

My Trip to Kenya

Blog of Matushka Marina Holland

Part 01

1/17/19

Last fall, Fr Methodius of Orthodox Africa came to the US to raise awareness of and funds for the orphanage he has established in Kinangop, Kenya. Kinangop is a small, remote village 50 miles northeast of Nairobi. It is 7500 feet above sea level.

Fr Methodius is an Orthodox Christian priest with a wife and three children of his own. He and his wife Evelyn were having breakfast one day at their kitchen table. The table was in front of an open window. They noticed there were three small children, around 4-5 years old, hiding in the bush outside the window. Fr said to his wife, "Let's get up and walk away from the table and see what happens." As soon as they turned their backs the children darted through the window and grabbed up the food remaining on the table. Fr realized they must be orphans – there are many in the area, related to the AIDS epidemic and to civil violence. He ran outside and called to the children, "Come back! You are not in trouble! I'd like to give you more food!" The children returned; Fr and his wife arranged with them that they could come back every day at that time of day and they'd be fed. "We don't have much ourselves, but we will share what we have."

The children returned each day, and gradually their numbers grew. Eventually Fr's parish rented a ramshackle building for the kids to stay in, and hired an unmarried young woman to oversee the care of the kids. In one end of the building are a couple of bookcases and tables with chairs. The other half of the building is empty of furniture. The boys sleep there on mats. The girls are housed with parishioners, so there are no "boy-girl" problems. There are now 180 children, ages 4-16!

Fr M came to America then to raise and money. They have dug a well and are building a school. His goal is to have a school at which these children, and paying children from the cities, will receive a good education, for only with education can these children escape the situation they are in. Well-to-do families eagerly send their children to rural schools, and pay well, so they can learn traditional culture and social values as well as academic subjects. Fr's hope is in this way to help his orphanage become self-supporting, not being reliant on donations from the west.

Fr M stayed with us in our home a couple nights, and spoke with our parishioners. We really loved him! He is a very kind, gentle, soft-spoken man with a quiet fervor. My husband, Fr Seraphim, said how much he'd always wanted to visit Africa, and so perhaps one day he would go to visit Fr M and his orphanage. Oh, how Fr M lit up! "Please come," he begged, "and you, too, Mrs. Holland!" And so we are going! I had assumed I would do something medical, being a nurse, but Fr M begged me instead to do what I could to teach the children how to read English. He said most of them know the alphabet and the sounds the letters make. I had loved teaching my own kids how to read, and volunteering at our son Daniel's school to help kids struggling to read. That experience will surely prove helpful!

Many of my friends and co-workers have heard the story and have been tremendously supportive, both in interest and promises of prayer, and in donations. For now I have only accepted donations of books, especially beginning-reader books, and cash to buy lap boards and other school supplies. A friend

learned that those large shipping containers can be sent for very little on a ship already headed in that direction. And he has such a container! I hope to learn what other things are needed, besides educational materials, and then will post a list of those items and begin accepting them. When the container is full, we will send it!

I will keep a diary of our experiences, and will share them with whoever is interested. Thank you for your interest, prayers and donations.

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