



# Aloysius Comes of Age

**“We have to begin our own secondary school.”** Based on disappointments arising from our experience with supporting AIDS affected youth in various high schools, Christian Life Community reached this conclusion on December 13, 2003, to begin a secondary school. and that is how we began January in 2004.

It was a decision based on hope. We had one month to find money, rent rooms for the school, hire the Headmaster, the teachers and select our students. Thanks to the generosity of many, we managed and served 21 Form II (Second-year) and 35 Form I (First-year) in 2004. In 2005 we served a total of 126 students. In 2006 we served 196 students. In 2007 we served 245 students. In 2008 we served 260 students. Currently, we continue serving 265 students: 70 Form One, 70 Form Two, 63 Form Three and 62 Form Four. Beginning in 2011 we plan to begin a three-stream school of 105 students each and to reach the eventual capacity of 420 orphans.

St. Aloysius is dedicated to serving AIDS-affected youth from Kibera slum, who have lost both parents or one parent, with the second infected. Kibera is the largest slum in sub-Saharan Africa with nearly 1 million inhabitants.

St. Aloysius is a Catholic school, which serves bright youngsters of all faith backgrounds, who are at risk, by providing a college preparatory education and support to overcome the deficits of their environment.

Our educational philosophy is based on Ignatian Pedagogy, the educational tradition of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) proven by over 450 years of experience. We strive to help our students:

- 1) Discover the richness and diversity of creation and their place in the world.
- 2) Recognize their potential based in their individual uniqueness
- 3) Realize a personal dream arising from one's relationship to God,

family, society and the world.

4) Become men and women for others, dedicated to bettering the society they live in.

So far three sets of graduates have passed through the school, that is the 2006 class, 2007 class and 2008 class. The 2006 graduates are all in colleges, some are about to finish. For the 2007 class 90% are in college while the rest are awaiting to join. The 2008 class are currently doing the community service which will end in June 2009; then, they will go to colleges, with most beginning this September. The Graduate Program is proving very successful for the community and graduates.



*St. Al's Student in a Clean Up Exercise*

## Letter to St. Al's Benefactors & Friends

Dear Benefactors and Friends,



**Fr. Terry S.J.**

Finally! We signed with our contractors for the permanent buildings for St. Al's on Easter Tuesday, 14 April. So as you receive this newsletter, our

contractors are doing site preparation, and construction begins May 4.

We are happy that the bids are in keeping with our most recent projection of costs so that we are hopeful that we will be able to complete the building project for something in the vicinity of US\$ 2.2 Million (as long as the US Dollar remains strong against the Kenya Shilling). This calculation includes most furnishings. Furthermore, the building period is 48 Weeks; we should be able to take possession by early April, 2010. Thus, we can begin our Second

Term in May, 2010, in the new premises.

It is also wonderful that we will be able to fulfill our hope to celebrate the Grand Opening of the new St. Aloysius Gonzaga Secondary School at our Annual School Feast of St. Aloysius on June 20, 2010. We hope very many of you will join us for this celebration.

Again, in the name of all here at St. Al's, I want go express our profound gratitude for your generosity that has enabled us to reach this point. I single out those who have made gifts specifically for the construction of the school. Of course, the people of the United States have all contributed through their government, which has granted us \$600,000 for the construction.

There is a very positive atmosphere at our School of Hope right now. We feel great joy that we have reached a new level with the graduation of our first large class

last November. The sixty 2008 graduates are now making a contribution to Kibera and beyond through their six months of Community Service. With the guidance of our Staff of the Graduate Program, they are also beginning to focus on choosing their careers and their programs of college studies as a preparation.

Thanks to all our benefactors, who, even in these difficult times of the world financial crisis, continue to sacrifice to contribute to St. Aloysius so that we can continue to provide quality education in forming Men and Women for Others.

Joyfully,

Fr. Terry Charlton, S.J.

## An Island of Hope in a Sea of Hopelessness

By Paul O'Callaghan

Keith Kweyu is counting her blessings. Despite living with her mother and five siblings in a one-room shack in the Kibera slum. She considers herself extremely lucky. A chance conversation overheard through mabati-thin walls, saved her school life.

On that fateful day she heard a neighbour discussing St. Aloysius Gonzaga Secondary School – a Jesuit-sponsored, secondary school in Kibera that first opened its doors for education in 2004.

With a father dead from AIDS and a mother in fragile health, Keith had given up hope of ever attending secondary school. On hearing about the new fee-free school in Kibera she presented herself to Mr. Dionisio Kiambi, the school principal. She hasn't looked back since.

"If not for St Aloysius School I would be working as a day labourer, housecleaning and doing laundry and I would not have this bright future ahead of me. This is why this school is such a blessing from God," she says.

The school is named after a 17<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit saint who put his theological studies on hold to care for plague victims in Rome; a work of mercy that led to his early death. In recognition of his care for sufferers of a dreadful disease, St. Aloysius was declared the patron saint of AIDS victims and their carers.

The brain-child and former school chaplain is Fr. Terry Charlton SJ, a Jesuit from Chicago. Yet, when Fr. Terry first arrived in Nairobi in 1990 after completing a doctorate in Systematic Theology in the US, setting up a school for AIDS orphans was not high on his list of priorities.

He was a professor, a recent appointee to Hekima College, a Jesuit-run theologate charged with sharpening some of the brightest and best minds of the Catholic Church in Africa.

It was while working as chaplain to the Jesuit lay movement, Christian Life Communities (CLC) that Fr. Terry witnessed firsthand the hopeless horror of the AIDS epidemic in the slums of Nairobi.



*Forming Men and Women for others: St. Al's Students in a discussion in a student recollection*

In a decision with an uncanny resemblance to the choice St. Aloysius Gonzaga made 400 years earlier, Fr. Terry requested an academic sabbatical in 2000 to, as he says himself, "put into practice the implications of the kind of theology I'd been trying to teach."

As the AIDS pandemic spiralled, requests for help paying school fees for AIDS orphans mushroomed and when the fees in neighbouring schools quadrupled it was proposed that CLC open their own school in the slum.

Fast-forward to today, and this school of 240 students has ambitious building plans that will see it provide education for 420 pupils by 2012.

As well as providing students with daily breakfast and lunch, the school also seeks to satisfy the students' hunger for learning by assisting with school fees, books and uniforms. But the help doesn't end there as Keith explains, "the teachers at St Al's care for both our quality education and our personal well-being. We are able to talk with our teachers about our problems at home."

These problems are countless.

Without electricity, many can't study after sundown. Even for those lucky enough to have artificial light, study is frequently disrupted by family members who live, eat and sleep in the same room.

Neighbour's domestic rows, loud music and raised voices from the all-too-common private drinking dens don't help either.

When it was discovered that some students were wearing their uniform seven days a week because they had nothing else to wear a special budget was set up to assist in buying clothes.

Yet, despite the myriad of problems; enthusiasm and humour abound. It is remarkable to meet young people who have every reason to be bitter and angry yet instead focus on their plans and hopes for a brighter future.

This message of hope is a recurring theme when you talk with Jill Juma, a biology and chemistry teacher at St. Al's. "I go beyond just being a science teacher. I want to teach life skills and empower young lives with hope," she says.

"Providing a free education is lifting the burden of poverty for families and enlightening their otherwise dark world with hope." This infectious, "Yes, we can", approach has spread to the students.

*"This is the school of hope," ..... "The teachers at St Al's really care for us and they give us hope for a better future."*

"This is the school of hope," enthuses Atieno "Perez" Okoma, a grateful Form IV student. "The teachers at St Al's really care for us and they give us hope for a better future."

Striving for a better future is expressed practically in a unique six-month voluntary community service programme undertaken by Form IV students. Working in schools, health centres, parishes and orphanages the young people paying forward to their own communities what they themselves have received from donors who in all likelihood they never meet.

Herein lies the secret of the school's success. For in forming men and women 'to learn, to love and to serve', the school has strengthened the students' conviction that through their efforts Kenya can be a better place for their children and their children's children after them.

# KIBERA & HIV/AIDS

## KIBERA

Kibera is about 7Kms to the west from the city centre of Nairobi. It is estimated that 800,000 to 1,000,000 people live in Kibera, in an area that is only 550 acres making Kibera the largest and most densely populated informal settlement in all of sub-Saharan Africa.



Kibera

The vast majority of residents here live in abject poverty. While many are unemployed, those that manage to find work generally earn less than US\$ 2 a day selling fruits and vegetables or working as casual unskilled labourers. In the absence of viable opportunities for earning income, theft, prostitution, smuggling and illegal alcohol infect Kibera.

Kibera, like all slums in Nairobi, is severely over-crowded, insecure and unsanitary. On average, 4 to 5 people stay in a room less than 9 feet square. One-room shanties are sandwiched together. The only walkways are narrow dirt paths that frequently sewage flood.

Urban services are virtually non-existent here. The government does not provide social amenities for Kibera residents. Almost 75% of the residents have no access to toilets and are forced to use open areas and 'flying toilets'. Those lucky enough to have access to a pit latrine are forced to share it with fifty to one hundred people per toilet. The lack of sanitation has led to serious environmental and health hazards including a higher incidence of diseases like typhoid, cholera and tuberculosis.

## KIBERA & AIDS

Nearly every family in Kenya has been visited by HIV/AIDS. Since 1984 when the first case was reported, more than 2.5 million Kenyans have died from AIDS with 800 dying from HIV/AIDS complications daily and about 3 million boys and girls left

orphans. Out of a total population of 30 million, about 3 million are HIV/AIDS infected

Aids patients currently occupy half of the total beds capacity in Government hospitals. Due to the overwhelming increase in number, Where HIV infection is on the increase, the related illnesses and opportunistic infections are taking their toll on education: For example, money for schooling is naturally diverted to a parent's ill health. The child may miss classes in order to take care of the sick parents at home. By time children are actually orphaned, they feel uncomfortable going back to school because they are likely to be overage for their class. HIV/AIDS is destroying the school system: first, by taking away the manpower, which is the trained teachers and thus increase in class size, which brings down the quality of education. Secondly, by eating into family budgets, reducing money available for school fees and increasing pressure on children to drop out of school and marry or enter the workforce. Thirdly, by adding the already high number of children who are growing up without the support of their parents, and this surely affects their ability to keep on with schooling. About 12% of school age children are themselves HIV-Positive.

*The child may miss classes in order to take care of the sick parents at home. ....HIV/AIDS is destroying the school system.*

## CHILD HEADED FAMILIES

Kenya is estimated to have over 3 million orphans 15 years of age and below. The ones between 10 and 15 years of age often act as parents for their younger siblings. They have to look for food and every thing else that is needed at home; at the same time, they are expected to go to school and see to it that the younger ones go to school too.

People are busy trying to take care of their own problems and have no time for orphans and suffering people, not even for those who are close relatives. *Some essential cultural values are also at stake. For instance, the spirit "The orphan belongs to the society" is long gone.* The tradition of,

"This is my brother's child, I have to assist" is no longer observed. Homesteads have become graveyards and most neighbourhoods are peopled with the dying. Obviously orphans are seen as a burden to the society. Often they are dumped by the healthy and well to do, to die in isolation. Please note that many of these orphans are HIV positive themselves. Nutrition is their top priority, followed by health, education, housing, clothing respectively.



A child removing dirt from a trench - open sewer, that had been blocked with garbage

## BASIC ASSISTANCE

Often when you visit someone who is AIDS infected, you realize that they have not eaten for days. Yet it is dangerous for an AIDS patient to take medicine on an empty stomach. As a result, the aspect of nutrition is very important. They simply refuse the bitter medicine if not accompanied with something sweeter like potato. Our patients are constantly harassing us for food. We can hardly enjoy our sleep any more because both patients and orphans keep knocking at our doors. Most of these patients live under depressing conditions where there is no piped water; thus have to carry many buckets of water in order to drink, clean their clothes and wash themselves.

Taking care of AIDS people becomes a heavy burden. Over-crowded hospitals want to get rid of the terminal patients as quickly as possible. This is common, especially as their condition worsens. That is why families, ill equipped as they are, have to persevere in taking care of their loved ones during the last stages of their ailment.

CLC

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St. Aloysius Day Festivities, 2008. Mark you calendars to join us on 21 June 2009 and 20 June, 2010.

## What Students Say

By Jim Collins SJ



Keith Kweyu (*pictured*) lives in a one room shanty in Kibera slum with her mother and her 5 other siblings. The youngest are twins only 10 months old. Keith's father died of AIDS when she was 12 years old and her mother's health is fragile. Keith considers herself lucky to be at St Aloysius. "I have been blessed by God to be at this school."

Keith was named after her grandfather, who is of royal lineage. She is proud that her birth name, Shiundu, means "a great leader" in her native Luhya language.

After primary school Keith was devastated to not be able to continue her education. Her family simply could not afford the school fees so Keith joined her mother at work for a year. Until one day, she heard a voice that changed her life.

Keith explains that the walls of the slum shanties are so thin that she "literally overheard a neighbor's conversation through the wall". Her ears perked up when the neighbor mentioned a new "free" secondary school in Kibera. Keith quickly and confidently presented herself to the school principal and explained her situation and

ambitions. "If not for St Aloysius School I would be working day labor, housecleaning and doing laundry and I would not have this bright future ahead of me. This is why this school is such a blessing from God."

Keith hopes to become either "a journalist with CNN or a judge in the High Courts of Kenya." She says that her, "greatest interest is to help others just as I have been helped." She is concerned for the other young girls of Kibera who cannot go to school or who drop out and become pregnant. She is grateful that St Al's also teaches the variety of students "how to live together as a community". She claims that when benefactors help St Al's students they are indirectly "helping all of Kenya because of the benefit this country will receive from the graduates."

**"One day I heard a voice"**

Keith sits in the front of crowded classroom and is curious and confident enough to ask lots of questions. Her bright eyes and ready smile broadcast her interest and alertness. Her favorite subjects are English, Chemistry, History and Kiswahili. Her enthusiasm for school is manifest in her boasting that "most schools don't offer the opportunity to have

Saturday classes like at St Al's." She adds that, "The teachers at St Al's care for both our quality education and our personal well being. We are able to talk with our teachers about our problems at home." Science teacher, Ms Jill Juma says that Keith "is a great public speaker. She's a natural leader. She just has it!"

Keith wakes up at 5 am to study before breakfast. In the evenings she is occupied with cooking and cleaning and caring for her younger siblings. She sometimes goes to the local church to study in the evenings because she cannot study with the little ones around her at their small home. On weekends she joins her mother as a day laborer trying to provide for the seven of them. Unfortunately Keith frequently suffers painful migraine headaches so she struggles to keep focused on her studies.

Keith has this to say about the meaning of the school slogan: To Learn, Love and Serve: "The 'serve' part crowns it all. We learn the tools and skills to be able to love others in order to serve them. To me, it is impossible to serve without love."

To the benefactors she says, "Thank you for finding me and giving me this future. May God continue showering you with His blessings."