

Mission to Mozambique

One Virginia woman, led by faith, passes her sturdy cane to another

By Judy Worthington

'And what does the Lord require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.'

— Micah 6:8:

She was almost 80 years old when she decided to go on her first mission trip. It promised to be challenging and she nearly backed down before deciding to follow Christ's calling on her heart and join the 10-member Eastern Shore District team to Mozambique. The trip proved to be at least as challenging as any of us had imagined.

Over the course of a week we traveled hundreds of miles over poorly maintained roads in a tightly packed bus. Each day began before 6 a.m. with temperatures already in the mid-80s. The only relief came from the daily afternoon downpour that ensured a brief respite from the heat but also knocked out the power for the fans and whatever air conditioning there was.

We ate foods we had never eaten before, and some days there was no time to stop for lunch, so we snacked on breakfast bars we had stashed in our suitcases and knapsacks. We took pleasure in the little luxuries — a wet wipe rubbed across the back of a sweaty neck, the gentlest of breezes, shade under a big mango tree, or just sinking into the comfort of bed after a long day.

On more than one occasion my almost-80-year-old friend nearly gave up. But she didn't. She faced each new day and each new challenge with the courage of a 20-year-old — fully aware of God's love and vitality in and surrounding her. At the end of one long, hot and difficult day, she found she no longer had the strength even to climb into the bus. One of her team members had to help lift her in. She cried, "I just feel so helpless." That day, like every day, ended with a time of prayers and devotions as we reflected together as a team on where we had seen God.

The following day, we boarded the bus again at 6:30 a.m., already hot from

having slept without air conditioning but ready to face whatever adventures God had in store for us.

A little before noon we had reached our morning destination — the Massinga Shelter for Displaced Widows. The center is home to 26 women who had been driven from their homes and rejected by their families under suspicion of witchcraft following the deaths of their husbands. The women were left to fend for themselves on the streets, but The United Methodist Church in Mozambique stepped in and gave them a place to live and work. They farm cassava and potatoes, raise pigs, goats and a cow, and live off the land.

Some of the women were bent over, unable to stand up straight; some had faces creased with the years. But all sang and danced and greeted us with smiles of warmth and welcome. With great joy they showed us their homes, their gardens and their hearts. As we left the community, my friend leaned over to me and said "I think this trip is making me feel young again!"

On one of the last days of our travels we stopped at the small adobe home of our host pastors, Victoria and Salvador. With pride they showed us their home and shared sodas and cake their daughter had baked. As we entered their home we were greeted by an 86-year-old woman, Salvador's mother, who was sitting on a grass mat in the shade in front of the house. It was clear



From left: The Rev. Victoria Armando Catine and team members Betsy Sweigard, Al Crockett, Rosemary Welch, Lynda Moore, Tammy Estep, David Outten, Judy Worthington, Barbara Sturgis and Kemp Rantz, with Victoria's mother-in-law (seated), recipient of the cane.

that getting around was difficult for her and that she probably made the trip between the house and the mat only once or twice a day. Compassion welled-up in my friend's eyes as she watched this woman struggle into the house to share in the treats set aside for us. When we were preparing to leave, the woman was back on her mat outside the house. My friend leaned over to me and, with



The choir at a United Methodist church in Maputo sings for the Eastern Shore team.

tears in her eyes, said, "Do you think it would be OK for me to give her my cane?" We talked briefly about how my friend would manage through the airport without her cane and then, with great courage and faith that God would provide, she walked over and laid her cane at the feet of this frail, old woman. I turned away because I could no longer hold back my own tears.

There were other adventures on the roads and in the villages of Mozambique, but none touched me quite so much as the faith and courage of my friend as she was stretched to the limit, and beyond, but kept going despite her fear, her fatigue, and her discomforts. □

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