

ST. JOSEPH ORPHANAGE

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**— FATHER FRANCIS
BANURA**

As director of the St. Joseph Integrated Orphanage Home, Father Francis Banura oversees the care of 50 children. Because he is an ordained priest, they address him as “father.” In another sense, too, they think of him as their father. “After they have been here for some time,” he says, “they don’t like to be thought of as orphans. They say ‘Father, you are our father.’”

By 2003, when Father Banura took charge of the orphanage, in the small town of Kagadi in western Uganda, he acquired an acute and agonizing understanding of how AIDS was shattering family stability in the vicinity.

Established by the Catholic Church in 1989, the orphanage has increasingly sought to fill a parental void created by the AIDS crisis. A majority of its wards are now children who were orphaned when their parents died of AIDS.

The orphanage, located in an outlying corner of Kagadi, consists of a modest cluster of one-story, yellow-brick buildings flanked by gardens of vegetables and gaily-blooming flowers. One building, which is designated as a classroom for carpentry instruction, remains empty because the orphanage lacks the money to equip it. For electricity, the orphanage relies on erratic solar panels.

Father Banura, a short man with a genial, gap-toothed smile, looks younger than his 36 years. Though he says there is no firm estimate of the number of children in the Kagadi area who have been orphaned by



Photos: Joe Rosenbloom

Father Francis Banura runs the St. Joseph Orphanage, supported by AIM to expand an outreach program.

AIDS, he does know there are more of them all the time. “The problem we’re having is, there are so many who are applying to come, but we have limited space,” he says.

All too often, it is the impoverished grandparents of the orphans who take them in but who lack the means to feed, clothe, and educate them. If they have nowhere to turn, some AIDS-orphaned children end up on the streets. There, they may then meet a fate that is tragically ironic, Father Banura says. “Some of the girls meet men who give them gifts for sex,” he says. “And some will get AIDS and die of the same thing as their parents.”

Distressed that St. Joseph could not accept more orphans, Father Banura developed an outreach program. Financed by a grant from AIM, the orphanage has held seminars for foster parents about HIV/AIDS, nutrition, and



Orphans tend a garden at St. Joseph Orphanage, where vegetables and flowers are grown.

ways they might augment their income by raising poultry, rabbits, or pigs. There have been workshops about beekeeping, and the orphanage has distributed 80 beehives to foster parents as another income generator.

As the recipient of an AIM grant, the orphanage itself has gained a technical-assistance boost. AIM helped the orphanage’s seven-person staff upgrade their management skills so they could satisfy the grant’s bookkeeping requirements.

“I dare say that I’ve benefited personally, because I’ve gained some knowledge about recordkeeping and data collection,” he says, “and I’ve gotten connected with other people dealing with the same problems as I am.” ■

AIM'S ROLE	Provided funding, technical assistance, and capacity building
TOTAL GRANT	Ush 30,914,950
CONTRACT PERIOD	August 2004 to July 2005
ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY AIM	Orphans and vulnerable children Outreach orphan activities
OTHER DONORS	German Ugandahilfe-Kagadi e. V Hoima Catholic Diocese