

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund

Newsletter

December 2014

Email: info@ugandachildrensfund.org

"The excellence of a gift lies in its appropriateness rather than in its value."

—Charles Dudley Warner



The Perfect Gift

The one who receives the perfect Christmas present is happy. He says of the giver, "She really *knows* me. She knows what I like." The giver knows his interests, his color and size, his style. For our orphaned slum-dwelling children, "being known" is a much simpler, and at the same time, a much deeper concept.

Most of our primary school students have individual sponsors. We try to let each sponsored child know that "Mr. & Mrs. S ___ are donating money for your schooling this year. They care about you and remember you in their prayers." Recently, we told one of our girls about her benefactor—how much this kind lady loved her and that she was praying for her every day. She opened her eyes wide, looked off in the distance, and said with wonder, "She knows me!"

In Uganda, poor children are on the lowest rung of society's ladder. If they happen to be orphans, they are even below that rung. They're often considered an inconvenience by the relatives who are grudgingly caring for them. They're treated collectively, not as individuals, referred to as "those orphans," or "my late brother's kids." If they're in school at all, they're the first sent away for lack of payment and the last to return. Many never return.

From the beginning of this ministry, we've made it a priority to know each child by name, his or her personal history, and home situation. It was important to us, but was it important to them? Recently we've been asking some of our long-time

students this question, "Do you remember the first time we met?" These older teens and young adults all respond in the same way. They break into a big smile and come up with a precise answer. "I was in second grade." "My aunt brought me to your room when you were staying up there." "I saw you outside the church when I was eight years old." Many of our university graduates, expressing their appreciation, said that becoming part of the St. Nicholas family has been the most important thing in their lives. Even better, they want to give back by becoming mentors to the younger "brothers and sisters" who are following them.



Maria, Lilian, Gladys

Tough Love (also a gift)

An unexpected dynamic in our ongoing relationship with these kids is the way that they respond to our discipline. Poor or not, children will misbehave. If they're lazy, careless, or disrespectful at home they get beaten. We have higher aspirations for them. We want them to strive for the good, not seek to avoid punishment. Yes, we sometimes have to call them to account, and the extent of our chastisement is based on their age and how long they've been with us, learning and understanding the values we're trying to teach. Usually, after a feeble attempt at excuse or self-justification, they become almost pleased that someone cares enough to scold them and hold them to a higher standard. We counsel and advise each child, both

personally and academically. They might not always agree with our decisions at the time, but when they're putting on that cap and gown, they're grateful that someone knew them—knew their needs, strengths, and weaknesses—and loved them enough to steer them down the right path.



Joan, Saidat, Edward, Anastasios, Peter, Hadijah

Giving It Forward

Our university and vocational students, together with those who've completed their education, have formed the "St. Nicholas Old Students Association." Among their goals are coaching our high school and older primary students, rewarding top performers, and motivating all to higher levels of success. They're also building a network of capable young adults in a variety of careers that will serve to facilitate employment for both present and future members of the organization.



Mubarak, Becky, Peace, Charles

Celebration

As in previous years, we'll be hosting Christmas parties for our Primary and Secondary students. We'll show movies—fun for the little ones, edifying for the teens. There will be sodas, snacks, and prizes. For sure, each child will go home having received the perfect gift of "being known," and the comfort and joy of being part of a loving family.



Sharon and Aisha

Thank you for your love, prayers, and support throughout the year, and wishing you a joyful and blessed Christmas.

Peter & Sharon

The joy of brightening other lives, bearing others' burdens, easing others' loads, and supplanting empty hearts and lives with generous gifts becomes for us the magic of Christmas."

—W. C. Jones

We welcome your donations.

Checks may be sent to:

St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund

P.O. Box 285

Chardon, OH 44024-0285

Or you can donate online at

www.ugandachildrensfund.org

The St. Nicholas Uganda Children's Fund is a registered non-profit 501(c)(3) organization eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions.