

Dreaming with Our Hearts Open

The retirement benefit the UM pastors received after thirty or more years of ministry was two corrugated, aluminum panels. The modest but welcome retirement payout would become the roofs for the recipients' homes.

In almost every way possible, it's a long way from North America to Africa. The 20-hour flight can be grueling. We perceive the countries of Africa as far-away lands. And North America is a distant and unfamiliar place if you are African. See your own home place through the eyes of a UM clergy visitor from Africa: "My hosts were gracious and took me on a drive. I was fascinated as they casually pointed out the elementary school, the sewage treatment plant, the fire station, and the retail shops. I thought, wouldn't it be a blessing if our villages had clean water? What a joy it would be for our children to attend school." Our African brother knew he was a long, long way from home.

Can we bring the aspirations and joys, insights and pain, experience and challenges of Africa's people closer? How can we close the dividing gaps of culture, history, colonialism, language, and lifestyles in ways that give authentic witness to our connection as God's people, and for hundreds of thousands in Africa, our connection as United Methodists? How will we embrace the blessing that is Africa?

I was thinking how difficult it is when my local paper arrived with a story about Ellie Ambrose. At 10 years old, she was deeply touched by the stories of a missionary visiting her church. "I started to dream," she says. "I wanted to help."

Not satisfied with sharing her allowance and birthday money, she envisioned a 5K run fund-raiser. "Ellie's Run for Africa" now has over a thousand people registered. Funds contributed will support AIDS patients and build a school.

It's a long way from here to there, especially if we close our eyes and hearts and shut down our imaginations. The headline in the paper was "A Child Shows the Way." Who will follow Ellie? This edition of *CR* seeks to help us find inspiration and encouragement to follow her lead.

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