

## SEPTEMBER LETTER:

Dear Family and Friends, greetings and love:

During term break, in August, Brenda and I were very busy and were able to use our time well. We began by resting. Sometimes resting is the best way to use one's time. We were recovering from malaria and an amoebic condition, so the rest was very important to our quick recovery. After a week's relaxation here at home, we traveled to Kampala for a "retreat", a time of reflection and review about our work at the school. We stayed at Cornerstone Development, where we had the blessing of a large apartment with a kitchen. We were able to invite close friends, Anna and Faith (Turumanya), with their husbands and children, to join us for dinner one evening. We met a number of other missionaries from a number of countries who are working, like us, in Uganda. Each day and evening seemed to bring new people and opportunities to share. We were greatly encouraged by all these unexpected encounters.

During the days, we did shopping and internet work at a large, very modern mall called "Garden City", had maintenance done on the school truck, read books and rested. We also discovered that a church meets on the Cornerstone property, so we only had to walk across a small grass yard to worship on Sunday. We also enjoyed eating at three nearby restaurants when we were unable to make our own meals. After we returned to Nyamarwa, we spent the last two weeks preparing for the new term. All in all, it was a very productive and refreshing time.

Now, we are already two weeks into the third and last term of our first year's service. We faced many difficulties and a few hardships during our second term that have strengthened and seasoned us, we trust, for the balance of our service here, whether it turns out to be one or even more years. Thank you for your prayers for us.

Our relationships are deeper and stronger than we could have imagined would be possible in such a short time, including our love and respect for each other. Brenda and I have worked through the sometimes difficult realities of co-leadership, often with overlapping responsibilities that could easily pit us "against" each other. By God's grace and because of our long and well-tested friendship, we have found the path to a smooth and productive partnership. We have become very close friends with Rev. James Adyeri (and his wife, Aidah, and children), with our Operations Chief, Rugo Darius and with our cook and housekeeper, Grace. In a very real sense, they are our Nyamarwa family. They work side-by-side with us each day, share our table, join us in daily prayers and cooperate in every way to accomplish the myriad of tasks that go into managing a school program.

We are especially grateful to God for our strong, intimate, open and productive working relationship with James Adyeeri. We meet early every morning to assess the day's needs, attend to problems left unsolved the night before, plan the morning assembly and pray. James is truly a visionary, and yet at the same time, a meticulous leader. He is not a "doer"; he is, by title, aptitude and inclination a *director*. He sees the broad vision ahead, while at the same time keeping amazingly alert to check on the details of daily operation. He is quick to delegate and is able to carefully evaluate complex problems and make difficult decisions wisely. His greatest areas of need are in with financial control, fund-raising and communications, the very areas Brenda and I are strongest on. So we have become a good team.

We are also pleased with the commitment, diligence, sincere friendliness and hard work of everyone on our faculty and staff. We have become personal friends with every one. We know them all well, have met many of their spouses and a few of their children, have visited their homes and have welcomed them to ours. We often share hospitality, both casually and at our more "formal" faculty/staff meetings. We are truly working WITH them and feel more and more that we are being accepted as regular members of the community, who just happen to be "western" (muzungu) and white-skinned. We are always impressed with their competence, thoughtfulness and self-sacrificial attitudes and are especially grateful for the privilege of PRAYER with these people, whose difficult life situations daily test and yet at the same time, clearly strengthen their trust in God. They are always a source of inspiration to us.

Poverty, lack of basic infrastructures (decent roads, modern housing, electricity and clean water), sickness and seemingly "unnecessary" deaths are ever present. During our first five months there were only three burials. One was a twenty year old young man, the second an older woman, the third an infant. But during the next three months there were FIVE more. Three were a mother and her just born baby and a second mother during childbirth. Another was a young man less than thirty who died of a heart ailment that wasn't treated soon enough. Four were near relations of people on our staff and faculty.

I (Bob) have attended most of these burials. I struggled with this because of what Jesus said about "letting the dead bury their dead", but have capitulated to what he exemplified by ultimately coming (even if four days late!) to his friend Lazarus' burial. Burials are where you go to weep with those who are weeping. They provide a time to honor the living and give thanks for the past and eternal life of the deceased. And they are a time, most importantly, to share the encouragement of the gospel with many people who are struggling along without hope or faith in God.

The first thing Rev. James and I do when we get to the home of the deceased is to make our way into the front room of

the (usually) mud house, where the body lies under a cloth drape, surrounded by seated, stoically somber or quietly weeping women - the wife, mother, sisters of the deceased. There, we squat down so that we are at eye level with them. Sometimes tears come as we get immersed in their grief. Sometimes not. But in every case, we express our mutual sense of loss and sorrow, James in Runyoro, I in English. James acknowledges the pain they are feeling and gives some brief utterance to presumed perplexing questions associated with any unexpected death. Sometimes I sing a song like "The New 23rd". And we pray. Then we quietly retreat from this shrouded room to the bright light in the yard outside, individually greet the men of the family and join the hundreds of others waiting for the burial service.

**I have learned that funerals are the largest and most frequent gatherings of people in this region (and perhaps all of Uganda and the third world).** They are a time of comforting, grieving, remembering, challenging, feasting and community affirmation. For Christians there is always a message of comfort and hope - and it is always seasoned by an evangelical challenge - bringing comfort to the surviving and a forthright challenge to all who are still running from the author of the resurrection life.

**Even at the Muslim burial I attended there was a strong call to repentance; and Christian leaders attending were permitted to speak freely about Jesus.** At that same burial, I saw my friend Kitende, an older Muslim who lives here in Nyamarwa, but whose congregation is in another village (there is no mosque here). He is a very kindly and friendly man who was one of the first to welcome me and Brenda when we arrived. I went over to greet him and found that the woman who had died was his niece, a young woman in her early thirties, who died in childbirth along with her baby. He was moving about, openly weeping as he comforted other family members. As I embraced him, tears came to my eyes as well. We spoke of our mutual faith in God and of the hope brought to all mankind through Jesus. Here, Muslims are very embracing of the prophetic authority of Jesus, so there is no offence; only the acknowledgement that death brings us all to our need for God's mercy - and there is no prophet who spoke more about God's mercy than Jesus. That moment of shared grief was also a moment of shared agape love.

I recalled one morning some weeks before, when Kitende and I met while I was out for a walk. He asked me how it is that Brenda and I are so different than other muzungus (white people) he has met over the years. Why do we not seem afraid of Africans? Why are we so open to actually being friends? Why do we seem to trust people so easily? To his questions I offered a single answer: it is because of our relationship with Jesus, who gives us the way of freedom, faith and love in regard to ANYONE, even our enemies. Why then not our neighbors, regardless of their color, religious beliefs, culture or economic "status"? Please pray with us that Kitende will find his way to a full relationship with Christ Jesus.

**We are finding that our mere presence here in Nyamarwa is not only affecting the school and the village. It is also having a telling effect on our entire geographic area, the Kibaale District (a large "county").** Our Board President, George Bizibu, is also a high-ranking District official. Because of this, the KIBBUSE Foundation is invited to many public events - events that help shape peoples' attitudes toward their communities. As Rev. James and I go out and share, we are finding that people are gaining confidence, just because a couple of muzungu are now around (there are not many missionaries or other westerners in Kibaale District). We don't have to do much or even go many places. It is assumed that muzungus bring money, investment and friendship with America.

In our small village, shopkeepers are putting up new buildings, a tower for wireless telephone has been installed and there are promises of other forthcoming infrastructures, such as improved roads (HALLELUJAH!) electricity and public water treatment facilities during the next few years. Much of this is being driven by upcoming elections in 2010-11, and all of it probably would have happened eventually, but the hope stirred by seeing even the small investment we are making in KIBBUSE has had a telling effect in hastening development - beyond what you would think possible on the surface of things. I do not want to exaggerate the importance of what we are doing - and especially not who we are - *but I also want to clearly communicate the importance of your investment to hundreds, even thousands of people in this region.*

**Finally, our little church is growing.** More students are regularly attending than in the past and we are seeing new faces of people from the village. We have had visits to our church (for the first time ever this year) from our Anglican Bishop and our area Head Deacon. And it is the first time our Parish minister has visited more than once in a single year. Plans to make our church a parish center are being urged ahead. This would mean that our church pastor would also oversee other rural sub-parishes in our area.

I am preaching about once a month and sing in the choir. Brenda has started an "altar guild" at St. John's (there has been no such group up till now. Last Sunday I helped her hang a large, student-made rough hardwood cross in front of a white linen cloth, along with cut flowers for the altar and colorful flags draped from one end of the sanctuary to the other. The church has never looked as good and people were clearly blessed by the changes.

PLEASE PRAY, WITH THANKSGIVING:

- For our continued good health, patience courage in the face of daily trials, clarity of mind and good humor!
- For our students' health and financial needs
- For our faculty, who have graciously accepted cuts in pay and heavier work loads
- For our children, Jim and Rachel in Grand Rapids, and Aaron and Melissa in Texas, who have now not seen us for eight months and only hear our voices about once a month; for God's blessing and mercy in their lives
- For Rev. James and Aidah and their children, who face many difficulties daily with grace and courage and who have suffered much grief and loss this year. Especially pray for provision for the completion of a new home for them (they are living in a nearly thirty-year-old mud house with a dirt floor and no modern amenities).
- For the political leaders of Uganda and especially President Museveni, as elections approach (we are praying for God's will to be done in the USA two months from now, as well) that there will be a peaceful change of government at the right time, whether this election or next.

In Christ, our love, prayers and fond remembrances linger over many of your names daily,

Bob and Brenda