

## Link Letter No.5 December 2015

**Dear brothers and sisters,**

### **Hospitality**

There is a time for everything – a time to host and a time to be the guest. At the moment I am enjoying the hospitality of my parents and of many friends, and strangers who have become friends, during the visits to my link churches. I am very grateful for the generosity of those who have welcomed me in, offered me a glimpse into their life, allowed me an opportunity to share my story and to feel part of their fellowship. Thank God that once we become part of his family, all around the world we will find people who welcome us and make us feel at home! However, I must confess that coming on “home leave” has also made me realise that if you have lived for a while in a different part of the world, you are unsure about what to call home. It is something that can make you sad, but I am comforted by the thought that we are all wondering pilgrims on this earth or like Jim Reeves used to sing, “This world is not my home”.

My home leave happens to coincide with a large wave of refugees flowing across Europe which immediately challenges countries, the church and individuals. What is the right way to respond? A lot depends on our world view and interpretation of “hospitality”. Isn’t it ironic that people who originated in other parts of the world have integrated so well into our society that today they consider Europe their continent and want to close the borders? If you are a Christian who takes the instructions in the Bible seriously, I am afraid you cannot really opt out of hospitality. You will find that you have to receive and treat both guests and strangers in a warm, friendly and generous way. In Leviticus 19:33-34, God tells the Israelites: “When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” Romans 12: 13 says: “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”



Visiting friends



**Wies Landheer**  
CMS mission partner  
Rwanda

Wies Landheer is a Dutch doctor and CMS mission partner working at Gahini Hospital in Rwanda. If you want to learn more about Gahini you can visit [www.gahini.blogspot.com](http://www.gahini.blogspot.com)

And in 1 Peter 4, when Peter talks about the end times being near, he urges people to be alert and pray and to love each other; following this, the next most important thing is to: “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” I have to smile about the “without grumbling” bit as I realise that my experiences in Gahini have taught me so much about continuously being ready to receive guests but I still need to learn more and to be able to do it without grumbling.

Have you ever been overwhelmed by the way someone offered you hospitality? Was that person from the same social and cultural background as you? My most humbling experiences have been with people in Uganda and Rwanda who



Visiting people at home

welcomed me into their homes and treated me better than they would treat themselves. No matter whether I came expectedly or unexpectedly, I was cheerfully received as an honourable guest. They would not just share a meal with me but slaughtered their only chicken and served me a feast. They gave me the best bed in the house and happily slept on the floor. They had so little, but gave me everything and more. They challenged the ways I had been receiving guests and changed me. Never again will I be able to host someone on an air mattress and

sleep in my own comfortable bed without feeling guilty.

How grateful I am for being given the opportunity to have my own household in Gahini and to practice hospitality! In fact, what I have been missing most during my home leave is a place that I can call my own where I can host others. I miss the open door, people walking in who are always different from the people who have promised to come, sitting around the table listening to other people's stories, playing games, singing songs, preparing meals together with as many people as we can possibly fit into the little kitchen, enjoying food together and being able to call the neighbour to come and eat what we can't finish ourselves, a mixture of laughter, joy, shared sorrows, words of encouragement and prayers before our guests return to their homes. I miss "giving the guests a push" and accompanying them halfway home on their journey while making plans to meet again and exchanging words of gratitude and greetings to people in other homes and families. I think it is easier for me to host than to be the guest, to give than to receive.

With which situation do you feel most comfortable? When you are the host or when you are the guest? In which situation do you think you give the most? Jesus gives us many examples of being the guest and the host, sometimes quickly shifting between the two like in the story of the disciples that he meets on the way to Emmaus. He gives as much in both roles, sharing everything that he has and ultimately giving his life. My experiences in East Africa have taught me that by making the effort of moving into the world of others, by coming to work with them or paying them a visit at home, I honour them. If you decide to visit someone, don't think of yourself as a bother but as a facilitator of friendship and fellowship! A nice illustration can be found on YouTube if you search for "lonely homeless man".

Every stranger is a potential friend. You just have to spend some time with someone, focussing your attention on the other. An old Hasidim tale explains it like this: "An old rabbi once asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun. 'Could it be',



Receiving a very warm welcome at church!

asked one student, 'when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?' 'No', answered the rabbi. Another asked 'Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a palm tree?' 'No', answered the rabbi. The pupils didn't know what other answers they could give. 'Then what is it?' they asked him. He replied: 'It is when you can look on the face of a stranger and see a friend; because if you cannot see this, it is still night.'"

We live in an imperfect world where we won't always be welcomed warmly. Not everyone will respect us. Not everyone

will be unprejudiced. Not everyone will be willing to meet us halfway. Not everyone will be interested in becoming our friend. Some people may want to take from us rather than giving us something. What to do when we meet with unloving people and their rejection? Jesus advises us to quickly continue on our mission. (Matthew 10:14, Luke 9:5)

**Here is an interesting piece of liturgy on the topic, called “The Way Home”.**

Our “Home” is the realm of God.  
It is where love and justice prevail.

and we are called by God  
to make wherever we are  
as much like home as possible.

We dare not feel “at home” in a world like this:  
where one-third of the people live abundantly,  
and two-thirds live in scarcity –

Two ghettos: one rich, the other poor.

In such a world we are refugees  
dwelling on either side of a dividing wall  
afraid to cross the boundary.

Christ breaks down the dividing wall.

“Home” happens when the walls come down,  
and the ghettos are no more,  
and we are all brothers and sisters.

The beginning of the way home  
is the way of sharing!

Our footsteps down the aisle to share with others  
are the first short steps  
of the long journey “home.”

(Richard Wilcox: Gifts of Many Cultures: Worship Resources for the Global Community, Cleveland: United Church Press, 1995.)



A baby hat and a message...



A meal shared always tastes better

As we walk our way of life, are we walking “home”? Are we looking forward to the great banquet where God will host us together with many others coming from all nations? Are we prepared? Let’s pray that when the time comes, we shall all sit together at the table and share with friends!

**Transitioning**

I have been reflecting on home and friendships recently not only because of my home leave, but also because my life is to be in transition again...

I was very much looking forward to returning to Gahini for another year or two, but new insights and information acquired over the past few weeks have shown that it would be better for me not to do so. Expanding my medical knowledge and expertise in the coming years and doing a masters in medicine, while it is still possible, will enable me to be more effective in the future when I hope to return to work in East Africa for a longer period of time, or any other place where God sends me for that matter. Together with CMS, I have been exploring future options and so, from February, will be finishing as a mission partner and leaving CMS to concentrate on training. I ask for your prayers in this.

Let us continue to rejoice over the lives positively impacted by the work that has been done together in Gahini over the past three years – I with my presence and you with your continuous support and prayers. Thank you for your care for me!

### **Christmas blessings**

Last Christmas, the choir in Gahini was singing “Come and welcome Jesus!” Now Christmas is nearing I pray that you will find time to prepare for the coming of the world’s most important “guest” and that he will be welcomed into the hearts of many! Have a very blessed Christmas!

### **Prayer requests**

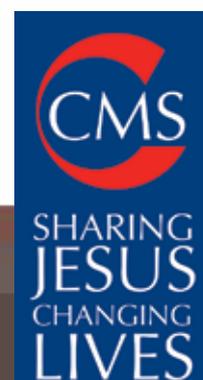
- While writing this letter to you, prayer requests have come in for our brothers and sisters in Burundi. We don’t hear much about it on the news but apparently people are hiding in the churches afraid of being killed if they go home. Please pray for peace in Burundi and continued peace in surrounding countries like Rwanda.
- Thank God for the opportunity to visit all my link churches, for the hospitality I received and for new and strengthened friendships!
- Thank God for his faithfulness over the past few years and pray now for his guidance as I take steps into the future.
- Thank God for all the knitters who so enthusiastically responded to the request for hats for (premature) babies! See photo overleaf.
- Pray for the people in Gahini and especially for those who need medical care. May God continue to provide them with motivated and skilled medical staff who can give the best possible care, leaders who will enable that and a system that makes it possible.
- Pray for the children in Gahini, that they may learn about God and get to know him, that people in the church will be called to help them with that and to accept them as full members of the congregation.
- Pray for the people in Gahini who work in the hospital, and those who teach in the school and serve in the church, that they may know God’s love and that this will give them the strength and endurance to continue their work in the best possible way.

The [www.facebook.com/friendsofgahini](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofgahini) will become a closed group. That means that you have to become a Facebook member and a member of the group to be able to access the information. Look at the mentioned page to for directions!

God bless

*Wies*

[www.cms-uk.org](http://www.cms-uk.org)



**Church Mission Society**

Watlington Road, Oxford, OX4 6BZ Tel: 01865 787400 Fax: 01865 776375  
Email: [info@cms-uk.org](mailto:info@cms-uk.org) [www.cms-uk.org](http://www.cms-uk.org) Registered Charity Number 1131655