

Faith Walk

Inspiration For Your Journey

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Lift It Up In Prayer

Acoustic Grace

Two women from Eau Claire learn 'It Can Be Done' on mission trip to African village

By The Rev. Sandra McKinney

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead

Our group arrived in Africa amidst wind and dust and a night sky heavy with a million stars, all bearing silent witness to life come and gone and come again. Here, the ground and the air and its people reflect our common origins, rooted in ancient times. The many faces of Uru's children are curious, smiling, laughing, welcoming and singing."

These words — taken from the itcanbedoneafrica.org blog written by Barbara Joye — describe my first trip to Africa, a trip where I planned to work.

Through this work, called mission, I hoped to leave this little piece of the world — in Tanzania — a little bit better than we found it, for them, the children.

Many faith communities have mission projects around the world. It is what we call "Jesus' work," although spiritual leaders from all faiths guide us to thinking outside of ourselves, addressing the needs of others, seeking to understand "oneness."

Unity Christ Center in Eau Claire was introduced to this mission back in 2008 with a request to join in prayer. The request came via Joye, the founder and president of It Can Be Done!

This was a natural fit for us, since the Unity movement was founded on prayer back in the late 1800s. The prayers were for guidance and success in finding underground water to supply the mountain village of Uru East with the life-giving resource of potable water.



Contributed photo

The Rev. Sandra McKinney, left, and LeeAnn Richards, second from right, met with others from Wisconsin and Illinois taking part in the January It Can Be Done! mission trip to Tanzania on the African continent on a stop in Amsterdam.

Within the first week our prayers saw fruit. Knowing Eau Claire in French means "clear water," I did not question it when our prayers expanded beyond holding this community in our thoughts and hearts to actually traveling there.

The awe-inspiring Mt. Kilimanjaro colors all of life, tempering Africa's heat and still offering glacial melt for water. It is this water that now runs deep, deep underground that has been tapped successfully by ICBD for the Grandmother Well at Kimocholo.

During our travel there, we were able to celebrate the first water from this well as we toasted and drank with the many villagers, all blessing and giving thanks to God and for everyone's fruitful efforts here and in America, for water and for friendship.

This being my first trip to the African nation, I brought many memories home with me:

■ Breathtaking views from Uru's hillsides, overlooking fields of maze, small homes

and huts and the Moshi town far, far below.

■ Red clay roads full of rocks, holes and trenches, all obstacles to movement.

These very small roads are shared by autos, scooters, bicycles, cows, goats and people — each entity believing they have ownership.

■ The people — from a baby girl being baptized on Sunday morning (again that water connection) to a 104-year-old elder still living in her small mountain home.

It is the connection to the people that makes this kind of travel so life transforming.

With the success of finding, drilling and storing water, the women and children no longer need to seek out their daily water supply. Freeing up that time and effort has allowed them to form the Acorn Women's Cooperative Initiative.

They spend several days a week together creating textile, jewelry and craft items, and with ICBD's help, they are moving toward fair trade product status. All the monies

raised currently are going back into their project toward that goal.

I heard many times "this trip will change your life." And it has. It has touched something in me that I am still exploring within my soul.

In the city of Moshi at the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro, I was overcome with the visuals of extremes between the two distinct classes — those who have plenty and the masses who have little to nothing.

Those living on the mountain in the village of Uru East — the people the ICBD project have been working with — are included in the latter. However, they do have a gift that all of us seek. They have joy, they have peace, they have a very strong belief in education, they have faith, and they have a happiness that just tumbles out of them.

They have shelter and plenty of fresh, organic food they have grown themselves, but most important, they have love

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During a recent mission trip to Africa, the Rev. Sandra McKinney of Unity Christ Center in Eau Claire helped residents of the village of Uru learn how to use new sewing machines brought from America.

Contributed photo

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for family and community. They call everyone their brother and sister.

Words that touched me came from our English-speaking (with a Swahili accent) host: "We have been waiting on our tiptoes for your arrival."

Wherever we went, we were never allowed to carry anything. And in helping the weakness in the white woman's legs in walking up a mountain path, another would always take my hand and sing me up the hill. It worked.

Being with the people of the village of Uru, sitting with them packed shoulder to shoulder in their wooden pews at Mass, dancing and singing together, sharing a meal in their homes around their simple homemade tables, visiting their classrooms filled with bright-eyed children of all ages who rise and curtsy a greeting, and yes, even riding on the very narrow, rut-filled red, dirt roads creates a change deep within to know the meaning of oneness and to know what is ours to do.

If You Go

To hear and learn more about the Rev. Sandra McKinney's and LeeAnn Richards' trip to Africa and *It Can Be Done!*, attend the following presentations:

■ 6:30 to 8 p.m. Friday, April 13, Unity Christ Center, 1808 Folsom St.

■ 6:30 to 8 p.m. Friday, April 20, Hope United Methodist Church, 2233 Golf Road.

Refreshments will be served and an offering taken for ICBD. The organization's ongoing work involves a second well and reservoir. Acorn Women's Cooperative Initiative products also will be available for sale.

This project was started with an idea, an idea that took root in the minds of a very small group of people. It validates Margaret Meads' words.

Social justice or mission is the work of the world, whether in Eau Claire or halfway around the world in Tanzania. Some of the money raised come from those willing to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro, raising funds through their sponsors.

LeeAnn Richards was one of those climbers, successfully reaching the hard-fought summit. Fundraising for ICBD

has now contributed more than \$40,000 to this project since its beginnings. The work and need continues.

Portions of this article were taken from the *It Can Be Done Africa* blog written by President Barbara Joye and the Rev. Sandra McKinney with input from LeeAnn Richards, ICBD Vice President Chris Moses and Angela Dampier.

About the author

The Rev. Sandra McKinney is pastor at Unity Christ Center in Eau Claire.



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