



Good News from a Far Country
Hands Across Nations Newsletter
3/20/2015

What had been a prayer and a dream for over a year, has now become a reality. Lira Main Prison has become the newest location for "Sharing the Love of Christ in Practical Ways" that God has opened. The prison proudly possesses the fastest progressing group of teachers and learners in the Hands Across Nations (HAN) "Learning to Read to Read the Bible" program. The words "Ber Atek", the Lango language equivalent for "Very Good", are heard all through both the men's and women's sections of the prison. Those two words exemplify the encouraging way the teachers are trained, and they in turn train their learners in this adult literacy method. All efforts by the learners are celebrated by the whole class, whether correct or slightly off. Learners are gently led to the correct answers without embarrassment so that each one is willing to take part in the lessons in front of their fellow prisoners.

Peter Pule, HAN lead literacy trainer, congratulates Patrick Ebil, coordinator of the student teachers at the Lira Main Prison, for a job well done during the Teacher Training Workshop there. Ruth, next to Carolyn, ministers to the men and women incarcerated there. 38 received graduation certificates.

In just one week, the 105 male learners completed 7 lessons and 49 female learners, 4 lessons. All students were tested for reading vision and given donated glasses to ensure they could see their primer books. Some of them could not recognize a single letter, and had never held a pencil prior to these classes! Classes began using symbols printed in various directions to train their eyes to look for differences in them. The learners are willing to spend 3 1/2 hours a day, 5 days a week, rapidly learning to read and write. This is a good thing

because the prison population changes daily with some being freed, moved to other prisons and new people arriving. It is a mixed group of believers in Christ, non believers, 2 Muslims who have volunteered to be part of the teaching group and 2 Muslims in the learners group. Each morning, from 9 am to 12:30 pm, 4 groups of 25 to 29 men can be seen in 4 classes, outside in the prison compound. Cheering and clapping for each other and many "Ber Atek's" are all part of the excitement we are seeing in the men taking part. One guard shared that the Learning to Read program has already brought a surprising change in the atmosphere around the prison where so many are now studying rather than playing cards, just sitting around and often fighting. He said, "this has made the job of guarding the men so much better. They are so happy to be learning to read so quickly."

Milla, an elderly woman in the program said she never imagined she would be able to write her name, and now she is writing her name and many other words in just one week. Jane, a guard, has humbly joined the women's class to improve her reading and writing skills.

In the Bible, Matthew 25: 36b, 39-40, Jesus told some righteous people about how they would be eventually judged: part of it was... "I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me". When they asked him "when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" His striking answer was, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these you did for me." How wonderful to know, that all of us, whether in the US, or here in Uganda, who have been a part of donating our effort, money, time and talent to see this become a reality, have actually done it for the Lord himself. He goes on to say that those who feed the hungry, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, and visit the prisoners, will have a good reward. It's worth it to read the whole story: Matthew 25: 31 - 46. We want to say "Ber Atek" to that! Thank you for giving to the Lord!

This prison adventure is undoubtedly a story brought about by a "God" encounter which many of us call a "divine appointment." Keith sat next to a Ugandan man - Jimmy - on the airplane from Amsterdam to Entebbe, Uganda back in December 2014. Keith is quite shy and would rather read a book or watch the monitor showing the progress of the airplane than talk to anyone. The irony is, Keith was the instigator of a conversation with Jimmy. It turned out, he was returning home to see his fiancée, a Lango woman. Her mother, a widow named Ruth, has been visiting and ministering in the Lira Main prison for several years.



Ruth contacted us and introduced us to Maureen Ninsiima, (above), the Officer in Charge of the prison. Maureen is a dedicated Christian leader who truly cares about those in her care - over 600 men and 70 - 80 women. She was approached about the reading program, and because of her trust in Ruth, she gave immediate approval and the vision became a reality.

We've freely provided almost 200 books, writing materials, small notebooks and large HAN made blackboards, with bamboo tripod stands (Keith made) for the teachers and learners. They now number 135 men (shown above) and 66 women. Usually we charge \$.80 per book, a really low cost now that we are printing them ourselves. However, prisoners have no way of earning money. Therefore, if any of you have a heart for this ministry, it would be wonderful to have the financial support for these people and for other prisoners who are sure to become learners. The sweet blessing that comes from taking part in salvaging lives, is beyond description.

We will most likely have to plan for Teacher Training Workshops every 6 months there. Just imagine - as these teachers and learners leave prison and return home, or go to another prison, the reading program can be expanded to their home areas! The learners can become

teachers as well. Primer book #1 contains a teacher's guide and they will know the method well after completing 72 lessons in the 2 primer books.

Stay tuned, God is not done with Hands Across Nations yet. We are continuing to "Share the Love of Christ in Practical Ways".

Keith and Carolyn Jones

We so appreciate your emails letting us know the news from home. Send an email to: Keith at keith.jones@handsacrossnations.com, Carolyn at carolyn.jones@handsacrossnations.com, and Debbie at deborahinlira@gmail.com

Donations can be sent to:

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