An experience that changed my life

BY CHRISTA SLATER, GIRL’S FAITH ENCOUNTER ’14

In Summer 2014 I visited the Rwamagana Lutheran School with seven other young women from the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA for an life experience called the Girl’s Faith Encounter (GFE). In short, it changed my life. I met so many incredible people committed to social justice and sustainability, and the young women I learned from at RLS took a piece of my heart. The church has always been close to my heart, but during this time I learned about my passion for interaction in the global church.

In Fall 2016 I excitedly began my university education at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. PLU offers me so much every day, including many ways to serve God and neighbor. One of the best ways I got involved this year was through campus ministry. The University Congregation at Pacific Lutheran is a congregation of the ELCA led by students, for students and our community. Current PLU students of all Christian backgrounds take on leadership roles, help to plan and lead worship, and other activities. Each semester, the University Congregation leadership team at PLU picks a different church-based non-profit or charity that the students are passionate about. At our January meeting, we unanimously voted to support RLS with our prayers and offerings during our Spring semester, from February to May.

I hope that you hear and feel the prayers of many young people who are passionate about our global church. I’m so excited to connect the University Congregation with Rwamagana Lutheran School this semester. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a global church, and making connections like these are important because they help us support each other in our mission!

2017 Tuition Increase

In January, we welcomed 141 new students to our 2017 school year. Students now occupy our new boys’ dorm and we plan on completing the second half of the girls’ dorm. We thank God for blessing our students and our school as we enter the second decade of operation.

Princeton in Africa volunteer MK Speth works in the lab with some of our students.

According to our 2017 budget, it now costs $1,835/student and we continue to move in the direction of making our school self-sufficient. Consequently, we have increased tuition, sponsorships, and teachers’ salaries by 17%. This means that a full sponsorship will increase from $120/mo to $140/mo.

NEW OR RENEWAL SPONSORSHIPS:

Full sponsorship: $1,680 year or $140/mo
Half sponsorship: $840 year or $70/mo

We continue to thank all of our sponsors for their continued support.
WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GOOD TEACHER? The longer I study teaching and practice it, the more I realize that part of what makes it so hard to define is that it has so many moving parts. The content of what we teach – our expertise in the field – is just the tip of the iceberg. But getting that content from a teacher to a learner requires a whole raft of additional skills.

We have a wonderful group of teachers and volunteers who are team players, curious learners and people who love students. They are making our school better each year!

Some of the questions we are wrestling with this year include, “How do we involve as many students as possible at any given point in time when we teach?” “How do we help students succeed in math and acquire a math mindset?” “How do we differentiate instruction for children from widely different backgrounds and experiences?”

In many Rwandan classrooms, a single student goes to the board and works a math problem, narrating her process for all the other students. In reality, it means that seven students pay rapt attention and thirty-two others pass notes or look out the window. In a better situation, all students work a problem and then discuss in pairs how they arrived at their answers, or perhaps a teacher gives the answer and asks students to describe the steps in getting there.

Another important question is what we do with wrong answers. Jeannette, our physics and calculus teacher, understood immediately when we talked about wrong answers being a “door to discussion about how the math (or science) works”. In the old model, students simply receive a curt “wrong” and the teacher moves on, but a student who has a correct answer who is engaged with a student who has a wrong answer may think more deeply about the process he used. That is, after all, how real science works, with a tremendous amount of give and take between practitioners.

Meanwhile, our volunteers have put out great efforts as well. MK, from Princeton in Africa, and Kristy, from ELCA’s Young Adults in Global Mission, have worked together to enhance our Crew Curriculum, sustainable energy growth, workable waste and transport management, urban planning and species conservation. Because of that, our school is a working model of sustainable practice.

WATER:
We have 85,000 cubic liters of rainwater roof catchment and all of our toilets use low-water or no-water flush systems.

WASTE:
We use a biogas system which inputs human and cow manure and uses that methane for part of our kitchen cooking fuel. In the dormitory, compost toilets use no water and make the waste safely disposable after 6 months. We are working hard to implement garbage sorting so that a portion of our garbage is recycled; the only such program in our town.

POWER:
Thanks to a generous grant honoring the memory of Professor Kenji Kitao of Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, we are soon to have continues on page 3

WHY ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS AT RLS

The effects of climate change are keenly felt in Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa, where patterns of rainfall and dry season can make a difference between a family eating or going hungry. More than 75% of Rwanda’s population does subsistence farming, and we heard numerous reports this year of families in certain areas going hungry. Add to that Rwanda’s being the most densely populated country in Africa, and even with a big family planning emphasis, it will be challenging for Rwanda to meet the goals it needs to meet in the next ten years.

Our students need to know how to lead their country into new patterns of farming, sustainable energy growth, workable waste and transport management, urban planning and species conservation. Because of that, our school is a working model of sustainable practice.

ROBIN’S LETTER

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Our cow, a gift from Pastor John

nearly 4 Kilowatts of solar power, enabling us to have enough lighting, operate a photocopier, use laptops, run a projector and power our microscopes. Although Rwanda’s electricity grid has vastly improved (quadrupling from 50 MW to 200 MW in 9 years) and is up from 6% of households in 2007 to 22% today, it is also more than double the cost of what average Americans pay for electricity. Solar power will give our students another model of what can be possible in Rwanda’s future development.

CONSTRUCTION:
Cement production is a major contributor to greenhouse gases and most modern floors in Rwanda are made with cement. EarthEnable (www.earthenable.org) is a non-profit in Rwanda helping families to transition from dirt floors (which bring many sanitation and health problems) to a mix of compacted sand and soil with an oil sealant that is hard and sanitary and doesn’t emit greenhouse gases. We were the first large institution to use their services in our new dormitory, and this spring we will be teaching students how the process is done!

EDUCATION:
This year, we implemented our Campus Sustainability 101 project to make sure that all students and teachers know why we have these systems. We hope that if you come to visit us, any student can give you a campus tour! Meanwhile, we are still working to build more and more workshops and eventually a curriculum that focuses heavily on environmental sustainability.

Our Pi Day chain represents the few first hundred digits of pi!

Our rainwater catchment system

improve our environmental education, inventory and organize our equipment in the science lab, help current students and graduates with college plans, and lead girls’ sports. During this Lenten season, Kristy has worked with students to develop a Wednesday evening Lenten service with music from Holden Village’s Lenten Prayer.

We’d also like to thank Erik Skeaff and Heidi Ahrens, who are taking a sabbatical year with their two daughters, ages 7 and 10. Rwanda is their sixth country in 8 months, and they both teach in Colorado. They were generous with their time to volunteer in doing workshops and teacher mentoring, and on their last day, their girls Cora and Ramona also performed a Bollywood dance for the Senior 6 students! How cool is that?

Most importantly, perhaps, is the role that many teachers play as parents away from home. For our students who board, and even for a few who don’t, teachers listen to student problems that are profound and sometimes deeply troubling. We talked recently about how we want to be viewed as a school by the wider public. We agreed that it’s not important to us to be listed in the top five in national exams, but to turn out students who are doing their personal best and who have learned to be good people and confident leaders in the community. To all our teachers and staff who help our students learn, empower and lead, thank you!
Please send us your current e-mail address to help us complete or update our records. We would love to reduce both our paper consumption and our printing and mailing costs by offering an electronic version of the newsletter. If you would like to continue receiving a paper version we are happy to continue to mail. However, if you would prefer to receive our quarterly newsletter by e-mail, indicate that preference. The full version of the newsletter will be sent as an e-mail attachment.

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