

REACHING RWANDA – PHILLY'S PLACE

I am sure many of you recall Samantha Hunt's May visit to our Church to give us an update on the work of her charity. That presentation inspired us all by the excellent work being done at Philly's Place. However, we were dismayed to learn of the restrictions being imposed for Presidential security reasons on the number of pupils and the length of the teaching day. These severe limitations highlighted the importance of the new building situated outside the security area being completed and open as soon as possible. This is where you and our Church stepped in.

Samatha and I concluded that a minimum of £18,500 was required to complete the new building ready for use and if the money were found quickly an August opening could be achieved, ready for the new school year. I was fully aware of just how far our Church funds are stretched due to ongoing commitments and the essential spire and bell renovations, but a way just had to be found and this was how a loan scheme from the Church was devised and worked out with Samantha.

At the June PCC meeting a proposal was put forward that the £15,000 should be a gift from our Mission Fund. As you can imagine this was totally beyond my wildest dreams and certainly those of Samantha.

The £15,000 and pledges of £1,250 were remitted to Rwanda within a few days of the meeting. The remaining monies from the congregation collection and the Church's funding contribution will be remitted soon. The total will exceed the minimum amount to complete the building work, but any excess will be used to kit out the teaching areas.

Good news travels fast and on 17 June work started on the retaining wall (100metres long) and was completed 10 July and it looks great in beautifully dressed stone. Now the site is being cleared and levelled in preparation of construction of perimeter wall with gates. Internal painting is in progress. Surf is obtaining approval of the Community Authority for the educational use of the new building. Special thanks to Raban, who worked so tirelessly on the construction and Sam, who obtained all the legal approvals for the project and is now working on the final approval of the Community Authority for the educational use of the new building.

See *pages 8-9* for Samantha Hunt's thank you letter, which says it all.



Construction of the stone retaining wall

On 6 July, Dave Percival reported that the bell had arrive in Rwanda, cleared customs and was in the safe hands of *Surf*.

This is a great achievement and the completion of a promise that Dave made that he would get the bell to Rwanda. We give our heartfelt thanks to him for this significant contribution.

Samantha's reaction has been one of pure delight as shown in her email to Dave:

Dear Dave,

I cannot begin to tell you how poignant and meaningful the bell story is to me and my Mum. In my head the bell is a tangible reminder of the hopefully ongoing relationship between and link between Philly's Place, my family, and the Church. The whole story is incredibly moving to me and every time I see that bell or hear it ring, I will remember my beloved Philly and also feel incredibly grateful for the amazing gift bestowed by the Church in which you and Brendan have played such vital roles.

I am very grateful to you for all your efforts to bring such a precious piece of Sandhurst history to its new and rightful home. I will show you pictures when it makes its final journey through the "beautiful land of 1,000 hills".

*Thank you so much once again,
Samantha*

(The full story of St Mary's bell is available from Dave Percival).

I have had a discussion the Samantha and it is agreed that the bell will be hung in its own free standing metal structure, and I will collaborate with a Rwandan designer to design and create this. The bell will be rung and will ring aloud and strong.

Samantha, as deputy Head Teacher, invited me to the closing school assembly at Sandhurst



School on Friday 19 July to see her presentation on *Reaching Rwanda*, where I received and enthusiastic recognition from the whole school of our support and financial contribution. The tight schedule only allowed me to accept the recognition with a regal wave! There will be a student visit to Rwanda next February and this brings home to me the unwavering support the school have given to Samantha and her project. Samantha will travel to Rwanda on 6 August and, directly with her teachers, they will start organising the fitting out of the two teaching areas and detailed planning for the new teaching year.

I have just heard from Samantha that the opening ceremony of the new Philly's Place is planned for Monday 19 August!

I thank God for showing his love and kindness through the choices we make as members of St Michael's Church community, under the leadership of Reverend John Castle. Just think of the joy and life enhancing experiences that children will find in the new Philly's Place. Together as a Church we can achieve anything.

**Brendan Watson,
Reaching Rwanda Champion**

REACHING RWANDA

A letter from Sam Hunt

Dear Reverend John and the congregation of St Michael's Church,

Five years ago I developed a dream to build an education centre for children in the district of Bugesera, Rwanda. This district was ripped apart during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi and saw some of the most brutal murders on an industrial scale. It was my dream to build a centre where all children, both Hutu and Tutsi, could come together to learn, play and laugh. Perhaps through sharing such magical, educational experiences, those beautiful innocent children can grow together in love, mutual respect and tolerance, helping to ensure that Rwanda never again descends into the hell of ethnic hatred and division.

As a teacher I truly believe that education has the ability to transform life chances, and even more so in Africa. Education gives the chance of a route out of poverty and the hope of a brighter future. The hundreds of children who have been regularly attending the Philly's Place education centre, until now operating from a temporary, rented building, are testament to the hunger for education in Rwanda. In addition to the regular programmes in English, Maths,

Science, Technology, Art, Drama, Music, sport and dance, Philly's Place offers the opportunity for children to play with toys, for children who have such challenging lives to just enjoy being children for once.

The temporary, rented site we have inhabited for four years is completely unfit for purpose, leading me to dare to dream that one day we might be able to open our own, purpose-built centre which can safely accommodate every single child who wants to attend, completely free of charge of course! The past four years, whilst I have been building the new Philly's Place centre, have been fraught with set backs and frustration. The entire centre has cost approximately £110,000 and the final £20,000 required to finish the construction and be finally able to open our doors, has been frustratingly elusive to raise.

But then the congregation of St Michael's Church has stepped in!! The belief you have shown in what I am trying to achieve in Philly's Place has truly humbled me. The last four years trying to raise the money to build the new centre has sometimes felt like a lonely journey. Your support and kindness, however, have greatly encouraged me.



REACHING RWANDA

A letter from Sam Hunt



From the very bottom of my heart I would like to thank each and every member of the St Michael's congregation for your kindness and generosity. I would also like to thank Reverend John and the leadership team for their trust and backing and also Dave and Brendan for spending so many hours helping me to refine the plans for the centre. As a church congregation and as individuals, your financial support, as well as incredibly kind words of encouragement, have made the dream of Philly's Place actually become a reality! Because of you, countless children

will have that precious chance to learn, to play, to have fun, and to enjoy one another's company. The words "thank you" cannot adequately express the depth of gratitude I feel for what you have done for me personally and for each and every one of the Philly's Place children. Please know, however, that my gratitude is truly heartfelt and unending. Thank you for making such an enormous difference in my life and in the lives of so many children in Rwanda.

May God bless you all.

Sam Hunt

