



Weeping and Rejoicing with Africa

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Weeping and Rejoicing with Africa



By the Rev. Eric Shafer, director, ELCA Department for Communication

In February 2004, I was fortunate to lead a group of ELCA communicators on a "Stand with Africa" trip to east Africa. We saw the ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds at work in Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, addressing HIV/AIDS and combating hunger and starvation.

As I reflect on this visit, I think more of our time as "weeping and rejoicing with Africa" rather than "standing with Africa." I am also proud to say that ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds are working wonders in east Africa, saving and changing lives.

Weeping with Africa

How does one tell the story of how our hunger appeal funds help children to have a good death? That is not the usual hunger appeal success story we tell, but it is a "success" story nonetheless.

Supported by funds from the ELCA Division for Global Mission and the World Hunger Appeal, staff of the North West Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania support families caring for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Some of these children are also HIV positive themselves and the program gives them funds for school uniforms so that they can attend school as long as they are able and for medicine to ease their pain.





We visited families living in the countryside outside of Bakoba, Tanzania. These families lived in the poorest conditions, mud homes with dirt floors. They spread fresh hay on the floor for our visit. One mother ran after us as

we left to give us a gift of fruit. Another asked me why her one grandson was dying of AIDS while her other grandson was not and, before my halting response could be translated, asked me to pray with her. We wept with Africa that day.

Later in our trip, we visited a relief station near Wenenata in southern Ethiopia. There, staff of the South Central Synod of the **Ethiopian Evangelical Lutheran Church Mekane Yesus** (EECMY) coordinates food donations to 300-400 people each day. This year the EECMY will feed 54,000 Ethiopians in six relief centers like the one near Wenenata.

These efforts are supported by our ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds through the **Lutheran World Federation**. The good news is that, because of better rainfall thus far in 2004, this number has decreased from 94,000 in 2003. The bad news is that famine in Ethiopia has continued there for nearly 30 years and shows no sign of ending soon.

I wept after visiting this relief station. I wept for the injustice of nearly 30 years of starvation. And I wept as I thought of how decreasing churchwide budget support further restricts the help that the Division for Global Mission can give to the EECMY for similar projects.



Rejoicing with Africa

Despite my weeping, there is much to celebrate in Africa and many amazing projects supported by the ELCA World Hunger Appeal through the Division for Global Mission and companion churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and **Lutheran World Relief**.



In Uganda, we spent a day with the women of the Katosi Women Fishing and Development Association (KWFDA), a project supported by World Hunger Appeal funds through Lutheran World Relief. Begun as a fishing and fish-marketing project for

women in the town of Katosi, this work has expanded into micro-loans for small businesses, organic farming, safe water, home and latrine construction and much more. There is no way I can capture the enthusiasm and determination of these women, some of whom are HIV/AIDS widows with children.

Also in Uganda, we visited the Kiteredde Vocational Institute, begun more than twenty years ago to educate Ugandan civil war orphans and more recently dramatically expanded to serve HIV/AIDS orphans. Supported by our ELCA World Hunger Appeal funds through Lutheran World Relief, the Kiteredde Vocational Institute has more than doubled its student body, many of whom live on campus in buildings they have built themselves. Most graduates are able to find employment, even in the desperate Uganda economy.

I was pleased to make this journey with eight ELCA colleagues: Deb Bogaert, Aaron Cooper, Paul and Sue Edison-Swift, Bob Fisher, Marcia and Mark Holman, and Nathan Ruby. Our trip was partially supported by a grant from the ELCA Ministry Among People in Poverty immersion funds.

To support the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, make a gift through your congregation or send your check, payable to the "ELCA World Hunger Appeal," to P.O. Box #71764, Chicago, Illinois 60694-1764. To pay by credit card, telephone 800-638-3522 or go online to www.elca.org/hunger.

To see more pictures and read more stories, visit this website: <http://www.elca.org/hunger/stories/EastAfrica.html>