



Empowering children with training and resources so they'll never need charity again!

Hello ZOE Partners!

Our Hope Companion travelers have returned from Rwanda! Because there is so much to report, this newsletter will be more than two pages. More information about ZOE Rwanda will be included in future editions.

Three of the team members have made statements about what impressed them most about their trip.

Joel Strickland:

“What most impressed me about our visit to Rwanda this past week was just how effective the ZOE program seems to be. By visiting groups ranging from those who were two weeks into the program to those who were about to graduate after three years, we were able to see the transition from broken kids with little sense of self-worth (those just entering the program) to those who now had a sense of purpose and hope (those with a year in the program) to kids who had demonstrated they were on the move (the 2nd year participants) all the way to those who had thriving businesses and were helping those within their family and in their community at large (those about to graduate from the program).

It is striking to see the metamorphosis from children who cannot look you in the eye as they describe their situation into young adults who now look you straight in the eye as they tell you what they have accomplished and what they now plan to do.

It still seems almost impossible that this can be accomplished within a budget of only \$300 per child, but I saw it happening. Such empowerment is a marvelous phenomenon to witness.”

Andrea Carter:

“It was a great honor and privilege to represent St. Luke's and to meet and speak directly to the individual orphans on your behalf. I want to thank everyone for your words of encouragement, prayers, and support for our Hope Companion team and more importantly for the orphans of Rwanda.

I fell in love with the Rwandan countryside and its culture, my fellow travelers, the ZOE staff, and especially the ZOE kids. I am so grateful for this opportunity, and I highly recommend it to each of you!

The most powerful and humbling moments for me were when I encountered individual ZOE children who looked me in the eye, reached out to shake my hand and said, 'God bless you. I will pray for you.' In those moments, I could sense the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit guiding this mutual exchange with BOTH of us being the hands and feet of Jesus.”



Ann Eppinger:

“While this is my third ZOE Rwanda trip, I am always amazed what God has to reveal to me. One of those things on this trip, was a reminder that while food, a home, and health care seem obvious needs that ZOE must address, dignity and self-respect are perhaps equally important in these kids' recovery from extreme poverty to a sustainable life. The ZOE empowerment model allows them to look others in the eye, with pride, causing villagers who previously abused and shunned them, to treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve as children of God.

The transformation of the working groups is remarkable.”

The annual summary provided by ZOE of three of the working groups with whom we partner can be found at this link: [HOPE COMPANION PARTNERSHIPS](#).



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Here is brief report of a working group the team visited:

We were able to check in with the Ubumwe "Unity" working group, which consists of 29 separate households for a total of 80 children (left picture below). Unity was funded by the Crump family in January 2016.

We are happy to report that these teens, one year into the three-year empowerment program, are able to put food on their tables (generally two meals a day) and pay uniform and school fees to get their younger siblings back in school. This is a dramatic improvement from last year's visit when we encountered hunger, homelessness, disease and abuse. The children have a long way to go, but they eagerly greeted us, and looked us right in the eye, unlike last year.

Two examples of Ubumwe's successes are Claudine and Samuel. Claudine (center picture, gray t-shirt) has a thriving basket-making business. She buys raw materials for \$1,000 Rwandan dollars (\$1 American = \$800 Rwandan), which sells for \$4,000 Rwandan. In a week, she is able to produce 4 baskets. At the market, she also sells tomatoes, eggplant, and bananas. She has been able to purchase pigs and rabbits to raise for profits. Samuel (right picture) is successfully breeding and trading chickens and growing food to sell. His fruitful business provides enough money for him to rent a piece of land where he can hire others to farm for him while he raises his chickens. So, Samuel is already a boss! He is also sharing his blessings in an endeavor to help others step out of poverty by paying school fees for 2 children from the village, who are not in the ZOE program, so they can attend school. The generosity of ZOE kids is amazing!

Ubumwe, "Unity," Abanyamurava, "Brave" and Tuzamurance "Lift One Another" are the first three ZOE working groups with whom St. Luke's UMC has partnered with funds coming from groups, as well as individuals and families making donations last Advent season. When funds are provided for 3 working groups at once, ZOE creates new groups in the same area and calls it a "neighborhood." These three groups, Unity, Brave, and Lift One Another are a neighborhood. So just like East Winter Garden, St. Luke's UMC is trying to help transform a whole village in Rwanda. Because we become partners, Circles leaders and ZOE participants are lifting themselves out of poverty!

The teens of this neighborhood have elected a leader of the three groups and the president spoke to us. As he ended his welcome speech, he shared a memorable Rwandan phrase: "God may live somewhere else, but he always sleeps in Rwanda." We certainly did see God at work here!



(members of Unity)



(Claudine and her basket display)



(Samuel addressing the group)



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Prayer Points

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| Week 1 | Orphaned and vulnerable children yet to be placed into a working group |
| Week 2 | The Unity working group |
| Week 3 | Claudine and her basket making business |
| Week 4 | Samuel and his chicken breeding business |

If you'd like more information about ZOE, go to www.zoehelps.org.