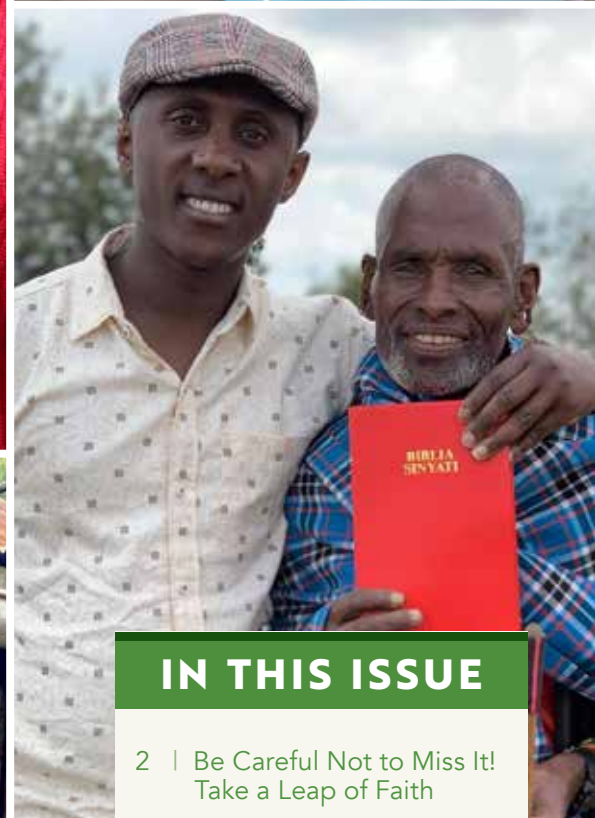




GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

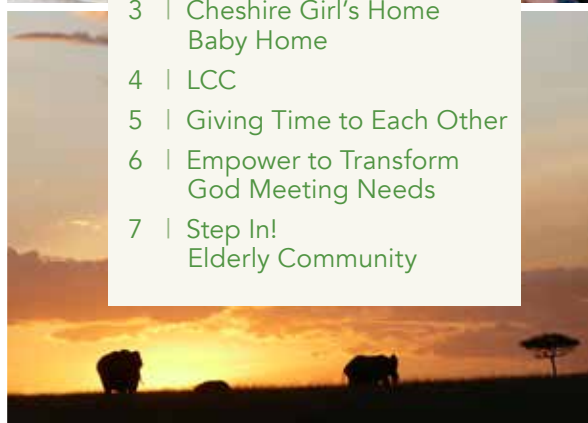
RETHINKING HUMANITARIAN AID



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 | Be Careful Not to Miss It! Take a Leap of Faith
- 3 | Cheshire Girl's Home Baby Home
- 4 | LCC
- 5 | Giving Time to Each Other
- 6 | Empower to Transform God Meeting Needs
- 7 | Step In! Elderly Community

Serving & Learning
from the
 orphaned, widowed, poor & oppressed



BE CAREFUL NOT TO MISS IT!

TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH, GO TO KENYA!

Jesus tells us the Kingdom is here, "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" - not some far away place you arrive when you die. It is present, yet hidden, all around us like the miracle of a small seed growing in the ground into a large mustard tree or the yeast quietly doing its work in the dough! Jesus says to pay attention - don't miss it! After many years of visiting the orphaned, marginalized, sick, and suffering in the villages of Kenya, I have come to know and see that "God is present" among these neglected and disinherited communities.

Jesus seems to be telling his disciples in the last half of Matthew 25, there is a time coming when He would not be with them, yet He says I live with you and among you in the presence of the poor and the outsider. Be friendly with them and you will be friends with God, serve them and you are serving me. If you harass them, shut them out, deny them what they need to sustain their lives, then you deny God. Jesus is teaching us that God is present among us in the poor and suffering; the hungriest, sickest, smelliest, most neglected! How we treat them is how we treat God.

Different from any kingdom we know, Jesus says this Kingdom includes the poor and the hungry; the people on the margins and the bottom rung will be lifted to places of honor. Also, the Kingdom is for the merciful, the peacemakers, and the little children. Seems the people Jesus talked about in Matthew 25 - have a special place in His Kingdom - however, the kingdom knows no geographic boundaries, no single language or culture - no political parties or tribes. The Kingdom advances

not through power and might, but through acts of love and joy and peace, missions of mercy and kindness and humility.

We often visit these villages with extreme poverty, orphans, neglect and hunger, thinking that with our wealth and western ideas we have the answers. I have come to believe we are very much further from the "answer" than the poor and suffering in these villages. Encountering the impoverished and hungry, walking for a while in the world of the marginalized and being with the sick and have-nots of our world is a necessary aspect of our own spiritual journey. Our vision is forever shaped by this encounter - our souls are touched. There is a joy and level of faith in and among these people in all their hardships, that we cannot fathom.

There, in a one room shack with a dirt floor, among a hungry family of five, we experience our moment of hopelessness - a sacred moment, "the absolute now", a sense of the Presence - we realize God is here, and we do not come with the answer. The "Realization" is of profound importance!

The person who is poor outside is an invitation to the person who is poor inside. The suffering person's pain and poverty is visible and extroverted; mine is invisible and interior, yet just as real - and somehow we must deal with this realization! Could this be the yeast in the dough at work? We begin to see the privileged perspective of the impoverished people who see spiritual reality with a clarity of vision we may never achieve! Maybe Jesus was saying that recognizing

Christ in the "least" of our brothers and sisters is for our redemption, our liberation, our healing - not merely to help others.

The Kingdom is at hand - it is God's great community of human compassion where people care about one another - and God's spirit moves freely. Where, through acts of outward kindness, we do not realize that its full intended effect is to change us as much, or more, as it might change them. Then we suddenly realize we have discovered a little corner of the Kingdom of Heaven - this is the great adventure of life!!

Be careful not to miss it!! Come join us on this adventure. - **AL PUCKETT**



"Practice kindness all day to everybody and you will realize you are already in heaven now."

~Jack Kerouac

Take a Leap of Faith, Go to Kenya!

I read somewhere that going to Africa is for your soul. I can understand that now. My soul was filled to the brim on our trip. Now, it misses my Kenyan home. Every day I look back at my pictures, watch the videos, and miss being there. It is strange that a place I had never been before could completely capture my heart.

I didn't really get it before. My mom and aunts have been going on Global Connections trips for many years now. Two of my older children have gone on the trips as well. But I always had someone younger at home to look after, and so I let them go

and would hear about the trips when everyone got home. I thought maybe someday I would go, but I wasn't really sure if I ever would. And then this year, I surprised myself a bit, and said yes.

I am so grateful that I took that leap of faith and decided to go. The trip blessed me and my family in so many ways. I am thankful for all the people who welcomed us with open arms and made us feel right at home. I am thankful for all of the joy, the laughter, the prayers, the songs, and even the tears, that I felt so fully and that touched my heart.

I have a "Karibu" sign now at my front door. It is to remind me to be welcoming to others, as I was welcomed in Limuru. I want to keep that welcome in my heart and to share it with those that I encounter every day. Sometimes I feel myself

slipping back to old habits, old comforts, and not always being the love I wish to be in the world. But I am trying. Even though my heart really wants to be back amidst the big smiles and hugs at LCC and partner families, I am trying to remember to share big smiles and hugs with those I encounter here every day. To love my neighbor close by as much as I love my family far away.

My mom always said she thought of her trips as visiting family across the globe, and I understand that now. To those of you who, like me, have considered a trip, but haven't made the jump to yes, I say go for it. Jump. You have family waiting for you that you haven't met yet.

- **McBourt Thomas**

CHESHIRE GIRL'S HOME + BABY HOME

Having Our Best Days Ever at Cheshire Girl's Home

"I love it! Best day ever!" squealed my new best friend Paula as we danced around in a circle and tried to keep rhythm with the crowd. We were at the Cheshire Home for Girls in Limuru, a special place that houses over 70 girls with physical and mental disabilities, and teaches them important life skills along with technical skills such as beadwork, knitting, cooking, and dressmaking.

Paula was originally from Nairobi, and her specialty was beadwork. She was 17 years old and was very proud of her craft, her home, and her best friend/roommate, Elizabeth. I tried to think of my "best day ever" at 17 years old. Was it the first day of senior year? Getting accepted into my dream school? My first ever boyfriend? Graduating from high school? Had I even thought about what my "best day ever" has been?

It was only two years ago that I was Paula's age, but I don't think I have yet to match the joy and excitement that she and her fellow friends at Cheshire felt the day we had our dance party.

What started off as a well-planned and strategically thought out afternoon of light dancing, snacks, and fingernail painting soon began to be an all afternoon dance party in the field behind the compound. It was full of group dances, a conga line, and lots and lots of giggles at the "mzungus" trying to keep the beat... hey, we were trying! I think that almost everyone broke into a sweat after the hours of dancing, and we all deserved a well-earned popcorn break at the end.

Seeing the girls (and some volunteers) get out of their comfort zones and twirl, jump, and turn, was so much fun, and I think that while they had to teach us a lesson with moves, we might have even given some of them their best day ever.

More than once we were thanked for coming to visit the girls by the Sisters who run the home. They continually reminded us that God is good and will always provide - no matter what. They truly blessed us more than we blessed them.

So, until next year's dance party! Hopefully we will have learned some new moves by then...

Hannah Hoang

Adoptions, fosterings, and reintegrations are happening at the Baby Home.

Thank you to all who have supported and prayed over each one of these precious lives that the Baby Home has had the privilege to watch over until their family and them connect. Please keep this wonderful ministry in your prayers and praise God for these littles finding their homes!



LCC is Love

Love is a loaded word. In fact, it's so loaded that for many, it's not just a word. Love is a sense just like sight, smell, taste, hearing, or touch. When love is present, when love is good, you can feel it. If you find that feeling in a place, or in people, cling to it like nobody's business. Because if that love is true, that is where God will be. After all, God is love.

Limuru Children's Center is one of those places. You walk into the front gate and meet the LCC Dad, who greets you with excitement that he even has difficulty articulating at times. You haven't even made it 10 feet into the walkway when Mom Jane, who saw you at the gate and physically ran down the walkway as soon she saw you, screams your name and gives you a big hug. You keep walking up the path to hug mom Agnes, who's in the middle of talking to the kids about what they need for school tomorrow so she can go to Limuru town to get it for them. Then you make it into the kitchen, where the laughter that will fill any room takes place. Chef Caroline and the moms are cooking,

talking, and offering you food constantly. You pop out of the kitchen to go put up your backpack upstairs. Once upstairs, you swing by the office, where mom Caren is finishing some work up for the kids while drinking hot water because that's how she likes it. After dropping your backpack, you pop by mom Lilian's office as she works away. She lights up when she sees you, and you can see the joy in her face. You go downstairs and into a classroom, which is where you find mom Maureen working on homework with

the kids that just came home from school. After a hug and laugh with Maureen, you go into the courtyard, where you find LCC Dad playing with the kids smiling ear to ear.

It is there that you feel it. You feel the love. You feel God's presence. This is the good stuff. The crazy part? That's just the staff, I haven't even mentioned God's presence in these kids, and let me tell you, God is so present in them. If you ever are in a place that you feel your sense of love is lacking or in need, buy a one-way plane ticket to Kenya, and spend a few days at Limuru Children's Center. You will feel it.

Jackson Cobb

3rd Annual Field Day

Let the games begin! This summer, Limuru Children's Centre celebrated the third annual Olympic Games! Teams were divided up, flags decorated, and the procession of teams began. Allie Brown led the teams in several different relay races, and lots of giggles were heard as the competition began to heat up. All of the children loved the games, and hula hoops, balls, and bubbles were everywhere! The kids can't wait for the next games, and I know we can't either!



Smiles All Around at the LCC Birthday Party

One of the best days for the GC team is getting to celebrate all the children's birthdays at the LCC on our visit. Each child was celebrated and fun was had by all! Happy birthday!



GIVING TIME TO EACH OTHER

IS THE BEST WAY TO EXPRESS LOVE

People who knew I was going to Africa often asked what I would do there. Honestly, other than safari, I had absolutely no idea. One of the very reasons for going was for my son, who grew up in church, but in a comfortable North American environment. He heard some about the outside world, but had never actually seen it. I did have other limited mission trip experiences before, so at the beginning of the trip, I was thinking we would be hanging out in the orphanage with the little ones, pampering the babies, helping with some volunteer work etc.

God works in mysterious ways and always beyond the imaginations of our little brains. From the first hug with the local family, to the awkward dancing with the lovely girls, to the weird and sudden farewell, many small scenarios, tiny little things touched & stimulated all of my senses. It's never some simple volunteer work per se...

Who would have thought it would be a treat and a joy to be among the teens. Probably because some of them have a prior life that is beyond our comprehension; probably because you just feel the sympathy by knowing some of them never knew their parents; probably because my stay was short so I didn't encounter the daily challenges... Regardless of the reason, you just feel they all have stories they'd like to share with you, but due to various reasons, they couldn't. Yet, you wanna be with them, even sitting together without a word. Ironically, the language barrier made it not as awkward. It's like you have a lot to say, but due to the obviously objective reason you can't. Yet, both feel good intentions towards each other. Then, instead of awkwardness, you feel attachment.

Jane, one of the main staff members, a.k.a a mum said she was fortunate to have these lovely children - not only the chubby cute little ones, but also those grown-ups. "It made you feel all the sacrifice is worth it." Just as one of the visions of the Limuru Children's Center says: "It's not merely a job..." Yes, all of these volunteers/employees or however you wanna call them, they're not merely doing it as a job. They're actually mums and dads. They've been pouring out love towards those kids for years... Typically, after returning from a short mission trip like this, you would be treated like a victorious hero by the locals. No, those brothers and sisters devoting their lives to those kids are the true unsung heroes!

Well, could it be because these teens were well trained and disciplined that they know Jesus well and could easily feel the love from others? So they're not those typical teenagers that you just wanna stay far away... Duncan, the founder of the Oasis of Endless Hope ministry would correct my stereotype of using the word like 'typical teenagers'. God has put a burden on his heart that he feels teenagers need more attention, care and love. He had been searching for churches & help for teenagers that appeared in his life unexpectedly. And guess what, God started an unexpected journey with him. After all his efforts searching ended up in vain, Duncan finally realized this calling to take care of those kids. Not surprised, just as he said, teenagers need more.

Guess it's also because of the love from Duncan and many others like him in the Oasis of Endless Hope ministry, you felt connected with those kids even being with them for a short period of time. Yes, they would ask you difficult questions like "how to forget past traumatizing experiences?", "how to forgive people who caused you all the miseries in life so far?". But, they would attentively listen to your answer; they were sincere.

No, I'm not a counselor and I didn't assume my conversation with the teenagers gave them any enlightenment or some sort of help. Most of the time, I can only spend time with them, either through some simple chats or playing sports with them. I think that's what they enjoyed too. Especially these big boys that didn't have much to express about their feelings. Yet all of us seemed to have a tacit agreement: being together is the most important thing; giving time to each other is the best way to express love.



The trip felt short. It was merely 3 weeks. Speaking of the weird and sudden farewell, I don't seem to be good at saying goodbye. Well, I'm actually not good at saying hi either... The latter is you don't know what to say; the former is you feel you have a lot to say towards the people who have been with you these three weeks, yet you don't know where to start. Also, in the scenario here, it made you feel sad and powerless to say anything positive or encouraging to help these teens walking boldly into society. High unemployment rates, horrendous corruption from the government, few opportunities for the youth... It just makes you feel irresponsible to tell them blindly that as long as you study hard, with God's help, you'll have a bright future.

*"Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full and deny you
and say, "Who is the LORD?"
or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God." (Proverbs 30:8-9 ESV)*

Spiritual warfare is beyond our comprehension in a society where struggling for food is the main topic for many people. Food is never enough; resources for the basic needs of daily life are never enough, time is never enough; love is never enough. It's easy to think about what Mother Teresa said: "The good you do today, will often be forgotten by tomorrow; do good anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; give your best anyway. You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God; it is never between you and them anyway."

All I said is "nakupenda" to each individual. (Swahili for I love you.) Also thankfully, we have the hope that couldn't be found in this world!

Fan (Nicky) Wang

EMPOWER TO TRANSFORM

GOD IS MEETING NEEDS AND CONFORMING OUR HEARTS

Empower to Transform

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”

— Matthew 25:35–40

Not only does Julius embody this command through Empower to Transform, but he offers another layer of connection to the families that he serves. Julius connects families from across the globe through Christ. The families in the United States offer up a monthly donation of \$70 to feed their partner family, while the Kenyan families offer up something much more valuable - **prayer**. Each Kenyan family receives pictures, letters, and prayer requests from their donor families, and they pray for the health, safety, and wellbeing of the families that are supporting them. Each donor family receives photos and updates on the wellbeing of their partner family in Kenya.



While coming to Kenya last summer, I was able to go on many home visits with Julius. I remember walking through the slums for hours visiting with the people of Limuru. All of a sudden as we were walking up to a small tin roofed house, Julius turned around and said to me, “this is your family.”

Inside the small house was a mother with seven children! I couldn’t even fathom how they all were able to fit inside of the small room. I was able to talk with the eldest son, who is my age, and he told me about his plans for university; for a minute it didn’t matter that his house had dirt floors, tin walls,

and two rooms. We were two teenagers both anxious and excited for our futures, and I wished him the best. As we were leaving, the mother pointed to a wall in their house. There was a picture of my family hanging up. She told us she prays for us often, and my breath was taken away. It was so amazing to get to see him again and share experiences again!

Once a month, the families who are a part of the Empower to Transform Program come to Tigoni Baptist Church to receive not only their food, but also blessings and fellowship with the volunteers throughout the morning. It was truly a blessing to be with Julius and his volunteers, to help pass out the food to the community, and to fellowship with them and talk about our lives.

I am so grateful to Julius for letting us be a part of his mission!

Nakupenda from Kenya!

- Hannah Hoang

God is Meeting Needs and Conforming Our Hearts

One afternoon a group of us were visiting families in their homes with Frances when we came upon a small property on the side of a large hill. We entered through the fence surrounding the property and found a small dirt path leading into a shelter made of tin and wood posts. At the entrance of the shelter, there was a boy. He was on his knees, staring into the distance, food all over him, mud covering the front portion of his body, moving spastically, completely nonverbal. His mother could no longer handle the burden of caring for him, so she had left. She left him with his grandmother and great aunt, who were already struggling to make ends meet. He got around the 10-foot path between the fence and shelter by crawling with his arms. The scene seemed hopeless. It’s scenes like this one that I believe God uses to conform our hearts.

Years prior, he had received a walker and his caretakers were told to use this walker to strengthen his legs. Only problem was, the women had no idea how to use it, so they didn’t. It sat under a small wooden couch untouched, until that day. Minutes later, a scene that felt so hopeless, got a little brighter as he stood holding tight to the walker. Then brighter again as he took steps down the path with his walker. Then brighter again as he ventured outside of the fence, up a hill, on a journey to visit the cars parked in front of his home. He loves to look at cars. His grandmother and great aunt were ecstatic, he was doing it!



At the end of the day, he didn’t need me, he didn’t need any of us on the GC team. He has God, a loving Grandmother, and a loving great Aunt. He is going to be okay whether any Mzungu (foreign person) shows up at his fence or not.

I believe this day changed me more than it changed this precious boy. And I’d go so far to say it had a large impact on team members besides myself as well. Moments like that can’t help but morph your heart. Romans 8:28 says, “**God works all things for the good of those who love him**”. I love this verse; many people know it. Everything is working for the good, but what’s the good? Walking into hopeless scenes like this one, or any of the other 20 homes we visited that afternoon, how is my viewing of these hopeless situations in any way “good?” If you keep reading, Romans 8:29 gives you the answer, we are being conformed to the image of God’s son, Jesus Christ.

Being in these homes transforms your heart. It gives you more patience, it gives you more perspective, it gives you more grace, it gives you more gratitude, it gives you more gentleness, it gives you more kindness, it gives you more compassion, it gives you more love, you just have to allow God to work. I encourage you, allow yourself to be transformed by God, because he will conform your heart to the image of his son. And who doesn’t want to be more like Christ?

Through this situation, this precious boy is now in a school for children with special needs, Camp Brethren. God used us to make a way for him. What can God not do?!

- Jackson Cobb

STEP IN!

As I prayed about going from America to Kenya, two questions kept coming to mind. The first one was "How could/would God use a 70-year-old man in a country where he didn't know the language or culture?" And the second question was "Doesn't it make more sense to save the money it would cost me to make the trip and simply donate it to be used there?" Unlike some, I did not struggle with the "what if" fears. What if I get sick? What if I struggle to eat the food? What if something happens back home and I need to be there? And the countless other "what if" types of questions that come to our minds. Truthfully, because I had previously been on multiple other ministry trips outside of the States, God had given me total peace concerning all of those "what if" questions. However, I was honestly struggling with how I could/would contribute while I was there and wouldn't just sending money be a better choice.



Throughout my life, our Heavenly Father has led me, as He led Joshua, when Joshua came to the Jordan River. If you recall, God clearly instructed the Israelites to cross the river, but the river did not divide until they 'actually' stepped into it. The honest and sincere questions that Joshua may have had were not answered, until by faith, he stepped into the river. And as our Heavenly Father has faithfully done in the past, once the Global Connections projects began, God quickly answered both of my sincere questions.

Regarding my first question, as "could I or would I be able to contribute", I will share two of many examples. The first example centers around helping in some building projects. Fortunately, I am still physically active and could help 'some' in the actual building process. But the greatest way our Heavenly Father used me was in the questions that the workers would discuss with me while we are working. You may not be aware, but English is the second language in Kenya and every worker I met could communicate in English. In the days we would "physically" work together,

question after question would be asked. For the most part they were about the differences and similarities of Kenya and the United States. But without a doubt, in time, spiritual questions would be asked. The initial questions were general in nature. Examples: Do I own a vehicle? Do I have siblings? How far did I go in education? What are my hobbies? How many kids (grandkids) do I have? Etc.... All questions that I could easily in turn ask them. As they realized that many of my answers related to my faith in God, then the questions would get a little deeper and more personal. Examples: What does God says about marriage (it is legal to have multiple wives in Kenya), parenthood (responsibilities of the husband or father), being a good son (what are my responsibilities for aging parents), honesty (isn't ok to lie if it benefits the family)? Etc.... And then as the trust deepened, the doors naturally opened for me to share the Gospel. I can honestly say, once I arrived, God opened countless doors to show me how I could contribute by personally being there.

Regarding the second question, about "Wouldn't it be better to simply send the money a trip cost?". Here is what God has shown me. It is true, all mission organizations (like Global Connections) can use donations. Donations are absolutely critical. However, sometimes God desires that we "personally" go. First, because of what God wants to do in the Kenyan's lives, but secondly, what He wants to do in our lives. I discovered that many times what Kenyan's need and desire is a listening ear, a hug, a time of laughter, and even a tear or two. Looking eyeball to eyeball. Simply taking time to sit and have tea next to a warm fire. A strong handshake or a manly hug. Experiencing the gift of being together. I can't over emphasize the importance of being with Kenyans 'in person'. As important as money is, money can't replace the human presence which they (and you) will remember for years to come. They certainly appreciate the donations, but they cherish our presence.

So, I close with the following encouragement. If you are sensing God is leading you to participate with Global Connections, then from my experience, I have found three primary ways. The first is, if you are "physically" able to go, then join in one of their trips. If because of a multiple of valid reasons, you can't personally go, then give. You can give to a specific project or even give so that someone who desires to go, but can't afford it, can go. And thirdly, pray. On every trip I have been, there have been unbelievable doors opened, that without a single doubt, came about because God honored the prayers being lifted during that trip.

— Salt Jones

THE ELDERLY COMMUNITY: RICH IN FAITH AND GRATITUDE

"Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord."
Leviticus 19:32

While the elderly members of the community that are served through Pat's Feeding Program may be poor in strength and agility, they are rich in faith and in gratefulness. Not once did they pass anyone on the Global Connections team without stopping to shake hands, say hello and good morning, and ask them how they were and their names.

Francis, Peter, and the rest of the volunteers (who take no salary for their time,) truly follow the command of the Lord from Leviticus, treating the elderly members of their community with dignity, respect, and reverence while serving them twice a month through Pat's Feeding Program.

After a bright and early 6:30 AM breakfast time today, the team loaded up and made the trek to the Kenyan Red Cross Center to help with the distribution. We were greeted by songs, praises, and many "habaris!" The line quickly began moving and we were put to work.



More times than I can count, women well into their 70s, 80s, some even 90s (all over three times my age!) would stop, tell me I was beautiful, and say that I was such a blessing to them. Little do they know the blessing they became to me during our time.

Pat's Feeding Program was such a blessing to all of us!

Francis is also the director of the Homebound Elderly Program. This program was started when Francis began hearing about some of the elderly community who could not come to Pat's Feeding Program due to their homebound situation. Visiting these homes with Francis was a blessing. These volunteers are truly living out the phrase, "see a need, fill a need". Not only does the program provide food and meet medical needs, in some cases, the program is even making sure they have a proper burial and their lives are celebrated.

The elderly community is not being looked over in Limuru, Kenya. Thanks to Pat's Feeding Program, Homebound Elderly Program and Global Connections for making sure this community is seen and shown the love of Christ.

Hannah Hoang



GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

RETHINKING HUMANITARIAN AID

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED
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What a Joy to reflect on the Lord's faithfulness in 2023 and we are so incredibly grateful for you serving alongside us. Your support, prayers, and partnership have guided Global Connections mission to serve and learn from the orphaned, widowed, poor and oppressed.

We pray you have a wonderful holiday season and pray that God will continue to use us to spread the love of Christ around the world.

God bless you!



**SCAN TO DONATE
TO ANY GC
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Thank you for your consideration of partnership with the ongoing service efforts of Global Connections!

All donations are tax-deductable and 100% of the funds are used for the program YOU designate. There is no deduction for administrative costs.