

"I SAY YES"

"Digo Si, Señor" "Aoó, ShiBóhólnihii!" "Oo, Diyos" "Ndio Bwana"

Occasional Publication

Fall 2007

PITCHING YOUR TENT IN THE MISSION FIELD

BY TOM GARLITZ

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, says to "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you in richly." Col 3:16. At first reading, this seems like an admonition to a pious and devout study of the scripture, a good discipleship practice. And it is, and we should. But it is so much more.

With the word *dwell*, Paul calls to mind an earlier image as told in a verse from the Gospel of John. "The Word became flesh and made his *dwelling* among us, and we have seen his glory: from the Father, filled with enduring love." Jn 1:14 And so, Paul is not simply calling us to Bible study, he is saying that we must allow Jesus, the Word, to become flesh in our lives, to live in and through us. He is saying that just as Jesus lived and walked along the shores of Galilee and the highways and streets of Judea, talking with the people, healing them of their diseases, reaching out to them to lighten their heavy burdens, thus revealing the love of the Father, we must make Christ's love present to those we meet in our travels. Christ must become incarnate in us and live through us today.



Tom Garlitz, Director of Peace and Social Justice Ministry and Partnership in Mission

But this word *dwell* hearkens still again to another, even earlier image in scripture. The word *dwell* in the Greek gives the picture of pitching a tent; that is, it could be read, "Jesus pitched his tent among us." John is calling to mind the story of the Hebrews sojourning in the wilderness, everybody living in tents, but in the middle of the camp was the Tent of God, called, in fact, the Dwelling, Ex 25 – 40. This tent was filled with the radiant Glory of God. All life was ordered and organized around the Glory of God dwelling inside a tent in the midst of the people. Wherever they traveled they followed the Glory of God in the cloud by day and the fire by night above them,

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Upcoming Mission Schedules

- University Mission to the Philippines (1/1-13/2008)
- Mission to the Philippines (2/1-16/2008)
- Mission to Quito, Ecuador (4/3-17/2008)
- Mission to Sucre, Bolivia (4/5-19/2008)
- Native American Mission (Navajo) (6/7-21/2008)
- University Mission to Sucre (6/6-20/2008)
- Beyond Boundaries H.S. Mission (7/7-14/2008)
- SWIM High School Local Mission (8/4-9/2008)
- Africa Mission to Kenya (8/29-9/13/2008)
- National Disaster Recovery (ongoing)

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PARTNERSHIP IN MISSION

FAITH PROMISE DINNER 2007

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26TH, 6:30PM AT
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of Jesuit Volunteer Corps.

This year's focus: The University Mission

Special Music, Great Food, Neat Prizes, Wonderful Fellowship & Inspirational Message

PITCHING YOUR TENT IN THE MISSION FIELD

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

and carried that same glory with them in the Tent of God.

The Israelites were God's first missionaries, taking the Light of God with them wherever they went. It was God's hope that as they lived so close to him that all nations would be gathered to him.

As God's people today, as his missioners, we too are sojourners in this world. We have no permanent dwelling, only a tent. We travel light, owning only what we can easily carry. We live simply. We do not want to be burdened and distracted with the accumulation of things. What wealth we may have is used for the journey and to help those we find along the way.

Ex. 35: 20-29 As tent dwellers our lives are centered around God. God is the organizing principal for everything we do. We follow the Glory of God wherever it might lead us, from Sucre, to the Navajo, to Quito, to the Philippines, to Kenya, to the Gulf Coast. The Light of God radi-



A final image.....

ates throughout every aspect of our comings and goings. As we live in the light and allow the light to shine through us, each person we meet is drawn to God.

A final image. Remember going camping as a child? You pitched your tent and got out your Coleman lantern. As darkness fell you turned the lantern up to its brightest. Looking at the campsite, there in deep of night, you see the tent softly aglow. That is our life as missioners. We travel into the darkness and despair of peoples lives and allow the light of Christ to gently glow through us.

Seeds sown by Sr. Florence Muia grow into a global village of love

When Partnership in Mission teams return to Naivasha, Kenya, they are welcomed warmly and with huge hugs – especially at Upendo Village, a rescue community run by the Assumption Sisters of Nairobi for women and children with HIV/AIDS. "Upendo" means "love" in Swahili, and a primary source of the love in the community is Sister Florence Muia, Director of Upendo Village.

Upendo Village is an ecumenical project and the realization of Sr. Florence's dream of a sanctuary for some of the 2.2 million Kenyans who live with the HIV/AIDS virus. It is not a hospice program where death is the final outcome but a life-affirming mission for staff and volunteers who provide hope, love, services and resources to strengthen clients and their families and help them plan for their futures.

Sr. Florence was born and raised in a rural village in Kenya and became an Assumption Sister of Nairobi about 30 years ago. With a diploma in Social Work from the Government Training Institute Maseno, a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, and a Master's degree in Pastoral Counseling from Loyola University, Chicago, she worked to address the needs of her people by serving as an administrator in a school for hearing impaired children and in a girls' elementary boarding school, and she was the first nun in Kenya to work as a probation officer.

Her life and service gave Sr. Florence a deep understanding of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in which women and children, in particular, are vulnerable and disadvantaged. Along with the devastating stigma of HIV/AIDS, there are many myths about the disease, such as the one that virgins can cure a man who is HIV positive - a misconception which results in growing numbers of girls becoming infected and often rejected by their families.

Many wives are abandoned by husbands who deny being HIV positive and avoid being tested for the disease. Other women who are sick themselves bear the burden of caring for their dying husbands and children.

Sr. Florence first shared her dream of helping Kenyan HIV/AIDS victims with the Wheaton Franciscans in 1998. Involved in HIV/AIDS ministries for more than 11 years, they recognized her energy and commitment to follow through with such a challenging undertaking and her insights into appropriate solutions that go beyond dealing with symptoms of the problem.

With the financial support and mentoring of the Wheaton Franciscans, she began preparing for this endeavor by visiting Chicago-area programs with relevance to Upendo Village including a local HIV/AIDS organization, a domestic violence shelter and a comprehensive agency that served a variety of needs of persons who are poor.

(continue on the next page Seed Sown by Sr. Florence Muia...)

MISSION OFFICE NEWS

Partnership in Mission welcomes two "new" office staff members, Dr. Vic Trinkus and Deacon Tom Goebel. Dr. Trinkus, already giving much time to organizing and leading our medical teams around the world, will be devoting additional days each week to developing regional medical directors, communications with our national partners, and efforts to expand community health initiatives and systemic change. Deacon Tom, co-leader of the Navajo Mission and Holy Land Living Stone Pilgrimages, will be assisting Sister Shirley with missioner formation and the development of a new service / solidarity experience in Palestine.

Construction Corps members “walk the walk” on Arizona Navajo Reservation

On its most recent trip to Chinle, Arizona, members of the Catholic Construction Corps left behind many completed tasks designed to improve the lives of the people on the Navajo Reservation there – and brought home with them much love for the people they helped.

For one participant of the 17-person team, Dianna Witkowski, this year’s trip to the Reservation was her fifth. Dianna shares the belief that “to achieve peace we must first work for justice.” As a confirmation teacher, she feels that, in order to talk the talk with her students, she must also walk the walk.

“My being a short term missionary is a way for me to fulfill those words - to be able to reach out and help those who need a helping hand, to serve the poorest of the poor.”

In particular, Diana chooses to work with the Navajos because the needs are so great.” One of the biggest misconceptions,” she explains, “is that Native Americans have all they need to live courtesy of our government or that all reservations have casinos. This couldn’t be further from the truth.”

She illustrates the poverty level on the Chinle Reservation by telling about the food pantry: “Twice a week, a truck brings

donations from the local grocery store. This is nice - except that the fruit is badly bruised and vegetables are overripe. But the people line up ahead of time, smiling and grateful for what they receive.”

Water quality is also poor in Chinle, says Dianna. And while there is some public housing for single mothers, apartments are often without electricity because the women’s funds must go for food, clothing and other basics for their children.

During the spring 2007 trip, the missionaries worked with Father Blaine from Our Lady of Fatima Parish; some members contributed to the needs of the Navajo community and others to the parish. The group accomplished about 70 projects including roofing, siding, painting, plumbing, using a tractor to clear drainage ditches, and building a new outhouse.

“We helped with bingo night,” says Dianna, “and entertained little ones while mom played bingo. A member of our group also held a plumbing class that was very well received.

“But most important this year to most of us was helping a

(see Construction Corps members....on back page)

Seeds sown by Sr. Florence Muia grow into a global village of love

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She met National Catholic AIDS Network representatives who helped her refine her dream, became skilled in political advocacy, and learned how to establish a not-for-profit organization.

Sr. Florence structured a community which could respond to immediate issues impacting the HIV/AIDS crisis and also address long-term needs by engaging the community. In addition to treatment and counseling for infected patients (some of whom receive home visits), Upendo offers educational sessions which debunk falsehoods and provide accurate information about the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Knowing the importance of good nutrition for those affected by the disease, staff members teach clients how to prepare high-protein, balanced meals to build their immune systems and prevent opportunistic infections.

More than 1.5 million people have died from HIV/AIDS, and Kenya is now home to some 1 million HIV/AIDS orphans, the majority of whom have dropped out of school to earn a living to support themselves and their siblings. These children who have suffered the loss of one or both parents are also stigmatized, alienated, shunned, abused and neglected. Care for the orphans is a crucial aspect of Upendo Village. The community is committed to providing them with proper nutrition, counseling, healthcare, education, placement with extended family members and income-generating opportunities to empower families towards the future support of the children.

Since Upendo Village became a reality in 2001, it has continued to grow. Sr. Florence now handles managerial responsibilities, directs the community’s ongoing outreach programs and works on securing funding and resources to ensure a stable and a sustainable project. Basing her work on love which is rooted in an authentic spirit of nonviolence, she is able to diffuse potential conflicts and focus on what unites rather than what divides the community.

Fund-raising efforts to benefit Upendo Village program continue to be held by school children, university students, Physicians for Human Rights chapters, religious organizations and concerned individuals across the US. In addition to raising money, these events educate American citizens about HIV/AIDS and illuminate the faces, rather than the statistics, behind the disease.

Continuing their close collaboration with Upendo Village by serving on its board, the Wheaton Franciscans are stakeholders who embrace this ministry. Other Upendo partners are the Chicago-based Rotary Club, Global Alliance for Africa, and the East African Program.

Sr. Florence is considered a committed and skilled pioneer in her work with HIV/AIDS in underserved rural Kenya. She is recognized as a source of inspiration, hope and healing in her community and a person of integrity who practices nonviolence by creating respect, practicing honesty, promoting justice and nurturing wholesome relationships.

But perhaps the greatest measure of her work lies with the people of Naivasha who do not think of Upendo Village as Sr. Florence’s project, but as their shared project. From one person, they all became dreamers. Now these dreamers span two continents, linking people of hope in Kenya and in the United States in a “global village of love.”

Acknowledgements

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Construction Corps members "walk the walk" on Arizona Navajo Reservation (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

young mother prepare her home or 'Hogan.'

We put on a new roof, siding and paint, fixed the wiring, and made sure she had the means to clean the floor sand. Valerie and her children were a joy to work and play with, and we all felt a real joy knowing she would be moving into her home."

In another project, this one for a disabled vet, the group laid a floor and installed cabinets, sinks, a toilet and a water heater.

Dianna also recalls the bond which is forged among team members on the mission trips. "We learn to depend on one another for emotional and spiritual support, gathering spiritually, and working, laughing and crying together. At every formation we are reminded - and we truly feel - that we are the mission.

In sharing the days' events and in our partnership with mission leaders, we become family. " Team members try not

to get too emotionally involved with the people they help, but, Dianna notes,



Mission group on a picnic in the canyon listening to a family member telling a story of her family

"You always leave behind a little piece of yourself, and the people are always in your thoughts and prayers.

"It's important to find quiet time at the end of the day and spend it with God. Keeping a journal can also help you center yourself and prepare for the work ahead. And a sense of humor always helps!"

The Construction Corp experience continues to be a rewarding one for Dianna who feels great love and joy working with the Navajo people. She says, "Five years ago, I heard God's whisper telling me to answer the call, and I am glad I listened. Because of the generosity of my parish family I am able to continue my missionary work, and I can't express enough thanks to them."