

PARTNERPLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



Gillian Rose - Bangladesh March 2010

Bollobhpur Hospital
PO Kedargonj
District Meherpur
Bangladesh

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

Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday February 14th, and the Sunday before Lent, and also St Valentine's Day, and I note that I signed off my last letter to you on November 22nd last year, in time to reach you all before Christmas, and that it is high time to get a letter into the post as 2010 speeds on its way.

January seemed to get lost this year, it sped away so swiftly, and now February is half spent, bringing our two months of winter to an end. For Bangladesh has six seasons, each of two months each, and today is the first day of spring and it is a beautiful day, with the temperature in the low 70's, and a light breeze beginning to dislodge the leaves that have remained dry and dead on the trees during the winter. New green growth is showing green against the blue of the sky, and my two dogs are lying sprawled out on the crunchy carpet of leaves covering the vegetable patch.



In front of the hospital wards the new mothers are out in the sun with their babies in their laps, exposing them to the morning sky and rubbing mustard oil into their small bodies to strengthen them and the girls on morning duty are bathing them one by one, and helping the mothers with breast feeding.

A peaceful and idyllic scene indeed, but the state of the country does not reflect the scene! Despite the efforts of the new Government, the old activities continue. Bribery and corruption in every quarter, folk in responsible and high positions amassing illegal wealth. Large amounts of bribe money are required to obtain any government funded post, for instance in hospitals, schools, colleges and universities. Bribe money is needed to get a child into a college, or into a nursing school or college. Traders are held up at knife or gun point and money demanded and failure to give, or any show of resistance, causes loss of life. Contractors cannot get on with any construction work without paying money to the local gangs who arrive with their knives to intercept the work.

Political clashes between students in the country's universities are claiming lives and causing frequent closing down and disruption of studies. Young women are still being married ("sold") with huge dowries or bridal price demanded, and the daily papers still bring horrifying reports of young

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married women being killed by husband or mother-in-law for not bringing more money from her father.

But the report that shocked and horrified me the most during the recent weeks was the story of a school, where the teacher fell out with the headmaster over the sharing of the bribe money paid by the new teachers just appointed. And in the resultant brawl, the headmaster was killed by his own school's teachers!! Unbelievable, but it is happening, and the daily papers do not make pretty reading.

But to return to Bollobhpur.....

December 2009 brought end of the year examinations for all groups, so there was much preparation, and lights burned well into the night. Frequent electricity cuts – (load shedding!) no longer caused problems, as the solar lighting springs into action and no ones preparation is hampered.

The second year group sat their half year midwifery examinations and it is good to be able to report that there were no failures, and all are now proudly wearing their 3rd Year red striped caps. The senior group successfully completed their hospital final examinations and sat the external Final Midwifery examinations before Christmas and are anxiously awaiting the results. The 1st Year group will be sitting their 1st Year examinations in the first week of January, eager to earn their 2nd Year orange striped caps.

Wednesday December 16th 2009 brings the annual public holiday to celebrate Victory Day, the day the war with what was then West Pakistan was won, aided by the Indian forces which stepped in to help, and East Pakistan became today's independent Bangladesh. The day is celebrated across the country, especially in schools and colleges, for the majority of the ordinary Bangladeshi people are peace loving and law abiding folk who love their country.

Our girls too celebrated as usual with a festival of song and dance, single and group drama and as usual it is difficult for Mary and husband Arun and I (who are the judges) to decide who should get the prizes, all entries are so good. And Bangladesh is a land of poetry and song, especially renowned for the writings of Robindranath Tagore, and following the war of independence many beautiful songs and poetry were written, and it was a joy to hear these sung by our girls. And the same deeply moving poem read this year by a new reader, wins first prize again, and there are tears in everyone's eyes as they hear once more of the mother, waiting and scanning the horizon, and preparing the different traditional foods as the months pass by for the son who never returns home. The new 1st Year group excel in the group drama, portraying what actually happened to women and children at the time. And although versatile Ila has left us, training complete, she has a successor in Sarnila, also a tribal girl from Ila's home area, and Sarnila's beautifully rendered song nearly won 1st prize, as did her beautiful dancing. The whole programme is staged in the middle of the ward, and the patients with their children and relatives enjoy it too, and the girls bring the Geriatric Ward patients in chairs and on sticks to join in. They once performed a small drama themselves several years ago and won a prize but the present occupants are very frail, and chirpy Lotika, who once did a dance to much applause, is now heavily reliant on her stick, though mentally as willing and active as ever.

The evening finishes with the prize giving and giving of thanks, then the putting of the ward back to right before the night nurses take over for the night. I thank God once again that Bollobhpur is such a happy place.

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The previous Saturday December 12th brought our monthly Community Health meeting, and this is the Christmas meeting and after the sharing of the monthly reports each group brings health teaching in the form of drama, and the meeting ends with a lucky dip and presents for all, a small thank you for another year of working to improve the health and nutrition of the women and children of the surrounding villages.

And after the meeting all pile into the hospital car for the monthly visit to our clinic at Nityanandapur, for it is "all change" weekend for the girls getting experience at the village outstation clinics, and tomorrow we must be up at dawn for the 4 weekly visit to our clinic at Khulna, to catch up on all their news, give support to Kalpona in her little laboratory, and fetch medical supplies, and have the oxygen cylinders refilled at the Oxygen Company.

Friday December 18th 2009 and the Hospital Management Committee meeting today, the third meeting of the year and we are grateful for their support and advice. And in the background the girls can be seen putting up gay coloured paper to make Christmas decorations for the wards and departments and the night nurses spend the next few nights putting the decorations up, in between nursing their patients, feeding the babies and looking after the maternity ward and delivering new babies. Their enthusiasm and energy never wanes!

December 24th and Christmas Eve and the off duty girls spend time helping to decorate the parish church and also to create a stable in the centre of the hospital grounds and with groundsman Babu's help to erect a large illuminated star to lead the wise men to the child in the manger.

By 6 o'clock the church bell is ringing us to the first service of the Christmas celebrations and leaving a handful of senior girls on the wards the rest of us answer the call of the bell and join the village people streaming to church for a beautiful and moving parish communion service. We all receive our communion together then return, the night nurses to the wards, me to take over responsibility for the hospital while the staff take a special day off for Christmas and the rest of the girls to their kitchen. They spend half the night making and frying 'luchees' (fried breads) for their Christmas breakfast, plucking and preparing several fat chickens for the Christmas curry, before they all stream out to sing carols and dance around the stable after the night guard sounds out 12 o'clock on the gong.

Christmas Day and the day begins with Parish Communion, the congregation spilling out onto the verandah and the paths. The girls work short shifts, running the wards themselves, with me in the background to help them as necessary and spend the rest of the day visiting home and relations if they have anyone within reach. The girls from distant places enjoy the chicken curry together, and as a special treat are allowed to watch films in the classroom.

There are several empty beds in the Geriatric ward for we encourage families to take their elderly relations home for the Christmas period, but those who have no one are cared for by the girls and are brought festival food from their own kitchen. It is a busy day on the wards and we have a Christmas baby which pleases everyone.

But the sad news is that our Dr Nokrek has handed in his notice, and today is his last day with us. We are grateful to him for his two year service, and wish him success as he goes to study for further qualifications. And as usual, in a remote situation, it is not easy to find a replacement, and advertisements have not brought any applications so far, and we will be relying on the services of a visiting Doctor from the government hospital in Meherpur for two days a week. Not an ideal arrangement. Pray God with us for a Doctor willing to serve in a rural backward area.

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December 26th brings the opening of the annual “Anando Mela” i.e. joyful gathering – with sports for the children, football matches and different competitions; and little stalls have sprung all around the playing field, a great attraction for our girls in training, who spend hours browsing around and return giggling clutching their cheap purchases.

The celebrations are opened by our new MP, a local man from a neighbouring Muslim village who incidentally was born at Bollobhpur hospital. He comes with his retinue to visit the hospital, talks to the patients and their relatives and shows an interest in our incubators. He notes down that we need a new one, but I doubt whether anything will happen!!

Tuesday 29th December brings not only the weekly clinic at our Karpasdanga village centre, but “all change” for the senior group and those who have just completed their final examinations come to relieve their immediate seniors at the different clinics, for they will leave us at the end of the month with their hard earned certificates.

Karpasdanga clinic is a busy clinic, and we have over 100 mothers coming for antenatal check up with Benoka, sister in charge, and her team of students. Alongside I see over 70 general patients from surrounding villages and as usual the prevalence of diabetic patients is obvious and every week new cases are diagnosed and management begun.



Ripa at the hospital shop

Which reminds me that I forgot to tell you that Monju and her small son Mark came to Bollobhpur for Christmas to spend some time with us. Monju's husband brought them to us before returning to his work in Dhaka and I advised him to leave them with us until they can sort out their lives and organise something for the future. For Monju is almost blind now due to her diabetes. She has no vision at all in her right eye, and can see very little with her left eye. She is under treatment by an Indian doctor in Dhaka, and the aim of the treatment is to prepare the left eye for surgery if possible. Please pray with us for

Monju's sight. At present she is being looked after by our first year girls and they have a routine for themselves i.e. whoever looks after her and Mark during morning duty, comes back to sleep with them at night. This enables her to have a carer all day and night too. And there is no lack of willing helpers for little Mark, and the off duty girls are only too pleased to have a chance to carry him off. He is always in someone's arms or learning to walk with two girls holding his hands on two sides. He is one year and 5 months old now, weighs 7kg 200gm and eats whatever he is given. The problem is the future for the little family. Monju obviously is not going to be able to go back to her work, and husband's salary is not sufficient for a family to live on in a rented apartment in Dhaka. Also Monju needs someone to help her in the house, as what she can do for herself is obviously very limited. Please pray with us for the future of this little family, and for some solution to be found.

Thursday 31 December 2009 and time to say goodbye to yet another group of girls who have completed their three year training, and the fifteen of them gathered in the hospital office to sign for their hard earned certificates and make their tearful goodbyes. In no time at all we will be hearing that they all have places of work, no one remains idle, and in the few days holidays they get they come home to their village homes, with new clothes as presents for mother, father, brothers and sisters and in no time at all, with that one girls earnings, there will be transformation of the home.

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January 1st 2010 finds the whole parish gathered at the church for the first parish communion of the new year – a lovely tradition of the Church of Bangladesh that we all start the new year together and receive communion together before going out to the days work. Pray God that we continue as we begin another year of his service.

The afternoon brings the prize giving for those who were successful in the different sporting events of the past week. The little stalls are folded up and carried away, and tomorrow the classroom will be back to normal routine and we thank God for another festival season with all the joy and pleasure it brings.

January 18th 2010 brings new beginnings and at the crack of dawn five very excited senior girls with their bedding and belongings, accompanied by Michael and Babu, squeeze into a hired car, which will take them to the Baptist Mission Hospital at Joyramkura, the hospital Mary and I visited during our time at Halvaghata for Bishop Sunil's consecration in November last. For at their last meeting, the hospital management committee decided that they no longer wanted the students to continue training at Meherpur in a private clinic. And praise God, Dr Tapoch and Dr Lucy accepted my request for our students to be able to learn alongside their students and as a result the first group have been taken today. Pray God they will settle in well, learn quickly and also be a help to the busy hospital there. And it was a dark and foggy day for the trip there and back but praise God all went well and I have a report back that all is going well.



The Consecration

And in the afternoon of the same day 17 new girls arrived to commence their three years training with us here. As usual they come from all over the country as well as from our local villages. Please remember them too as they settle in and staff nurse Hannah as she prepares them for their Preliminary Training school examinations.

Saturday January 23rd and a workshop in the afternoon and evening on HIV/AIDS and drug misuse for our two newest groups. This is conducted as usual by a team from Youth First Concern, a Christian group whose one and only work is to bring this teaching to the young people of Bangladesh. For although in our village area HIV and AIDS is an almost unknown thing as yet (thank God) drug abuse is rampant in Bollobhpur and in all the surrounding villages and our girls must learn quickly and early to steer clear of such things. The group is enthusiastic and learn well, and are active in the discussion groups and activities that follow. I am grateful to our friend Liton, who organises such events for us.

February 1st 2010 and we were thrilled to receive yet another welcome parcel from our friends at St Ninian's, Glenrothes, Fife, Scotland, and this time containing just what we needed most, little knitted woolly cardigans for our small babies. We are really grateful to you all for your wonderful friendship, and our small babies send their thanks too!

Friday 12th February we received a visit from a new friend from S.K. Foundation in the Netherlands. We were grateful to him for his visit and for the interest she showed in the hospital. Thank you so much for your visit.

Monday 15th February and time to get my letter into the post to you. And the last news is that the new building has just received its first coat of paint and distemper, looks lovely and we and the patients who are using the rooms are all pleased. The rest of the hospital looks drab indeed in

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contrast and is needing some maintenance too. The constant repair and maintenance of so many buildings is a headache indeed. And our village outstation clinics are all in urgent need of painting and whitewashing too. But our main need at present is for our own residential Medical Officer. Pray God the person of His choice may soon be made available.

It is pitch dark as I bring my letter to a close, a moonless night with a few stars showing above the dark trees silhouetted against the river banks and the sky. Mosquitoes are out in plenty as the temperature rises over the past two or three days but not a firefly in sight. It is obviously not yet warm enough for them.

Thank you for keeping alongside. May God bless you all.

With greetings from us all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Mac'.