

The School Sisters of Notre Dame

Good News From Africa



Spring 2009

Swahili Proverb from East Africa

Kila mlango kwa ufunguo wake.

Every door has its own key.

Together We Continue to Open Doors

So many in our world are without hope, facing doors that they just can't seem to open on their own. For some it is a life of poor health due to AIDs or lack of good nourishment or clean water. For others it is a life of illiteracy, not being able to fully participate in society because of the lack of skills for reading and writing. As you read the articles below you will see how together we are opening some doors to good health for people in Kenya by providing a means of safe drinking water. In Ghana the door to literacy is opened so that a mother will be able to help her son as he grows and enters school. There are so many ways we can open those doorways of hope for others.

As part of her preparation to become a novice director in Africa, along with Sister Grace Okon, Sister Delia Calis has spent some time with our sisters in the various countries, getting a taste of the cultures and countries of the novices. The door to these new experiences has opened for her a view of the richness and beauty of the ministries and sisters she met as well as the people and landscapes of the countries.

Can you continue to join us in opening doors of hope?



A family with their bio-sand filter

Good News From Kenya— Water as Medicine

By Sister Janet Crane, SSND

I grew up along clean Missouri springs and streams where good water was in abundance. When we turned on the faucet in our house, I knew that the water that came out had gone through a purification system for our town and that the water was good to drink. I could not imagine wondering where my next glass of clean water would come from. When I came to Kenya, I found that pollution made clean water scarce. There are very few city purification plants so the water coming from the taps was not good to drink. In many places the people got their water directly from the streams or from wells. All of the

continued on page 2

Good News From Kenya—Continued From Page 1

drinking water needs to be filtered or boiled for twenty minutes to make it safe to drink.

Water has many benefits in promoting good health through hydration and cleansing. Clean and sufficient water aids like medicine in the recovery of disease. In many areas of Kenya, sufficient clean water is a dream. Water is drawn from rivers, dams, and wells which are drying up. This water is not safe for human consumption. The reports indicate waterborne diseases have been rampant, especially in school children and the sick in the area. The situation keeps getting worse with time because of the scarcity of water. Some members of the community, especially the elderly and those who are weak because of sickness and are unable to fetch water from the common water points, are helped out by water vendors. The water that is sold to these families is usually polluted because the vendors themselves do not know the source of the water. For them it is a way of making a living.

Boiling water has been the means for the community to purify the water. This has posed various challenges to the people. Boiling water requires additional expenses like buying of coal, gathering firewood from dwindling forests and carrying it long distances. Boiling for the twenty minutes required reduces the volume of the precious water. Apart from rampant waterborne diseases, skin diseases were also common because of the dirty water used for bathing and washing clothes.

In 2004, small portable camping filters were introduced into the Riara Health Project in the Kibera slum of Nairobi. The medical team reported a reduction of diarrhea, skin diseases, and stomach problems from those who used the water from the filters. The filters were expensive and the main filtration “candle” was pottery. However, even in the recent post-election chaos when the inhabitants ran for their lives, no filter was lost!

In 2008, bio-sand filters using simple technology and available materials at a low cost were installed in a rural area affected by high rates of HIV and waterborne diseases in the western area of Kenya. Recent reports of overall good health and reduction of waterborne diseases confirmed the benefit of the bio-sand filters. And as the people’s health has improved so has their ability to work better on their farms and so improve nutrition.

In December 2008, a number of workshops were held to create awareness of basic water sanitation as well as how to build and maintain the bio-sand filters. This will ensure that these filters can serve the community for many years to come. The bio-sand filters are poured concrete with tubing leading to the outside from about half way up the tower. The inside has a bottom layer of limestone rocks (chat), then a layer of gravel, and then about a foot of sand. A small metal square above the sand keeps it so that when adding water it does not displace the sand. The bio-sand filter then takes ten days for good bacteria to form that kill the harmful ones in this suitable bio-state. When dirty water is added, it goes through the filter and the tubing from the bottom and allows clean water about 99% pure to flow out. The filter is cleaned by mixing the sand lightly and sending water through it. When the water is clear it is ready to use again. It could last forever as long as the tower is not moved so that the sand shifts to the bottom. Community health workers and clients are being trained so that water is purified efficiently and cheaply. This too adds to their health. One tower can purify enough water in a day to provide a day’s supply of water for ten households.

Sister Rose Ngacha has facilitated the bio-sand filters, and I facilitated the camping filters in Kibera. We hope to continue training for the cost effective bio-sand filters in both Kibera and Oyugis. Both of us have received much interest in continuing the programs to ensure accessibility and availability of clean water for all, to improve the living standards and to promote health in the HIV affected communities. Good, clean water is actually a wonderful medicine as it prevents many diseases from ever getting started.



Women from the Oyugis Area with Sisters Rose Ngacha and Janet Crane

Good News From Kisumu, Ghana— Education for All, One Person at a Time

By Sister Joan J. Okoth

Lydia Abena is a thirty-two-year-old young mother of one. Lydia comes from Brong Ahafo region in Ghana and is married to Martin Nadaki who hails from the Northern part of Ghana.



Lydia and Sister Joan

Lydia and Martin are a lovely couple who are both physically challenged. They stay and work at the Orthopedic Training Centre where rehabilitation and physiotherapy of the physically challenged takes place. Despite the couple's disabilities, God has blessed them with a handsome bouncing three-year-old boy named Martin Nadaki Junior. Martin Junior, who is known by his local name of Kobe, attends a nearby nursery school in the neighborhood.

Lydia's early childhood experience was in a village. Most of the people were farmers. The schools in the area were scarce and a far walk. This meant that there was no possibility for Lydia to attend school as her disability

made it impossible for her to walk far. There is a saying that goes "No matter what, with determination everything is possible." With this conviction, Lydia was determined that one day she would be able to read and write at least her name, even though she could not go to school.

For SSNDs, education is our pride and hope. I didn't know that this young mother was watching me teaching others at the Orthopedic Centre to read and write. Some of the patients who had never even dreamt of holding a pen to write the letter "A" left the Centre with smiling faces and a new vision of life. Lydia approached me one day and told me she would like to learn how to read and write so that in the future she could be proud to help her son with his school work. I am proud to say that our daily thirty minutes of learning both reading and writing is a blessing.

Lydia can now read simple sentences, speak simple English and best of all, write her name. Our thanks go out to all those who have shared with us the teaching materials. Many, like Lydia, have both benefitted and appreciated our outreach. And now Lydia will be able to help little Kobe as he attends school. The education of even a single person will touch many in their lifetime!

Good News From a New Missionary— Africa is Like a Prism, Rich in Variety and Color

By Sister Delia Calis, SSND

My two months in Africa have been filled with many experiences—each a gift received and welcomed. A prism is a symbol that helps image the color and rich variety. The passionate and loving commitment of the mission of God, the following of Jesus, is the prism through which the rainbow of colors spreads out and extends ever outwards, giving life and hope in the countries I visited: Nigeria, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Ghana. At the same time the creative gifts of each sister, the various cultures and needs, the diversity of ministries and communities all converge into the white Light of God's Love made visible through the



Sister Delia Calis

presence, prayer, and work of our sisters. Whether in schools at all levels, both in the villages and the cities, in parishes and women's centers, in clinics and many other outreach ministries, our sisters are willing and ready to serve. There is no doubt that transformative education, especially of women and children, is the way our sisters are striving to live out their love of God and neighbor. As I entered the rhythm and flow of the communities' life, I was inspired and at the same time felt that further resources would help their ministry reach more people in need. Much is done with little.

continued on page 4

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Good News From a New Missionary—Continued From Page 3

Celebration is an essential part of life in Africa. Joys and sorrows are times for communities to gather and to give thanks and share. I enjoyed a variety of celebrations—jubilee celebrations on the beach of the Atlantic Ocean with the Notre Dame community in Ghana, the funeral and thanksgiving Mass for the mother of one of our sisters, a few special Sunday celebrations, early morning Mass at the University, the ordination of a deacon in the Cathedral in Sierra Leone, final profession for a Medical Mission Sister in Techiman, Ghana. What strikes me is the sense of community, the full participation, the dancing and singing, lively music, colorful dress, and the patience and acceptance of the flow and rhythm. No time keepers; Sunday is the Sabbath, so to be in Church all morning is part of our faith, our life as community. Actually, because of the involvement and variety of quiet time, motion, singing, and being caught up in each moment, I was not overly conscious of time.

Travelling is an adventure; the roads are a challenge. There is a lot to see and I've become

more aware of all creation belonging on this planet earth and having a right to the road. Sheep, donkeys, cows, goats wander on the roads as their home. Some interesting learnings—did you know that a cashew tree bears each cashew nut individually? The nut actually grows at the end of a fruit that is edible and, in The Gambia, our sisters make jam out of the fruit.

I learned that the Muslim population is very high in West Africa as in other parts. To hear the call to prayer from the mosque in each village along with the church bells is a familiar sound. There are many Muslim children in our schools. On the whole, there is a peaceful living and working together of Christians and Muslims, realizing we are all God's children and are about helping each other.

As I prepare to come and minister in Ghana, I am grateful for this learning time and look forward to the ongoing growth of entering another culture. I forget the author who wrote *When you enter another culture, take off your shoes for God is there before you.* I know this is true and so I go open and ready.