

Buckner, CBF Volunteers Celebrate With Orphans_11005

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Oliva
Ober of
Houston
shares a
smile
with an
orphan
from the
Baptist
Children's
Center in
Nairobi,
Kenya.
(Photos
by Scott
Collins)

Buckner, CBF volunteers celebrate with orphans

By Scott Collins

Buckner News Service

NAIROBI, Kenya—Marlene Grant put her arms around Teresia Ngao and helped the little girl cut out figures of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus.

A smile crossed Teresia's face as each character dropped to the table with the last cut. Grant smiled, too. Together, the Kenyan orphan and the Texas volunteer were telling the Christmas story.

Teresia and 76 other orphans from the Baptist Children's Center in Nairobi were joined by 29 volunteers from across the United States for a “Christmas in Africa” camp sponsored by Buckner Orphan Care International and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

The camp, one of three hosted by Buckner in Kenya in 2004, provided an opportunity for 50 orphans from the children's center and 27 who live in Buckner-sponsored foster homes to interact with the American volunteers. Activities included crafts, recreation and Bible stories.



Volunteer Bob Hefner of Dallas (left) tells the Christmas story during a VBS camp with children from the Baptist Children's Center of Nairobi, Kenya.

The “Christmas in Africa” trip marked the 41st and final international mission excursion sponsored by Buckner in 2004. More than 700

individuals traveled overseas with Buckner during the year. Buckner President Ken Hall and CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal, along with Global Missions Coordinator Barbara Baldridge also participated in the Kenya Christmas trip.

“It's so encouraging to return here and see how God is using Buckner, CBF and our Kenyan partners to make a difference in the lives of these precious boys and girls,” said Hall.

Dickson Masindano, director of Buckner Africa, said the orphans living at the center “really love the time they spend with the volunteers. It means so much to the children to know that people care enough to come from the United States and spend time with them.”

“We have people from all over the United States here, and they are using their talents and serving God and being faithful to what God has called them to do,” said Eraina Larson, international missions coordinator for Buckner. “The children have come alive with this group.

“I can really see a difference with the kids,” she added. “Even though our teams may have different faces each time, it's the same God working through each of us, and that's who the children are building a relationship with.

“Our hope is that God would use the people on the team and that they would be faithful to use whatever talents God has given them and that they would just be faithful and leave the work up to God” Larson said. “Our hope is that the kids would receive one-on-one attention so that there is someone hugging on them and that through that, our volunteers would be the love of God and not just tell the love of God.”



Beth Wilkinson, a volunteer from Norcross, Ga., puts shoes on a child's feet as part of the "Christmas in Africa" mission trip.

Grant, a member of Tallowood Baptist Church in Houston, said her passion to "serve God" motivated her to join the team. "I absolutely love children, and my heart was calling me to go do this."

She said the highlight of working with the orphans is the appreciation they show to the Americans and to each other.

"They are so giving and so appreciative," she said. "They take care of each other and the (Kenyan) workers are so wonderful and loving."

Grant said she returns to Houston with a commitment to pray for the children and to get others involved.

"I'm going to remember their faces, and I'm going to put their names and their pictures on my refrigerator, and I'm also going to get my Sunday school department to pray for the children."

For volunteer Bob Hefner, who has made several international trips with Buckner along with his wife, Laura, returning to the children's home in Nairobi is a confirmation of the work Buckner, CBF and Kenyan Baptists are doing with the children.

“We have fallen desperately in love with these children,” said Hefner, who is a member of Park Cities Baptist Church in Dallas. “They are literally the most important children I have run across. They are bright, and they are hopeful, and they appreciate where they are and are anxious to succeed. They really want to show appreciation for the help they get and to just grow in their faith. They are extraordinary Christians.”

The Hefners believe the most encouraging aspect of their involvement with the Kenyan project is the progress they are seeing in the lives of the children.

“Today, as a consequence of the kind of gentle care they are getting at the home, we are seeing children walk around looking for ways to nurture the other children and to be of service to the others,” Hefner said.



CBF Coordinator Daniel Vestal participates in a song with the orphan children.

Hefner believes children in Africa “not just deserve our help, but they are exactly the 'least of these.' They are the most perfect example of what I believe Christ called us to do when he talks about helping children and helping the least of these. Some of these kids were found naked at age 3 and 4 and 5, wandering garbage dumps. It's impossible to describe.”

Hefner believes it is important to provide for the material needs of the children by “investing our funds in them, we can help them enormously.” But, he added, it is just as important to “be their servants—clean up after them, hold their hand and dry their tears, give them encouragement and talk to them about their futures. No child in this ministry will be stopped in terms of education because of lack of resources. Every child who comes through this institution will be given the opportunity to go as far as his intellect and his energy and his interests will take him.

“Being a part of that and being able for a few days just to be a servant to one that you owe nothing to is just what God called us to do, and I get a rich blessing out of it.”

Lynn and Sharon Robinson, members of First Baptist Church in Winnsboro, made the Christmas trip along with four other members of their church. They said the love of the orphan children was a “blessing” for them.

“They've got a lot of love,” Mrs. Robinson said. “They are amazing. They really love Jesus. They know the Lord, and they are a blessing to work with. We just wanted to give them something, and what they've done is give us more.”

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