

January 2014

The next major part of our team's three-year practical curriculum, along with a project to translate and record a number of Bible stories, was to do a community development project. Professors from Carlile College came from Nairobi to teach us a seminar on how to devise a sustainable, workable plan for helping the community. We learned the method from start to finish. Then we began trying to implement it.

Five local men and a woman came to give input about what were the needs of the village. Wells, education, a maternity ward at the clinic, a cell phone tower, and lab supplies for the high school were all mentioned. They also mentioned adult literacy, the need for more teachers (especially at the high school level), and the need for a preschool. They mentioned the need for English classes. We continued gathering data. And we all were experimenting with helping our friends and neighbors.

Martha was already teaching a lady to read. Anita had gotten interested when Martha read a story to her in halting Swahili. She helped Martha translate it. Anita ran a small restaurant, had three children, and could not read. So she asked Martha to teach her. Scary and difficult, but so worthwhile if possible...

Meanwhile, Ruth and Esther made friends with a man who was a community leader, shop owner, and soccer team coach. He began helping them translate Bible stories and was interested in what ways education could be strengthened in his village. Several women told Ruth they wanted to learn to read one day when she went to the well for water.

Joseph was teaching three young men to read and speak English. They came regularly to his house and read the parallel New Testament in English and Swahili several times a week.

Deborah had more students than she knew what to do with! She started teaching her little Abigail to read, then a neighbor boy joined them. After that, some more preschool age children came. Next came some students from the elementary school nearby, asking Deborah to teach them some English. This was hilarious because Deborah was too shy to speak English in our group. But she added that English class after her preschool/kindergarten class. Then came two women asking for literacy. So she started their class to run after the other two. All her classes met on the front porch of her house.

Naomi's adventures didn't have to do with literacy. She made friends with the chairlady of her section of the village, the leader of about a dozen women's "savings and loan" groups. These women met once a month and each paid in a certain amount of money to the group's little cash box. Each month the women had the option to take and borrow the whole amount for some big project, like fixing up her house, buying seed to plant a farm, or paying her child's school fees. Then she paid

it back with interest little by little. At the end of several years, the box was opened and the money was distributed among the group.

Our team was especially delighted and amused when our friend and helper, Nathaniel, opened his own after-school English classes. A couple of the team went to observe him as he drilled the children in their phrases and rapped them on their heads with his knuckles when correcting their grammar. He was using the same kind of language exercises to teach English that we had used when asking him to teach us his language!

It seemed more and more that we could contribute something to the community in the way of education, but what about some of the other ideas? Could we do anything more? And if we chose to help the community by helping them in education, what would that look like? None of us were teachers by profession, although we were all teaching informally. A team committee was appointed to sort out and present all the various options. Maybe that way we could get some clarity.

Meanwhile, God was about to surprise us.

Below: Community Development Seminar

