

A Great Thing Happened on My Trip

You have to be kidding? In Zimbabwe? The country fraught with disease, unemployment, hunger, and a “brain drain” of many of its professionals and middle class who have fled the country? And worst yet, a country governed by an 84-year-old despot whose policies have ruined the economy?

But if you ask Sara Dickey, Kathy Surma, and Mary Beth Zollars about their mission teams’ visits to Nyadire, Zimbabwe, this spring and summer, they will immediately and adamantly respond, “It was GREAT!”

Part of THE NYADIRE CONNECTION (TNC) Volunteer in Mission team, they journeyed the 8,400 miles from Pittsburgh to the United Methodist Mission in Nyadire, some two hours from Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. The mission is much like a college campus with a 240-bed hospital, a nursing school, a school system for 1,200 students, a preschool through high school, an orphanage, a teachers’ college, a church, and a farm. These programs provide services for a large rural population.

THE NYADIRE CONNECTION was organized by the first Volunteer in Mission trip team after they returned from Nyadire in 2006. Their goal is

to keep the services and programs in Nyadire operational during the chaos and deprivation the country is experiencing. TNC is committed to a long-term relationship, working as partners through “chabadza,” the Shona word meaning to stop and help someone who is already at work.

Sara, Kathy, and Mary Beth have different stories to tell about this concept of “chabadza.”

Sara Dickey, of Bridgeville, made her eighth trip to Nyadire in April 2010. She was on the fact-finding team to Zimbabwe sent by Bethel Park’s Christ United Methodist Church (CUMC). Their charge was to visit hospitals that needed revitalization and would be appropriated for the church outreach program. Nyadire was selected because the hospital was in good shape, a nursing program was in place, and they needed a doctor. There was no other hospital in the area to service the many people.

Nyadire Hospital today is much different than the one seen in 2002. A doctor is in place and much needed equipment, supplies, and medications are visible evidence of “chabadza.” Assisted by Brothers’ Brother, TNC sends two ocean containers a year filled with x-ray equipment, hospital beds, and urgent medical supplies. Medications are kept on the shelves through biannual shipments. A storeroom was built in the hospital to house the contents of the containers. The focus of Sara’s team’s was to distribute the goods to the programs throughout the missions—books to the library, nursing school, and teachers’ college; equipment and materials to the orphanage and preschool; backpacks for students. Forty-five reconditioned computers were installed in the schools and administration, and an Internet café near the hospital was set up and is now operational. TNC had worked with the Nyadire personnel to make sure all these goods were things that were needed.

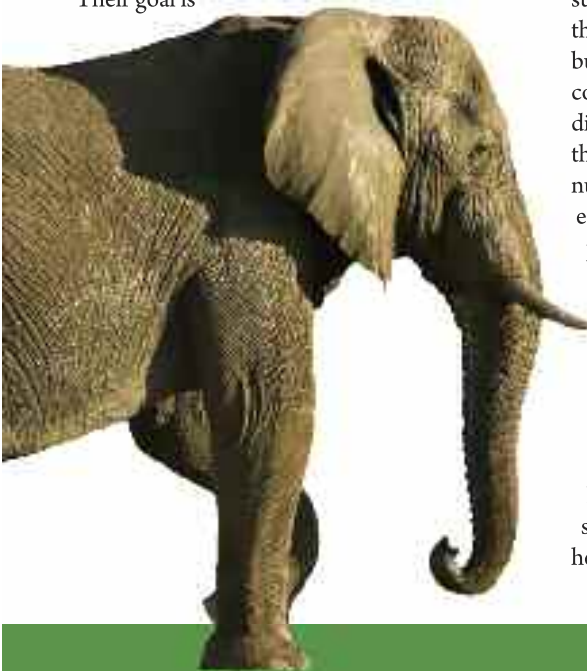
Sara’s son, Aaron Cannon, joined her in Nyadire and was able to meet the folks whom she had talked about for so many years. Aaron helped with the distribution process and the

harvesting of maize, the staple food of the region. Aaron, a chef in NC, even prepared a turkey dinner for the team as well as the children and caregivers of the Home of Hope (HOH) Orphanage.

Kathy Surma of Greentree made her first trip to Nyadire in July and remained for a month. Her “great thing” revolved around the children, who “got under [her] skin” so that she cannot stop thinking about them. She loved being at the Home of Hope Orphanage, reading to and playing with the children, watching them, hearing them sing, making up games, holding her hand. She recounts playing Crazy Eights with a number of children. Lorraine, a sharp 10-year-old, stopped the others when they were “bending the rules,” keeping everyone on target. Kathy admits she has good card skills, but Lorraine beat her and didn’t want Kathy to leave when it was time to go. One morning in church, Kathy was sitting in the front pew and she was hoping that the two HOH children next to her would cue her as to what to do, but they were asleep. Then she heard a voice behind her say “Stand up,” and afterwards, “Sit down.” She said she was “immersed in the moment” when she was there.

Since dental hygiene is Kathy’s profession, she organized and updated the dental office, and even repaired equipment. A sure measure of her relationship with the children is their allowing her to clean their teeth. They had never been in a dentist’s chair before, but not one cried or protested. She also identified those who will need further dental work. Presently there is no dentist in residence on the mission, and Kathy remarked that many of folks on the mission approached her “with their mouths open.”

During the month that Kathy and Mary Beth Zollars were in Nyadire, they and other team members took on many physical projects. They cleared brush and built a fence around the garden at the Home of Hope to prevent wandering cattle from trampling the crops. The produce grown there provides food for the



to

ZIMBABWE

children and an opportunity for them to learn about gardening. The children also learn about animal husbandry by keeping chickens, rabbits, and goats.

Since power is available 50% of the time, at best, running water is a problem. The team also

created a water reservoir, providing water for the orphanage even when the power was off. The platform of the outdoor cooking grill was raised as well, making cooking easier when there was no electricity.

Mary Beth is a German teacher at Chartiers Valley High School and was a member of the original mission team of 2006. When she returned from that trip, she felt her calling was the orphanage and helped to establish The Nyadire Connection sponsorship program for the 24 orphans in the orphanage. Sponsors pay \$30 monthly to cover the children's housing, food, clothing, medical, school fees, and supplies. Mary Beth, Kathy and their team also visited five schools neighboring Nyadire. They took photos and recorded information on some 500 orphans for another sponsorship program, the Home of Hope Outreach School Sponsorship. Sponsors are being sought to pay an orphan's school fees for a year and provide a backpack of school supplies. Information on both these programs can be obtained by contacting Mary Beth Zollars, mbzollars@aol.com or by visiting The Nyadire Connection website, www.nyadire.org.

The culmination of their time in Zimbabwe was a three-day safari excursion to Imire Safari Park near Harare, the capital. Twenty-five Home of Hope children, 14 other Nyadire children, over 20 adults including the HOH caregivers and the administrator and his family, plus eight Nyadire Connection team members packed up the children, strapped their mattresses atop the Nyadire High School bus, and loaded the luggage on the back. This safari was probably the first trip away from the

mission for most of the children, and the first excursion for most of the adults.

The plan was for the children to stay the three days and nights at a "bush camp" a distance from the lodge where the adults stayed. The children were to sleep in traditional, round, thatched-roofed huts and take part in a separate program, including environmental activities, volunteer work, and game drives to view the 600 animals of the park. After one night in the camp, when the weather became unseasonably cold and windy, it was decided to move all children into the lodge with the adults. The bad weather turned into a blessing, since bonding took place between adult and child, Zimbabwean and American. Together they learned how to track animals, how the animals' characteristics varied, and helped with a volunteer project stacking long poles for fences. And, of course, they enjoyed seeing all those animals they had only seen pictures of: zebras, giraffes, antelopes, rhinos, crocodiles, a python, hyenas, and elephants.

Seeing elephants up close was both scary and exciting. An elephant trunk swooping its trunk near the children sent some of the children to the cab of the lorry for refuge and others squealing. All who wished could take an elephant ride. Mary Beth heard a child crying and noticed that Charles, one of the orphans, had lost his shoe after sitting atop the animal. In the next moments, that same trunk that had scared some, scooped up the shoe and returned it to the guide who returned it to Charles.

Working together. Helping. Relationships. Sharing. People. Children. Chabadza. Joy. These are the "greats" in the mission trips to Zimbabwe.

