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Link Letter No 6 December 2009

Dear friends,

Hi everyone,

Warm greetings from Yei! I would say sizzling greetings, but it has just rained a little, so it is nice and cool! I do not mind this at all since I need to walk to church soon as I am doing some training for their Sunday school teachers (this is a new church, so they are not at the other training I am doing!). I am all too aware as it hots up here that we are coming to the end of the wetter season, and the hot season is a-coming! I know that I have only endured one hot season so far, but it was enough to remember that I was VERY hot in that time!

End of year

I can't believe we are coming to the end of another year. This has been quite a year for me in many ways. I still feel I am learning how to work within an NGO, writing proposals, reports, dealing with project money, but also wanting to keep developing relationships with people as well. It is sometimes a fine balance not to get bogged down and office bound! But I feel SO fortunate to be sent by an organisation who knows the value of relationships. This is the foundation of all that I do, and all that I am out here for. I am not here to tell people how to do things within children's ministry, but to explore and learn together (even with over 20 years of experience in children's ministry, I am still learning huge amounts!) what we can work on and how we can continue to improve on all that is happening with our children here.

Bridge building

Not long after I wrote my last Link Letter, I went with Mary to visit 'the bridge' – a community project with one of the communities she works with. This community, having gone through the Pap 'process' (explanation in Link Letter 4 – you can download it

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Constructing the bridge



The children who were helping to build the bridge



The children gathering sand for the bridge

from www.cms-uk.org), realised that to really maximise what they could do in their community, they needed a bridge, so they could get the things that they are growing to market. So the community set about gathering materials they needed etc, and a church in the UK has also generously contributed to this. In terms of raw materials (sand, stones etc), and labour, the community have donated a staggering \$12,000, almost a third of the total cost. This is a HUGE achievement for Sudan, with the community realising what they ARE able to achieve and that they do not need to wait for an NGO to provide for them.

Empowering children

The day I visited, we passed a funeral and thought that we might not find anyone working at the bridge (when people die here the whole community comes to offer condolences and support the family). How wrong we were. There were a number of people there, including a workforce of children! They were happily filling bowls with sand and stones, and passing it all down to the men below. What struck me about these children were the smiles on their faces as they were working. They were so happy to be involved in this community project. The village chief was also there, leading from the front line; he was happy to get dirty in leading his community. I was able to speak to him, and I encouraged him in the fact that the children were involved. I said the children were so happy to be allowed to help, and that I would share this with people in England, as all too often we tell our children that they can't help with things – as they will often slow us down! We miss so many opportunities to allow our children to develop like this and really be a part of all we are doing.

One of the other men working told us that his children had even been working harder than some of the men who have worked with them! By allowing our children to do things like this, they are

truly a part, and know they are a part, and valuable, of our communities. These children will be telling *their* children, and their grandchildren, how the WHOLE community joined together to build the bridge, and will also grow knowing that they can do so much themselves as well!

Travels around Sudan...

The PAP programme and children's ministry are about to integrate together more. PAP has recently started work in Boma, in Jonglei state, an area which has seen terrible tribal conflict over the last few months. The culture will be very different to that of Yei, so I am looking forward to visiting and seeing a new area. PAP's work empowers the community to be able to identify their own needs, and to work together to overcome these needs. By taking children's ministry into the process, we will be helping the church to see children as God does, and to identify the needs of the children. We hope also that we will be encouraging them to include the children in identifying their own needs as well. We will see how this will work, but we are all very excited about the prospects. It is a great opportunity!

We will be flying into Boma, as the roads aren't passable, and I shall have my beady eye open for any animals! During the war most of the animals left the country, but since the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) was signed, animals are now also returning, in their number. Boma is one of these areas, so I will be looking to see if I can spot anything as we fly in! Mary is hoping that the pilots do not get lost this time, as when she last flew in they didn't appear to be able to find the airstrip! It is also a swampy area, so the airstrip really is the only option for landing!

Holding hands...

I have been leading devotions now in the nursery school for a few months, and I love going down there. The children get very excited when I arrive, and it is sometimes hard to physically walk to the office as I seem to have about 100 children hanging off each arm! The language can make this frustrating, as I am aware at times that some children are pushing the others hands away, as THEY want to hold Ruta's hand alone! I need to perfect the Arabic for '*I can have many hands holding mine – look I have five fingers!*', perhaps not the most obvious phrase to learn but I feel that it may help my predicament!

Telling stories

The children LOVE it when I tell them stories, and I seem to have talents in drawing that I never had in the UK! I have been able to draw pictures (copied from a book) to accompany the stories, which the children love. We have been looking at how we can choose to be kind and caring to each other, no matter who the other person is. We can choose how we want to be, and we are ALL special to God, he chose to create all of us. The building is currently a mud hut, with two classrooms, but the wall doesn't reach the top of the room, so the noise travels easily through to the other side. There are also three classes, so one sits under the mango tree. This is directly next to a busy road, so it can be very distracting to the children.

An ex CMS mission partner has been raising money (apparently also doing a parachute jump for the cause, I am not sure I will ever

be following in her footsteps there!) for a new nursery school, and we had the opening of it last week. The children were able to sing and present a few items for us, and I really enjoyed the day. There are still challenges to be overcome, there is no water supply close to the school, no latrine or fence yet and only one classroom has tables and chairs, but we are excited to move in the New Year.

Teaching students

The last few weeks has also seen me in Yei Teacher training College (YTTC) training the students in child protection issues. Initially I was quite daunted at doing this; although I have taught child protection on many different occasions, suddenly to be teaching in a college felt a little strange as a non-teacher! But I soon found that I loved being with the students. They were very interested in the subject, and participated well. I have often walked through the college, and as always greeted students as I passed, as is the custom here, but now we are able to have conversations together. I have been thinking recently that maybe it would be good to start a bible study with some of the female students, build some more relationships with them, which in turn will also develop the children that they will be working with in the future. I need to pray about this one, but I love being more in contact with the students. They were complaining that our time together is nearly over (as I will

The old nursery school



The new nursery - with Miriam the headteacher



be in Boma, then they will be doing exams, and then they will be 2nd years, and out much more on school practice), but that encourages me that for the new intake of first years, we hope to do much more with. The vision of the college is to produce teachers with a difference, those who love Christ, something that will influence their teaching. It is so exciting to see how the college is developing, and its vision for the future, but already the number of students means that space is very tight! I feel privileged to have been able to spend time with them.

The Yei based group of students that I was privileged to study with earlier this year meet regularly to discuss issues that they can be involved with. One of these is child protection. We recently had a meeting with a Sudanese employee of ARC (American Refugee Care), followed by a meeting with a lady who works in the special protection unit at Yei police station as well. We were discussing issues of gender based violence and child protection, and what each of us can do to help the situation. I feel excited to be included in this very dedicated group of people.

Relaxing...

Working in Sudan is great mostly, but it does mean that I really look forward to times where I can rest and relax a bit. Living and working on the same compound can be a little hard at times. I have been fortunate enough to be able to spend time with both my parents over the last few months. Mum and I spent time together in Uganda, and Dad and I mainly went to the Kenyan

coast. Both holidays were relaxing, and I can usually come back with renewed energy, always helpful!

Please pray...

Please pray for Sudan as a nation at this time in particular. Registration has begun for the elections next year. As I am sure you can imagine, this is a very delicate time for the country, nearly five years after the CPA was signed. Please pray that peace can continue, and that we will be led by God.

Well, I will stop there. Thank you again for all your support, prayerful, financial, practical. It really is a partnership – with you and with the church here as well. Although at times it can be very demanding work and difficult, Sudan is also an amazing place to work, with lots of exciting things and wonderful people.

May God bless you richly over this Christmas time as we join in together with our Christian brothers and sisters all over the world in celebrating the birth of our wonderful Saviour.

Lots of love

Ruth xx



One of the children sharing about creation, on the opening of the nursery school

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