

# UGANDAN AIDS ORPHANS AND GRACE LUTHERAN CHURCH

## HOW IT STARTED

Mark and Sharon Dembro met Father James Ssemakula, a priest at the Anglican church in Stockholm, when Mark was assigned to the U.S. Embassy in the mid-90s. In 1996 Father James returned to Uganda to work with AIDS orphans in Mpigi District. He supported 70 children with help from the Swedish government and private contributions and had started programs to empower women. Grace Lutheran began contributing to his work in 2002. Father James visited Port Townsend in 2005, speaking to area churches and other organizations about his work, and receiving pledges of support. In August, 2005, we learned that Father James had died suddenly while visiting his family in Sweden. We were at a loss to imagine how we could continue to help these children, 'orphaned' a second time. Bill and Gwen Howard had visited Father James in Uganda and one of their contacts recommended a young man of integrity who would see that our money got to the orphans' schools. Kenneth Kasule has far exceeded our expectations. He:

- knows each child, their scholastic and other needs and aspirations
- visits their schools regularly and speaks with their teachers
- knows their home situations and intervenes to resolve problems
- takes care of their medical needs
- counsels them
- holds group meetings at the end of each school term to discuss school and other issues
- provides us with budgets and written accounts of all funds expended for each child

Kenneth was able to contact 35 of Father James' orphans. All of this initial group have finished secondary school and additional training courses and are now middle-class citizens. They include nurses, beauticians, teachers, caterers, electricians, skilled carpenters, social workers, computer technicians, business owners, community health workers and our first M.D.

We currently support 31 children. Because of Kenneth's dedication they were able to continue studying during the two years of COVID school closures. In national tests, several of our students have scored at the very top of their districts.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

### ARE WE SUPPORTING AN ORPHANAGE?

No. Our children live with extended family or with the remaining parent. If that situation is untenable, Kenneth enrolls them in a school that accepts boarders.

### WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

Church budget funds are not used for this program.

Funding comes from Lisa Lanza's annual concert, Grace Lutheran's endowment fund, and individual contributors. The average cost per child is about \$500 per year including administrative expenses.

### DO WE SUPPORT THE CHILDREN IN OTHER WAYS?

Our support goes beyond financial commitment. We try to link each child in the program with a member of Grace with whom they exchange emails facilitated by Kenneth. We include an orphan each week in prayers during the Sunday service. We contribute to a fund to buy a special Christmas gift for each child. This year all the children received a pair of shoes and a backpack.

### HOW ARE OUR FUNDS ACCOUNTED FOR?

Kenneth submits a budget itemizing projected costs for each school term. He disperses the funds to the schools our children attend, scans the schools receipts for each child and transmits them to us via

email. We pay about \$160 per three-month term for his transportation and communication expenses including his cell phone, internet subscription, and transport costs to go to the children's schools. Kenneth receives a salary of \$40 per month for his services. He also receives about \$200 per term to be used for our children's emergency medical and other expenses.

#### HOW DO WE TRACK OUR CHILDREN'S PROGRESS?

After each term, Kenneth scans and sends the child's school report. These are then forwarded by email to those writing to the student along with letters the child writes to his/her Grace pen pal.

#### HOW CAN I SUPPORT THE PROGRAM?

Thank you for supporting the orphans through your attendance today. Should you wish to contribute further, go to [gracelutheranpt.org](http://gracelutheranpt.org), click on giving, then on Ugandan Orphans. Questions about the program may be directed to [sharon.dembro@gmail.com](mailto:sharon.dembro@gmail.com).

#### WHY SHOULD I SUPPORT THE ORPHANS?

There are 15 million AIDS orphans in Africa, 1 million in Uganda alone. Without education, their likely future is begging or prostitution, and possible early death from AIDS. Grace Lutheran and others in our community have participated in a miracle - these throw-away children, with your help, become productive middle-class citizens.