

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

Volume XI, Issue 4

Happy Holidays from Nyumbani

Fourth Quarter 2009

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Greetings from a Kenya rejoicing in the onset of the rains, bringing to an end the worst drought in 70 years. Planting is the order of the day with hopes of harvesting in early 2010. Still, 10 million people will struggle to get food for another few months, which includes some of our families in Lea Toto and our neighbors in Nyumbani Village. Sadly, because these El Nino rains are exceptionally heavy, they are a mixed blessing—several areas in the country are flooding. Will our world leaders read these signs of climate change and make the necessary hard decisions regarding control of carbon emissions in Copenhagen in December?

As I write, my heart recalls with awe the experience of my four weeks of public relations efforts and fundraising in the U.S.A.—the extraordinary hospitality and generosity I found each day of my visit. One meeting on my schedule was with the Hudson Institute, whose members were interested in hearing about the philanthropic aspect of our programs. In preparation, I sketched a diagram of our donor sources and events over the 17 years of our mission. To my astonishment, the exercise produced a framework that described my schedule over the four-week period of this current visit, which included meetings/receptions/events with the U.S. board; the U.S. government; international and national foundations for humanitarian and religious purposes; corporations; churches; and colleges and schools. And this framework is replicated

through our boards in the UK, Italy, Ireland, Spain as well as through contacts and former volunteers in many other countries of the world. I pray that the Nyumbani mission, envisioned by our Founder Father Angelo D'Agostino, will continue to inspire our friends not only to support us, but as a source of meaning and hope in our world, which is too frequently battered by violence and despair.

The peak of the visit was the 16th Annual Benefit organized by our U.S. board and held in the historic Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C. Given the economic downturn in the U.S., the great turnout of friends of Nyumbani filled me with amazement and deep gratitude. This was my third benefit since Father D'Ag passed



Nyumbani supporter John Noel, Sister Mary and Nyumbani resident Mungai at this year's Annual Benefit Dinner.

See more pictures on page 5.

away, and I now know many more of you, our U.S. supporters—so it gave me great joy to meet individually with those I could and to thank all when I spoke. I shared our Nyumbani joys and achievements, as well as the challenges—not mincing my words regarding the latter. Those challenges include the need to access the more recently developed antiretroviral medicines (ARVs) and the urgency of reaching out to more orphans before they grow up unparented. I was delighted that Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, was present to hear the pleas regarding ARVs.

It also was special that the Chair of the Kenyan Board, Professor Dominic Makawiti, could attend the benefit. He, too, was in awe of the hospitality he received and the generosity of the American people. Together we had the opportunity to visit Capitol Hill and meet with Senator Johnny Isakson as well as staff members from the offices of Senator Russ Feingold and Representative Donald Payne, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. The crown of our Capitol Hill visit was a reception on Sept. 22 to which many Senators, Representatives and staff came, as well as U.S. board members and many friends of Nyumbani. I was delighted to accept Congressman John Conyers Jr.'s invitation given that evening to meet with him later.

During my time in Washington, D.C., I also was privileged to meet with the newly-appointed Global AIDS Coordinator Ambassador Eric Goosby, M.D. and

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A Nyumbani Flashback

Learning to Carry Little Ones on Your Back

By Sister Tresa Palakudy, SABS

In the year 1995, the sisters of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament (SABS) Missionaries from India started an apostolate in Kenya and Tanzania—I was among the pioneer group that came to Kenya. In 1996, Father Angelo D’Agostino S.J., M.D. invited us to work with orphaned and abandoned children infected with HIV. We thanked God for this golden opportunity to serve these children.

Back then—the very humble beginnings of Nyumbani—there were just a handful of children who all lived together in a small hall where they dined, slept, and played. On Sundays, that hall also was our chapel.

My first day was really memorable—the children were very small (between the ages of 2 and 5 years), but we soon discovered they had very large hearts. One story illustrates how these children can bring joy. As soon as we arrived, little James came running to me to request I carry him on my back like a mother, which bewildered me because I did not know how to carry a child on my back. To manage, I told him “Tomorrow I will do this.” This satisfied him, and he looked at me with shining eyes and smiled. By the next day, I had totally forgotten the promise and started my work, preparing injections for the children. The veranda was my treatment room, and I kept the medicines on the half wall. I was bending and putting the medicine into the syringe, but little James, remembering my promise, came running, climbed on the half wall with great difficulty and climbed onto my back, saying: “Yesterday you told me that today you will carry me on your back.” At first I was frightened the child might fall, but the incident touched my heart and filled my eyes with tears. The thought that flashed through my head was how much these children long for the love of a mother. This need is why I have decided that I will be a mother to these “motherless” children, which has filled my heart with glory. We have tried our level best to make the children feel at home—we have loved them as our own.

Who We Are

The sisters of SABS are missionaries from Kerala, a state in South India. We have responded to the urgent appeal of the church and are deeply motivated by the missionary vision of our founder (the late Bishop Mar Thomas Kurialassery), which was to make the Eucharistic Lord known, loved, and adored by all everywhere and always.

In Kenya and Tanzania, we have 14 stations among the poor and needy working mostly in rural villages. Our wealth is our dedicated hardworking sisters who are deeply committed to SABS, have a strong faith in God and deep trust in divine Providence, have an optimistic vision, and the ability to adjust to different peoples and their cultures.

In East Africa, we are teachers in schools, doctors, nurses, and technicians in health facilities, and caretakers of orphaned children infected with HIV and physically handicapped children in small homes. We also do pastoral work as well as run women’s and youth projects. At Nyumbani we have the following tasks:

- ★ I am the Matron of Nyumbani, in charge of medical care in the home.
- ★ Sister Little Tressa is a registered nurse who takes care of Lea Toto.
- ★ Sister Emily is our Montessori teacher in charge of the

small children at the Nyumbani Home.

- ★ Sister Annie is a laboratory technician and the administrator of the Nyumbani laboratory.
- ★ Sister Reena is in charge of the finance department of Nyumbani.

What We Have Learned

The sisters of Nyumbani will tell you that what we have all learned by being sensitive to the needs of children is that the love and care we give has a more positive impact than food, clothes or any material things. We have also found that we can even expand the life span of children by making them feel wanted, encouraging their great potential and creativity.

We feel we have attained not only faith formation in the children and devotion to the Holy Eucharist, but also instilled hope for the future. Our own personal desires for these children are that they will learn to be self reliant when they grow up and that they will want to help others who are suffering.

We have also experienced great joy in the progress being made. In the beginning, the condition of the children was pathetic—most were abandoned by their families and relatives, and their misery and anguish were unimaginable. Not only did they have the pain of abandonment on their faces, they had the added burden of an incurable disease. In those days, death was a regular visitor to the home, and though we were not afraid, we were affected by the constant loss of the children.

Father D’Ag’s own words were: “I am sick and tired of burying children,” and that feeling was shared by all. But through this passion, a campaign was born to bring down the price of antiretroviral medicine, and this campaign has worked! For this reason, we are deeply thankful Father D’Ag took the courageous step of challenging the developed world and the pharmaceutical companies to bring down prices. We’ve seen firsthand the huge difference in the lives of the children at Nyumbani and Lea Toto.

Despite the hard times and the bleak beginnings, Nyumbani has grown to such an extent that even the structural pattern has been changed: The Home now has children staying in family units and each of those units has a “mum” or “uncle.”

Meanwhile, the sick are given special care in a sick room with day and night vigil, and they receive the best possible medical, nutritional, psychological and spiritual care.

We’ve also seen what effect Nyumbani has had on the world: attracting support from all around the globe and inspiring many good people to help Nyumbani by giving not only money and resources, but their own personal time and energy. For being part of that vision, we are truly blessed.



Sister Reena with one of the children

The Fr. D'Agostino Circle of Friends Society

By Joe D'Agostino

In one of the past issues of this newsletter, I shared with you a request that we consider a new “giving group” of Nyumbani donors. This group would be made up of individuals who have mentioned a gift to Nyumbani in their wills. Since that article was written, a few people have contacted me and assured me they have already made this choice as a way to give. Accordingly, we are happy to announce that we are forming a new group of donors called: The Fr. D'Agostino Circle of Friends Society.

We are asking Sister Mary to consider a place at Nyumbani where a plaque will be erected listing present members with space available so future members might be added.

The first list will include the following names:

- * Donna Denelli-Hess
 - * Deborah Foss
 - * Mike & Kim Litzelman
 - * Joseph and Mary Ellen D'Agostino
- (We also have two anonymous donors)

If there are others out there who have made this decision, please contact me at: dagfan@aol.com. We invite you to list your names so that we will have a large circle of friends for the Nyumbani children to view as their extended Nyumbani family in the U.S.A. and elsewhere.

For those who may be interested in the future, here are some guidelines:

- * Please consult your personal lawyer,
- * The legal name of Nyumbani-USA is Children of God Relief Fund, Inc. (COGRF)
- * The Federal ID Number of COGRF is: 13-3615655.
- * COGRF is recognized by the IRS as a 501 (c)(3) organization and contributions to COGRF are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Nyumbani Children Helped Author Create Book

Mariellen Rich, an author from the small town of Poland, Ohio has used the children of Nyumbani as both an inspiration and source in creating several books: *You Are Worth the World* and the companion book *Within Their World*.

The books are intended to show children that no matter what happens in life, they are worthwhile and that wonders await them in the future. Rich wanted to find children from around the world to help illustrate the books, so she contacted Nyumbani, as well as other children's advocate groups such as Casa Madre in Youngstown, OH. The children drew some of the artwork, wrote letters of inspiration, and are featured in some of the pictures.

“It is such a gift from these children to allow me to look into their hearts and spirits,” Rich says of her experience. For example, Nyumbani's Sammy wrote: “I would like the world to be no more wars and no more suffering and no more sickness.”

Rich has been a children's yoga instructor for 10 years and runs numerous other children's programs. She also writes poetry and runs “Sunshine Spirit Girl's Project,” which helps girls ages 7 to 12 with issues related to self esteem. She will be working on an inspirational CD for children next year. If you would like to know more about the You Are Worth the World Project, contact Rich at me.rich@zoominternet.net.

Further details and Form 990 may be downloaded from www.nyumbani.org

The mailing address of COGRF is: 4910 Massachusetts Avenue, Suite 100, Washington, D.C. 20016.

Blessings on all of our donors; know that the Nyumbani children and staff have you in their hearts.

What Nyumbani Means to Me

By Nyumbani Home Resident Benard Mwololo

I came to Nyumbani 8 years ago. There, I found a loving family. Nyumbani provides shelter, food and clothing for us—some of the basic things that every human being is supposed to have. I also have never missed school because of school fees since I came to Nyumbani, and when I become sick, I am given medication.



Staying in Nyumbani also has really built me up—in every aspect of life—spiritually, mentally, physically. I always smile when I am around Nyumbani and its residents and staff because I don't have any reason to be down. What do I lack? Nothing: there are always people to care, love and protect me, and my fellow children in the home are the best people I have ever seen. Then there is the staff and volunteers, which I can just say are extraordinary people. When I think of the boards that support us and the staff that take such good care of us, I am without words because they have their own children and families, but they give us the best quality life they can and the same amount of care in many cases as their own families. I believe only God knows or could tell me why.

I remember one volunteer saying that when she heard about Nyumbani, she knew she had to visit the home and help. We give thanks to all the volunteers who come to Nyumbani to spend some of their lives there—Sr. Julia, Lloydie Zaiser and so many others.

My life before Nyumbani had become a nightmare, one that I no longer remember. To those people who once said I have a short life span, I am sorry for them because I have a better life than many of them.

Despite the challenges of my life, I did well in my high school. And as I write this letter, I am surrounded by many negative guys and see that I am better off than some of them in my classes. I am performing well in my class work and also my exams. Despite the world economic crisis, I am eating well and going to school. I am now in one of the best colleges in Kenya, studying information technology. My thanks to Jack Dausman from the U.S.A., who is really helping me with Nakeva, and to come up with a blog.

My blog is blog.Kitela.wordpress.com if you'd like to visit and find out more about my feeling towards Nyumbani.

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Lessons from a Recession "Runaway"

By Village Volunteer Stacy Oliver

I'm trying to remember how I got here: traveling on the shoulders of a pack of boys, staring up at the bluest sky that surely ever existed, listening to the chants of 40 Kamba grandmothers. Children run out of houses to catch a glimpse of the commotion and end up joining our joyous parade as we wind our way through the Village. This parade started as an innocent farewell dance shared with a group of the most utterly amazing people I have ever known—the Nyumbani Villagers. Before I knew what was happening, I am in flight, soaring through the Kamba-land brush, regretting the five mandazis (fried breads) I had for breakfast, but happy that I came here and sad to leave.

My adventure began four months earlier when, frustrated by the mounting pressures of a sagging economy, I decided to push the pause

button. For months I flirted with the idea of taking time away from work to do some volunteering, and on one fateful evening in early June, a phone call from a family friend determined my direction. Less than three weeks later, I was on a plane bound for Kitui, Kenya.

I arrived in the Village on a Thursday: my travel companions were a group of mothers and daughters on a K-E-S-T service trip led by Lloydie Zaiser. There was also another large group of visitors in the Village that day, and between both groups we totaled over 30 Mzungus (a Swahili word for light-skinned). Our presence caused a special celebration, and the children and Susus (a tribal name for grandmothers) gathered in the Social Hall to dance and sing for us. For them, it was a spirited celebration. For me, it was the first of what would become countless moments in which my heart stood still under the weight of what I was experiencing.



Stacy and her new family

I slipped into Village life with unexpected ease, and as the wonder and complete grace of each new day washed through me, I felt myself begin to change. I listened to stories from the Susus and absorbed the seemingly infinite wisdom that is granted by a lifetime of experiences much different than my own. I became the jump rope champion of one group of girls and introduced another to guacamole. I learned the songs and games that define a Kenyan childhood and took comfort in the small reminders that children are children all over the world. I also discovered kindred spirits in a universe that seemed to hold nothing in common with mine, and savored the bonds that grew from long talks by the campfire and over mid-morning tea. Somewhere along the way, against all expectations, I stopped being a volunteer and became a Villager.

Looking back on my three months in the Village at Kitui, it becomes clear that I learned many lessons but mastered none. I learned to speak slowly and with intention.

I learned to be present in the moments, hours and days that make up my life and the lives of those around me. I became comfortable in the absolute honesty that simplicity brings. These lessons are endless, and I'm certain they will continue to influence the thoughts and actions that define my journey through life.

To say that I am grateful is an understatement. Mine is a feeling beyond expression. It is a feeling I am a changed person, and I hope to carry the Village with me for the rest of my life.

Giving the Gift of Hearing

As with many things Nyumbani, what started out as an appeal from Father D'Agostino has turned into a major effort in Kenya that could help as many as 3,500 children who could be affected by ear problems and hearing losses.

Tomi T. Browne, Au.D., went to Kenya several years back after retiring from Nyumbani founder Father Angelo D'Agostino for his own hearing loss. While there, Browne tested and began efforts to help Mungai receive a much-needed cochlear implant. Sister Mary suggested she test the other children too, and the project expanded. Dr. Browne has now traveled to Kenya a total of seven times, bringing volunteer audiologists and student audiologists to assist her. Doctoral students from Salus University, Elkins Park, PA, will travel with her in February and students from James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, will go to Kenya with her in June.

The initial results of testing: "opened a Pandora's box for me, and I couldn't ignore what was jumping out," says Browne, who recognized that there is a profound need for ear care among the children in Africa affected by AIDS and related problems. These children, like Mungai, are intelligent youth whose health, development and independence could be severely affected by ear pathology and hearing loss.

Browne herself has been back three times already this year, and has given up her

practice in the U.S. in order to devote herself to the effort. Most recently, she and audiologist Melette Meloy from Atlanta spent six days working in each of the Lea Toto clinics, as well as with children from the Nyumbani Home. She will also be traveling to the Nyumbani Village during her targeted three trips per year to Africa on behalf of this effort.

The Browne family incorporated the not-for-profit HEART of the Village, Inc., (www.heartofthevillage.org), to help support her efforts. If you would like any more information or want to get involved, contact Dr. Browne at tbte@msn.com.



Melette Meloy (left) and Tomi Browne (center) test a child's hearing.

An Evening that made a Difference in Nyumbani Lives



Special visitor and honoree Professor Dominic W. Makawiti, Ph.D., president of the Kenya Board of Directors.

Even with the U.S. economy in distress, the 2009 Nyumbani Benefit and Auction was a resounding success. There were 325 attendees at the event, which was held at the elegant and historical Willard InterContinental Hotel in Washington, D.C. The auction raised an astonishing \$70,000, which is close to \$33,000 more than last year's events and is on top of what the benefit itself brought in for Nyumbani's causes. Of the auction amount, \$42,750 was raised for the Fund-a-dream cause after one donor gave \$25,000.



Special guest and honoree Anthony Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health.

Photography of the event was donated by Richard Latoff Photography, www.richardlatoff.com



Mistress of Ceremonies Kathleen Matthews greets board member Townsend Van Fleet.



(L to R) Michael D'Agostino, father of four boys who visited Nyumbani last Christmas and nephew of Father Angelo and Joe D'Agostino; Maxi and Savino Recine, longtime friends of Father D'Ag and owners of Primi Piatti Restaurant in Washington, D.C.; Joe and Mary Ellen D'Agostino; Sharon D'Agostino, wife of Michael and mother of the boys and executive with Johnson & Johnson.



Attendees look over the silent auction goods.

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

directors British Robinson and Susan Adams to thank them for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief funding, which almost entirely supports Lea Toto and the homecare and medical services of Nyumbani Village. I shared with them the challenges of ARV drug resistance and our need to access more potent ARVs.

I also had a marvelous opportunity to speak with the Non-governmental Organization Committee on HIV/AIDS, an opportunity made possible because my religious congregation, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loreto) has an affiliate presence at the United Nations. The committee admired the scope and mission of Nyumbani and Loreto. When they saw the living conditions of some of our Lea Toto HIV+ children and their families—many of whom live on \$1 a day—they were receptive to my challenge to change from talking about affordable ARVs to free ARVs. They were also receptive of my lobbying for access in the developing world to the more recently developed ARVs.

Fundraisers by the Mia Sutphin Foun-

dation and by Dr. Paul Perito; speaking at masses in St. Mary Church, Greenwich, CT; visits to corporations and foundations (Johnson and Johnson, Becton Dickinson, Micato Safaris, Medicines for Humanity and Red Ribbon Foundation); visits to Georgetown and George Washington Universities and Regis College; and visits to the homes of Nyumbani supporters kept me on a busy but rewarding schedule. Bringing a special fulfillment was time spent with Father D'Agostino's family, Joe and Mary Ellen, Sister Savina and Lorraine.

On my second day back on Kenyan soil, my U.S. experience continued through a visit to the Nyumbani Home from Ambassador Elizabeth Fawley Bagley, Special Representative for Global Partnerships, Office of the Secretary of State, and her husband. Ambassador Bagley was eager to learn all about Nyumbani. As we walked around the home and met our happy, healthy children, then visited the new Respite Centre for Lea Toto children, a stark contrast was revealed: seven children had been admitted to the Centre in conditions that no child should be asked

to suffer. I had hardly bid farewell to Ambassador Bagley and her husband when British Robinson and Sandy Thurman arrived. Again, both were saddened at the condition of the Lea Toto children, which revived the memory of how Nyumbani Home was in the 1990s. We do have the exceptional, serious illness in the Home, like that of Paul at the moment, but in general Nyumbani Home children can look forward to a long life. Happily, Paul is now recovering.

Before I left for the U.S., Nyumbani had our 17th Foundation Day celebration, graced by the presence of the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, Michael Ranneberger. This gave me the chance—on Kenyan soil—to thank the U.S. government and American people, especially our U.S. board led by Dr. Marilyn Jerome.

May God continue to bless each of you, our U.S. friends, during this joyous Christmas season and the year to come; and may Nyumbani's mission continue to inspire and deepen the meaning of your lives.

Sister Mary
Owens



The 2009 Nyumbani Annual Benefit

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