FRAGMENTS FROM THE FRONTIER #18

August, 2025



KG2 at work!

Dear Friends of the Mission,

I know it is a long time since I wrote, so much has happened in the intervening period. We had a wonderful Triduum with Fr Angelo, the chapel was really packed with the team, our other residents and volunteers. We celebrated the Passover of the Lord with great solemnity and a deep spirit of prayer trying to be present to the reality as the liturgy placed it before us.

Daily life takes on many different forms as we try to live the mysteries we celebrated during Easter. I have been struck by the increasing numbers of poor who come to our door each day... witnessing to us the broken Body of Jesus and giving us the opportunity to enter into a deeper communion with Him through our interactions with them, and the friendships that we try to develop with some.

The humility of the poor as they open up their lives to us, accepting the little we can do with open and grateful hearts, the dignity and acceptance they show when we cannot help them because they can still manage, is so striking. It is never easy to say, no to someone who comes to the door but with the numbers who attend the programme having dramatically risen we have to turn people away all the time. Not because they don't need help but because others need more! As I write there are 72 children (not counting the babies who will come to us when their mothers have completed their 2 months of "maternity leave") 34 women and 8 men who work in the fields plus the team of volunteers and myself…. there are at least 120 of us Monday to Friday to provide breakfast and lunch for.



To know where we are in Africa!

I am happy to see the hard work of the team pay off, the children are divided into small groups and with the help of Marlena and her friends the educational strategies we have tried to assume are slowly being implemented. In fact, the few who attend a regular school in the afternoon have done very well at the end of term tests, all coming in

the top ten of their classes. We are looking into trying to put seven of the children who we see progressing into regular school at the beginning of the school year. The problem is that "our" children do well in small groups with individual attention, but we are not so sure how they will do in classes of 40 to 50 where the teacher is distant and does not have the time or experience to discover new ways to help the children learn. If some do start to go to regular school, we shall keep a close eye on them and try to continue working with them in the mornings…



Ferdowsa giving a talk to the women of Tamara about FGM

We have had workshops about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), the scourge of the lives of so many women in the country a treatment which leaves them both psychologically and physically scarred, resulting in many intrauterine infections and often causing complications at childbirth. We spoke to both men and women separately and I was shocked to hear the different beliefs of men with regard to superstition and sexuality.

The women themselves were much more open to listen to the information but then face the problem that the men demand they can only marry women who have "been cut", So unless we have an educated local person who will be heard and trusted nothing will really change. The chief midwife from the hospital came and spoke to the women, being both Somali and Muslim herself her voice carried greater weight than ours; but she recognised that it is very hard for practices to change if men do not accept it.



Some of Tamara women at the FGM talk

I discovered that this practice is not only found among the Somalis, but also among other ethnic groups to a lesser degree. It is shockingly found among Christians as well!

When I was at home in the UK in March, I received a phone call from the hospital about a young man who it seemed was very ill. On my return to Ethiopia, I sought out the young man and found that he had been discharged on to the streets of the town. I found him opposite the Orthodox Church sleeping on the street. The local people provided him with food. As I bent over him, he poked his head out from under his blanket so I asked him if he would like to come to our house, he gave the most extraordinary answer, "That would be a good opportunity!"…. Solomon, as we later discovered is his name has gone on to make a very good recovery and is now one of our team. His gentleness with those who come to the gate is apparent and his way of dealing with the children, who love to help him water the garden, is a joy to behold…Since Mekonnen, our diabetic patient has left us to seek his fortune in the world, Solomon has taken on the job of minding the gate.

We had a recent visit from a representative of the German Embassy who donated money to us to extend our weaving programme into half of the storeroom, thus liberating some rooms., few made a classroom and 'moringa processing' room as well as e nursery enabling us to bring the babies into the

school block. The visit went well and Tim, from the German Embassy was happy to see how the funds have been used.

Part of the funds went towards two ‘Max LifeStraw Water Filters’ which work quickly and efficiently using no electricity or chemicals,

Now we can give 400 litres of drinking water daily to the prison as well as the 25000 litres we already distribute each day. In a climate which is normally at 33-36C during the day, water is truly life!!



Work on the banana plants

In June we had the joy of welcoming Ola again She spent a lot of her time tidying up our cupboards and generally bringing order to our house. The children enjoyed her help in the classrooms, even bringing scientific experiments for them to do!

At the end of July, we welcomed Grzegorz, a Polish national, to our compound Grzegorz is a professional English teacher. He is a volunteer who had offered his services to teach English to the teachers who work in our school. Of course this was a welcome offer, and he began to teach our young people ‘online’, before announcing to us that he could come to teach for three weeks here in Gode!



Ola does her thing!

He has already given 60 hours of English instruction to our teachers, including some of the primary school children. I can see the change this has had on the students some of whom suddenly start speaking English out of the blue!!!

Solomon 'Risen' from the dead!



On a day-to-day basis I have the often-distressing job of sending people away from our gate, with only some dry foodstuffs or in so many cases just bananas. It is not as if these people are not in want, as in the present economic climate everyone is in need, but we try to help the poorest, those who are at the edges of despair. We are able to help those who need medical help, by guiding them to the right doctors and buying medicine prescribed for them. It is only a little help when so much more is required…. Our two fish and five loaves…… we trust that the Lord who fed the five thousand will help these women and children.

Often, I cannot help myself and I take in yet another poor woman and her children. My team are very understanding, even though we are already ‘oversubscribed,” they help me to widen the tents to receive those the Lord sends, I feel it is a call to walk on water.



Max LifeStraw drinking water for the prison

The garden seems to be doing quite well we had a huge bunch of bananas recently and have been able to eat the beans grown in the garden on some occasions. At the end of this month, we shall have a visit from an agricultural expert paid for by Missio Austria, who will help us get the most out of the land and to go further on the journey to sell moringa. This year we have not had a lot of mangoes or papaya…. So, there is still a lot to learn.

As I write we have already had the visit from our agricultural expert Aweke who helped us on the way to sustainability. It goes well, and Awerke, who has stayed for the month to help us implement all the suggestions both he and Asmelash have made to effect a huge transformation. The farm looks better already after two weeks, and we have begun to sell our bananas. We hope as the farm becomes more efficient, we shall be able to pay the men who work on the farm from banana sales.

We are making drastic changes in the classrooms by erecting walls to separate the different classes of children and help them to be able to concentrate a little more. This is always a huge problem with our children, who live such distracted lives, with so little order. It is hoped that having these divisions will help the children to discover the joy of learning.

As ever, I am so grateful to all the friends of the Mission; through your prayers and financial contributions, you allow us to continue in Gode, helping the poorest of our brothers and sisters. It is such a great privilege to be entrusted with the task of seeing and loving Christ in his distressing disguise each day in this part of the country which is twice over a ‘desert’: firstly, because it is geographically so barren, and secondly because it is so bereft of so much of the benefits of what we call civilization.

I pray for you and your families every day before the Eucharistic lord in our little Chapel here ‘at the end of the world’.

God bless,

In Jesus,

Sr Mary Joachim



Our greatest treasures: Let the little ones come to Me!