

## Working hard to affirm life

-- Henriette Thompson

“It’s a struggle – how do we affirm life?” With this question, the Right Reverend Yona Katoneene, Bishop of West Ankole sums up the challenge from the perspective of the church in southern Uganda.

West Ankole is one of 30 dioceses in the Church of Uganda. For the past two years, the Anglican Church of Canada has had a direct connection with the diocese through the work of the Rev. Dr. Carolyn Langford, formerly a priest in the Diocese of Ottawa for 13 years. Carolyn is a Volunteer In Mission (VIM) serving as Principal of Ankole Western Institute of Science and Technology (AWIST) and a former practicing veterinarian. The college provides technical training in business and human resources management, health science, and veterinary sciences to students in the “cattle corridor” of Uganda.



Beginning in January the ties are being strengthened. Jeffrey Hooper and Michelle Taylor will support the work of the diocese in a range of areas – communications, veterinary science - for three months through the Theological Students International Internship Program (TSIIP).

While AWIST strives to meet the growing technical and professional needs of communities in (West) Ankole, Bishop Katoneene struggles to meet the spiritual and social needs of the people in a diocese with 117 clergy-led parishes (and growing) and 500 lay-led sub-parishes. Clergy training is lacking, clergy stipends are low, and the needs of communities for the sacraments and the Word are not being met.

For one hundred years, the Mothers’ Union has provided “Christian care for families” around the world, and is according to the Bishop, “the backbone of the Church” in West Ankole where it has been active for 31 years. Yet, the women too, struggle to find resources to meet the need for literacy and numeracy training, and participation costs (transportation, accommodation) for members to attend annual leadership workshops.



Socially and economically, people in West Ankole struggle with the grip of widespread poverty and its attendant features of HIV and AIDS, alcoholism and unemployment. Local high school science teacher and graduate student in Statistics, Development and Planning at Makerere University, Epaphras Niwamanya (left), says the national

Poverty Eradication and Action Plan (PEAP) was designed to help Uganda reach the targets established in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

After almost 8 years, Ugandans have seen some gains in agriculture and food production.

These gains have been brought about by increased crop research and the resulting improvement of indigenous crops such as maize, beans, *matooke* (cooking banana, a local food staple) and potatoes. Businesses have started to produce a range of value additions such as sorting, preserving and packaging of exports like coffee, tea and cotton. Yet, a number of factors threaten to undermine these gains. They include the massive return of Northern Ugandans to their communities, which have been



destroyed after 20 years of war. Also, the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo requires provision of humanitarian resources from the government. The current global financial crisis is increasing the cost of agricultural inputs (machines, tools, fertilizer) and energy, and decreasing the value of the Ugandan shilling.

Indeed, how is the Church to affirm life in the midst of these challenges? Bishop Katoneene has a vision of holistic church ministry in which all the strands come together – spiritual, social, and physical. The vision begins with lay ministry and the need for training to equip male and female lay leaders to minister to people in communities. It expands to include clergy who are well equipped to help meet people's needs and a working together of the church with other parts of Ugandan society, none of them "in isolation from each other."

Through Partnership visits, the TSIIP and VIM programs, the Anglican Church of Canada continues to support the mission of the people of West Ankole.