



SUITCASES for AFRICA

News Letter

Fall 2019



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This newsletter edition is dedicated to the Importance of Water Projects in SFA's Mission. We have a treat for you with a guest writer this month. Gerald Vanderweyden shares his experience of a six month bike tour from Cairo –Capetown and his insights on water and the lack thereof in Africa. Plus....Two more life- saving water projects are getting under way this Fall and we are launching a special Christmas Shoe Campaign to end the suffering of jiggers.

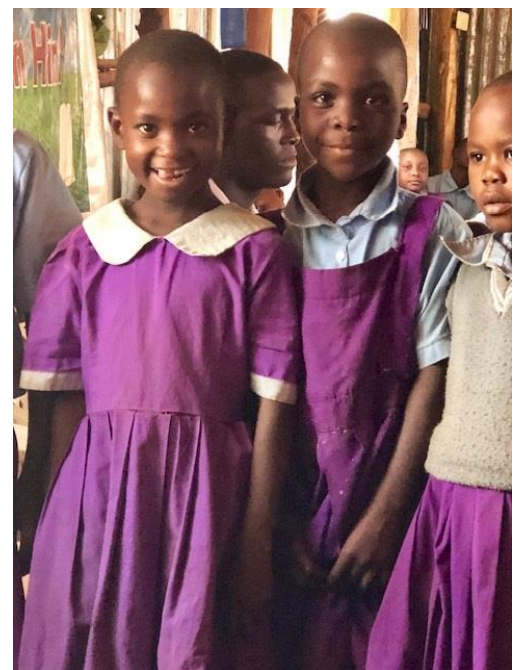


Kicker Junior Academy Water Collection System

During the annual visit to the Kenyan projects last February, Wendy and Michele were able to visit a community in Muthao which is struggling due to extreme poverty. With income generally less than \$4.00 per day per family and little work available it is virtually impossible for them to manage an education for their children. As parents search for work the children remain at home unattended. There are also many orphans with no support at all. This ensures that the cycle of poverty continues for the children. The church has set up a small fledgling school named Kicker Junior Academy in Kakamega County. This is an Early Childhood Development facility which currently has ninety students enrolled. They also take in forgotten orphans which are otherwise stigmatized, ignored and left to live in social isolation. Our team visited the

ECD learning center. They were very impressed with the little school. There is great need and much to be done there over time. **Bringing clean, accessible water to communities is one of our founding principles.** We decided to go forward with a project to install a water collection system for them. We will fund the erecting of a large overhead steel tower. The piping and a submerged pump will facilitate water collection. Wendy & Michele are very pleased that they will be on hand in February for the official opening.

Be sure to check out our next Newsletter for a report and photos of this water great project.



SFA is Launching a 2019 Christmas Shoe Campaign



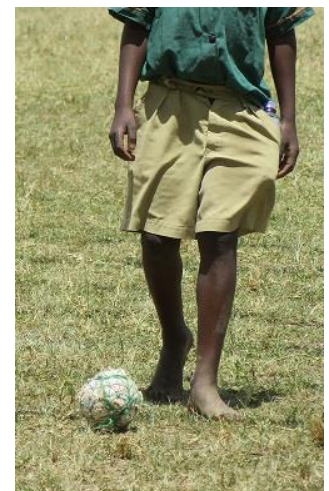
In Canada we often express joy at the thought of going barefoot in the summer at the beach or on the grassy summer lawns. Not so in Kenya. We have seen firsthand the tragic results of going barefoot where jigger fleas are endemic resulting in the pain and suffering of a jigger infection. Millions of Kenyans are suffering from this debilitating condition. It renders whole villages incapable of living a normal life. Situations occur where the people cannot work or go to school due to the pain that often makes walking impossible.



WHAT IS "JIGGERS"?

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP PREVENTION IN VULNERABLE CHILDREN?

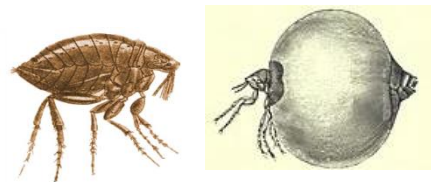
WE HAVE A PLAN..... Learn more on the following page.



What is Jiggers?

“Jiggers” is a condition caused by the Jigger flea

(*Tunga penetrans*). The jigger flea causes widespread health problems in Africa and suffering for millions of Kenyans. The Jigger flea is a tiny parasitic sand flea that thrives in poor living conditions. It lives in the sandy soil. The female burrows deep into the skin, most often into the feet, usually between the toes and around the nails. Here it feeds on blood and swells with eggs, causing a pea-sized lesion and severe burning pain. The lesions make walking very painful. Untreated, Jiggers can lead to deformed limbs, secondary infections (such as tetanus), gangrene and even death. Learn more from the link below.



VIDEO LINK

<https://www.dw.com/en/battling-jiggers-in-kenya/av-48147867>

A simple pair of shoes can help to prevent infestation or re-infestation after treatment for the parasite at a jigger clinic. We plan to partner with Martin Achero who has established ‘Volunteer Jigger Africa’ to help address the problem of lack of shoes for these vulnerable children. He was a volunteer intern with UN Habitat in 2012 and what he witnessed moved him to assist communities with this problem. We would like to buy shoes for as many

children as possible to end their suffering.



300 children have been identified in these nearby schools...

1. Mwirembe Primary
2. Emalindi Primary
3. Mushikongolo Primary
4. Emukhunzulu Primary
5. Eshibinga Primary

The majority of children targeted for help are aged 4-13 years old from Nursery Class to Class 3



Maji Ni Uzima! Water is Life!

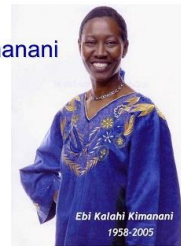


When Suitcases for Africa got our Charitable Status & Charter in 2010 we knew that the provision of clean safe water was going to be one of our main priorities. In 2010 we were four years into our work in rural Kenya and our eyes were already opened to the significant impact that the lack of a clean, safe water source can have on the health, well-being & human dignity of a community.

The *raison d'être* for Suitcases for Africa is to honour the memory of Dr. Ebi Kiminani

who lived on the West Island of Montreal but was born in Western Kenya. Dr. Kiminani was working on the development of a vaccine against malaria when she unknowingly contracted the disease and died shortly after her return from Africa in 2005.

Dr. Ebi Kimanani



Coming from a land such as Canada which has an abundance of clean accessible water we felt that it was imperative that we bring this very basic commodity to as many people as we could. Over the years we have seen firsthand the suffering and illness that contaminated water brings in its wake. There are also the inherent dangers that young girls encounter on their daily quests for water. Water collection is still mainly on the shoulders of young girls - literally. Young girls and women suffer tremendous spinal stress from the constant pressure of carrying 20 pounds or more of water on their heads every day. The girls can also fall prey to animal attacks by crocodiles or whatever other large animals that inhabit the same water source. Due to the fact that the water is often collected in the early morning hours or at dusk these young girls are also targets for assault, rape or abduction.

Suitcases for Africa's catchment area is in Western Kenya where 80% of the population does not have access to clean, safe water. As a result most people face the hazards of consuming, cooking and bathing with highly contaminated water. Diseases such as cholera, amoebic dysentery and life threatening parasites are rampant.

In 2010 we encountered a small community of dedicated parents, grandparents and teachers trying their best to provide care & education for disadvantaged children. Initially we were impressed with how well behaved all the children were until we realized that they were all listless with runny noses, deep chesty coughs and obvious evidence of parasitic infestation. They met each day in a small dung shack and did not have access to water. We immediately made resources available for a well to be installed on the site. You can imagine how thrilled we were to return one year later to meet the same children running around and being naughty – just like average preschoolers.

To date we have installed 14 water projects – either collection systems or hand dug wells. Two more on the way in November.



It is always a great community wide celebration day when our team is on hand for the inauguration of a new well. During our annual trips to Kenya we often get the opportunity to revisit many of these facilities to verify the systems' upkeep and see firsthand the tangible benefit of this basic commodity to the whole community.

Even though over the years we have addressed many, many problems we always come back to the basic need for clean accessible water. This is where we usually begin to assist a community. Illnesses that accompany the lack of clean water sicken individuals to the point that they cannot function well enough to support a healthy life. They cannot farm their land, they cannot hold a job, they cannot educate or feed their children. When a whole community is in a downward spiral it can usually be traced back to the very basic need for clean accessible water.

We can become discouraged now and then when confronted with the massive needs all over the world these days. Then we remind ourselves that the oceans are made up of an undeterminable number of single drops of water and we realize that together we are making a difference - even if it is one drop of water at a time.

Water is Life Maji Ni Uhai

We are excited to feature a special guest writer in this Newsletter edition.

Gerald Vanderweyden & his wife Lenore Lewis undertook an epic bicycle tour from Cairo to Capetown this past winter/spring. The accompanying blog he wrote throughout the trip was insightful, informative and inspiring. We are happy to share with you excerpts from that endeavor as well as their decision to use this trip as a means of giving back to the people of this beautiful continent. Their appeal raised the funds to bring clean water to another community in Kenya. Here is their story, enjoy.....



How Canadians are Helping in their Own Way

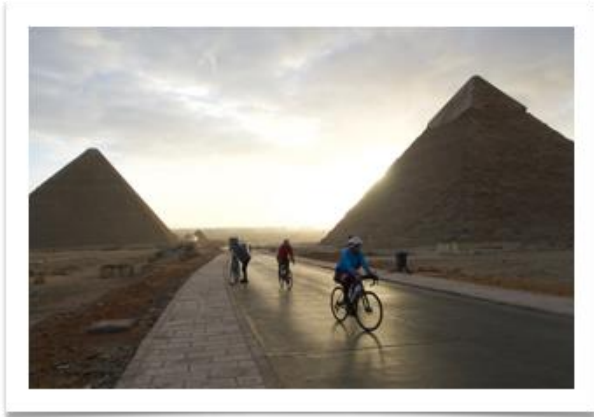
Thanks to you, SFA is making a Difference:
One Child at a Time, One Community at a Time



SFA would not be able to realise the wonderful projects taking place without the help of many Canadians who are finding ways to get involved. We thank them for sharing their ideas and their time and talents in many simple and creative ways. We are proud to introduce some of them to you today on the following pages. THANK YOU!

Cairo to Capetown on Bicycles

This is an account of a trip to Africa that involves bike boxes, not suitcases, but comes around in the end to *Suitcases for Africa*. In it Lenore and Gerry ride their bikes a very long way and are thrilled to be of help in funding a water project in the process. All is explained herein.



The Tour d'Afrique is an 11,220 km, four month long bicycle journey from Cairo to Capetown. The route traverses ten countries, spanning the African continent from top to bottom. It begins at the Great Pyramids of Giza before entering the Eastern Desert, then climbs inland to the ancient temples at Luxor, turns south through the breadbasket of Egypt along the Nile, then the Nubian Desert of the Sudan, over the highlands of Ethiopia, across the equator in Kenya, past Mount

Kilimangero in Tanzania, on to one of Africa's Great Lakes in Malawi, the "Elephant Highway" in Botswana, Victoria Falls in Zambia, along the edges of the Kalahari Desert, and finally past the red sand dunes of Namibia before arriving at the Atlantic and eventually the "Mother City" of Capetown, South Africa.

A spectacular bike ride, an intense social experiment among strangers, and a unique way to behold the continent of Africa are all rolled into one epic adventure. My wife Lenore and I were fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in TDA Global Cycling's marquee event between January and May of this year. During the course of our preparations it occurred to us that our "first world" indulgence might be a chance to help others not quite as lucky as ourselves. Good things happened, but first, a brief look at the Tour.

*

A welcome end to months of planning and logistics came in Cairo where we were joined by a cast of 30 truly international participants, our family for the next 120 days. Our support group consisted of leaders, a medic, bike mechanic, drivers and a chef. All the requirements to ensure the fulfillment of our dream were well taken care of: daily directions and trip information, vehicles to transport gear, a ride in to camp if required, and timely food in outrageous quantities. It was down to us to ride our bikes and make the journey memorable.



Morning departure after a night camping in the desert

And what a journey it was. To begin with, the thing about signing up for a trip that involves cycling the length of Africa, one of the Holy Grails of bicycle touring, is that you have to actually cycle the length of Africa! This entails an average of 130 km on riding days (88 of them, plus 25 rest days). Distance is only one part of the story of any given bike ride, however. Among other challenges were extreme heat in Sudan and week long stretches of dirt and gravel roads in Tanzania and Namibia. Political strife forced us and our bicycles onto buses to avoid Sudan's capital city Khartoum, while tribal rumbling in Ethiopia and northern Kenya also had us detouring on the bus.

More predictable parts of the itinerary involved access to some of Africa's "must see" attractions: the Pyramids, Luxor, Abu Simbal, The Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater, Chobe National Park, The Okovango Delta, Victoria Falls, incredible Sossusvlei Sand Dunes in Namibia and iconic Table Mountain in Capetown. It was a bonus for us to see these sites in passing, but the moments that we will cherish the most came out of the advantage of seeing life and geography unfold in slow motion on our bikes, exposed to the elements, eyes wide open.

The elements, specifically the weather in Sudan's Nubian Desert, presented us with our biggest test of the tour: 145 km in a blast furnace (mid- forties Celsius). Our destination for the night was known as "Dead Camel Camp", the only "bathing" option was an industrial sized wet nap, peeing in the sand

barely left a wet spot, and heat rose from the ground under the tent until well after sundown.

Bleak as all of this sounds, the day was saved by a welcome act of kindness after Lenore began to show signs of heat stroke shortly after lunch. While waiting to be "rescued" by our TDA crew, a 4X4 with 2 official looking types, along with a driver, pulled over to offer assistance. We consulted with them briefly and, trusting our instincts and the recent discovery that the Sudanese are some of the nicest people in Africa, decided that they would give her a ride to camp - a patch in the Sahara marked by the carcass of a dromedary along the blistering highway to Khartoum.

Weather presented less of a challenge in Ethiopia than naughty rock throwing boys and gastrointestinal issues - small prices to pay in this beautiful, conflicted country. Views from the saddle between Gondar and Bahir Dar evoked a painting at every turn. Rolling hills, alternating with cultivated pastures, allowed us periods of exertion followed by the reward of the descent. This has always been our favourite rhythm on a bicycle.

We tempted fate and sampled the unique Ethiopian cuisine and drank coffee from the nation where it was invented, ending up needing antibiotics we are loath to take. On the bikes we battled for openings alongside tuk tuks, donkeys towing carts, cows, chickens and bleating lambs on their way to market, dragged by a single foreleg forcing them to hobble along on the other three. The streets were often thick with the smoke of improperly ventilated home fires fueled by lung crushing charcoal or sun baked cow dung patties. "Where you go?" We were asked a thousand times by curious natives. "Addis", we replied, to be respectful and give them a plausible answer when we were still 8000 km shy of Capetown. Who would believe anyone that said they were going all the way *there*?

Ethiopian villages swarm with humanity and we were scrutinized at lunch stops and camp sites by large gatherings, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. Kids running amuck are part of the frenzy in the towns, but they also materialize in rural settings from the doorways of structures built with eucalyptus walls and corrugated steel roofs. They approached us at speed from fields, barefoot, waving frantically and yelling a rapid fire, high pitched "youyouyouyou" or "money, money, money". We had to pedal hard to leave them behind.

Of course they found us when we did stop for lunch and overnights. This was the section of the tour that gave us pause beforehand - images of onlookers positioned beyond perimeter ropes (flimsy barriers which were always respected), observing outsiders like animals in a zoo. Is it envy that incites them to watch, or is it curiosity that brings them to this peculiar spectacle? *Surely our travelling show would turn heads even back home?* We are still pondering.

A Gallery of onlookers in Ethiopia

We might have been able to get feedback from the Ethiopian galleries had they been able to speak English like many of the people of Malawi. A presumption that linguistically incompatible natives from countries we had already cycled through were content in their relative poverty took some rethinking when Malawians expressed their discontent to us in our own tongue. An idle young man in Karonga lamented that there were no jobs to be had. An elementary school teacher I engaged in conversation as we cycled side by side indicated his bicycle as “proof” of his poverty. An entrepreneurial sort on the beach at Chitimba was hopeful for job creation programs promised by candidates in upcoming elections.



Most disturbing for me, as I stood almost choking while taking photographs, were young women cooking nsima (a thick paste made from ground white maize flour which is a staple of the Malawi diet) over open fires in an unventilated, repurposed classroom at the Liviri School where we were camped for a night.

Cooking nsima in Malawi

Despite these hard luck stories everyone in this poor country seemed to be friendly. The unemployed young man in Karonga considered himself fortunate to have recently married and is looking forward to being blessed with a child. The teacher on a bicycle pointed out that fuel shortages are to blame for the lack of cars and he considers himself fortunate to have work at all.

The hustler on the beach in Chitimba offered to take us fishing and sold us a "Malawi" bracelet which he wove in front of us as he tempted us with teak wood carvings of his own creation. There is a resilience to these people, indeed most Africans we came across. Somehow they find a way to get what they need, and take contentment in the little they have. This must be why Malawi is known as "The Warm Heart of Africa". There are lessons to be learned while cycling across a continent.



The lesson in the barren Didi Kagalu Desert of Northern Kenya is that the members of the local Maasai, Rendille and Samburu tribes are aware that passing bicycle riders will sometimes share their water. We obliged them whenever possible. It is difficult to imagine how these nomads can sustain their herds of goats, camels and cattle when water is so scarce. Families can literally spend all their time and energy sourcing and collecting it.

This means that they never settle in one place, and kids never go to school. The lack of an education assures that the cycle repeats itself. Part of the objective of aid organizations in building a well is that a community can form around it and break that cycle. In the city of Laisamos, a group of women from the Rendille tribe populated our refreshment stop, their heads adorned with spectacular weaves of beads, flowers and coins which they modelled for us. A well in this community has made it possible for them to settle there.

The indispensable role and pursuit of water for human existence and prosperity was apparent in every village and household we cycled by. Large numbers of natives appeared always to be gathered at source points from which the indispensable resource was pumped out of the ground or scooped out of reservoirs into every imaginable container of every size and shape before being carted off by beasts of burden, donkey carts and on the backs and heads of (almost always) women. The time and effort spent in the procurement of water is staggering.



Villagers assemble at wells in Sudan (left) and Malawi (right).

Even our own TDA crew was on a never-ending mission to source water. Shortages gave our participants first hand exposure to rationing. Bathing quickly became a luxury. Over time we became very proficient at washing ourselves with a single bucket of water which locals would sell to us on occasion. A bucket of water is sufficient to bath oneself and wash one or two clothing items! In the extreme, meals did not include water-intensive ingredients such as pasta. Fortunately, the situation never became dire enough to endanger the morning coffee ritual - an act which may have spurred a riot!

As I write this, intending to contrast our western *caffeine* expectations with the realities of sourcing water for the most basic needs in Africa, it dawns on me that we sat in many a roadside coffee and tea "station" in Sudan and Ethiopia. These were tended by women whose livelihood came from creating wonderful aromatic concoctions over charcoal fires with practiced hands. Water is a mainstay of their livelihood. That we were able to share our coffee ritual with natives shows what a great equalizer the availability of drinking water represents. We *all* want a cup of coffee. Surely we all *deserve* a cup of coffee.

*Once upon a time our three daughters were the catalyst in coming to know Darlene Anderson and her wonderful nursery school. Our youngest attended "Miss Darlene's" with the younger of Dr. Ebi Kimanani's sons. We knew Ebi casually as parents of young children do, through the school and children's music lessons at Beaurepaire United Church.

Of course, we were touched by all the good that has come out of the tragedy of her passing.

We have been pleased to make a donation in the name of a family member to Suitcases for Africa for many years now at Christmas, in lieu of a traditional gift. He very generously does the same for us in turn. Soon afterwards an SFA card detailing the particulars is hand delivered to our mailbox. This service no doubt stems from familiarity and the fact that we live close by, but to us the notion that the cost of a postage stamp is taken into consideration means that the larger ticket items are being well managed. The significance of this detail has certainly been amplified after witnessing the excesses of certain charities on our travels.

When it occurred to us that we might be able to champion a cause with our trip blog, it was only natural that we turn to Darlene.

We are pleased that we were able to work together to secure funding for the Shamoni Well and that SFA will bring reliable, safe water to another community.

Thanks to all donors, to SFA for their humanitarian efforts, and to you for reading.

Gerry van der Weyden, with Lenore Lewis



The Shamoni Community Well will soon become a Reality!

SFA would like to thank Gerald & Lenore and all those who donated to this water project. This source of clean reliable water will change the lives and health of so many.

Installation begins in November.

It will be Water Project # 16 for SFA.

Watch for photos and stories of the celebration at the grand opening coming in our next newsletter.



The Annual SFA Plant Sale & Bake Sale 2019



Many thanks once again to our donors and friends who provided wonderful plants, garden items and delicious baking for our annual spring event. It is always a fun day and a chance to catch up with everyone. It is one of our favourite events of the year. It was a great success and we look forward to seeing you all back in the Spring of 2020 at Joe and Edwina's home.



..... **THANK YOU!**



Amanda Pierlet Retires her Knitting Needles



As many of you who follow our newsletters know, Amanda has been knitting little comfort dolls for the children in our projects for many years. Choosing each colour of wool and knitting with love to bring joy to each child. For most children it is the first and only toy they have ever had. We want to thank Amanda, a resident at the Maxwell Residence in Baie D'urfe. At 93 years young Amanda has shown us all that there is no age limit on giving to the those less fortunate. As she reached her goal of 800 dolls sent to Kenya over the years, Amanda has inspired others to take over this labour of love. Daphne will now lead a new group of Maxwell residents in knitting the dolls for SFA. **Thank you Amanda!**



SFA Events Coming Soon!

Fundraising Shopping Night at Soko Thursday, October 24th to benefit Suitcases For Africa



Supporting Orphans & Vulnerable Children
in Kenya through
Education, Nutrition & Healthcare



**Join us at SOKO, located at 319 Lakeshore
in Pointe-Claire Village, Thursday October 24th from 4-7pm**

Many Kenyan handcrafted items brought back from our
last trip will be available for sale -
100% of the profits go directly back to the charity!
Also come meet Fr. Paul here on a visit from Africa!

While there, get a jump on your holiday shopping - 25% of all items
purchased at Soko that evening will be donated to Suitcases For Africa!



Come down, have some fun and know that your purchases
are making a difference! Thanks for caring!

info@suitcasesforafrica.com soko@bellnet.ca 514-697-SOKO (7656)

A MUSICAL EVENING
"SONGS of COMFORT"
to benefit:

Suitcases for Africa
&
Lakeshore Unitarian Universalist Congregation

OCTOBER 25th. 2019
Doors Open at 6:30pm
Show Starts at 7:00pm

Presented by the students of:
Kerry-Anne Kutz

Lakeshore Unitarian Church
5065 Sherbrooke St., Lachine, Quebec

Cost: Suggested minimum donation of \$10.00 at the door
Refreshments & Bake Table following the concert
Information: Kerry-Anne (514) 624-2307 or
Wendy (514) 697-7788



Coming Events continued.....



Come join us at this Holiday Event. SFA will have a table with Kenyan gift ideas, decorations and our Donation Gift cards for sale. Choose a project and make it a gift for someone you love.



Corpus Christi Parish.....Christmas Bake Sale & African Market

To be held in the parish hall after Masses on Sat. Dec 14 & Sun. Dec.15.
(approximate time.... 5:30 pm & 11:00am)

The talented parish bakers will offer their delicious baked goods for you to purchase so you can get a head start on your Christmas supply. Gift ideas, African ornaments, decorations and nativity sets as well as our **Donation Gift Cards** will also be available.

Baking can be dropped off before Mass or you can call to donate baking if you require it to be picked up.

Darlene at 514 457-3786 or Wendy at 514 697-5588

CORE
W O M E N

AND

Beaconsfield
United Church



Present

Annual Craft Fair and more

December 7, 2019 9:30 am - 4 pm

At Beaconsfield
United Church
202 Woodside
For information call:
514-654-2070



Come find special Christmas gifts from local artisans while
supporting good causes



CRAFTS from KENYA brought to us by
Suitcases for Africa



TEA ROOM
BAKED GOODS
WINE RAFFLE

**SUPPORTING HEALTH, CLEAN WATER, EDUCATION, AND
BEACONSFIELD UNITED CHURCH**

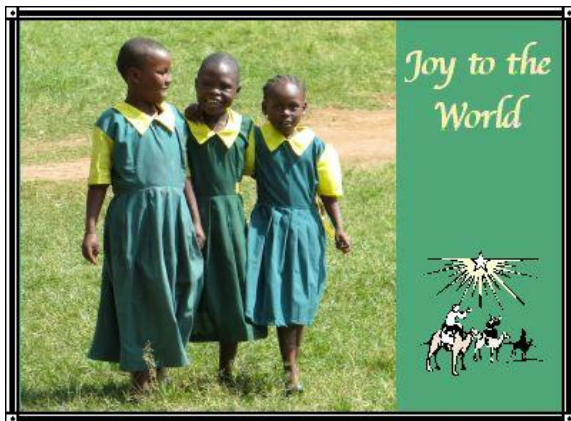
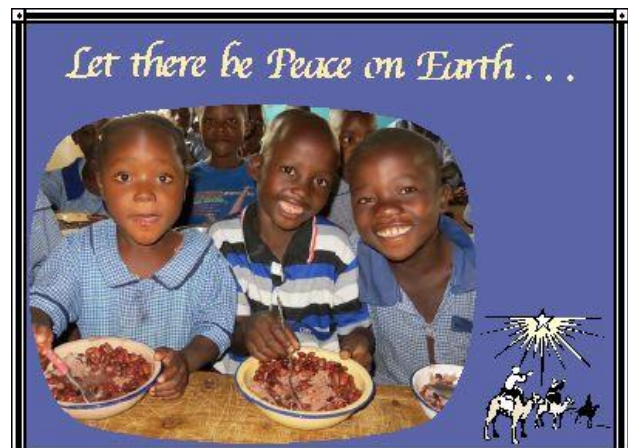
HOW YOU CAN HELP THIS CHRISTMAS

- Join us in raising funds and awareness with your own ideas or events.
- Make a donation to support our projects. A tax receipt will be issued for all donations of \$25.00 or more.
- Purchase our donation cards (see below).

Looking for a Special Gift this Christmas?

We have many Donation Christmas cards to choose from. For each card you can choose an insert describing the project you wish to support. Then give the card as a gift. We have had wonderful feedback from those who receive them. Select a project for clean water, education, bed nets or shoes for a child. See the following page for our 2020 inserts

Cards can be purchased for \$10.00 and up and are great as a gift for a teacher, a business contact, or for friends and family.



To purchase cards call **Wendy** at 514 - 697- 5588 or **Darlene** at 514 - 457- 3786.

Card Inserts for 2020 SFA Projects

Your donation will provide shoes to a child suffering from Jiggers. After treatment, shoes will prevent reinfestation.



Best wishes from
SUITCASES FOR AFRICA
Supporting Orphans & Vulnerable Children through Education, Nutrition & Healthcare

Your donation will
Provide Educational Support
In the form of uniforms, books and school supplies at impoverished Primary Schools.



SUITCASES FOR AFRICA
Supporting Orphans & Vulnerable Children through Education, Nutrition & Healthcare

Your donation will
Provide Children with Clean, Accessible Drinking Water
Waterborne illness kills millions of children each year.



Best Wishes from
SUITCASES FOR AFRICA
Supporting Orphans & Vulnerable Children through Education, Nutrition & Healthcare

Your donation will
Provide Children with Mosquito Nets to Help Prevent Malaria
Malaria kills & disables millions of children each year



SUITCASES FOR AFRICA
Supporting Orphans & Vulnerable Children through Education, Nutrition & Healthcare

Your donation will
Provide Help where most needed for a Vulnerable Kenyan Child.



SUITCASES FOR AFRICA
Supporting Orphans & Vulnerable Children through Education, Nutrition & Healthcare

Thank you for Caring.