



People of courage — the women of SWAN

On their second Sunday in Nairobi, the participants on Lutheran World Relief's recent study tour of East Africa were invited to spend the day with the women of SWAN (Sudanese Women's Association in Nairobi), a self help organization for women and their children who are living as refugees as a result of a decades long civil war in Sudan.

The day started with worship led by the Sudanese women. Since their worship was informal and not bound to a set liturgy or lectionary, the leader and preacher were free to select any

text. Rose Soma, the preacher for the day, chose Luke 10:25-37, the parable of the Good Samaritan. She was not theologically educated nor an ordained pastor so her sermon was not a masterpiece of exegesis and Biblical interpretation. But it was, without a doubt, the most powerful sermon based on the Good Samaritan story that members of the study tour ever had the privilege to hear.

Why? A seminary professor once

LWR provides hope for Sudanese refugees in Nairobi

said that at good sermon is a captivating performance of a Biblical text that somehow takes the Gospel from 2000 years ago and makes it alive and relevant for the contemporary listener. And that is exactly what the Rose Soma did.

Prior to their visit with SWAN the LWR group knew virtually nothing about the plight of Sudan. They did not know it is the site of the longest ongoing civil war in the world today (since the 1950's). They did not know about how the Islamic north has declared *jihad* (holy war) on the Christian south. They did not know about bombs that are indiscriminately dropped on Christian villages (including hospitals, orphanages and churches). They did not know about the thousands upon thousands who are living in refugee camps in Kenya and other neighboring countries. They did not know about the hundreds of Sudanese women living in Nairobi as aliens in a foreign land, not allowed to work or send their children to public schools. They did not know about how the women of SWAN had not

seen their husbands, older sons and other family members for five to ten years and have no idea if their loved ones are alive or dead.

But, by the end of the sermon, the visitors from America knew Rose Soma, and her sisters in SWAN, and their families in the refugee camps and villages of Sudan, as the neighbors that Christ says they are, learning first hand their names, their stories and their needs.

Though the women of SWAN are working diligently for peace in Sudan, their most immediate need is sufficient income for daily necessities. To accomplish this, LWR recently funded a pilot project to empower at least 60 Sudanese women with skills to establish and manage small, income generating entrepreneurships. The project also provided loans for the women to buy supplies and build an inventory of salable products.

The project was an incredible success with 81 women participating. Most of them make and sell clothing and handicrafts. Of those who needed a loan to launch their business, 90%

are up to date in repaying their debt. Of the 10% in arrears, most are making payments and will eventually catch up.

But the greatest achievement of the project is the high level of self-reliance and self-confidence that the women of SWAN are experiencing. Even though they are refugees living far from home, through a good, old fashioned, neighbor helping neighbor kind of project, they are beginning to earn

sufficient income to provide food, shelter and clothing for themselves and their families.

By supporting LWR and the ELCA Hunger Appeal, members of the East Central Synod of Wisconsin are helping their neighbors from Sudan survive today and live with hope for tomorrow.

Photos & Story by ECSW supplement editor, the Rev. Paul F. Heykes, one of 21 participants on the LWR study tour. Help banish hunger and build peace. Support the ELCA initiative "Stand with Africa" in 2001.

