

Cornerstone

Newsletter & Magazine December 2020

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

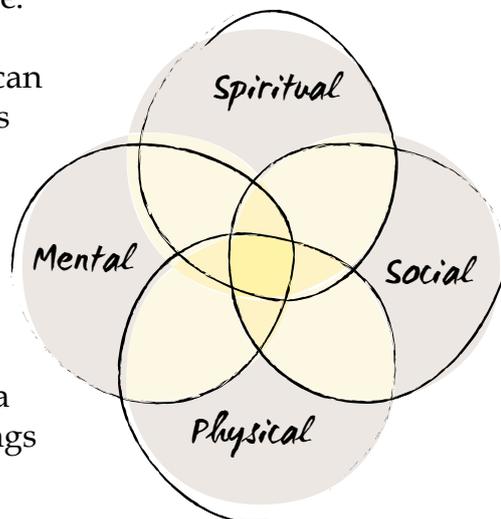
STAYING STRONG AMIDST CHALLENGES

The year 2020 will go down for many people as one of the most challenging periods they have experienced in their lifetime. And, we still don't know how 2021 will turn out, especially in regards to the current pandemic.

But what we do know is that God's grace will be sufficient for whatever challenges are ahead of us in life - as long as we do our part to stay strong and keep pressing forward. In this newsletter, Tim will share 7 thoughts about how we can cultivate strength, resilience and faith despite the challenges life brings our way (see article starting on back cover).

The first four come from a diagram that we have used in our discipleship material about "The Principle of Balanced Living." Over the years, we have found it particularly helpful to remind us to see life from this wholistic perspective and to give proper attention to each area of life.

From the diagram we can see that these 4 areas overlap and are inter-related. This means, that only when we give proper attention to each area and create healthy habits in all the 4 areas - will we live a balanced life which brings a sense of well-being.



Interestingly, there is a verse in the gospel of Luke 2:52 - that mentions all of them when describing the life of Jesus as a young man. It tells us that Jesus grew in 4 areas: "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and favor with Man." And in this passage we can see the 4 areas of life!

1. Wisdom - that is the Mental aspect;
2. Stature - that is the Physical aspect;
3. Favor with God - which is the Spiritual aspect;
4. Favor with man - which is the Social aspect.



Inside

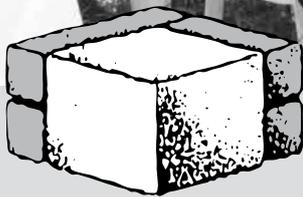


and...

- * Program updates amidst the Covid-19 pandemic
- * Centerfold Pictorial
- * Thoughts from Tim



Discipleship classes at Ekitangaala Transformation Highschool happening 'outdoors' as part of Covid-19 SOPs



Cornerstone Development Africa

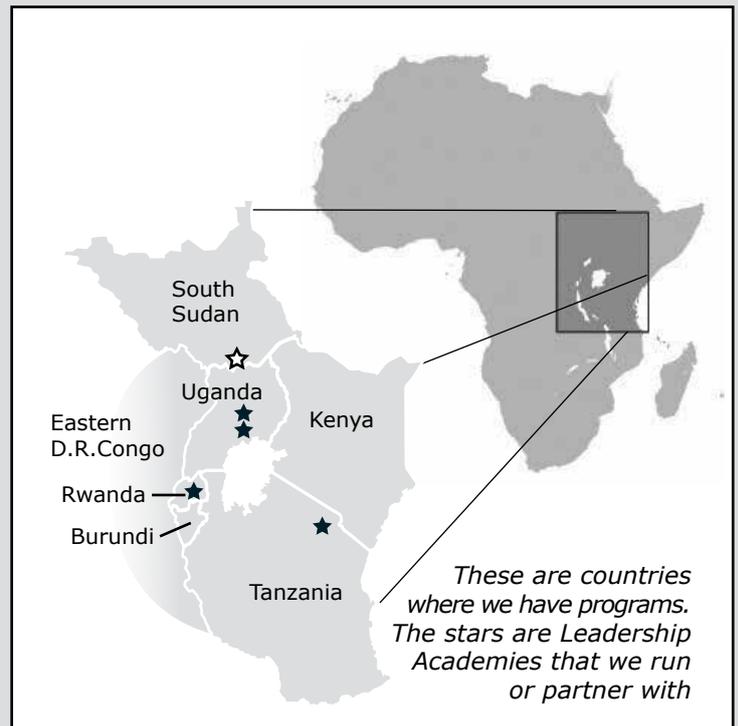
Our Vision: *An ever-expanding movement of transformational servant leaders in Africa, building a better world.*

Our Mission: *To be a family of friends in the Spirit of Jesus working together to develop generations of young leaders with vision and purpose, personal integrity, and committed to unity, reconciliation, and long-term relationships.*

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, five homes for homeless kids, three hostels for university students 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

2



These are countries where we have programs. The stars are Leadership Academies that we run or partner with

all that 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.

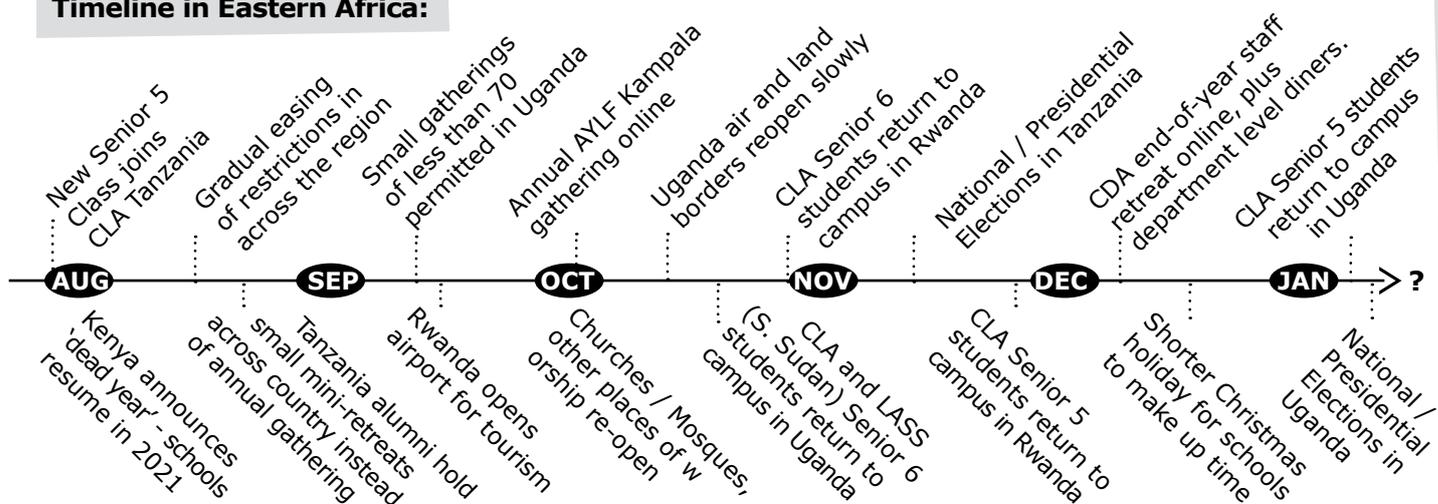
In our character development curriculum we teach the timeless, universal principles of forgiveness, honesty, integrity, compassion, kindness, hard work, humility, and of service to the less fortunate, as exemplified in the teachings of Jesus and the perennial wisdom of all traditions, but without affiliation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

See more online: www.CDAfrica.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 in our community, reflecting on 'finding the gifts in this time' of the global Covid-19 pandemic. Now in this current edition, we turn to highlighting our PROGRAMS in general, and ways we have found to 'stay strong amidst challenges'!

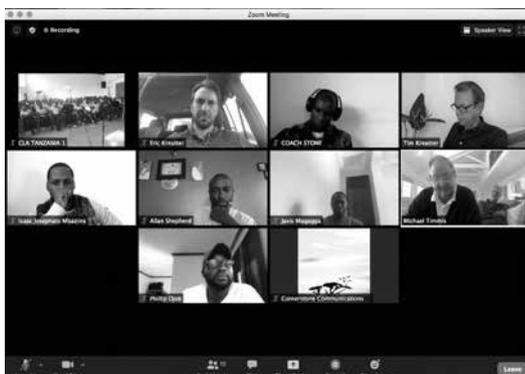
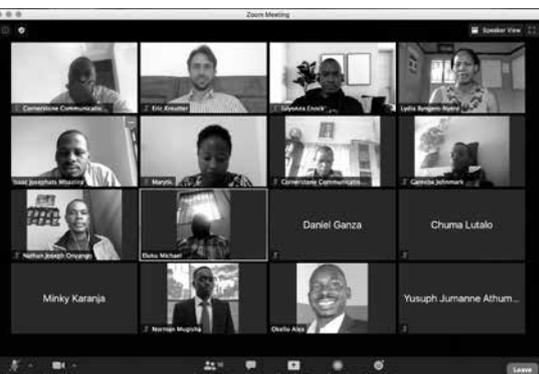
What have we been up to?

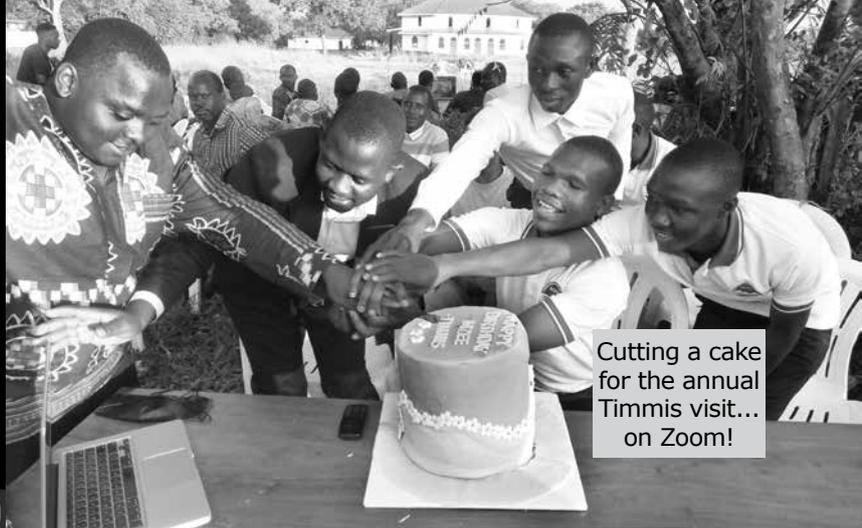
Brief Covid-19 Pandemic Timeline in Eastern Africa:



Like many others around the world, this year has been a year unlike any other! We have been able to navigate various challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic effectively by adapting to new ways of operating, allowing us to continue investing in the lives of young people in significant and meaningful ways. This year, students in our schools embraced online learning, and we were able to find new and innovative approaches to have many of the weekly, monthly, and annual gatherings that are usual in our broader community. The various restrictions this year forced us to take significant steps towards leveraging new technologies in our work too. This has opened up many new possibilities for us both in our organizational management systems, and also in our programmatic impact, by reaching much broader audiences that we previously thought possible.

This year, we have faced our fair share of hardship through it all too. We all had to wrestle with the new challenges of working more from home, and learning new ways of being effective in new work environments. Though we were able to retain all our staff, individuals in our community faced economic set backs as family members or friends lost jobs, and scarce resources grew more strained amidst the broader economic depression. Students did struggle adapting to online learning, and in some cases, they have had to start working in order to help their families make ends meet at home. We also experienced the loss of two individuals from our alumni community who committed suicide in the midst of the added mental and emotional stress of lock-down restrictions. Despite it all, we have continued to journey through the whole experience together, in our offices and in our groups of beneficiaries, and truly believe that we have come out stronger as a community in the end!





Cornerstone Leadership Academies

Uganda

I don't think there has been a year of my life that I have learnt so much, and experienced so much personal growth as this one! When we started out, we had a lot of ambitions, so many plans and things laid out to be done. We began with the recruitment of our new incoming classes at the leadership academies in Uganda. But just as our students had started settling in, then the fear of the COVID-19 pandemic started reaching us, and in March a total lock down was effected so schools were ordered to close.

It was hard to see a clear way forward, but we kept engaging students online, and the lockdown presented a platform from which we would practice what we'd taught our students over the years. Convictions like: "the most hopeful in the room, has the most influence," now had to be tested in real time.

None amongst us knew exactly what to do and how to go about the situation, but we are resilient people and have learned to stand in any storm. Unlike many out there, we'd been equipped through years of fellowshiping together, to know where to put our trust in days like these. Scriptures like the one in Matt 8:23-27 became like fountains of hope to me:

"Jesus entered into a ship, and his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!"

Knowing that I am known by the storm-calmer - Jesus brought this peace to me that Saint Paul famously said 'surpasses all understanding.'

4

Even though we closed the schools, teaching and learning didn't stop. We kept in touch with our students through online tools like zoom and Whatsapp. As much as we wish we could have avoided the pandemic altogether, it has proved to be a blessing in disguise for us in rural Ekitangaala Ranch. This season has pushed our boundaries, forced us to embrace new technologies, and accelerated learning for us in many ways!

Today, we are in the process of having a network booster constructed that will enable us to have network in our community that lacked both internet and mobile connectivity. We are very happy about this development, thanks to God for the providence. Zoom and WhatsApp became our principal tools of engagement for our students in Academics and Discipleship classes during the lockdown. Change is never easy but the joy of recognizing that God has a new future laid out for us if we embrace it gives us hope. We can now move forward with confidence that we can use alternative ways of teaching our students outside the classroom in the digital domain of e-learning.

We thank God that also during this time we have been able to have a face lift in our school. We did an expansion of the computer lab, a face lift in our library, repairs in the teachers houses, the kitchen, student's dormitory among others. Right now, our candidate class (Senior 6) is here with us to complete their academic year. We are also hopeful that our S.5 class will soon join us soon too as we have still continued to engage them through e-learning.

While others are complaining about the circumstances, we are striving to continue innovating and advancing and this gives us a sense of fulfilment knowing in our hearts that we are doing the best with the opportunities we have here on earth. As a school we still remain committed to excellence in all ways without any excuse of COVID-19!

By Kenneth Tumwine

Rwanda

Throughout history, one thing has held true when it came to advancement of civilization: humanity is moved forward more in the face of storms and adversity than in their absence. Even from our sacred scriptures, we see story upon story of God's dealing with people by way of challenges. It is as though humanity cannot fully advance without an advent of a huge storm. Study the history of Rwanda and you'll know what I'm talking about.

According to the Gospels, one evening Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Suddenly a furious storm came up, with the waves breaking over the boat that nearly flooded it. Jesus was asleep in the boat, and the disciples woke him and asked, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" The Gospel of Mark (4:35-41) then states that:

Jesus woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

During the time of storms such as the current pandemic, all people are completely affected by it, but interestingly, some people are not. Somehow, some people appear immune from the effects of the storm - being at complete peace with it the way Jesus was in the boat. I feel that it is these kinds of people who understand the deeper source of life that we are sustained by, and it is these who are able to give hope (and thus lead) others through it all.

When our school (CLA Rwanda) was closing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I took time and prayed with both the staff and the students together. I wanted everyone that day to go away with an assurance that Jesus was going to be by each one's side. Over the coming seven months of schools being physically closed, we were one of the few schools in Rwanda that was able to quickly adapt and continued operations... completely through distance learning and online! Everything continued as according to our work plan. Staff meetings didn't stop, teaching both the national Curriculum and our discipleship program didn't stop. The only thing that wasn't there was our physical presence with one another. With the support of our Regional Office, we were introduced to the idea of remote working at the time everybody needed it the most.

We've heard shocking statistics and reports from government and other civil society organizations on the impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing of young people in Rwanda (and across the continent as well). For instance, there have been a lot of teenage pregnancies as well as abortions on the part of young people who were now redundant due to schools' closure. In other instances, young girls have been married off to older men as a means to get livelihood for families who were hit bad by the effects of the pandemic. I am glad to write that none of these misfortunes has happened to our students at CLA-Rwanda thanks to the consistent dedication of our teaching staff and the entire Cornerstone community who took it upon themselves to walk with our students diligently through this 'storm' in the spirit of Jesus.

We arranged with authorities in Rwanda for our staff to visit students immediately after initial travel restrictions were eased, a gesture many of our students applauded. Those who couldn't travel, were assigned students to talk with via phone. Most of the lessons took place on zoom and via whatsapp, through support from the regional office, all students who had no access to a smart phone and data, to make learning possible, were fully equipped with brand new smart phones from the school. And every student, received a monthly internet allowance to make lessons efficient and effective.

We continue to keep the main thing the main thing even after schools have been allowed to resume with only candidate classes allowed to return. These storms are temporal, and they all have one thing in common... they all come to PASS!

By Sam Birondwa



Students back on CLA Rwanda campus... all SOPs observed!

Tanzania

In these uncertain times, one thing that we can be certain about is that every year comes with its own challenges and has different defining moments. Indeed, this year seems extraordinary, but we can't lose sight of the notion that challenges are part of life and as we seek to follow the principles, precepts, and person of Jesus, they can help us transition through new levels of growth.

The past six months have really stretched and tested our capacity to manage challenges, as we've had to adapt quickly to huge immediate changes, and keep our programs running at the same time. Looking back, it might seem like we've done alright, but it can be hard to appreciate the immense complexity of decision making that it took to navigate the challenges, since at every single turn we had to run simulations of all possible new scenarios playing out.

The Covid-19 pandemic brought about many changes which were highly disruptive to all of us. At the very beginning, as an academic institution we received a national directive to go on unplanned break for an undefined length of time. For us holidays are always meant to ring bells of joy, fun and re-union but it didn't feel the same at all this time round. Darkness and hopelessness were hovering around with little to no signs of us going back to normal. Our lives only got centered on precautionary rules and practices, among which were; wear your mask, keep a social distance, sanitize, sanitize and sanitize some more. Our students especially (those in the candidate class) were just two months from their National Examinations and were left troubled and completely perplexed because of the situation. The future only looked foggy.

Putting it all in perspective, this was a time for us to learn and to adapt to new things, it was a time to teach ourselves to stay strong amidst challenges. It pushed us to learn and adapt to the use of ICT tools and virtual spaces such as WhatsApp and Zoom in facilitating our need for continued work and engagements that include learning and teaching, meetings and fellowships, etc. It was difficult at first but with time both teachers and students were able to catch up with the 'new normal'. With the help and support of parents and guardians to support students in the online learning, it all got better with time.

6 We learnt that challenges do not come to kill us but to make us better.

The difficulties we got to face this year have pushed us to learn very many new things that still are and will remain useful even post COVID-19. Here are a few 'reminders' to encourage us all in this time:

Reminder #1: You're doing great already! You're still breathing, your heart's beating, and you have what it takes to walk ahead powerfully. Remind yourself every day - "I am okay. Everything will be okay. I always get through somehow. I trust this."

Reminder #2: This too shall pass. Challenges are like storms that arrive in your life, like a weather pattern, storms have a life span. And your life span is longer than most storms' you'll ever encounter! This storm came and it will soon be no more, and you will still be here.

Reminder #3: Diamonds are made under pressure, and so are you. Your challenges will be the making of you. Life challenges pressuring you are softening your rough edges, calling you to evolve, buffering you to expose the power and beauty you have. On the other side of this challenge, you will shine again, brighter than before.

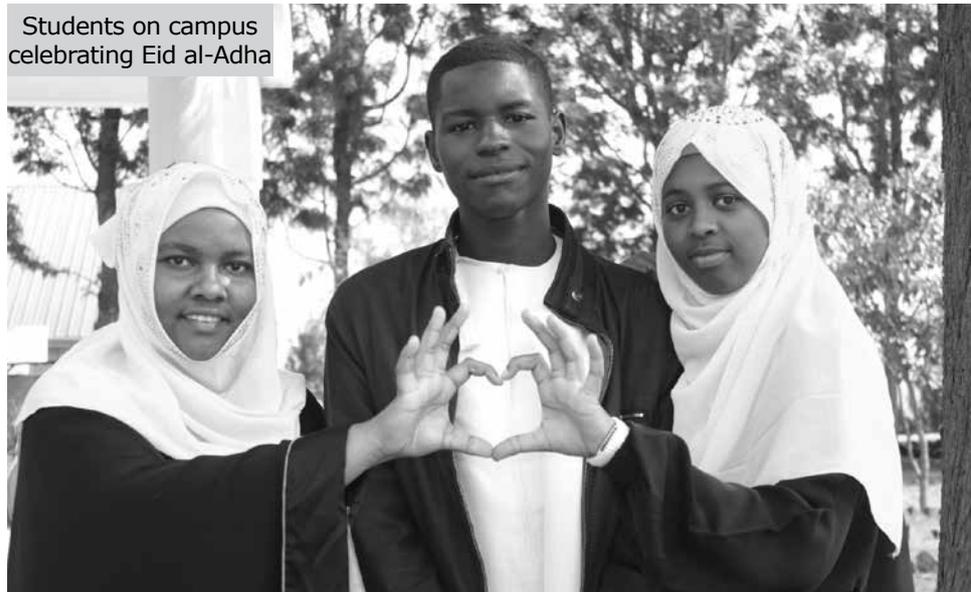
Reminder #4: Remember that when it feels like life is falling apart, sometimes it's actually life's way of spring cleaning you (and your circumstances) to prepare you for the coming summer season of your life. So even though it's tempting to think that life is beating down on you, pause to consider if maybe the slate is being wiped clean in order that something better can form.

Reminder #5: What we resist persists. So, it's vital TO let go and flow. Use this mantra on a daily basis... "This is happening, and I choose peace." Your attitude is EVERYTHING when it comes to staying strong. You will either become a victim to what is happening or you will rise up and be a victor.

The choice is yours, and it all starts in your mindset.

By Julius Ejalam

Students on campus celebrating Eid al-Adha





An HLD / TYLEP gathering
- social distance style

Outreach Initiatives

Highschool Leadership Development (HLD)

& Youth Impact Mission (YIM)

The year 2020 started with plenty of excitement about the opportunities that were expected to come with it. But alas, along came COVID-19! The speed at which Covid-19 events unfolded caught many of us off-guard, and we spent much of the year just trying to keep up with the changing operational landscape, navigating different restrictions, planning, and re-planning, and pre-planning again with each of the changes. The biggest measure taken by governments to slow the spread of Covid-19 that directly affected the demographics we work with (in HLD and YIM) were the closure of high schools. In Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and DRC along with nation-wide lockdowns, high schools were closed with little advance warning in March. Even in Tanzania where the government did not put the entire country in a lockdown, secondary schools were closed indefinitely. It was only in Burundi, where there was very little government intervention to slow the spread of Covid-19 that our work continued undeterred by the pandemic.

For nearly three months in the 2nd quarter of this year these secondary schools were closed (with the exception of Burundi), and we could not interact physically with the students at all. This restriction also affected our staff teams in the region. In order to justify their pay, we had to re-strategize our work plans and think about how to continue advancing with our vision and mission. We understood that maintaining connection with the students scattered all over (and some in very hard to reach areas) was going to be a long and tough journey for us, and from early on we knew we had to be creative as we could not figure out a one-size-fits-all approach to keep the work going forward.

In looking for a way forward, there was a lot of learning from other departments in the greater Cornerstone Development community especially the Africa Youth Leadership Forum (AYLF), which has many similarities in program activities and

implementation approaches to what we do. We realized that we could leverage on the earlier discoveries and learnings by AYLF and other departments to work more online and accomplish our annual goals and targets. Social platforms (WhatsApp, YouTube), video conferencing platforms (Zoom, Webex, Facebook live), various Google services, Workplace, and also teleconferencing, among others became incredibly useful tools that we have used. We have been able to conduct small group fellowships, workshops and topical discussions, online conferences, as well as producing inspirational audio and video podcasts, among other activities.

The new opportunity to connect and engage our audiences in new mediums was exciting, however, it also brought to light challenges our community members were facing. Some of our members' families were struggling to meet basic needs, especially food. We worked with our members to support each other by mobilizing donations from within our community. We could only do so much, yet the need was huge, and even at the time of writing this article the needs are still overwhelming as many parents and guardians have lost jobs and their businesses have really suffered.

We experienced further challenges regarding internet infrastructures especially in extremely hard to reach areas. Furthermore, where there WAS good internet infrastructure, many of our students had problems accessing smartphones or computers to connect to the internet – so they had to borrow their parents, and could only do so at limited times in the evenings. If some had smartphones and/or computers of their own, then the challenge was around affording to buy data to keep engaged online. In such cases, teleconferencing (using phone lines and adding participants to group calls) became proved to be more effective in reaching people at vital times.

As a program and leaders, we have learned new ways of doing our work in situations of crisis. We have grown as leaders and leveraged this complicated situation to learn to solve problems through creative thinking. We are excited to continue to utilize these innovative strategies and incorporate them into our programs and activities implementation going forwards.

With these innovations, we are proud to say that we have remained connected, working in the spirit of Jesus to impact the lives of young people in relevant and transformational ways.

*By Edmond Elasu, Peter Nkotanyi,
and Joram Nkumbi*

Outreach Initiatives

Africa Youth Leadership Forum

Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer! For I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit East Africa, many of us were in a state of confusion. There were many questions about the real existence of the disease, how it is spread, and whether people were dying from it. I recall having a conversation with a colleague in the office early on about COVID-19 in China, and its potential to spread eventually to Africa. It seemed far-fetch then, but soon enough the realities of the pandemic had come close to home. There was no more confusion, the virus was real, and the consequences had far-reaching effects on our way of life and work. It has affected how we deliver our programs in an unprecedented way.

We work with student leaders at Universities in 7 countries across Eastern Africa. Working fast to control the spread of COVID-19, the governments here locked down high population centers first. Universities were among the first things to be closed in March 2020. This was followed by subsequent lockdown measures that limited movement and physical interactions between people.

With our target groups and staff members unable to physically interact as usual, we had to re-group, re-think, and re-strategize how we were going to keep engaging the young people we work with during this time. We quickly realized that we could leverage and ramp-up the existing internet infrastructure we had to continue to work and accomplish our annual goals and targets. Doing this, we explored massive expansion of our engagement with beneficiaries through both old and new online platforms. It wasn't easy to get used to, but it was surprising how quickly people adapted and were willing to find innovative ways to connect - a testament to the enthusiasm of our community.

As leadership team using these new-found online tools, we were able to engage our team members in one-on-one situations to hear from them their personal and work concerns during the pandemic. This helped us learn how together we could find solutions for both personal and work problems, but as well understand if there were emerging concerns from our community members that needed immediate attention. We also engaged our leader-



This year Makerere University recognized Heritier Mufano as "the best overall student leader of 2020"

ship teams in group catch-up calls at country and regional levels to keep the bigger regional perspective in mind. We have been doing this on a weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly basis.

In creative ways, we have been able to re-invent and implement our the small group meetings, seminars, workshop, conferences, and gatherings that we used to do physically using the online internet platforms, and we have carried on with our work. We are happy to report that our AYLF community is alive and well amidst all the changes this year - we have stayed connected to each other, and we have continued investing in the youth we work with. The credit goes to the leadership teams for quick learning and adjustment to the new normal. Our small groups continue meeting faithfully, the relationship are thriving in the community because our members intentionally connect through these challenging times, and we have even seen increased participation on our online events (through new initiatives such as 'watch parties').

The new normal of virtual learning has also had its challenges. Internet connectivity and access is the biggest challenge for our members, and aside from network connection, is also financially expensive for most of our members to keep online engagements. Virtual work has also brought a lot of strain on our staff in terms of mental health - working at home, attending many meetings while seated in one place on a computer, dealing with kids home-schooling, etc.

As 2020 comes to an end, we are grateful for the support we have received from our partners. We know that we will continue living with COVID-19 for a while longer, but have hope that it will one day pass. We have learned a lot this year - we are more creative and resilience, and we will capitalize on this to keep moving forward.

By Allan Sheperd

Salaam Mentoring

As Muslims, our holy book, the Quran, encourages to stay strong amidst tough times and challenges. Chapter 94:5-6, teaches: “Verily with every difficulty, there is relief.”

Indeed, this year has not been easy with so much loss and fear both in the region and around the world. At some point, we too felt powerless and helpless for our lives. Our work was disrupted by the lockdown to points of despair. But in it all, we are grateful however for the blessings that God has granted us, and our community has grown in faith. Our love for God, family, and neighbor more than anything has been tested during this time, but it has also grown stronger than any other.

As a program, we’ve continued with our commitment to advance the message of Jesus to our community. Regardless of whatever obstacles that have come our way, we have continued and still are continuing to build this movement of like-minded peers building meaningful relationships in the spirit of Jesus. In our work, we focus on:

- Loving God and Neighbor.
- Advancing a message of reconciliation and unity across all that is dividing humanity
- Maintaining a long-term partnership with each other.
- Being peace-brokers for a better and peaceful world.

Currently, Salaam mentoring program has over 34 small groups that meet regularly across the four East African countries we work in: Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda. These groups are composed of Christian and Muslim friends who meet weekly to pray together, share their personal journey with Jesus, personal life experiences, build meaningful relationships, support one another, and celebrate the friendship created by our family of friends.

In order to advance our work during the lockdown in countries like Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda, we utilized the online platforms (both video conferencing and social media) to reach out to our small group members so that we maintain our culture of meeting together in prayer, support and sharing in the words of Jesus. We have learned that the earlier followers of Jesus were encouraged never to stop

gathering with other believers.

These efforts however came with challenges like in some areas where internet reception and penetration are so bad, the high cost of internet and smart phones that could facilitate online engagements for some of our members. So, we are glad that the countries in which we experienced lockdowns, are now resuming their normal physical small group meetings and we continue to pray and believe for the best in the coming months.

Our friends in Tanzania were able to hold more physical meetings this year because the country as a whole didn’t respond to the Covid-19 pandemic as severely as others. Our outreaches continued to influence young people to live the way of Jesus. Our friends in Tanzania continue to carry out outreaches in Universities and high



A Salaam small group fellowship meeting together in Kampala

schools, join radio talk shows to promote the virtues of unity and reconciliation in the spirit of Jesus. Other countries are following suit after the lockdown was lifted.

Despite the challenges we have experienced this year, the Salaam mentoring program continues to influence a generation of young people in the Muslim community to find common ground with Christians in the teachings and person of Jesus. Through the program, our members continue to spread and live out the values of unconditional love, generosity and compassion as taught by Jesus to promote a more peaceful and better world through building meaningful relationships.

By Faisal Kateyenge



The Learning Center staff on a recent team-building retreat in Jinja

Youth Corps

Dealing with the unexpected is part of life. Knowing this however doesn't make it any easier when you're going through the difficult time.

Our department dealt with several significant, unexpected back-to-back losses during this period. Enduring such brutal experiences in quick succession knocked every last one of us so hard, but with time, our team got back up on their feet to continuing empowering at-risk young people in this country.

In this, we found comfort in other people's courage. One particular thought that we persistently reflected on was from Harriet Beecher Stowe;

"When you get into a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems as though you could not hang on a minute longer, never give up then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn."

When the total lockdown was announced in Uganda in March, we were able to relocate almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the kids in the Youth Corps homes back to their relatives. We closed down the Youth Corps Learning Center, and we stopped all physical weekly staff fellowships in our facilities. This was not easy at all, considering the at-risk nature of youth we work with, but we had to comply with government mandates. In the end, amidst all the turmoil we did lose contact with some of the youths in our sponsorship program (who were sent back to their families when schools closed), and, we know that at least three of our staff lost their loved ones, amongst others.

routines, and relationships caused many people we work with to adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms like sleeping too much, watching too much TV to deal with the pain and frustration, depression, over-eating and general idleness. However, we realized that getting to a place where we were able to move forward emotionally and physically required that we did something about what we were experiencing.

We decided that we would take the situation for what it was so as to offset the pressure that had arose from living in denial of what was happening. We let go of our fantasies and advanced the belief that the only thing we had control over was ourselves. We figured that wearing new lenses from which we could view our world with freshness of perspective and a focus on things within our control, would bring us back on track.

This is when we had a paradigm shift about all that was happening: Not only were we going to survive the season, but we could also seize new opportunities this season presents and make something more meaningful out of it all!

We navigated past the challenges of travel restrictions by adopting video conferencing and online communication. Then we began experimenting with new ways of working, such as offering online counselling



Kids practicing their debating skills!

sessions with the kids who were not physical with us. The tailoring vocational program at our Learning Center also saw new business prospects in the production of face masks that the government required of all people out in public once lock-down started easing up.

We became intentional about Self-Care and Self-Compassion. Times of grief or struggle bring new barriers and challenges to self-care, even though these times are exactly when we most need self-care for its stress-reducing effects. Despite the laxity to engage in self-care activities, when the lockdown lifted, we decided that we would find ways in which we would engage both our staff and beneficiaries in team building activities for the sake of their mental health. We held joint parties for the children in different homes, and, we had a retreat in Jinja for our Learning Center staff, mentors, counsellors and Resettlement and Boarding Programme officers (RBP). We encouraged each other to exercise regularly, as well as take ample rest and healthy diet.

At the retreat, we stressed the importance of growing our social networks; and cultivating meaningful relationships on the premise that they are vital for good mental health, resilience, and getting through tough times. We pointed to ways this would be done and one strong thought was reaching out to those most lonely and isolated. We all need a support system, a community, to fall back to when we can't do everything we usually do for ourselves.

As a department, we are now intentionally invested in building relationships internally and externally as best as we can. Through our community outreach program we have created new partnerships with like-minded partners such as Jaja's foundation, Straight Talk Foundation, and Teen Challenge. We are also learning to incorporate Communion with the divine, through prayer and meditation, spending time in sacred spaces, and seeking the wisdom of trusted spiritual leaders, as a way to cope up with the storm. Our staff and beneficiaries are taking the issue of faith and spirituality very serious. Joint prayer services for children in the different homes, are being held centered around the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

It has not been an easy season, but we have been able to stand firm and rise to the challenge. We have expanded our capacity for perseverance and resilience, and we have more hope than ever that this too shall pass - our best days are yet to come!

By Harriet Adongpiny



Group counseling session with girls at Kyambogo home



Wilter conducting a health talk



Kids going for a dental checkup!



Harriet and resettlement team visiting a girls relatives

Cornerstone

Cornerstone

Newsletter Pictorial



Facemasks now part of the uniform at CLA Rwanda!



Kigali Hostel construction progress



This year, a smaller version of the National Prayer Breakfast happened at statehouse, Entebbe.

The AYLF Uganda gathering this year was a 'hybrid-event' with a small live portion, a zoom-cast, and watch parties





Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) at the Cornerstone Head Office in Kampala: Facemasks, temperature checks, and lots of hand washing!



The "Hi-5" concept was initiated of encouraging people to meet in smaller groups of five instead of our previous huge fellowships!



Staff at the Ekitangaala Ranch looking for network signal to log on to Zoom meetings!



Salaam coordinators regreat, watch parties with speakers zooming in



Many meetings held in outdoor environments this year for better ventilation



Men's program with Alfred Edakasi, continuing to meet amidst SOPs

A Family of Friends!



Cornerstone Alumni Programs

Uganda

Challenges have always been part of our life's journey, and this year, for most of us it was the COVID-19 pandemic. From the great to the least, we have ALL been shadowed by what I have referred to as "the Global Darkness". This darkness has tested us in many ways, our strength, our patience, and our values.

From our families, to peers and to all people we serve, it's been a season we'll hardly forget for the rest of our lives. Most of our members in Stage 2 have been pushed to their limits, many scrounging for basic necessities of life. Serving our 'family of friends' throughout this whole time hasn't been easy on our part. Similar to our members, we've had to deal with a lot of issues as a team that have slowed our response to crisis in significant ways. We've had to even deal with ourselves, and our own fears that crept into our belief system from early on in the pandemic.

Even amidst the chaos and unpredictability around 2020, It would be unfair to not highlight what an eye-opener this year has been for us too. One of the realizations we have come to is that none of us are immune to anxiety and discomfort in the face of challenges. We've all had to deal with the fear of uncertainty occupying our minds, and we've had to prepare ourselves for what next year may turn into should our "new normal" not return to our old normal.

But with our great family of supportive brothers and sisters we've not been short of little rays of hope and love that have made us see the light

above the seemingly prevailing darkness. The culture of staying in touch with each other, more than anything, has motivated us to shift our attention from the challenges at hand and has pointed us to the virtues of hope and courage, laying a fertile ground for us to better serve those in our care at Stage 2.

Knowing that "all things work together for good," (Romans 8:28), has played a vital role in reminding us at Stage 2 how what we go through may not necessarily be against us but rather may be a means to fulfilling God's plan in our lives. Whereas everything around us can be uncertain, we can fix our gaze on Jesus, the one who never wavers.

I remember Prof: Ezra Suruma a former Finance Minister in our country, while sharing in one of our Men's online video-conference gatherings said that, "Times of trials, emotional fatigue, and stress, have a way of weighing many down, but for you and I here, we cannot afford to forget how faithful and good our GOD is and has been. Our faith may falter but the jurisdiction of His mercy never for once allows it to fail."

The dark times we are in may overshadow our faith, but that doesn't mean that Jesus who is our light is absent, it doesn't mean that the love we receive from His friends is absent. All we need is to look beyond this darkness and see the light in us through Jesus.

As the psalmist, who pens beautifully these words in Psalms 30:5c, says; "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

By: Musinguzi Vasco

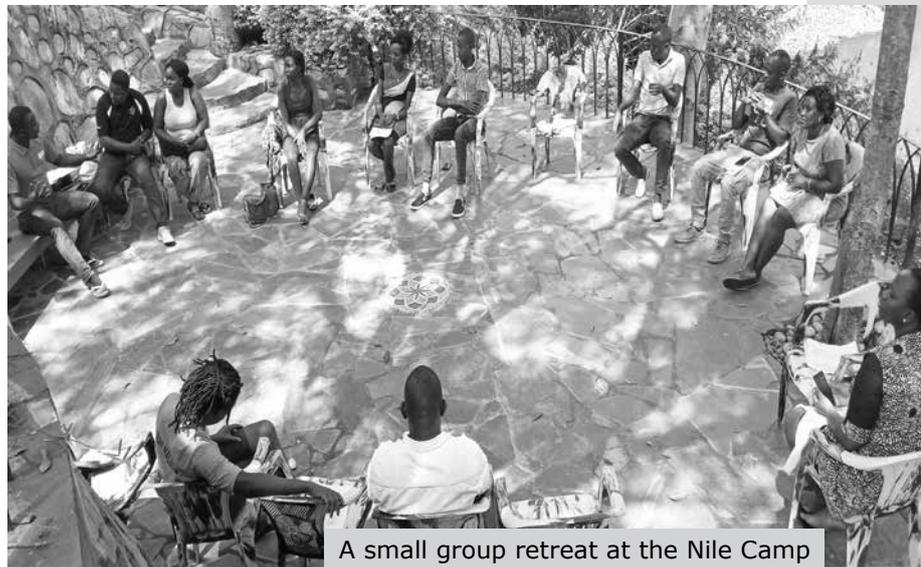
There is no easy way to say it: Our entire alumni body of Cornerstone programs has been affected in different ways by the heightened uncertainty over the economy, employment, finances, relationships, and of course, the physical and mental health of many in this country. Yet as human beings, we crave security. We want to feel safe and have a sense of control over our lives and well-being. Fear and uncertainty left many feeling stressed, anxious, and powerless over the direction of their lives. So, we've found ourselves emotionally drained and resisting the downward spirals of endless "what-ifs" and worst-case scenarios about what tomorrow would bring.

In this, our programing has dramatically pivoted to navigating the restrictions of public gatherings, and at this same time responding to the real needs of our members. And everyone had very different needs depending on their circumstances and how they react. Some people seemed to enjoy taking on new risks and living unpredictable lives, while others found the randomness of life in lock-down deeply distressing.

We have learned that uncertainty is a natural and unavoidable part of life. Very little about our lives is constant or certain, and while we have control over many things, we can't control everything that happens to us. As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown, life can change very quickly and very unpredictably. Some of our members have struggled with loss of jobs, others have struggled to put food on the table, and some even sudden unexplainable sicknesses.

Worry has overcome many during this season as we've tried to cope with all this uncertainty. Worrying can make it seem like you have some control over uncertain circumstances, but it is rarely true. You may believe that it will help you find a solution to your problems or prepare you for the worst. Maybe if you just agonize over a problem long enough, just think through every possibility, or read every opinion online, you'll find a solution and be able to control the

outcome. Unfortunately, none of these work. Chronic worry can't give you more control over uncontrollable events; it just robs you of the joy in the present, saps your energy, and keeps you up at night to say the least. But there are healthier ways to cope with uncertainty, and a good starting point is adjusting our mindset. In trying to respond to these fears and uncertainty, I have learned to focus on controlling those things that are under my control. For example, I have continued challenging those who lost jobs or income during this difficult time to not let worry consume them, but channel their energy into searching online for work, sending out resumes, or networking with their contacts. We've seen COSA members resort to supporting each other through food collections, visiting one another, fundraising for situations like sickness and death, and others resorting to pursuing business opportunities.



A small group retreat at the Nile Camp

In trying to take control, seven of our alumni at Stage 3 who are involved in social entrepreneurship ran successful projects addressing unique challenges that COVID-19 does present (see article on page 20-21 of this newsletter for more).

In this season I have learned to reduce my anxiety and stress and to trust God. Phil 4:6 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God". Taking steps to reduce your overall stress and anxiety levels can help you interrupt the downward spiral of negative thoughts, find inner calm, and better cope with the uncertainty in your life. Learning to have enough sleep, eating healthy, and making time to relax and exercise. Finally, we should know that God is with us. Joshua 1:9 "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

By Michael Eluku



Monicah with students employed at MaryStaurt Supermarket/Restuarant during their Gap Year.

Rwanda

A mahoro (peace) to everyone and greetings from Rwanda! This has been a challenging year for us indeed... and considering the highly social nature of our work, the hardest part by far has been the need to 'social-distance.' Being in the people business, where human interaction is the foundation of what we do, it was shocking when we first started to learn about the various measures we would need to put in place to mitigate the risks and the spread of Covid-19 in our community.

In our community, we often talk about the example of Jesus in Mark 3:14, where "he appointed twelve (disciples) that they might be WITH him." And this notion of WITH-ness has become a huge foundation of our approach to mentoring and relationships, as you have to be WITH people, doing life together, in order to have a meaningful impact in their lives. The nature of our work requires us to be in touch with people every day – sure we can do this on the phone or online, but this is most felt by others in our physical presence. We really didn't know how we were going to get through the whole endeavor, but through various fellowships we had in the Cornerstone community, one thing that began to emerge is the idea that as leaders, we are "dealers of hope."

With this inspiration and new frame of mind, we moved forward into what we all began calling the 'new normal.' But, then a new problem emerged... I am clearly not a tech-savvy individual, and this 'new normal' required that we all adapt to working in a digital / online work environment! So, we all (myself especially) had to gain a few new tech skills to better serve those in our movement as best as we could.

A shift to zoom and other online tools, while not easy, became inevitable for us all. In order to keep up our momentum and investment in the young people we are working with, we needed to replace all physical interactions with online interactions. This was VERY foreign to us, but we had to do it for our community to thrive!

In Stage 2 of our work (with university students), this was especially challenging as the Universities closed and all of our students had to go home. Many felt they had nothing to do, and were not prepared to continue studying alone. We had to emphasize the importance of continuing to



A stage III men's fellowship in Kigali

meet together, to continue challenging, encouraging, and inspiring one another. I began sharing with as many as I could about having hope for the future, while in the same breath depositing these very words inside my core.

In Stage 3 of our work (post-university), we started our Covid-19 response with 3 things;

- **Clarify the situation** by taking a step back to know the level and details of the scenario and the impact it would have on us and our community.
- **Change perspectives** and find ways to sustain a mindset that would navigate through any hardships ahead.
- **Reorder our priorities** from a program centered paradigm to a people-centric one. We knew that people in our community needed us the most when times got tough. Our opportune time was in being there for those in our movement especially those who were not doing well.

These 3 ideas have kept us grounded and focused during this time, keeping the main thing in our work the main thing. During this season, we have also birthed a few new ventures in our work. The first is the launch of the 'COSA village' – an idea of buying a large plot of land, and subdividing it between a small group of friends (currently 7 in the first group), so that they can support one another, and live near each other in somewhat of an 'intentional community' in future when they build houses. The next is an entrepreneurship fund to support our members whose livelihoods were affected by Covid-19, and who possess business ideas that can be accelerated with some little funding. Yes, it has been a challenging year, but as these last activities illustrate, we are continuing to move forward!

*By Jeninah Uwingabire
and Modeste Ntaganda*

Tanzania

This year we have learned new ways of living, conducting our programs, and have shifted how work is done in our circles. Even though we didn't experience the more extreme restrictions imposed in other East African countries, here in Tanzania all schools and universities country-wide closed for a good 3 months, which meant that most of our members at this stage were stuck home. It is in this time where we really realized the importance of having people around us in our lives.

When the pandemic hit, we were as clueless as everyone else was about how we'd go about our Stage 2 and Stage 3 programs, especially those in which we used to meet physically. For the most part, these events were moved online, and we all became savvy in new video conferencing tools, and ways to stay in touch virtually. But, even as formal restrictions eased, for much of the year large gatherings were discouraged all over the country – and we knew our big annual alumni retreat would not happen this year! So, we devised means by which we could go to where people were and meet in smaller gatherings across the country, and the idea of mini-retreats was birthed. In this, we managed to organize and run quite a few of these kinds of retreats wherever our members were.

This season of uncertainty came loaded with opportunities for us to learn. We had to learn how to work and be productive while at working at home, something we weren't used to. It is during this time that our work and personal lives collided in ways never imagined before. Working remotely has allowed us to improve our digital / online communication a

great deal, and it has afforded us to connect with members of our community in new ways.

Beyond the level of how the pandemic affected our office work and programs, it also had an impact on our alumni in various ways. Many of our alumni who were formally employed were asked to take unpaid leave, and several lost their jobs entirely. For those who were informally employed or self-employed, it was even worse as they had no financial 'safety nets' to fall back on. We do know that a few members got infected by the novel corona virus, but we may not know the real total as with the stigma associated with it, many probably just kept quiet and stayed at home to recover. It was indeed a difficult year for us and for our family of friends. In our darkest times, we knew that our role as leaders was to fan the sparks of hope in others, not just for our own members and those within the reach of our influence, but also for the whole society as well.

Jesus' words in John 16:33 became an anchor for many of us to hold on to during vicious times: "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have OVERCOME the world." We are grateful to Jesus that after this storm, the sun is rising and shining yet again. Our prayer is that each one of us is kept in perfect peace.

The three big lessons from this season for us are: Adapt, Engage and Prepare. Adapt to the new world, and to new ways of doing things. Engage with all stakeholders, keep connected, check-in with people, and encourage them. And finally, Prepare for a new future and the new opportunities which come with it.

By Elly Johnson and Magoli Waziri



A workshop for COSA ladies in Arusha

Cornerstone

South Sudan

In the beginning, no one had an idea how long the Covid-19 pandemic would last, or how long we would have to endure the lockdown and various subsequent restrictions. None had a clue about how it all would affect our work either. Life quickly started taking a twist from how we had used to live. The way we work started to dramatically shift within days; working from home a phenomenon unfamiliar to many of us before corona began to be the norm in no time.

One of the challenges for me that came with the season was how hard it was for me to quickly adapt to the shifts in the way we had to start working online. It is during this period that I discovered first hand that my tech skills were wanting. Whereas others seemed to quickly find their ways around the online video conferencing tools we had started using like zoom and webex, it wasn't the case for me. Thankfully, with time, a lot of patience and rigorous trainings, we quickly began to find our footing.

We've had to learn to function in our roles even when conditions weren't conducive because of the pandemic. What you need to be aware of, we are in the people business and what this means is that, our work revolves mostly around physical human interactions. The pandemic meant that these physical interactions with students and staff would be put to halt and new ways of connecting be discovered!

At LAOSA, we developed strategies to interact with our alumni at the village-level through 'family' cell-based fellowships that we had established in ten core zones of Arua, Koboko, Bweyele, Yumbe, Moyo (both town and refugee camp), Kampala, Nimule, Juba and Torit. These cell-based fellowships became our grassroots, home-grown solution to working around the government imposed restrictions where students coming from the same locality could fellowship together, discuss challenges affecting them locally and forge ways to come up with collective ways to answer those challenges.

Through this initiative we were able to see a number of our alumni rise up and take on some bigger community challenges. For example, Alex Motidyany, a first-year student at Makerere University Business School, embarked on training the community members on liquid soap making in

Pakele refugee settlement in Adjumani district. This not only generated income for him and those he trained but also, it came handy in the fight against the virus through the hand washing campaign at the refugee settlement. Many of our people like Alex became useful to their communities in the time of the pandemic, some served as volunteers with NGO's in the settlement while others started small businesses providing essential commodities for their communities.

Overall, three lessons stood out so clearly for me over this season:

Guarding my heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, "guard your heart for out of it comes the issues of life." God is committed to preserving our lives but when it has to do with our hearts, the only place He's left the responsibility of guarding in our hands. Thus, we can rightly say that regardless of what life can throw our way, we can come out of it as the best versions of ourselves if we are intentional about staying focused on what is good, pure, righteous, holy, etc.

Accepting reality. I must confess that, in the middle of the lockdown anxiety got the best of me. Many of our students were trapped in cities and villages far away from their relatives back in South Sudan and my job was to partly supervise their wellbeing - a thing I had no clue about doing in the midst of a pandemic! I worried about the security of my job, and many other issues I had no control over. But when I started acknowledging all that was happening, I started narrowing my circle of concern and started focusing on my circle of influence.

My final lesson was **productivity**. Jesus, in the parable of talents, calls the man who wasn't productive as wicked and unprofitable. Woe betides a soul that is void of understanding the principle of productivity. In all things, Jesus calls us to do the best with what we are given... even in the middle of a pandemic, we can DO SOMETHING!

By Nelly Achola

Meeting with two LAOSA members food stuffs in Bidi Bidi



Coach Stone meeting with smaller groups of youth at their homes instead of on the pitch



The Wolves Football Club

It is possible that no other program in Cornerstone has been affected more by the Covid-19 pandemic than the Wolves Football club. This is because of the nature of our program, and the nature of the boys we work with. First, with the lock-down, came the closure of all sports activities and gyms – so there was no way to practice together, which was the primary point where our mentoring happens. Next, nature of the boys we work with are not like youth in other Cornerstone programs who could be engaged effectively online, ours is a much less formal community, and much less tech-savvy.

The best we could do this year has mainly been to engage them one-on-one through phone calls or personal visits. Given the nature of our boys, nurturing them mentally during the lock down was a big challenge. Over the years, Wolves has nurtured the boys through physical meet-ups on and off the pitch. When Corona hit, everything was shut and so it was harder for us to keep them motivated without engaging them in physical play. It was only at the end of October that the gyms were allowed to re-open and our daily practice schedules have resumed.

Indeed, this year has been characterized with a number of challenges and setbacks but it has also been a channel for us to gain new insights and wisdom. Almost all our boys at the club live hand to mouth, with no substantial savings whatsoever. When the

virus hit, it felt like it was going to finish many of them off... not necessarily from the virus itself, but from the socio-economic fall out of not being able to have enough food on the table!

Many of our boys were thrust in dangerous situations which meant that resorting to old ways of theft and manipulation to make ends meet. Even when as lockdown was slowly lifted in phases, it has been hard to get back in touch with some of our boys who we fear have backslid too much, or gotten into trouble of one sort or another... we hope and pray that nothing dangerous happened to them.

Amidst all this, one thing has remained sure: *Set-backs are inevitable in life but misery is a choice.* We've learned to respond wisely.

Covid-19 has taught us that what we do before storms come matters a lot, if we wait for the storms to hit we be ill-equipped. It can be too late, and too costly at the same time.

We've also learned that without mental strength, life's challenges will breed self-doubt and anxiety. Staying strong in tough times we've realized requires that we manage our thoughts, feelings and behavioral patterns in a meticulous manner.

As we work in the spirit of Jesus, this season has once again highlighted to us the importance and value of others in our life. The idea that each of us needs all of us, and all of us need each of us, has been embedded in our core during this time like in no other time.

We've not only gained insight but we've also learned to adapt. We prayed and trusted God like in no other season before. We faced reality and accepted that the situation here to stay.

We've become flexible in our ways of thinking. We have had to learn new things and unlearn limiting beliefs so as to thrive in the new era. For instance, we've had to encourage the boys to engage in physical exercise from their homes in small groups.

We have started using simple social media platforms online, such as Whatsapp, as a way to stay in touch with the few members who do have smart phones.

We've become more obedient to government and ministry of health guidelines in order not to cause trouble.

While this storm has ravaged a number of us, more than anything it has also strengthened our resilience to weather any and every kind of storm in the future.

By Coach Stone Kyambadde

The Advanced Leadership Initiative

The Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI) brings together alumni of Cornerstone, and its broader family of friends, in a network of social entrepreneurs that are championing values-based transformational change in local communities. These unique initiatives are impacting local communities in the areas of education, finance, agriculture, vocational skilling, mentorship, psycho-social support, and empowerment, just to mention a few.

This year, one of the big projects this community has worked on is in incubating, piloting, and developing initiatives that address the unique challenges / opportunities brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. After an initial brain-storming session back in March, we received a total of 27 proposals from individuals/groups, and went through a process of community-vetting and selection in which 7 proposals were selected to develop further and pilot.



The 'Women with A Purpose' (WWAP) backyard vegetable growing project.

Implemented by Prossy Babirye Magala and her husband Enoch under CFYDDI - a community-based charity in Gayaza which they both started and run. Prossy is a COSA alumnus from CLA girls class 2006. The project reached out to women who lost their jobs, or whose income was affected because of the Covid-19 pandemic and were stuck at home (with kids out of school) during the lockdown. The project sought to provide small business loans and training in growing vegetables in backyard gardens since access to markets was more difficult. Forty six women have been a part of the training so far, and many of them have gone on to scale up their ventures post-lockdown into larger commercial farming.



Mwatate Health Care Community Services.

This project was run by Minky Karanja, an AYL Alumni in Kenya. It was implemented in Embakasi East, a slum-suburb of Nairobi, and sought to reduce the possibility of increased maternal and neonatal mortality rates as a result of the movement-restrictions and economic challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a door-to-door mobile training unit, more than 2,100 men and women were educated on the importance of attending antenatal clinics - most were only marginally informed and so would not have gone because of the extra Covid-10 related challenges. Thus, hospital deliveries quadrupled, and mothers going for antenatal increased since the inception of the project by 45%. Due to its positive impact, this project was featured on KTN television in Kenya. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XdsaVrfzPOM>

Reusable masks and sanitary pads.

This project was implemented by Onesmus and Betty Ngoboka in Rukungiri district. The couple directs a social enterprise called God's Embassy ministries. Onesmus is a Cornerstone Alumnus from CLA Boys class 1998B. The project involved making washable fabric face masks, and part of their sustainability plan (post-Covid) was to pivot their production capacity towards reusable sanitary pads. One unique marketing point of their face mask production was to partner with churches, so as these facilities were allowed to open, they could do so with their congregations' safe. As demand for facemasks has reduced, the initiative is continuing with production of reusable sanitary pads for the most vulnerable girls and women in the districts of Rukungiri and Kanungu in western Uganda.

Empower Her initiative in Western Kenya was started and is run by Buya Mukonzo an AYLK-Kenya alumni. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she and her team implemented a personal protective equipment project. They developed a facemask production facility with individuals in their community whose livelihoods had been affected by Covid-19, and then ran a sanitation and sensitization campaign about Covid-19 with business women in Kakamega Market to enable them to continue with their businesses safely with SOPs in place. The target women of the project were mostly the bread winners for their families. Through this pilot-project, Empower Her was able to attract grant funding to continue operating and has also secured a partnership with ABSA bank so the women are now accessing loan financing for their businesses. Empower Her intends to keep seeking opportunities to help more women and become more resilient.



Guma Mu Rugo Project. This project is a collaboration between two of our alumni in Rwanda, Daniel Ganza (of Youth Impact Mission) and Enoch Ruyonza, CLA Boys class 2006. It focused on collecting and archiving stories of Rwandans on life amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The goal was to create a permanent post pandemic record of stories of resilience. They are not only preserving these stories for the future generation but also are using them to inspire resilience among several communities in the country. Their efforts have been recognized by several media outlets and they have featured their initiative on radio talk shows, in schools, as well as other community foras. They also have created a website www.mycovid19story.rw, in order to reach wider audiences.



St. Liza NCD awareness initiative. Alex Okello (CLA boys' class 2002) together with his wife Betty implemented a project to enable continued access to high quality, professional, affordable, and safe medical support for people affected with Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) during covid-19 lockdown using the telemedicine services approach. With the Covid-19 Pandemic, came a renewed national attention on a dramatic rise of NCDs in Uganda. Through their 'mobile-clinic', the project team delivered medicine to NCDs patients in their homes during lock-down and provided psychosocial support for people who are managing chronic NCDs through medication. During the pilot-project period they reached 146 people with screening and medical supplies. Discovering an untapped market in this area, their dream is to now traverse the entire nation educating the population about NCDs, and connecting them with tools and medication to manage their conditions better.



Aid my Learning. This project was done by Builders of Future Africa (BFA) – a group of students and alumni of CLA Tanzania under the leadership of Elisante Ephrahim. They provided learning materials as well as training in home-schooling to children and parents when schools had closed nationally. The targeted children did not have access to online learning, hard copy learning materials, or even basic school supplies. They directly impacted 203 children both boys and girls who were in their final year at primary and secondary level. The project was done in five regions in Tanzania; Arusha, Morogoro, Kigoma, Dar es salaam and Dodoma. In their sustainability plan, the BFA team also started small community libraries to enable students continued access to learning materials, on a monthly-subscription basis.

By Lydia Byogero

On Staying Strong

There are a very many ways to make money but there is no one formula which works for everyone. A starting point is understanding your 'comparative advantage' - what you are good at or the gifts and opportunities that life has brought you. Your personality strengths and weaknesses. If you are among the 1/3 of the population (on average) that has entrepreneurial inclinations you can partner with well-trusted friends and try out a business.

Stable civilizations throughout history have followed common basic principles which are key to achieving financial well-being (which are echoed in our scriptures). Four classic principles for financial independence:

i. Thrift: Learning to do things inexpensively when possible and not wasting money in extravagant spending.

ii. Industry: Being hard working, busy and productive. There is no question that those who are getting ahead financially here are those that are very active people, they don't just sit back waiting. When they don't have a job - they make 'looking for a job' - their job.

iii. Saving so that you can Invest: It's often hard in Africa, due to cultural/family obligations, to save. But the popularity of the many "Savings and Credits Cooperatives" (SACCOs) have provided to be a good solution to this challenge.

iv. Earning Interest rather than Paying Interest. Financially intelligent people use debt only to increase earnings and acquire assets which appreciate in value. Financially careless people use debt to buy depreciating assets that don't generate income.

2. Cultivate Strength in the Social Area of your Life.

When we are having struggles with the various relationships in our lives - it really saps our energy. But just like all the other areas - there are healthy habits to help us improve in the way we relate with others. In our Cornerstone schools, at the time of graduation, we have given our High School graduates a list of around 20 inspirational books to choose from so that they can read during their vacation prior to further studies.

One book that has consistently been selected above all the others is, "How to Win Friends and Influence People." The book's popularity shows that we all have a strong need to love and be loved. We all struggle with relationships and they cause some of the biggest challenges of our lives. The book gives the following advice:

- Become genuinely interested in understanding the people in your life.
- Smile, be kind, respectful and polite with those with whom you interact.
- Remember people's names - their name is the sweetest and most important sound to them.
- Be a good listener.
- Talk about the other person's interest not just yours.
- Make the other person feel important - and be sincere.

*"In this world
you will have
tribulation,
but be of good cheer,
I have overcome
the world!"
- Jesus*

3. Cultivate Strength in the Mental (Intellectual) Area of your Life.

Here are several ways to further mental sharpness and intellectual development:

- Keep **reading for knowledge** understanding and wisdom. Thus far your education has been cramming to pass exams and reading is just academics. Develop a life long interest and habit of study.
- **Travel to new places** - Whenever you visit new places you are broadening your mental horizons, you are able to see things in a new way.
- Be around people with **more intelligence**

than you, or who think differently than you.

- **Educational courses** - keeping the learning curve alive by taking courses, listening to inspirational CD's, attending seminars, etc.

- **Meditation or Contemplative Prayer** - it is simple, but very difficult to learn. When you can quiet your mind and gain relief from the relentless flow of words and thoughts that we can't seem to control - the mind functions better.

4. Cultivate Strength in the Spiritual Area of your Life:

This aspect provides meaning and purpose for developing ourselves in the other areas. In our Discipleship lessons we have this teaching of "The Wheel" - with 4 Spokes of Spiritual Growth: Prayer, the Word(Study), Fellowship and Service (or Witness.):

i. Fellowship: The whole point of fellowship is to "gather" regularly with like-minded people that we are walking with through life to share our challenges and gain inspiration. We all need good people around us to help us stay on track.

ii. Study of Scriptures & Wisdom Literature: In order to counteract all messages that are coming to you from the secular society around us- through radio, new papers, TV, worldly music - it is vital that you are feeding your heart and mind with wisdom.

iii. Prayer Life: We have to learn how to connect and have a relationship with our Maker through meditation and prayer. It is not enough just to go to religious service once a week - you need to have your quite time alone with God.

iv. Have an "Outflow" (service, ministry, giving, mentoring, witnessing, teaching others): No one can really grow spiritually unless you are giving out in some way to others. When we dedicate ourselves to helping others grow, we in turn will experience growth.

5. Clarify your Motivation and Connect with your sense of Mission.

Whenever I have been in the United States and return to Africa, as I am making the hour and a half hour drive in from the airport, the contrasts I see out the car window between the two worlds are striking. And, the fact hits me that as a 'white man' I am always to some degree a 'foreigner' in this part of the world. This forces me to connect with my sense of mission and remind myself what I am doing here and why I have chosen to make this my home.

Any time we think about making the effort to 'stay strong' - it begs the question, WHY??? Why bother? If we can answer that - we connect with our motivation. What makes you get out of bed in the morning? What is your passion or your vision?

Each of us come to planet earth with a unique mission that we are to carry out in making a contribution to the kingdom of God coming on earth. We all need to constantly seek to understand and discover what this is. For me there are three that often come to mind:

- When I see the young people we work with struggling against great challenges - to succeed, to create a meaningful life and to make a contribution to their world ... it inspires me to continue the work we do.

- I am also driven by a desire to invest my life in things that will count in the bigger scheme of things.

- At the end of my life I want to hear the words: "Well done my good and faithful servant!"

6. Commit to a Small Groups: Small groups are something we emphasize a lot in our community: having a few close friends that you meet with regularly. In our schools we break down the student population into 'care groups.' This helps teach us that we all can derive great benefit when we walk through life with friends that share our values - friends that we have allowed to 'speak into our lives.' Such friend-

ships can become a powerful, transformational part of our life and allow us to exert greater influence upon society.

I like the slogan of the UK football team called "Liverpool" - it says: "You will never walk alone." I have a small group of Ugandan friends in Kampala that I have been meeting with regularly for breakfast - every Wednesday for the last 20 years. I also have a small group of mzungu (white friends) that meet over zoom now, connected with the "Prayer Breakfast" work in Africa. I have been with several of them for the past 20 years.

But I have to confess this concept does not come natural to me and it was not part of my upbringing. I think many, like me, want to be self-reliant - we don't like to be vulnerable and open up to others about our personal struggles. However, I have learned how incredibly important it is for having a sense of community around you and support through life's ups and downs. Jesus showed us this principle when he sent out his disciples "two by two."

7. Continue to Have Fun & Cultivate Joy:

One of my favorite quotes of Jesus is: "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer - I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33) I like it because it speaks to the toughness of this human experience but then it tells us to cultivate joy - despite it all.

So, whatever is happening in your personal life, or in the world at large, I encourage you to see through it and hold to the eternal truth that "all things work together for good in your life." Don't let problems beat you down. Engage life fully, but don't take things too seriously. Be cheerful and light hearted. Crack jokes with friends and laugh. Be a force of nature that not only stops fear in its tracks, but helps lift the spirits of those around you.

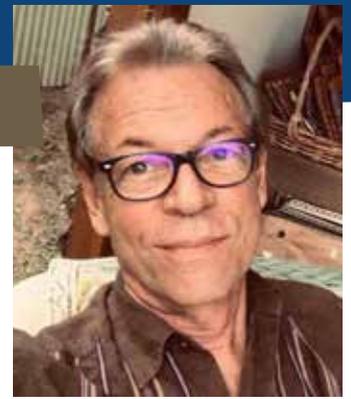
Seek out activities that that make you feel happy or activate your creativity. That's what makes us feel alive. Included in this is having a hobby that you enjoy, this can be: various forms of sport, exercise, art, nature walks, travel, going out to dinner with friends or playing with children. Just work at finding and creating time for healthy things that simply bring you some joy. People who cultivate healthy fun and joy are better able to: deal with stress and bounce back from adversity, adapt to major life changes, uplift others, see all the blessing in their life with gratitude, laugh and remain strong despite the usual challenges.

I hope you have found this helpful. Stay strong and never give up. Tough times will always come - but they also must go. So, learn to be resilient and keep moving forward.

7 TIPS

ON STAYING

STRONG THROUGH TOUGH TIMES



On the front page of this newsletter we introduced the diagram of the 4 areas of life. The author Steven Covey taught that if you ignore any one of these areas, eventually, it will become like a 'black hole' sucking strength and energy from your life, no matter how good you might be in other areas.

Interestingly, these 4 areas also correspond to the four basic needs that all human beings seek to satisfy, captured in the slogan: "To live, to love, to learn & to leave a legacy."

The Physical Dimension: The need to live. It has two parts a.) Biological needs b.) Material needs. This covers basic needs such as good health, nutritious food, clothing, shelter and money.

Social Dimension: The need to love. The need to relate to other people, to belong to a group, to love and be loved. Your relationships with your friends and your family.

Mental Dimension: The need to learn. The need to develop and grow in our understanding of the world around us, the history of mankind and a broad knowledge of life.

Spiritual Dimension: The need to leave a legacy. Human beings need to have a sense of purpose in order to bring meaning and fulfillment to their lives. We must feel that our life has counted for something and made a contribution toward things that matter. We are God's instruments in this world - to further his Kingdom.

The first four of my tips on "Staying Strong Through Tough Times" come from cultivating healthy habits in these four areas.

1. Cultivate Strength in the Physical Area of your Life.

A) Biological Health: Our physical body belongs to nature and so vibrant health is based on understanding and living in harmony with natural principles. Here are some aspects of that:

i. A balanced diet that includes proteins, greens, carbohydrates, vegetables and fruits. Diabetes and other 'western diseases' are growing at a fast rate in African cities as diets are changing from the more simple, natural African foods to an over-reliance on foods made from highly-refined wheat (bread, chapatis) and products with a lot of sugar like sweets / candy and sodas.

ii. Regular aerobic exercise. The body is the only machine that wears out from lack of use. If you who are still walking a lot that is enough. But if you are driving and sitting at a desk all day - you will need to add some exercise to your routine.

iii. Adequate rest - this varies with individuals, but about 7-8 hrs is average.

iv. Healthy frame of mind. It is amazing how strong the effect of negative thinking is on your body. The entire immune system is compromised when we are bitter, depressed, stressed, angry, etc.

v. Avoid toxic substances which are harmful to the body (drugs, smoking, alcohol, etc).

B.) Financial Independence: Many reading this are young and struggling to finish university before earning an income. And of course, until you are earning an income you will be off-balance financially. But even so, it is still important that you try as much as possible to learn healthy financial habits. Money does not solve all our problems in life but it obviously makes it possible to get out of the soul degrading kind of poverty that we see around us in Africa.

