

Dear Friends of Africa,

June 2022

Our rainy season has settled in and the residents of this part of the Usambara Mountains bundle up in any kind and shape of garments to keep out the constant frigid mist and rain and to keep some warmth within. Children who were born and raised in the mountain climate seem to fare much better than those from the lowlands, but it is an unnerving experience to see little children barefoot in this weather. Today however, such scenes are rare, thank the Lord.

The Form VI students started their final exams this Monday morning. After the Sunday Mass, each student came up to the altar for her special blessing holding out her writing materials for a blessing as well. Many of the students have been with us for six years. Others have joined after finishing the first four years of secondary school elsewhere. It is quite an experience to see those young ladies coming up to the altar so poised and confident and to recall them as they were little girls coming fresh from home some 6 years ago. I can never forget the looks on those innocent little faces of the new intake of first year girls and those wide open eyes seemingly asking, 'Where is Mama?' As I mentioned, the long awaited examinations for the form VI are under way and the students are coping with the anxiety of the exams yet to deal with the relief of the exams already over and done with. They are all very devout at the 6 o'clock morning Mass and are excused from the early chore of carrying two chunks of fire wood to stoke the dozen or so stoves in the school kitchen.

The kitchen is an essential factor in the school's functions. The students have 3 cooked meals a day and a tea break at 11 a.m. We have our own bakery and each student gets a hefty homemade muffin each day to carry her over to the cooked lunch at 1 p.m. A basic item for the school diet is a corn meal mush along with home grown vegetables. Rice and potatoes, which for some reason they call Irish potatoes are also for Sundays and special occasions. Our Bursar here is an avid gardener and is doing a fine job of keeping us supplied with fresh vegetables. Cabbage and beans are a mainstay, but carrots, bell peppers and other greens are convenient substitutes. I am alarmed at the amount of firewood that we consume daily to keep the kitchen stoves going for meals and for heating water for bathing. However, in an effort to save fuel, we have no hot water taps in the washrooms but each student can obtain about 2 liters from the hot water station, which she takes with her to the shower room where there are shower stalls and normal tap water available. Our main water supply comes from a spring some 3 kilometers away located on the mountains in the forest reserve.

We have been licensed to tap into a spring practically on a mountaintop, but the flow of pure fresh spring water is always bubbling forth from the inner resources of the mountains. I lament the purchasing of plastic bottled water but the notion that it comes in a sealed bottle and therefore must be better, somehow prevails. I recall a newspaper article of a survey of all the popular well-advertised water specialties. Among all the presented labels there was one bottle without any label. It happened to be New York City tap water and it rated number one for taste and purity. Here at Mazinde Juu we have a permanent staff of water men who keep the main lines open and attend to all the plumbing affairs in the school buildings, as well as the houses of our 46 member teaching staff.

For our building purposes and lumber requirements for furniture, windows frames, doors and roofing structure, we rely on our own trees. Some are indigenous and others we have planted and tended. Cyprus, Silver Oak and Eucalyptus are our commonly used lumber for building and furniture. Our school property is surrounded by a protected forest reserve but the local people have a healthy relation to the

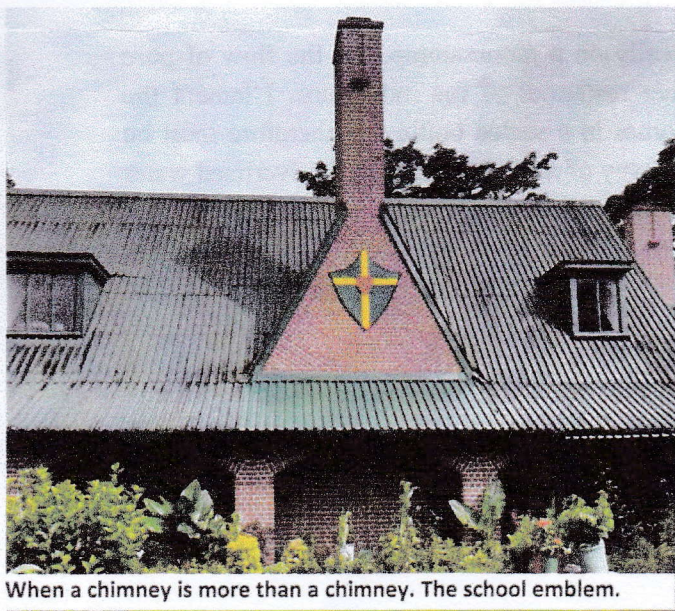


forests and do plant seedlings on their own plots for future harvesting and private use. However, in just the 40 years I have been resident here in the Usambara Mountains, Camphor and Cedar trees have been wiped out. It is sad to see in one's own life time the loss of such prized natural resources. The original buildings here at Mazinde Juu were all roofed with wooden shingles, provided by the cedar trees then native to our local forests. Now we use aluminum roofing sheets from Europe or America for our roofing materials. We have teams of local men and women including masons, carpenters, plumbers and electricians as well as sawyers to maintain our school buildings and teachers houses. When we are putting up a storied building we rely too on the local residents who are prime earth movers and concrete mixers. When such structures are in progress, we can have some 80 on 90 persons on the payroll and many of the number are women hoping to earn a little ready cash for the family budget. Can you imagine living for a whole month for example without any cash income whatsoever? Yet each family has to meet necessary cash expenditures like, school lunch payments and car fares on the local buses and motorcycles. Every Monday there will be scores of women both young and old gathered at our door hoping to get a part-time job in the gardens or carrying firewood or anything that needs ready hands and strong backs. It is painful to have to look into those expectant eyes and have to say, "there's nothing doing today".

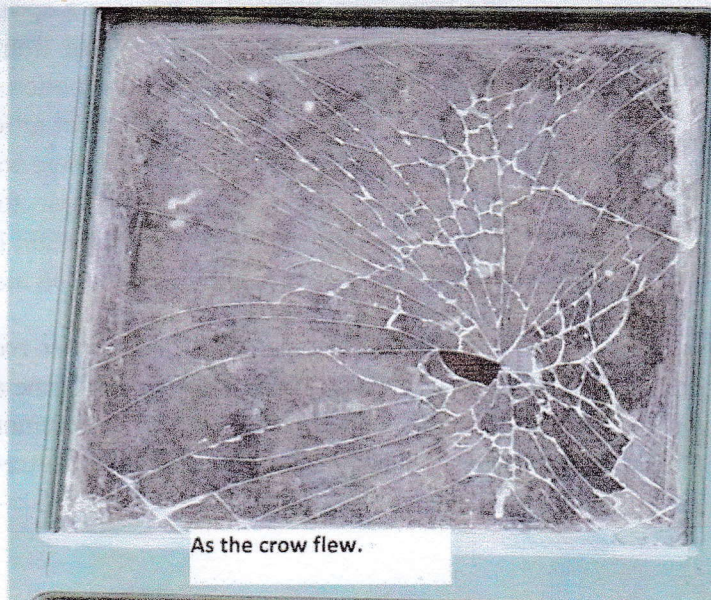
We do have some full-time women like gardeners, cooks and kitchen helpers. We even have women carpenters who are also fine glaziers and have full-time employment keeping our hundreds of windows glistening with full panes of window glass. I was astounded one day recently to find one of the dormitory windows shattered, but with a perfectly shaped hole in the center for all the world looking like the profile of a bullet. The workers put me at ease when they told me that a crow hit the window at full speed never seeing the glare of the glass, but only empty space. Sadly, however, the crow did not survive the impact with the window and an improper entrance into a girls' dormitory.

I am in a very privileged position here to see daily the impact of your generosity in keeping all of these children so well cared for in the daily necessities but also getting a prime education for their future life. In truth I can say "I was there and saw it all." However, in truth you have been there just as I have been with you at my side by your faith, your prayer and your generous helping hands.

Sincerely, Father Damian



When a chimney is more than a chimney. The school emblem.



As the crow flew.