

An unusual beginning

Kakumiro: a beginning that was unique in the Congregation. Happenings and appeals both in Uganda and in Italy. 1987, the first three Ugandan sisters leave for their years of formation. The involvement of Sr. M. Pia Quochi and the then mistress of novices, Sr. M. Viviana Ballarin. The choice of Kakumiro, inaugurated in 1993. Improving the status of women through a training school, its growth in prestige and esteem. The memory of Sr. M. Monica Loyarte.

Kakumiro had an entirely different beginning from other missions of our Congregation. In all other missions sisters were sent out, then gradually welcomed native vocations. For Kakumiro, Providence worked in a different way, using the deacon Deogratias Sserunjoji while he was a student in Rome. During his summer holidays in Veneto, he met our Sr. M. Amabile who invited him to visit the community of Via degli Artisti, and a great friendship began.

At about the same time, in Uganda, two students from St. Edward's Senior High School had told the school chaplain, Fr. Marcel, of their desire to enter religious life, asking him to help them choose a Congregation to enter. He advised the two students, Josephine and Noeline, to wait awhile. When the deacon Sserunjoji went back home to Uganda for a short holiday, he went to visit his friend, Father Marcel, and, hearing of these



Around the tomb of Sr. Monica, buried between the parish church and the Kakumiro convent - Uganda

two girls, he left them a brochure of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena. Meanwhile, a third girl, Norah, from Kampala, was introduced to the Congregation by her cousin, Fr. Charles Nabwana. These three girls were put in contact with each other, decided to set out together on the

same journey, and in 1987 left for Italy to start their initial formation. The mission of Kakumiro had begun - all thanks to the first three young Ugandans who came to Rome.

At the end of their first year of novitiate, the then Mother General, Sr. M. Pia Quochi, met with the Bishop of Hoima, Monsi-



Not enough space.....new class-rooms are built for the school

gnor Deogratias Byabazaire, who was in Rome to visit other novices from his diocese. The Bishop, almost jokingly, invited Mother Pia to open a mission in his diocese of Hoima. The invitation was taken seriously, and, to enable the three novices to make a more realistic choice, the Prioress General decided to accompany them and their Mistress, Sr. M. Viviana Ballarin to Uganda. When they arrived, the Bishop offered them five possible places to choose from: Murro, Kakindo, Bujumbura, Bukuumi and Kakumiro. They chose the last because of its strategic position and because there was no community of sisters there. The building of the convent was begun, and the three novices made their profession in Rome, 3 June 1992, feast of the Ugandan Martyrs, to whom the Prioress General entrusted the new mission. On 25 October of the same year, Sr. M. Josephine Namukwaya, Sr. M. Noeline Nakakawa and Sr. M. Orestina Capozzoli left for Uganda. As the convent was still under construction and since the two junior sisters had to at-

tend college to complete their training as primary school teachers, they lodged in the secretariat of the Association of Ugandan Religious, Kampala, from

where every now and then they went to see the progress of the building at Kakumiro, about 200km away. On 7 October 1993, the convent at Kakumiro was officially inaugurated. The Bishop of Hoima, Monsignor Deogratias Byabazaire, the Apostolic Nuncio, other bishops and priests, sisters and many laity were present, and of course, the Prioress General, Sr. M. Pia Quochi, with the sisters of the community: Sr. M. Orestina Capozzoli, Prioress, Sr. M. Paola Cassetta, Sr. M. Josephine Namukwaya, Sr. M. Norah Sitenda, Sr. M. Noelina Nakakawa, Sr. M. Lucy Nabukeera and Sr. M. Monica Loyarte, who was killed five months later in an ambush along the way to Kampala. This was a terrible experience for the new community, just taking its first steps, but the sacrifice of

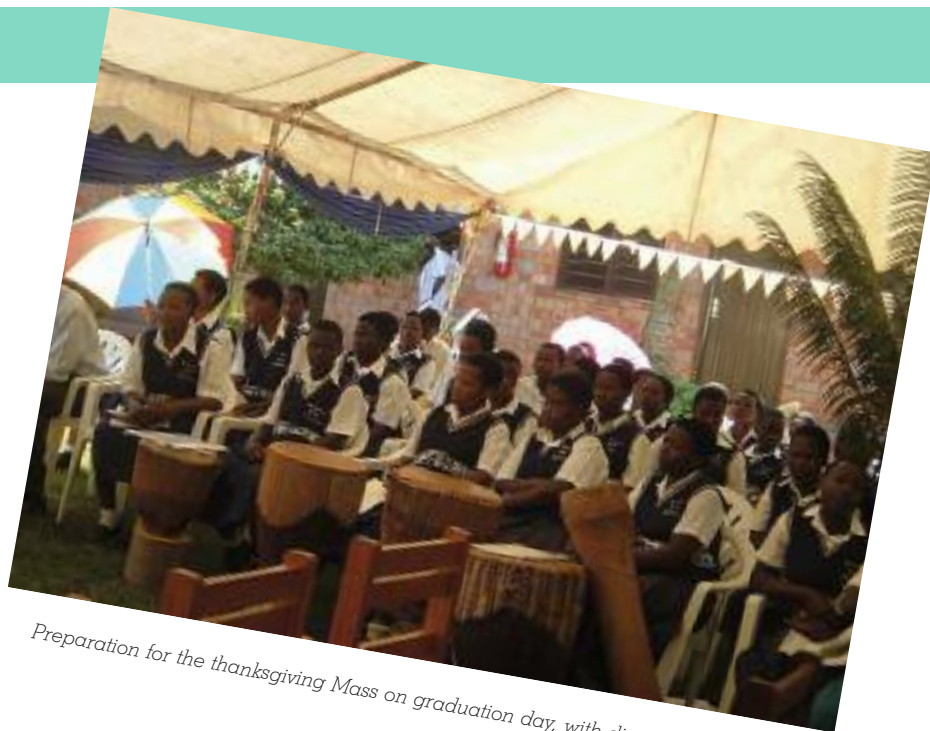
the young Argentinian sister made everyone quite sure that God was guiding this work; and if he had taken her to heaven, it was to make her even more useful for this country which she had loved so much. Sr. M. Francesca Bray arrived the following year, 1994, followed in 1998 by Sr. Anna Maria Ubaldi, who gave excellent nursing service in the Government Health Centre at Kakumiro from 1999 until 2007.

When we first reached our mission we were seriously concerned for the position of women there: many girls did not go to school, some had discontinued their studies, others were pregnant and facing all the stress of being young, unmarried mothers, some had been married at an extremely young age. There was widespread unemployment. How were we to face so many serious issues? We decided to open a vocational training school for girls, and in 1994 welcomed the first students into a room in the convent. It was an uncertain and impoverished beginning, but full of hope in Providence and also in the young



Cutting and sewing workshop

girls who were arriving; there were so many of them, in fact, that we had to think of building two class-rooms in order to organise the two year course more efficiently. Our dream began to be realised in 1998 when we awarded the girls a proficiency certificate in cutting and sewing; however, this certificate was not recognised by the State. After difficult but persevering consultations with other training schools and with the Minister of Education, the school was not only recognised by the government in 2003, but in 2004



Preparation for the thanksgiving Mass on graduation day, with distribution of diplomas



A class-room of the training school with young students and Sr. Nora Sitenda (at the back)

achieved official registration, with the right to be a centre for government examinations. The imposing title of "The Mother Géline Vocational Training Institute", replaced that of "The Mother Géline Vocational Training School". Besides cutting and sewing, the following subjects are taught in our Institute: cooking, farming, knitting, health, commerce and, of course, religion, English and mathematics. Our Institute takes in girls who

they are awarded the Craft Certificate One only after two years of attendance. Once in possession of the state-recognised certificate, the students have the opportunity to go to University and follow a two year course leading to a Diploma that will qualify them to be teachers in similar schools. Those who wish, after completing their training, can begin to earn their living in the workroom, improving their skills so that eventually they can be self-employed, or be taken

have completed elementary school; after three years they receive their Junior Certificate; afterwards, those who wish continue for two more years of classes leading to the 'Craft Certificate One'. We also admit girls who have attended the High School up to class four;

on as assistants.

In addition to the Training Institute, we have a hostel with places for 100 girls, either from our own Institute or from the local State High School. The hostel aims primarily to help girls who live at far distances; this not only to spare them the fatigue of covering long distances on foot, but also to save them from moral and physical dangers. With the scholarships offered by friends and benefactors of the Congregation as well as by the AVSI association, we offer a future to our young people, especially to orphans.

These, therefore, are our goals:

- To improve the status of woman: to make her self-sufficient and to help her discover and appreciate her own dignity and value.
- To create work suitable for girls, giving them the possibility of earning a living and to live with dignity.
- To help the girls to become good mothers, capable of looking after themselves and their