

Letters from Overseas

Karen and Bill Butt Write from Mozambique

August 9, 2009

“Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor....”—Ruth 3: 3

A Moabite woman and a refugee in Judah, Ruth depends on her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi to guide her in the ways of this country that’s so new to her. Some of these customs might have seemed strange—glean in the field of Naomi’s cousin Boaz, lie down and sleep at his feet in the granary—but the story ends with cultural differences surmounted and blended, an inter-ethnic marriage, and two generations later the birth of the boy who becomes King David.

Cultural bridging. On both sides it takes, among other things, constant alertness, faith in one another, and flexibility, to achieve this meeting and marrying of minds. Right now we have with us eight recent graduates of the Theatre Performance program at Humber College in Toronto, three other Canadian theatre professionals, and another from England. Besides another project of theirs in Quelimane they’re here to work with the girls of PEDRA—two dozen girls each morning and another two dozen in the afternoons—teaching and learning songs, skits, games, dances—life, really—of each other’s cultures.

What does this have to do with a program to protect young girls against HIV?

Well, for all these activities you need to concentrate, observe, and process new information.

You need to coordinate gesture and voice and body activities.

You need to work precisely as a team.

You need to plan and strategize.

You need to make decisions on short notice.

These are challenges for everyone involved, especially when working with no common spoken language, and so a song or game or dance well done makes everyone who takes part feel good about herself and all the others she is working with. Each girl feels strong and supported—and a girl with more such strength and support is better



able to observe, process, and make life choices for herself that will keep her free from the HIV.

The two contrasting photos show well enough the mixture of affection and orderly rambunctiousness that the week has been. The Spirit that unites us all in love has truly been at work.

By the way, at The United Church of Canada's General Council pages on the [Flickr](#) photosite, you can also see the now-former Moderator of The United Church of Canada preaching at the General Council meeting in Kelowna, wearing one of the now-famous PEDRA friendship bracelets, hand-made here in Mozambique by the girls themselves.



When Ruth put on her best clothes to go to the threshing floor, probably she too wore at least one beautiful bracelet. If a friendship bracelet, so much the more appropriate, since she and Boaz straight off became fast friends and more.

In mission and service,

Karen and Bill Butt

To see more letters, and more photos accompanying this letter, visit www.stpaulsunitedchurch.com.

Karen and Bill Butt are United Church of Canada Overseas Personnel serving with Conselho Cristao de Mocambique in Mozambique. The work of this ecumenical partner and the work of overseas personnel are made possible through your gifts to the Mission and Service Fund of The United Church of Canada.

