

February 26, 2017

Dear Friends,

It's Sunday afternoon and I am beginning to prepare for my departure on Tuesday afternoon. I thank God for this opportunity to see many dear Rwandese friends, to teach a little, to encourage others, and to be encouraged by them too. I remain so grateful for your prayers, emails and encouragement. In this letter, I'd merely like to share different vignettes from my last week here:

Vignette One: Earlier this week, I hosted our weekly Monday afternoon Bible study for members of the cooperative. You may remember that this cooperative caters mostly to vulnerable people with HIV/AIDS. All are poor, and many are widows and genocide survivors.

During the Bible study, we discussed the account from Acts about the stoning of Stephen, the first martyr in the Christian church. As I related this story, one precious woman named Anne Marie walked away from the group and began sobbing. The depth of Stephen's pain obviously hit a chord in her tender and sensitive heart. During the genocide, she was buried with only her head reaching above the surface of the ground. I don't know whether she saw people get stoned, but she encountered much violence and our lesson reminded her of that.

Usually, the participants like to dramatize our Bible lessons, and this is always great fun. But this time we axed that plan and instead drew pictures from the story. I have attached a couple of these pictures here. You will easily recognize Stephen. The figures in the sky are when Stephen looked up, saw the heavens open and beheld the glory of God. If you're wondering why the drawings are rudimentary at best, keep in mind that many of these adults have rarely ever used crayons. Thankfully, Anne Marie recovered and rejoined the group. I've attached her photo here with another woman. She is wearing pink.

Vignette Two: Later in the week, the cooperative hosted a graduation for young adults who had completed a three-week program to prepare them for entering the work place. We invited community leaders, and there were over one hundred people in attendance. We toured the cooperative together, blessed a house that we had built for a widow, listened to speeches, enjoyed watching Rwandese dancers and then looked on as the participants received their diplomas. We also rejoiced with another group of "students", mostly adults who had taken literacy lessons and just learned to read and write.

In the pictures attached, you will see me wearing a traditional Rwandese dress called an umushinana. It's a lot of fun to dress up and embrace the culture more vividly. I'm also including pictures of the dancers, the house that was blessed and a view of one section of the cooperative from atop the hill where the ministry center is located.

Vignette Three: Yesterday, my host, Godfrey, and I drove to Kigali to visit several of my "kids" from Musanze who are now in school or university. Theoneste Ndagijimana came, and he is now studying at a university in Kigali. Jean Eric (formerly Gasore) joined us and he is studying accounting at Mt. Kenya University, also in Kigali. And remember Marcel? Yes, we picked him up from the automobile mechanic school that he now attends. In addition to this, John Rutagengwa arrived later. John was the driver at Sunrise School for Orphans when I served there. John is one of the most caring and humble men I know. He repeatedly ministered to me when I lived and worked here in quiet, practical, and unassuming ways.

The meal with these young men was special. Isaiah 54 speaks about the "barren woman" who has many children. These are some of my special kids, along with my students who visited last weekend, among others. I guess I feel a bit like the old woman who lived in a shoe. But it feels good to see how different ones are maturing in their relationship with Christ and committed to becoming godly, educated men and women. I love them all.

Tomorrow, I'll lead another Bible study and complete some financial work with the business manager here. I'll start to pack and begin to say good-bye. Thank you for vicariously accompanying me during this visit. Being here has prompted me to contemplate the continuum of time and how life keeps moving forward. It encourages me to remain steadfast in my commitment to these people. And like the writer of Proverbs, I pray that God will enable me to "speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves".

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of those who are destitute.
Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Prov. 31:8-9).

With love and appreciation,

Martha