

CORNERSTONE NEWS

March 2008

Volume 8 Issue 1

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Kampala, UGANDA. Yes, Kampala. We are still here, gaining valuable training in **patience and perseverance** as we wait for clearance of the containers through customs to be completed.

It has been a pretty interesting couple of months in Uganda. Read on for more details on the following pages. Our apologies for the late arrival of this issue of Cornerstone News. We have experienced many difficulties that have delayed this issue for nearly a month. Sorry!

It's a longer than usual newsletter, but we hope you find it informative.

We have changed the format to simplify its production. Unfortunately it is not uncommon to be without electricity for 4 or 5 days at a time in Kampala, so the use of the lap-top to produce Cornerstone News has been hampered on many occasions. That's life!

After a very busy 6 weeks in Australia during January-early February, we arrived back safely in Uganda on 13th February after good flights: Adelaide to Melbourne, Melbourne to Dubai and then on to Entebbe. Thank-you to those who came to Adelaide airport to see us on our way.



Within a few days of our return, the reality of working in an African country hit home. As we reported in the December newsletter, our applications for "Entry Permits" were ready to be lodged with the NGO Board just before we returned to Australia on December 31st 2007.

Our friend Richard (from MAF) informed us upon our return that the applications would not be accepted by the Board until our "2008 Work Plan" and "Budget for 2008" had been endorsed by the Resident District Commissioner (RDC) in Kitgum. The RDC would not sign until the Chairman LCI, LCII, LCIII (local council officials) had endorsed the documents. There would be no other way than to drive up to Kitgum (a 900km round trip) just to get these signatures. Without them, our "Entry Permits" and the application for "Re-registration of Cornerstone Foundation" with the NGO Board would be "dead in the water". So, off we went to Kitgum on 27th February.

Our trip to Kitgum:

It was Bev's first experience since 1998 of travelling on the Kampala-Kitgum road. What a trip it was!

It is quite an experience to leave Kampala at 5.00am in darkness and deal with on-coming trucks so overloaded that their headlights shine right in your face, blinding your eyes to the pedestrians in dark clothing walking on the edge of the road with their backs to you, and with a 3 to 4ft deep open channel waiting to gobble up the vehicle should you veer too far to the left to dodge "special" vehicles that head straight at you with only one of their 2 headlights working. Once daylight arrived the driving became a little easier, with the main task now to somehow dodge as many cavernous pot-holes as possible without hitting any on-coming vehicles who are doing the same thing from the opposite direction. 12 hours at the wheel is quite a challenge! Praise the Lord, we arrived safely at "Far Reaching Ministries" guesthouse in Kitgum, with no major vehicle problems or breakdowns. FRM is an American based NGO working both in Kitgum and in neighboring southern Sudan doing some wonderful children's ministry in IDP camps and isolated communities, as well as among children with disabilities. We really enjoyed our stay at the guest house and got to know Erica (the co-ordinator) very well and several young Sudanese men who help with the children's ministry.

All of the signatures required by the NGO Board were obtained in 4 days!!!! That is some kind of record I'm sure. It was very encouraging to see the enthusiasm shown by all of the officials, who made it quite clear that they are really looking forward to our return and to see the project commence.

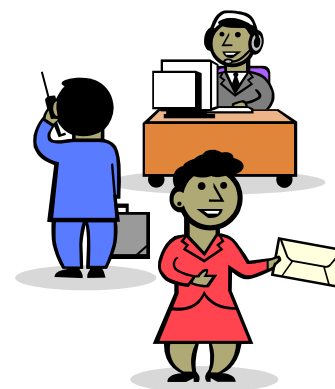
While in Kitgum we met with our South African friends (who drilled the water bore for us last year) and were able to arrange to stay in a small house that they own, when we first return to Kitgum, while we clear the container contents with customs officials. Once cleared we can then use the tools and equipment sent from Australia to erect our “prefabricated room” on our land. How good God is in arranging the fine print eh!!!

We returned to Kampala on 6th March with the signed documents which have now been lodged (together with all of the other documents) at the NGO Board awaiting their decision.

Please pray that our “Entry Permits” and the Re-registration of Cornerstone Foundation will be approved by the NGO Board as soon as possible. Our “Special Passes” run out on 9th May.

Container Clearance:

During our visit to Kitgum we met an official from the Office of the Prime Minister (Dept. for Disaster Preparedness) who suggested we write to the Commissioner (Dept. for Disaster Preparedness) requesting that the taxes and import duties be “waived” since he felt we should not have to pay the estimated 60,000,000 Uganda shillings due to the URA (Uganda Revenue Authority). That’s AU\$40,000!! We were being taxed the same as a businessman importing goods for sale for profit, which he felt was most unfair.



The following account is included in this newsletter to give you, our supporters, some idea of the difficulties faced when working in a developing country such as Uganda.

Greatly encouraged by the information given to us in Kitgum we prepared the necessary paperwork and submitted it to the PM’s office. Unfortunately the Commissioner informed me that our request did not come within his department’s jurisdiction and suggested we write to the Permanent Secretary (PS) for the Ministry of Education and Sports, (MoES) since all of the items in the containers were for educational purposes. Another letter was prepared and lodged with the PS, MoES. “You please check in a few days about the status of the letter.” So I rang and was informed that the PS is “out of the country”. “You ring again next Tuesday.” Next Tuesday came. We rang and heard the familiar recording: “*The number you have called is not available at the moment. Please try again later.*” Ultimately we were informed that the letter was now forwarded to the Acting PS. Another phone call and the letter had been forwarded to the Director for Education and would be acted upon soon. Ultimately, a week later a letter from the Director stated that unfortunately, the MoES did not have the authority to waive the taxes, and suggested that I write to the PS, Ministry of Finance / Secretary to the Treasurer, since he had the authority to waive the taxes and duties. So another set of documents were prepared and lodged with the PS, Ministry of Finance. Another phone call a week later and we were informed that the PS was “out of the country” and the file had been passed on to the “acting PS” for his consideration. After another week the next phone call informed us that the file was now sent to the Department of Taxation within the Ministry of Finance for their assessment.

At the time of writing, the file is still with that department.

After weeks of writing letters, numerous phone calls, waiting in corridors, trying to arrange meetings with officials and generally feeling that we weren’t making much progress at all, along came a most encouraging development. While waiting to see the doctor recently, I met an elderly man from Scotland who had experienced difficulties trying to sell some land in Uganda. He asked for my mobile number and said he would speak to a friend of his who may be able to help us. Subsequently his friend has been most helpful. It’s been a long slow process to finally meet the person who may be able to help us the most with the taxes.

We are about to submit the entire file (several hundred pages) for consideration by one of the highest level officials within the Revenue Ministry. A meeting is being arranged for us to meet the only person who has ultimate authority to waive or reduce the amount of taxes payable to the URA. Please pray that our case will be favourably considered, and that the “taxes and duties” will be waived as a matter of urgency.

Health Issues:

Not long after returning from our trip to Kitgum, Bev fell and twisted her ankle, tearing the tendons very badly, resulting in severe pain and swelling. After a few days it took on colourful purple / grey tones. Crutches were the order of the day. Without them she could not get around at all. A close friend had a similar experience and named her crutches “rod” and “staff”. We decided to give Bev a new name: “tripod”. As if that wasn’t enough, just as she was getting used to this new way of walking, she picked up a “stomach bug” that kept her in the “throne room” for a number of days. Dehydration set in quite quickly and I had to rush her to the hospital on April 11th at 5.00am with constant vomiting and diahorrea. She was admitted and was put on a drip for 5 hours. A course of anti-biotics and some rest, and she recovered well only to find out a few days later that her blood pressure was "through the roof". She went to have a medical check-up to do with her Australian driver's licence, and found out that her blood pressure was at a very high level. The doctor was not happy and has put her on different medication to try and bring the pressure down.



Unfortunately the ulcer that caused me such pain and discomfort last year has returned with vengeance. Recently prescribed medication has brought some relief, but the pain comes and goes. I trust that it will subside soon, to avoid another possible endoscopy!!

Please pray for our health concerns, especially when we travel to Kitgum, where good food is another matter.

Cornerstone Website:

What a joy it is to let all of you know that the CFA web-site is soon to go “on-line”. Bev and I have had the privilege of viewing and exploring the web-site, just to check that the content was ok. When we opened up the home page we were so thrilled with what our dear friend Elisa Davies (from Sydney) has been able to achieve.

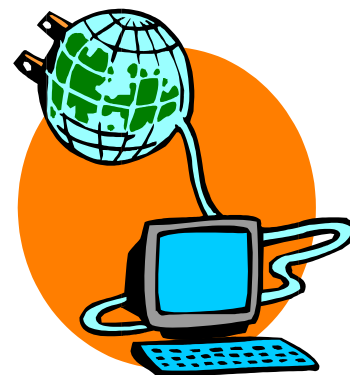
Thank-you Elisa and your friends Annabel and Leo who helped with the logo, the headers and all of the technical back-up needed to create the web-site.

We are so thankful for people with such wonderful talents who are prepared to use their skills to bring the situation in Kitgum into people’s homes throughout the world.

Thank-you, on behalf of Cornerstone Foundation and the young people of Kitgum.

Readers, please check out the web-site in a few weeks time at:

www.cornerstonefoundation.org.au



You will find heaps of interesting information about Uganda and be more fully informed about the ministry of Cornerstone Foundation in Kitgum. Please encourage your friends to visit the site!!

Uganda Update: LRA Peace Talks

Joseph Kony (leader of the LRA) failed to attend the signing of final peace deal documents.

He was due to sign the first of two documents recently to finalize the "Peace Process" and bring an end to the turmoil across northern Uganda. 200 dignitaries and Govt. officials were invited to witness this historic event (all flown in by helicopters). Kony didn't show up. He stayed in his hide-out in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Surprise, surprise!! He had a bad bout of diahorrea!

At the same time as the final stages of the "Peace Process" were being played out, 255 more children and adults were abducted by LRA rebels from DRC and from Southern Sudan!! I believe he has no intention of ending the war. It seems that he has used the last 2 years to re-group, re-arm and is now preparing to return to open hostilities once more, abducting children from northern Uganda and southern Sudan, just as in the past. Should this happen, it would have a very serious impact on our plans as well.

Joseph Kony is a very dangerous man, illustrated well by a gun-battle and internal revolt that occurred at his camp in the DRC recently, resulting in the death of his deputy commander Okot Odhiambo. Newspaper reports here have also stated that Kony had his ex-commander's eight wives killed as well.

Kony has been indicted by the ICC (International Criminal Court) in the Hague for crimes against humanity with an international warrant for his arrest.

In a recent article the "Monitor" newspaper stated that "*Kony remains ready to sign, but wants guarantees of his safety and financial security first*" and "*Even if Kony does sign a peace agreement, the LRA will not disarm until the ICC indictments are scrapped*".

No one here really knows what he will do next. Roadside ambushes etc. may well start up again at any time, with many innocent people being killed.

Please keep us in your prayers, especially as we travel up to Kitgum in the near future.

Postal Address in Kitgum:

Last year we requested that mail not be sent to our post box in Kitgum, since a number of parcels had "gone missing". During our recent visit to Kitgum we spoke with postal staff and the person who had been using our post box for free over the last 12 months (in our absence), no longer has the key. We have been given the only key to Box 134, so we were assured that there should be no further problems.

We trust that mail will now get through to us.

If you would like to send us a parcel of such items as Nestle "Hazelnut Coffee" sachets, Lipton "Strawberry, Raspberry & Cranberry" infusions, the occasional beef steak pie, pavlova or honey sponge roll, all would be most welcome.

A tub of "Golden North" ice-cream is something we can only dream about!! Seriously, any small items with flavor of some kind would be most welcome.

Our Postal Address is:

Wayne Stevens
PO Box 134
Kitgum
UGANDA
EAST AFRICA



SMS Details:

A number of people have contacted us using SMS messaging on their mobile phone. It is a very cheap and effective way of communicating, since we are able to send an immediate reply to any message for only a few cents. Please be aware that Uganda is 6.5 hours behind South Australia. It is best to phone any time after 3.00pm (Sth Aust. time) If you would like to send an SMS our mobile numbers are:

Wayne: +256 775115026

Bev: +256 773259088



Sending e-mails to us:

Our e-mail address remains as published previously: wbstevenscfa@ozemail.com.au

Please note: when sending e-mail attachments please keep the size of any attachments to a maximum of approx: 120Kb. We only have GPRS internet connection which does not handle large files very well.

Annual General Meeting:

The AGM was held (just before our return to Uganda) on Sunday February 10th at Modbury Church of Christ. Reports from the Management Committee Chairman (Ross Shepherdson), Treasurer (Don McKenzie) and Directors (Wayne & Bev Stevens) were presented. The Auditors Report, Financial Statements and minutes of the 2007 AGM were verified. Joy McKenzie decided not to continue as a member of the Management Committee for a further term and David Bennett was elected onto the committee as a new member of the team. Joy has served faithfully on the committee for 2 years and we thank her for her active involvement in many fundraising events and for her prayer commitment to see young lives in Kitgum changed for the better. Marlene Shepherdson and Denise Turvey joined the committee during the year and their nominations were verified during the meeting. Unfortunately, Marian Inglis had to resign from the team during 2007. She is still actively involved in the distribution of the postal version of Cornerstone News. Thank-you Marian for continuing with this very important role. Please pray for the Management Committee as they carry out many important tasks in Australia to ensure that the ministry in Uganda is able to function well.

Entertainment Books:

As a fund-raising venture for Cornerstone Foundation, Candice Walker is promoting "Entertainment" books containing vouchers for discounted prices at a large number of restaurants, movie theatres, sporting events etc. These books are great value! Vouchers can be presented at a wide range of venues and are valid from March 27th 2008 until June 2009.

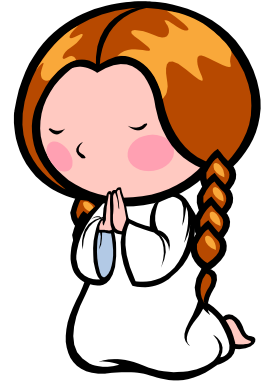
To purchase an "Entertainment" Book please contact Candice: (08) 8371 2001 or at walker12@arcom.com.au

STOP PRESS: "Container Contents able to be Verified in Kitgum":

We have just received approval from the URA that the contents of the containers can be verified by Customs officials on site in Kitgum!!! Praise the Lord! This means that the containers will not be opened by anyone until they are unloaded on CFA land and safely stored on site. What an answer to prayer!! Thank-you Lord!

Prayer Points:

Praise God: For the completion of the CFA web-site
 For our safe return from Australia to Uganda
 For His protection when travelling on the road to and from Kitgum
 For approval by the URA to verify the container contents in Kitgum
 For assistance with documents seeking “waiving” of taxes & duties
 For Mike and Laura’s generosity in providing a “home” for us for the duration of our stay in Kampala (over 5 months)
 For a place to stay once we arrive in Kitgum



Please pray: For improvement in our health
 For favour with Government officials to “waive” all taxes and duties
 For continued financial support for the project in Kitgum
 For the safety of both containers and their contents in transit from Kampala to Kitgum
 For the management committee as they plan fund-raising events and for their new role of providing the vital support we need in Uganda
 For approval of our “Entry Permits” and NGO re-registration to enable long-term residency
 That insurgence by LRA rebels will not rise up again. Pray that any plans by Joseph Kony to plunder northern Uganda, Sudan or the DRC will be squashed.

Thank-you for your on-going prayerful and financial support.

Lubanga Omedi Gum (*God Bless You*)

Wayne and Bev



Donation Reply Slip:

(A receipt and thank-you note will be issued for all donations)

I / We would like to Support the ministry of Cornerstone Foundation (Australia) Inc. in Kitgum

Donate toward Wayne & Bev’s personal support Monthly Quarterly

Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Enclosed is my donation of: \$ _____

Phone: () _____

Method of Payment: Cheque Postal Order

Please post to:

Mr D McKenzie
 Cornerstone Foundation (Australia) Inc.
 PO Box 26
 PINNAROO SA 5304

