

Water is Life!

By Nadine Mwesigwa

Those who attended the Mission Committee sponsored “Water is Life” fundraiser on June 4, 2011 will agree that it was an enchanted evening.

Soprano Jamie Chamberlin performed with pianist Renee Hamaty and the *Istochnik Choir* of The Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos Serbian Orthodox Church in our dimly lit sanctuary under the watchful eyes of our golden icons. The



moving liturgical music was followed by “the fun stuff,” as Ms. Chamberlin calls her international repertoire, including selections from *Romeo and Juliet*, in the parish center. Gourmet Mediterranean-style finger foods were prepared on site by members of our own Mission Committee, and accompanied by champagne. Before we even began our opera fundraiser, two very generous anonymous donors pledged \$15,000 and \$10,000. The well-attended event brought in another \$10,000 (\$3,300 from raffle tickets alone.) The end result: we raised \$35,000! “We” meaning ALL of us here at St. Paul’s.



The driving force behind the event was a challenge from St. Barbara’s Greek Orthodox Church in Santa Barbara. Fr. Simon Thomas and his Mission Committee constructed a church in the Mwanza Archdiocese of Tanzania in 2009 following the visionary example set by our own Fr. Steve. Before leaving Tanzania, they made a promise to His Eminence, Archbishop Jeronymos that they would return soon with well-digging equipment (which costs \$70,000 used.) St. Paul’s portion of the clean water initiative materialized in the form of a new truck, to be purchased in East Africa for \$30,000, enabling the drill to move from church to church, village to village, and drastically change the landscape of daily life with clean drinking water.



All of us who have been to Tanzania (for the construction of our church in 2007, its consecration in 2008, or the medical mission team of 2010) share the same joint memory of watching villagers excitedly scoop up bottlefuls of murky, stagnant water using our Mission Committee’s discarded water bottles. It happened repeatedly. Ask any one of us and we’ll tell you of our own horrified moment, witnessing children in particular, gulp down water that quite frankly no American would wash his car with. It marked us so much that when our committee was approached to design an activity for GOYA’s Hunger Strike weekend, the clean water issue was the first to leap to mind. Our “game” involved buckets of clean water that in the course of various relay races became filthier and filthier. The winning team received the “prize” of getting to drink a glass of the now muddy water, because that’s what their Tanzanian brothers and sisters, in villages without water wells, would be drinking today. One brave St. Paul’s teen crossed himself, closed his eyes and was about to take a sip before he was stopped.



Studies show that villages with wells that provide clean water suffer from 60%-70% less water-borne illness than villages without wells. It has long been the dream of Archbishop Jeronimos of Mwanza to see each Orthodox Church in the area operating its own well – sustaining its own village and functioning as a witness to those outside the Church. But the only drill his staff had access to was fragile and decrepit. I remember a monstrous carcass of a 1964 truck decomposing in the Archdiocese courtyard, with a drill so old its repairs would cost more than it was worth.

This past May, St. Barbara's Mission Committee successfully purchased a gently used, but very powerful water drilling rig. It was specially chosen by Ed Peer, an engineer and former OCMC missionary to Tanzania, for its suitability to the region's rocky terrain. In about eight weeks, when the drill, its pumps, and some repair tools arrive at the sea port of Mombasa, Kenya, Mr. Peer and professional well-digger Bob Perry will be there to personally deliver the container to His Eminence. They will be driving our "Water Is Life" truck, which the Archbishop's staff is busy selecting now, and which will be theirs to keep and operate by July.

As members of a universal, evangelical and growing Orthodox Church, we are all called to follow the Lord's command to "Go forth and make disciples of all nations" in whatever way we can. The Mission Committee sincerely thanks everyone who contributed to the success of our "Water Is Life" fundraiser with your time, effort, financial support and prayers. The generosity of St Paul's parishioners is overwhelming, and is quickly gaining national and even international fame. About 20 villages in East Africa can vouch for that.



The new truck and well-digging equipment that will be purchased with the funds that have been raised by our parish and St. Barbara's in Santa Barbara.

Mission is Possible—St. Paul's Greek Orthodox Church Mission Committee

Alex & Linda Gorbenko, Nadine Mwesigwa, Jennifer Schipsi, Steve & Carolyn Kouracos, Jackie Lovato, Stephanie Petas, Kristi Sardis, Carol Sekeris, John Smith, Mark & Ginny Tomich, Tony & Juliana Wissa, Myrlee Cuiching, Craig & Amy Williams.