

July 2010 Pilgrimage of Service Report

A team of 12 traveled to Angola for three weeks, many for the first time. Half of this year's team live in Chicago, one in DC, one in California and four in Tucson, and half of the team members extended their stay in Africa. . .so there were unique elements to the team dynamics and logistics.

We had a great trip and once again left Angola deeply enriched. The team worked together beautifully and was incredibly flexible, which is critical when traveling to Africa! Cell phones are now everywhere in Angola, but internet access remains severely limited and we had no email communication until back in the States. It is always a challenge to try to share the experience, for words cannot adequately convey our time, nor the powerful impact on our lives. The relationships developed between those on the team and our Angolan friends were rich, highlighting the significance of involvement in other's lives. Andrew's dream of a bridge between those in Angola and those in the US continues to build. No longer distant and impersonal masses, we know people by name and know the places and details of their lives --privileged to call them our friends.

The war ended eight years ago and I am amazed each trip by the numerous and tangible changes--construction and rebuilding in the cities and towns, repair of railroads and bridges, reconstruction of brutal roads, increased traffic with the addition of thousands of motorcycles, cars and trucks, more and more available products and many new stores. Angola is a country of contrasts--ruins and rebuilding, wealth surrounded by hunger, hardship and poverty. Rural areas continue to suffer with lack of infrastructure, few schools and little or no healthcare. There is progress, yet the newest Unicef statistics state that 4 million Angolan children are not in school.

The team visited RISE schools and saw hundreds of beautiful children learning in places where there has never been a school. We were shown sites where schools are desperately needed as children meet under trees. In April we visited one such site, where a school is now under construction as a result of the efforts of students and teachers at six US high schools coming together to make a difference--Glenbrook North, Ironwood Ridge, Maine West, Prosser Career Academy, West Chicago and Wheeling! Over 600 children, now schooling under trees, are excited to soon have classrooms in which to meet, protected from sun, wind and rain!

Life in Angola remains difficult for those with whom we are involved, but that does not color their deep joy, sense of community and desire for partnership. The struggles and challenges, including lack of clean running water and electricity, road blocks and rough roads allow the team to experience daily life as the Angolans do, broaden our perspective to the realities of life for much of the world, and appreciate what we have. We were constantly greeted and welcomed with singing, enthusiasm and delight. Thought provoking reflections began each day. The team did a great job presenting workshops, offering enriching sessions which were gratefully received by nearly 300 participants--teachers and leaders hungry for training and input, in Lobito, Balombo and Chilonda.** Privileged to worship in Balombo, singing and rejoicing, we witnessed giving with joy as lines of children, youth and adults sang and danced their way to the offering buckets giving of what they had. One tiny boy could barely reach to drop in his ear of corn as a gift to God.

Many send their greetings and gratitude to those in the U.S., thankful to you who have partnered to build schools, for your support and encouragement. Given the huge challenges, it is incredible that so much has happened--the schools, the partnerships, the interweaving of our lives. Again and again, people asked that we not forget, that we not grow tired of helping. May we be challenged to spend ourselves.

Lynn Cole