

The School Sisters of Notre Dame

Good News From Africa



Winter 2010

Swahili Proverb From East Africa **Ucheshi wa motto ni anga la nyumba.**

The laughter of a child lights up the house.

You Touch the Children and Make Them Laugh!

St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Hightstown, New Jersey, had an African Tree of Hope in the lobby of their Church this past Advent. Parishioners took home with them an ornament bearing the name of a child from one of the primary schools they are helping to support in Sierra Leone. During the wonderful days of preparation for Christmas, the family held this child in prayer. What a wonderful way to touch the life of another! The tree in the church held a second ornament bearing the name of the child as well as the name of the family. What a tremendous witness to the true meaning of Christmas!



At Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Waterloo, Ontario, they have a tradition of putting an angel at the Christmas crib that bows its head when coins are put inside. The collection is then given to a charity that helps children. This year it was decided that the collection would be given to help support our outreach to orphans in Kenya and it more than doubled what was usually collected. Added to the collection this year was the money raised from the auction of a single, very special golf ball . . . a great story!

Yes, you do touch the lives of very real children and bring them laughter. School buildings with roofs that don't leak and benches to sit on rather than boards and rocks make a difference! Sisters who have the support they need to begin the work of reaching out to the very needy children orphaned by AIDS are there because of your support. We are partners in transforming our world.

Good News From Kenya— Notre Dame Children Outreach, Our Newest Ministry

By Sister Mara Frundt, SSND

The Good News from Nyalieng'a is that WE HAVE BEGUN. In response to the critical need for care of orphans we, the SSNDs in Africa, have together committed ourselves to this goal. After research and consultation the decision was made to begin an "Outreach" to orphans in one of the neediest areas of Homa Bay Diocese in Kenya. "Outreach" means that the children remain in their own

continues on page 2

Good News From Kenya—continued from page 1

homes rather than come to live in an orphanage. This helps to assure they do not lose their land to people who would be ready to take it from them. It also helps them to retain and continue their relationships with their extended families. It may be necessary, in certain circumstances, to remove some children from detrimental situations and provide another option for them. We are exploring ways and means of doing this while intervening to improve their conditions at home.

Our parish is Nyalieng'a and just 4½ years old. Mostly due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic the number of orphans is very high. On June 1 Sisters Rose Ngacha and Mara Frundt moved to Nyalieng'a and lived in the parish house with Father Michael Odiwa, our parish priest and the Vicar in the Diocese. In August Sister Mary Aloo Odhiambo joined us and soon after we moved into a small semi-permanent house on the church compound. The house had undergone some renovation for our needs.

Nyalieng'a parish has thirty-four centers and, with the help of Alice, a social worker, we began to visit the centers and get to know the catechists and Church leaders. The Christian Communities were asked to identify the neediest "orphan headed household" in their center. It is these thirty-four families that have become our initial target group. The orphans are either living on their own or with a guardian who is elderly or unwell. We then began to visit the homes and meet the children and determine

their most urgent needs. Sister Mary took on the challenge of meeting with and organizing the youth in each of the centers.

On December 8, 2009, we gathered the children together in the parish for a day of play and learning. We want them to get to know one another and to begin to find support in our community spirit. There are 109 sponsored children in these families which is a very small number compared to those in need yet unattended to. We do hope that in time we can respond to more. The children truly enjoyed the day, a good meal and games, singing and praying, and they learned about HIV/ AIDS, moral behavior and how to make choices to live a good life. It also gave us a chance to meet with each of them individually and review their school performance as well as listen to them



Sisters Mara Frundt, Rose Ngacha, Mary Aloo Odhiambo, and Mary Kerber (District Leader)

share about their concerns, fears, worries, hopes, and dreams.

cerns, fears, worries, hopes, and dreams.

We have been truly touched and have felt much hope from the generous people who have already taken a keen interest in our project and have sent financial assistance. Without such partnering in mission, we could not be doing any of this outreach. Recently, we received communication from people in a parish in Canada who made a special effort during Advent to raise funds to support Notre Dame Children Outreach. We are sharing their story as we express great gratitude to all who are reaching out to these orphans through us. (See below.)

Good News From Canada— Christmas Tree Special Delivery

By Don Hunt

It's tradition every Christmas at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, to erect a large Christmas tree in the Sanctuary, with its high ceiling, at the front of the church. The majestic tree, with its bright star on top and hundreds of white lights, is the centerpiece of a full set of Christmas decorations displayed throughout the church, including a manger scene. Each fall an appeal goes out to the Parish for the donation of a large pine tree to become that Christmas tree and somehow a tree materializes every year. This year was no different. A member of Westmount Golf and Country Club heard about the need for a tree at Lourdes and offered one that was destined to be removed from the golf course.

continues on page 3

Good News From Sierra Leone— A Small Town, Lots of Work

By Sister Antoinette Naumann, SSND

Three School Sisters of Notre Dame live and work in a small town called Petifu Lokomasama in Sierra Leone. Although the town is small, the work there certainly isn't!

Sister Nentaweh Wakger conducts a literacy and craft program for women of the area on two days a week. On the other days, you can find her at the Child Feeding Center for malnourished children. Sister Christine Spour conducts workshops for primary and secondary school teachers so they can make their teaching more effective and the school day more interesting for the students. One of her latest projects is setting up a library at Lokomasama Secondary School so students can lose themselves in good literature. Sister Antoinette Naumann is working with the administrators of one secondary school and nine primary schools. During the years of rebel activity in this small country, the school buildings were left to deteriorate. She has been working with the heads of these schools, many scattered in the remoter parts of the parish, to repair roofs, finish floors, make blackboards, get student benches made, and provide supplies. Some schools even needed more rooms built to accommodate the influx of students. You can also find Sister Antoinette at St. Paul Church where she is pastoral minister. A priest only comes once or twice a month for Mass so she conducts Communion Services on Sundays and Morning Prayer during the week.

By working so closely with the people in the parish and schools, the Sisters become well



Sisters Antoinette Naumann, Christine Spour, Nentaweh Wakger

acquainted with their joys and sorrows. When Mr. Bai Moro Kanu, one of the deputy head teachers in the town, died suddenly after a very short illness, Sister Antoinette and members of the parish saw to his burial. His wife, Mariatu, was left with five children to care for. She manages to provide for the family by selling small things. One way she does this is to purchase a large bag of sugar and then repackage this into small packets to sell. This brings in a very small income. One of her daughters, Fatmata, is an excellent student, but there was no money to send her to school. Now a donor has stepped forward and promised to pay for Fatmata's primary education expenses and assist her until she completes secondary school! The life of this young girl will certainly be transformed because of this gift. And this is just one person whose life is changed because of the presence of these three Sisters in one small town of Sierra Leone!

Good News From Canada— *continued from page 2*

On the Saturday shortly before Christmas, a small party of about twelve church members met in the parking lot at Westmount to cut down and remove the designated tree. The tree, a blue spruce, appeared to be the right height—about twenty-five feet—with a thick array of wide branches. The chainsaw made easy work of the tree and soon it came crashing down. In no time at all the twelve volunteers were struggling to carry (in fact drag) the tree across the second fairway to the parking lot. With a great struggle the tree was finally lifted onto a flatbed truck and secured for the short trip to the church.

The next day, Sunday afternoon, a larger group of volunteers *continues on page 4*



(left to right) Fatmata (in primary school uniform)
Mariatu (her mother), 2 of her sisters and 1 brother
(baby brother not shown)

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Good News From Canada—continued from page 3

arrived at the church to help in moving the tree inside. The double doors at the front entrance looked small against the large tree with its wide swath of branches. After a few moments of awkwardly jostling the tree into position, twelve volunteers lined up inside the church to pull on an attached set of straps while twelve more were outside ready to push. With the count of three, the tree was thrust through the front doors to the sound of cracking branches and the flurry of flying needles and cones. A second set of double doors followed with similar results. Then the tree was bounced and manhandled up the narrow main aisle while the small army of men struggled over the pews. At last the blue spruce was dropped unceremoniously at the front of the church in the sanctuary near the intended display area. Parish Priest, Father Ed Sheridan, who was standing beside the altar in the sanctuary where the tree was dropped, had watched (with doubt and trepidation) all of the efforts to cut the big tree down, bring it from the golf course, through the front doors and over the pews in the church. He immediately sighed with great relief that through the whole process no one was injured,

there was no apparent damage to the church, and the tree appeared to have suffered only superficial damage to some of its larger branches. It was then that Father Ed, bending to admire the great tree lying on its side, noticed something slowly rolling out from the thick tangle of branches—a small white object. A golf ball!! A Dunlop 3!

How long ago did a golfer hit a shot so awry that it landed in this particular tree? What are the odds that this little golf ball would make the trip it did, only to suddenly appear in the church sanctuary next to the altar? Father Ed, recognizing the golf ball as something special, at Christmas Masses told the story of its arrival in the church and announced that the lucky ball was up for auction and available to the highest bidder. The proceeds of the sale would go to the School Sisters of Notre Dame Mission Fund, for the building of a rescue center in northern Kenya for children whose parents have died from HIV-AIDS. He asked for a starting bid of \$1,000.00. By New Year's Day the highest bid was at \$5,000.00! Because of that little lucky golf ball, the School Sisters of Notre Dame are much closer to their fundraising goal. Thank you Westmount!

