

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Good News

From Africa

Spring 2011



Do You Give or Give Up?

Lent is fast approaching with Ash Wednesday on March 9 this year. Already I've found myself thinking about what I should give up during those days. But lately I've also begun to wonder if this is really the right attitude to have.

Maybe instead of giving up something we should GIVE. All of us certainly have much we can give. Perhaps we can give time as we share our talents with a group or agency. Perhaps we can give friendship and laughter as we visit homebound relatives or neighbors. Perhaps we can give prayer as we participate in the celebration of the Eucharist or take an extra ten minutes each day for personal prayer. Perhaps we can reach out to those in need by helping to support the work of those who help to transform the lives of the poor. One thing I do know for sure is that by giving, we will never grow poorer! Included in this issue of Good News from Africa you will find many ways different people have given of themselves to change lives. Maybe these stories will give you an inspiration of a way you might give rather than give up this Lenten Season.



I also want to share this special photo with you. On October 22 Larry Nelson and his son Jesse walked from Harris, MN to Minneapolis, 52 miles, to raise money to help educate the children in Sierra Leone. They had requested pledges and donations from family and friends for this effort

Now that is GIVING!

*You will be enriched in every way
for your great generosity . . . (2 Cor. 9:11)*

Sister Ruth Emke, SSND Director of Development

Good News from Ngalieng'a, KENYA Lilian's Story

By Alice Akoth Ochieng'
(Social Worker for Notre Dame Children Outreach)



I find it difficult to stop thinking about the family of a very elderly woman named Susan Ochieng', in particular the little ten year old girl called "Lilian." Lilian is an orphan in Class One in Obengle Primary School. Both Lilian's parents died when she was only two years old.

After the death of Lilian's parents, Aunty, the only remaining daughter of Grandmother Susan, promised to take care of Lilian and took her to her home in Mbita, about three hours drive away. After only a few years the aunt decided to bring Lilian back to live with her siblings who were under the care of their aged grandmother. Whenever we visit the home, the grandmother always speaks bitterly of how God,

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Good News from Makeni, SIERRA LEONE

University of Makeni Welcomes All Who Look to a Brighter Future

By Sister Rosanne Rustemeyer

The sign at the entrance reads “Welcome to the University of Makeni” and more specifically “Welcome to Fatima College”. This site marks the first private university in Sierra Leone, established in 2009. Nearly 600 students pass by the sign and among them are two students pictured here. Meet Alie Bangura and Ibrahim Thullah. I would like to tell you a bit of their stories. Both young men came to Fatima College to gain skills in Information Technology.



Sister Rosanne Rustemeyer with Alie Bangura and Ibrahim Thullah

Ibrahim hopes to achieve a certificate to use in securing employment as a secretary. He grew up in Makeni and attended St. Francis Secondary School. He contracted polio as a small child. Handicap International has provided Ibrahim with his crutches. In referring to the new walkways leading to the IT lab, which have been made accessible for those physically impaired, Ibrahim says, “The place is so nice and after doing the course I will benefit in the future.”

Alie Bangura has come to Makeni from Freetown to stay with relatives while he does his computer studies. Alie travels the 45 minutes to school in his bike, a gift from Mercy Ships, which helps him cope with the aftermath of polio. Alie reports, “Makeni is much better

than Freetown because there are no hills and it is easier to get around Fatima College since there are not many steps.”

Because the University of Makeni is a Catholic College efforts are made to include students with physical impairments. Several sight impaired students are also pleased with improvements for accessibility made on the school campus. Sisters Eleanor Ewertz and I joined the staff of Fatima College in 2008, where we teach in the Religious Studies Department and work extensively with first and second year students in the Foundation Classes.

In just a few years the school has achieved University status. We have seen several improvements in the school infrastructure, as well as academic programs, in these two years. It is amazing how much can be done when a cooperative spirit prevails. Because we are a private university under the Diocese of Makeni the school depends on generous contributions as it moves into the future.

Good News from Nsawam, GHANA

A Bike for Kojo By Sister Cecilia Gros

For most children, learning to ride a bicycle is a normal part of growing up. However, for the children at the Orthopedic Centre in Nsawam, it presents a particular challenge and is especially rewarding. In the past, most of the children at the Centre had been afflicted with

polio so riding a bicycle was not appropriate for a child with paralyzed legs. Now most of the children seen at the Centre are victims of terrible road accidents and have had either one or both legs amputated. With the prostheses they are able to function like any other child.



Kojo is a fifteen year old boy whose left leg is amputated above the knee. He came to the Centre when he was nine years old. Because

of the situation at home Kojo goes to school in Nsawam and goes home only for the holidays. Before coming to the centre his father used him for begging. Now Kojo is learning his self worth and is a good influence with the other children.

Swimming was one of the first things he learned to do at the Centre. A few months ago an old bicycle was found in a container sent from Holland. With the help of another one of the patients, he soon learned how to ride it. The sisters used some of their gift money to buy him a new

bicycle. It is probably the first time this boy has had anything that was really his. Soon the other children wanted to learn to ride. A group of women who visit the Centre regularly donated several bikes in different sizes. Now, in the afternoon when it is cooler, you can see the children outside helping each other learn how to ride a bicycle. Not only are they having great fun but they are exercising. Learning to ride a bike gives them a wonderful sense of accomplishment.

Good News from Sunyani, GHANA God is Good! By Sister Elis Viebeck



Ruth and Sister Elis Viebeck

“Sometimes I am sitting at the edge of my bed pondering the way my life went and without being aware of it tears start running down my cheeks, tears of wonder, of astonishment and thanks giving.” These are the words of Ruth. “How could I become who I am now, a teacher at a Vocational School, happily married to a reliable good husband and blessed with a healthy baby?”

Ruth’s life started out in hopeless poverty. Her father died leaving her mother without enough to support herself or her child. During her Primary School the girl went around washing people’s clothes. When she reached junior high school her mother gave her as household help to a policeman, so that she could earn her school fees. When the payment was due the man refused to give her the money unless she would sleep with him. She ran away. Later she was given to a rich woman in Accra with the promise that the girl would help in the household and at the same time be allowed to attend school. Ruth describes her stay in Accra with these words. “In the morning I had to clean the whole house and wash the clothes by hand. Then I ran to school where I got beaten because I was late.

After school I ran crying back to the house and got beaten or deprived of food, because I was late.” Ruth managed to finish junior high. In order to be able to register the girl in Notre Dame Senior Secondary School in Sunyani, Ruth’s mother sold her last wrapper. (A wrapper is a piece of cloth used as a basic piece of clothing for women in Ghana. Most often it is wrapped around the waist as a skirt.) Because of her poor academic background Ruth was asked to attend the preparation year in PreSec. This is a year of basic academic subjects meant to help those girls who do not come to the secondary school with a good educational background. After this year the exam showed that Ruth still would not be able to follow the program of the secondary school. She wept bitterly begging that I would enroll her in a Vocational School, otherwise she would never see a school again. This is the moment her life started to change. I phoned a friend from my former school in Germany asking if she would take over the payment of fees for the education of Ruth in a Vocational School. She generously agreed. Ruth made her way successfully through the Vocational School, where she chose dress making.

During the years of education in the Vocational School and especially in the Polytechnic she learned to live with the tension of studies, work and the need to share her small finances with her poor mother. Many visits and shared experiences bound us together and Ruth became for me like my own daughter. It is still overwhelming for me when she ends the reflection about her life with the expression. “Yes, I suffered. It is necessary to suffer in order to learn to understand people. God is good.” Listening to her I tune in to her “God is good”. God brought all of us together, the sisters, her mother, my generous friends and me, people from different continents (who certainly didn’t plan to meet on Ghana’s soil) to make a young girl understand His personal love for her.

Isn’t it wonderful to be used by God?

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after giving her seven children, has taken back three sons and three daughters, leaving her only the one daughter who now is not in a position to assist her. The question for her now is who will bury her when she dies? All the children that she banked her hope on are gone. She is left only with grandchildren and the responsibility to provide for them. She has neither the strength to work nor the capital to start a business. But, what business could she manage anyway at her age?

Lilian's elder sister Diana Adhiambo dropped out of school in Class Six and married when life at home became unbearable for her at the death of her parents.

Evans Akello is the second born. He is 17 years old and dropped out in his first year of Secondary School in 2008. He had no one to pay his school fees for him so he moved to the lake and started fishing and once in awhile takes a little support to the family.

Kennedy Okoth is 15 years old and is the third born. He dropped out of school in Class Seven, the same year Evans did. His biggest challenge was lack of food. Even though he is bright he could not concentrate in school because of hunger so he left school and joined his brother at the lake. He would like to return to school but fears that he would have the same trouble.

Albert Okeyo is 13 years old and the fourth born. He is in Class Six at Ariwo Primary School. He has

repeated this class for the second time now. Albert says he can't perform because when he comes back from school he starts "cracking his brain" how to get and cook food. He is also responsible for taking his sister to the clinic once every month.

When Lilian came back from her aunty she was looking unhealthy and malnourished. Lilian is HIV positive and is already on ARV drugs but because she hadn't had a permanent home and someone to monitor her with the medicines, the drugs did more harm than good. This made her life even harder.

Since Lilian came in touch with Notre Dame Children Outreach, her life has changed tremendously. Even though there are still ups and downs, she now looks healthy, lively and happy. She still needs a lot of support to make her life complete, as does the family which needs so many things. Christ says that "Whatever you do for one of the least of these, you do for me." It is all our responsibility to give Lilian her life back.

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