

## **Dear Friends and family, greetings and love:**

In our last email we announced our decision to follow the Lord in the invitation to serve at the KIBBUSE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL in Nyamarwa, Uganda. Since then, we have spent a very busy, full and joyful yet sorrowful summer in family life, ministry and travel.

### ***A busy summer at the home front***

The first two months were primarily devoted to work with the Grand Rapids Area Service Project, where I (Bob) had the joy of leading about a dozen groups of volunteers doing home repairs in the inner city.

In the meantime, Brenda has continued the work of organizing our large and overstuffed Home Street Home and managing the care of a truly full house. As you may remember, when I left for Uganda in May we had only our Sudanese foster daughter, Amir, in the house. When I returned we had six! Since then, two have left and three have replaced them. Thankfully, everyone is scheduled to move out by October 31, giving us two months of breathing, cleaning and packing time!

We hope to sell or rent the house before departure. As you know, the housing market is a mess right now. However, we are trusting, just as God has ordered our steps and opened the way to a new home in Nyamarwa, He will provide a buyer or renter for the house we are leaving. The family I mentioned in my last letter is still interested in "housesitting" from June on, but would prefer that we find another alternative, since they are quite happy in their present home. Please pray.

### ***Family visits and farewells***

In July and again in August, we visited Pittsburgh to attend meetings with ENCOUNTER UGANDA, our mission "covering" organization. In August we traveled to Erie for a family reunion with Bob's brothers Tom, Steve and Stan, sister Ann, Mom-in-Love Joanne, and lots of nieces and nephews. We also saw one of our Sudanese foster daughters, Sim Sim, and her infant son. At the end of August we drove to Branson, MO, to spend a few days with our eldest son, Aaron and wife, Melissa, and Sarah (13) and Andrew (8) who drove up from Texas. We then went on to Kansas City, to visit Jackie, our eldest (Sudanese) foster daughter, Jackie, husband, Lawrence, and their month-old daughter, Tebyan.

Finally, we returned to Grand Rapids via Pittsburgh, where we attended the inaugural Encounter Uganda 2008 team meeting at Christ Church at Grove Farm. There, we shared with the team our call to and vision for the work at KIBBUSE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL and spent another afternoon with the Van Normans, our forerunners at KIBBUSE.

We put nearly 4,000 miles on the car in less than a month! It was a truly grand tour and we were constantly aware of God's favor, as we were able to have wonderful times with everyone on Bob's side of the family and had many unexpected meetings with old friends. We hope to visit Brenda's side with a Thanksgiving trip east and south.

The summer has not been without sorrow and difficulty. At the end of our time in Erie, we had a brief visit with our niece, Suzanne, who had been fighting cancer for four years and had really taken a turn for the worse just before we arrived. The half hour we spent with her was truly holy and precious. She still had the light of faith in her eyes and a smile that spoke of a courage and a hopefulness that defied the reality of her condition, though she and her husband had just been told her time was short. It turned out much shorter than anyone expected as Suzanne died the next day.

It was a sad and hard time for the whole family, but we were grateful to be there to be among the comforters for her husband, Eric (our nephew) and children. I was asked to lead the prayers at the funeral, which was held in the same church where just ten years ago I sang at her wedding. The funeral was as beautiful and sorrowful as the wedding had been beautiful and joyful. Please pray for Suzanne's husband, Eric, and James (9) and Caitlyn (6) and for Ann (my sister, Eric's mom) as they continue to live through the shock and grief of Suzanne's death.

We arrived home and not a week had passed before our good friend and long-time Madison Square Church member, Norm Katerberg, died of brain cancer. This brought to four the number of deaths from cancer among close friends since April. It has been a real reminder of the preciousness of each day. We cannot know the day or hour of our own deaths, but we certainly can take each day and each moment as a gift and blessing, and make the most of every opportunity - especially the opportunity to love others, whether our family, friends, strangers or enemies.

### ***Preparing for KIBBUSE***

NOW, ABOUT UGANDA! We have not been inactive, even with all our other activity. Our two trips to Pittsburgh have confirmed and deepened our commitment to the KIBBUSE Vocational School and our knowledge of how to prepare. We are in process of getting complete physical examinations. And, we are doing whatever we can to prepare mentally for the work ahead.

This past Sunday, we spent the afternoon at *TILLERS INTERNATIONAL*, a farm near Kalamazoo, MI where "outdated" farming and manufacturing technologies are being recovered and utilized in combination with contemporary "high-tech" energy-saving (solar and wind powered electrical products), biodiesel and organic farming concepts to promote more healthy and ecologically sound lifestyles. We visited their carpentry and blacksmith shops, saw yoked oxen at work plowing an open field and helped operate a simple, but very effective sorghum press. We met the director and learned that *TILLERS* is actively working in Uganda, mostly in the Gulu and Soroti areas, to help farmers there move forward by using affordable technologies drawn from the American past.

This week we will be visiting *FLEETWOOD GROUP MANUFACTURING*, a Holland, MI employee-owned school furnishings company that is well-known for its openly Christian witness and high quality furniture. They have a staff chaplain, a missions committee and annually send out missions teams to help Christians in countries such as

Uganda develop appropriate and profitable manufacturing facilities and processes in the wood and metal-working trades.

We are also visiting our old friend Clare DeGraaf, who, with Fleetwood Manufacturing, helped send our son, Jim, and me to Uganda in 1999 and 2004.

***Raising support for the work***

We have done some budget work and know we need to secure \$900 to \$1,000 per month for our personal support. For anticipated needs of the KIBBUSE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL capital improvements, equipment and program development, we hope to help raise about \$60,000 to \$100,000 over the next two years.

We have also confirmed that our covering for the mission will be provided through Encounter Uganda, the mission outreach of Christ Church at Grove Farm, Sewickley, PA. So, if you wish to invest in KIBBUSE SCHOOL with us, please make your check(s) payable to "CCGF" (Christ Church at Grove Farm) and send them to:

*Christ Church at Grove Farm  
Eileen Hodgetts, Encounter Uganda Director  
249 Duff Road, Sewickley, PA 15143*

Please specify whether you wish your gift to support Bob and Brenda, by adding the notation "***Encounter Uganda - BBS***"; or KIBBUSE Vocational School programs and projects, by the notation "***Encounter Uganda - KVS***". We deeply appreciate your contribution to either fund.

We will be ordering our tickets soon and are now planning to depart Grand Rapids on January 3rd, arriving at Entebbe on the evening of January 4th, 2008. We have also determined that we will be going over with nothing more than we can fit in our four suitcases and carry ons. We have been advised by Encounter Uganda leadership that almost everything we will have to acquire to sustain long-term service at KIBBUSE can and should be purchased in Kampala. This will save transportation and shipping costs and assure us of furnishings, equipment and appliances that are appropriate for our situation and available sources of power.

***Preparing our hearts***

As the time of departure draws closer, people have expressed concern about a number of things, especially the lack of basic infrastructure (good roads, electricity, water and sewage systems, etc.) and inadequate medical facilities. Others make quite a fuss about how "remarkable" it is that we should be doing this. We want to assure you that we don't see ourselves as any different than any Christian who sees a need and responds. There is always risk, there is always stretching, there is always discomfort. But there is also always adventure, always growth and always reward. We are made, like Adam and Eve, always wishing we could get back to the home we once had; but we are also made like Abraham, always reaching out toward a home we've never seen.

Just like each of you reading this, Brenda and I have been uniquely shaped by our lives, our experiences and the sovereign hand of our loving God and Jesus Christ to be who we are. Unlike many, who are called to remain long periods of time in one place, B and I have been nomadic since our youth (Brenda moved more than thirty times before her fortieth birthday; I more than twenty; and since we married we have moved nearly a dozen times) We are shaped and continue to be shaped to go to new and different places and to live among new sets of people.

We will leave Grand Rapids and our beloved Home Street Home knowing we can never truly return. The "we" that leaves now will have to die to what we have been to become what we must be. We must give up what we have had so that we will be free to receive what God has in store for us.

We believe this is the heart of the Christian life; it's like spiritual breathing - confessing sin and receiving forgiveness, dying to self and living to God, letting go the old and taking on the new. Jesus said, "Here there is no continuing city." Life in Christ is a "movable feast." We are just moving on to a more remote section of God's wonderful kingdom.

In His love and service, indebted to you for your prayers, kindness and generosity,

Bob and Brenda