

Retired teachers bring hope to impoverished nation

FRONT COVER: Jeannie Reid and husband Rob recently returned from Tanzania, where they spent two years teaching.

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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Women ate only every other day. Kids sniffed glue because it warded-off hunger pangs.

Friday nights were for drinking Pombe. Walking through Tanzanian villages, seeing and hearing about the hungry or intoxicated was commonplace for Jeannie and Rob Reid, who spent two years making small inroads in changing the culture through education.

The Reids, who are both 66 and retired, recently returned from a non-paying mission in Dodoma, Tanzania, where Mr. Reid taught English at the Msalato Theological College and Mrs. Reid taught bookkeeping to secretarial students.

But they taught much more than English and academics.

Part of Mr. Reid's curriculum included malaria prevention, water safety, farming techniques, AIDS education and hygiene, to name a few.

Once word got out they were going on a two-year mission, people started asking them how they could donate to their projects. Fundraising wasn't something they previously thought about.

"We just wanted to go and work. We didn't

want to get involved with finances," Mrs. Reid said.

One-hundred-per-cent of any money received went to pay for Tanzanian projects. The Reids' housing was paid for.

The hard part wasn't raising the money, but deciding which projects to spend it on. To help streamline their choices, the Reids opted to support programs that involved education and that were sustainable.

The money was used to help support the college sports program, pay student fees, housing, medical needs, books, aid a street kids' program as well as village school and bible programs.

However, there are some situations that fell outside the parameters but could not be ignored.

In their travels to the villages, where their students lived, the Reids came across women who only ate every second day. They bought eight kilograms of maize and divided it among the elderly, Mrs. Reid said.

The Reids' first mission was in 2001. They spent two weeks in Honduras, where they dug ditches to run a water pipe from the main road to the church. They also engaged in Christian evangelism through fellowship.

In an effort to teach his students at Ballantrae Public School about character, Mr. Reid, who was a principal at the school, convinced Ballantrae to partner with his church — St. Philips on-the-hill — in a non-religious project in Dodoma in 2006.

A fundraiser gala for the project raised

\$20,000, which enabled missionaries to build a classroom, complete with furniture and books. The money also provided uniforms, which are mandatory in order to attend school, to about 100 children, Mrs. Reid said.

In 2007, Mr. Reid went to Tanzania with other members of their congregation to build churches and homes.

While there, he met central Tanzania's Bishop Mdimi Mhugolo.

A year later, the bishop came to Canada and was able to spend time with Mr. Reid. Among the topics of conversation was missionary work. He extended the Reids an invitation to Tanzania.

They took him up on his offer.

Not all Tanzanian programs were initiated by outsiders.

While Peter Fumbi was a student of Mr. Reid's, he spent his Saturdays working with an organization that sponsored children so they could attend school. When Mr. Fumbi was done there for the day, he worked at the street ministry.

The kids at the ministry were in need of a non-judgmental person to speak with, according to Mr. Reid. They also needed food. To ward off their hunger pangs, many of them sniffed glue.

With the aid of Reids African Mission, Mr. Fumbi was able to feed those street kids every Saturday.

Mr. Fumbi graduated from the theology college and is now a priest in the village of

Chikola.

Mr. Fumbi's long-term goal, according to Mr. Reid, is to buy a tractor so he can cultivate land that would in turn enable him to buy food for the street kids, as well as pay for their education.

Mr. Fumbi is also trying to turn an age-old tradition of Pombe Friday to Sports Friday.

Pombe is local brew made from anything that ferments.

"It's disgusting," Mr. Reid said, noting drinking is a huge problem in the village.

The Reids came home in August and four months later, they are still acclimating themselves to North American living.

"It's like being a new immigrant," Mrs. Reid said.

During the mission, they had no TV and received their news from friends, family and the Internet.

"Basically, we tried to tune out for two years," Mr. Reid said.

When it came to Christmas in Tanzania, the Reids bought a turkey and had a full traditional North American dinner with other ex-pats and locals.

But there was no Santa and "all the glitter of presents", Mr. Reid said.

Christmas in Tanzania is purely a celebration of Christ's birth.

For more information on their mission work, please contact Rob and Jeannie Reid at robjeannie.reid@gmail.com or 905-591-3413.

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