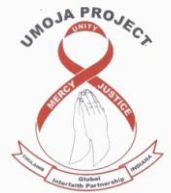


THE GLOBAL INTERFAITH PARTNERSHIP

Indianapolis, Indiana & Chulaimbo, Kenya

Committed to meeting the needs of vulnerable children in western Kenya



December 2009

www.globalinterfaithpartnership.com

Indiana Partnering Congregations

[Congregation Beth El Zedeck](#)

[Faith Missionary](#)

[North United Methodist](#)

[St. Joan of Arc Catholic](#)

[St. Luke's United Methodist](#)

[St. Monica Catholic](#)

[St. Paul's Episcopal](#)

[St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic](#)

[Second Presbyterian](#)

[Shaarey Tefilla](#)

[Tabernacle Presbyterian](#)

***Ministering in partnership
with over 25 congregations
in the Chulaimbo region of
western Kenya from diverse
traditions, including:***

African Inland Church

African Israel Ninevah

Anglican Church of Kenya

Church of Christ

Coptic Orthodox

Legio Maria

Pentecostal Assembly of God

Roman Catholic

Seventh Day Adventist

Voice of Salvation

As the Umoja Project comes to the end of its third year of service, I want to share one story from 2009 which moved me particularly. Many gifts have been exchanged through our partnership -- thank you for all of the ways you have shared your gifts and supported the Project!

Peace, Ellen



"All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4)

The festivities at Bar Andingo Primary School had been going on a long time and the day felt complete. For several hours the Duke seminary students and I had enjoyed being with the guardians, students, teachers, and other officials gathered under the trees to celebrate the Umoja Project. Young boys performed skits, clearly comedic though we could not understand the Luo language in which they were performed. The young girl students, who had stood shyly waiting for their turn to perform, came alive as they sang, drummed and danced. Then there were the songs of the guardians, a mix of young widows, elderly grandmothers, aunties and neighbors, whose soulful singing made me teary, even without understanding why. There had been much laughter when all of the visiting Americans joined the women in a circle dance, awkwardly learning the steps by trial and error. Finally, all of the school and other local officials had given their speeches, acknowledging all that our partnership had accomplished thus far and encouraging our continued work together.

It felt like a day in which we had seen heaven on earth, and I tried to communicate as much in my own moments of speaking to the crowd. Nothing more was needed; it had been a full and completely satisfactory afternoon. I thought the party was over.

Then Leonard, one of the school teachers and the translator for the afternoon, came up to the table where I sat with the Duke students. One more thing, he said. The women have some things for you and would like you to come forward one more time. Unsure of what was expected, we hesitantly rose from our seats and came out from behind the tables which stood between us and our Kenyan hosts. At this, the drums resumed their beat and dozens of guardians danced their way in from the periphery of the circle to form a tight group in the center. All carried in their hands a household item: brooms, calabashes, pots, baskets, cooking utensils and more.

Our Core Values

Our faith in a loving and merciful God unites us and motivates us to serve.

We believe every person has equal value under God. We celebrate and respect our various gifts and recognize that we need each person to fulfill our mission.

We are affected by others' suffering and are prompted to do whatever we can to alleviate physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Sharing our distinctive gifts, we respond collaboratively with all of our partners to respond to the current and future needs of Kenya's orphans and vulnerable children.

We believe full participation in the family of God depends upon basic human rights for Kenya's orphans and vulnerable children.

We believe a successful interfaith and cross-cultural program is dependent upon learning and understanding each other's core values, beliefs and expectations as well as ongoing program research and evaluation.

Leonard explained that each woman had brought one item from her home to give in appreciation for our shared partnership and work together. With the drum providing the background rhythm, the women formed a line, singing all the while. I was positioned in the middle of the line of American visitors, with the Duke students on either side. Even before the first gift was given, I was completely humbled. Yet somehow I managed to receive the women, as one by one they came forward with their gifts. Leonard served as translator as I asked each one's name and a little about her circumstances, then received her gift with heartfelt thanks. One after another, I gazed into weary eyes and touched calloused hands. The words spoken, however, only conveyed tenderness and love, as the women mentioned their children or other family, some of the sorrows they had experienced, and their appreciation for their friends from Indiana and North Carolina.



As the line of women shortened, a young mother came forward. In her hands, a chipped clay bowl with a broken lid. She murmured something in Luo and I looked to Leonard for help. It is her sugar bowl, he said. She wants you to have her sugar bowl. Gently I took the bowl from her outstretched hands, passed it to the intern standing by my side and embraced the woman before me.

The widow's mite, I thought, as I hugged the woman. I have received the widow's mite.

It is impossible to convey the emotional impact of receiving such gifts from these women. Women, who by American standards have so little, had reached into their small stash of household belongings and selected something to give the visitors. What could I do but receive graciously and with a silent pledge to be a good steward of their stories and their gifts?

I live in a culture in which most decisions about what to keep and what to give away are made based on practicality and prudence. So much of American life is arranged to protect us from outside risk. This gift of a Kenyan sugar bowl stands in stark contrast to the American way. It was neither practical nor prudent for an impoverished, uneducated woman to give up her sugar bowl. She risks never having another. She cannot control whether I will make good decisions for its safekeeping. She cannot be sure I will fulfill my promise to tell her story.

For me, the gift of the sugar bowl was a moment in which radical hospitality and extravagant generosity trumped all other more practical considerations. In this season of giving and receiving presents, I realize how grateful I am for such a precious offering.

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