

Nearly £2,000 collected from fund-raiser for Zimbabwe - Thursday, 26 March 2009



Nearly £2,000 has been raised to help some of the poorest children in Zimbabwe, one of the most dangerous and desperately deprived countries in the world.

The money, which currently totals £1,850, will be sent to Sister Paulette, formerly Mary Frances Curran from Castlehill, Dumbarton, by her aunts, Kitty and Elizabeth Jones, who organised the successful fund-raising exercise.

Sister Paulette is a Dominican missionary who

faces a daily ordeal in Harare of having to deal at first hand with death, disease, violence and famine.

Supporters gathered in St Patrick's Church Hall, Strathleven Place, Dumbarton, on Tuesday, March 24, and dug deep into their pockets and purses for this excellent cause.

Kitty Jones, who is a former head teacher of St Ronan's Primary School in Bonhill, Alexandria, said: "The people here have shown that there is no such thing as compassion fatigue in Dumbarton – and we are very grateful to them for their generosity."

Her sister, Elizabeth, said: "The general feeling was that it was a particularly enjoyable evening - not to say profitable. We have received £850 in generous donations to add to the £1,000 we raised on the night from tombola and raffles and upside down bingo."

She added: "I want to stress that there are absolutely no overheads. Everything we had was donated, so the full amount goes to Zimbabwe."

"I want to thank everyone who has helped. We need to transfer the money out there as soon as possible because the situation in Harare is desperate."

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

The former Notre Dame High School pupil has been a missionary in Africa for 40 years.

She has experienced the best and the worst of times there, having arrived at a time of relative prosperity and come through a civil war and into the current political crisis which has brought the country almost to its knees.

Sister Paulette, whose sister, Colette, is a Carmelite nun at the Holy Ghost Monastery in Dumbarton, has many stories of bombings and shootings and even of colleagues being murdered in the bush in cold blood.

She now works at a residential school for 300 orphans in Harare, the capital city of a country in crisis, where a day's pay for a teacher amounts to not enough money to buy a loaf of bread.

Sister Paulette refers to herself as "a general dogsbody" acting as computer teacher, bursar and bus driver and generally tackling any and every job that requires doing – "I do what I feel has to be done," she said.

One of the tasks that has to be done is bussing groups of pupils through hostile countryside – and for her fast driving and safe handling of school buses, Sister Paulette has affectionately become known as "the flying nun".

Canon Gerry Conroy, parish priest of St Patrick's, said: "Zimbabwe is a country in crisis. Its people are in despair. AIDS has ravaged the country and now cholera and starvation are taking their toll. Abductions and torture are commonplace. We hope that the money raised here in Dumbarton will help to alleviate some of that suffering. I know it will be greatly appreciated by Sister Paulette and her fellow missionaries."