



program

DNDi presents certificates to Lea Toto staff who participated in their research

December, 2018

Dear Friends of Nyumbani,

Greetings to each one at this time of preparing to celebrate at Christmas Christ become incarnate in our world.

During this period, we celebrate Christmas with our children/adolescents in Lea Toto - the one annual treat for them. I so love spending time with them, always an opportunity to see how well they are growing up, and rejoicing that they can participate in fun activities like swings, merry-go-rounds, swimming, have a special lunch, followed by the cutting of a Christmas cake.



**Sr. Mary with Lea Toto Children cutting the Christmas cake swimming**



**The children enjoying water games and**

Our children who sat the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education have now got their results and are eagerly waiting to find out where they will be placed for secondary school, especially our 8 in Nyumbani Home. Lea Toto are rejoicing with Leila achieving 416 marks out of 500, the very first in our programs to achieve over 400 marks. The Lea Toto results in general were very satisfying. Lea Toto Dagoretti recognised this by awarding their top student at the Christmas Party. Hotcourses Primary School, Nyumbani Village are delighted with improved results all round, and the students are currently being guided whether to choose to join Lawson High School or COGRI Vocational Training Centre. Our students who completed their Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education will receive their results before Christmas.



Special of course at this time was our celebration on 20th November of the 12th anniversary of Fr. Angelo D'Agostino's leaving us. It was an opportunity this 27th year of the founding to rejoice in the gift of his vision and mission. His charism and extraordinary commitment are especially being realized through over two-thirds of our children being in adolescence and growing up healthily and happily, with numbers of young people from Nyumbani Home, Lea Toto and Nyumbani Village reintegrating into the wider community increasing by the year.

Other significant events recently included our young adolescents having the opportunity to undergo the Christian Rite of Initiation. Nyumbani Home and Lea Toto joined others at a residential facility and Nyumbani Village had their own program. On 10th December, Nyumbani Village hosted Family Day, family members braving torrential rain to come for the event and take home their family member. We are rejoicing that, at last, the Village is having rain and our 7 water pans are now almost full. A very important event - the successful completion of DNDi (Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative) research on the LPR/r pellet, took place on 13th November, starting with lunch followed by presentations of their achievements by the three parties who took part in the research: Kenyatta National Hospital, Gertrude's Children Hospital and Lea Toto. All were presented with a certificate, and thanked by the Director, Dr. Monique Wasunna. Participating in a clinical research was a tremendous ongoing educational opportunity for our Lea Toto staff.



**Fr. D'Ag Memorial Mass**

We have had two graduation ceremonies in Nyumbani Home these last weeks with 7 young adults graduating on 24th November and 8 on 16th December. It is always a moment of mixed feelings. We rejoice that these young people, some of whom have been with us for over 20 years, have now the potential to become self-reliant, but a sense of loss is also present. We assure them, however, that Nyumbani will always be home for them, and alumni gatherings each year keep them in touch, as well as their personal visits. It gave us great joy that one of the graduates had been awarded, 'Best overall student' when she graduated from College. She has set the standard high for her followers in Nyumbani Home.

A PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) meeting on 27th and 28th November took me back to Washington DC, during which I was requested to make a presentation: 'Opening Doors to Bright Futures', a recognition of our process for transition from our programs.. This meeting invited and developed a strategy for stronger collaboration between PEPFAR and Faith-Based Organizations in the needed endeavor to reach underserved HIV populations which includes children. On 29th November, a small group was invited to the White House for a World AIDS Day event during which Vice- President Pence announced to our great joy that the PEPFAR Agreement would be extended for another 5 years. Towards the end of his speech, he narrated the story of one of our Lea Toto graduates, Mercy Millicent, who had earlier written a letter of gratitude detailing: 'I am who I am because of Lea Toto and PEPFAR'. After that he recognized my presence and expressed great appreciation of COGRI. Link to White House event: <http://bit.ly/2KlvCY5>



**Sr. Mary recognised by USA Vice- President Mike Pence**

I then left for Rome where I participated in another "High Level Dialogue to Assess Progress on and Intensify Commitment to Scaling Up Diagnosis and Treatment of Pediatric HIV" held on 6th and 7th December at the Vatican. This was again an excellent meeting during which a way forward both for diagnosis and access to pediatric anti-retroviral medication was developed, with the collaboration of regulators and pharmaceutical companies. Now, we here in COGRI have to develop further strategies to find all the children in our areas of service, initiate them on ART and ensure that their viral load is suppressed in the UNAIDS spirit of 90-90-90. A unique award was made, during the Lea Toto Dagoretti Christmas Party, to 12 adolescents who had recently achieved an undetectable viral load in the spirit of Undetectable = Untransmittable which is the goal for all our children. Both in Washington DC and Rome, I was happy to meet up with some of our International Board Members.

Following Family Day in both Nyumbani Home and Village the majority of our children/adolescents are now enjoying time with their families. We try to ensure that those remaining with us experience special care. Nyumbani Home children are enjoying a holiday program interspersed with special parties both in Nyumbani and outside. Prime Bank for the third time organized a special day of fun activities and their staff served us a sumptuous lunch with cake cutting and donation of gifts. Nyumbani Village children are enjoying a variety of sport events and visits from local groups. A special event was the presentation by the Rotary



District 9212 Governor, Jeffery Bamford and members of Rotary Club of Karen of donations of food from the Rotary Club Of North Cotswolds, England and a donation of mosquito nets from The Inner Wheel Club of Grantham, UK Rotary District 7, through their leader Pam Metcalf to the Rotaract Club of Nyumbani Village.

But what will remain forever in the memories of 25 children from Nyumbani Home, 18 from Lea Toto and 2 from Nyumbani Village will be their being invited to a day long Christmas Party in State House on 15th December, hosted by President Uhuru Kenyatta and First Lady Margaret Kenyatta. Mum Terry, CA Joseph Ngei and myself escorted the group. From the start, our children/adolescents mingled delightedly and happily with the others, 3,500 5-17 year olds in total, enjoying fun activities, music and dancing led by a gifted DJ, followed by a sumptuous lunch. Their Excellencies Uhuru and Margaret Kenyatta joined the party in the afternoon, enjoyed entertainment from children's groups and President Uhuru gave his Christmas message, afterwards inviting his guests to view the President's and other official cars. One of our young Nyumbani Home children told me that he actually sat in the President's car! Later, His Excellency cut the massive Christmas Cake, the children were invited to an evening meal as well as to enjoy cake and ice cream. Magnificent fireworks followed, and the party ended with each receiving a personal gift suited to their age. You should have seen the delight and smiles as each opened their gift. What a marvellous experience this event was for these 3,500 children!



*COGRI Board Members at the Annual Board Dinner*



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*President Uhuru Kenyatta speaking to his guests*

*Waiting for the cutting of the Christmas Cake*

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In conclusion, I wish each one God's special blessing on you and family as we celebrate Christmas Christ born into our world and may 2019 be a year of fulfillment for each one graced with peace, joy, and love.

Sent by mary@nyumbani.org in collaboration with

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