

Dear relatives, friends and benefactors,

here in Karamoja, but also in other parts of the world, a handshake confirms to my counterpart that I perceive and respect him / her as a person.

In this time of the pandemic, an old ritual is now a taboo. However, it has been observed for a long time that this form of deeper mutual perception is increasingly lost in the hustle and bustle of our days - not just at Christmas. We rush stressed from one appointment to the next. We only perceive neighbours, colleagues and fellow human beings on the way to work or while shopping at the edge of our field of vision, we greet them briefly and haste on.



But when was the last time that I took more time to get involved more deeply, to really look at my counterpart and to confirm this comprehensive perception as a person with a firm handshake?

For me it was always natural to shake hands with visitors at the door when we said goodbye; this gesture means that I consciously turn to the guest once more, thank him or her for coming and express my wishes for the near future. With the handshake I pass on God's blessing for the journey until we meet again - a ritual that is now missing.



Blessing of a new Ambulance-vehicle

Corona has radically changed our way of living. Most people are now aware that the state of emergency will probably last even longer and that the pandemic will cost a lot of sacrifices - human life, health, economy, finances, security ... In this crisis there is no predetermined path, and in the search for solutions, mistakes were and will be made. Everyone misses normality, closeness and relaxed joy. The prospect of a "lonely" Christmas is scary ... that touches us deep within. Already during Easter, we were robbed of all the joyful ceremonies. And if, in view of the high number of infections, we are prevented from celebrating church services in a large community for an indefinite period of time, then we feel all the more how much we need to pray and search together, sing and be happy.

The new uncertainty affects us all - hardly anything can be planned, and so we have to keep our hearts in check so that it does not become too attached to our own desires and be disappointed in its anticipation. Sometimes it seems as if the colourfulness has disappeared from our life. This I compare with the solar eclipse a few years ago when the moon darkened the sun. One could still see everything in a twilight grey - the colours were missing.

It is all the more necessary in these times for us to reconnect with God for Christmas, who gives our lives colour, light and depth!



Landscape below Matany Hill appears as during an eclipse

Most of you received my circular letter at Pentecost. Therefore, I will start my short report from July, when we had a unique event here in Matany, namely the ordination of three Comboni Missionaries as Deacons - including Isaac, who is doing his pastoral work with us. Despite the Corona restrictions, it was a wonderful feast.



Dn. Isaac

Our Deacons with Bishop Damiano Guzzetti

In August we started the renovation work in medical ward and later also in the surgical ward. Both wards have a capacity of 41 beds. After a pandemic-related decline in patient numbers in April and May, these rose again in June. Since then the Hospital has mostly been overcrowded.

Triggered by the pandemic, we had a lot of additional work to do. As there was also a ban on gatherings, we were unable to continue our preparations for the 50th anniversary of St. Kizito Hospital. In addition, because of the restrictions, it was completely unclear whether we would be able to celebrate our festival with the people of Matany and surrounding villages – who are very important to us. Therefore, we decided to postpone it until after Easter. Nevertheless, we have started redesigning the entrance area of the Hospital, and I am very pleased to be able to inform you that this construction project will be completed soon.



At the end of August our dairy goats had their offspring. Each of the four mother animals gave birth to twins - now we can deliver more goat milk to the nutrition unit again.

In September we were allowed to re-open our Nursing and Midwifery Training School after almost 6 months of Corona closure - but only for the final classes. Of the 80 returned students, 13 tested positive for Covid-19. Thank God the infection was asymptomatic in all of them. The exams began on the 30th November.

Some of the Comboni missionaries in Uganda were also infected with Corona. All three confreres from Opit near Gulu, including our 85-year-old Fr. Josef Gerner, survived the infection and are doing well. However, three other confreres recently succumbed to the disease - including Br. Elio Croce, who headed the technical department at Lacor Hospital for 35 years.

He also looked after an orphanage. He was loved by many and was a technical genius. He always helped us reliably when we had problems with our X-ray machines. Many people mourn these confreres. Some of you have lost family members or close friends who have fallen victim to the pandemic. May they rest in peace.

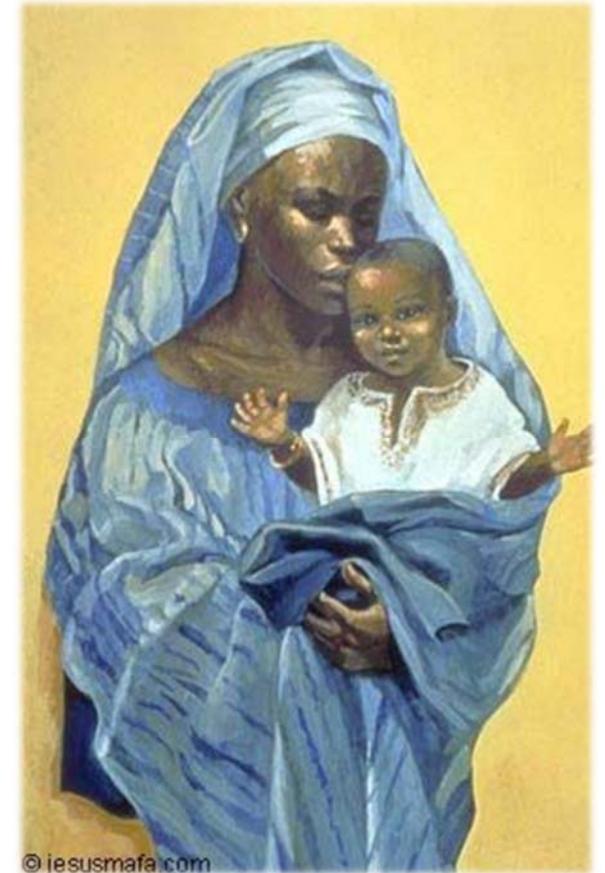
Because of the pandemic, we experience a decrease in donations. Government aid has also been cut. Nevertheless, we trust in God's providence, which never fails and always opens up new paths. – A reason for being thankful was e.g. the arrival of the container with various medical and technical supplies, which Dr. Friedrich Ullrich and Johann Öfele had sent off many months before. We are also glad that Bruno, the in charge of our Technical Department, is finally back with us in Matany after his shoulder surgery in Germany. Recently our surgeon, Dr. Paul Kasalirwe, received the "Heroes in Health Award" as the best Doctor in Uganda and Matany Hospital was rated as the second best "faith based" Hospital in Uganda.

Election campaigns are currently underway in Uganda. There have already been riots with loss of lives. We can only hope that the ones in power will respect the rights of the poor and the hopes of the young.

In this season of Advent, we wait for our Saviour full of trust and hope. The life of Jesus is fit in between his birth as a helpless child in the manger and his death on the cross, helpless in human terms. The love for the weak and the little ones is the guiding principle of his message and his actions. Christian discipleship therefore means to make this God incarnate - the powerful, who made himself very small - concrete in our own behaviour towards the powerless and marginalized. If we too make love the guiding principle for our actions, then the world will be a little warmer, more colourful and brighter and this not only during this Christmas season.

I wish you and all of us this light of hope,

Yours **Br. Günther and Team**



To all of you

A peaceful Christmas

hoping that in the New Year

we will again shake hands

without fear of infection