

Cornerstone

Newsletter & Magazine July 2020

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



FINDING THE GIFTS IN THIS TIME

For all of us, the last few months have been one of the most extraordinary experiences of our lifetime as the whole world has been affected by the storm of the Covid-19 pandemic. It's like we have been in World War 3, but this time we are all fighting an invisible enemy together instead of fighting one another - which at least is one good thing!

A big storm, like this one, causes a disruption in our normal routines. It causes some chaos and perhaps some destruction. Fortunately though, storms are temporary and not a permanent condition. So, eventually we will make it through this time and hopefully change for the better.

In terms of weather patterns, storms come as part of natural cycles that restore balance when neighboring atmospheric regions are out of balance with each other - due to differences in temperature and atmosphere pressure. The winds and rain storms that are generated - often bring other positive benefits. Strong winds remove dead leaves from trees and rain storms bring water to dry areas. Additionally, storms help clean the air and leave everything freshly washed.

Something similar can happen in our world and in our own lives - as we go through the storms of life. Storms can strengthen us. They can force us to get rid of debris - the things that don't need to be in our lives. They can help cleanse our souls.

This happens because they disrupt our normal routines forcing us to re-examine our circumstances and relationships afresh - which bring new perspectives and help us shift to new ways of doing things and relating to others. So, instead of focusing on the hardships of life's storms, what if we looked for the good things? What if we look for the gifts in this current Covid 19 storm?

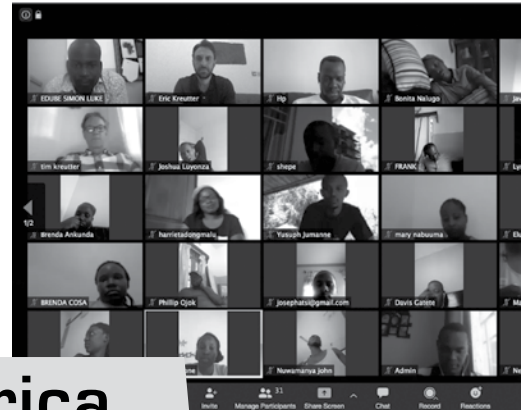
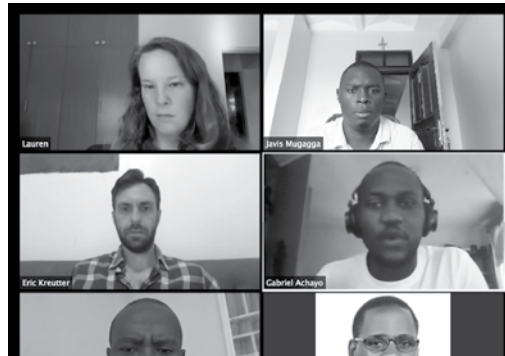
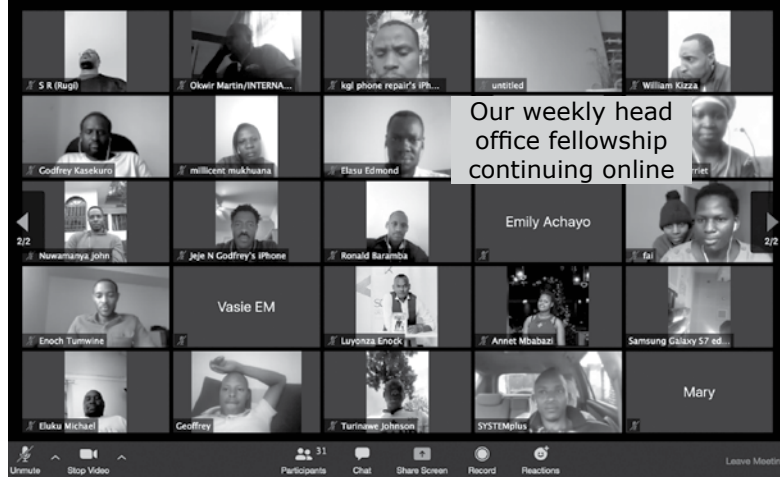
In this newsletter/magazine we share our experiences and the lessons learned during this time. Tim also gives us: *"7 Thoughts on Managing the Storms of Life"*

Inside



and...

- * Centerfold Pictorial
- * Covid-19 Response Initiatives of our Alumni
- * Thoughts from Tim



Cornerstone Development Africa

We are a family of friends in the spirit of Jesus committed to:

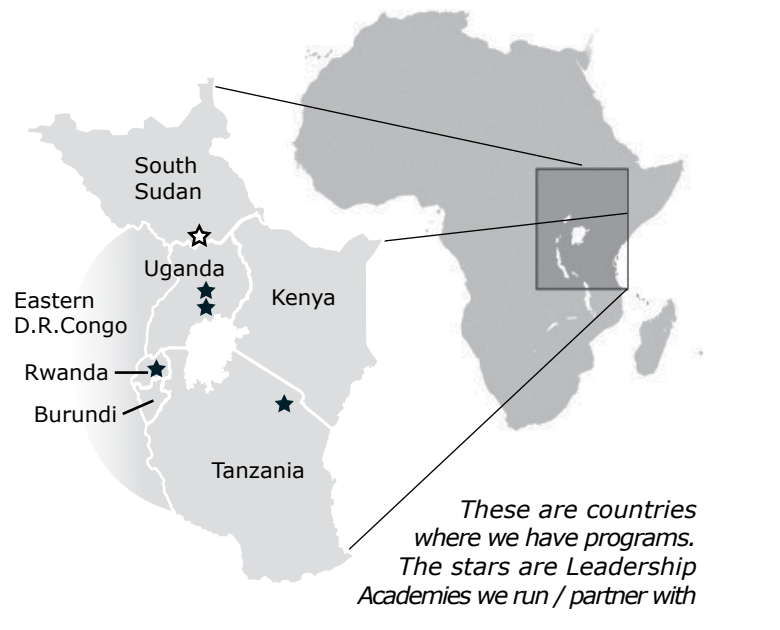
- * Equipping and advancing a movement of servant leaders with a shared vision for the positive transformation of their communities, nation and region.*
- * Compassion for the poor with a focus on young people.*
- * Working across the lines of culture and faith differences.*
- * Maintaining a long-term partnership with each other.*
- * Loving God and neighbor.*

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 all that

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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.

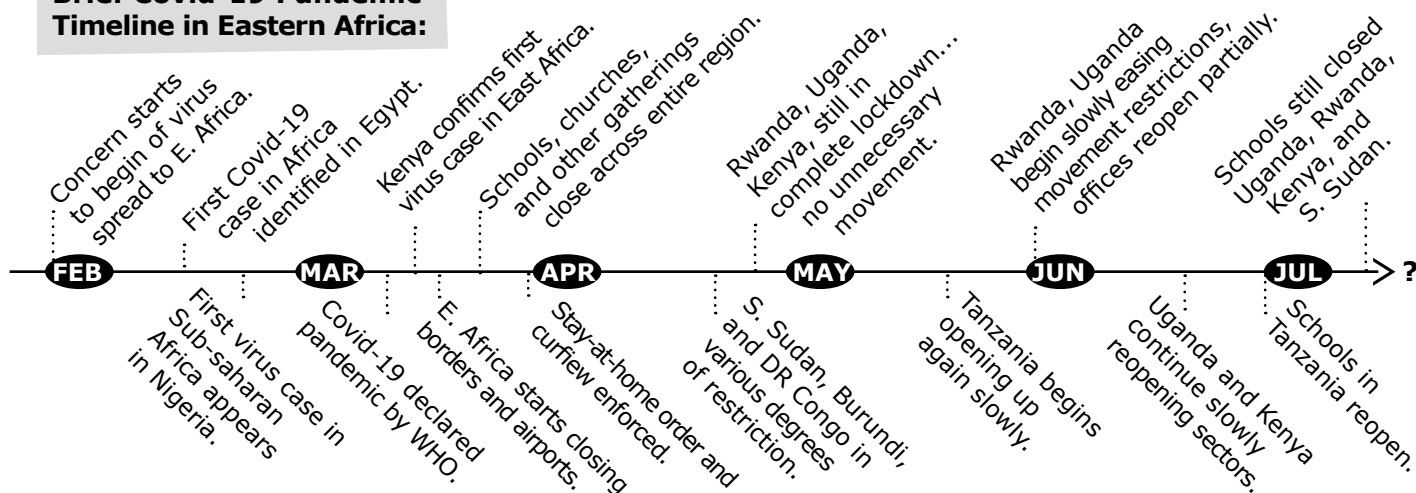
See more online:

www.CornerstoneDevelopment.org
www.CornerstoneSchoolsAfrica.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. At the end of last year, we highlighted our work and PROGRAMS in general, and now in this current edition, we turn to highlighting several of the PEOPLE in our community.

What have we been up to?

Brief Covid-19 Pandemic Timeline in Eastern Africa:



Many things about our work have changed in the past couple of months! As Covid-19 started spreading in this part of the world, governments of respective countries we work in imposed various measures of outbreak management. Most of these include closure of boarders / airports, limitations on large public gatherings, closure of school campuses and places of worship, etc. The most extreme of these was for several months in Uganda where people were ordered to stay home and not even allowed to drive their own cars! As measures are now being slowly lifted around the region, the countries we work in have been going in and out of varying degrees of restrictions, so we have to continuously adapt to evolving circumstances of operation week-to-week.

Right now, all our offices are officially open, but we are operating with temperature monitoring, face-masks, hand washing, limited hours, and staff are working from home where possible. To compensate for these restrictions, we are using online workspaces to create a sense community and manage workflows, and we do a lot more video conferencing that we used to! In order to do this well, we have had many trainings and tech upgrades with our staff to make sure we are equipped and able to engage productively in this new environment. We are fortunate that our entire team is still intact and we have been able to adapt in ways that keep us fruitfully engaged in our work, as we strive to continue being a mainstay of excellence and innovation in our field.

As various school campuses closed, we have continued engaging students online as much as possible considering the low-tech circumstances here. We have ensured that all students of our Leadership Academies have access to

basic smart-phones, and have worked with parents to ensure that students have internet access so they can get notes, and engage in online lesson-based chat groups and video calls. In the Alumni aspect of our work, many of our activities that relate to people gathering physically in larger groups have paused (except in Tanzania), and these engagements now happen on various video conferencing platforms. Every week, over a hundred small groups, special interest groups, fellowships, workshops (etc...) happen in our community across the entire region. We have learned a lot about his new online environment, and how to make these engagements meaningful for participants. Additionally, we have also been working with social entrepreneurs and innovators in our alumni networks, developing a variety of initiatives responding to challenges presented by the current season.

A staff workshop at CLA TZ in Arusha facilitated by Eric in Kampala via Video Conference





Kenneth Tumwine

Ntuti, Uganda

I started the year with so much ambition, so many plans - all the ideas I had been waiting for the new academic year to start implementing. We began on track, with strategy meetings, training workshops, student recruitment, selection, orientation, and just as our students were settling in, the fear of a global Covid-19 pandemic started reaching our local media outlets here in Uganda we were suddenly thrown in to LOCKDOWN!

Our new day-to-day life, the 'new normal', began with no idea of how long it would take for us to normalize again. When the announcement came in March that schools would be closing 'temporarily', I thought that things would resume to normal maybe after April. Then one month passed, and things weren't getting better... maybe after May? Then another month passed, and things still weren't better... maybe after June? Then another month... maybe after July? Then another month... surely after August?! But as time goes on, it's very clear that this 'new normal' has begun and it is here with us in one way or another.

In the midst of the lockdown, stuck at home, in fear of an ambiguous virus 'out there', we were unable to do anything about it but wait. And then, as we began to collect ourselves and ask "what next," came the struggle of adapting to change - work methods changed, ways of engaging with the world again changed, and this called for adaptation and total trust in God.

Having a bit of time now to look back and reflect on how far we have come with this work-from-home challenge, I can say that Jesus has really been faithful. As I have struggled to find new ways of

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Learning to Find Hope Amidst Uncertainty

continuing to be effective in my leadership responsibilities, God has met each of my steps forward in faith, with some good ground to step on. So, I am learning to live one day at a time devoting more time to experience God through prayer, and through quiet-time reading of scripture.

With more time spent in the God's presence, the word 'hope' has come to the forefront of my mind. I know that in my roles, I need to be an ambassador of hope for the sake of all the students who are struggling with it because no one expected the lockdown to take this long. So many parents have gotten worried of how much longer this is going to take, and teachers are wondering what the plan is going to be? But in all this God still remains God, God of all creation, God of all time, God of the possibilities, and he knows what we are going through... and I believe he surely has a plan for us all that works together for good.

Charles Carlson says in his book -The Good Life: *"we need to accept the seasons of life and learn what God has to teach us through each."* The 'good life' is not about things you will have, or places you will be, but it is about a quality of 'being' where you are. In the many changes in the world, one that I have been challenged to adapt to is working online and even embracing the ways technology can enhance our work. It is something that we have always lagged on here, especially in the rural context of where our school is located at Ekitangaala Ranch. The poor phone and internet network here has not made it easy... but I now have to admit that it is POSSIBLE, and if I don't struggle to catch up, we will be left behind. I didn't want the network issue to continue being a convenient excuse to not adapt, so therefore I had to be an example to all my staff by making it happen for myself.

We now use Zoom and WhatsApp as principle methods of engaging our students in both academics and discipleship lessons. 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... and 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. While others are complaining about the circumstances, we are striving to continue innovating and advancing, and this gives us a sense of fulfillment, knowing in our souls that we are doing the best with the opportunities we have here on earth.



Grace Sanya

Arusha, Tanzania

Praying, Baking, Driving, Gardening, Tailoring... and lots of Music!

Give thanks to God for His love endures forever (1 Psalms 118:1). For, all we are and have is a gift from God. Counting our blessings in this season begins with a grateful heart- having a family is a blessing, life is a blessing, friends around us are a blessing, and work is a blessing.

Be a blessing to others, for no tree enjoys its own fruits, so we are blessed to bless others. I have learned to share my life and love of God with others. At least even just as small as a smile, or even a hug to someone that needs it, a call or a message to friends as a sign of care, or spending my time visiting friends and family.

Invest in the Kingdom of God. In this season, I have spent much time praying for the world, beloved ones, work, our donors, and our entire organization Cornerstone. I have spent time sharing the gospel and giving hope to the hopeless, especially in church where I and my husband serve and fellowship to the youth, orphans, and widows.

Be creative in this season of the lockdown, find what is beneficial to life rather than remaining idle, and blaming circumstances. During this time, I have learned new skills that have added value to my life - I have really discovered more of who I am and what I can do!

- 1) I learned some new baking skills and was able to share with friends around me.
- 2) I learned how to drive from Mr. Babu Kasim, a fellow staff member. This is something that I really feared to do, but, now I am proud to say I can confidently drive on my own!
- 3) I have also cultivated a small garden of vegetables which I have been harvesting and sharing with our community.
- 4) I started learning some new tailoring skills...
- 5) AND, I have started to play the keyboard with my boys at home to add some flavor to our home fellowship praise and worship time.

Working with Cornerstone and the support they have given us during this season has been a true blessing to me. I have learned a new meaning of community, and have made lifelong friends here. I have learned to share my life with young people, and I feel I am living a real life of purpose!

Throughout my lifetime, I have come to learn to appreciate the beauty that surrounds all circumstances and seasons of life. Even if it is difficult to see at the moment, I believe that God has a purpose for every season in our lives. Jesus is with us in the good times, and Jesus is with us in the hard times... and even though the Covid-19 pandemic has been a gruesome season, living amidst uncertainties of what tomorrow will bring, we still have a reason to thank God.

It all started several months ago with great fear and tension for me. The fear of losing my beloved ones to the virus, my young boys and my husband, and the fear of losing my job as economies around the world started to crash. It felt like a darkness coming over the whole world, and my soul cried out, "Where is God?", "Can't God save the world from this mess?", "Can't God tell us what to do to overcome this?"

Suddenly one night in a dream, I heard a still voice reciting the scriptures: "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:1)... "Do not fear for I am with you... When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and when you pass through rivers, they will not sweep you over, When you pass through the fire, you will not be burnt... For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 43:1-3) I woke up filled with great joy as I had gotten answers to my questions! Then I wrote down some reflections to help keep me going:

Remain hopeful in Jesus and believe that amidst tribulation, He is right there. All we need to do is to call unto Him. He said storms will come our way but one thing He promised is that He will never leave us.

Working Online, Embracing Technology



Jackie Mbabazi

Kigali, Rwanda

This season has taught me to take one day at a time. I remember when the first Covid-19 case in Rwanda was announced, and I was very scared - it felt like the world was coming to an end. I remember fear overcoming me because of the gripping way that the news agencies had been reporting about it. For some time, I had started to believe that 2020 had already gone to waste. It is only now that I am discovering that this was a really limiting mindset. Rwanda is progressively opening back up, the economy is starting to move again, and we are back in our offices.

These months have been very tough for many - especially in our part of the world, but we should also recognize that a lot has gone well too. One of the biggest blessings this COVID 19 rendered to me was spending quality time with my family.

My husband and I recently celebrated our first year of Marriage, but until the lockdown, we actually hadn't spent that much time together. This is because he works upcountry, and so the only time we had with each other was over the weekends. Then, because weekends are full of other social engagements, we would not even have much quality time together when he was around. But, being stuck at home during the lockdown we were forced to slow down and unwrap the gift of quality time together, and we've really savoured these moments!

Of course, it wasn't all just precious moments, for there were many times you lose perspective as the days just melt together, and you struggle with a sense of meaning and purpose in it all. One of the phrases that kept me focused in this time came from a sharing of Uncle Tim's during one of our

online fellowships, quoting Napoleon Bonaparte: "A leader is a dealer in hope."

I work with Stage 3 of Cornerstone's work here in Rwanda, and this quote made a lot of sense to me from the perspective of my work. In it was the importance of me being a source of hope, not tension and fear, for those around me and those I represent. I decided that I wouldn't be a victim of fear inducing 'click-bait' news, or be the source of it for others. I determined that I would become a sharer of hopeful and helpful information online. I had experienced my fair share of exposure to hope-diminishing information that had a toll on me, and I didn't want anybody I cared about go through what I had gone through. To this day, my desire is that everything about me is able to communicate hope to those around me.

Another leadership lesson I've learned lately comes from how we do our work. Prior to the lockdown, the only thing I thought would be done from home was domestic work. Not in my lifetime had I envisioned my husband and myself waking up and going to work in our living room. It has been a struggle for me and those I serve to adapt quickly in use of technological tools, but Cornerstone has been very instrumental in helping us make these transitions easier.

Today my professional confidence levels have shot higher because I can execute my day today work using technologies like Zoom, WebEx, Whatsapp, Workplace, Google docs, to mention a few. Learning how to take my work online and embrace new technologies has without a doubt has been a gift for me in this season.

The hardest part of this season for me has been the social distance. I thrive very much around presence with others, and when you can't meet people, it is as though you've been disarmed. It bothers me when I cannot attend a loved one's funeral service or burial ceremony because of the pandemic. I consider my work pastoral in nature, and I have had it rough when one of the people I work with really needed my physical presence and I couldn't be there!

Amidst all this change and uncertainty, it has really helped me to meditate on the scripture in Hebrews 13:8 that says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."



Dusabe Alexis

Bujumbura, Burundi

I Found A New Passion In a Difficult Season

In my work engaging highschool student leaders with Youth Impact Mission (YIM), I serve as a communications officer, and I can say that I did not fully appreciate the importance of this role until these past few months that the Covid-19 pandemic has hit us. Initially, I just thought my role was about sharing information and updates... I would write about activities that happened, I would post some pictures on social media, and some people would 'like it' or comment about how great our work was. That was what I thought my responsibility was.

Honestly, it didn't require much skill, and also, at some level I felt unfulfilled as it was not really exploiting the gifts that I felt I had in me.

But as the outbreak of this pandemic began to ravage our country... things changed. It has not been easy for us here in Burundi because we live in a context where there has not been clear information about the extent of the pandemic published locally. This environment is a breeding ground for various rumors, and a general mood of fear about what is really happening has gripped people.

Amidst all this, I saw that we needed to keep the vision of YIM growing and we needed to continue encouraging our family of friends here in Burundi (especially the younger ones who are still in high school) to have hope for the future. I saw that we needed to help them continue believing in themselves, maintain healthy habits, and keep working hard and committed to excellence during this season, just as we taught them in the leadership principles of our curriculum.

This is when I saw that I had a leadership responsibility in my communication roles. I saw that good communication is not about just sharing information, but it is really about helping people grow!

So, I started reading some books and going through online tutorials about how to communicate more effectively and I improved my skills in taking pictures, editing videos, and writing content. I pro-actively get feedback from my peers and my audience about how I am doing so that I keep getting better. Sometimes I get negative feedback, and this is hard as it makes me feel like giving up. But when I get positive feedback, such as a young person who said they were really encouraged by my work, it really tells me that I am doing something worthwhile and I should continue.

Our monthly coordinators fellowships are of particular inspiration to me, for this is where we reflect on the teachings of Jesus. And, we really challenge each other and dream together about what is possible for our work in Burundi. In one of these sessions, a facilitator told us that we deserve to be watched because we are full of potentials and capacity to use our talents and gifts to light the world no matter how small it could be. That statement alone moved me deeply and convicts me to continue my newly discovered platform of leadership in the form of good communication.

Today, this gift is something that is still growing more and more in me. Something that I once minimized and didn't think much of, I have now seen has the potential to lighten the world! Who would have thought, that in the middle of this difficult time for our nation, with fear and insecurity everywhere, that I would find my purpose in life? I will keep on moving no matter the criticisms or discouragement in this area because I believe that my gift can inspire many young people to change their hearts and minds. This small gift I have discovered of good communication can help others with a sense of purpose in their lives, and make this world a better place to live in for us all.

Accepting Circumstances, Moving Forward!



Nhial Moses

Bor, South Sudan

Tragedies in this world are not things we forecast, but come upon us unexpectedly. Celebrating the new year, of a new decade, no one would have believed then how this year has played out. What started as rumors of a mild flu-like virus, has now brought the greatest nations on earth to their knees. This novel coronavirus now known as Covid-19 has proved to be an enemy unlike any our world has faced, and is leaving many living in fear, as governments are trying to do their best to “flatten the curve” of its spread.

Suddenly people all around the world have been cast into a common struggle, with common daily habits of social-distancing, studying/working at home, and economic uncertainty. While it seems obvious that what we need most is solidarity in order to follow guidelines and beat the virus together, people wrestle with their individualistic desires to live life on their own terms. But this virus knows no young or old, outcast or righteous, rich or poor. Everyone is a potential victim... and herein is the tragedy of it all.

So, what does life have to teach us in times of such misfortunes? In the wake of devastating disruptions to our every-day life, once we are able to get over the ‘injustice’ of it, we end up finding a way to live with our ‘new normal’. For me in particular, this has been the disruption of my academic progress... a journey on which I have over-come so much along the way, only now to be stopped by this invisible force. All of a sudden, classes were canceled, and I had the entire day to do as I wished! The one day turned in to several days, and I started experiencing a strange mix of boredom and stress about where this would all lead. I knew the pull of my bed

would get stronger and stronger if I didn’t take action to accept my circumstances, not wait for things to change, and keep busy working on manifesting my greater purpose in life.

I believe that knowing the difference between failure and success lies somewhere in one’s attitude towards hardships, discouragement, and setbacks. This attitude is the difference that could make one a victim, or a victor, amidst and also after the pandemic. I have grown in my understanding this, and taken my own steps forward, by paying more attention to my environment and thinking through the solutions to the problems I have identified.

After being displaced from my family home in Bor (South Sudan) because of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts, I spent many years as a refugee in Uganda. I have come to believe that a peaceful movement of activism in our generation of youth, through loving our neighbors as Jesus taught, could bring forth a change in the violent culture of our nation. For various cultural, spiritual, and geo-political reasons, a majority of our citizens nationwide have become participants of the degrading tribal initiations and victims at the same time. Awareness and education of the youth plays a vital role in the transformation of the hearts and minds of many young South Sudanese. Thus, I have been convicted to use my new-found free time to broadcast my message of hope, and peace-building. I started exploring every opportunity and tool I had in front of me to do this, and so-far have been focusing on social media. Every week I produce at least one video covering a certain inspirational topic, and I have seen my audience slowing growing with every clip. Although there is the usual scuffling of opinions that happens on social media, for the most part I have been really motivated by the constructive engagement and positivity of my audience.

Having such a platform has challenged me to work harder to assimilate transformational thoughts and content. I have found myself immersed in great works of literature such as, *Animal Farm*, *The Republic*, *The Rights of Man*, *Why Nations Fail*, *15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*, etc. These only increase my aspiration to make a positive change in South Sudan. I know that I have to become the point of change myself first, a thing I used to think was only for people who had finished their academic studies. I am starting to realize that who we become is a result of how we spend our days now - so use them wisely!

Let's Take Stock Of What We've Learned



Harriet Adongpiny

Kampala, Uganda

I have learned one truth in my life: nothing is what it seems. We so often believe in what we think things are from our limited perspectives, but as things unfold we see they were not what we once thought. The best advice I have received is that: you don't have to believe everything you think! Lean forward into the unseen, the unknown, and trust in Jesus. There is always a gift in everything. Reflecting on these thoughts, I decided to come to peace with the possibility that everything I 'know' might not be true, and instead of holding on to what I 'know,' explore the fears behind why I am afraid to let go of the belief that I have to 'know' what something is all about.

Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic I have been fortunate to have a good community to engage with, and process what is going on. Even through it has affected nearly every aspect of our lives today, I have tried to look at the whole situation from a more constructive perspective. These are questions I pondered regularly:

"I wonder what gift is in this _____?"

"If I was totally safe, totally self-assured, totally at peace - what would that feel like?"

One big thing that I consider a gift is that I have had time to intentionally reconnect with my distant relations and friends during this period. Before the lockdown, I got too lost in my job to call or even meet up with many of them, however, the lockdown rekindled a fire in my interpersonal relationships that made me learn the value of such relationships during turbulent times.

I heard Uncle Tim say, "we are all in the same storm but not all of us are in the same boat." I repeat this

quote in my head often because I consider myself very privileged to have a job, none of my family members fell sick of Covid-19, my friends have all been ok and none lost their jobs, and generally, we are all healthy. Yes, I miss some of my family members and friends who are out of Kampala or even out of Uganda. Yes, I get stir crazy and sometimes veer into feeling sorry for myself, but I repeat the quote in my head and it puts it all in perspective. I also remind myself that never again will I get to spend this much quality time with my family.

Professionally, I took the extra time to enroll in some short courses online, I researched and compiled capacity building materials for staff in my department, and worked on some policy documents. I also used this season to stay in touch with the children and mentors in the Youth Corps homes through weekly phone calls. The biggest work-related challenge I've faced personally is struggling to disconnect from work since work is home and home is now work. It was particularly difficult for the first few weeks but I'm now trying to adjust to the practice of leaving my desk when I would normally have left the office. The other big challenge is just the fatigue from so many virtual meetings and phone calls. To be honest I haven't figured out how to address that yet, so if anyone has any ideas please reach out to me!

I think this season might permanently change the way we behave, act or live because I think it will permanently change how we view the office. People will return to the office but I don't think we will return to how we used to do things. I also think that after families being so close and having dinners with each other every day that it will actually result in people making better work life balance decisions.

I would therefore encourage us to take serious stock of what we are learning about work and life right now, and plan for what lessons we want to hold on to in future. The times in my life when I have been too busy, too overwhelmed to sit down and to think about what I wanted to do were the times I felt the most disconnected, depressed and out of control. To me a plan is a way of making my life purposeful and a way to make myself accountable to the things I say I want to accomplish and that includes work, household stuff like cooking/cleaning, exercise, social outings, reading, and family stuff.

Life In Lockdown?

Some reflection from our broader family of friends around eastern Africa, and across the world...

Tracy Rose Kisakye: I have learned that I will never be alone. I had a friend who joked a few months ago before this pandemic season, "but Rose if a time comes and my job closes where will I go?" I actually told her that there are things which we can't manage by ourselves - only with God... And now here we are! God has seen us through so far, and now I know the Lord our God will work all things together for good.

modest fund we were able to reach up to 31 families/individuals with survival hampers and also support community policing. The lockdown time also enabled me to organize my photographs and get rid of lots of clutter from the house.

Nanziri Jane: More time with family, increased in meditation, building our friendship with my hubby more.

Earl Pitah: For me I realized dreams are God given and you might have your own dream, plans all well aligned but things don't go your way and you begin to question God. However, for I know that he has a better and bigger dream for us. The reason why I learnt this because of my plans especially after campus that is graduation, marriage...etc. but however this lockdown has shown me that sometimes we just have to trust in God and realize that he has a better plan for us.

Nankunda Elizabeth: It has helped have a more quiet time with the lord and I have learnt that we can do without some of the luxuries.



Sharlee Curry: Being in the country (USA), very rural, we have not been too affected but continue to enjoy our farm. We have gained more motivation to connect with our dear friends online and that will continue to benefit!

Ziraba Samuel: Wonderful time spent with family, had time to evaluate my years goals together with my wife. Yeah, my wife has also taught me some baking. Despite the restrictions and also not being able to go to work it's been a blessing in disguise. Been reading a lot about disabilities. Also read a book "The reason for my hope" by Billy Graham. Lastly, I have had enough time to pray and read my bible.

Kevine Beza: I learnt that God wants the best from his people so he decided to bring down all excuses that we made to him for not accomplishing his will in our lives but I see that everyone no longer makes his own ways as before rather than looking for heavenly support. So, to everyone this is your time cover up the debt you had with God when you were so much busy to yourself.



Charity Byarugaba: Being home, with no work deadlines and no stress has given me time to carefully reflect my decisions, my goals and my purpose. In so doing, I have received some good project ideas that I really look forward to Post-Covid19 Lockdown! Above all, having a 'me-time' and uninterrupted time with God is worth noting here. My heart is full of gratitude.

Ntege Issa: Surprisingly, I went into Lockdown with a mumbled spirit but now pray that we can have an annual monthly Lockdown. Some realizations: 1. Science has limits. 2. Fast political-economic life is merely strenuous. 3. Family bonding gives the best social satisfaction. 4. I have understood my kids better. 5. Pollution hit a real low - nature is getting restored with water levels rising to their original.



Sky Adams: When our lockdown became a reality, a thought crossed my mind that I had read somewhere, "You cannot think biblically and adopt a passivity lifestyle." I prayed to God to show me how to use this gift of time that was given to me. When God called me to help our thirsty world, He gave me a passion for it, which of course was good, but sometimes passions can become a problem. Somehow God needed to show me to trust Him and not to work so hard and that is what he is teaching me during these unsettled times.

Wyclif Jonathan Peraan: I have been loaded with much work. My colleges are at home and I'm carrying their load if I was also carrying their pay would be greatfull but am not.



Rebecca Karagwa: It's given me time to relax. I always have the pressure to perform- but I have slowed down as a result of the lockdown. I am living one day at a time.

Talanta Nahurira: It's been an awesome time to reflect, read my bible, read a book and of course try out new things like watching movies it hasn't been my thing.



Runtown Jhon: I have realized how important is to save some money from work. It has showed me that am important to some people that is to say, I received help financially and morally from some people and I was also able to help some people but all in



Robinah Sarah: I have spent my time with family and also worked in my garden and my poultry farm. This has enabled me to rely more on farming because with it you can't go wrong because it has sustained us during this lockdown.

Twahirwa Edwardz: This lockdown has taught me many things like thinking ahead... #BeginWithAnEndInMind, creating more time for friends and taking my time to understand myself better, understanding my fellows than before and having a deep think about my future career or education.

Victor Nicholas: I have learnt that people are more equal than they may think and to keep friends and make good ones, the earth is the challenge but God is the solution, last but not most observed is that saving is very crucial!

Mpeera Winy: The lockdown has taught me not to take the grace of God for granted because I have realized some of us have been home since it started but how we have managed to eat and drink or how we have been sustained... it's the grace of God indeed... it has also taught me to wash my hands and sanitize.



Paulo Kyama: Mine started with the work from home... as I had cough and flu which was uncomfortable for me and colleagues at work. By lockdown I had devised ways of remotely managing my busy desk. This has enriched me greatly. Upon advent of the full lockdown it became difficult to maintain active office contact hence freeing much time. I used the time to organize a community response to help the vulnerable within our community and precincts through mobilization of contributions from the people. Through a

all I have liked this lockdown - to a small extent it shows me that everything is possible.

Franklin Humble: It has taught me that we are all equal both poor and rich coz we have been all in lockdown and always to prepare for unprepared situations.



Gertrude Edakasi: I thank God for this lockdown was able to be with my hubby and children from Sunday to Monday, morning evening, we have been able to know who they are, we have been able to bond... hard to access stuff but very good for family and resting.

Asekenye Caroline: My God! I have learned everything in life is a privilege from God, the freedom, friends, life, food I mean everything! I really should be grateful for everything God has provided. As humans we plan but God directs it all.

Sylvie Mutesi: It's been a great time to reflect, re-strategize and work on myself generally, and also I have drawn much closer to God.

Josephine Ogaba: This lockdown has made me reflect on my spiritual life. I have learned to pray & fast and do "over-night" on my own. This is the time that I understood that church is actually me not the building... this might be strange but I thank God for this period.



Dorothy Ziraba: This is a season I have actually made more money as we opened our first "telegram baking school", I didn't know this was possible until I got time to think what next for me and my family, and right now already 15 students have registered to start classes on 27th, and more to this I have been researching a lot about food since that's my area of interest and am so happy so far my heart is satisfied with where I am heading, and of course the time I have had with my husband, it's been a season of family and am so so grateful to God. Now I must agree with the president that after this season the economy is going to be much better than it was before, we will now have many job creators, around the country.

Nelson Awule: Being restricted from going to our Church (physical), I have become the defacto senior family pastor, and this role has humbled me before my family.

George Graham: I experienced three days of quarantine (in the U.S.) before being called back due to crushing workload of settling or continuing court cases sans court hearings. Been doing it ever since. But hey glad to be working and have a job. No complaints.

Ongom Geoffrey Kaunda: 1. Not to fear, for God didn't give us the spirit of fear. 2. Leave everything in God's hands, He knows the future. 3. We have a part to play concerning our lives & God has a part to play, we should not leave all to God. 4. No condition is permanent. 5. There is an opportunity in everything, some who know how to grab it became very rich.

Jackie Ssemuusi: It has enabled me to do a lot of farming here. I have great time with my children and entire family.



Bob Hunter: On March 17, I woke up in the middle of the night with a full-blown press release in my mind. I went to my computer and wrote it and we (Consumer Federation of America) put it out that day. It was Holy Spirit inspired, I know. The release showed that the auto insurance companies were getting a COVID-19 windfall of profits because no one was driving any more. Two weeks later we came out again with more but the drop in driving was over 60% nationwide... The media picked it up, and insurers started offering paybacks to customers which is a huge success.

Inshuti Divine: Time management, Home chores as an act of worship Spending time with my family I've discovered that I can occupy myself and don't get bored at home, I've learnt that yes we can live a simple life at home the whole week and a month and life goes on!

Nambalirwa Loyce: Personally, it has taught me to prepare myself in heart with the Lord coz anything can happen any time but how have you prepared yourself for the Lord so we ought to prepare our lives socially, economically above all spiritually.



Buwule Doreen: I'm like in coma, everything seems okay but when it all fades I do not know where to start from. It's a painful wait.

Anatole Kaddu Kiriggwajjo: I have utilized this lockdown to do basically 5 things: Resting both passively and actively. Exercises both in my garden, compound and on the road

to check on my 80yrs old mum. Reading for my research work and soul enrichment. Discovering my children's gifting and building their social capabilities. Giving thanks to God for what I have been through for the past 10yrs through reflections. It's a fruitful season, all we need to do is to allow our minds to accept what it's.



Ignatius Komakech: This was an opportunity for me to do a number of things. 1. I have been able to do farming in some 6 acres of land I had bought and also make proper use of my 1 acre land in Gulu town. 2. I have had the longest running time at home than any since starting work with UCI in 2018. 3. It's been an opportunity for me to check on my friends, family and colleagues since there is less work due to the reduced number of patients. 4. This lockdown gave me time to collect adequate data for my research within weeks since patient files are a bit free due to the reduced number of patients reporting at UCI.

Annette Mutaawe: Most importantly I've been able to connect with my God through reading the word (this time without dosing!) and praying regularly. I've learnt to appreciate and trust Him more in all situations. We have had enough time for both prayer and play with family.



Ampumuza Melissa Faith: I've taken time to read inspirational books that I had not been giving attention. I've gone back through my discipleship books to renew what I was taught before. Since we are spending more time with people, am working on my relationships with others, bravely and how to be more understanding. I've also realized am so blessed because life is still good to thank God more than I did. I am realizing my potentials more and knowing more about my future career and more.

Prince Emilio Alymas: The lockdown has helped me prepare myself 100% for my pre-entry exams and work on my health.

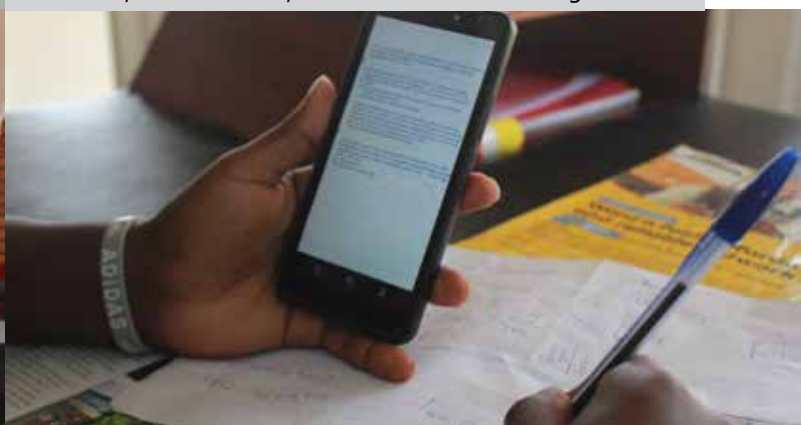
Namulondo Sandra: This time brought a lot of warmth amongst family. I have gotten time to plan better than ever with my husband. It has marked a new chapter of self-employment in our family. Lots of research on possible businesses and possible timelines.

Cornerstone

Newsletter Pictorial



When our CLA campuses closed, students have continued studies online - with basic smart phones they access notes, chat forums, and video conferencing calls.



CLA Tanzania graduating class of 2020. After a short lockdown, the school was able to open in time for the S.6 class to take exams and graduate this month



H.M. Ejalam and D.H.M. Sanya speak at graduation



Staff of CLA Tanzania singing a farewell song to graduates



Construction on the Kigali Hostel has continued during this season and they are now working on the top floor.



Student recruitment and a new class of students at CLA Tanzania!



Food aid distribution during lockdown initiated by Norman Mugisha, Enock Luyonza and Nicole Teta



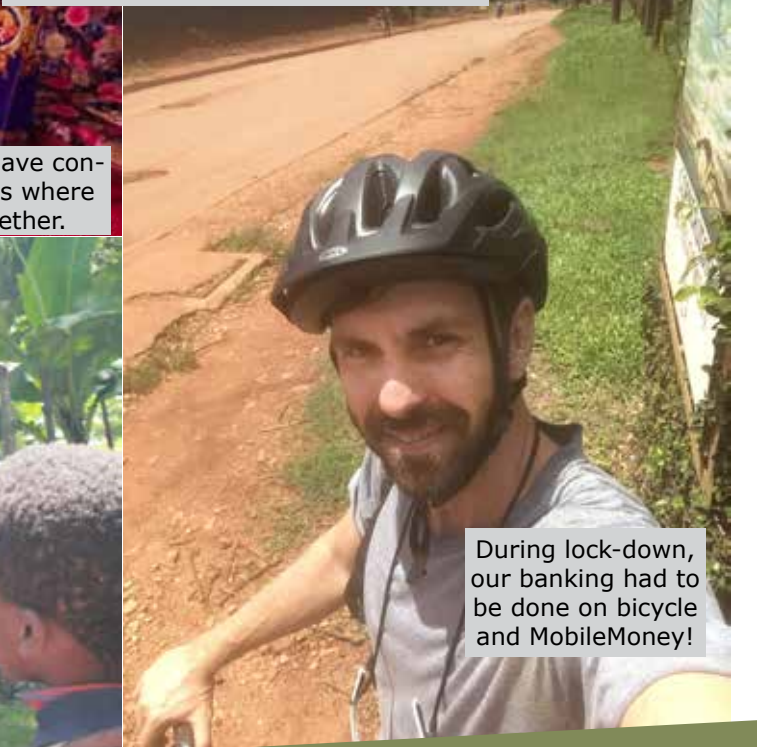
A new 4-unit house completed at CLA Tanzania for single staff members



Some house fellowships have continued in places in hostels where students are living together.



Mwajuma in Tanzania distributing learning materials to kids stuck at home



During lock-down, our banking had to be done on bicycle and MobileMoney!

A Family of Friends!



Judy Misati

Nairobi, Kenya

Crisis: Danger + Opportunity!

dissappointments resulting from this crisis, there is a new opportunity in it all. As we do all this adjusting, we can trust in Jesus for our future and reflect on The Serenity Prayer: *“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

I have learnt that cultivating a ‘good mindset’ is easily done through the power of thanksgiving. With a positive attitude, we can see the real gifts of the season are the aspects that give you an unexpected, or a renewed sense of purpose. As I go through this day, I appreciate the gift of life. It is not everyone who has seen this day. It is a blessing to have the blessing of life.

At the end of 2019, the regional WEKUSA games were nearing. I received a call from our games master requesting me to arbitrate the scrabble games. It was an exciting time. The games were to take place for three days; however, the scrabble games were to take place for two days. The teams had to play fifteen games to determine who would qualify for the regionals.

Arbitrating was not easy; however, watching the games as they were taking place was really out of this world. I remember calling out our women’s team, which, won fair and square the top team. Our male team came in second place. Which meant we automatically qualified for the nationals. To top that up we would also automatically be considered as the team that would represent the university in the East African games which would be held in Uganda.

In February 2020, we played the nationals, and our team registered significant growth. We were all set for the East African games in Uganda... **BUT THEN**, coronavirus happened!

Many of us had plans for the whole of 2020 that were cancelled. The new normal is one of adjusting... and surrendering our own will and our own might, and trusting in the power of the Almighty God that all things will work together for good. It turns out, the most significant gift I have found in this season is the time I have spent with my loved ones. I feel that this is the most prolonged period I have had to spend with my family.

I have heard that in Chinese the word for ‘crisis’ contains the meaning of ‘danger’ plus ‘opportunity’. Despite the canceled plans and the

I have genuinely been in a perspective of abundance in that I am graced with the skill of writing - a skill I gained slowly. Staying at home has allowed me to do more writing. I can let out my thoughts through writing. In this period, there has been a significant increase in depression. It is as a result of poor mental health and people not having proper channels to let out their frustrations. The looming crisis in the economic sector is prevalent. Industries are struggling to stay afloat. I know several friends who have been laid off from jobs. It is one of the difficulties of this season.

We can overcome this period by sticking together. Learning to give a friend an ear is essential. There is no better feeling than that of being cared for. Sharing is caring, by giving people your time you share it, by giving people an ear then you share. I enjoy talking, I love conversing, and this allows me to unload.

We can do more together than we do apart, through teamwork, partnerships, friendships and organizations. In my work with the Africa Youth Leadership Forum (AYLF), and The Blend Magazine in particular, I have a platform build on a network of relationships that allows me to connect and care for so many more people than I could alone. These platforms allow me to be involved in something bigger than myself even whilst being stuck at home in this coronavirus season.

As the water in a river follows with the current, I have chosen to release attachment to things I cannot change and open up to new things as they come. With every river that gushes into a waterfall, eventually its turbulence settles, and becomes peacefully flowing water again. I believe that this is a season with very many lessons that we will carry forward in our lives.

I Got Married!



Benjamin Bisimwa Cibaye

Bukavu, D.R. Congo

Though many take this notion for granted, we must always remember that life itself is a gift, that we are blessed with daily. It can be hard to appreciate this, especially in this season where the novel coronavirus has spread around the world, increasing hardship and causing many to live in fear of the future. This uncertainty has caused many conspiracy theories to spread, and people are desperate to find some understanding of what all this means as we read the news of thousands of deaths daily, and the difficult news that follows... "Wash your hands. Wear the mask. Observe social distance. Do not touch your mouth and eyes, etc..."!

As a result, people are visiting their loved ones less and less, public places of worship are closed, business is dwindling, etc. Life is almost coming to a standstill for some who are affected most, and governments are faced with no clear solutions as to what to do... every possible way forward seems to involve loss at some level. On the one hand, it is clear that lockdown restrictions are creating an economic nightmare for us. On the other hand, the risks of opening borders, allowing travel and other business, would improve livelihoods, but it would pose a real threat to the health of our loved ones (specifically the elderly), and would result in loss of life! One could really lose hope wrestling with the moral dilemmas that this season presents us with, and how to have those difficult conversations with others.

But if you just stop for a moment, and consider the case of the environment, which on another hand, has seen this season as a blessing, you might realize that it is not all just doom and gloom. Right now, the air in many parts of the world is cleaner than it has been in decades, there are less and less pollut-

ing activities, and people are beginning to gain perspective on just how bad things had gotten. This has given many of us a renewed belief that we CAN do something about environmental issues in our lifetimes... we just need to all come together on it.

This is why it's appropriate to recognize that the best way to understand the context of this season is to live with it. In order to find peace in all that is going on right now, we can still choose to enjoy each day that we do have here together, and remain positive and optimistic that things are going to get better.

For me, these times have made me value being a part of the family of friends in the spirit of Jesus - that I have in the Africa Youth Leadership Forum (AYLF). The constraints of this season have convicted me to do more to catch up with these friends, and it brings us closer to each other, especially when we least expect it. For it is also in this context that my wedding took place on April 14, 2020, in Bukavu (Eastern DR Congo), where I am proud to serve as coordinator of AYLF activities.

The challenges were indeed enormous in executing this most important event of my life, especially considering the small number of guests who were able to formally participate. But, having it all finished now, I can take this opportunity to express my gratitude in the whole community which goes beyond our borders - especially for the messages of support and wishes of happiness for me and my wife. What an honour to be part of such a great family. Can you imagine... even during this difficult season, I was able to have the most fulfilling and incredible moments of my life so far!

At home in Bukavu, the sky has not yet fallen on our heads. The proof? We continue to LIVE, confined or not, we wear locally made masks, even if it is sometimes stifling, we avoid physical contact with our broader community, we wash our hands (a lot), and while the places of worship are closed we continue to pray in our homes. The secret to daily enjoying this greatest gift that we have of our life, is to try to connect our daily activities to things that give us more meaning and purpose. Do small things each day to work on any projects you can - for oneself and for the community. In this context, we must not lose hope, so we can continuously grow. As long as you have dreams, you have the ability to work towards them! As long as I have a choice: I won't die...I will live!

A Few Things I Have Learned



Rogathe Loakaki

Arusha, Tanzania

Like many others, I was struck with anxiety when I started hearing statistics of this new virus, Covid-19, spreading across the world... Is this going to be a spark of a new world war? Is this the beginning of the end of the world?!

When your normal life is taken away from you, at first there is the frustration and denial, and then comes the longing for when you can experience the little usual things again. I missed my friends, I missed our small group fellowships, shops and markets I used to freely go to, I missed walking down the streets without having to wear a face mask, I missed watching the news on TV with no mentions of the pandemic. I have been longing for the good old days, hugging and hanging out with friends.

Since the initial lockdown measures were taken, in Tanzania we have attempted to go back to normal faster than other East African countries. We have adapted to living with the virus with specific containment strategies, and this has given us some hope and confidence that we can beat the virus even without the vaccine that others seem to be waiting for. We have intentionally focused on overcoming fear and anxiety while following many guidelines to protect ourselves from contracting the virus. I'm happy to say that even in our Cornerstone family of CLA alumni, we are slowly getting back to our usual meetups, fellowships, and visits while taking precautions.

Amidst the ups and downs of this season, I have had a lot of time to reflect on some lessons I am learning, and I will take this opportunity to share a few:

76 Humility & Gratitude: COVID-19 has shown me that our human abilities have a limit, and at

a certain point I have to give up and come to peace with a higher power at work. In this, I also have returned to the basics and am reminded that life, good health, family, and friends are all a precious gift to embrace and appreciate while I can.

Unity: In the face of this common struggle we are all in, wars and fighting one another seem meaningless. As a family of friends in the spirit of Jesus, I have witnessed our community call for the mobilization of joint prayers across religious divisions, and I have seen people from different walks of life encouraging one another through our online fellowships. I am convinced that the only way through this is together... it is not an enemy that we can take on as divided people, and we will only live flourishing lives if we come together in this season.

Adaptation: I have been forced to adapt to the use of new online technologies in many activities like meetings and learning. It is not easy to do things in new ways, but I have seen others refuse to adapt and they have really struggled to stay healthy and positive. As we pursue our life-long relationships in COSA, we have to explore new possibilities of engaging with each other so that none of us is left behind. Being flexible to growth and evolution has actually been exciting for me and it has made recent changes much easier. I hope we can keep exploring such possibilities and use them to our advantage as a family of friends trying to stay connected to one another going forwards.

Reconnection: This season has created space for me to reconnect with my inner being. By taking a break from the busy-ness I was engulfed in before has given me a chance to reflect on my own life, the purpose to which I was created, my values, and what drives me. It has given all of us time to rest and feed our souls, reflect on what we truly love, and connecting with our beloved ones more intentionally.

Say what you want, but it may get worse before it gets better. By the end of this, I hope that we come out stronger, wiser, and much more aware than before. Tremendous growth awaits us if we open up ourselves to the lessons that have come to us in this season so let's stay positive and make the most of this time. Overall, if there's only one thing you can take away from this season we are in, it is that something positive can always come from any circumstance if you're open to seeing it!

The Gifts in Giving



Norman Mugisha

Kigali, Rwanda

My name is Norman Mugisha, Cornerstone Leadership Academy (CLA) Rwanda class of 2012, a social entrepreneur and a Schwarzman scholar with a Masters in Global Affairs from Tsinghua University in Beijing. I returned home from Beijing only a month before the first phase of Covid-19 lockdown was imposed and I am so grateful things worked out the way they did. This season has helped me become much more aware of the blessings heaven has bestowed on me. My response to being blessed so much has helped me cultivate a posture of gratitude and responsibility. I now use my gifts, time, and treasure to help uplift those in a position I once was in myself.

A week into the lockdown here in Kigali, I heard a knock on my gate. I remember this day like it was yesterday. She was a widow walking with her 5 kids, looking for food to feed her children. I listened to her story, and I was broken by it. Collecting all the food I could offer from my home, I offered her what I could.

This widow's heart-wrenching story wouldn't leave me for hours after. I could only imagine the many other widows out there, children and vulnerable people who were going through tough times but didn't have the boldness to act as the widow had. I was left restless. I knew there must be a way to help more but I didn't know where to start, so I began thinking about my broader community that had similar values and might share the kind of convictions I had.

It is in seasons like these where you come face to face with adversity that you begin seeing what the value of Cornerstone's family of friends really is. I reached out to as many of our CLA alumni and friends as I could, and appealed for them to share any food sur-

plus with the needy. Enock Luyonza and Nicole Teta, volunteered to help me coordinate the campaign, raising resources so we could distribute care packages to people in the most need.

We were overwhelmed by the amount of positive response! By the time lockdown was lifted, we had managed to feed over 250 families with a weeks' supply of food. Seeing all these families able to go through another day without the stress of not knowing where they'd get the next meal for me has been a gift for this season indeed.

Now that the lockdown is easing and more sectors are reopening, I am able to travel upcountry and re-engage with my work more actively. A year ago, I started a non-profit called Young African Business Booster with the sole aim of equipping youths living in rural contexts with necessary skills, mentorship and financial seed capital to create thriving agribusinesses. When we began, 700 young people from rural Rwanda were drafted into the initiative. For months, we made sure that these young people access valuable trainings from a host of experts in the field of agriculture. We taught them the principles of doing business and as you read this, 80 percent with the help of our financial facilities, have started their agribusinesses.

In June, we launched the Afri-farmers market; connecting local farmers with consumers by opening fruit groceries in 2 large markets in Kigali. With many of our young people growing vegetables and fruits now, we noticed that there was wastage and we needed to minimize it.

Looking back at where my journey started, the day my feet touched ground at CLA Rwanda, I can never be grateful enough. Having gone through so much personal transformation with the Jesus-based discipleship curriculum and being so passionate about good leadership, I remember being elected chairman of the school council in my second year at the academy. It is responsibilities like these that later would prepare and propel me into leadership positions I could only dream about - like becoming the first foreign-student guild president at Costa Rica's Earth University, where I did my Bachelors in Agricultural sciences.

Right from CLA, I have always known that everything rises and falls on leadership, but during this season of observing how different leaders around the world have helped communities and nations navigate this pandemic, this truth has never been so distinct.

Working on the Front-lines

A few profiles of individuals or initiatives in our community addressing the Covid-19 pandemic



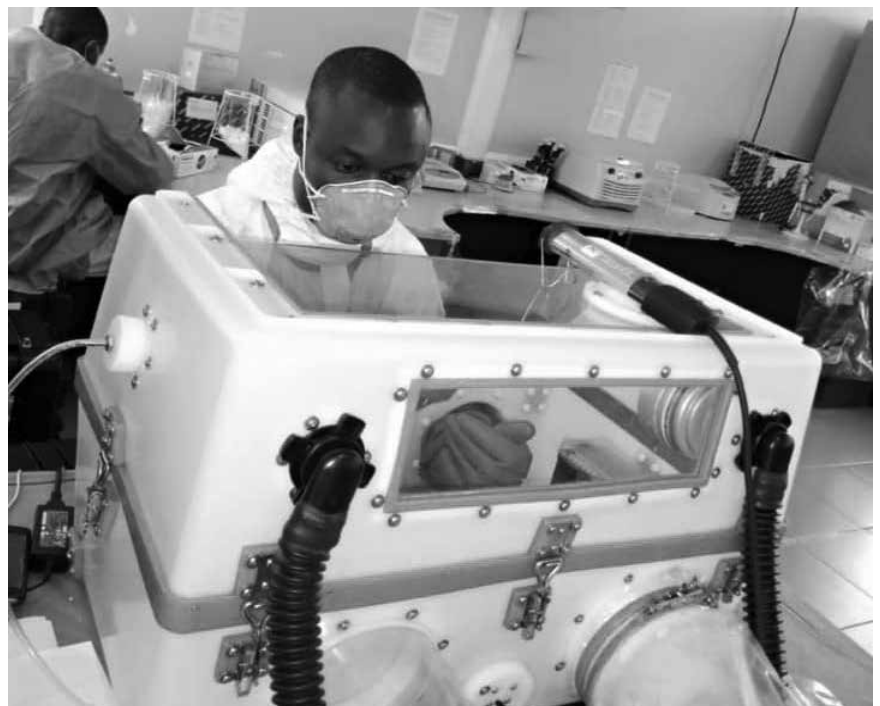
Tonny Muyigi (CLA Uganda, 2011)

Tonny works with the Ministry of Health in the Department of Public Health Emergencies. So, right now he is one of our 'front line' workers in the battle against the spread of Covid 19. He is stationed at Malaba border and does the testing of truck-drivers entering Uganda. He told me: *"I am always put on the frontline in the control of infectious diseases in Uganda - including Ebola, Marburg, Rift Valley Fever, Cholera, Anthrax etc... and now COVID 19. My major role is the timely diagnosis of infectious disease etiologies and control."*



I know Tonny as someone who lives by the principles of Jesus and who sees what he is doing as service to God through serving humanity. He was the chairman of his class at CLA. One of Tonny's favorite quotes is: *"Don't be in a hurry to condemn a person because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think... or think as fast as you think. There was also a time when you didn't know... what you know today."* - Malcolm X.

When I first met Tonny in 2009 he was still a teenager and I could not see what he would become in future. But, like all the young people who come into our academies from humble backgrounds -we believed that one day with the right mentoring and support - he would become someone who contributes to the good of society and be a role model for others. And in the same way don't disrespect yourself. You too are capable of greatness. Develop your capacities, move out, open doors, dedicate your life in service to God and humanity. Then you will see an invisible hand begin to guide you - to the place where you can serve best. The Master taught: *"Whoever would be the greatest among you...let him be the one who serves."* Mt. 23:11
- By Tim



Okello Alex
(CLA Uganda, 2002)

Together with his wife Betty, they run St Eliza Health Care Services, an organization that addresses the challenge of access to professional, quality, affordable and safely prescribed medication for children, mothers and elderly. In their Covid-19 response they are delivering medicines to people with chronic medication needs as well as carrying out psycho-social support through a telemedicine services concept. 60-patients on chronic medication mostly the elderly and pregnant who are not able to access health facility because of lockdown and high transport fares are being visited and supported with medical supply around Gayaza. A team of 4-passionate and experienced health workers who possess identification cards from the Ministry of Health are carrying out the assignment under the supervision of the Executive Director.



Daniel Ganza + Enock Luyonza
(YIM Rwanda + CLA Uganda 2006)

Guma Murugo is a documentary initiative and now web project that documents community stories from everyday Rwandan people about the impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic on their lives and general well-being. The project involves video interviews, pictures, and stories of COVID 19 survivors, victims, and health officials at the forefront of saving people's lives.

The major objective of this project is to collect and preserve these stories for the future generations of researchers, policymakers, health officials, historians, and learners; To have a glimpse of daily lives during this 21-century pandemic and the multifaceted ways lives were impacted. Besides acting as a valuable resource for knowledge, this visual archive will also act as a source of inspiration for future citizens to prepare for such unexpected and horrendous experiences.

Working on the Front-lines

A few profiles of individuals or initiatives in our community addressing the Covid-19 pandemic

Babirye Prossy (CLA Uganda, 2006)

The Covid-19 lockdown affected many peoples livelihoods, and also grocery supply chains. As a way to respond to the economic effects of women in her community and improve access to more nutritious food for families, Prossy identified a group of 30 women who she has trained in vegetable growing and small business management. By end of June she had also extended business loans averaging 500,000/= to 7 women. And, now many of the women were beginning to harvest their vegetables both for their own family's home consumption and for sale.



Elisante Ephraim and Friends

(CLA Tanzania, 2016)

Because of the closure of schools during lockdown. Builders of Future Africa (BFA) under the leadership of Elisante sought innovative ways to continue the learning of children in communities around Arusha, Tanzania. Their activities have included sensitizing parents about home schooling, providing text books, setting test questions and they have so far reached 203 primary school children in the area. Builders of Future (BFA) TZ is a group of alumni of CLA TZ based in Arusha.



Onesmas Ngoboka

CLA Uganda (1998)

Based in Rukungiri Western Uganda Onesmas is a pastor and community leader. During the pandemic his focus was to help community members gain increased access to affordable locally made face masks, as well as sanitary pads for girls. The project has so far benefitted 426 adults with masks, and 150 young girls with sanitary pads. It has also started a new business that will continue to employ community members and meet more such needs in future!



Minky Karanja (AYLF Kenya Alumni)

Minky is an AYLF Alumni in Nairobi Kenya and runs Mwatate CHC with the aims to reduce the amount home deliveries in Tassia, Embakasi East. This is the most populous Nairobi constituency with Tassia having a catchment population of 10,000+ women of reproductive age. With the socio-economic challenges experienced in the Covid-19 season, many women are unable to travel long distances to access maternal care in public health facilities which are overwhelmed - opting for home deliveries. This is a dangerous option which might influence maternal & neonatal mortality rates, they aim to curb this by mapping pregnant women in the area, enabling & encouraging hospital attendance.

Minky says, "Since inception of this project in May, hospital deliveries have tripled from 8 in April to 28 in June 2020. Mothers attending antenatal clinic have also increased by 45% within the same period. Having mapped 1500 households, we hope to map 4,000 households by the end of the program while equipping our maternity wing to include caesarian section, buy baby warmers, ultrasound machine & ambulance to ensure our maternal care services are comprehensive."

The Storms of Life

2. Storms carry a message for us that, "it's time to move higher, spiritually." When the storms of life are hitting us - let it be a reminder that's time for us to move higher and closer to God.

We can take an example from the eagle: When dark rain storms come, all the other smaller birds go downwards...to seek cover. The eagle alone goes upward until it rises above the clouds - where it emerges into the sun light above the rain clouds.

This example is meant to illustrate that in a storm we have a choice. We can allow ourselves to get beaten down by the rain storm coming from the dark clouds in life... or we can choose to 'fly higher' above the clouds and get into the divine Light that is always shining above the clouds.

Whenever you feel fear, anxious, disturbed or stressed - examine the reason your mind gives you for being in this miserable condition. You will find that it's always because we believe there is something "bad" and threatening, out there in the world. Yet, at the same time we can choose to believe - there is always another brighter Reality shining onto our life - just as the sun is always shining above the dark clouds.

So, may we also learn, like the eagle, to raise our hearts higher during the storms of life - instead of letting the storm beat us downward into despair or depression.

3. We may be in the same storm...but, realize that we are not all in the same boat. For some, this time of isolation...whether mandatory or by government has been a blessing - a welcome long pause after a hectic, busy stretch of life. But of course for others - this has been a desperate time of not being able to earn their 'daily bread' as many jobs were stopped and businesses closed down. Yet, others have benefited financially because of this storm.

For medical workers in hard hit places - this may be the worst experience they have ever faced. Some have been sick and almost died from this storm...others have already lost someone from it. For those that live alone, it may have been a time of real loneliness.

While for others- it's been a time of increased or renewed reconnection with family. I'm sure there

are many kids who will look back at this time with some fond memories of having extra time together as a family.

So, friends, we are all in the same storm but we are not all in the same boat. Therefore, whatever your experience has been - let's try to be sensitive to how this storm might have affected others. Let's be slow to pronounce our opinions and let's show some love and consideration during a storm - for those that have had a difficult experience.

4. In a Storm you have to take the responsibility to keep yourself strong: I like the saying: *"All the water, from all the oceans cannot sink a boat - unless it begins to get inside of it."*

If you watch fishermen in Africa who are using small wooden boats or canoes - you will see that they are constantly scooping out any water which leaks into their boat. Even large ocean-going ships have pumps continuously running that remove any water that finds its way inside the vessel.

In the same way, remember when you are sailing through a dark, stormy sea - it cannot sink you...unless you allow it to *"get too much inside of you"* - in other words, unless you allow fear and despair to accumulate inside of you to a dangerous level.

We are talking here about maintaining what could be called *'mental/spiritual/emotional hygiene.'* In other words, keeping negativity from building up inside of you to the point where it starts to sink your boat.

There was a time Jesus was telling his disciples that Satan was coming after him but he makes this interesting comment, he says: *"...he is coming - but he has nothing in me."* (Jn.14:30) I take that to mean - that Satan cannot really get to him or *'get inside his head'* - we might say, because he didn't have any *"loop holes"* to allow that to happen to him. In other words, he did not have weaknesses in him that Satan could exploit - to sink him.

5. In a storm as leaders, we also have the responsibility to keep those around us strong. During a storm a good leader must be *"a dealer in hope"* as Napoleon once said.

When there is a storm we have to be the ones who encourage people around us. As a leader, remember that everything you do or say has an extra effect on the people around you. Like stones dropped into still waters

*"I have told
you these things,
so that in me you may
have peace. In this world
you will have trouble.
But take heart!
I have overcome
the world."
- Jesus*

our words, attitudes and actions cause ripples to spread and expand as they move outward. They get passed invisibly onward from person to person. We either become a source of great joy, inspiration, anxiety, discouragement or pain and fear to others in our world.

There is a story that illustrates this well: Towards the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, many South Vietnamese people began fleeing the country by boat - as they saw the Communist North taking over the country. Over the next 2 decades...about 2 million refugees left by boat.

These over-crowded boats often met many terrible conditions. But the Vietnamese monk and author, Thich Nhat Hanh, discovered from those boats that managed to survive - there was a common reason as to why they did so. He wrote about it as follows: *"When the crowded Vietnamese refugee boats met with storms or pirates, if everyone panicked, all would be lost. But if even one person on the boat remained calm and centered, it was enough. It showed the way for everyone to survive."*

So, the lesson here is - in times like these, be that one person who gives hope to others. You may not know any more than they do, you may not have any answers - but you can speak words of faith that build up people's hope.

In a storm a good leader - must often be a **"Wounded Healer."** What this means is that a good leader must still speak healing words and act in healing ways - even if they are wounded themselves.

Don't think that you first have to solve all your own problems before you can help others. Almost everyone you meet today is having some challenge or fighting some kind of battle - just as you are now.

Almost everyone needs to hear words like: *"You will be okay. There are better days ahead. You are doing your best. I care about you."* Just one nice word can change someone's day. Just one small act of kindness, can give strength to a weary soul. It might be a little financial help, a text, a phone call or a smile which simply says: *"I see you...I care...I am with you."*

6. Storms shift things around and force change - but in times of change, there is opportunity to improve for the better: Storms force us to re-examine everything and open our eyes to see things in a new way. We can use such moments to make adjustments for the better - if we use the time to reflect and re-think the ways we have been living our life and going about our business.

So, there is an opportunity being presented to us - during those periods of our life when we feel lost and we can't see where our future is going. The opportunity - is to open a new chapter, tap new energies, change old habits, innovate and move in new directions.

In the big difficult storms of life - we ask God the deeper questions: *'What is the point of it all? What am I doing with my life?'* And, in such moments God is also asking questions of us: *"What can you let go of? What can you do - which you have been avoiding? What are you learning in this?"*

7. How to come out of a difficult storm: "Do the next right thing." I got this one from the recent Disney animated movie called "Frozen 2." Well, I don't watch many movies - let alone children cartoon films. But some on-line blogs that I follow - were talking about how this film contained spiritual messages for those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. So, I watched it.

In this movie, some kind of 'dark storm' came over the kingdom that the main character, Princess Elsa, had taken over from her Father. In a vision, she was told that the reason for this dark storm was due to a wrong that her Grandfather committed against a neighboring group many years before.

And now, she was being tasked to right this wrong in order to lift the curse that had fallen over their land. But, she was not given a clear way forward on how to do so. She was only told - at each step of the journey she must: **"DO THE NEXT RIGHT THING"** And, if she kept doing this, even though things may get worse temporarily - eventually everything would turn out for the best (as it did at the end of the movie).

This reminded me of a quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. which says: *"Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase."* Sometimes we can get so paralyzed by uncertainty that we end up doing nothing.

"The next right thing" may often not be anything big or flashy. It may not be recognized or applauded by others. It may just be apologizing to someone you hurt or forgiving someone who hurt you. Or, stopping an unhealthy habit. Or, keeping a promise that you made to someone. You will know it in your heart - if you ask God to speak to you. Your *'next right thing'* more than likely is totally different from everyone else's. After all, it's **YOUR** next right thing not anyone else's.

So, whether you are still in the storm or trying to recover after a storm - if you keep doing the *"next right thing,"* however small it is - you will gradually begin to put your life back into alignment with the perfect will of God for your life. And somehow - things will work out, for *'God makes a way where there is no way.'*

Don't focus on the idea of being stuck. Just take those little steps, the baby steps that are within your power to take right now. Remember, you don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the one step you can take - in front of you right now and you will gradually come out of the storm.



7 THOUGHTS ON MANAGING THE STORMS OF LIFE

Over the past few months all of us have had to adjust to the 'new normal' of the Covid-19 storm, in one way or another. And, most of us have had much more time to be reflective and to re-examine our ways of doing things. We have been forced to really pause, to stay in one place and to spend a lot more time - alone and with a few others.

For me personally, after a 30-year marathon of building up the Cornerstone programs in the 7 East African countries where we work - suddenly I could not travel anymore. (In Uganda we could not even drive cars and our office was closed for nearly 2 months.)



A Wise Man Builds His House on a Rock - Jesus

Big storms in life, like this one, shake things up and test us - on an individual level, on an organizational level and even collectively as humanity. They do not leave us the same. But there is also opportunity in such times - to shift out of old patterns that were not serving us well and to take up new ones that are more effective and more aligned to the values and mission that Jesus has given us.

In this article I share some observations, tips and thoughts that I have teaching about over the past months about moving through the storms of life:

1. Storms are natural, periodic occurrences that will keep coming through-out life. Years ago, I remember our senior mentor, Michael Timmis, saying that he has passed through many storms in life and that: *"the storms in life will always keep coming."* It struck me to hear him say this - but as he was older and had lived more life than me, I took it to heart.

It also reminded me of the opening sentence of a popular book called, *"The Road Less Traveled"* by the psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck. The opening line is 3 words: *"Life is difficult."* He then says, nearly all of the clients who came to him over the many years of his practice - were suffering unnecessary emotional distress simply due to one mistaken belief. They thought that life was supposed to be easy - yet their life was hard! And, this was the root cause of much of their psychological distress.

Jesus taught: *"In this world you will have tribulation!"* (Jn.16:33) In other words, *"...it's normal, get used to it."* But then he adds, *"Be of good cheer."* Or, *"Don't let that get you down."* Learn to find joy and live with joy - despite life's unavoidable challenges.

So, life is difficult and the storms of life that God allows to keep coming at us - serve some important purposes. Otherwise, he would not allow them.

Storms teach us to be resilient, to plan ahead, to be hard working - but in particular, they teach us the importance of investing: Investing in relationships, in savings, in our health and in our spiritual foundations. Because, when a storm hits, our strengths will be tested and our weaknesses will be exposed.

This idea is found in one of the parables of Jesus about how a storm affected two people differently. It's the one about the wise man who built his house on a rock (built his life on strong principles) compared to the foolish man who built his house on sand - which was destroyed in a storm. He concludes this parable with these words. *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house on a rock."* Matthew 7:24