

First Presbyterian Church of Hilton Head Island Report on Mission Trip to Kenya – August 2-14, 2018

Eleven travelers formed the mission team that completed a 13-day mission trip to Kenya in August of 2018. The team was comprised of Jack Alderman, Mary Stuart Alderman, Mark Brown, Amy Cross, John Cross, John Carter Cross, Rev. Jeff Myers, Lavon Stevens, Barb Thoreson, Brian Thoreson, and Rev. Joel Wood. The trip's purposes were to:

- Meet the new leaders of the Nairobi Central Presbytery and enhance our relationship and effective management for the benefit of the Bahati Scholars Program
- Strengthen our faith through joyful worship with our Kenyan friends
- Meet and deliver useful gifts to our fifty-seven current Bahati Scholarship students
- Celebrate the successes of our post-secondary students
- Gain greater appreciation for life and challenges in Africa
- Explore other possibilities for mission collaborations in Kenya

Itinerary We started and finished most days with meals at our Presbyterian Guest House. At the end of every day, we shared responsibilities for leading a devotion and writing the blog to be posted to the FPCHHI website.

Thursday and Friday, August 2-3 Eight of us flew from Savannah midday Thursday and arrived in Nairobi late Friday evening after stops in Atlanta and Amsterdam. The Cross family had arrived a couple of days earlier to visit Amy's cousin Rev. Bill Black in Nairobi. We were greeted at the Nairobi Airport by Susan Ngari (Bahati Scholars social worker and administrator) and Ruth Maina Wanjiru (Presbytery accountant) and their families. Simon, our very gracious driver for the week, transported us to the Milele Presbyterian Guest house for a midnight meal and some overdue sleep.

Saturday, August 4 We connected with the Cross family and met in the morning with Moderator Rev. Leonard Rukenya and Clerk Rev. Paul Kibiro Ngugi of the Nairobi Central Presbytery. Both are new in their positions; they were very cordial and voiced strong support for the Bahati Scholars program. We worked well together on an updated version of our Memorandum of Understanding and Outline of Responsibilities, which Mary Stuart agreed to draft and distribute for final approval. After lunch with the Presbytery leaders, we attended a very joyous graduation celebration for Catherine Ndinda, who has just completed medical school. She has been supported by our FPC choir throughout her secondary and college education, and she is a stellar Bahati Scholar success story.

Sunday, August 5 Ten of us worshipped at three different parishes (5 churches) within the Nairobi Central Presbytery. In each church we were invited in to sit on the chancel and participate in the service, which typically lasted nearly three hours. Three of the churches were deep in the slums, and we were honored to see the evangelical work the Presbyterian Church of East Africa is doing in these difficult conditions. Lavon was invited by Rev. Daniel Wachira (the former Clerk of the Nairobi Central Presbytery, who visited us on Hilton Head last summer) to join the worship music team at his new church, which is in a different Presbytery. We were all impressed and moved by the joy our Kenyan friends express in worship.

Monday, August 6 This was a work day at the new Makadara Boys Centre, where the homeless boys in our program are now housed when they are not in school. Makadara is a huge improvement in safety and living conditions for the boys, and the director and social worker there appear to be very competent and caring. We worked together with the students to clean and paint their new dormitory and living room spaces, and several of our graduates arrived to say hello and help with the work. We then worked with them to plant some shrubs on the grounds, which were dedicated to our new Bahati Scholar boys. The Presbytery Treasurer, Oliver Waweru Kimani, provided materials and expertise. Each boy claimed a shrub and proudly posed for a photo.

Tuesday and Wednesday, August 7 and 8 We traveled Tuesday morning to the Masai Mara National Reserve for a couple days of magnificent wildlife viewing. This area at the north end of the Serengeti was teeming with animals during the annual migration of wildebeest and zebras, and we were all amazed by this special part of God's creation, for which the Kenyans are proud stewards. We had the chance to tour a Maasai village near the Mara and our guide was the son of the village chief. Many of us purchased crafts made by the Maasai.

Thursday, August 9 Upon our return to Nairobi, we were transported to the Eastleigh Community Centre, which is directed by Phares Mithamo, the dynamic man who was on Hilton Head last year as part of the Presbyterian Peacemaker program. His work in this very poor part of Nairobi which has mixed Muslim and Christian populations is very effective and impressive. We left wondering what more we might do to help the Centre's successful education and technical skills training programs.

Friday, August 10 This was perhaps the most enjoyable day of our trip. We met at a recreation park with nearly all of our Bahati students, who were transported there by bus. They were treated to two fine meals, a meaningful devotion time, and an afternoon of organized games. Most of our group met the student they sponsor, and we enjoyed seeing all the students together for the first time. We recorded video interviews with most of the Scholars, and it was wonderful to see them enjoying the day so much. At the end of the day, they received the gifts that we brought for each of them – tee shirts, watches, and backpacks, and we delivered letters from their sponsors.

Saturday, August 11 This was a quieter day for us. Some of our group visited the Karen Blixen House and the Kazuri Bead Factory, while others stayed at the Guest House and rested, chatted, and edited photos. As always, John Carter made friends with the kids wherever we were – this day he organized some local kids into joyous games at the Guest house.

Sunday, August 12 Again, we visited three different parishes within the Presbytery and were asked to sit on the chancel and participate in the worship services. Many churches hold three different services in different languages: English, Swahili, and Kikuyu (the predominant tribal language), and we learned some Swahili words by repetition and recognized hymns by melody. We reveled in the energy and praise time of our Kenyan friends during their worship and discussed ways we might infuse our FPC services with such joy. We enjoyed a late lunch back at the Presbytery offices and returned to the guest house mid-afternoon to begin packing and planning for our departure on Monday.

Monday and Tuesday, August 13 and 14 Because of the death of a PCEA pastor over the weekend and the funeral on Monday morning, our final meeting with the Presbytery leaders was cancelled, allowing us time to visit the Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage and take a quick tour of the Nairobi Downtown area, including government offices and the site of the former US Embassy, bombed and destroyed 20 years ago in one of the first international terrorist attacks. We traveled an hour outside Nairobi to the home of the Presbytery's accountant, Ruth Maina Wanjiru, who had prepared a sumptuous farewell dinner for us. She and Susan Ngari presented us each with gifts of Kenyan tea and local handicrafts to remind us of our visit with them. Jeff Myers remained an additional two days to visit with the family of his surrogate Kenyan daughter. After airline travel ranging 24-36 hours, all eleven of us returned home safely with memories to last a lifetime!

Successes

Confirmation of relationship with Nairobi Central Presbytery
Assurance of better long-term sustainability of program
Meeting with nearly all students
Celebrating successes of our graduates
Strengthening of financial oversight
We returned with greater faith and joy

Challenges

Jobs for graduates
Financial cost of visits