

The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society November 2010

Loving Arms Mission Kenya

Written by Angela Heldon and Callista Barritt for publication by the Loving Arms Mission (LAM)



In January this year, during New Church Camp, while chatting on the beach in Australia, we discovered that we shared a long-held dream to do volunteer work with the New Church in Africa. From this conversation, the Lord then opened our way to the fulfilment of this dream. Soon we were in contact with Kent Rogers and Amanda Petro-Rogers, who led us onto Rev. Khalid Obiri of Riounde. We were overjoyed to receive an enthusiastic welcome from Rev. Khalid, which filled us with excitement to meet him and his many children, as he calls them. Together with his wife Josephine, Rev. Khalid manages The General Church of the New Jerusalem Riounde School and Orphanage Home in Kisii, Kenya, where just over fifty children are being supported by LAM.

So we decided to spend six weeks in the company of this community, and we will be forever grateful that we did. As it so happens, and as they say here, 'God has a plan'. This has been proven so strongly to us from the way everything seemed to fall into place. We contacted Gretchen Keith, a good friend of Angela's mother Margaret (Horner) Heldon, for more information on Riounde, as we knew she had travelled here last year. Gretchen told us that she and her husband Bishop Brian Keith were going to be in Kenya again this mid-July, which was exactly when we had planned to go.

It was providential that we arrived in Nairobi on the same morning as Bishop Brian and Gretchen, Kay Alden, Eric Carswell and Jay Barry, so that we could all go to Kisii together. We arrived at Kisumu airport to a warm welcome from a large crowd of smiling Kenyans. Rev Khalid, his wife Josephine, Rev Samson, his wife Jacqueline, soon-to-be-ordained Rev Nicks, (his wife Stella was absent as she had just given birth the day before), and many more happy faces, one of which was Adam Cole from Bryn Athyn, who had been in Riounde for a few months already. Adam said he was happy to 'show us the ropes' here, as Nicole Pitcairn had done the same for him. We thank the Lord Adam extended his visa which meant that our stays here happened to overlap, as his friendship was so invaluable, and his already established relationships with the people here helped make our transition to life in Kenya much smoother. We were also fortunate to benefit from Nicole's knowledge and experience through our contact with her as we prepared for our arrival.

Several days ago, a few of the girls here in Riounde told us we looked so happy when we arrived, and looking back, we can still vividly remember the excitement we felt the morning we first met all of the children. Their enthusiastic welcome was so infectious, and we immediately felt at home here. We were a part of the family. Right from the very beginning, we were well looked after by all involved here, as visitors in Riounde. We were fed very well, maybe too well at times, when we were even served two or three lunches in quick succession! Khalid and Josephine, the 'Manager' and 'Manageress' have many responsibilities and work hard to run this very large family, but their generosity seems limitless, for they somehow always take care of our needs as well. The children wanted to assist us with everything, from carrying our bags to washing our clothes and fetching our bath-water. They anticipate our needs even before we do. For example, they let us know when our feet need to be cleaned, which is done very lovingly with soap and water as we rub them on a large rock, an experience which is as pampering as a spa pedicure!

We feel the Lord's presence very strongly here. One way this is seen is by their great sense of community spirit. They share everything, especially their food. Leftovers never go to waste and are distributed well. If there are any extra treats like avocados or tomatoes, everyone gets their fair share. We thought it would be difficult to give gifts if we didn't have one for each child, but a few torches go round to whoever needs them, and a toy koala is shared by all. Another quality that impressed us here is the simplicity of life. Their resourcefulness continually surprises us. Back home, we think children need expensive toys, a variety of television and complicated computer games to keep them entertained, but here we see children happily playing with skipping ropes made from reeds, hopscotch games with stones, or using balls made from socks stuffed with leaves. Worshipping and praising the Lord through song and dance seems to be an integral part of the lives of the people here. From the smallest babies to the oldest grandmother, it is like they were born to express their spiritual affections through music. Learning and teaching songs has been a wonderful way to share and connect with the children, particularly the younger children who are very shy when it comes to speaking English, but have no trouble confidently singing a song in English after hearing it only a few times. Our hearts are deeply touched when hearing songs that we knew from growing up in church being sung by beautiful, strong African voices all in unison, a heavenly chorus. We taught the children 'Hodhoo laiHowah' and it is so special to hear them singing it before dinner.

There have inevitably been some challenges here, caused by adjusting to cultural differences and a level of poverty that we are not used to. The Western obsession with punctuality seems to be non-existent here. We call it 'African time' when the hour named to meet seems to be taken by all as a suggestion, for we have found it is quite flexible and the event may not actually take place until an hour or two after the time first mentioned. We felt challenged at the beginning of our trip, not knowing what to expect or the best way for us to contribute here. However, as we are in our last week, we can look back and see how things have unfolded involving our purpose in being here. At the beginning we met regularly with Jay and Adam which were very beneficial times of sharing ideas,

thoughts, and prayers, as all our hearts are in the same place. The priority of our involvement here is, for all of us, looking forward to the well-being of the children. Jay reminded us that simply being a non-anxious presence here among the children is very useful because children learn so strongly from the example of those around them. Loving them, giving them individual attention, making an effort to learn their names, and learning a few words in their local language was immensely enriching for both us and them.

The children can list the names of all the overseas visitors who have come here and spent time with them. Each visitor brings his or her own unique energy for the children to benefit from. We can definitely feel Nicole's presence here and can sense her positive influence in the children through what they say about her, and from what they do that we can see they've learnt from her. Also, we are glad our visit has overlapped with Duncan Smith, as his determination for improvements here is so inspiring, with all the obstacles he overcomes along the way. Visitors aren't the only positive influence on the children; there are some wonderful staff and teachers here who look after the children's needs. There are too many people who give their time and energy freely to the children to give them all justice here, but one individual we feel deserves special mention is Madame Rabera, who they call the matron of the children. Rabera seems to really hold things together here. When Rabera is around, there is an atmosphere of harmony, things run more smoothly and the children seem to feel more secure. She stays here with the children, giving them all her time and love, and they go to her to solve their problems.

From witnessing the needs here, our thoughts are drawn to the future, with ideas of how to implement sustainable improvements for the better health and well-being of the children. One of the main issues of concern to us is the diet of the children. We kept a record of what they ate in the time we were here. From this we observed that their staple food is maize, which is usually served three times a day in different forms. For breakfast, they receive uji, which is a porridge made from ground maize and water; lunch is usually boiled kernels of maize, sometimes served with beans; and ugali, which is maize meal made into a doughy consistency, is served for dinner with cooked greens, often sukuma wiki, which is a type of kale, or occasionally other spinach or cabbage-like greens. While we were here, we were able to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables to supplement their diet, but the best solution for a more permanent way of adding variety to their diet that is easily accessible, we feel, would be to provide a space along with the resources and education to grow their own food. They do grow some greens, but a greater variety of produce would benefit them greatly, and since the area is very fertile, with so much food grown locally, if they grew it themselves, they would use it, and not have to rely on it being bought. Keeping chickens, for the valuable protein and nutrients from eggs that is missing in their current diet, would also be great if it were managed properly.

Although our time here is drawing to a close, we know there is no way we could ever possibly forget the people we have met and the times we have shared with them. They will always be in our hearts and minds, and we hope that our involvement here does not end when we leave. Once again, we are both very grateful for the opportunity of coming to Riounde. We feel blessed to have been able to experience such vibrant life from the love that flows so freely here.

Callista Barritt (19) and Angela Heldon (25) are from Canberra and Sydney, Australia, respectively.

Note from Angela: I am back from my travels deeply enriched by the experiences I've had in both Africa and Europe. Callista and I are planning to give a talk at the 2011 Australian New Church Camp this coming January 3rd to 9th at Greenhills ACT on our time at the New Church in Kenya. In this talk we will also be able to address more about the challenges faced by the Loving Arms Mission who support the orphanage in Riounde Kenya.

Visit of Rev David Lindrooth

The Society enjoyed a brief but rewarding visit from Rev David Lindrooth, Director of Outreach for the General Church, for a few days recently. The opportunity was taken to have a **Holy Supper** service on Sunday 24th October after which everyone was invited to have refreshments and socialise at the home of Mike and **Kerry Lockhart**.

The following evening David gave us a most interesting talk about the work of his office including developments in India which we were unaware of. He also mentioned that feedback to the General Church website is very active including the negative influence of the sphere of the Red Dragon. (see True Christian Religion 619) David said he sends back a "Truth Sandwich" (a useful truth wrapped around with some love) and often is surprised by a subsequent positive response. Following Hurstville David was off to a full program of activities in Perth.

Visit of Rev Grant and Sarah Odhner

We are very hopeful of a visit from Rev Grant and Sarah Odhner in December and January and are just waiting on final confirmation. All going well Grant would be here to preach on Sunday 5th December through to Christmas and the end of the Summer Camp. A special bonus is that Sarah is an accomplished musician.

New Chinese Website to be Created

During the visit of Rev David Lindrooth we learnt the good news that a new website will replace an existing one of the books translated by **Huilong Sun** into Chinese. It will be done by a skilled Chinese web site designer to better present the works.

These books are:

- Heaven and Hell
- Married Love
- You Can Believe by Rev Grant Schnarr
- Afterlife by Rev Don Rose
- Light in My Darkness by Helen Keller

News Notes

Congratulations to **Murray Heldon** who recently attained the ripe old age of 60. Murray celebrated with family and friends at the Community Hall in Kingsgrove with lots of good food and a Bush Dance caller.

Jan Lindsay has had two weeks of rehabilitation at St George Hospital and has regained some strength and movement in her damaged arm and is now working on learning to walk again. She has returned to Bupa Nursing Home, Bexley.

It has been good to welcome **Brian** and **Claudia Horner** from Bryn Athyn who are in Australia for just over two weeks to visit family and friends.

It was a pleasure to see **Rev David** and **Pam Moffat** who made a special trip from Canberra to Sydney on Sunday 24th October for the visit of Rev David Lindrooth. Also in town for the occasion was **Graham Horner** from Tamworth.

Mike Lockhart is fortunate to have survived a bashing in his hardware store in the city. Mike approached a shoplifter who was stealing a metal gemmy. He was punched, falling and hitting his head and becoming unconscious before the offender fled empty handed. Mike fortunately has survived without permanent injury. We are all very relieved, Mike.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Cliff Adamou** (2nd), **Jesse Horner** (3rd), **Brian Heldon** (8th), **Cathy Kermond** (11th), **Skye Horner** (11th), **Lori Heldon** (30th)

November 2010 Calendar of Events

Note: All events are located at the church at 22 Dudley St, Penshurst 2222 (off Hillcrest Ave) unless otherwise stated. Contact the Hurstville New Church on (02) 9580 1589 for more information or email us at newchurch@optusnet.com.au
All are welcome and refreshments are served after church each Sunday.

Sunday	7th November	10 00 a.m. Worship (Informal Service)
Sunday	14th November	10 00 a.m. Worship
Sunday	21st November	10 00 a.m. Worship followed by Society AGM
Sunday	28th November	10 00 a.m. Worship
Sunday	5th December	10 00 a.m. Worship (Rev Grant Odhner)