

JANUARY 2009

The Inauguration Committee for President-Elect Obama must have felt it: that nervous flutter of anticipation and anxiety and the last-minute dashing to arrange the details before the Big Event. Were the VIP invitations all sent out? Was there enough parking reserved? Did all the security personnel know their assignments? Was there going to be enough champagne?

As we prepare to open The Rwamagana Lutheran School, we have our own Big Event in eastern Rwanda and the details seem to multiply as we get closer to the day: is the uniform designer ready for the order? Can the carpenters deliver the remaining chairs in time? Will we be able to coordinate the final registration with the Ministry of Education? Do the teachers have all their textbooks?

At the same time, I marvel at how much has come together. We are renting three beautiful new classrooms at a technical school for street teens about 1.5 km from our own site. Our teachers are a team of caring and committed graduates from Rwanda's Kigali Institute of Education. We have good-quality textbooks for almost every subject and a growing collection of resource books for teachers. Dr. Elaine Kasimatis and I spent the first half of December meeting with the teachers to plan, to consider the art of pedagogy, to iron out details and envision this new school. When our students walk through the door in February, we will be ready to welcome them as new members of a community of learners, and as our Administrative Assistant Moses Mufua said, "to be pioneers in education" as we think about how to put Expeditionary Learning into the Rwandan context.



Elaine and her daughter, Katja of Davis, California have returned home after a year of volunteering their time and brainpower and expertise for the school's preparation. Meanwhile, Jean Helmick of Harrisonburg, VA is preparing to come for a year to be the school's volunteer Comptroller. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to these very generous and flexible women who have put their "regular" lives on hold and adjusted to very different surroundings in order to make the school a reality!

It was exciting this month to bring together two members of our Board of Directors from California, (visiting with a delegation of Lutherans from Sierra Pacific Synod) with the Rwandan members of the School Governing Board. Americans,

Tanzanians and Rwandans together, sharing their vision of what we can accomplish: it was an incredible occasion!

Being back in the USA for a brief time this holiday season caused me to reflect on the economic crisis sweeping our nation and others. As I listened to elders who weathered the depression with common sense, hard work and fortitude, I hope that many Americans will rise to the challenge of pulling together and appreciating those things that matter most: family, friendships and the basics of shelter, food and good health. This is the state of Rwanda even in the best of times – both our teachers and students have seen hardships that we find hard to imagine and are deeply aware of the value of good education and those “basics” that many have to struggle for on a daily basis.

Even though the amount we are charging for tuition this year (about \$500) is only about a third of the total cost per student, it is still a princely sum for most Rwandans. Your assistance can make a big difference in a student’s life! In this year of belt-tightening for many Americans, we are doubly thankful for your help.

(Women in the church community in Rwamagana and Kayonza are also doing their part by making baskets and greeting cards to sell. If you would like to support us by purchasing baskets, please contact Jean at JeanHelmick@gmail.com.)



Our other major challenge is to raise funds for our own school building. We were extremely lucky to find rental space, but soon African Evangelical Enterprises (AEE) will need our rented space for their own students. Our new architect is putting together an attractive but practical and cost-effective plan for us on the beautiful plot of land we have on the main by-pass road around Rwamagana.

From the beginning, it has been my hope that we can build a school where young people are equipped to cope with a challenging and changing world. We want to help them grow to shape it in a way that helps all of us live in a healthy, peaceful and sustainable society. I hope that you will continue to be a partner with us in this new year of challenge and change!

Grace and peace to you in 2009,

Robin Strickler

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