

News on Nyumbani

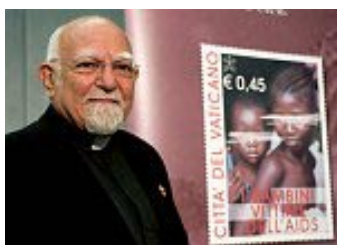


The first facility for HIV positive orphans in Kenya.

www.nyumbani.org

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Father D'Ag was invited to Rome for a press conference announcing two Vatican initiatives that are part of the Pope's Annual Lenten Appeal. In support of the Pope's emphasis on the children of the world, specifically those with HIV/AIDS in Africa, the Vatican released the stamp pictured here, which depicts African children. Proceeds from the sale of the stamp will go towards efforts on their behalf. A second initiative was an invitation to the people of the world to send funds to the Vatican in support of Father's D'Ag's programs to help the children and elderly in Kenya. More information on these initiatives will be included in future issues of News on Nyumbani.

Dear Friends of Nyumbani:

Greetings to all our friends in the USA, who are reading our newsletter. We are well into the year 2004 — certain that it holds much promise for Nyumbani. But, before we let go of 2003, let me share two items:

Christmas Day for the Nyumbani children was the best ever. The morning started off with the Papal Nuncio (the Vatican's Ambassador to Kenya) as the Principal Celebrant at Mass for the children. He relishes his visits with us and is getting to know many of the children by name. Later in the day, we had a grand party for the children and staff, and several groups made it especially wonderful for the children, stopping by with gifts and entertainment.

The year was also very special for

another reason: We had not one death of a child at the orphanage in 2003. I want to give thanks to you and our other friends around the world who support us in purchasing and obtaining gifts of antiretroviral medicines. This year's remarkable progress in keeping the children healthy is miraculous when compared with the grim statistics of our opening years.

At the same time, however, we are subdued in our thanks because we recently suffered a great loss when 15-year-old Joseph succumbed to illness (see page 2). We also know too many Kenyans outside the orphanage who cannot afford the medicines — despite what you read in some news accounts — the drugs are still not affordable enough for most people.

(Continued on page 2)

The Year Starts with Much Fanfare

Nyumbani has received a good deal of publicity both in Kenya and around the world in the last few months due to two major events:

Father D'Agostino traveled to the Vatican in late January (see picture) after a funding proposal he submitted was accepted by the Cor Unum Fund. His speech, as well as the event itself, generated much publicity for the HIV/AIDS situation and its affect on children.

Nyumbani also received worldwide publicity when a lawsuit filed on behalf of

the children was settled (see Father D'Ag's column, page 2).

The new Kenyan government has supported free primary education for all children in that country, yet school officials have refused to admit children from the orphanage.

On January 8, 2004, a judge in the lawsuit demanded school and city officials sit down with Nyumbani legal counsel and work out a deal. School officials then promised to take the children into classes as slots become available.



President's Report

I have been privileged to serve on the board of Nyumbani for a number of years. I use the word privileged because it is not often that we find ourselves in a position to help a man who has dedicated his life to the Gospel's imperatives to "Heal the sick, Clothe the naked, Feed the hungry." Father D'Agostino is that man, and we, in a sense, are his disciples. While we all have taken part in giving gifts, or arranging for gifts to be given to Nyumbani, we are actually the recipients of a great gift: the opportunity to do God's work here on earth.

So, it is in that spirit that I am humbled to have been selected to be the President of the Board for this year. I look forward to a successful year, one that has already begun auspiciously with the announcement of the commitment of the Vatican to the work of Nyumbani. Let us all hope that this augurs well for a spectacular year for the children to whose lives we are dedicated. Inspired by this development, and working together, I hope we will be able to look back with pride on this year and say, "Well done."

Ben Palumbo,
COGRF President

Besides regular donations of cash, donations of stock to Nyumbani's reserve fund has become an increasingly popular venue in which to donate to the children of Nyumbani (see Treasurer's Report, page 4). If this type of giving interests you, please contact Erin Melendy at the e-mail or phone number on page 4. If you want to make a contribution by cash, check or credit card, use the enclosed envelope.

Father D'Ag's letter (Continued from page 1)

Now on to 2004: the biggest excitement of the past few weeks was the publicity generated by the Nyumbani suit to win access to public school for our children. We were contacted by many media sources (including CNN, BBC, Reuters, Associated Press, and the New York Times), and as a result, we received worldwide attention. We have reached an agreement with officials and gradually the children are being admitted to government schools. In time, all will be accepted. Unfortunately, however, progress on this front has brought problems on another front. We are deeply indebted to an elderly couple who run a private school that has been taking our children without any hesitation for the past four years. The departure of our children as well as many others into the government schools will not allow them to continue their school. We want to thank them for their support of the past and wish them the best.

On another front, the plans for the Nyumbani Village are finally approaching realization, and we hope to have some news by the next newsletter on two developments that we are pursuing in that area. I also want to report that I was asked to submit a proposal for Nyumbani funding to the Vatican's Cor Unum Fund, which is part of the Pope's Annual Lenten Appeal. I traveled to Rome in late January after receiving word that my proposal was accepted.

In other good news, Sister Mary is now

back from her sabbatical year studying in the U.S. She was given a warm welcome by the children and the staff, who are very close to her. She is very busy these days sorting through all of the financial issues that came up during her absence. But, as many of you who have met her know, she will approach her task in her quiet steadfast way and solve problems using her Irish wit and charm to pave the way.

In closing, I ask my many family and friends to consider inviting me to their parishes when I visit the U.S. during the summer months. In the past, I have been invited to speak at Masses in parishes around the country including New York, Kansas, Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and others. In one Parish recently (St. John's, McLean, Virginia), I spoke at the invitation of the Pastor and of a dear friend of mine, Mitchell Spellman. People were very generous in their comments, support, and generosity after each Mass. One gentleman and his wife left me their business card. That action resulted in extended conversations with the couple, and a few weeks later, a gift of \$25,000! God is good in so many ways.

If you wish more information on my schedule, contact Erin Melendy at the email or telephone number listed on the back of this newsletter. She will be happy to coordinate my travel and dates for this effort.

Happy New Year 2004 and God love you for what you are doing.

Fr. Angelo D'Agostino, SJ, MD

Nyumbani Loses Joseph

Although the year 2003 was a special one because Nyumbani lost no children, the year 2004 started out with tragedy. Joseph, a 15-year-old boy who has been with the orphanage for several years, succumbed to severe stomach problems that kept him from eating.

According to volunteer Ted Neill, "his death hit the staff particularly hard because he was very close to many of them."

Because he spent time on the streets before coming to the orphanage, he grew up fast, and was mature for his age. The other children respected him, and he was a leader among the boys, Neill explains.

Nyumbani's Chief Manager Protus Lumiti adds that, "he was a boy of courage, loved to make friends and was full of jokes when he was fine."

Many people in the U.S. have seen

Joseph's face. He was the boy at the end of the award-winning film, "Left Behind" that, when asked how he contracted HIV, replied (in innocent ignorance) it was because he sniffed glue, which many street boys do. At the end of the film, he simply cries into the camera.

"I tell myself that his presence in Left Behind means his story will live on, continuing to affect hundreds of thousands of people who were moved by his soft voice and tearful face," the film's Producer/Director Christof Putzel says.

"Joseph shed a light on the situation of an entire generation of children. Many of us had heard of the devastating effects of AIDS, but it was Joseph who woke us up and touched us with the realities. None of us will ever forget that last scene," he adds.

Joseph's picture and information on the film are at www.leftbehindfilm.com.

Protus Lumiti:

Ten Years at Nyumbani

by Nyumbani Volunteer Ted Neill

Editor's Note: Protus Lumiti is Nyumbani's Chief Manager. When he started working with Father D'Ag, the orphanage was little more than a plot of land. It now houses 93 children on campus and helps almost 1,000 children outside the compound. Protus holds three bachelor's degrees and is working towards a master's in business administration.

Last autumn you marked ten years at Nyumbani. What originally brought you here to this particular cause?

During my studies at the seminary, we were assigned to a number of different ministries. We worked with the poor, the sick, the dying, and children. A priest saw my work and recommended me to Father D'Agostino.

In the time you have been here, what do you consider the home's biggest triumph?

Looking at the first few years we were here, the trauma of losing one child after another was the biggest challenge. Our greatest triumph is that now we celebrate life, not death here. But I'd say the second big triumph for Nyumbani is the recognition that the home has received. We are a good example, and we have been part of broader efforts to get Kenya and the world to focus more on HIV/AIDS, not just for children but for everyone.

What have been the most significant changes?

I'd say the staff has reached a point of maturity; they see this work as a service, not simply a job.

As far as the children themselves, the biggest change is their health, and you can see that change in another big development: we have teenagers and young adolescents now. The children also now understand they have HIV/AIDS — they are coming to understand the implications in a way our children did not in the past. They also have a different attitude towards life in that they realize they have futures. They can say, "I want to be a pilot," "I want to be a teacher," "I want to be a driver, when I grow up."

How has Kenya changed in terms of the climate of HIV/AIDS in these ten years?

Looking back at the 1990s, people did not talk about HIV/AIDS. But now there is a lot of publicity and awareness. Many



Protus and two of the children

people are taking up the cause and setting up organizations. Some are well intentioned while others are just being set up because it is the trend of the time. But either way, serious change is taking place. The school curricula now includes HIV/AIDS education.

How have you changed?

I came to Nyumbani very naïve, just a kid out of college, so I've gained the maturity that comes from management and administration. I've learned a lot from trying to train the staff to take their work not as a job, but a special service. I also have learned a great deal from the children.

In your time here, what has been the greatest challenge for Nyumbani, and for you personally?

For so long, nothing was being done on the national level to help with the HIV/AIDS situation. Our work is just a drop in the ocean in terms of needs; not being able to do more is always difficult.

For me, the challenge is: no matter how much work we do, the demand for help will always be greater than the supply.

What do you see as Nyumbani's objectives for the future?

We will maintain the good health of the children, but also strive to help them reach a point of independence. This is hard, however, for even at 18, when they are

legally adults, they will need continued support and guidance as they learn to live with HIV. I think it is crucial we address the pain of our teenagers and come up with programs to enable them to live positively.

Going out to the community was a big step for us, and we will continue to seek out places where need is greatest. I think it is imperative that we try to help the elderly; they are the forgotten. Since a challenge for all our programs is that we depend solely upon donations, a situation that makes it difficult to plan too far into the future, I think it is important we continue to move towards the village model [the Nyumbani Village] as a self-sustaining entity. I believe in the providence of God, though. He has helped us through the generosity of many people, and I know He will continue to do so.

Where do you see our children in five or ten years?

Now that they can attend public school, I see them finishing. I see them contributing to this nation as professionals. When I see young adults like David, I see doctors. When I see Laura, Knight, Christine, I see teachers, nurses, lawyers. I don't see them — and they no longer see themselves — as people doomed by AIDS. Maybe some will come back to this institution and be future managers. We want to impart to them the value of giving back and helping others. In general, I see a lot of hope for their lives.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of your work, your mission, the past ten years?

I don't need to look for happiness outside; it is here at Nyumbani. My reward is not remuneration or the skills I've picked up from managing. It is the happiness of the children. I know each one and when I call them by name, and they smile back, that response, along with their good health of course, is the biggest gift.

Treasurer's Report

As we move forward into the New Year 2004, I thought it would be good to take a look backward at 2003. Let me begin by stating what I have said in the past: All of you on our mailing list (about 3,100) are the best supporters and advocates in the world. You not only give tremendous support to the children of Nyumbani, you also spread the word to first-time givers. As a result, our final tally this past year is unbelievable.

The total of donations received in 2003 was \$341,020. That's an increase of five percent over our record year of FY 2002, which brought in \$322,900.

Of that amount, the Children of God Relief Fund Board sent monthly stipends to Nyumbani (requested by the Kenyan Board) that totalled \$135,000 for the year. With the addition of specific designated gifts in the amount of \$8,795 for the year, the total sent to Nyumbani last year amounted to \$143,795.

As many of you know, the Board started a reserve fund several years ago. It was begun in 1997 by an anonymous donor who gave \$100,000 to be held in reserve for emergency or immediate need and also to start the formation of an endowment fund with the goal of \$1 million in reserve. It was hoped that

amount would be achieved in 10 years so that the orphanage could stand on its own and have a more certain future. Presently, that reserve fund stands at \$822,000. We are deeply grateful to those of you who continue to donate monthly, year after year. Your donations reinforce a confidence in our mission and comprise the backbone of the monthly stipends to Nyumbani, allowing the reserve fund to grow.

Let me share with you a breakdown of the type of giving that we received in 2003.

- ◆ 444 donors gave under \$99
- ◆ 300 donors gave \$100 to 249
- ◆ 120 gave \$250 to 499
- ◆ 91 gave \$500 to 999
- ◆ 57 gave \$1,000 to 4,999
- ◆ 18 gave \$5,000 to 9,999
- ◆ 1 donor gave \$25,000.

Numbers who gave through the website: 46 donors gave \$8,086.

Numbers who gave by responding to the newsletter: 193 donors gave \$29,811.

The net proceeds of the annual September benefit amounted to \$86,000.

As you can see, you have much to be proud of; your dedication to the children of Nyumbani inspires the Board to move ahead to meet the challenges of the coming years. The children will be remembering their dear friends in the U.S. in their daily thoughts and prayers.

Joe D'Agostino, PhD,
COGRF Treasurer

Nyumbani's New Board

Ben Palumbo took over as president late last year. His comments are on page 2 of this issue. Joe D'Agostino's comments as treasurer are included on this page.

The other dedicated people who make up this year's board are:

Executive Vice President:

Larry E. Byrne

Vice President:

Rev. William George, SJ

Secretary:

Townsend Van Fleet

John B. Brew, Esq.

Janice E. Conway

George L. J. Dalferes

Dino J. DeConcini

James M. Desmond

Marilyn Jerome, MD

Michael F. Litzelman, PhD

Lydia S. Lively

Thomas E. Mooney

Marian E. Ord

Mary Lynn Qurnell

Gilbert Simonetti, Jr.



Deloris Jordan, mother of basketball star Michael Jordan, recently visited the children of Nyumbani. Jordan is an author and serves on the board of the Jordan Institute for Families. She received a warm welcome from the children (upper left) and Father D'Agostino (above).

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