

3 January 2009

Dear Friends and Family,

“Just think – you don’t need a thing! All God’s gifts are right in front of you.....and not only that but God himself is right along side to keep you steady and on track.....He will never give up on your. Never forget that.”

1Cor. 1: 5 – 9 (Peterson, THE MESSAGE)

What a joy it has been to hear from many of you during the holiday season. Thank you for sharing by mail and email. We always love to hear from you and know what is happening in your lives. It helps us with our prayers and to keep up with you, the people we love. We pray you had a Christ-filled Christmas and that the New Year will bring us all closer to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

December has been filled to the brim and overflowing with special days, new events and amazing occasions that have helped us better understand those with whom we work and serve. December 1st was World AIDS Day. The theme for the day was “Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise.” It was held in a small village about 8 km. from Maua. Our Giving Hope Program took 320 children, youth and adults making three bus trips. The group made a huge impact on everyone that day. First they met at the hospital and then they marched through Maua. Then they were loaded on the bus and went to the World AIDS Day program. Three of the numerous groups who had prepared a presentation were able to perform for the District leaders, community leaders, interested persons and numerous HIV groups. Through poems and songs the children had written, they expressed their feelings by engaging leaders to lead, to deliver the necessary support and services to all, and to empower the children (orphans) and those living with HIV. The youth and children were such an inspiration to everyone.



Giving Hope children, youth and sponsors Bill and some of the Giving Hope children

The other group that had a great impact was also from Maua Methodist Hospital. It is the Maua Men’s Group which is part of our Palliative Care Program. In our area, Maua has the ONLY HIV/AIDS men’s group. Basically in our area men would rather die than admit they were HIV+. All the groups in the area are $\frac{3}{4}$ or more women. Thus, this men’s group has the potential to save 100’s of lives. The group is made up men from every sector of our population. Their presentation focused on the need for men to come forward, be tested, take medication and be leaders in the fight against HIV. Bill and I are so proud of Maua Methodist Hospital and the programs they have that are making the difference for so many children, youth, women and men.



Some of the Men's Group



Giving Hope Youth take a break

December 14th was a Family Service at St. Joseph's Methodist Church (our church). It was a combined service (combining the English, Ki-Swahili and Ki-Meru services). It was to start at 10am and it did. The first two hours of the service were Bible verses, poems, songs, drama and dances done by the children and youth of the church. It was the most incredible service I have attended. The Sunday school class had brought all the small plastic chairs they have for the children and the first 5 rows in the church there were 150 – 200 children ranging in ages from 3 – 8. The next 5 rows were the older children and youth (approximately 200) and then the adults, moms, dads, grandparents, neighbors and friends sat watching with amazement and joy! Several children, 3 – 5 years old, took the microphone in their hands and gave a poem or Bible verse with such confidence and determination. All of us old folks were so inspired by the children and their hard work, dedication and courage!



The children sitting in the front of the church A young boy, 5 years old, who recited a long poem

A nativity drama combined the youngest children with some youth and was very well done. Everyone who participated and everyone who watched seemed to have such a wonderful, joyful time.



3 year old girl who performed twice



Participants in the nativity drama

On December 18th the hospital had their annual Christmas party. It is a special day for all staff which includes a meal, speeches, a gift, and lots of fun. The party was to start at 12noon but due to many different factors it did not start until 2pm. That is when all the food was delivered in huge sufarias from the kitchen (rice pilau with meat, stew with meat, meat, ireo (potatoes, green bananas, and black beans), soda, and bananas. The food line took about 1 hour and then we had speeches by the Hospital Management Team. We had one staff person retire and she and her family were honored and given a gift. Then the games began. There were numerous running races, sack races, balloon breaking races and finally a race to see who could eat one loaf of

bread, a banana and drink a soda fastest. How we enjoyed watching the staff and students compete, dance, sing, shout and have fun. They have more fun doing simple things and it is such a delight to watch and join them.



Staff dancing



Women preparing for sack race

The hospital cateress made a beautiful cake for the party. First the cake was carried to a table and then there were some speeches and lots of singing and dancing. The one cake, though quite large, serves everyone at the party because the cake is cut into very small pieces, what we would generally call a large crumb. But that is enough for everyone.

Following the cake cutting the staff was given a number and the number matched a gift. They filled through one of the classrooms in the school of nursing to pick up their gift. The gifts were very nice this year and ranged from a cup to a hibachi type cooker. It was almost dark before everyone began their journey home. We had eaten, listened, laughed, danced, sang and laughed some more. It was a wonderful way to start our Christmas holiday.



The Christmas cake
a race!



Sr. Sophia, the nurse in-charge of Pediatric Ward dancing after winning

And now for something completely different: I think I confused people talking about my replacement a few emails ago. Our present assignment will end in 2009. We have requested another 2 year assignment to remain in Maua through most of 2011. My replacement is in school, working on her BS in Nursing and we pray will graduate in mid-2011. I will be training her when she is home on leave from school and before we leave in 2011. Thus we will be seeing our supporting churches this year, 2009. As soon as we receive word from the Global Ministries, we will be writing everyone to make arrangements.

We know that our friends around the world are having difficulty due to the financial crisis. We pray that as each of us deals with the problems we face, we will continue to remember the poorest of the poor around the world. If we are hurting, imagine the problems they are facing. This month we have admitted more malnourished children in our Pediatric Ward than we have in the 11 previous months combined. It is so difficult to send these children and mothers home as there isn't any food at home or money to buy any food. Our rainy season stopped 2 – 3 weeks too soon and thus there is almost no maize and very few beans. Our Kenyan friends and colleagues have serious concerns about 2009 but their hope and trust in God is as solid as a rock! May we all stand firmly on the Rock, trusting in God and reaching out to help others around the corner and around the world in His name.

In His grip,

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“Lead with love and faith, and overcoming mountainous challenges, indeed accomplishing almost anything worthwhile, will be possible.” Charles C. Manz