

South Sudan/Uganda update
October 3, 2011

From Clint Schwartz, reporting on the final day of ministry in South Sudan---

Well, what can I say about today other than it was an incredible day in South Sudan. I always look forward to the last day ... but at the same time knowing that it will break my heart. The day started with an early breakfast and by 8am we had already exchanged \$900 into Sudanese Pounds and left for the market to finalize our shopping. Steve, Marc and I went with Anthony and a driver first to a pharmacy where we dropped Marc off to purchase \$100 worth of drugs for the children of New Generation Dreamland. Steve & I then proceeded to a goat market to purchase the biggest goat that they had. This goat was for a huge feast that we were putting on for the children of the Dreamland later that night. It was interesting to put "Billy" in the back of the truck and then also ride with him as we drove around town shopping for more things. We then stopped and bought a lot of tomatoes, onions and garlic as spices along with 15Kg of "cow meat" at the open air market. We also purchased 240 eggs for the children to have for breakfast the next day as that is a huge delicacy here in South Sudan! We went to a hardware store and purchased some orange and white paint to finish up the lettering on the dormitory and then quickly ran back to pick up Marc so we could go back to the base camp. Steve and I had a meeting scheduled at 10am just down the road from the base camp with James Kepo, the president of the board of the Christian based micro-finance company CAF ECC that is in Arua, Uganda, so we had to hurry. We made it back in time and then the rest of the team loaded up the truck and traveled to the Dreamland to finish up the art and photography projects. The ladies didn't ride in the back of the truck with "Billy the goat", not sure why? :)

Steve and I had a great meeting with James talking about what it would take to start a micro-finance company based in Yei, South Sudan. James is a wonderfully educated Christian man who is the principal of a local teacher's college. What we have read about, and what Steve saw firsthand in Arua, is that the best way to lift people out of poverty is to help them find jobs. Micro-finance companies are a way to give small loans in order to help people start their own businesses. We left the discussion about an hour later planning to continue talking through email over the months to come.

We then went back to the market to finish up the shopping---what an adventure that can be! We bought 25 chairs for pastor Stanley's church, they had to turn people away on Sunday because they ran out of chairs. We also bought enough fabric for the girls to each have a brand new dresses. We purchased 6 cases of pop to go with the feast that evening and then we began the task of searching for "netball rings". You see, the girls were EXTREMELY jealous when I arrived with soccer uniforms and shoes the other day and they didn't get anything for their own "sports team". They came up to me almost immediately to explain that they had a team, it was a netball team. I didn't quite understand what that meant and eventually thought that they meant volleyball. They told me that they needed "netball rings", which I thought was the rings that you stretched the volleyball net across. Boy, was I wrong. "Netball" is really more like basketball, but they don't dribble. What they wanted were 2 basketball hoops on poles so they could play their game! I eventually caught on, but as you can probably imagine, you can't just go down to the local Walmart and purchase a couple of basketball hoops. We went to two welders shops and found a good respectable one who promised he could make

these out of metal parts if we took him to the metal shop to purchase it. I said it had to be done today as I couldn't personally handle all of the angry looks I was getting from the girls at the Dreamland. He promised it would be done today, and we sent him on his way with another worker to start the project. Steve and I headed out to the Dreamland to deliver our goods and catch up with the rest of the team, we also brought Ester (our cook) along so that she could deliver lunch and start preparing dinner. You see, in South Sudan, preparing dinner isn't done with a microwave or purchased in a drive thru; it takes several long hours of hard work over an open fire to do it correctly. Ester has been doing that for us all week and our food has been wonderful, she is a huge blessing!

When we arrived, we found the team just enjoying their time with the children as they had finally finished their art and photography projects. They even had the opportunity to watch "Billy the goat" being prepared for dinner, it was quite a site and I'm sure most of those pictures won't make it into the report. But, the fun part of the day was about to begin! We ate lunch and did some video spots with Pastor Stanley for Art for the Heart of Africa before we handed out brand new suites to all of the boys. I would have rather bought them all shorts and t-shirts, but the Sudanese culture has the children dressing up for special events and church and none of them had anything good to wear. This is just a small step to help them to feel better about themselves, and they were very happy as they walked to their dormitory with their new suites.

4pm came quickly as that was the time scheduled for the soccer match between the New Generation Dreamland boys in their new soccer gear with an outside team. The outside team was a bunch of older high school and young adult boys from the church who looked quite a bit taller and bigger than the younger Dreamland team. I was a little worried that the first match would be a lopsided loss and even began to pray for the team! They marched out onto the field in a ceremonial manner, both teams lined up single file on center field. Then one of the boys stepped forward and they led the crowd and teams with the new South Sudan national anthem. The words are pretty special, so I've included them below:

Oh God!
We praise and glorify you
For your grace on South Sudan
Land of great abundance
Uphold us united in peace and harmony
Oh motherland!
We rise raising flag with the guiding star
And sing songs of freedom with joy
For justice, liberty and prosperity
Shall forevermore reign
Oh great patriots!
Let us stand up in silence and respect
Saluting our martyrs whose blood
Cemented our national foundation
We vow to protect our nation
Oh God, bless South Sudan!

Sound familiar? It's a little like our own National Anthem! After the song, the game began. It was a fast-paced, high energy game with the visiting team consistently pushing the smaller Dreamland team around because of the size difference. There was a lot of cheering from the sidelines as we all wanted the Dreamland team to win. At halftime, the game was scoreless even though there were several shots on goal from the visiting team. Then, early in the 2nd half there was a corner kick by the dreamland team and a headshot bounced it in for their first goal! We all jumped and shouted and the children on the sidelines even did cartwheels to celebrate. All you could see were these big toothy grins from the team as they jogged back towards their side of the field in jubilant celebration. It couldn't get any better than this. They held on to win 1-0. The boys were so proud of themselves, and it was so fun to give them all high-fives to congratulate them on the win.

At this point, the truck pulled up and all you could hear were the squeals of girls as they discovered that the "netball hoops" were being delivered. They were jumping up and down and so excited to see their dream realized. I went over and inspected the all metal basketball hoops and was very impressed with the quality of workmanship by the welder. And, they were even painted! I guess some things in Africa can move faster than what it would take in America! We set them aside so that they could be installed in the ground the next day. It was great to no longer be receiving the "dirty looks" from the girls, they all gave me knowing grins when our eyes would meet the rest of the night.

The children had planned to put a program together for us, so we headed into the main cafeteria and sat down with much anticipation. They went on in a very organized manner with quite an agenda of speeches of thanks, songs and dances, riddles (we didn't quite get them, but it was fun) and prayer. It was all so wonderful! In one of the speeches of thanks, Clement, one of the oldest boys, ended his speech by saying "do not forget us". It brought tears to my eyes. And then the entire group of children began to pray for our team by stretching out their hands and praying for protection and blessing. This made me cry even more.

After the program, it was time for our feast, but first we handed out 100 Bethel bags (donated by Bethel College) that had toys donated by the middle school students of The Vineyard Church. They were all so happy to receive these gifts, but I think they were just as happy to dive into their feast! They had rice, goat, beef, rolls piled high on their plates with cans of pop to drink! Their faces were so happy! We all had the same, but ours was specially prepared to American standards by Ester so that we wouldn't get sick. It was soooo good!

After dinner, we turned on the generator and started watching Veggie Tales on a 19" tv. Can you imagine 100+ children all watching the same 19" tv at the same time? Somehow it worked and they all had a fun time as we began passing out glow sticks and suckers. The kids loved having the team here with them, but it was soon time to say good-bye. The older girls who had made quite a connection with our ladies began to cry as they understood that we wouldn't be coming back the next day. It was sad, but good at the same time as I knew that our team had been able to show them love in a genuine way. We said our good-bye's as it began to rain. The girls jumped into the cab of the truck as us guys jumped into the back of the truck and we drove away watching the little hands waving and hearing the cries of "bye" from a chorus of little mouths. This scene a few years ago always made me cry, but now that I

have been here a few times and know that our church is committed to helping these children, I know it's not good-bye for me, but it's "see you next year". We drove home with the pounding rain hitting our faces and the memories of these very special children tucked safely in our hearts. I will miss them...

Tomorrow we head to the airport at 8am to fly to Entebbe for a day of shopping and a few hours of showers, then back to the airport for our marathon trip back to the good ole' USA. Thank-you so much for your prayers and your gifts, they have been a huge blessing to the people here and I am privileged to serve God by representing The Vineyard Church in South Sudan.

Thank you,
Clint Schwartz