

Conway Report April 2018

Hello everyone!

I remember seeing a plaque in the office of one of my university professors, which read, "If you want something to last for a season, plant flowers. If you want something to last a lifetime, plant a tree. If you want something to last an eternity, plant a church".

As we have been learning more and more about disciple making, we have been challenged to plant a church on the streets among street youth where they live. We have been praying about it for some time. One of our first action steps was to speak to the street youth about this and find out if they were favorable for having a church on the street or not. They loved the idea. Street youth do not feel welcome in traditional churches. People look down on them, shy away from them and gossip about them. One of many hurtful things people do is call street children 'chogora', which means scavenger. Hearing themselves referred to as 'chogora' makes street youth feel ashamed, embarrassed, hurt, and sad.

At first we thought of starting the 'church under the bridge' but then we considered the numerous distractions at that location. These distractions include being located near a huge bus stop with many people boarding and disembarking from buses, gang members who live in the area who are quite violent towards street kids, and close proximity of a police station with police officers who are not very sympathetic towards street youth.

The 'church on the street' is quite unique. The church meets in the afternoon because street youth are busy in the mornings trying to earn a few coins/pocket money. They look for 'scrap' items such as metal, glass, plastic, and paper. Street kids do odd jobs for people or businesses like carrying heavy luggage or sweeping or cleaning market areas. The service on the streets is shorter than most worship services due to the short attention span of street youth. Sleeping on the street does not allow one to get a good nights rest so they are tired and fight sleep during the day. A good nights sleep on the street does not come easily, due to the constant threat of harassment and at times rape. There is fear of arrest by the police and of violence from drug gangs. Because many street youth are illiterate, the Bible stories are told and then a 'skit' is acted out with some of the kids being asked to reenact the story. The 'church on the street' has been meeting now for a little over a month. The attendance ranges from 15 to 22. This is the rainy season in Kenya and the rains have been very heavy so meeting outside on the street can prove to be challenging, however, no meetings have had to be cancelled at this point. We ask for your prayers for this young church.

The 'Sheng' language is used among street youth. It is the language that is derived from English, Swahili, and some local Kenyan languages. Below, are some examples of Sheng:

White person = mlami, derived from the Swahili word 'lami' which means road surface.
Because the white people brought the pavement or road surface, they are called
'mlami'

Eye glasses = goggles

Cap = label, label refers to the stitching or emblems on most caps.

Man = Charlie

woman = dame

leader=master

Sheng vocabulary is always changing because the street youth do not want adults or those in authority (like the police) to understand what they are talking about.

Fortunately, I have friends on the street who keep me up to date on the current changes or new words in this fascinating language.

(See Larry's Facebook page for a short clip about the street church.)

Until next time,

The Conways



