

# Cornerstone

Newsletter & Magazine December 2019

A Family of Friends - Developing the Cornerstones of Africa's Next Generation



## TO SERVE AND TO LEAD

Jesus said to the disciples, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." John 15:16. And, in Peter 2:9 it says: "You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own... who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Such verses carry the implication that we did not come here to planet earth in a haphazard way, but that there is some kind of grand plan and purpose for our being here.

In the parable of "The Wedding Feast" (Matt. 22:1-14), Jesus tells a story of people who were invited to a wedding celebration, but did not show up. So, the invitation was extended to many others. However, those who then turned up were required to honor the call with appropriate attire or risk not being chosen to stay in the feast. Jesus ends the parable with the famous statement: "For many are called, but few are chosen." In this, we learn that to serve and enter the 'kingdom of heaven' is not just something reserved for certain special people, but that we are all invited. But, this call also requires us to take seriously the work of personal transformation in order to stay in the program.

This newsletter explores the idea - that we are all called to serve in some way or another - but we must walk 'worthy of the calling' to realize our greatest potential as transformational, servant leaders chosen to bear greater responsibility.



### Inside



### and...

- \* The Highschool Leadership Development
- \* The Africa Youth Leadership Forum
- \* Thoughts from Tim

Allan, Michael, Henry, Sarah, and others at our Kampala Office



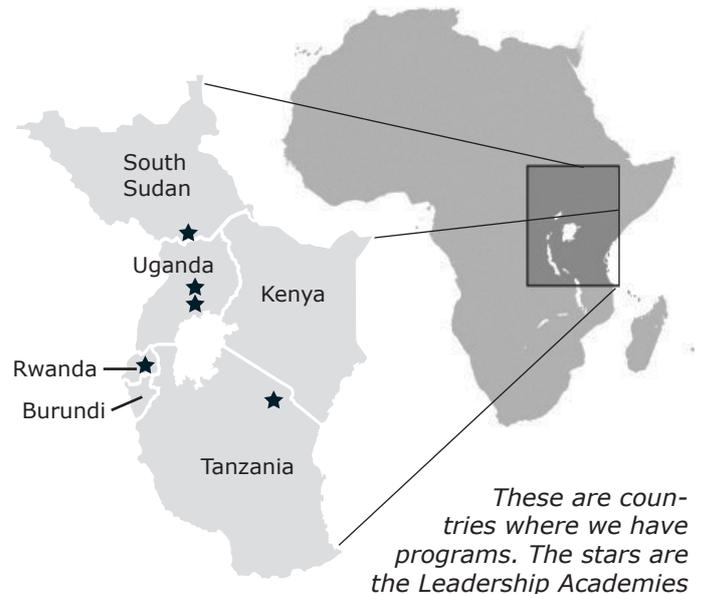
## Cornerstone Development Africa

We are a family of friends in the spirit of Jesus committed to:

- \* Equipping and advancing a movement of servant leaders with a shared vision for the positive transformation of their communities, nation and region.*
- \* Compassion for the poor with a focus on young people.*
- \* Working across the lines of culture and faith differences.*
- \* Maintaining a long-term partnership with each other.*
- \* Loving God and neighbor.*

Cornerstone Development was established in Uganda in 1988 to help in the rebuilding and development of the nation as it was emerging from a turbulent past. In recent years we have expanded to Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi and Southern Sudan. All our programs are directed towards helping under-privileged children, with a special emphasis on youth leadership development. Since its inception the work has steadily expanded to include over 2,000 young people today- in a variety of programs including five schools, ten homes for homeless kids, 4 homes for university youth and sports programs - all designed for providing love, education and character formation.

Our core focus is on “Developing the Cornerstones of Africa’s Next Generation”. That is, to raise up future leaders with a shared vision of positively transforming their communities and nations, as an outgrowth of their own personal transformation. Our approach involves creating loving, family-like environments in our schools and other programs for under-privileged young people, while empowering them with education and character formation in order for them to become leaders. Furthermore, the young people coming through our programs are forming a movement that seeks to make a contribution to the betterment of society while promoting reconciliation across all that



*These are countries where we have programs. The stars are the Leadership Academies*

is dividing humanity. We as a community are a living model of this kind of unity in diversity, in that we are composed of all the different tribes, nationalities, cultures and religious backgrounds found in this part of the world.

In our character development curriculum we teach the timeless, universal principles of forgiveness, honesty, integrity, compassion, kindness, hard work, humility, and of service to the less fortunate, as exemplified in the teachings of Jesus and the perennial wisdom of all traditions, but without affiliation to any one institutional religious group.

See more online:

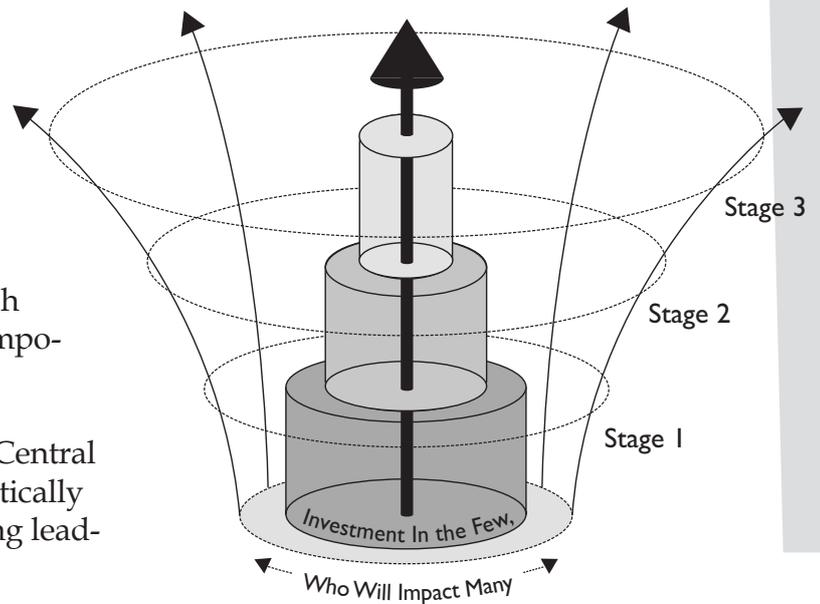
[www.CornerstoneDevelopment.org](http://www.CornerstoneDevelopment.org)  
[www.CornerstoneSchoolsAfrica.org](http://www.CornerstoneSchoolsAfrica.org)

Our core focus is 'youth leadership development' after the model of Jesus. So, in addition to our schools, all the various programs we run serve this focus by providing a practical "training ground" where graduates of our schools can learn to serve and pass on what they have received. Each year we put out two magazine's like this one. Earlier this year we highlighted several PEOPLE we work with, and this one will highlight the core of our work and PROGRAMS.

# STAGES OF OUR WORK

In its broadest aspect, our work is linked to a world-wide family of friends who seek common-ground around the principles, precepts and person of Jesus. We seek to do this in way that transcends differences of race, tribe, religious or political affiliations. We also put a lot of emphasis on long-term commitments to each other, rather than seeing relationships as temporary conveniences.

Our community and programs in East and Central Africa are structured in three stages of a vertically integrated investment in the young emerging leaders we work with:



## STAGE 1

This stage is the entry point to our movement and it involves creating life-transforming learning environments in our mentoring homes, schools and Cornerstone Leadership Academies. This provides a core from which we impact many other schools in the region through various other programs.



## STAGE 2

This stage supports our young leaders during their college years and their involvement in various career development initiatives that will enable them to move into key positions of influence within society. Through these individuals and initiatives we impact thousands of other students on many of the most of the prominent university campuses across the region.



## STAGE 3

This stage is about maintaining ongoing fellowship/support groups after college that support the personal and spiritual growth of our alumni so that they go through life aligned with the best values and principles. Through this, we support these relationships and networks to cultivate an innumerable amount of life-transforming grass-roots initiatives that have impact on all sectors of society.



# Cornerstone Schools

## Uganda: Stage 1

To lead is a marathon not a hundred meter dash! As we take leadership on we encounter many obstacles and setbacks but, the goal is to finish well not just by ourselves but also with others under our care so that they too can join us in the race and reach their fullest potential on this leadership journey.

In our schools in Uganda, we work with open-minded young people who are ready to influence their communities. When they come, we remind them of the virtues of leadership and help nurture and draw out these virtues from within them through daily deployments and assignments. We bring to their awareness the truth that the power of a leader comes from within and, not from without and how everything we are and everything we do must be anchored in the identity we have with Jesus.

Our leadership challenge at the academy has always been about how to help the young men and women understand and capture what the kingdom of God is all about and how every last one of them should be a proponent and propagator of the ideals of this kingdom- which is a call to serve.

Throughout the year, we design an activity calendar suited to creating an environment that draws out every student's leadership potential. For example, on the list of activities this calendar year, we had among others, activities like debates, pay it forward, a school initiative where our students go on community outreaches, students' mission trips, community service to the villages around like building the homes/huts to the vulnerable.

We also have activity day, a day's event that brings all our schools, students, teachers and members of our community together in a huge joint community fellowship. The students run these activities solely with minimal support from the teaching staff. This not only builds the leadership muscle needed for their thriving but also brings joy and a sense of fulfillment in the lives of these young people.

It's always a great joy seeing young people from humble beginnings turn into responsible leaders, fathers and business people in the real world. We are always thrilled at these outcomes and never for once do we ever wish to take for granted the amazing footprints our teaching and non-teaching staff leave on the hearts of these young men and women while at the academy.

As the team leader at the academy, my role is to encourage ourselves and to point us to the reason for our existence as an institution through daily focus on the following;

- Maintaining a vibrant, personal relationship with God.
- Maintaining a learning atmosphere where students learn from various sources
- Living by identifiable goals which are characterized by a good degree of self-control in our mind, will, and emotions.
- Take time to develop a network of intentional relationships.
- Have a clear vision and lifelong commitment to pleasing and honoring the lord through a daily and deliberate surrender to the lordship of Christ in all things.

# Rwanda: Stage 1

The theme of this newsletter has been something we have discussed through out the year, and has been a great source of inspiration as well as a challenge for us at CLA Rwanda. That Jesus would offer us an invitation to service, is a wonder in itself but that few would take it up, a nightmare and a terrible thought to ponder. For much of our undertakings this year, the question has been; are we answering the Master's CALL in this endeavor?

As such, our staff has been able to work beyond the confines of their job descriptions and our students beyond the requirements of the school. A beautiful example of this is the participation of both staff and students in the Cornerstone Leadership Academy - Rwanda community outreach programs which are not only impacting us but also communities around the school and members of these communities in a great way.

One outreach program to families, for instance, is making rounds and having far-reaching impact on families and marrieds in our surroundings. Using the values of forgiveness and reconciliation we have been able to witness with our own eyes an advancement of Jesus' kingdom, through restored marital relationships, emotional healings, and restoration of children-parents' relationships. Through the families' outreach program alone (Society Foundation), our students have had first-hand leadership experience and exposure through the opportunity and privilege to mentor children from broken families.

Our community outreach programs have found expression within initiatives started by students and staff members which include among others, Society Foundation, Builders of Hope Africa (BHA) and Youth Impact Mission (YIM). These initiatives have been very instrumental in recalibrating the leadership potentials of our students and staff in incredible ways. Our students leave our academy

better than the average school sophomore in the country of Rwanda. They leave equipped with sought after leadership skills like higher emotional intelligence, responsibility, creativity, and integrity.

During the national week of unity and reconciliation, Nzaramba Theoneste, alumni and now a staff member at the academy, participated in teaching victims and perpetrators of the genocide against Tutsis in Rwanda the value of unity and reconciliation in families. Great lessons were passed on and families were edified that day.



Students participating in community service projects

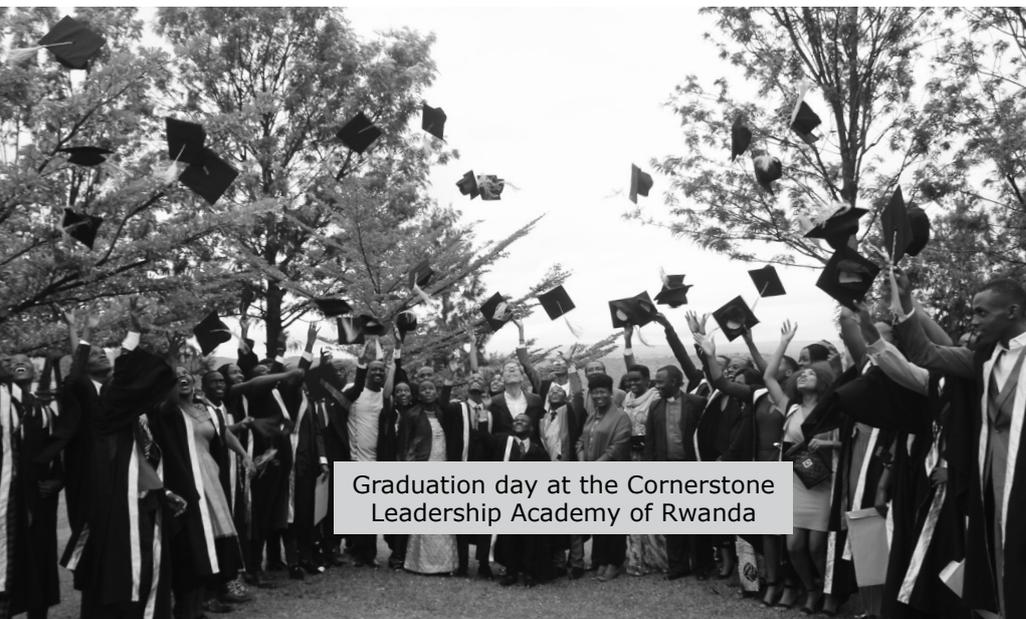
The school has built a house for a widower in our neighborhood under the "Tujyanemo" national program geared at empowering the vulnerable. This year also, our students have built three houses for homeless families around the school.

And through BHA, our students have learned the kingdom value of generosity using part of their pocket money to take kids back to school from less privileged families. 20 kids to this end, are in school thanks to BHA and the selfless giving of our students at the academy.

In our school, we feel that we have been charged to respond to the call of Jesus at the academy by:

- Envisioning a better world
  - Taking the possible steps towards the world we envision
  - Mentoring both young and old people for peace and love
  - Pouring our lives into others and for others
  - Creating environments in communities around us where the value system of heaven is preminent,

We are building a culture and an ecosystem where everyone who'll walk in the boundaries of our school will catch a hunger for their lives to align with Jesus' dream!



Graduation day at the Cornerstone Leadership Academy of Rwanda

## Tanzania: Stage 1

When considering the notion that ‘many are called, and few are chosen, I believe that Jesus uses the word “calling” as an invitation. The parable that this idea comes from (Matthew 22:1-14), is an analogy of what we have been invited to. It is an invitation to something more than just a life lived serving only ourselves... but rather, it is an invitation to live a life with Jesus, serving God and experiencing the fulfillment that service brings to life. To be chosen on the other hand is to accept the invitation and to do what is necessary to live according to the invitation. God calls everyone, but it’s those who wholeheartedly accept the invitation that become the chosen.

My question is, am I heeding his call and accepting the invitation to serve?

We have been privileged to have an empowering culture in our Cornerstone Leadership Academy in Tanzania. We’ve been committed the stewardship of the value system of a higher world where virtues like integrity, purity, kindness, love, compassion and mercy ought to be displayed by us. This is the way of Jesus.

This year we have tried our level best not only to study and discuss the theme but to live it in all our programs, we have been able to accept the invitation and being God’s vessels in bringing hope, peace, reconciliation and positive reformation. For example, through the BFA (Builders of Future Africa) outreach program our students have been

able to reach out to more than fifty underprivileged children who live around our school community and share with them love, joy and even provide the scholastic materials to them. It was also so touching and inspiring to see our students also building a small house for one of the families whose child is a beneficiary of our students’ program BFA. This family was living in a very poor shack, and so students contributed their time, meagre resources and energy to see to it that this impoverished family live in a slightly better house.

Furthermore, through the Highschool Leadership Development program, we have been able to engage and influence more than ten schools around Arusha region with the principles, precepts and teachings of Jesus. In addition to this, over four hundred students outside our school have been resourced through the Vision Conference we hosted recently.

During holidays, a couple of our students used part of their holiday time to serve their neighborhoods in an activity that was geared to reach out to orphans. They looked for and took items like food supplies, clothes and scholastic materials for the school going kids.

Our girls at the academy have also forged lasting partnerships one of which is a girl child empowering organization called KISA AFRICAID which does community outreaches and offers trainings to the entrepreneurs of one of Arusha’s biggest markets called Kilombero. At KISA, the girls facilitate most of these trainings sharpening their leadership skills while at it.

I hope you may be challenged and inspired just as I am to hear Jesus’ invitation to serve others!



Induction of new Care Group and Student Council Leaders

Students gathering in campus small groups



# Highschool Leadership Development

Having been accorded the privilege to work with the High School Leadership Development Program (HLD), I have witnessed two interesting truths as I and the team go about work.

First is that in every student that we encounter either through a small group or a conference, there's a desire to serve others. This desire is what drives them to seek opportunity by joining prefect councils or take up any other responsibility. This desire perhaps symbolizes the open call that Jesus places on our lives to partake in the transformation of the world, to bring heaven on earth.

Secondly and what will be the interest of my article is that every student, mentor, coordinator, the patron has to make bold choices in response to this call to service. So, I will reflect on ways in which through our engagements this year, the people we have reached out to have heeded this call earnestly and boldly not only transforming their lives but their communities as well.

Late this year, the HLD program in Uganda underwent some big changes as we tweaked our model to be more cost effective, and we added 30 more schools to our roster where we have active bi-weekly engagement (making the total number 50). This came with a greater call for service, especially from the coordinators/volunteers. With more schools and students to teach and mentor, their unflinching dedication to continuing to serve is to us a grand demonstration of what Jesus meant when he said: "many are called but few are chosen..."

In Rwanda, we go by the name 'Youth Impact Mission', and this year we held a 5-in-1 Vision Conference, which happened simultaneously in 5 different

places in 5 different regions of Rwanda. The big Annual Vision Conference is on 24 November 2019. In the 6 conferences, we've had so far, over 5700 young people have been reached and we expect over 1000 young people in our annual conference. We have served 137 Schools across the country this year reaching over 64,000 Students with one school GS Paysanant in Mahama refugee camp holding a population of over 23,000 Students. We've also been invited as delegates to participate in 6 National Level conferences to deliberate on issues of national importance.

Also this year in Rwanda, we were asked to represent the country in an international conference organized by the Westminster Foundation and Common Wealth held at the Uganda Parliament under the Theme: "YOUTH WHO LEAD."

In Burundi, our programs officially launched this year in September. Two schools, Lycee Notre Dame Rohero and Lycee de la Convivialite, in the city of Bujumbura, opened their doors to us to facilitate discipleship there.

Since the launch in September, several community-outreach programs have been registered under the supervision of YIM Burundi chapter. One notable campaign worth mentioning is the campaign our people are spearheading of conserving the Environment through plastics collection and recycling to reduce their harm to our beloved earth.

The willingness to serve on our part this season has become a portrait for many in our programs to live out what has been modeled to them. And as a result, more people have been affected positively by the servanthood heart exhibited by our members.



Winners of the 2019 AYLF University Student Leadership Awards in Kenya

# AFRICA YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

*"Everybody can be great,  
because everybody can serve."  
- Martin Luther King Jr*

We are quite proud of the achievements of our various teams in all the 7 countries we have worked in 2019. Other than the regional office team, who are full time, our AYLF leadership teams in all 7 countries, are largely volunteer-based and just one or two part-time positions - which says a lot about their commitment to our vision!

AYLF operations are based on a small-groups leadership model. We have over 100 active small groups at University in the 7 countries we operate in. Each small group is coordinated by at least 2 people; which puts our small group leaders to 200 and more. This is just at the small group level. If we for instance factor in other leadership teams, our entire AYLF leadership team will go to 300 leaders in 7 countries. This is just the picture of leaders making AYLF vision happen on the ground.

In Uganda under the leadership of Michael Kirya, AYLF has registered successes in areas of partnerships with the Guild councils for leadership training projects (such as conferences and seminars), a student leadership development program (8 months program); there are 16 vibrant small groups spread across the country; and organizing guild elections debates.

The efforts to mobilize and coordinate the AYLF alumni by championing regular meetings through small groups and supporting University small groups; and doing their retreats. With support from the Uganda National Parliament, participants to the 2019 gathering in October were hosted by the Rt. Hon. Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament for luncheon immediately after the 21st Uganda National Prayer Breakfast.

In Kenya, there is rapid growth in what we are doing with University students' leaders. There are now 26 active and vibrant small groups and the numbers are expected to continue to rise; the University Students' Leadership Awards, Student Leadership Development (8 months program). AYLF also signed a memorandum of understanding with the University Deans Association of Kenya. The purpose was to streamline partnerships and enjoy the creative synergies of both entities.

There is a vibrant and well-coordinated AYLF alumni group in Kenya. The alumni are digging in deep to support the Kenya National Prayer Breakfast and any related activities such as the 'building bridges' initiative, and the Men's Gathering, among others. The alumni are also doing groundwork to establish sustainability projects for the AYLF and its members; such as establishing an investment forum through Princeps Investment Cooperative - a savings and investment vehicle for AYLF members across the region (in the current 7 countries of operations) whose objective is to create financial freedom for our members. The alumni have also been instrumental in forming the core AYLF leadership team in Kenya under the guidance of Gabriel Achayo; who is the country coordinator.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, under the stewardship of Baraka Emmanuel and his dedicated team, AYLF is celebrating 5 years of official operations. We had started earlier in 2008 partially in Beni city but with minimum operations. Regardless of the challenges and complexities in DRC, AYLF has been able to expand its programs to 7 different towns (Bunia, Beni, Butembo, Goma, Bukavu, and Kinshasa. By strategically creating small groups in the biggest Universities in the country, AYLF's influence is coming alive; a case in point is the current President of Students at Universities in the entire country and also the Deputy Guild leaders at the University of Kinshasa, Priscah Many-

la, is founding coordinator of the small group at University of Kinshasa. This is the first time, a woman has held this position in its history. We celebrate Priscah and the AYLFF movement in DRC.

In Burundi, under the stewardship of Keith and his team, we embarked on a two days retreat geared towards re-grouping AYLFF since the 2015 conflict the brought political tensions in the country. The tensions in the country slowed us down and the morale was low. We had a chance to re-vision and give confidence to our team here in Burundi. We also specifically invested time and resources in the small group coordinators' training to equip them so that they can expand the vision as far as possible. This training has helped our small groups to be more interactive and creative because small group coordinators now master the vision and they share it with good knowledge.

Small groups in all the campuses have organized leadership conferences to mobilize and shine a light on our work, the vision and mission of AYLFF (at Hope university, Tanganyika Lake University, Ngozi University, and Bujumbura International University) In addition to the existing small groups, we have started two more small groups; one at the Medical Institute of Ngozi and another one at Institute de Pedagogies Appliqués. We also organized a city forum in Bujumbura that gathered student leaders and young entrepreneurs. This event has impacted more than 150 young people in the city, and in May, we held our first women's forum.

AYLFF Tanzania is stabilizing after a transition to a new leadership team (Jorum and Leonce). There are currently 9 small group chapters spread across Tanzania. Given the vast size of this East African nation, this number is still small, however, we are confident in the new leadership team to do more. We are happy to share some of the AYLFF successes in 2019 here. We have been consistent in our engagement with our members and Alumni online; using WhatsApp platforms more than ever before through a "Series of Au-

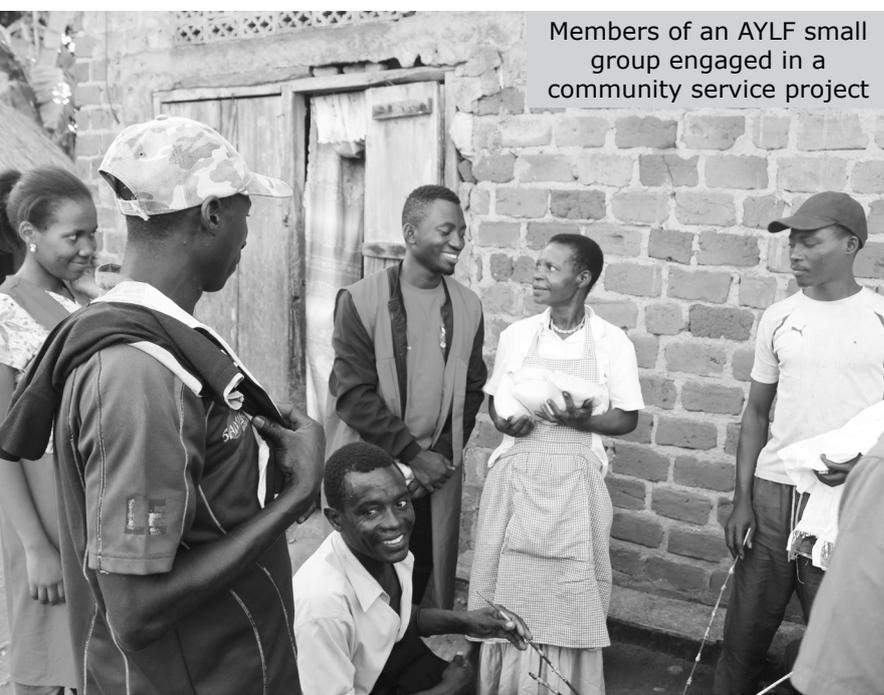
dio Clips" about leadership and our AYLFF DNA. This has helped us spread the vision to places we can't reach. We have also carried out leadership trainings and awarded certificates to 102 members in various Universities. Certification leadership training is one of the ways we equip our members to meet various job skills requirements. Our alumni are marketable in this highly jobless country. Our members are securing jobs with the help of the leadership certificates we award them after training. As part of mentoring others, AYLFF Tanzania has also engaged 9 Secondary Schools in Dar es Salaam and Arusha. Through high school outreaches, about 1000 or more students have had our message of leadership.

Rwanda AYLFF under the leadership of Pascal Hakizimana is privileged to serve and provide a platform for the formation of the next generation of leaders. In 2019, we have invested time and resources to support 25 small groups on campuses across the country; with about 875 active members. There is engagement in weekly meetings and workshops spearheaded by members of our small groups. There are about 50 small group coordinators who we have also engaged in workshops to equip them with the tools to serve and lead other leaders in AYLFF. Just a couple of weeks ago, we had one such workshop in Kigali and in the Southern province of Rwanda.

We have also partnered with the Ministry of Youth to organize and implement, leadership and entrepreneurship conferences at the provincial level. These included the Eastern Province conference (600 participants); Southern Province conference (1201 participants); Kigali Students' Leaders' Conference (150 participants). We also held a prayer breakfast for students and youth leaders in Eastern province where 200 participants attended.

In South Sudan, our involvement with University students' leaders is in its early stages. John Machiek went back to Juba to start small groups at Universities there and is supported by Santa Safari. We initiated small groups at four Universities and have regular weekly meetings to engage students' leaders. We are at Star-Ford University, Catholic University, Upper Nile University, and Juba University. We are also mobilizing and engaging South Sudanese student leaders studying in Kenya and Uganda. We have done a leadership workshop for them this year, and are currently looking at other platforms to engage them.

Thank you to all our leadership teams throughout the region, from the small group coordinators, project managers and all the volunteers. AYLFF is what we make it through our dedication, resilience, commitment, passion, loyalty, and self-sacrifice!



Members of an AYLFF small group engaged in a community service project

# Cornerstone

## Newsletter Pictorial



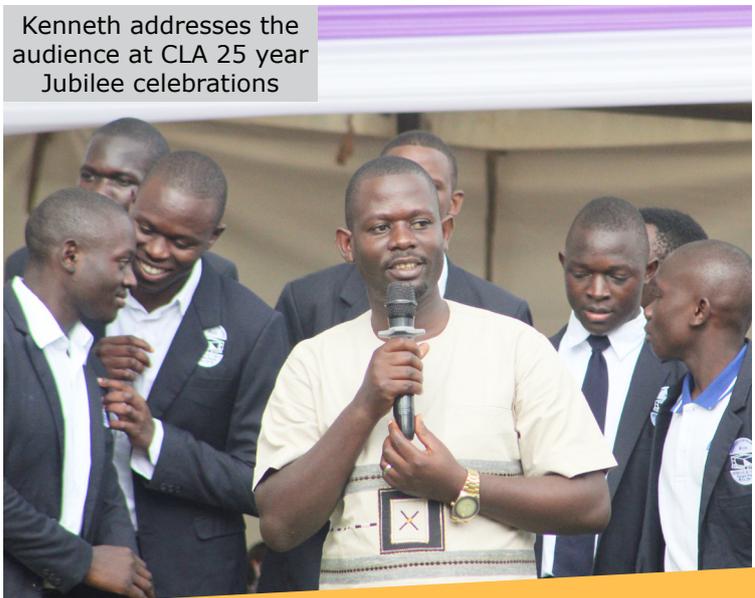
One of the groups criss-crossing Uganda during this year's COSA Caravan to meet and reconnect with alumni



Students all dressed up for graduation at CLA Tanzania!



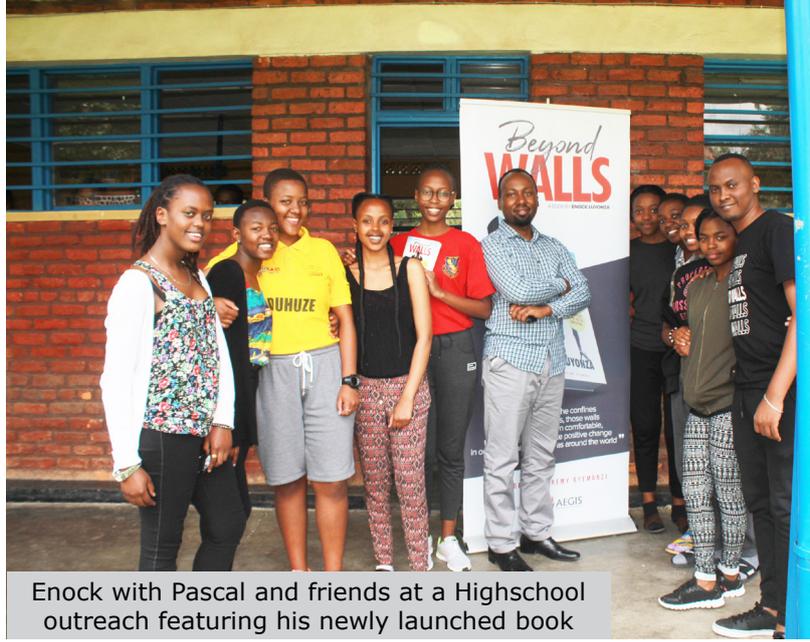
Student speeches at the Cornerstone Leadership Academy graduation in Rwanda



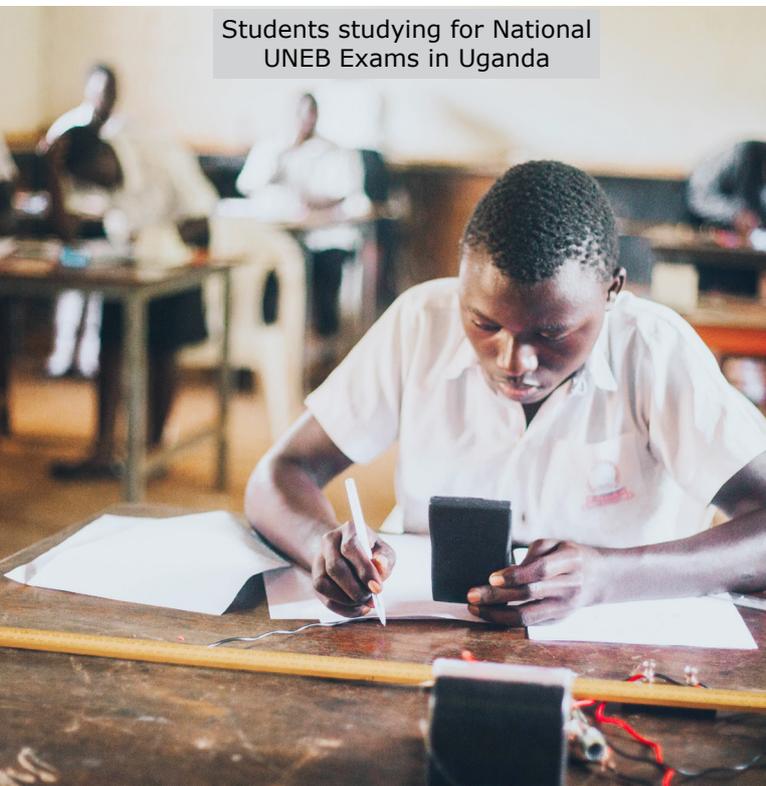
Kenneth addresses the audience at CLA 25 year Jubilee celebrations



AYLF members attending the National Prayer Breakfast in Kinshasa



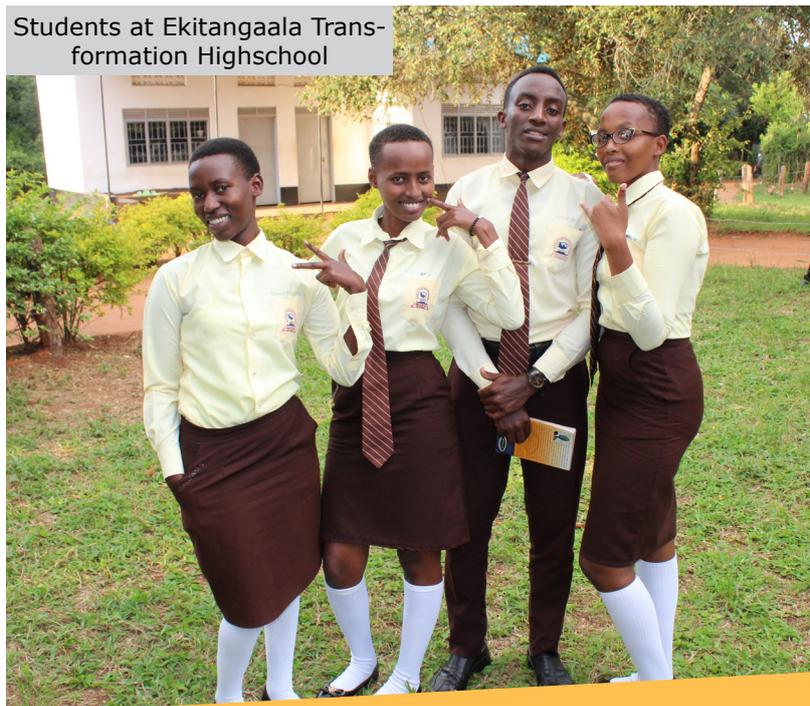
Enock with Pascal and friends at a Highschool outreach featuring his newly launched book



Students studying for National UNEB Exams in Uganda



Student entrepreneurship club in Rwanda showcasing their products



Students at Ekitangaala Transformation Highschool



Small groups meeting at the COSA Rwanda Annual Retreat

*A Family of Friends!*



Members of the first two generations of CLA Uganda at the 25 Year Jubilee Celebrations

# ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS

## Uganda: Stage 2

The university program in Uganda currently has 455 students that we work with. Given the dynamics of this program, we have a team of 14 individuals working alongside 35 student leaders to ensure the continuous growth of our cornerstone vision and movement.

The mission of promoting a continuous, holistic personal growth and a leadership development ecosystem for our members is why we do what we do. Our work is done based on four core values; Christ-centeredness, developing long term relationships, pursuing unity and reconciliation in Jesus and taking up leadership responsibilities. When we serve the vision and mission of our movement, responsibly, we recalibrate our people's desires to also serve in areas where God has called them to serve.

Serving and leading go hand in hand and at COSA, we hold service in high regard. We perceive service as a spiritual discipline that needs exercising. We know that service is not limited to academic qualifications. All that is needed to serve are hearts and souls drenched in love. It is this understanding of service and leadership that we are enriched to stay committed to our work that facilitates a movement of service in Uganda and beyond.

We have several platforms through which our members get involved as a means of giving back and leading others. Some of these outreach platforms include the Salaam Mentoring program, the AYLE, the community Outreach activities, and HLD. These platforms are entry points for our members at stage two to exercise what they have learned through Cornerstone to serve their communities. Through our 'in-reach' or the peer mentorship initiative,

our members get to pass on to their peers what has been passed on to them over the years. Peer mentorships happen in high school visits as well as in youth core homes. Youth core homes are homes to former street kids and children from abusive backgrounds. Our members serve in these homes as mentors to help rehabilitate these once hopeless lives.

For our members that can't be absorbed by the above initiatives, we have several interest groups like the Creative Arts and Ministry, the Social and relationship matters, the Business Forum and the Leadership Forum where our members can find support and a place to be of service to their communities.

Communal living is another avenue where our Cornerstone DNA is emphasized. We like to have our stage two members live together and so we encourage them to find shared accommodation while at University or join our hostels. Activities like let's talk, Bible studies, and the intentional mentorship engagements thrive mostly in these communal arrangements and accountability is strengthened.

Our Master, said "...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many-Matthew 20:26-28. This text is a reminder to all of us that "Greatness is rooted in service."

The good news is we all have been called to fulfill a particular assignment. God has called us to serve him in capacities we have never dreamt about. Serving is contagious because when you serve excellently like the child of God, you model to the watching world what is possible and forever you extend to them an invitation to a life of service they were fashioned to live.

## Uganda: Stage 3

For the past 25 years, Cornerstone has nurtured men and women of passion committed to the course of changing and transforming their societies. Many of these people's dreams were birthed at the Leadership Academy in conversations around tables of food, inside the reading room, dormitories, padlocks, and the chapel. Right now, we have our members spread all over the region occupying various spheres of influence which among others include; Academia, Politics, civil service, Church, Armed Forces, NGOs, CBOs, and educational institutions. All these members have dedicated their energies and responded to the call to serve selflessly.

In the past couple of months, we have been moving across Uganda in the 'COSA Caravan' visiting various alumni and we have been thrilled by the level of impact that is being championed by many of them. Our members now owning schools (Rukundo Caleb, Mutawe Richard, Alutia Moses etc), others run orphanages, Sponsorship schemes for children (Prosie Babirye, Mutawe Richard, Okurmu Denis). One brother in Pader (Northern Uganda), David Lagen founded a Youth Empowerment Center, where character development and skills are passed on to young people in this community. Our members have also championed and pioneered Women Village savings groups, Couple mentoring groups, Churches, Community Based organizations as well as, Bible schools and Health facilities. Our brother in Rukungiri Onesmas Ngoboka is meeting the health needs of his community through the health facility he established.

All these initiatives have arose in response to dire situations in many of the communities where our members are. Most of these communities are characterized by abject poverty, desperation, poor service

delivery and general loss of hope. Our members have responded to the higher calling to live beyond themselves and make their contribution to their communities. It is a call of manifesting the kingdom of God here on earth, where you can feel loved, experience forgiveness, kindness, and restoration of hope.

Our community has also experienced an increased number of individuals involved in church leadership. We believe that the call for transformation is rooted and is reflected in the nature and mission of the Church. We have been challenging each other on biblical models of human service and social transformation and how the church can be strategically positioned as an agent of change in community. And through the effort of our Pastors' Network, members are receiving moral support from each other and building skills and collaborations for better service.

As we traversed the country in the past months, we have noticed the strength and effectiveness of our small groups' model where accountability and genuine growth have vividly found expression amongst our members across the different districts of Uganda. Because of the strength of the small groups model, we have and are continually experiencing growth in our networks and as a result, self-supporting initiatives like SACCOs and recently launched Corporative Society (Cornerstone school's Alumni Cooperative Society) have sprung up. The mission of this Cooperative is; "To live a legacy of saving and Investment for posterity." The Cooperative now boasts of over 160 registered members who are committed to regular saving and joint investments.

In regards to our work with married couples' small groups, we recognize that any society's transformation is hinged upon the health of families in it. Our Couples' fellowship and retreats are facilitating the creation of an atmosphere for couples in our community to work on their relationships. What we are seeing now are high rates of stable families within our circles and couples beginning initiatives together to support the underprivileged in their communities.

"What does it take to create a better world? I feel that it's about some individuals to tap into the call upon their lives and selflessly serve with integrity, passion, diligence, and commitment to their high calling. And I believe that's the call upon all of us as we celebrate years ahead of us.

A gathering of friends at one of the COSA villages in Matugga



# Alumni Associations

## Rwanda: Stage 2 & 3

Like the work we carry on within our departments, it is only right to grow our leadership capacity to be effective in all we do. When putting together this article, I was inspired by the words of Ann McGee Cooper which resonated with me and the theme of our Newsletter:

*“The true heroes of the new millennium will be servant leaders, quietly working out of the spotlight to transform our world.”*

You will, in the paragraphs following, read about the work happening in Rwanda, executed by people in our community who not only hold high the banner of our vision but who also embody Cooper’s thoughts.

The COSA office in Rwanda is proud of the number of inspirational leaders rising through the ranks who are serving and leading their immediate environments in the unwavering Spirit of Jesus. In the past quarter alone, we’ve been able to execute many activities with our university/school going people who make up Stage 2 of our community. These members are the biggest participants in our annual family of friends retreat every year. For the first time, COSA Rwanda members were able to do a community project (Umuganda) together at our annual retreat. During this activity, a house was built for a widow from the ground up in the close neighborhood of our Rwanda leadership Academy.

More community outreaches have been spearheaded by our members at university, another reason for us to celebrate. One of those remarkable outreaches was the HIV women victims outreach carried out in the Southern Province of our country. In this outreach, besides, the food supplies, clothes, and piglets given, our members took with them the binding message of Jesus Christ and through counseling, they ministered healing to women affected with HIV.

Monthly, our members at university have been consistently reaching out to high schools in Kigali and other provinces sharing timeless truths which they acquired through discipleship at the Leadership Academy. This has not only ensured their growth, but it has also ensured continuity of and the propagation of the timeless truths, principles, precepts, and person of Jesus.

The COSA staff in Rwanda has proactively challenged and encouraged members at all stages to constantly mind their individual development as a good pathway for them to influence communities for

God’s kingdom. This they have done and still do by attending weekly and monthly fellowships that take place in universities across the country where our members are.

In our COSA stage 3, we are seeing a strong commitment to the vision of our members who are out of university. Our Marrieds’ fellowship, for example, is growing steadily, with meetings happening monthly since the beginning of the year. This has been a great place for our married members to grow through vulnerability and learning from their counterparts on matters of family in godly ways.

We asked Vedaste what belonging to the marrieds fellowship meant to him and his family, and this is what he had to say; “Belonging to this fellowship has opened me up to be vulnerable about my family issues with others. Many a time we are overwhelmed by what we go through in our marriages until we hear about what others are dealing with in theirs. I especially love it when my colleagues share their life experiences with us. This has had a tremendous contribution to my family and my marriage. In this fellowship, I have connected deeply with others and I have firsthand seen the value of what a community like this (Marrieds) contributes to the wellbeing of a family. I cannot be thankful enough.”

Besides the marrieds fellowship, our members are influencing their communities in humble but glorifying ways wherever they are at. Many are adding value in their work placements, communities and church families. In this article, we wanted to shine a light on just one of our people in stage 3 who are bringing to life the dreams of God in their immediate communities.

COSA members helping to build a mud house in a community service project





## Tanzania: Stage 2 & 3

This takes me back to what has been taking place throughout this year in my work with COSA in Tanzania. This year, we have celebrated a bigger number of University graduates that in previous years. Having these great numbers is not only a sign of an increase in the size of the COSA family here in Tanzania but also a great sign that more students are being supported and have been able to stay focused and stable during their studies and to graduate successfully. So, for COSA this has been a great achievement since each of these graduates has had to put their best foot forward by working hard and maintaining a good character that has helped them stay disciplined to what was required of them to graduate.

All our university graduates are job-ready and seasoned to take on any challenges in the professional world thanks to the discipline, character, and grit that they have been able to build over time while at university. We are confident in these guys and we believe they'll make for exemplary human resources, great role models and wonderful leaders driven by a great sense of purpose and conviction for their generation.

With the ranks of our university graduates increasing, the days ahead for Stage Three of our work look more exciting than ever before. We anticipate greater levels of commitment to the vision of Cornerstone and high participation levels in weekly and monthly fellowships. We have already had a taste of this in the recently held fellowships as well as in different leadership initiatives and forums like AYLf and the business forum.

A good number of individuals in this stage of our work have secured job placements in different places across the country where they are sowing seeds of influence fashioned after the principles, precepts and teachings of Jesus. We've also had a couple of weddings and additions to the family from those who have had the blessing of new-borns! It has just been a great year of blessings and celebrations.

We still anticipate many more weddings and new families in the coming days and even within these Institutions we see great opportunities to serve and to lead in such a way that we raise new generations that will run with the call to bring the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven.

The understanding of this newsletter's theme, "CALLED TO SERVE, CHOSEN TO LEAD," that has appeared in various forums of ours through out the year, has inspired us to advance our movement of transformational servant-leadership in many ways. As COSA we've been challenged to love more, to forgive more, to be more patient, to be more caring and understanding, to be accepting of one another and to also be tough a few times when we had to but most importantly among many others we've had to honor our callings and to serve to the fullest of our capabilities. Many of us have exhibited virtue in places we found ourselves in, show-cased talents, and great gifts worthy of God's children.

But we've been able to do so by intentionally investing in building ourselves piece by piece, thought by thought with all courage, discipline, faith, and determination for the greater good of our grander vision God has entrusted to us all.



## S. Sudan: Stage 2

We went to South Sudan in very troubled times of fear of war and insecurity. A time when the population was running into Uganda for refuge. Nothing would have given us the comfort like the phrase "Peace be with you". It is evident that this peace has been with us. Through the war times even when we had temporality relocate the school to Uganda.

Fast forward up to now, I can imagine the realization of this peace demonstrated through how our students now entrusted with leadership responsibility at the different university campuses. These is a show of faith in how they have conducted their lives and also a show of what to expect from these students in the years to come. The list of these students include Alier John Panchol now the University Student Body President for Livingstone International University. Angesha Thomas in the position of international Students Representative at Kyambogo, Okwera Francis is entrusted with leadership of the Social Work and Social Administration Students association at Kyambogo University.

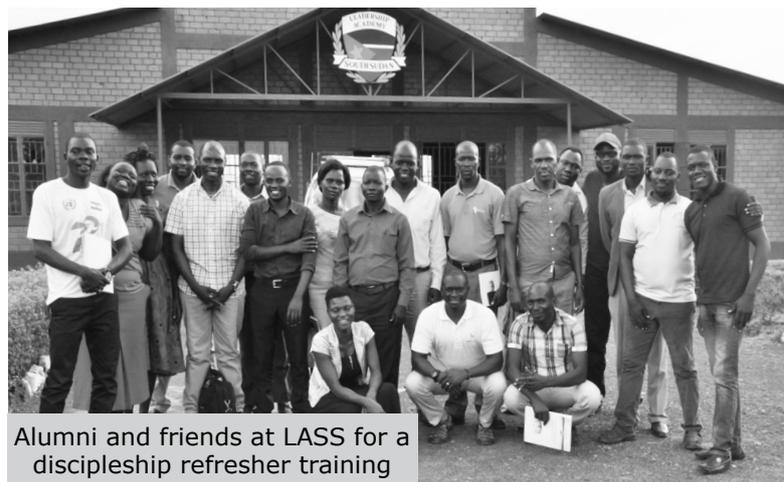
The list of our other students who have taken up elective position of responsibility include Ajwok Mary Valentino, Kiden Josephine, Bakata Emmanuel, Rumbek Emmanuel, Kinyera James, Utyera Lazarus, Lokuyu Boniface, Yagub Daniel, Buli James, Okenye Godfrey, Guya Joel, Oryem Bosco and Yengi Bismarck.

Not only in the above leadership positions, some of our students have gone ahead to form initiative and among them we have "Seeds of Hope" which is founded by a group of four students who leave in the camp as a way to improve the lives of the young South Sudanese where they lobby for resources from friends and add to what they have then buy scholastic materials for pupil so that they can remain in schools and also they do church ministries with the different churches in Kiryandongo refugee settlement while organizing youth workshops with the religious leaders so as to improve morals in the settlement. The other is also "Unity and Peace in diversity" founded by also a group of five old students where the always meet with the different cultural leaders

and organize gatherings that brings people from different tribal backgrounds together and talk about South Sudan as a nation not individual tribes.

As a way to keep our student active we continue to engage them in bread breaking knowing well that it's through eating together that we grow in our relationships with one another and bring to pass the vision we all so cherish, Academics school Visits that is regular as a way to bridge the gap between the students still at the academy and those that are out of the academy, retreats so as to always remind ourselves of the vision and re-unit again as a family among others.

Getting back to school which is the Leadership Academy of South Sudan, our theme has been manifested in our different activities starting with the new recruits in form five where this exercise brought in students from over 28 tribes representing every region in South Sudan that in the previous years we had not achieved, in addition we competed in the Secondary school torments with our girls playing the finals but in over role we became the third runner. As an approach to the community involvement five of our students had a radio talk show on Nehemiah Radio in Nimule sensitizing the community about the importance of educating and keeping the youth at school. We also offered a service at the market so as to create a relationship with the community and also promote a clean environment Movement.



# MILESTONES

May 2019 - Nov 2019

This section of our newsletter celebrates significant moments and “milestones” happening in our community around East Africa. We believe that significance comes in many forms, from the life changing events to the small moments in our connections with each other. This section is a space where we can record and celebrate events, best efforts, and accomplishments across our family of friends. Please note that this section is just a small glimpse of the accomplishments in our community across East Africa. If there is something significant you’d like mentioned in the next newsletter for yourself or another individual in our community, please email: [cstonemedia256@gmail.com](mailto:cstonemedia256@gmail.com)

## ACADEMICS

- 58 students (UG-CLA 19) joined COSA
- 3 students (TZ-CLA) received scholarships to pursue Bachelor Degrees in India.
- 2 students (TZ-CLA) received scholarships to pursue Bachelor Degrees in Costa Rica.
- 2 students (TZ-CLA) received scholarships to pursue Bachelor Degrees in Albania.
- 17 students (RW-COSA) graduated from university
- 7 students (RW-CLA) received university scholarships abroad (Canada, China, USA, Israel, etc.)
- 14 students (UG-CLA) received local university scholarships
- Nathanael Niyivuga finished his masters in Economics from the university of Kigali. Graduation is in December.
- 50+ students (UG-COSA) graduated university.

## LEADERSHIP & INITIATIVES

- Godfrey Mondli (TZ-CLA 14) is a founder of Maendeleo talk forum.
- Elisante Ephraim (TZ-CLA 16) is a new president for Builders of future Africa.
- Sanya Samuel (UG-CLA 07) has become a church elder at Habari Maalum Church.
- 18 recent graduates (TZ-CLA) have started or are involved in social impact initiatives
- 12 students (UG-COSA) have taken up various positions of leadership on campus
- UG COSA celebrated 25 years of CLA Boys existence with attendance of over 2000 guests at the ranch
- UG COSA Successfully registered the Alumni Co-optative society / Savings scheme with 164 in memberships

- UG COSA coordination office visited over 200 COSA alumni across the country within 6 day period of the COSA caravan in 80 districts of the country. We managed to celebrate the different initiatives that have been started by our members in those districts.

## JOBS

- Vincent Kuley (TZ-CLA 16) - Dummen orange as an IPM manager, Integrated pest management.
- Anold rweyemamu (TZ-CLA 15) - direct sales staff at National Microfinance Bank – Dodoma region.
- Robert Jambia (TZ-CLA 15) - sales manager at Amana bank Arusha.
- Nick Mshomi (TZ-CLA 16) - teacher at New dawn community secondary school.
- Gift Ayo (TZ-CLA 15) - community worker at International citizen service (ICS)
- Vaileth Nko (TZ-CLA 14) works with an organization that empowers the disabled.
- Mkasu John (TZ-CLA 15) works with a loan company.
- Musonera James (RW-COSA) - Sales Manager Hippo Ltd, October.
- Kayesu Maureen (RW-COSA) - Finance & Admin Asst. Grantx Inc. Canada. September
- Abera Deborah (RW-COSA) - Rwanda Utilities Regulatory Authority, RURA.
- Muhongayire Edith (RW-COSA) - Procurement officer, office of the Government Spokesperson.
- Maureen Nirere (RW-COSA) - recipient of Community Solutions Program Exchange Program for 4 month’s in Rochester, NY.

## Country Abbreviations:

UG: Uganda, RW: Rwanda, KA: Kenya, TZ: Tanzania, SS: South Sudan, BU: Burundi, DRC: D. R. Congo

## Program Abbreviations:

CLA: Cornerstone Leadership Academy, LASS: Leadership Academy of South Sudan, ETHS: Ekitangaala Transformation High School, AYLF: Africa Youth Leadership Forum, HLD: Highschool Leadership Development, YC: Youth Corps

## Others:

Uni.: University  
Gov.: Government  
Sch’p.: Scholarship

## FAMILIES

- Neriwa John (TZ-COSA 15) married Martha in October 2019
- Abrahaman Juma (TZ-COSA 13) married Elinzoo in August 2019.
- Ambrose Musinguzi (UG-COSA) and Magoli Waziri (TZ-COSA) have been blessed with another baby girl called Melisa.
- Sedar (RW-COSA) married Pamela in June 2019
- Enock & Denise Ngensonziza (RW-COSA) married in July.
- Ronald & Racheal Rutinduka (RW-COSA) married in July
- Emma & Ange Ndwano (RW-COSA) married in August.
- Peace Busingye (RW-COSA) gave birth to her first born in May.
- Modeste and wife Jackie (RW-COSA) gave birth to their 2nd child towards the end of August.
- Robinah (RW-COSA) gave birth to her 2nd child early in October.
- Justine (RW-COSA) also gave birth to her 1st child in June.
- Julius and wife (RW-COSA) had a baby boy too in July
- Dative (RW-COSA) gave birth to a baby girl in June
- Hope (RW-COSA) gave birth to a baby boy in May
- Opio Didimos (UG-COSA) got wedded
- Mugabi Eric (UG-COSA) weds Bitijuma Nabukalu (UG-COSA)
- Kansime Rose (UG-COSA) Introduced her Fiancee to her family
- Grace Natukunda (UG-COSA) Introduced her fiancée to her family
- Wanyenze Florence (UG-COSA) wedded Ivan Ndawula
- Lawrence Musinguzi (UG-COSA) got wedded.
- Ziraba Samuel (UG-COSA) weds Dorothy Owumugisha (UG-COSA).
- Alobo Betty (UG-COSA) got wedded.

## Called and Chosen

Jesus also taught frequently about using our lifetime in a way that counts for something in the “next chapter” of things. One such parable that made a big impression on me is called the Parable of the Talents - where he taught that: We are like the stewards of a wealthy master who have been given money (a mina) to invest on his behalf. And when the Master comes back the stewards are rewarded according to how they used what was entrusted with them.

In this Parable - the consequences of their actions are MASSIVE: *‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’ “The second came and said, ‘Sir, your mina has earned five more.’ His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’ Lk.19:17-19*

This teaches us that in eternity - the rewards we will receive far outweigh our efforts now to live our lives in service to the Master. As has been said: *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no human mind has conceived” -- the things God has prepared for those who love him.” I.Cor. 2:9*

I know many of you reading this are struggling with meeting your basic needs and this can overwhelm any considerations about investing for eternity. This was also true with the first followers of Jesus. But today he offers us the same advice and promise, that he gave to his disciples: if we “Seek First the Kingdom of God,” he would help us in regards to our material needs. (Mt.6:32)

It makes sense - does it not? If the Big Goal for our planet is to see the Kingdom of God coming to earth - then, the more we align our lives and our entire life purposes - with the over-arching “Cause of God” - the more we will be taken care of by God.

But please also realize that it says, *“Seek First” the Kingdom of God not “Seek ONLY.”* You still must be wise in the practical concerns of life. You must study, work hard, save, invest - generally be responsible in regards to the practical aspects of your life.

### *But how Do You Know Your Calling or Mission?*

This is a question I am frequently asked by young people It can take awhile to work this out. From my observation, it’s often not until around age

30 that most people settle into what will be their life work or vocation. (Jesus did not begin his public campaign until age 30. Mother Teresa was 38 when she left the convent to work on the streets.)

So, be patient with the processes God is taking you through, be faithful with whatever responsibilities are being entrusted to you and keep nurturing those dreams and aspirations in your heart that seem to be hinting at what your mission in life is.

But here is a helpful story about this called, *“The Three Great Trees”*: One night, over 2000 years ago, a man was sleeping only to be awakened in the middle of the night by an angel. The angel gave him 3 seeds to plant and told him to care for them until they grew tall. He was told that all of these 3 seeds had great potential. They would not only grow into nice trees...but they were destined for greatness and used for something important.

So, the man planted the seeds on a hill outside of town...and carefully watered them all his life until they grew tall. And as he cared for them, he would tell them that they were all destined for greatness.

Now, these 3 Trees had a way of communicating with each other and they would share the different things that their hearts were telling them - the great things that they felt they were going to become one day.



One tree said, *“I believe there is greatness in me and one day I will hold the most important and precious things in the world. So, I feel my wood will be made into a beautiful box, something like a treasure chest - for holding rare and precious things may be like all the king’s gold and jewels.”*

The 2nd tree said, *“I believe there is greatness in me and one day I will be made to carry very important people across the oceans. So, I see myself becoming a great sailing ship.”*

And the 3rd tree said, *“I also believe there is greatness in me but I feel I am to remain on this very spot where I will stand tall, be close to God and I will be seen by everyone in the world.”*

Now eventually the man who planted the trees died and people came to cut down all three of the trees for timber. The 1st who believed he would become a treasure chest - instead became a wooden feeding-box used for holding grass for cows and horses in a small shelter made to keep animals at night.

And the 2nd tree that believed he would become a

big ship and sail the ocean with important people - instead became a simple fishing boat used by a group of simple fishermen on a nearby lake.

And the 3rd tree that believed he would remain there on that hilltop growing tall, close to God, seen by the whole world - instead, was just cut up into long pieces and left like that - piled in pieces.

All of these trees wondered why they ended up in such humble forms when they had been told they were destined for greatness and had developed their visions for greatness. Years went by, and the trees almost forgot about their dreams.

Then one day, a man and woman looking for any accommodation came to spend a night in the barn where the 1st tree had been made into a feed box for animals from the first tree. And that night the woman gave birth and placed her baby in the feed box or manger. Angels came into the place and then the tree suddenly realized the great importance of this event. And, it realized that it was being used to hold the greatest treasure of all time: the baby Jesus - so the dream of its heart since long ago had been fulfilled.

30 years later, a group of men who often used the fishing boat made from the 2nd tree was trying to cross the sea at night when a great storm arose. The tree that has made into a boat - wondered if it was strong enough to keep these men safe. But one of them, who had been sleeping - got up and shouted to the storm: *"Peace be still!"* Then the storm stopped. At that moment, the tree suddenly realized that all along it had been carrying the King of Kings and his 12 disciples - and that the dream of its heart since long ago had been fulfilled.

A couple of years later, some angry people came to get the pieces that had been cut from the 3rd tree. They nailed two big pieces together into the form of a cross and the wood was carried on the back of a man - through the town and up to a hilltop as people mocked the man carrying it. This was the very hilltop where the tree had grown from and there the man carrying the cross was nailed on it and it was raised upright.

At that moment, the 3rd tree suddenly realized that the dream of its heart since long ago had been fulfilled. Because, it was now holding the Son of God and it was being raised high in a way that the whole world was to see and remember that day, forever.

The moral of this story is that we, the 'called and chosen' - all have seeds of purpose and of greatness deposited within us to fulfill our mission. And, those seeds will express themselves as some kind of yearning, ambition or feeling - that there is something we are supposed to be or something we are to do.

Maybe you have a feeling that you are to be the President of the Country. Well, it might happen - or it could just be that you are to take up leadership and influence many people.

Maybe you have a feeling that you can become an airplane Pilot: Well it might happen - or it could also be God's way of telling you to aim high, to fly high and become someone significant in life.

What is most important is for you to say: *"Here I am God - use me to build your kingdom."* For you are Called to Serve and Chosen to Lead.

***"To Serve" is simply: "To do useful work for others:"*** It could be your community, your family, your country and organization, a person or even God. Especially, to serve the big vision of Jesus - to see that better world, the Cause of God...Kingdom of God, coming on earth as it is in heaven.

Every time you choose to participate in a loving response, in bringing order where there is disorder, in bringing reconciliation where there is disunity, in bringing better service to others, in bringing integrity where there is lack of it, in an act of kindness, in a loving thought, in forgiveness - you are manifesting the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

And, as it comes in... there will be more harmony, more order, more peace, more kindness, more love of neighbor, more justice, more development... and, less corruption, less waste, less pain, less suffering, less conflict, less poverty.

***And 'To Lead' can simply be expressed as, to:***

- 1. Step Up*** - Move toward taking up responsibility not away from it.
- 2. Stand Up*** - Stand for those positions of responsibility in your school and society.
- 3. Speak Up*** - Find your voice and use it when you see things going wrong.
- 4. Style Up*** - Get yourself together, be a role model and example to others.

***In conclusion***, we are all called to use the time, treasure and talents to serve the 'Great Cause of God, which Jesus championed over and over - that his kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven.

But in the "Parable of the Wedding Feast" from Mt. 22:14 we get the famous statement: *"Many are called, but few are chosen."* And, this story, teaches us that to remain in the "program" (wedding)- we must take seriously the work of personal transformation and 'walk worthy of our calling.' (Eph.4:1)

And if we do, we will be used by God to our full potential - we will be chosen for greater responsibilities.



# **CALLED** to serve and **CHOSEN** to lead

There are many passages in our scriptures that use the words 'chosen' and 'called.'

For example, the ancient Hebrew prophet Jeremiah wrote: "The word of the Lord came to me saying: "I chose you before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations." Jer. 1:4-5

Such verses imply that we did not come here to planet earth in a haphazard way, but that there is some kind of grand plan and purpose for our being here.

Just like Jeremiah, I believe that you and I - made some kind of 'agreement,' in heaven with God before we were born and we are sent here to earth for specific reasons.

I have come to the conclusion that, as eternal souls undergoing development, we have come to live out a human life on planet earth for two main reasons:

1. To learn certain lessons that this particular world provides.
2. To fulfill the unique missions that we are tasked to carry out in our lifetime.

In regards to the 1st point: Life on earth, creates a difficult but potentially soul-transforming, learning environment. "

In regards to the 2nd point: Life on earth is still far from ideal. So, there is much work yet to be done - if we are going to see the kind of world that we want our grandchildren to live in. And, our individual missions all contribute towards the transformation of our world - to what Jesus called "the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth."

From an early age, I developed a feeling that I was not here on earth for mere survival, or to live a self-centered life, or just to try and collect as much wealth

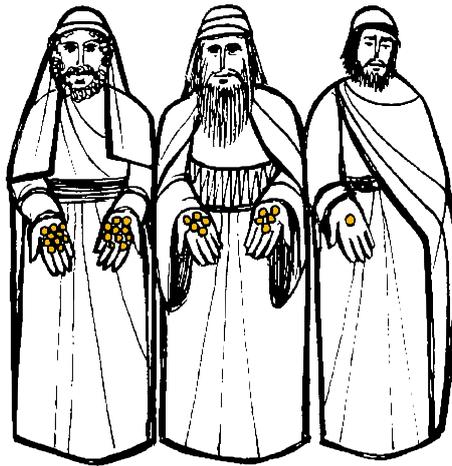
for me and my family. And, this realization led me to make a 'dangerous prayer' at the age of 19 - that went like this: "*Here I am Lord use me.*

*I will do what you want me to do.*

*I will go where you want me to go.*

*I will be what you want me to be."*

Soon, after I made that prayer, it seemed that an invisible hand gradually began to guide my life. I was taken through various experiences and came into contact with significant people - all of which prepared me for the journey that was ahead of me. Not long after that was when I felt I should leave the United States, where I had gone for University and return to Africa - for what, eventually, became my 'life work.'



Parable of the Talents  
Luke 19:17-19

There is a lesson in this: To fully activate the calling that is on our lives and maximize our potential, we must submit our will, our plans and our dreams to God. God has given us free-will and will not force his will on us. We fear to surrender absolutely - but the truth is his plans for us are even greater than the plans we make for ourselves.

About a year after this, when I was 20, my mother passed on. This tragedy underscored to me - the need for us to take seriously the limited time we have on earth. And to invest my life in things that would count in the 'bigger scheme of things' rather than spending my brief time on earth - chasing trivial pursuits.

The word 'invest' has always been key for me. Any resource we have can be invested to create a greater return in future or it can be consumed and enjoyed there and then.

This concept of investing - comes up strongly in our sacred texts, especially in regards to the lives we are given to live now on Planet Earth - and how we will be rewarded later.