

News from Rwamagana Lutheran School in Rwanda – Summer 2012

On Saturday, July 21, we said good-bye to students as they left for their summer holidays – this year, extra long at 6 weeks because of the national census, which uses school teachers as the main census-takers. It was a bit of a thrill for me to see a Coaster busload of our students with bright green T-shirts in the parking lot with students from other schools at the town bus station!

Rwandan education is in the midst of enormous change. In 1991, only 70,000 students were in secondary school, and in 2010, there were close to half a million (not a factor which can be explained by population increase alone). Also in the early 90's, only 34% of secondary students were girls, compared to 50.1% today. And in just the six years that I've been in Rwanda, primary completion has jumped from about 45% to nearly 75%.

Yet a great many challenges remain!

The Rwandan government states that it has “plans to put more emphasis on learning the English language, constructing more class rooms, expanding ICT, ensuring regular school inspections, and increasing the number of better qualified teachers.” Just 25% of secondary teachers are female and the primary teacher-pupil ration is still 1:63. This still means that girls have to be extremely vocal and motivated to withstand the pressures for dropping out before they finish secondary school. This is above and beyond the pressure on many poor children to fetch firewood, water and cultivate for their families to the point where they have no time to complete school work.



One part of our effort to meet that challenge is completion of our **first dormitory**, which will house 30 girls. Having baths and toilets connected to the building where they live is a big step and they will have more privacy than they've had with the temporary classroom space where they've had to paper over the windows. Construction is ongoing during this summer break – as you can see from this early August photo, we now have a roof and doors! Plastering, flooring and tiling will follow. A huge THANK YOU to everyone who

contributed to make it possible!

We had a lot of changes this term. We had a “shout out” of recognition for a 7th-grade boy who came in so shy that he hardly spoke. His classmates clapped for him when we mentioned his increased participation in class and tendency to smile more. Two of the girls who were held back last year are now leading their class, and we see some students who came in with little self-discipline settling down a bit more. We've implemented an Honor Roll for each term and 11 students were on it this second term.

In accordance with **Expeditionary Learning** (read at www.elschools.org!), we also implemented Learning Targets in every class, a new process for both students and teachers which helps everyone to have a clear understanding of academic expectations. In addition, we also had a “mid-year check-in”, where students were asked to assess their own progress and Crew Leaders then met with them one-on-one and discussed that assessment. “They were really honest!” one teacher remarked, and it was the first time many students thought clearly about their own responsibility



to set academic goals.

We had a good **professional development** day in June with our six teachers and four more teachers from Gashora Girls' Academy. We've been emphasizing methods of working in small groups and increasing student participation and methods of assessing students in ways that help them learn rather than just assigning them a score.

More students have become active **volunteers**, with several students (especially Amani and Esther) helping to run the library and others keeping our biogas system in shape. Third-year student Bruno (pictured left) also organized a return trip to the local



hospital, where students visited with patients and donated soap and used clothing and raised money for two needy people to pay for their health cards. In the photo on the right, students posed at the hospital with Dorm Parent Helene Muhongerwa, who accompanied them.

Two of our biggest logistical challenges as we've

grown are **water and electricity**. We now have water catchment tanks that can keep 15,000 liters³, which is a lot of water for 25 but not so much for 45 boarders! Except at the height of the rainy season, we've had to buy outside water, which means paying a young man to haul jerricans on a bicycle 1.5 km. We are considering options for greater storage and we're researching the drilling of a bore hole. Meanwhile, our electricity functions well on sunny days but on cloudy days the power often goes off early in the evening, so we need to get more battery power. The good news is that a wonderful team of visitors from Westminster College and Lutheran High School South in St. Louis, MO, brought us four laptops. Now we need more power to run them regularly and have regular instruction!

Finally, we would like to ask for help in finding **frequent flier miles** with Star Alliance (United, USAir, Ethiopian, ANA, Lufthansa, Singapore, Thai and Air China, among others), or Sky Team (KLM, Air France, Korean, Kenyan Airways, Delta, Alitalia and China Eastern, among others). Thanks to a grant from Expeditionary Learning, two of our teachers will have the opportunity (one in December and one in spring of 2013) to attend training in the USA with other EL teachers. This is a fantastic opportunity which we don't want to miss! Do you or someone you know have miles you'd be willing to donate? Please contact me at robinrutsi@gmail.com.

We recently had a group of **Lutheran visitors** from San Antonio, Texas and Sterling, VA. They came to build, file, hammer, write, cook, organize, clean and carry! Four of our students who are living on campus during the break were also here and we had a great time working and eating together. Later, students Jimmy and Ignace helped the group visit other locations in Kigali. "What caring boys! They treat each other like family!" said one visitor. I thought that was one of the best compliments they could have made. Thank YOU for helping our family grow and look toward the future!

Grace and peace,
Robin Strickler

PS: For those of you who enjoy **Facebook**, we now have a Rwamagana Lutheran School FB page! Click "like" to see more photos of school life there and find frequent updates.