

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Honoring the Children and their Supporters

As its name indicates, Nyumbani's annual fundraiser is held to generate financial support for the children. However, it has a second purpose — to raise awareness of what's going on in Kenya and how U.S. supporters can help. One special event that occurs during the evening is recognition of some of the people that have made a difference through their contributions of time and resources. This year's honorees include:

- Robert G. Liberatore, Group Senior V.P., Global External Affairs and Public Policy, DaimlerChrysler Corp.
- Thomas E. Mooney, Staff Director & General Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives
- Ted Neill, Nyumbani Volunteer Coordinator, 2002 to 2004
- MaryLynn Qurnell, Former Legislative Asst. to Sen. Jesse Helms
- Tim Rieser, U.S. Senate State, Foreign Operations Subcommittee
- Terrence E. Sauvain, Minority Staff Director, U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee

Come find out what these special people have contributed and help us honor the children of Nyumbani.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

The entire month of June was spent in the U.S., where I made a special trip to celebrate my 50 years as a Jesuit. It was truly a cause for celebration and wonder. Since I entered the priesthood at the advanced age of 29 and was ordained two years early because of lupus, I can truly say I never thought I would see this banner year . . . I guess our lenient Creator requires more from me — a challenge I gladly meet.

I was feeling my years somewhat, though. A bout of arthritis laid me low for a few days, but it was miraculously relieved by a single epidural injection. I was especially grateful for that because the recovery was followed by the sudden death of my brother Tony in Kansas City, which meant I was called upon to concelebrate at his funeral Mass there. He was 90 years old and the father of 11 children

and 36 grandchildren. His memorial services were a mixture of joy of celebration of a fruitful Christian life and the sadness of separation.

Before traveling to the U.S. in June, I spent an enjoyable, as well as profitable, few days in Italy where a recent visitor to Nyumbani, Chiara, held an exhibition of her photos of Nyumbani and Africa at a fashionable gallery near the Spanish Steps in Rome. Chiara's efforts are especially appreciated in light of the fact that she returned from Kenya with more than photographs. Chiara was kind enough during her visit to take the children to the giraffe center. While feeding one giraffe, she was butted in the face by another, causing her a black eye and bruised cheek — a "gift" from Africa that must have been hard to explain upon her return to Rome.

Soon after my return to Kenya from the U.S., I visited the Village at Kitui, a visit both satisfying and somewhat frustrating. It was satisfying to see that several houses are now roofed. However, work in general has progressed very slowly, and our deadline for Phase I was postponed — we now hope to see occupants housed by mid September.

I felt nothing but pure joy, however, on Saturday, July 16, when we had a very moving ceremony in which our latest infant, Isaac, was ceremonially handed over to his adoptive parents. Isaac came to us six months ago suffering from malnutrition, rickets, and what we thought was AIDS. However, after the antibodies from his mother had time to pass through his body, he tested negative for HIV. Despite his illness, he was a really good baby

(Continued on back page)

Nyumbani Annual Fundraiser

- ❖ Tuesday, September 27, 2005
6 p.m. Reception;
7 p.m. Dinner and Program
- ❖ Renaissance Hotel in Washington, DC
999 Ninth Street, NW
- ❖ Mistress of Ceremonies: Kathleen Matthews, Anchor, WJLA-Channel 7 News
- ❖ Special Entertainer: Mark Russell, Comedian, Political Satirist



Nyumbani's Residents are Growing Up!!



Photos courtesy of Michael Sherwin

A Gift Tied with a Red Ribbon

Nyumbani recently received a generous donation from a group of people who live with the dream of someday being out of a “job.”

The Red Ribbon Foundation, which presented a \$15,000 check to Father D’Ag in June, was founded in 1994 in Connecticut by a group of concerned doctors and citizens committed to raising money for AIDS care, education, and research. Founder Florence Suerig’s dream was that one day “we will close our door and post a sign reading: AIDS cure found — *we are out of business!*”

In the mean time, the foundation holds fundraisers that celebrate life through entertainment and music, then gives the proceeds to organizations whose goals align with its own.

Red Ribbon’s relationship with Nyumbani occurred through Red Ribbon board member Diane Terry. Terry has been to Africa many times and was searching for a connection between her organization and AIDS efforts there when she saw an article about Father D’Ag’s legal victory to get the children of Nyumbani in public schools.

“It was obvious to Red Ribbon that Nyumbani’s work caring for children with HIV/AIDS was impressive and deserving of our support,” she says. Because she frequently visits Africa, she can fulfill one of her organization’s operational goals, which is to become directly involved with the organiza-

tions the foundation supports. Terry, who runs a women’s adventure company, fulfills her passion for Africa by bringing 10 to 15 women there annually.

She’s already been to Nyumbani once and says she’ll return in November and again next Spring with her family. She says her visits only served to fuel her passion.

“The

women in the group I went with [the first time] were all mothers,” Diane explains. “We learned from these children what we learn from our own healthy children — joy, the pleasure of company and visitors. But we also saw in them strength and courage, and that was what moved us so much,” she says.

She also experienced what she says is reaffirmed with each visit to Africa — that there is joy in both how alike the world’s people are and how much we gain by getting to know our differences. “We are all human beings living together on this planet. We should learn from each other our traditions, our talents, our skills for living, coping, loving.”



Diane presents a check to Father D’Ag at an awards ceremony June 16.

Ensuring the Children’s Future

When Nyumbani was started, most people believed its purpose would be to alleviate the pain of dying children: a hospice for orphaned children who most likely would succumb to AIDS. That vision has changed as drugs became available and the orphanage and its supporters and staff have learned new ways to treat and help the children. Though death still threatens, today most Nyumbani residents are living happy and productive lives, and one group is reaching young adulthood.

While this change has brought enormous joy and hope to Nyumbani and its supporters, it’s also brought challenges. One such challenge is the future—what the children can do with the rest of their lives. Because of this, Nyumbani’s supporters have begun the Nyumbani Children’s Education Fund for children entering high school and hopefully, who can go on to college. In fact, the first young adult is already eager for more education and will be old enough for college in another year.

To send a child to high school or college costs at least \$1,200 a year—for tuition, room,

and board. This is because while public school education is “free” in Nairobi, students have to supply their own books, clothing, beds, and desks. Thus, public school often costs as much as education for students attending private schools.

Because of this, the Nyumbani board wants to set aside \$1,500 per child per year for the fund. With six kids reaching high school level next year, that means an annual expenditure of \$9,000.

Board member Michael Litzelman started the ball rolling by contributing \$5,000 in memory of a recently deceased uncle, and his sister, who is Michael’s aunt. Litzelman’s uncle was a highly successful chemist who valued education, studying at night during the Depression to ensure he would have the necessary courses to be accepted to college.

If you’d like to donate funds for the Children’s Education Fund or if you would like to honor a loved one through a financial contribution, contact Nyumbani’s administrative offices at info@nyumbani.org or (202) 342-8488.

Visiting Nyumbani Fulfills Sherwins' Dreams

by Diann Sherwin

In April of this year, my husband Mike, our daughter Elizabeth (Libby), and I had the opportunity to visit Nyumbani. Each of us went on this trip with a slightly different perspective. Mike wanted to see for himself what he had heard so much about as a member of the U.S. board of directors. I wanted to visit the children and the staff I met five years ago when I traveled there with Mary Ellen D'Agostino, sister-in-law of Father D'Agostino. And Libby was realizing her dream of visiting by working for a month as a medical student, assisting the nurses and doctor who care for the children at Nyumbani and in Lea Toto, the community outreach program. Together we were also eagerly delivering a large shipment of medicine and medical supplies donated by a Christian organization called CrossLink International (www.crosslinkinternational.net) as well as a shipment by friends and Nyumbani board members of everything from band aids to antibiotics, other donated medications, and equipment, including two wheel chairs.

Libby arrived before us and celebrated Easter at Nyumbani. Shortly thereafter, she was able to attend the official dedication of the new village at Kitui, an inspiring event. At Nyumbani, she quickly learned much more about AIDs-related conditions, as well as the complexity of distributing daily medications to the children at Nyumbani. In the community clinics she visited, she saw the importance of the most basic medical care — how much difference it can make in the children's health and well-being — even simple things such as cough syrup, vitamins, tooth brushes, and antibiotic ointment. She also saw the limited resources the two hospitals she visited in Nairobi have compared to facilities in the United States.

Mike and I arrived in mid-April. I was delighted to see so many of the children from St. Clair Cottage where Mary Ellen and I had worked. Some of the girls I met before are now beautiful teenagers. A younger girl who was quite ill five years ago is now bright and energetic. A boy, who was 18 months old and not walking when we first met five years ago, is now a healthy, active boy with a big smile. Mom Christine is still the Mom for St. Clair Cottage, and she has 16 children under her care, eight boys and eight girls. The volunteers we met were an amazing group from Canada, Ireland, Norway, Scotland, England, the United States, and Italy, and it was inspiring to watch Protus Lumiti running daily activities with his usual efficient style.

I noticed a number of positive changes since my first visit — the most striking being the improved health of the children. Those who need treatment for HIV now receive antiretroviral drugs. Because of this, there are many fewer respiratory illnesses and other opportunistic infections. In fact, the emphasis at Nyumbani has shifted from making the children comfortable for the duration of a possible short life to planning for their growing up and leaving Nyumbani! Additions to the compound include paved (stone) roads that keep down the dust, the “new” kitchen that was under construction five years ago, the reconfiguration of the administrative offices, and a large garden on a newly acquired plot of land next to the original boundary.

While we were there, Mike participated in several meetings with government officials related to funding for the village project, as well as a meeting of the Kenya board of directors. He introduced Father D'Agostino and Sister Mary to PACT-Kenya, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to assist groups like Nyumbani in grant writing, organization, financial management, and other skills. And a conversation with Protus about the cost of “free” primary education versus the cost of private high school and college led Mike to suggest that the U.S. board establish an education fund to assist the children (see related story, page 2).

Two experiences were particularly powerful. The first was visiting the new village at Kitui. The trip to the village is a bone-jarring three-hour drive from Nairobi, which Father and Sister Mary have been making weekly. The village is literally being carved out of dry scrub land—brush has to be cleared, roads created, gardens dug, fences erected from twigs, water drilled to replace water currently hauled from the river by donkeys and oxen. Houses are being constructed of bricks made on site. Many local people are working hard on this village and learning skills they will be able to take with them to other sites.

The second experience was spending a morning with Sister Little at her Lea Toto clinic and day care center in the Kibera section of Nairobi, the largest of the slums. It covers a huge area on a hillside and



Dr. Libby Sherwin checks on a patient.

houses about one third of Nairobi's population. The modest clinic and day care center currently are moving down the street to another rented house. When we were there, Sister Little was planning to move a huge metal shipping container to the new lot for use as the day care center, and to obtain a second container to put on top of it for storage space. A neighborhood man is her chief helper, and one of the community women manages the day care. Sister Little has helped local women learn to make and sell jewelry and baskets. She told the story of one who saved enough money to buy property in her home area, build a little house, and move there with her 13 children.

While there has been growth and change in the Nyumbani programs in the last five years, many things are the same. Chief among them are the dedication of the staff and volunteers, the playful, happy atmosphere in the compound, the smiles on the faces of the children, and the love and faith that sustains most everyone involved. As Libby said in a report to Crosslink, “the continuing generosity of so many from so many countries is remarkable and absolutely necessary for continuing this work. Seeing the happiness, the outgoing and vibrant personalities, and the confidence and serenity that result from the gifts of individuals and organizations makes every effort worthwhile and every penny essential. It was very humbling.”

Father D'Ag's Column

(Continued from page 1)

with huge eyes (which is why he was called "Eye-sac"). And with such a happy disposition, he was endeared to all the children, staff, and volunteers alike. While other babies and children have been adopted, what was so unusual about this event was that Protus orchestrated a wonderful, meaningful "transfer" ceremony in which the receiving couple and their extended family broke into native (Kikuyu) song and dance holding him high in celebration.

And in a touch of the incredible, the adoptive father, in a moving speech, pointed out that he and his wife were older (in their late 40s) and childless — the same as the biblical Abraham and his wife, who had a son in their old age — a son called "Isaac" of course!

On July 22 and 23, President Clinton made a whirlwind tour of Kenya — after having been to Botswana, Angola, and Tanzania. He had a very cordial meeting with Kenyan President Kibaki, and I met him at a reception, where we chatted about a mutual friend. That friend was his Georgetown teacher — Father Otto Hentz, SJ — who entered Georgetown with me. CNN anticipated President Clinton's visit to Kenya and Africa. The filming crew spent a fair bit of time interviewing me and the

children both at Nyumbani and at the Kibera (Nairobi) community clinic. The crew was more than pleasant, and we received some footage in the hour-long documentary about AIDS, Africa, and Clinton.

The feast day of St. Ignatius (July 31) is the foremost Jesuit commemorative day. Archbishop Boniface Lele, our great Kitui benefactor and now the ordinary of Mombasa, celebrated the day with us, along with my anniversary in the Jesuit priesthood.

It is hard to believe 50 years have gone by — though some days I feel it is a hundred. However, each day is a cause for thanksgiving to God and to all of you who have helped make this mission a successful work of compassion.

*Fr. Angelo D'Agostino,
S.J., M.D.*

Our Address Has Changed

Please note that the Nyumbani administrative address for donations and information has changed. It's now:

Nyumbani-USA
c/o Collier Shannon Scott, PLLC
3050 K Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20007-5108
(202) 342-8488
Info@Nyumbani.org

A Deeply Felt Loss

One of Nyumbani's children, William Waweru, has left Nyumbani to travel to heaven.

William was born on April 23, 1997, to a family with three siblings. He was the only one who inherited HIV. His mother died when he was two years old and his grandparents were too elderly to care for him. William was admitted to Nyumbani through Lea Toto in December 1999.

He was admitted to Class One in Jamhuri Primary School in January 2005. It was a part of his life he really enjoyed: going to school and playing with his many schoolmates and friends. His entire school class and teachers were in attendance at the funeral service. William was deeply loved and will be greatly missed.

A copy of the latest U.S. financial report and official registration filed by the Children of God Relief Fund, Inc. can be obtained by contacting COGRF, Inc. at 3050 K St. NW, Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20007-5108, or by calling (202) 342-8488. Residents of the following states may also obtain this information by contacting: NEW YORK - New York State Attorney General's Charities Bureau, Attn: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10271; VIRGINIA - Division of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 526, Richmond, Va. 22304. Registration with these governmental agencies does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.

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Diane Terry (right) and some of the mothers who traveled to Kenya for a visit to Nyumbani (story on page 2).

