MALAWI - TWIN

*Container Number Ten – May 2018*

Newsletter No 71

 March 2018

SALUT-Malawi

## *Sanitary Aid and Ladies’ Underwear to Malawi*

We are SALUT-Malawi, the latest chapter in the Malawi Twinning story. Our start came out of a moment of epiphany last year. Listening to Brian’s annual appeal at Corpus Christi Church, one of us remembered an article on the BBC news website about girls who stop going to school when they start to menstruate because they lack underwear and sanitary pads - basic commodities which we take for granted.

With our apologies to the male readers of this newsletter, cast your mind back ladies, to being a teenager and waking up on a school day with menstrual cramps. Remember how the pain, not to mention the anxiety about leaks and odours, inhibited your activities and undermined your self-confidence. And let’s not forget the further embarrassment unleashed as breasts developed and hips filled out. Now imagine going through those days with neither sanitary pads nor underwear.

This graph shows the results of a survey conducted in 2010 among 104 schoolgirls in Malawi, about their experiences of menstrual hygiene in schools. It is clear that sanitary pads were their top priority though so many other basic needs were also missing. The “Other” category included lights, a place to wash menstrual cloths, cleaning materials, doors, locks, toilet paper, underwear and a sick bay.

*“You can find that a girl has only one underwear and two pieces of cloth for usinduring menses. This makes it difficult for them to come to school during menses.”*

Teacher from Tanzania after teaching girls about menstrual hygiene

In Malawi, like much of Sub-Saharan Africa, the shortage of schools means that many children must travel long distances to attend classes. Some children are able to get a room in a dormitory next to the school. The schoolgirls in this survey all lived either at home or at their school dormitory. The results revealed that in one term they missed 85 school days due to menstrual hygiene issues. While 58% were off school for one to two hours, 15% were absent for more than three days. School was missed for body washing, pain control, changing stained skirts and general malaise. Yet these girls are the lucky ones. For most girls in rural Africa, the difficulties involved in managing menstruation mean that the start of their period marks the end of their education.

So, with the support of the Malawi Twinning Project and the International Women’s Network of Tonbridge, four of us used local networking and social media last Spring to organise collections of gently-used underwear, bars of soap and money for the bulk purchase of reusable sanitary pads. There was an enthusiastic response as people were genuinely moved and in a spirit of solidarity with their Malawian sisters donated generously. Within three months we had filled 16 boxes with all sizes of ladies’ and children’s underwear as well as reusable diapers and raised just over £650! We also made contact with Helen from *Cheeky Wipes* who gave us a 35% discount on the bulk purchase of their reusable cloth sanitary pads which meant we were able to buy 250 pads which we packaged into 50 individual packs of 5.

This is only a small drop in the ocean when you consider that Malawi Twinning supports more than 8000 school children. However, the feedback from Malawi is that these donations made a significant difference last year. So, this time we are aiming higher and, dear friends, this is how you could help.

1. **Spring clean your underwear drawers**, gathering together all those bras, knickers and children’s underwear no longer, or never, worn.
2. **Donate new packs of underwear**, especially training bras and sturdy knickers for teenaged girls. Remember these need to withstand a lot of washing as girls often only own one or two.
3. **Donate soap**. SOLID SOAP ONLY please. Beside the plastic nuisance, bottles of liquid soap are of little use where there are no taps of running water and the soap is used riverside to scrub clothes.
4. **Contribute towards the purchase of reusable sanitary pads**. Please do not buy these yourself since they retail for £4-£5 for one pad while our bulk buy price last year was £2.66 for one. If you are a Corpus Christi parishioner, could we ask you to make your donation by cheque payable to “Corpus Christi Church Tonbridge”, placed in an envelope marked “Container – SALUT-Malawi” and handed into the Parish Office. In this way the project will be able to benefit from Gift Aid.
5. Bring your donations to one of our **collection events**:
* **2pm-4pm**, **Sunday 4 March 2018** at the Fisher Hall, Lyons Crescent, Tonbridge
* **12noon-2pm**, **Friday 9 March 2018**, during the International Women’s Day Lunch, Christ Church, High Street, Tonbridge
* **6pm-8pm, Saturday 10 March 2018** at the Fisher Hall, Lyons Crescent, Tonbridge
1. **Encourage your children’s school or nursery to get involved**. This year we will be asking local schools and nurseries to host collection boxes for underwear, especially training bras. We will also be looking to engage with students by making presentations and encouraging discussion to raise their awareness of the levels of deprivation experienced by their peers in countries like Malawi.

**We will be accepting donations until mid-April.** If you would like to assist, donate or ask a question, please do not hesitate to contact **Maria Neves** (**07503 663 734**) or **Jacqueline Nunes** (**07914 771 357**).