

Dispatches: Sent to live at New Life Home

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Linda and Ken Hall at the New Life Home for babies in Nairobi. (Photos by Ken Camp)

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Thursday, Feb. 22, Nairobi, New Life Home

When I heard we were going to visit a home for HIV/AIDS orphans, I expected to see a hospice. But children in the New Life Home are not sent there to die; they are sent there to live.

Clive and Mary Beckenham opened the New Life Home in Nairobi in 1994. The Kenyan government registered the home to provide care for orphaned and abandoned children—particularly children with HIV/AIDS. Since then, the ministry has expanded to include homes in five other locations.



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Susan Bush from First Baptist Church of Athens at the New Life Home.

The facility is not a Buckner-sponsored ministry, but Buckner has a close working relationship with the home, which is affiliated with Barnabas Ministries. Some children who aged out of the New Life Home have gone on to live at the Baptist Children's Center, and Buckner has provided some financial support to New Life.

When we arrived at the site, we were struck by the contrast to the slums we saw yesterday. As we entered the sparkling-clean, state-of-the-art facility, we looked at before-and-after photos of children who entered the home. One particularly striking pair of photos showed an emaciated, listless-looking child who entered the facility and the same child—bright-eyed and well-fed—two weeks later.

Not all children who enter the home survive. In some cases, the AIDS virus is too far advanced. But when many of the babies are taken off infected mother's milk and given proper medical treatment, they not only survive but thrive.

In a play area for creepers and crawlers, we found nine babies receiving hugs, kisses and plenty of attention from a half-dozen workers. Before we could enter the room, we all were required to wash our hands.



Jay Abernathy, pastor of First Baptist Church in Palestine, and Tim Watson, pastor of First Baptist Church in Longview, play with Eunice, a child who lives at the New Life Home in Nairobi. New Life provides a home for abandoned and orphaned babies—many who have HIV/AIDS. Buckner wants to start a similar home for babies in Ethiopia.

After seeing that area, a worker showed us the isolation nursery. New arrivals go first to intensive care and then to the isolation nursery. Babies who contract communicable diseases also are kept in the isolation area so other children —particularly babies and toddlers with compromised immune systems—are not put in danger.

We saw women rinsing diapers, loading them into washing machines and then hanging them out on a 64-foot clothesline to dry. We met a group of student volunteers from a Pentecostal college in Norway who were on a mission in Kenya. And we experienced the joy of cradling, hugging and

playing with the children.

The New Life Home is inspirational—literally. It offers a model that can be modified and made culturally appropriate in other settings in Africa. Ken Hall explained that Buckner wants to build a home for abandoned babies—some HIV-positive—in Ethiopia, where we will fly later this evening.

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