

News on Nyumbani



The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

Volume IX, Issue 1

First Quarter 2007

At the Helm: Sister Mary Owens

As we reported in the last issue, Sister Mary Owens took on the role of Executive Director last fall. With the recent passing of Father D'Agostino, the burden that falls on her shoulders is greater than even she could have imagined as she must serve not only as the top administrator, but a spiritual advisor to the children and staff as well.



For those who don't know Sister Mary, she has been with Father D'Ag and Nyumbani from its first days. As she describes it:

"In 1989, I returned to Kenya having trained as a counselor/psychotherapist. I needed supervision while I was doing

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Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

This is the first "Dear Friends" column from Sister Mary Owens

All of us at Nyumbani hope the year 2007 has begun happily and that God will lead you towards fulfillment of your desires and goals — even if they don't always come about in the way you expect. We trust God will strengthen us for the challenges that life presents.

One of those challenges for many of us right now is our first year without Father D'Ag. As I write this letter, I realize I am sitting in the same place, on the same day of the week, at the same time as seven weeks ago, when I received a call from Karen Hospital that began those never-to-be-forgotten days at Father D'Ag's bedside before he left us last November. The memory of our founder, while evoking sadness, spurs us on to continue our mission with courage and determination.

And so with the dawn of a new year and the warm memories of a generous celebration of Christmas, we have begun to focus on goals and ventures ahead of us. One of those ventures at the Nyumbani Home is watching our children's performance in school. For 2007, we are placing special emphasis on education which, in a developing country like ours, is the gateway to self-reliance. What doors open for our children at the end of each education level depends on their performance, so this year we are challenging our young people to make the most of their educational opportunities. We are motivating them by helping them understand that this depends on them. We are telling them that we love them, are able to feed, clothe, care for

them medically, psychologically and spiritually, but we cannot learn for them. We see them already responding to the challenge. Four of our students received primary examination results and have been placed in appropriate higher-level schools. Our other children were also promoted to the next classes — 78 are attending four primary schools located around Nyumbani, eight are in secondary boarding school and one is a day scholar. Only eight remain in the pre-unit school we have at Nyumbani, and our eldest, Denis, awaits his end-of-secondary school examination results while currently working and earning a salary.

We are blessed to have so many students pursuing education free from the health problems that always hung over our heads in the early days — which brings us to another challenge. Over the past few years, as our children's health stabilized on anti-retroviral medicines, their physical maturation has improved by leaps and bounds, so we are now preparing them for life after Nyumbani. Most recently, 12 girls and 12 boys moved into two new houses built alongside our original plot of land where they now live a more independent lifestyle under the care of a mentor — doing their own housekeeping, having more freedom — but also taking on more responsibility.

Another venture going forth involves some of our Lea Toto efforts. Back in July 2006, following evaluation by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the award of a three-year grant of \$2.5 million, Lea Toto developed a five-year Strategic Plan that expands and enhances our vision and mission. That mission is to provide quality

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At the Helm

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my internship for accreditation with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. I heard that Father D'Agostino, a psychiatrist, had come to Kenya while I was away and requested he be my supervisor."

Once she was accredited, Father D'Ag invited her to co-found and help set up the Centre for Religion and Psychiatry in Nairobi.

"Around this time, he experienced the reluctance by the board of a local orphanage to admit HIV+ children because of the medical infrastructure required [see the accompanying story on Father D'Ag's life], to which he responded: 'I'll do it.'"

Father D'Ag then invited Sister Mary to sit on the committee that helped to plan Nyumbani.

Sister Mary grew up in Ireland, attended Holy Faith Convent through primary and secondary school, then entered Loreto College. She received her undergraduate degree from University College in Dublin in 1963 and later went on to further studies, getting a master's in education with a specialization in counseling from Trinity College, Dublin in 1989. In the intervening years, she was a teacher and headmistress at Loreto College in Dublin, then Donegal. In 1969, she transferred to Loreto in Nairobi. She was Principal of Loreto High School in Limuru for 12 years, Superior at Loreto Convent in Msongari, Nairobi, and Provincial Superior of Eastern Africa for six years. She was a student counselor at Kenyatta University when Father D'Ag approached her regarding Nyumbani.

Besides co-founding the Centre with Father D'Ag in 1992, Sister Mary founded the Loreto Girls' Secondary School in Nyakato, Mwanza in Tanzania in 1998. She was appointed Deputy Executive Director of Nyumbani in 2004, General Manager in August of 2006 and became Executive Director last November.

Nyumbani's New Leadership in the U.S.

Each December the U.S. Board of Nyumbani—The Children of God Relief Fund (COGRF)—elects a new slate of leaders to assist with efforts in Kenya. This year a change in the bylaws expanded the number of board members.

Leading the board for the next year will be Joe D'Agostino, Father D'Agostino's brother and a long-time board member. Joe has kept a tight watch on the financial progress of COGRF as Treasurer of the board for the last 11 years. The other officers of the board are:

- ❖ Executive Vice President: Larry Byrne
- ❖ Vice-President: Michael Sherwin
- ❖ Treasurer: Dino De Concini
- ❖ Deputy Treasurer: Lawrence Duncan III
- ❖ Secretary: Gail Dalferes Condrey.

The new board members were chosen by a nominating committee for their support of the Nyumbani mission over the years. They are:

- ❖ Karyn V. Lang, who is Director of Congressional Relations for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement,
- ❖ Thomas Grumbly, who is Vice President and Customer Relations Executive for Lockheed Martin Information Technology,
- ❖ John Doyle, who retired from Bell Helicopter, formed his own consulting company,

and is now semi-retired,

- ❖ Lawrence Dunham, who recently retired from the U.S. Department of State where he served, among other assignments, as Acting Chief of Protocol,
- ❖ Jeffrey T. Browne, who is a partner in CapAd Communications, Inc, a firm that provides a full range of direct voter contact programs for political campaigns and direct marketing for associations and corporations,
- ❖ David Whitney, who is legal advisor to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary and Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet and Intellectual Property,
- ❖ Sister Mary Owens, who is Executive Director of Nyumbani, and
- ❖ Dominic Makawiti, professor of biochemistry at the University of Nairobi and former Dean of the Medical School.

The other distinguished members of the Nyumbani board include: Rev. William George, SJ; Townsend Van Fleet; John Brew, Esq.; Jan Conway; James M. Desmond; Alberta M. Gueli; Marilyn Jerome, MD; MaryLynn Qurnell; Karen A. Robb; Ben Palumbo.

Emeritus members are: George Dalferes (dec.), Michael Litzelman, Thomas E. Mooney, Marian E. Ord, and the Hon. Alan Wheat.

The Children Get a Computer Learning Center

by Nyumbani Board Member Jeffrey Browne

As soon as school ends, the children line up and wait patiently for a turn on one of the computers at the year-old Nyumbani Computer Learning Center (NCLC). While some play games and others investigate favorite websites, all are getting valuable hands-on experience with modern technology.

"A few years ago these kids were literally fighting for their lives and now we're talking about needing to supplement their education and teaching them job skills," says Jack Dausman, one of the founders of NCLC. "This is a good problem to have," he adds.

Like many things at the home, Nyumbani's Computer Learning Center began with a donation. A dozen contributed desktop computers were set up in the back room of a converted garage at the orphanage and used sparingly by the children. In late 2005, the Dausman and Browne families pitched in to install a wireless network, modernize the computers, make the Internet available for the first time and rebuild the interior of the garage to outfit it with 7 work stations. Last summer, Sun Trust Bank provided 15 modern laptops

to replace the older desktop computers and Nyumbani hired its first computer center manager, Pascal Opiyo.

"We're looking for volunteers willing to teach a short computer course when they are visiting Nyumbani, whether it's Computer 101 or something more advanced like PowerPoint," Dausman explains. "Ultimately, NCLC could even become an internationally recognized authorized examination site for basic computer qualifications. The sky's the limit." NCLC is a work in progress that is already reaping benefits, he adds.



Thoughts from COGRF's President

With all that has gone on these past few months, I was unsure how to begin this personal note to all of you on the Nyumbani-USA mailing list that have given so much and will be asked much in the future. I will begin, however, by wishing you and yours a wonderful, prosperous and blessed New Year 2007.

Before going further, I want to express my gratitude to the members of the COGRF Board for their confidence in electing me as President for 2007. I accept their decision with the realization that I will need their support as well as yours during the coming year.

I also want to thank Ben Palumbo for his wonderful service as President for the last three years. During his administration, COGRF took on some major issues and, with his guidance, successfully tackled each one. Also, under his leadership, the Annual Benefit has grown to record numbers both in persons attending and in funds accumulated. His administration is a difficult act for anyone to follow. I thank, as well, the earlier COGRF

Presidents - the pioneers in building the Nyumbani-USA Family: George Brady; Jim Ord (dec.); Father Bill George, SJ; Mark Soresi; George Dalferes (dec.); "Van" Van Fleet; and Jim Desmond. That is quite an Honor Roll, and we are building our efforts going forward on their contributions.

It would be an understatement to say that we face a huge task this year—our first year without the vision and focus of our leader, Father D'Ag. He has overseen tremendous growth in Nyumbani programs not only in Kenya, but also in a support network of organizations in the nations of the USA, the UK, Italy, Ireland and, very soon, Germany and Spain. His absence after 15 years leaves a huge vacuum because he was our founder—the visionary, a driven leader and our best fundraiser. But this vacuum provides us an opportunity to show we are steadfast and determined to continue his vision and complete his dreams, which have become our dreams.

Last year, at his invitation, Father D'Ag held the first gathering of the Presidents of the National Boards I just mentioned. As I write this, I prepare to leave to attend the Second Nyumbani International Summit

in Nairobi, where the Presidents and key Board members will sit down with Sister Mary Owens, IBVM, the newly appointed Executive Director of Nyumbani Programs. Our agenda is quite clear - driven by the mandate of Father D'Ag: "To make life better for children with HIV/AIDS and to develop a support system for those who have been affected by the deaths of so many due to this dread disease: the countless homeless children and the destitute grandparents." It will be our privilege to rededicate ourselves to supporting as many of these people as possible and to continue to save the next generation of Kenyans.

Let me share something that is still in the formative stages. Your Nyumbani-USA Board is considering a memorial tribute to Father D'Ag. One of the options is to raise sufficient funds to complete the Kitui Village, which was Father D'Ag's key project when he passed on. A Board Committee is being commissioned to study the extent of this tribute, and the details will be relayed to all of you as soon as they are approved by the Board. Anyone reading this newsletter that has ideas about how to help in this effort, please contact me with their suggestions or recommendations.

Finally, I have already mentioned to the USA Board that I accepted this position for one term only, and I want you all to know this upfront as well. My email is open to anyone who wishes to send ideas and comments. Feel free to contact me at any time at: dagfam@aol.com.

Please join with me and the USA Board in continuing the vision and great work of Father D'Ag. We cannot succeed without the help of each and every one of you.

Sincerely,
Joe D'Agostino

Golf Tourney Surpasses Expectations

The Anthony Alberico Memorial Golf Tournament, which was held last August, surpassed what even the planners, Brian and Mary Keegan, could have counted on, in both spirit and amount of money raised for Nyumbani.

As Anthony's wife Laura Alberico put it: "It far exceeded my expectations and was such a fantastic day on all levels. I was touched by the generosity and support I receive from sponsors, personal donations and enthusiastic players." She says the sun-filled day was capped with an amazing band "who entertained us and made it a fun day."

The event raised over \$18,700, but Laura says it was as much the encouragement she got from friends, families and even some people she'd never met, that will help in the years ahead as she struggles to live without her husband.

"There is no doubt that Anthony would be so honored. Thanks again to all who made this happen," she says.



Letter from Sister Mary

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comprehensive care and support to HIV positive children and their families living in the resource-poor communities of Nairobi. One of our main goals going forward is to prevent deaths and transmission from mother to child. Currently, we have 2,000 children under our care, and we hope to reach out to 4,500 by 2008. Happily, through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief program, we have 700 of the Lea Toto children on medication. As with our children at the Home, Lea Toto children are beginning to show a marked improvement in health and overall well-being. And, like with the Nyumbani Home, we are focusing on their future through education. For example, we have one Lea Toto boy (Victor), who, like Denis at the home, is awaiting end-of-secondary school examination results. [See an excerpt from his beautiful tribute to Father D'Agostino in the special memorial issue enclosed with this newsletter.] As Father D'Ag wrote in his introduction to the Lea Toto plan, "We still work to make Lea Toto an organization of choice for HIV+ children and our stakeholders while inspired by

compassion and love of God."

Another remarkable event helped along by USAID funding is that families have started arriving in the Nyumbani Village. This has marked 2007 in a special way. We now have three families of 23 children headed by their grandparents in residence with many others on the horizon. The opening of the village has considerably increased the complexity of our mission, so currently we are engaged in a restructuring of the management to address the different projects within the village including home care, the primary school, the medical clinic, a soon-to-be-opened technical school, and the Sustainability Program. This last program has gained considerable strength in the last months, helped along by the unprecedented rains we received. We now have organic agriculture, extensive reforestation, carbon-farming, a bio-fuel plant and essential oils distillation. This is a significant step towards the self-sustainability that is our goal. Still, we have about 40% of the Village to build, so this will be an important goal during 2007.

Lastly, I found it poignant that Father D'Ag's final column for this newsletter was a litany of gratitude to our USA supporters. He especially treasured the support of his compatriots, which range from family and peers in the medical profession to numerous friends made

during his long years of service in the States to the friends drawn into his special mission on behalf of the most neglected people in our world today. Without your help Nyumbani would not be what it is today. I trust in your continuing support in his memory and for the sake of our children.

Sister Mary Owens

To donate to Nyumbani, use the enclosed envelope or visit us online at www.nyumbani.org.



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In His Memory

News on Nyumbani Celebrates Father D'Ag's Life

Father D'Ag's Life:

Determination and Strong Family Roots Create the Nyumbani Miracle

Father Angelo D'Agostino left this earth for his heavenly reward on November 20, 2006. But his spirit will remain for many years in the hearts of the children whose lives he touched, and in many cases saved, and the friends and supporters who were witness to what he was able to do in just the last decade and a half of his life.

His story, however, begins many years before the Nyumbani Children's Home, Lea Toto, and the Village at Kitui were created.

Angelo was born in 1926 the fifth child of Luigi and Julia, immigrants from Italy who settled in Providence, RI.

His father Luigi was a hardworking family man who supported his family through his job as foreman for a construction company. He was a stern, disciplined leader of the household and a regular church-goer. The deepness of the family faith, however, and the tendency to want to help others, came from Angelo's mother Julia, a book-lover and devout Catholic.

"She would read to us the lives of the Saints and kneel with us at bed time to pray," says Joe D'Agostino, the youngest of Angelo's siblings. "I found out after her death that many neighbors and relatives would come to her for advice about life. I believe it was her inspiration and example that resulted in so many of us entering the religious life," he adds. Two of Angelo and Joe's siblings devoted their lives to the church—Sister Savina D'Agostino, FMM (still living at 93 in Providence) and Rev. Lorenzo D'Agostino, SSE, PhD, who taught and was an administrator for many years at St. Michael's college. The other siblings provided the large family that still gathers today – including Anthony D'Agostino, who raised 11 children with his wife Mayme; Carmella D'Agostino

Knoeber, who with husband Anthony raised six children; and Joe and his wife Mary Ellen, who have two children and just welcomed their fourth grandchild.

Angelo D'Agostino's childhood was largely influenced by a severe asthma condition, which when he was very young kept him from many of the activities of other boys his age. Joe, who



shared a bedroom with Angelo, recalls that: "he would often awake in the middle of the night gasping for air but asking me not to bother our parents."

His condition, however, fostered his love of reading, as well as model airplane making and gardening. While he was an average student in the lower grades, by high school "he began to shine as a gifted student," says Joe. "I know that because every single teacher I had would start class off by saying 'D'Agostino? Are you as good as Angelo?'" Joe recalls with a laugh.

Both Joe and Angelo were also gifted singers and performed not only in

church, but in school musicals. As it still does today, social life in the early days of the D'Agostino's revolved around family – the many aunts, uncles and cousins who lived in the Rhode Island area. "We were a very close knit family," Joe says.

Angelo also developed another passion when young that would remain with him for the remainder of his life – the outdoors. Both Joe and Angelo were active in Boy Scouts for many years and some of their happiest boyhood memories involve camping in the summer.

Angelo also continued to shine in academic circles. He pursued degrees in chemistry and philosophy at St. Michael's College in Vermont and then pursued a medical degree and later a master's degree in surgery from Tufts University Medical School. He was called to serve his country during the Korean War and became chief of Urology and a captain in the U.S. Air Force. His interest in serving the church as a Jesuit priest began during a retreat in the mid-1950s, and he received his ordination in 1966. During the intervening years, Father D'Ag became one of the first American Jesuits to be trained as a psychiatrist. He taught at Georgetown University and George Washington University, and in 1972, bridged a gap between two fields of study when he founded the Center for Religion and Psychiatry.

Father D'Ag first became interested in working overseas in the 1980s by helping to administer refugee centers in Thailand and East Africa. He returned to the United States for a short time in the mid-1980s, but by then, had already fallen in love with Kenya and recognized that country's many needs. In 1990, while serving on the board of an orphanage in

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In Appreciation:

“Father Angelo D’Agostino has left us physically, but the memory he left behind will continue to inspire us. Each person who came in contact with him has their own story to tell, how he touched their life, this encounter leaving a lasting



Memorial Mass celebrated at Holy Trinity Church, Georgetown. Rev. Tim Brown, SJ, Provincial, Principal Celebrant, surrounded by fellow Jesuits.

memory. For many of us, it was his compassion that touched us, experiencing this compassion as a reflection of God’s own compassion. Through his charismatic presentation of and action in the mission for HIV+ orphans, he called us beyond where we would go, invoked our generosity and challenged our commitment. He did not allow any obstacle to halt him in his efforts to make possible the holistic care the HIV+ child needed, even if this meant challenging authority and meeting with opposition. The needs of the children were his focus, not his own image. He reached out to all people in all walks of life in a way that Jesus did in his lifetime. No one was excluded from his social outreach, each one felt welcome and significant. May each of us whose lives were touched by Father D’Agostino, in our own way spread that compassion of God wherever we are.”

Sister Mary Owens

“Father D’Ag was a personal friend of long standing in our family, sharing special moments like performing the marriage ceremony of our daughter Lisa and her husband Mark, baptizing our granddaughter Jeannine and recently blessing our great-granddaughter Catie. Four generations of Bellantis have been blessed with his special gifts of grace, love, patience and giving. He will be missed but never forgotten.” ***Dr. & Mrs. Joseph A. Bellanti, Bethesda, Maryland.***

“In October 2006 we once again invited Father D’Ag to speak in front of an overly entertained Miami crowd. After single-handedly enchanting the attendees and raising more than \$38,000 for the Village, D’Ag enjoyed a day on the water

with close friends. One of those friends, a fellow psychoanalyst and my father, asked Father D’Ag ‘If you knew you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do?’ Father D’Ag answered, ‘Exactly what I am doing now.’ How blessed we ALL were to have had him.” ***Dr. Paul E. Perito and Roxie Bogran***

“During the three months that Father D’Ag lived with us while he and I worked at the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, he said a home mass every morning. These were special experiences with shared homilies. But what became clear to both my wife and myself was that D’Ag brought Christ into the world each morning through mass and then proceeded to bring Him into the world for the rest of the day. He never lost focus and it was such a privilege to be associated with him. We will always miss him, but remember the lessons he taught.” ***Dr. John and Pat Perito***

“I met D’Ag when I was 22 while attending GW. I was feeling lost and needed direction – distressed over what I was to become now that the ‘real world’ confronted me. My stepfather, D’Ag’s former colleague, suggested I see this priest who was also a psychiatrist. I went to see D’Ag and, after telling him about the dismal spot I found myself in, he simply said ‘Do you want a beer?’

“I became further dazed and confused! How could he offer such a remedy? When would the analysis take place? Shouldn’t I be lying down instead of sitting on the couch? I remained sitting and drank my beer. I then proceeded to have one of the loveliest conversations with another man I had ever had. He touched my soul and in no time helped me find a place within my own existence to go for comfort and security.

Twenty years later, Father D’Ag and Father George asked me to take over as leader of the U.S. board. The need was great and the time crucial for Nyumbani as well as D’Ag personally, because both were victims of some ruthless characters out of Africa and about to be victimized by zealous NY Southern District prosecutors. D’Ag and I together, with the help of a beer during the really challenging times, remedied the situation and got Nyumbani on solid ground with strong footing. The rest is history.

“D’Ag, wherever it may be we all end up, I know that when I get there, you will have shaken things up — for here on earth you made some gigantic changes while providing us a guide to be courageous. D’Ag my friend, I will terribly miss you.” ***Mark V. Soresi***

Father D’Ag was a man who dared to dream great dreams. But he was no mere dreamer. An ‘action intellectual’ in the spirit of Ignatius himself, he had a kind of passionate indifference as to the outcome of his many ventures. He’d simply and confidently delegate them to the Holy Spirit.

“He was also a man of notable contradictions. He was humble, but worldly. He was compassionate, but tough as nails. He was quiet, but nobody could work a room like D’Ag, or bring out the best veal in Italian restaurants.

“I suspect that every few decades the Lord gives us someone whose ultimate purpose is to give us a glimpse of a more noble vision of ourselves. D’Ag and I were friends for over 30 years, and he worked in me something wonderful and sublime. I am less without him, and more because of him.

This was a great man and much, much more.”

Dr. Joseph R. Novello

The first president of Nyumbani, George Brady, has a revealing story to tell about how far the Nyumbani effort has come from the really early days, as well as how persuasive a person Father D’Ag was from the beginning. As George tells it, he met Father D’Ag when Angelo counseled his ailing wife and just before Angelo went to Africa. They remained friends and when Father D’Ag came home for a visit, filled with passion about the babies abandoned by parents dying of AIDS, George agreed to help him.

“D’Ag had determined a way to accomplish his objective, and I bought the supplies he needed to initially equip the operation. We had to borrow a station wagon from the Jesuit’s House at Georgetown University and load it both inside and with boxes tied to the roof. Off we went to Baltimore Harbor, where D’Ag had a friend who was captain of a ship going to Kenya. We had great difficulty in finding the ship, where we unloaded our supplies. As always, D’Ag found a way to get the children what they really needed.” ***George Brady.***

“I had known Father D’Ag for years prior to a lunch we had one day while he was back from Africa. This was during the



At the Georgetown Memorial: Joe D’Agostino, Sister Mary Owens, Mary Ellen D’Agostino Edwards, Joy D’Agostino Edwards.

time he was establishing Jesuit Refugee Services there; well before Nyumbani was even the germ of an idea. He startled me by saying, 'You know, I have come to believe in prayer.' I responded, 'What are you talking about? You've been a priest all this time and only now you believe in prayer?' He said, 'Yeah, yeah. I always have believed in prayer, but after what I've been through in Africa, now I really really believe in it because I have found out it works!' I never forgot that; never will. It guided his life. It created Nyumbani. You see, Father D'Ag turned out to be the answer to the prayers of others. I shall also never forget the twinkle in his eyes which was the essence of his soul." **Ben Palumbo**

Condolences from Heads of State

From President Bush:

"I am saddened by the loss of your brother, Rev. Angelo D'Agostino, SJ. I hope your sorrow is eased by your fond memories of his life and your time together. Laura and I offer our deepest sympathy and pray for God's blessings on you and your family during this time. May you find the encouragement and support of your loved ones."

From Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki:

"Father Angelo's death is not only a loss to the Nyumbani Community but to the

nation at large. The late Father D'Agostino distinguished himself as a great Christian who worked diligently in serving the vulnerable members of society."



Joe D'Agostino greets President Kibaki at the Kenyan service.

From Kenyan First Lady Lucy Kibaki (and Patroness of the Nyumbani Programs):

"It is with a deep sense of regret that I learned about the death of my colleague in the field of caring for HIV positive children, Father Angelo D'Agostino, SJ." The First Lady pointed out that in the true sense of the mission of the church, "The late Father D'Agostino devoted his life to initiating projects to cater to children with HIV/AIDS, orphans and even elderly who have been deprived of care by the loss of their children to the HIV epidemic." She commended his efforts in founding the Nyumbani Children's Home, the Nyumbani Village in Kitui and the community program called Lea Toto.

From the Heart:

Those in attendance at Father D'Ag's memorial and funeral services heard many touching tributes from the children themselves, as well as the Nyumbani staff and volunteers. Here are a few excerpts:

David writes:

"Thank you for traveling the odyssey with us. You were always effervescent in whatever you did. We know that you are a fine sentinel who never gave up in his mission, but battled to death. You did not die empty-handed; you carried the victory and left behind freedom and new life. . . . You were a bulwark against our stigmatization, discrimination and all other forms of social injustices that kept on strangling us. Though stupefied by your departure, we do not bemoan, but celebrate you life and your achievement. . . . Thank you for being a true hero."

From a poem, entitled simply "Death" by several of the children:

"Death confuser of people.
Death you have tripped up Father Angelo D'Agostino.
Death hushed my shining star.
Death felled my dad."



Martin prepares to share his rose with Father D'Ag.

From a staff member who found a new life at Nyumbani:

"Surely my life now is like a rose that blossoms every day of my life. Thanks Father for letting me be one of your own family. Though we have lost our Father, I am happy that you leave us a good place to dwell . . . God is harmony and together we will win in love."



Children leading the procession to the Jesuit cemetery in Africa.

From a poem by long-term volunteer Daniel:

"In a great darkness
While many cursed the darkness
While some looted under its cover
You lit a candle
A tiny light
That a great difference made!"

From a poem called Dangerously Beautiful (Keith Murfee):

"A friend of mine died a couple of days ago
And when I heard the news
It shook me to my core; I turned my head away
But I did not cry
Because he led a full life.
His mission in life was to reach out to the children
They captured his heart so long ago
He could not let go of them
Was fighting what seemed to be a hopeless battle
But he never did falter
He always prayed at the altar
The altar of God."

From a poem called "Will the World Watch and Hear This?" by Victor of Lea Toto:

"We are once again orphans, without our beloved father.
Father D'Ag was our Pillar, Our Torch-Bearer, Our Beacon of Hope.
Has Father D'Ag departed from us? Oh no. Our Hearts and Minds are full of his life.
The burden is to you Kenyans, to you the World, to carry on the Extraordinary big load of Father D'Ag's mission."

Father D'Agostino's Life

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Nairobi, Father D'Ag first recognized the needs of a group of children being ignored—those who initially tested HIV positive and were abandoned, then ostracized for their disease and kept out of the mainstream of help. That particular board rejected a plea to create a home for such children, but in typical Father D'Ag style, rejection didn't slow him down. In 1992, he rented a small house in a Nairobi neighborhood and took in three HIV-positive children. With help from Sister Mary, the orphanage moved to its current location in Karen several years later.

In the early years, the orphanage existed mostly as a hospice, and death was a constant companion of Father

D'Ag and Sister Mary's efforts. But drugs and victories in other areas created a stable environment for the children, who now number almost a hundred with many children adopted and some of the youngsters now grown into their teens. In the intervening years, Father D'Ag and Nyumbani blossomed through accomplishments such as:

- ❖ Founding of the Children of God Relief Fund in Washington, DC, to raise money for Nyumbani's programs and the Nyumbani Diagnostic Laboratory to fulfill much-needed research and testing in the HIV/AIDS field.
- ❖ Founding of Boards in Kenya, United Kingdom and Italy.
- ❖ Founding of the Lea Toto program in 1998 to reach

out to HIV/AIDS-affected children and families in the slums of Nairobi—a program that now helps over 2,000 children largely through the help of USAID.

- ❖ Several major victories in the area of getting drugs to allow children to live, including a major shipment from Brazil

that greatly decreased death rates at the orphanage and an agreement with a drug manufacturer in India to receive greatly discounted drugs.

- ❖ A courtroom victory in 2004 that forced the government of Kenya to allow more than 100,000 HIV/AIDS children there to attend public schools.

Father D'Ag's latest victory is still taking shape: Nyumbani Village in Kitui, a 1,000-acre site where a self-sustaining town is rising out of the desert through the blood, sweat and resources of many people including the major help of USAID. The Village, which will house grandchildren and grandparents affected by the death of loved ones in a self-sustaining environment, welcomed its first residents recently. (See Sister's Mary's Letter, cover of Spring 2007).

News on Nyumbani dedicates these few pages to memories of Father D'Ag. But his real memorial lives on through the miracles he created in Kenya and the example he set for the rest of Africa and the world. We know there are many people grieving but wanted to provide a sample of what people are feeling.



Final blessing by the Papal Nuncio to Kenya.



Mourners at Father D'Ag's graveside.

Tributes from Congress:

Several tributes to Father D'Ag were printed in the *Congressional Record*.

The Honorable George Miller of California paid tribute on December 6 with an explanation of Father D'Ag's courageous efforts in Kenya. He concluded that:

"Father D'Agostino was truly a hero and a pioneer in the fight against the scourge of AIDS. He believed that every HIV positive and AIDS-afflicted child and family, no matter how poor or meager their existence, deserved the chance to live a better life. He was a model for those who wish to dedicate themselves to improving the lives of others. I admire his work and commitment in serving children marginalized by society. He will be missed."

On December 7, Sen. Patrick Leahy from Vermont ran Father D'Ag's obituary with his own personal com-

ments, including:

"I told some of his fellow Jesuits that we long ago decided that we would do whatever Father D'Agostino wanted—eventually he'd make sure we would anyway, so we might as well do it graciously to begin with. Nothing fazed him when he was asking for others. He always went out of his way to remind Senator DeConcini, Ben Palumbo, and me that we shared Italian heritage. I once told him, 'Angelo, no matter who you were seeking help from, you would find something to connect you, and that would be the reason to do it.' I remember his laugh to this day.

The beauty of Father D'Agostino and the saintly nature of him was that he never asked for anything for himself—it was always for others. He gave a voice to those who had no voice, and he leaves a great gap in their lives."