

A man wearing a brown hat, a light blue checkered shirt, and dark suspenders is kneeling on the ground. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. In front of him are several young children, some of whom are looking at him. The ground is dusty and there are other people in the background, some of whom are out of focus. The overall scene suggests a mission or outreach activity in a developing area.

For the Life of the World

Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne

April 2008, Volume Twelve, Number Two



Out of Africa

Rev. Dr Arthur Just

There and Back Again

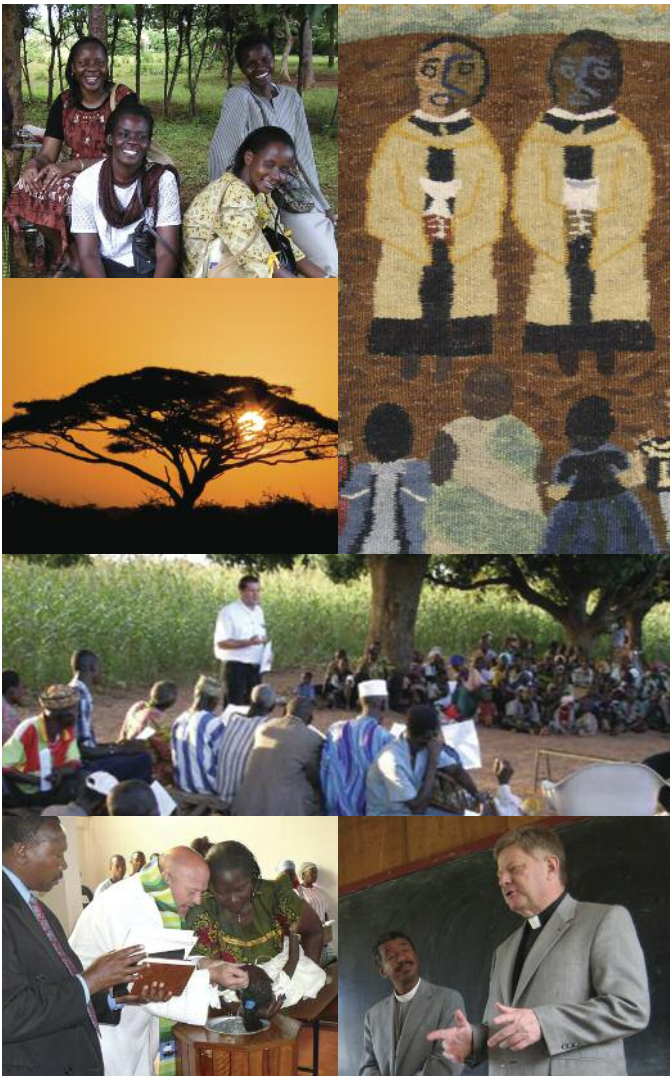
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Starving for the Gospel

Rev. James May

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By The Reverend Dr. Arthur Just

The Concordia Theological Seminary deaconess program has been privileged to learn and receive mercy from the deaconesses in the ELCK. One of their leaders, Lorna Meeker, studied to be a deaconess at our seminary and now serves alongside her husband Dennis at a church in the Kibera slums of Nairobi that suffered much from the post-election violence.

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By The Reverend Prof. Robert Roethemeyer

Dr. Weber wanted this to be an investigative visit. "Come, Robert, and tell me what your eyes see and your mind thinks," he said. During what was the last two weeks of their summer holiday, I did just that. I sought to understand and then to provide options and models and solutions for a wide range of library, technology, accreditation, and utilization of space issues.

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By The Reverend James May

In the capital of an African country, a white person stands out. Very frequently, people come up and say, "My friend, how are you?" The questions nearly always lead to, "Who are you, and why are you here?" I respond, "I am a Lutheran pastor, and I have been sent to teach the Word of God."

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By Adriane Dorr

In a country where poverty and deadly diseases are rampant, "what speaks the loudest to the people of Kenya is love. . . acts of love and mercy speak loudly and clearly," states Meeker. "It becomes an opportunity to proclaim Law and Gospel, to introduce them to Baptism, and confirm them in the gifts of the Eternal Feast of Victory."



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God Is Right There in Our Midst



“Head of Christ,”
oil, by Elimo P. Njau.
Contemporary African Art
from the Harmon Foundation

(In the Field by Adriane Dorr)

His story sounds like an intriguing novel. A good, old-fashioned Iowa boy meets an exotic woman from a foreign country and falls in love. But it gets even better. This story has a Lutheran twist.

In a country where poverty and deadly diseases are rampant, “what speaks the loudest to the people of Kenya is love. . . acts of love and mercy speak loudly and clearly,” states Meeker. “It becomes an opportunity to proclaim Law and Gospel, to introduce them to Baptism, and confirm them in the gifts of the Eternal Feast of Victory.”

The Reverend Dennis Meeker (CTS 2007) arrived in Fort Wayne in 2001, pursuing seminary training. One of his first acquaintances on campus was a pastor from Kisumu, Kenya, who introduced Rev. Meeker to one of his members from back home, Lorna Olack. After completing summer Greek in 2003, Rev. Meeker took a short reprieve from school, packed his bags for Kenya, married Lorna, and brought her back with him to Fort Wayne. She joined the deaconess program, and he continued with his seminary studies. In the spring of 2007, he received a call to Springs of Life Lutheran Church in Kenya.

Now living in Kibera, a slum of roughly one million people just outside Nairobi, the Meekers have settled into a routine. “My day usually starts at 6:00 a.m. with devotions and a study of the week’s Scripture readings,” Rev. Meeker says. “Daily, I go to Kibera at about 9:00 a.m. and tend to any needs that exist. There are always people waiting to visit the pastor.”

But his work and congregation vary a bit from the standard in the United States. “What lies behind all I do in my call is the HIV virus and AIDS. AIDS orphans are everywhere and are cared for by everyone who is still healthy.” Realizing the great need to care for the afflicted, Rev. Meeker has started several meetings a week for people specifically suffering from HIV/AIDS.

In a country where poverty and deadly diseases are rampant, “what speaks the loudest to the people of Kenya is love. . . acts of love and mercy speak loudly and clearly,” states Meeker. “It becomes an opportunity to proclaim Law and Gospel, to introduce them to Baptism, and confirm them in the gifts of the Eternal Feast of Victory.”

But the struggles are numerous. And as if sickness and shortages of food and money were not enough, the presidential elections of December 27, 2007, caused even more turmoil. Tensions rose, and protesting grew. The newly elected president was accused of cheating, and as a result, looting, burning, and rioting began to spread across the country.

Rev. Meeker's church, Springs of Life, quickly came into direct contact with angry protesters. "One of the elders called me," he remembers, "and asked us to make phone calls to get people to the church because a large crowd was gathering on the street by the church. They pleaded with the mob not to burn the church. Sadly, they were overpowered and had to run for safety. Caleb, one of our elders, called and told us that the church was on fire. Lorna and I wept bitterly. 'God, forgive them for they know not what they do,' is all that kept running through my mind. Jesus spoke the truth." But the horror was not yet over. "The gangs destroyed the pastor's house, first looting it and then burning it." The church's medical clinic and school were burned as well.

Church—Kibera is in the body of Christ, which can never be destroyed. God loves Kibera, God loves the world in His Son, and by His grace, we will continue to serve Him in this place. It is," he says humbly, "simply the same theology of the cross that every pastor throughout the world suffers, endures, and takes comfort in."

Despite the risk, Springs of Life is still full on Sunday mornings. Even though they must worship at a charred altar and the children must attend Sunday School in a burned-out building, all is not lost. "The altar of God still brings us mercy and strength in order to march on in our daily vocations to love and bring mercy to the world."

"It is our prayer," he continues, "that we would one day be able to rebuild our church, medical clinic, parsonage, and school. Thousands and thousands of people were loved through the medical clinic . . . Hundreds of children were loved and evangelized in the preschool. These were how we reached and mercifully served the community, which always led people back to the altar of Christ."

There is much that Lutherans in America can do to help the Meekers and their fellow church members in Kenya. First, pray. "We are one in Christ. When you are reclined at the table, we are there with you. When we are reclined at the table, you are with us. I can not put into words just how much we appreciate your prayers and kindness. We continue to ask you to join with us in

prayer that the ELCK and Springs of Life remain faithful to the Word of the Lord and properly administer the Holy Things of Christ. . . . When pastors and parishioners of the LCMS are faithful Lutherans, upholding the confessions in the States, then the body of Christ is strengthened by the peace and mercy that flows from the Scriptures," says Rev. Meeker.

But there is a practical need as well. "The truth is, after faithfulness to God's Word and prayers, we need funds. The U.S. dollar goes a long way in Kenya. We can purchase what we need, but our members earn about one dollar a day. It will be a long—no, a very long—time before we can rebuild. The sooner we can serve the sick, love the orphans, and teach the children, the sooner we have a bridge of love to the people in Kibera."

Kenya is a far cry from the fields of Iowa, and deadly elections are nothing like stable presidential races. But Rev. Dennis Meeker carries on, for "The Lord cares for His people . . . We put everything into the hands of God with confidence and peace. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." 🏠



In the face of fear and danger, the Meekers have remained in Kenya, refusing to leave the people of their church. "The Lord is using the fires of the riots to purify His church. God is right there in our midst, sustaining and forgiving us day by day. We pray for our enemies and those responsible for the damage to our compound, that our Almighty God may call them to be His own," says Rev. Meeker.

And yet, even in the face of such horror, Rev. Meeker has, by God's grace, found it "easy to preach words of comfort and peace. That is His nature. Springs of Life Lutheran

To help the Meekers and Springs of Life Lutheran Church, send gifts to Friends of Mercy, 546 Stoddards Mill Drive, Ballwin, MO 63011 (earmarking your donation "Kenya Work") or go to www.thefriendsofmercy.org and click on Donations.



Photos courtesy of www.TheFriendsOfMercy.org; permission granted.