

NEWSLETTER



Spring 2022

Dear friends and supporters of Les Amis,



At this time of year, Gillie would normally have just come back from her annual trip to Burkina Faso. She would have spent an extremely busy week tearing around the country visiting all our projects, coming back with a lot of information and photos to use in the ensuing newsletter. However, since 2019, her visits have been impossible as Burkina Faso has been fighting armed campaigns by groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS) that have spilled over from neighbouring Mali. The number of attacks has risen from nearly 500 in 2020 to more than 1,150 in 2021. Local security forces and civilians have been the primary victims of the violence by armed groups. *“Burkina Faso has experienced a convergence of crises, including inter-ethnic violence, armed conflict, poverty, inequalities, food insecurity, and environmental change. As a result, over 1.4 million people have fled their homes in search of safety – making the situation in Burkina Faso one of the fastest-growing displacement and protection crises globally. The instability has also created cross-border movements.” UNHCR*

Gillie was saddened, very recently, to be sent photographs of a seminary, to the east of the country, where she had attended Mass and spent a lovely day; it had been attacked by terrorists and burnt down ([see left](#)).

A key development politically since our last newsletter is that on 23rd January of this year there was a military coup. The speech given by the military on the occasion said that *“the sole purpose of the coup was to get Burkina Faso back onto the right road and to fight with all our force to defend our country, its borders and its integrity”*. It was recently announced that free elections would take place in 2025; we all hope and pray that Burkina Faso can be restored to peace and security soon.

Despite all the difficulties, and thanks to you and your ongoing support, our charity and its projects continue to do great and truly invaluable work.

THE YOANN FOUNDATION IN OUAGADOUGOU

This was where all our work began. Named after the late Yoann, a sufferer of cerebral palsy, this foundation serves the needs of disabled children, their mothers and other women in real need. They get together regularly at the Franciscan Friary in Ouagadougou where they are given money, sacks of rice and meals.



Left is a photo, taken in 2006, of the very moment I first met Brother Harry (he is on the left) along with Brother Vincent. Little did we know, at that very first meeting, just how much we were going to achieve together to help the handicapped children and their mothers through the work of the Yoann Foundation. There are so many children and women who have been lifted out of despair thanks to this first meeting. Sixteen years later,

and as a direct result of your giving, we continue to work together to transform lives.

In the photos which Br Harry has just sent to us of the latest distribution of food and money to those 23 handicapped children and 20 disadvantaged women we are currently supporting, we are delighted to see Amelie ([right](#), in her wheelchair).

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We have been taking care of her since she was a very young child. She is one of twins, her twin sister being physically normal and well. The sort of help we have given to Amelie is the purchasing of appropriate wheelchairs



as she has grown up, and money to help her mother cope with the demands of looking after a handicapped child without help or support from a family.

Right are the women who have got together at the friary where they have been given sacks of food and other essentials to help them. It is always good to get them together, as it creates a bond of friendship and the sense that they are not alone in their sufferings.



PROTECTING AND EDUCATING GIRLS

The protection and education of girls and young women is really important to us. Burkina Faso is a country which favours males and gives few rights to females. One of the biggest problems is the giving away of young girls to much older men. If those girls know of somewhere to run for help and protection, then they run. If not, they are consigned to a life of servitude and misery. We are so happy to be able to help them.

..... in Baskouré

In Baskouré we fund a refuge for runaway girls. There, they learn lots of different skills to help them secure financial independence until such time as they wish to marry. They learn to grow crops, to look after livestock, brew beer, embroider, make soap and weave cloth.



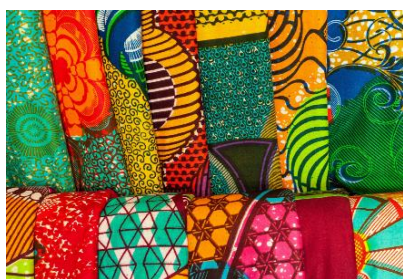
In our last newsletter, we took the opportunity to mention that the girls of the refuge in Baskouré were encountering serious problems with their water supply. Living in the UK, where there is plenty of water, it is hard for us to imagine what it might be like not to have access to water. How much harder to imagine what that might be like in a country which, for a significant part of the year, has no rain and is roasting hot; in such conditions, being without water is unthinkable. We are extremely pleased, therefore, to be able to tell you that we found the funds to allow them to drill for water and then set up a big water tank (**right**) and a solar-powered pump. The Sisters who run the refuge very thoughtfully took and sent us a video of the joyful moment the drillers struck water, and this short video has been put onto the website so that you can share their, and our, joy. The wonderful moment they hit water comes just over a third of the way through the video. It can be found under 'All our Projects' and then under the item about providing a refuge (or this link <https://tinyurl.com/yr2ydy9a>). We do hope you enjoy watching it.



..... in Fada

At the St Joseph's Training Centre in Fada, owned by the Diocese of Fada, we sponsor the training as seamstresses of a number of girls who have run away from forced marriages.

In anticipation of this newsletter, Sister Marie-Micheline, the new Sister in Charge of the St Joseph's Training Centre, wrote to let us know how things are going. She writes: "Each of the girls is doing well in sewing.



Sonya has completed her weaving training and has her own loom now. Anna is in her third year of sewing and is preparing for her end-of-year exam. Overall, they are well and carry out their activities with joy. In addition to their sewing, they are also able to increase our income a little by breeding chickens and pigs. Your support is so much appreciated by us all; the girls are happy, eat well and are well-dressed thanks to you."

However, Sister Marie-Micheline has told us that they'd like to add to their dress-making business by buying and selling materials to other local dressmakers.



REACHING OUT TO REFUGEES AND INDIVIDUALS

We love to give financial help directly to individuals whose situations in life are really difficult. The help we give to them is genuinely life-changing. We also love being able to help, in a very direct way, those who are fleeing from trouble spots in search of safety and help.

Father Lambert is in Kaya, one of the key towns which is receiving thousands of refugees from the north and northeast of Burkina Faso. Whilst being difficult to cope with such an influx, with the help of major relief agencies and Les Amis, it has not proved impossible.



Pictured (**left**) is a little boy, who, when this photo was taken, had just arrived in Kaya after a long journey, on foot, in search of safety. As an indication of how personally involved Fr Lambert is, this photograph was taken at Fr Lambert's own house in Kaya.

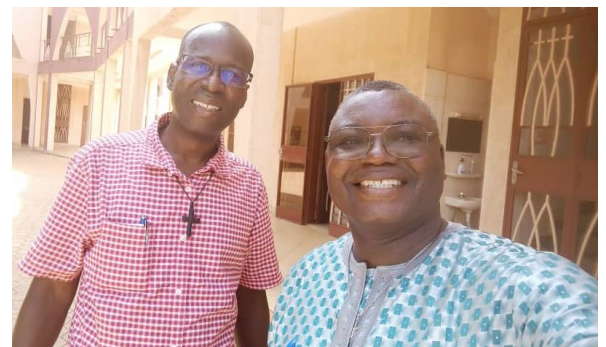
We have put on our website on the Emergency Appeals page a video (here's the link <https://tinyurl.com/mu4ekf48>) sent by Fr Lambert in which he shows the food he has organised for those who need to access that sort of help. Helping Fr Lambert in this work has become an important aspect of our giving.

Pictured, (**right**), is Michel who had an accident and broke his leg. The current treatment is, as you see ... not ideal! We have asked Fr Lambert to let us know how much it would cost to get his leg appropriately treated in hospital in Ouagadougou.



FATHER PAUL IS BACK IN BURKINA FASO

None of our work, particularly in the initial years, would have been possible without Father Paul Nazotin. Right from the start it was he who pointed us in the direction of where help was needed; it was he who drove Gillie around, each year, covering thousands of kilometres, often in difficult conditions, to enable her to visit our projects. After seven years studying in France, he is delighted to have returned to Burkina Faso and to take up the post of teacher at a seminary in Koumi, near Bobo. Here he is pictured (**right**, in red checked shirt) just after getting back to Burkina Faso, and reunited with his friend, Father Lambert. Without these two wonderful priests, our work would be so much harder, if not impossible. We wrote to Fr Paul to ask him to let us know if there was anything which is especially needed just now. He wrote:



"When I returned from France, requests for help came from everywhere, much more than in other years. The money you sent me quickly melted away like snow in the sun. The harvests have not been good in the Fada area, and the security situation has thrown many people into precariousness.

However, the event that I immediately wanted to tell you about happened in early January. I was saying Mass for an elderly [religious] Sister. Since there were only two of us, I gave her the floor after the gospel, so that we could share our meditations. She was telling me about her ministry before Covid. She took care of widowed women; she told me about the enormous suffering of these women, especially when they have the misfortune of being Christians, or of not wanting to align themselves with the practices of the tradition of the villages: forced remarriages for example. I wondered if we should not help her to help these women.

Clara (in Salembaoré) continues to oversee the women's association. Many women ask to join the group to benefit from micro-credits, but the financial capital of the association is limited. I was wondering if Les Amis were able to respond to the ever-increasing number of requests.

Another idea came to me in December. One of the girls whom Les Amis helps is studying here in Bobo. Would it be possible to help her to buy a moped at the start of the next academic year? If I haven't told you about it, it's because I'm trying not to weigh too much on the finances of Les Amis, which I know are under pressure."

Bjr tt Labe cmma t'al-lez vs.S'il te plaît,je vs enssoupli,je demande de l'aide.

jeu. 10 févr. à 16:00

He shared with us this heart-rending plea for help which he had received via text from a young girl in a village. (*"Bonjour l'abbé, comment allez-vous ? S'il te plaît, je vous en supplie ; je demande de l'aide"* / *"Hello Father, how are you? Please, I beg of you, I need help"*). It is hard to imagine how priests such as Fr Paul, when faced with such a plea can, without our financial help, give the help that this poor girl clearly needs.

If you'd like to help us respond to any of these above mentioned, then we'd love to hear from you!

COVID RESTRICTIONS ARE LIFTED AND WE WOULD LOVE TO GIVE MORE TALKS!



Gillie is really looking forward to giving her first talk for over two years! Due to the restrictions of Covid, this aspect of raising awareness has been impossible, and it would be fair to say that our funds have been affected by this. Thank you to the women of the 'Cranleigh Mothers Group' for inviting her to come and meet them and tell them all about our work. If you are a member of a group, no matter how small or big, do ask us to come and give a talk.

A personal message from Gillie ...

Thank you all, so much, for your continuing support. It has, once again, been hard to resist the temptation to go online and book myself onto an Air France flight to Ouagadougou. The hard part of staying away is that our projects concern people we know personally. My annual visits to them were of great importance not only in terms of the financial help we gave, but the boost it gave to know that people really care about them. In our continued giving, I hope that they know that, whilst still out of sight to us this year, they are definitely not out of mind.



PLEASE please continue to help us. Continue with your Standing Order if you can; increase it if you can; if you are someone who prefers one-off donations, then please consider us in your Lenten giving. And finally

A great escape! In the Spring 2019 newsletter we mentioned the various awful things that had happened to Europeans/visitors to Burkina Faso which made it necessary to cancel my trip that year. One of those was the disappearance of Edith Blais (**right**) and her companion. We felt sure that they had been kidnapped and taken to Mali, which turned out to be the case. We were astonished and delighted to learn that they had made an audacious escape from their Jihadist kidnappers through the deserts of Mali. Their ordeal has resulted in a book called 'The Weight of Sand' by Edith Blais, a great though harrowing read which confirmed that I was right to cancel my trip that year.



Thank you for continuing to help us to change lives.

ANY CHANGES TO YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT?



Moving house? There is always much to think about when moving house, and the last on your 'to do' list will be to let us know you are moving and to give us your new address. **However, if you'd like to continue to receive this newsletter, then please let us know you have moved.**

Can you still Gift Aid? If your circumstances have changed, and you can no longer Gift Aid your donations, then please don't forget to let us know.

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Our continued and heartfelt thanks to **Headline Design & Print** in Woking for printing this newsletter for us. They do a fantastic job, and we are really grateful to them.



The Trustees of Les Amis-Burkina Faso: Gillie & David Nicholls and Jude O'Mara-Spicer

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The poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you to open wide your hand to the needy and to the poor. (Deuteronomy 15:11)

In so far as you did this to the least of those brothers of mine, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40-41)

100% of money given is passed on to the needy. Yes, 100%!