

COLOMA PRIMARY SCHOOL, UGANDA

UPDATE 2024

Dear Friends

It is the time of year again when we begin to think of family and friends with grateful, loving hearts and indeed it is the same for us all at Coloma.

Firstly I wish each one of you a blessed and joyous Christmas with a happy, prosperous and peace filled 2025. Indeed is it not what we all long for in this troubled world of today.

Here at Coloma our hearts are filled with gratitude to have reached the end of the year. We express our grateful thanks to you all for your kind thoughts, your communications, your good wishes and for your great support in many ways. It is always a great joy to hear from you and to be part of your life's journey and that of your family.

The children of Coloma are the center of the school and 2024 has been a good year for them and for us, the administrators and staff. Happily, we did not have many health challenges apart from an outbreak of tonsillitis during 2nd term. The children did not have to go to hospital – it was managed from school, as was a very common outbreak all over among children. There were the usual coughs and flues as expected among children but as I write the children look fine and healthy.

In January 2024 we received the results of the previous year's exams. They were very good and we were happy to be the 2nd best school in Mbarara city. There are 110 primary schools in the city. We were very grateful to the children, the teachers, the support staff and the parents for this good performance. Most of these children have continued their education in 2nd level institutions. While catering for the children, the teachers too continue their own academic learning. At the beginning of 2024, 3 teachers received their teachers' degrees and presently 4 are awaiting their graduation before Christmas while other are continuing their upgrading studies

In 2024 the number of children increased to 440 for the first time. This included a double stream in the top class of 77 children. This was the first time for a double stream in P7. While being happy to have an extra class it created its own logistical challenges of needing double of everything. These girls sat their final state exam on November 6th and 7th and we await their good results.

A very big thank you to our sponsors and donors for their great support during 2024 and continuing. Without your support many of our children would never have been able to come to Coloma. We thank you most sincerely and may you be greatly blessed. Extra curricular activities play a significant role in the school for enjoyment, for exercise and for competition. This year the children participated in maths, sports, music, drama and dance competitions. They performed very well - one girl has reached the East African finals in Maths to be held in Nairobi while another reached the National finals in Netball. Added to these activities 2 new indoor sports were availed of this year – Scrabble and Debating. These were well appreciated and considered good learning activities for the children.

As the school expands so too must all other structures together with new developments. The construction of a house for women and girls is almost complete and will be in use for the next new year in February. This will accommodate 8 single girls and 4 married women with children. Different organizations have been very generous to us together with individuals in supporting the construction of a

rabbit house, a pig house and a hen house together with planting a woodland plot of Grevillea Robusta trees also the purchase of musical and sports equipment and Girl Guide uniforms, while we await the upgrading of the playground for the young children. Gradually the whole place is becoming truly "Coloma village".

In response to the needs of our planet earth and the commitment of our Congregation to caring for the environment a big effort has been made in relation to the disposal of plastic papers and plastic containers. The school has set up a collection system whereby all plastics are gathered together and later sent to a recycling depot in Mbarara town. Also the primary 6 class undertook the construction of a rainwater harvesting tank using empty plastic soda bottles. These were cemented together forming the walls of the water tank. Presently it is in use for collecting rain water from the rabbit house.

On the farming side it was not a good year. The whole area got Foot and Mouth disease. This is not like Europe where a whole herd is slaughtered and compensated for by government. There is no compensation in Uganda so the farmers struggle to keep their animals alive. I had never seen foot and mouth before – the animals suffered greatly – they just could not eat or swallow. We lost 7 animals and this was with the best possible care we could give them. Our neighbour lost 50% of the herd. However, the after effects were very severe and this was compounded with a very severe dry season, that lasted from May into October. The animals never got a chance to pick up and so remained thin and miserable. It is only now in October and November that they are regaining their body weight. Yet, as my mother used to say "we thank God while it stays outside the house" and indeed we do.

We had a severe lightning strike in October and in spite having 2 lightening arrestors on our borehole pump house it blew the whole system. It was an expensive replacement but there again all adults and children were safe.

In our future planning it has been a concern for us that yearly there are a few girls who cannot continue academically to second level education and we often dream of providing a skills training for them. While at Coloma they are introduced to various needle/hand crafts, which they enjoy and are generally good at. If the girls are to make a living from this they need further and better skills. We would like to see further training in the rearing of animals and in improved technical methods of vegetable and crop growing. These they study at basic level while here. We also think of hairdressing, catering and computer skills. In 2025 we hope to put plans in place for such a center and to study its feasibility..

If you, the reader, have any thoughts about such we would be happy to hear from you.

Again on behalf of Coloma Primary School Administration and of course on my own behalf I thank you most sincerely for all you have done and continue to do for our children and for the growth and development of this school.

Be sure that you are in our hearts and our prayers. Without you we could not manage this school. Thank you very much – may our God and Lord bring peace, joy and love into your hearts and homes.

Happy Christmas and a blessed year of 2025.

Sr Mona Maher and the Sisters of Coloma