

Parish doubles cash aid for Zimbabwe orphans - Sunday, 13 Dec 2009

Parishioners of a Dumbarton church raised an "astounding" £2,000 on Friday night to help make Christmas special for 300 orphaned, abandoned and deaf children in Zimbabwe.

This doubles to £4,000 the cash collected this year by St Patrick's Church to help the work of Sister Paulette, formerly Mary Frances Curran from Castlehill in Dumbarton.

Sister Paulette has given up her retirement after 40 years as a missionary in Africa to continue to help out as "a general dogsbody" at Emerald Hill in Harare.

The Dominican-run school and orphanage there desperately needs a new generator to pump water to their premises which house 92 orphans and 244 deaf children.

Sister Paulette's aunts, Kitty and Elizabeth Jones from High Overtoun, Dumbarton, organised an evening of Christmas carols, stand-up bingo and tombola in the church hall.

And Celtic Football Club chairman, Dr John Reid, donated a club home strip, autographed by their first team squad, to add to the many prizes which raised a lot of money.

The football jersey was won by a Dumbarton couple, Anne and Joe Hughes, who work at the Clyde Submarine Base at Faslane on the Gareloch.

Kitty Jones, a former head teacher at St Ronan's PS in Bonhill, thanked everyone who contributed to the generous array of tombola and raffle prizes – and also the priests and willing church workers who helped to run the event.

She said: "I am truly astounded that so many people came along and gave so much in the pre-Christmas season and when money is tight for a lot of people.

"This is a sign of the incomparable generosity of the people of St Patrick's and the neighbouring parishes.

"The money will be taken to Zimbabwe this week to start the Emerald Hill Generator Fund. There will be one proviso though – that a small amount is used to provide a Christmas treat, however meagre, for the deaf and orphaned children."

Three members of the Dalvair Singers, Hazel McLaughlin, Carol McLean and Susan Jo Hanna, provided the entertainment -- along with a surprise guest.

Zimbabwean Susan Kanyoka, who lives in Bonhill and is a care worker in Dumbarton, comes originally from Harare, near Emerald Hill.

Susan, who sang a couple of songs at the event, said: "I read in the local paper that the fund-raiser was happening and came along to give my support.

"I was delighted to sing and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Great work is being done here to help these poor children."

Sister Paulette is a school teacher who began her career in St Martin's Primary School, Renton, where she worked for three years.

Canon Gerry Conroy, parish priest of St Patrick's, said: "The money raised will help to alleviate some of that suffering and greatly assist the nuns in their work. The plight of these children is really quite desperate."