

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Dear Friends of Nyumbani,

Blessings to each one, hoping that life during 2010 may be filled with moments of joy and peace, a sense of fulfilling one's vocation in life and gratitude for opportunities to wonder at God's creation. Here in Kenya we are rejoicing in the blessings of harvest—fruit of the great rains experienced towards the end of 2009. Nyumbani Village has been transformed into an oasis of green. Also, when visiting Lea Toto homes in Kibera, I was held in wonder at a multitude of flourishing sack gardens (sacks filled with soil where vegetables are grown).

Christmas celebration in Nyumbani was anticipated in a lovely way when our three programs each received an award in the Annual Miconazole competition organized by Mission for Essential Drugs in collaboration with Johnson & Johnson. The Nyumbani Home came in first overall. We had a great ceremony at the Serena Hotel, which concluded with a documentary featuring Nyumbani prominently.

The actual Christmas celebrations took a variety of forms. Eighty-four children in the Nyumbani Home were invited to visit extended family and friends—for a few, this was a first visit, which is always so special. Soon, we hope

that all in our Home will get this opportunity. One desired outcome of these Christmas 'home' visits is the reviving of family bonds. For two children this year, these visits resulted in being received back into their families permanently.

For those who remained behind, every effort was made to have them experience special love through fun activities and exciting outings, chief among them a trip to Nakuru and Naivasha made possible by Lloydie Zaiser and friends. We also held our special Christmas Day Eucharist during which we gathered around Jesus in the crib, sang Christmas carols, cut our Christmas cake, had lunch together and were visited by Santa.

For the Lea Toto children, our efforts to

make Christmas special included two large parties organized on the Eastlands and Westlands sides of Nairobi. Witnessing these children, dressed in their best clothes, enjoy activities such as trampoline, face-painting, fun games, performing songs and dances makes you forget their slum life and fills you with hope that, through education, much of which comes through Lea Toto, they will finally break out of the poverty cycle.

Christmas in Nyumbani Village was celebrated at home. This was brought vividly to me when I saw the more than 30 toddlers, including Mary (now one year old), sitting in front of me when I joined the Village for Eucharist and celebrations on St. Stephen's Day. These toddlers have no conscious memory of their parents, so Nyumbani

Village is truly their home. As always for the Village, a feast of meat and chapatis, with biscuits and sweets from Sister Mary, is a great celebration, with gathering together for dancing and singing. This year, our National Television Network captured these moments and aired a great documentary two days later.

Christmas in Kenya is always followed by results of the Kenya Primary Examination, then waiting for

(Continued on back)



Participants in the 2010 Summit included (from left, front row: Sister Mary, Adriana De Pero Lodi, Marcello De Donno, Paula Lanco-Mutua, Jan Conway, Simon Phillips; second row: Marta Alonso Trascasa, Jeffrey Browne, MaryLynn Qurnell, Izabella Hearn, Primola Andolfato; not shown: Stuart Eastwood, Jann Eastwood, Professor Dominic Makawiti, Ambassador Denis Afande.



Annual Summit Reveals Nyumbani's Growth

By Jeff Browne

A meeting vital to the success of Nyumbani occurred in January when representatives of the International Boards and the Kenyan Board (Children of God Relief Institute) met with Nyumbani Executive Director Mary Owens and each of the program directors to review the Nyumbani programs. MaryLynn Qurnell, Jan Conway and Jeff Browne represented the U.S. Board. The meeting participants also visited not only the Nyumbani Home, where the summit was held, but Lea Toto sites and the Nyumbani Village as well.

For me, it was a personal journey. I visited Nyumbani for the first time four years ago. Not only was this latest visit a chance to meet the people who are the face of Nyumbani in their own countries and to share ideas with them, but an opportunity to reassess the Nyumbani programs firsthand after just a few years away. Here is some of what I found:

Nyumbani Home: The Father D'Ag Memorial Hall is a welcome addition and needed cottages have been built for the teens, but the Home is much as I remember it. However, the children themselves have grown, with some now towering over the visitors. An important new addition for 2009 was the opening of the Respite Center for children from the Lea Toto program who suffer from severe malnutrition or serious diseases. Four children from the Respite Center have already rejoined their Kenyan families.

Also, one of the most touching ceremonies we witnessed while there was placement of a HIV+ Nyumbani child with a Kenyan family she has visited during the holidays. Sister Mary and the staff did an incredible job recognizing that, while it was a happy event, it was also a sad parting for the Nyumbani children because they were losing one of their own.

Nyumbani Diagnostic Laboratory: We examined plans for the new lab that will enable personnel to do resistance testing on ARV drug effectiveness and expand the ability to provide other life-saving tests to the community. At present, resistance samples have to be sent to Japan for testing, which takes three weeks.

Lea Toto: The medical outreach program into Nairobi's slums continues to grow with plans to expand even further in 2010. Nearly 3,000 HIV+ patients receive help in some way, including about half who get life-giving ARV's. And the numbers are expected to double. What I

didn't realize before my visit is the wide variety of community services Lea Toto provides in addition to ARV's. They include supplying food, education, counseling, testing, economic sustainability training and community building, a program that reaches over 45,000 people.

Nyumbani Village: When I visited the Village four years ago, about 20 houses had been built and several community buildings were under construction, but the Village was empty except for the workers. The drought was in full force, and the only green things we saw were a few seedlings attempting to survive in the brutal Kenyan sun. Four years later, we were greeted by the entire Village of 584 children and 58 grandparents in the finished Community Center, and everywhere we looked was green.

The Village is already nearly self-sufficient in agriculture products, with half the needed crops grown in kitchen gardens. The first greenhouse paid for itself within a year, and three more are being planned. The finished Polytechnic school is not only turning out graduates with marketable skills, it is making many of the things necessary to maintain the Village—from bricks, to clothes and furniture.

Overall, Sister Mary has assembled an impressive management team to help her. Nyumbani is a complex operation with eight working sites (soon to be ten with



Sustainability and economic independence are keys to the Village's success. Woodworkers perfect their skills at the Polytechnic.

the expansion of Lea Toto) serving thousands of Kenyans in need on a daily basis. It is a testament to Sister Mary's stewardship that the Home, Lea Toto, and the Village were singled out in 2009 for recognition and awards by international commissions and agencies looking at hundreds of similar programs around the world (see Sister Mary's column).

I was equally impressed with our counterparts representing other international boards supporting Nyumbani. We met Board members from the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Kenya (the Irish Board was not there) and had a remarkable confluence of opinion on the current state and future of Nyumbani.

What I came away thinking was this: Nyumbani is in good hands.

COGRF Treasurer's Report - January 2010

In 2009, COGRF received strong financial support as the U.S. economy showed signs of recovery. COGRF collected \$712,414 in total contributions in 2009, COGRF's highest total ever. Of that amount, \$231,785 was raised at the annual dinner (the figures below are after expenses). The number of contributors and proceeds from the Combined Federal Campaign declined this year. We sent \$526,955 to Nyumbani in 2009, the second highest total ever.

	2008	2009
Number of Contributions	1,363	1,147
Total \$ of Contributions	\$643,570	\$712,414
Annual Dinner Proceeds	\$169,740	\$169,023
Combined Federal Campaign	\$ 10,140	\$ 6,360
Dollars Sent to Nyumbani	\$537,902	\$526,955

Proactive steps taken by the Finance Committee in early 2009 to adjust COGRF's reserve fund allocations produced positive results. COGRF posted an 18 percent return in 2009 compared to the 26 percent return earned by the S&P 500. Through much of 2009, COGRF was invested 30 to 40 percent in stocks with the balance in bonds. Consequently, we were able to earn 70 percent of the S&P 500 return in 2009 with only exposing COGRF to one-third of the risk. Concerns about the economy in 2010 remain, including high unemployment, sluggish economic growth, volatility in the emerging markets and elevated valuations in bond markets. Therefore, we will continue to pursue the same strategy for stocks and bonds we adopted in 2009.

The entire COGRF Board of Directors is very grateful to all of our individual and corporate donors in 2009. Your support makes the work of Sister Mary and our entire Nyumbani family possible.

Larry Duncan

To Plant a Tree and Watch a Village Grow

By Chesney McOmber

It is not often you see a society in its birth stages. Almost any city or town most people encounter today is hundreds of years old. That is why Nyumbani Village at Kitui, which is only three years old and completely made up of citizens from outside its borders, is so unique. This Village provided me the opportunity to witness the development of a community from the ground up—to learn how the citizens organized themselves to create a functioning society.



Chesney and new friend Faith make chapati bread for a Village party.

As in any community, mistakes are made, but together, the people of the Village and the people who devote their time to making the Village a reality, learn from those challenges how to move forward. What is particularly exciting is the development of the leadership that emerges within the community, which is a vital part of its growth and sustainability.

I arrived in Kenya in early September [2009], unsure of what my three-month volunteer experience would bring. Even now, months after my return, I find it hard to truly articulate everything I learned about the Village, the people, the way of life, and even myself. Yet, as I reflect on my time there, I experience again the excitement I felt as I walked through the farms during the evening hours knowing that, while red dirt and dry trees bore naked branches throughout the region of Kwa-Vonza, where the Village is sited, Nyumbani shambas are green with lush vegetables such as spinach and kale. In fact, despite a recent devastating

drought, Village Director Nicholas Syano's eyes reflect the confidence he feels in a well-laid plan of organic farming based on the theory of creating a permaculture. This is one of the aspects of the Nyumbani Village that is an example of how the development project has successfully created meaningful change within Kenya. Although much work remains, I returned to the United States feeling energized and optimistic about the Village's programs and the goals of self-sustainability. Part of this confidence is based on the fact that I saw how the long-term vision of the Village reflected in the hearts of each child, grandparent, and staff member that is taking ownership of its future.

I worked on many projects—from facilitating a reading club for the 7th grade girls, to writing and teaching a basic computer curriculum for the Polytechnic students, to working with the microcredit groups the grandparents have formed to create economic independence. There was one project in particular, however, that showed me the dedication of the children and grandchildren to the future and sustainability of the Village—the tree-planting project.

On October 15, 2009, after a three-year drought, rain came to the Village. In response, Joseph Lentunyoi, the manager of the sustainability program, coordinated a tree-planting program with the children and other volunteers and visitors to the Village. Led by Joseph and Spanish volunteer Maria Contreras, the children and other volunteers not only worked very hard in planting thousands of seedlings, they also learned about the benefits of these specific trees to their community. For example, together, the Village learned the importance of planting legumes in the melia fields, which is that they bring nitrogen into the ground, enriching the soil.

Nicholas often reminded us that: “to plant a tree that takes a lifetime to grow is the most unselfish thing you can do. When you do so, you are thinking about the future generations.” To promote responsibility among the children, each child was designated a tree to care for in the school lot. In this way, the children actively take part in the sustainability of their village, and ensure it continues to be productive for other children, long after the original habitants have left.

Another project I had the privilege of participating in, was the Water Conserva-



Planting a tree in the Village

tion Committee. This was a program set up just a week before I arrived, and during my three months, I was truly inspired to see how the group developed. The committee consisted of one grandparent and one child representative from each of the 14 clusters. (Each home is composed of a grandparent and about ten grandchildren. A cluster is made up of four homes which share a common water station. Cluster 1 houses the first families to arrive at the Village, and Cluster 14 consists of the newest families in the Village.)

At our weekly meetings, the grandparents and children brought forth their ideas and concerns regarding water use within their own clusters. Recognizing the scarcity of water, they developed solutions to water wastage by establishing a specific time of day to collect water. Together we arranged workshops within the clusters to educate young children on proper water usage, and we worked to ensure that each home had adequate water storage equipment.

This is the kind of leadership that is so inspirational to see, whether its microcredit groups set up to help the economy of the Village, tree-planting efforts by everyone, or other committees—you can see that there are many people eager to step forward with ideas and inspiration.

For me, my experience was a valuable lesson in community building. I learned how each person contributing to the growth of a village, despite limited resources, has an important impact.

Going forward, I will eagerly watch the Village continue to grow as it strives toward its goal of self-sustainability. I hope to return in the near future to continue to learn from the children and the grandparents who shared their knowledge, their songs, their friendship, and their hearts. Nicholas told me upon my arrival, “Sometimes you fall in love with the Village.” I would like to tell him now that he's right. In fact, I would venture to add that anyone who grows to know the Village's inhabitants and what the Village stands for, will fall in love.

Sister Mary's Letter

(Continued from page 1)

acceptance into secondary school. How demanding a competitive education system is for children! Happily, our 12 Nyumbani Home children are now in boarding schools, while Nyumbani Village children eagerly awaited the opening of Lawson High School [the school opened February 10]. Lea Toto children are also gradually being placed, many in boarding schools, to give them a more conducive learning opportunity.

January brought me to Washington, D.C. to make a presentation at an information-gathering meeting organized by the Institute of Medicine and commissioned by Congress as part of a planning process for an evaluation of PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). The Nyumbani presentation represented one PEPFAR program while the other three presentations from Africa represented groups of programs. This made me realize how well-known and appreciated Nyumbani is. January also brought a visit from John and Patty Noel to Kenya

to visit the agro-forestry project in the Nyumbani Village which John announced (at the 2007 USA Benefit) 'Make a Mark' would sponsor. To see 67 acres planted and some of the trees now at 14 feet was a great joy for them. John and Patty also spent a day at the Nyumbani Home, a visit in memory of their first contact with Father D'Agostino.

What specially marks January each year, however, is the Annual Summit meeting when the chairs of the Nyumbani Boards and representatives gather at the Nyumbani Home for a 4-day event. These gatherings were one of Father D'Agostino's last wishes, and he lived to be present at the 2006 meeting. He saw this event as a way of harmonizing the efforts of the local Kenyan Board with its international partners. In this way, too, the ongoing sustainability of Nyumbani would be consolidated. This year, after my overview report, each of the managers made program presentations: Protus Lumiti, Nyumbani Home; Sister Annie, the Laboratory; Nicholas Makau, Lea Toto Program; and Nicholas Syano, Nyumbani Village. Each presentation was

concluded with a financial report given by Father Paschal Mwijage, SJ, and Sister Reena. The second day, international board reports, followed by visits to Lea Toto, occupied the morning hours while the afternoon focused on the development identified for 2010. Chief among these planning efforts is the building of a new Diagnostic Laboratory, as well as a feasibility study for future development in the Nyumbani Home and streamlining of the volunteer program. A visit to Nyumbani Village occupied Day 3 while on Day 4 we celebrated Father D'Agostino's birthday with the Nyumbani Home children.

As we begin a New Year, it is with great hope that our children will gradually grow up healthy and happy and be able to fulfill their dreams. We now have several at tertiary level. Our gratitude as ever to you, our friends and donors of Nyumbani, who, as a network of supporters spread over the world, continue to encourage us. May each be especially blessed by God.

Sister Mary
Owens

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