

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

Volume X, Issue 1

First Quarter 2008

Mark Your Calendar

**Nyumbani 15th Annual
U.S. Benefit Dinner
Friday, September 26
The Embassy of Italy
Washington, D.C.**

The COGRF Annual Event Committee has already secured the venue and date and begun planning for a celebration of the Italian heritage of the D'Agostino family.

State of Nyumbani Address
Sister Mary Owens

Political Satirist
Mark Russell

Mistress of Ceremonies
Kathleen Matthews

Musical Entertainment
L'illon Millonig

Look for updates in *News on Nyumbani* and online at the www.nyumbani.org website under USA Annual Event.



Father D'Ag (right) and his friend Mark Russell at the 2006 Fundraiser.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

As I write this, we are experiencing great turmoil and uncertainty in Kenya. We are deeply saddened by the deaths and injuries of so many. While the violence has now mainly ceased, the humanitarian crises increase by the day as more and more people are displaced. Life for us in the Nyumbani Home and the Village continues as normal, and all our Lea Toto Centers are operating—though with challenges. But it is difficult to function knowing that our Kenyan sisters and brothers are in deep mourning and suffering, surviving in fear and facing despair because of losing their homes and possessions. Our prayer and hope is that the dialogue now taking place between political parties will result in a just and peaceful solution. At the time of publication, we await the fruits of the last stages of mediation with indicators pointing towards some form of power sharing.

Some Lea Toto-Kibera children have been displaced, and Kibera is still not safe for our team to function. Since the beginning of January, that staff has been operating from a mobile clinic in an area where the displaced have sought refuge. Two of our staff have braved the situation and are operating from the Center. When I visited and commended them for their courage, I got the answer "We have to come. The children need us!" Our security personnel in Kibera deserve our deep gratitude as they managed to protect our Center while all the property around went up in flames.

Much of our effort in our Lea Toto Centers has been focused on trying to make contact with our children to check that they

are safe and, if necessary, to make our services available at alternate locations. So far, contact has been made with 2,337 out of 2,502. Some are still up country where they went for Christmas and are unable to travel. Some are babies who have tested HIV negative so caregivers, given the insecurity, may be deciding to forego follow-up services. However, almost all those on antiretroviral medicines have either been able to access our services or have obtained their medication from another clinic.

Schooling has been disrupted as a result of the violence. During the second week, some schools had to close when the mass rallies were taking place. All the children in the Nyumbani Home are back at school, but it will take time to check on the Lea Toto children.

Our hearts go out to all of our children during this time of political unrest. Children cannot fully understand what is going on, and so their imaginations can conjure up horrifying scenes that evoke terror and fear, even when they don't witness the violence firsthand. Thank God, the time before Christmas was full of joy, excitement and bonding as many of Nyumbani's children spent time with either extended families or friends and Lea Toto children traveled to be with family. However, many children were stranded and some experienced violence. Victor (who is age 18) from the Nyumbani Home was held up at a police station in Kisumu, but had the initiative to contact the Children's Officer in the station as his medication had run out. She got him in contact with the Red Cross who had him flown back to Nairobi. We endeavor to care for those who came in contact with violence through

(Continued on back)



Meet COGRF's New President

Marilyn Jerome Foust took over from Joe D'Agostino as the new president of the board for the Children of God Relief Fund in January. For those readers who don't yet know Marilyn,



Marilyn and Father D'Ag in 2006

she's been an active board member for six years. She traveled to Kenya for the first time in 2000 with a school-organized trip.

The deep poverty of the people there affected her, but so did the kindness of the Kenyan people.

"After talking with some, I realized they shared many of the same issues we did when it came to working mothers and raising children," she recalls.

She decided to join the board at the urging of former U.S. board member Maggie Petito and later traveled to Nyumbani with two other friends (see President's Message).

She says the biggest changes she's seen in Nyumbani are that: "When I first started, each newsletter spoke of several deaths. The village was a dream. The Lea Toto program was having trouble getting drugs. Now we have so much to be grateful for ... yet so much more to do."

Marilyn is a practicing physician who says she's helped to deliver 2,000 babies. She attended medical school at the University of Cincinnati, pursued her residency at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., then joined the practice of Foxhall Ob-GYN. She is currently in private practice at Sibley Hospital, Maryland. Besides Nyumbani, she serves as head of several committees for the Jesuit Refugee Service. Marilyn has been married 23 years to practicing attorney John Foust, who was recently elected Supervisor of the Dranesville District, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

President's Message

The beginning of my tenure as President of the Children of God Relief Fund board is marked with sadness for the wonderful people of Kenya as they navigate this very difficult time. I am concerned about our children of Lea Toto who have so little already, and whose medical care may be threatened by the civil conflict. I am reassured that the children of the Nyumbani Home and of the Village of Kitui are safe. The situation there reconfirms why we must continue our work with even more vigor. It will take a stable government and a coordinated effort of all factions of Kenya to fight the war on HIV/AIDS. Please pray for the people there.

Because of the violence in Kenya, we postponed the meeting of the international boards scheduled for the last week of January. The three Board members who were planning to attend the meeting with me, Dino DeConcini, MaryLynn Qurnell, and Jan Conway, as well as Tomi Browne are eager to visit again and hope we will be able to travel soon. In the mean time, we are moving ahead at a rapid pace with our plans for the fundraiser in September (see the box on page one). It is a fitting tribute to the origins of the D'Agostino family as well to our many Italian supporters that the Embassy of Italy will serve as our venue. We hope you'll join us for the fabulous Italian menu and a chance to meet fellow supporters.

As I consider our goals for the coming year, I look back fondly at the week my friends Jackie Finn and Cathy Feehan and I spent at Nyumbani—the week before Father D'Ag became ill. We spent a wonderful week with the children; we visited clinics in Lea Toto with Sister Little, and we made the difficult road trip to Kitui with Father D'Ag. I was amazed at the dedication of Father D'Ag, Sister Mary and the wonderful staff and volunteers who work there, and I truly came to believe that faith can move mountains. When I asked Father D'Ag what we could do to help his mission, he said, "Get the word out." Because of his wish, I think this will be my primary goal for this year: to spread the message to as many people as I can how vital it is to continue our work and to expand his amazing vision. I am confident in the leadership of Sister Mary and will offer her my unwavering support as she continues this important mission.

Most importantly, I want to say thanks to all of you for helping us through prayers and donations. We couldn't do it without you.

Marilyn Jerome Foust, MD

Treasurer's Report

The year 2007 was another year that broke some records in terms of financial support for the Children of God Relief Fund (COGRF): we sent Nyumbani \$279,166 and increased the reserve fund by an additional \$313,443 for a net of contributions over expenses of \$564,783. This is a huge accomplishment.

In my report last year I pointed out the steady growth over the years and listed figures for 2004, 2005 and 2006. Here, I use the same table with 2007 numbers, which show continued growth. I have included a few notations that explain some of the figures.

	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total contributors	<1,000	1,276	1,728 (1)	1,481
Total contributions	\$ 491,030	\$ 492,599	\$ 625,548 (1)	\$ 682,943 (2)
Annual dinner proceeds	\$ 124,592	\$ 106,563	\$ 175,260	\$ 143,313 (3)
Combined Federal Campaign	Unknown	\$ 17,888	\$ 15,786	\$ 15,192
Sent to Nyumbani	\$ 216,604	\$ 282,956	\$ 349,058	\$ 279,166 (4)
Reserve Fund year-end balance	\$1,055,696	\$1,107,616	\$1,340,291	\$1,653,734

(1) The extraordinary surge in both contributors and total contributions in 2006 is due in part to the spontaneous response to the news of Father D'Ag's death in November of that year and an unusually large fundraising event.

(2) The even-further increase in total contributions in 2007 is due in large part to the response to COGRF President Joe D'Agostino's letter asking for contributions as a memorial for his brother Father D'Ag.

(3) Though still greater than any previous year except 2006, the decline in net proceeds for the dinner is due in part to a reduction in the ticket price from \$300 to \$250, and in part to donors mentioned in notes 1 and 2 above who generously gave directly prior to the dinner.

(4) COGRF sends Nyumbani money according to request and documented need. The higher amount sent in 2006 reflected the need for funds for building the first phase of the Nyumbani Village.

The board of directors of COGRF is very grateful to all our donors who make possible these continued accomplishments, which in turn, make possible the beautiful work of Sister Mary and the Nyumbani family in Kenya.

Dino DeConcini

Dreams Do Come True

By Susan Gold, Nyumbani Volunteer

I first came to Nyumbani in 2003 and spent about two months volunteering as a nurse. Like everyone who ever stepped foot on the grounds, I was profoundly changed by the children and the staff. From the day I left, my goal was to return.

It was the pursuit of that goal that led me to the Fulbright program. Fulbright grants have been awarded through the U.S. Department of State since the early 1960's—primarily given to professors or Ph.D. candidates doing research. I discussed the possibilities for Nyumbani studies with Father D'Agostino, who agreed to help me pursue this route. Father D'Ag shared my concern that the availability of antiretroviral treatment, while blessedly prolonging the lives of the children, also raised new issues based on the fact the children would live. They would eventually be making their way into the world, and to live a healthy life, they needed to be armed with factual information about the disease that so affected them, as well as other health issues. We developed a program called Nurse Implemented HIV/AIDS—education for adolescents who were HIV positive. It was a series of classes that instructed teens on reproductive health, the disease, the immune system and prevention of transmission.

To both of our great pride and astonishment, I was awarded the first-ever Fulbright given to a clinical nurse in April 2006. I am so grateful that in September of 2006, Father D'Ag and I had a few days together to celebrate this achievement.

When Father D'Ag passed on later that year, I was determined that his death would not end his vision for our project. With Sister Mary's support, I arrived at Nyumbani in January 2007. There, I taught the classes to over 50 children at Nyumbani and 30 children from Lea Toto. The classes were a success: the kids had many questions and soaked up the knowledge the nurses and I shared with them. It was important to me that I began every session with the reminder that Father D'Ag wanted them to have this knowledge and more importantly, wanted them to know the truth. At Village Manager Nicholas Makau's request, we expanded the program and trained the nurse at Kitui to teach the children there.

The program was such a great success that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has decided to fund the now-named Nyumbani Adolescent Program as part of its Health Education for Adolescents Project. The curriculum will be taught to professionals, caregivers and ado-

lescents all over Kenya.

This experience taught me that dreams come true, even for these kids. And now it's time to fulfill another dream of mine. As a volunteer, I worked closely with the children of Cottage D. While I came to love all of the children at the Home, four boys stole my heart. I also spent a lot of time in the Village and witnessed firsthand the amazing job Nicholas does there. My new goal is to bring John, George, Brian and Sammy, along with Nicholas, to the U.S. this December. The boys will receive medical check ups and needed care at the University of Wisconsin Children's Hospital where I work. We also will travel so they can see this country and how many people care about them. Nicholas is coming not only to assist, but as a most able ambassador for the Nyumbani Village. His articulate thoughtful presentations will be the centerpiece of several fund raisers I am arranging to coincide with our travels.

We ask for your prayers and your support of this dream. *To give to this effort, designate contributions to the Visit US fund.*



Susan and John

Shaken to the Core

By Anna Titulaer, Nyumbani Volunteer

Anna Titulaer returned to the U.S. last fall after more than three months at Nyumbani. She wrote a series on her experiences there, which she posted on a blog. News on Nyumbani asked her to share one of her entries. The rest can be read at <http://annatitulaer.blogspot.com/>

Tightly wrapped in hand-me down blankets on the make-shift bed in the kitchen, I fall into a daze, dreaming of things that could be. In only an instant I'm thrown from the reality that I know, as the sound of barking dogs, birds squawking, and poles rattling wake me. Through my mind pass infinite possibilities. Were there disagreements with the Somalis? Had Mungiki (a violent sect who have killed, even beheaded, hundreds) learned how to 'Google' bombs? Am I dreaming? Is this real?

Violence went through my head because

of 9-11, but thank goodness for the calm of Peter, Ignatius, Jerry and the rest of Cottage AB. Upon waking, we all learned the nightmare had in fact been tremors, an earth-shaking quake. For the first time in my life, I had absolutely no control over what would happen. Ironically, the children at Nyumbani live with that feeling every day.

Imagine life as a Kenyan, life with HIV/AIDS, or life in poverty. The ground is shaking and there is nothing you can do; your world is moving and you are powerless. Life changes and moves without consent; they just have to pray that God is there, and strive to achieve.

For just a few seconds, I was able to see their lives from my eyes; I was able to empathize, and it was heartbreaking. Never will we be able to understand what these kids deal with, but for a minute, the loss of control threw me into a realm of emotions I had never felt. These kids are life, and they are love. Yet, the daily internal turmoil they go through, no one sees. These kids take on more than any human ever should, emotionally, physically and socially.

The violence and bombs from 9-11 is a hard past, but it pales in comparison to the death, destruction and destitute world these kids see every day. Turning a house into a home and creating family from strangers is what keeps the fire of hope alive in each child; know that you are a part of that difference.

Edel, Dickson, Knight, Joseph, James, Anne, and the rest of the Nyumbani family are kids, but they are kids who have to deal with earthquakes each day; they do it with grace and passion. Never forget that each smile, 'I love you,' touch, letter, or donation helps stabilize their tremor-some lives.



Anna and Paul

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

listening to their stories and assuring them of our love.

For the children who remained in the Nyumbani Home over the December vacation, Christmas Day was made even more special by guests. A phone call the night before told us we would be visited by President Kibaki and First Lady Lucy Kibaki! Happily, the Kenyan Chair Professor Dominic Makawiti and Vice Chair Paula Mutua-Lanco and their families were able to join us for the occasion. After arrival, our guests visited one of the homes to meet the Mum and her small children, then proceeded to where children, staff, volunteers and visitors were assembled. President Kibaki and Mrs. Kibaki expressed great appreciation for the Home and assured us of support.

Also during the Christmas holiday, there was treat after treat for the small group of children who did not go on vacation, thanks to the generosity of many friends of Nyumbani. Happily, some Lea Toto children joined us on a few of the outings.

December vacation time in Nyumbani Village for the 223 children who now live there was typical of life in any Kenyan vil-

lage. The older children helped on the farm while there were activities, library time and some study organized during the afternoons. December 26 was a particularly memorable day. On that day, a group of about 30 staff from General Motors led by their CEO Bill Lay and a small group from Sameer, traveled the 3½-hour journey from Nairobi bringing Christmas gifts for the children. Village Manager Nicholas Makau acquired a music system and invited comic artists to entertain us. After lunch, each family was visited by Father Christmas in their homes. The joy on the faces of the children lingers in my memory.

The Village Primary School has reached full stature—after just 8 months of operation. The children made this happen through their eagerness for education. We also plan to open the Polytechnic in February with four courses. Building in the Village is in full swing with 12 houses, a guest house extension and Phase 1 of the Administration Block almost complete and 12 more homes and another school block laid out. In the Sustainability Program, we are placing much emphasis on helping families grow their own vegetables and fruit through drip irrigation using a grey water system.

In the Nyumbani Home, the Fr. Angelo D'Agostino Memorial Hall is nearing completion. There will be a room dedicated to his memory where the story of the founding and development of Nyumbani will be portrayed.

While his spirit is very much alive among us and inspires us, we believe that this will be a fitting tribute to the difference one person can make—a model which we surely need in our present Kenya and in our world.

As always, we extend our deep gratitude for your continuing support through your prayers and donations. We do not take this for granted.

May God bless your family with peace in a world that can be both unpredictable and insecure.

Sister Mary
Owens



President Kibaki (middle), First Lady Lucy Kibaki (right) and Sister Mary (left) on Christmas Day.



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