contains ten tribal girls, three from the Garo community at Mymensingh and seven from very poor Santal tribal homes in the Rayshahi area of the country.

It always gives me great joy to train these girls, to watch them mature and blossom into good competent nurses and midwives. Many of such of these are now working in hospitals and clinics all over the country. With them are

three local girls from neighbouring villages and four from the low lying villages of the south of the country. Please pray with us for them as they start their journey into the world of nursing.

July 20<sup>th</sup> and all change for the girls on rotation duty as the outstation village clinics. This includes the monthly visit to Khulna for oxygen, medicine supplies and to support Reba and handicapped Kalpona at the clinic.

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July found us at our Kejura clinic for the clinic management committee meeting. The work goes well there and the committee is pleased. I miss the clinic's dog who always rushed to the car to welcome me. She died suddenly a couple of months ago and Pascolina has not yet replaced her.

Wednesday July 31<sup>st</sup> and five of our Laboratory Technician training students complete their 18 months training. Pray God they find good stable employment and also remember to help the family at home. Most come from very poor homes and as I have mentioned before their income can transform a family home.

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The lights have been burning well into the night in the classroom with the solar lights springing into action during a power cut and on Thursday and Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> August the second year girls sat their final Anatomy and Physiology examinations, eager to pass and start their midwifery classes with me. Meanwhile the Final Midwifery examination results have arrived from Rajshahi and praise God, all have passed, including Muslim convert Moyna, who had missed out on several years of schooling, and also physically handicapped Rikta for whom the theoretical part of the course has been tough going. They will now have their three months operating theatre training at Joyranakura Baptist hospital and gain experience taking charge of the wards at night, before leaving us at the end of December.

Saturday August 31<sup>st</sup> brought a training session on HIV and AIDS for the two most junior groups. It is important that they have a good grounding on this subject, for it is amongst patients, many like these, that they will spend their nursing life. They need to know how to keep free of such things. The session also included teaching on drug misuse, a thing that is already becoming a burden for the youth of the country, and many fall into the clutches of drug taking, young women as well as men, and many young lives are being ruined.

Bollobhpur village itself has a huge drug problem amongst the youth which our energetic parish priest Rev Billiani is relentlessly hunting down and trying to crush. Pray with us for the village that we can free the youngsters from the curse of drug taking. And so we educate our students from the beginning of their training on the dangers of getting mixed up with drugs and how to recognise early signs so as to be able to help others to steer clear.



The new group of boys (Laboratory students)

Friday September 20<sup>th</sup> found me invigilating the entrance examination for our 18 month laboratory technician training. Seven young men vied for five places. Finally five were selected to replace those who had recently completed their training and on Wednesday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, they were in chapel for our morning prayers at 8am all fresh and smart in white shirts and navy blue trousers, eager to begin the course.

Probably, as the days pass by, they will no longer be as punctual or as careful of their dress, but it has been a hopeful start. Please pray with us that they can finish the course as they have begun, with no 'drop outs' on the way. And in the meantime, Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September found a group of very excited senior girls, boarding the car for the drive to Joyranikura and their three months Operation Theatre and Surgical nursing training. The start was at the crack of dawn for the militant Muslim group have called for another general strike for tomorrow which means the car must return today, no matter how late.

We send our driver Rintu, as guardian for the girls, as we are now 'vehicle-less' again and once more relaying on hired cars. Our new car have us wonderful service for almost six months, until on the way back from bringing oxygen cylinders from Khulna, it stalled, stopped and by no effort was persuaded to start again. Local garages and workshops could not help or fathom out the workings of this Japan-made vehicle. A skilled mechanic was sent from Dhaka and he too finally admitted failure. The end of the story is that the car was ignominiously towed back to Dhaka on Bishop's orders and is still languishing in the garage from where it was bought. And to date we have heard no more news!!

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> September and Rintu returned just before midnight with the seven girls who had just completed their training, a great relief. I am never happy until I see their safe return. They piled

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out of the car, tired but happy, and pleased that they had had the opportunity for the training and experience. Again my thanks go to Dr Taposh and Dr Lucy for making the training available.

And to return to the strikes 'hartals' that are being called frequently – the country is in a time of political chaos, with no one listening to anyone else. General elections on the horizon with still no consensus on how they should be held. The trial of war criminals continues, stirring up hatred from the parties they represent, and turning the strikes and shut downs into deadly hooliganism and bloody mayhem. Hundreds of vehicles, cars, buses even trains have been set alight and burned and ruined. The latest deadly deed being the setting trucks on fire with the drivers in the cab, even to the pouring kerosene on the driver himself and setting him alight with his truck.

The daily newspapers reported the deaths of three such truck drivers in the Dhaka medical hospital burn unit. It is almost impossible to believe, but it is happening, and people (mostly youths who have been educated in Madrassas (religious schools) are turning into criminals as they perpetrate such deeds. Bengali Christians read of the deadly bomb attack on Christians at Peshawar in Pakistan and wonder and fear that the same may happen in Bangladesh. No one feels secure anymore and the imminent elections bring more fears for the party that wins will not remain quiet but will instigate a reign of terror against those who they think did not vote for them including especially the minority groups. This has happened so often before and so no one's mind is at rest.

Sunday October 6<sup>th</sup> and I finally find time to bring my letter to a close. Tomorrow October 7<sup>th</sup> brings our second 'Eye Camp' of the year and we are expecting the team from the National Society for the blind hospital in Siromoni near Khulna. Sister Mary is putting the list with everyone's special duties for the day and I am soon to go across to the outpatients department with the students to prepare the rooms for the occasion. I, at last, have a camera which has remained unused since I bought it, the day's fly by in such a rush of different duties. But tomorrow hopefully we can take some pictures of our Eye Camp in progress and send to you.



The 'Eye Camp' group

And on Monday October 7<sup>th</sup> our Eye Camp has been a great success. Many received advice and treatment and 28 patients were helped onto the bus by us, en route for the hospital at Siromoni and surgery the next day. The group included Nasir, going for his second lens replacement.

I first found Nasir when he was about to take his A level examinations but diabetes was diagnosed and poor eyesight finally put a stop to his studies. With

his second eye operation on, we hope he may be able to see well enough to do our 18 months

laboratory training course. Please keep him, and indeed all of us, in your prayers.

It is late and my dog Tom has arrived on my bed and is making himself comfortable with one of the pillows. Mosquitoes are out in force, and a group of fireflies are twinkling off and on against the dark sky.

God's blessings and greetings from us all.

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