

2005

## African Children's Mission

*Grant Norris*

During the past year, the African Children's Mission has provided the Church of the Redeemer with a profoundly important means of expressing our concern for children who are living with the scourge of HIV/AIDS. The mission has engaged every age group in our parish and takes a wide variety of forms, from financial contributions to art work, from prayer and instruction to a commitment to be physically present to those we are serving. We have grown spiritually as a parish as a result of these various offerings, for the lonely child residing in Malawi reminds us of Jesus' call to serve "the least of these my brothers and sisters."

For the second year in a row a group of self funded parishioners traveled to Malawi to witness the situation there and, for the first time, two members of our Campus Ministry (Sara D'Angio and Andrew White) spent the summer as volunteers at the Open Arms Ophanage. The travel group visited the Kanengo AIDS Support Organization, the Kauma Village Youth and Children's Center, the Chisomo Children's Club in Blantyre and the Open Arms Orphanage. They spent several days with the people of Chididi village where they worshipped with the congregation on a Sunday and taught pre-school and primary school-age children on a week day. In Chididi they were blessed by the warm hospitality of Fr. Francis Matumba and his family, and the lay leaders of the church and village. They witnessed a great spirit and a firm commitment to serving the neediest people in the community, particularly the orphans and children at risk from various conditions. A tour of the village made clear to them that there are very critical needs and challenges, especially hunger and malnutrition among the children.

ACM Communications program in 2005 centered on support of adult education forums before and after the 2005 trip to Malawi, and multiple stories about the 2004 and 2005 trips that appeared in the Pentecost 2005 issue of *The Voice of the Redeemer*. During the year we hosted a viewing of "Living With Slim" at Adult Education. At year end, we coordinated a special appeal for support through the "Hunger Months" in Malawi and geared up for events in January 2006 with brochures for distribution at the Great Concerts for Great Causes and at a meeting of the Coalition for Compassion.

The ACM Children's Program's goal in 2005 was to develop empathy and awareness of the plight of Malawian children. Part of instructing Redeemer's youth and children about a compassionate God was helping them experience compassion for others. Two Malawi themed lessons were given to the Girl and Boy Choirs and three church school lessons were given to Grades 3-9. The lessons included hands-on activities, real artifacts, and follow-up activities related to Malawi. Our youth were invited to write letters to Malawi youth as a way to share a part of their own lives and help them connect with youth in Malawi. The letters were taken and distributed in Malawi by the travel team and responses were brought back from youth in Malawi.

In 2005 the ACM raised and distributed \$44,200. Working with GAIA these funds have been distributed as follow:

- Open Arms Ophanage for building of village nursery and orphan care feeding center.
- Chididi Orphan Care Center for food, medicine and other essential supplies.

- Kanengo AIDS Support Organization (KASO) for food, and clothing.
- Chisomo Children's Club in Blantyre for completion and furnishing of the Limbe Center.
- Kanengo AIDS Support Organization for food for orphans.
- Famine relief in late 2005
- Goats, goat supplies and necessary training to various villagers in Malawi

Overall the ACM has attracted many people from both within our active congregation and from outside also. It has allowed us to benefit from a large number of people sharing together and growing spiritually. The ACM has drawn us together, young and old, with a common focus and widened our experience in the larger world. In 2006 the African Children's Mission will continue to educate the children, youth and adults at the Church of the Redeemer on the challenges of HIV/AIDS in Africa, create opportunities for the congregation to become involved and distribute funds to programs in Africa. We will look to expand our activities where possible and plans are in place now for providing the congregation with opportunities for greater involvement in this area.