

Accompanied by Carlo Paglia and Giuliano Tasini, respectively Director of the Roberto Bazzoni Onlus and Chairman of the Spagnolli Onlus, we arrived into Harare on Monday, May 16th, and were greeted by Dr. Carlo Spagnolli, surgeon and on site project manager for the RBO.

Our first stop is to St. Marcellino Village (orphanage). Sybil and Norman plus some of the girls greet us by singing Happy Birthday to Carlo. The usual distribution of sweeties follows, greatly appreciated by the kids of all ages.

Norman leads us on an exhaustive tour of the compound. It is really a big area to work on. After a preliminary prayer, said by Norman, we go to business.

Norman relates to us the whole story of the Village, starting from Mutoko times. It is a lengthy tale, but very appropriate to set the scenario.

Sebastiano starts by saying that the Italian Association has some reasons to worry and a few technical questions to clarify. Starting with the former, Sebastiano points out that, so far, we do not see any finalized plan for succession of the Village, at some date in the future,. Sebastiano pointed out the importance of avoiding the experience of St. Michaels' Hospital and orphanage. Dr. Maria Grazia Buggiani was the Founder and Director of this hospital and orphanage, located in remote countryside in Zimbabwe. She died a few days ago at the age of 80, without leaving plans to ensure a smooth succession. The result is an emergency situation for those who remain at the hospital.

Norman informs us that an agreement has been put in place with the Carmelite Order to send three nuns by Jan 1st 2012. One nun will assume the role of teacher and the others will support.

The plan is to take over the school and gradually become involved in the management of the school orphanage.

The news is most welcome. We discuss building the school, the request of the nuns to have a convent etc. Before these works begin, Sybil and Norman will require a wall to be built separating their private home.

We await receiving the current constitution of the Village, which came into effect in 2005.

The evening closes with dinner at Sister Mary Jo's and a treat for Carlo's birthday.

May 17th

Before visiting the Braille library in Harare, we have an extremely useful meeting with Sr. Catherine at the Braille library. She is a Board member of the San Marcellino Village and supervises the teachers' activity.

She suggests financing the purchase of schoolbooks for the children at San Marcellino Village and revising the teachers' remuneration. She explains the teaching policy at the Village, giving a lively picture of the situation.

By 10am we are en route to the Luisa Guidotti Hospital, Mutoko, in the East of the country, close to the border with Mozambique. We are greeted by Dr. Pesaresi, the medical director of the hospital. We tour the hospital and neighbourhood and discuss the best way to insert the two volunteers (Alessio and Manuela) into the staff.

May 18th

At 6 am we leave the Luisa Guidotti Hospital, Mutoko, for St. Michael's Hospital to attend Dr. Buggiani's funeral. Giuliano decides to go directly to the St Marcellino Village to spend two nights and two days there, in order to have a direct perception of the situation, needs and personal feelings of all people involved in the structure. There is a huge crowd of people at St. Michael's Hospital for the funeral ceremony. Dr. Buggiani started the hospital from scratch in the eighties and its impact on the local people living in its catchment area was enormous. There were many speeches, mostly by pro-eminent politicians and ministers attending. She was buried in African fashion, just wrapped in a blanket and mat, and buried in a grove near her house. She had devoted her whole life to healing the poor and sick, and her final wish was to die in Africa.

May 19th.

We start the day by visiting Dr. Nyamayaro in Harare, with whom we discuss the situation at St. Michael's Hospital after Dr. Buggiani's death and decide to hire an experienced doctor as of June 1st. Dr. Nyamayaro promises his help.

Then we visit Stuart Barr's Garage outside of town, custodian of the charity's supply containers.. Carlo loads food for the Kariba sisters.

Just after 3pm we arrive at Kariba and are welcomed and shown around by the nuns and Michela, a volunteer from Italy. The children they care for at the nursery school are just awakening from their afternoon nap and in very little time all 140 of them are being entertained by their visitors!

May 20th

At 8am, with all kids attending under the gazebo, a welcome ceremony for the visitors takes place, with more fun, photos and laughter. We all were very moved.

At 2.30pm we reach the G. Spagnolli Center in Harare for a meeting with the mothers who receive their treatment there. Some 120 mothers are waiting for us there.

One of the mothers who is under treatment, Prisca, is the master of ceremony. She is very assertive, proud and efficient. I would say another doughty woman. Happily, and very importantly, we learn that in essence, the stigma of past years is no longer there. These mothers now can tell others that they are HIV positive, that they are under treatment and that they feel good and active. They no longer feel shame, they no longer hide the illness.

We are treated to a play, performed by a few of the mothers in order to show how things go, from despair in discovering their illness to hope because someone tells them about the Centre we are supporting, to coming there and starting their treatment.

The characters of the people involved in the Centre are beautifully sketched, and there are quite a few heartening bursts of laughter. There are more speeches from the ladies, then the guests are invited to answer. Sebastiano and Carlo Spagnolli address the gathering briefly and Carlo Paglia closes with a masterpiece of synthesis: "thanks to YOU!". The meaning is clear: our donors have played a large part in this happy scene, but these women put their suffering, pain, effort, will and hope into accepting this new thing- the treatment that makes it possible for them to overcome their illness and lead a normal life. With less determined women this would not have been possible. Hence, "thanks to you" is appropriate. There are more songs and a prayer, and we return to San. Marcellino village.

Here we must come to some conclusions following our recent days of meetings. Giuliano recounts what he directly experienced during the previous days. He has had free access to the village structures and staff, and he confirms that everything pertaining to the children's welfare and schooling are proceeding sufficiently. He notes that there are a few things to be done, and they are under control. The books requested by Sr. Catherine will be ordered on Monday, at a cost of USD 2,500.

The maintenance status of the whole complex is poor. Giuliano's proposal is to establish an extraordinary budget for repairs in order to get things fixed, and to establish, for the future, a permanent budget devoted to maintenance only. Agreement on this is reached, so it is now up to Norman to produce the repairs budget asap.

Moving to the future of the village, Norman took advice from his colleagues on the Executive Committee, and their opinion is that the preferable option is to build accommodation for the three nuns who are due to begin support on Jan 1st 2012. This will be the initial part of the convent.

Additionally the first part of the new school should be built, and to this effect updated quotes are needed.

In summary, we have a challenging period ahead of us, both financially and from a governance standpoint.

The situation at San Marcellino Village commands a few action points :

- 1) Appointing a local expert to closely follow the works and report to the donors
- 2) Making sure that the legal title to the land and to the buildings is correctly in the Village's name

- 3) Going through the decision-making body's constitution to see how it works. Additionally the initial balance of members in this body should be restored
- 4) **In essence, we have to be conscious of the simple fact that we cannot invest donor's generous funding, without having these minimum safeguards in place**

(RBO-trip to Zimbabwe 15-21 May 2011-trip notes, final)