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# WITTEVEEN NEWS

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## Greetings from Kenya!

This past December, a remarkable event occurred. The Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA) youth met for a five-day Christmas camp in Bungoma, Western Kenya to wrestle with "Peace and Reconciliation." This timely and critical event hosted 300 youth at their first meeting since post-election violence rocked Kenya a year ago. Representing many different communities, the youth came from all over Kenya. They all had been deeply affected by the violence; many had witnessed atrocities. Many of the Kenyans who participated and died in the clashes were youth.

The youth chose Isaiah 43:18-19 as their theme verse: *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"* The determination of these young people to move forward in a new way was clearly evident. When planning for the camp stalled, instead of canceling, the youth leadership picked it right up. Within three weeks, they pulled the camp together. Even though they lacked sufficient funds to run a full five-day camp, they stepped forward in faith that the money would be raised. At one moment during the camp, an early shut down seemed unavoidable. However, by practicing some newly acquired decision making skills, the youth leadership engaged their youth groups in brainstorming options. Even though many of the youth were students who could barely afford the registration fee and transportation costs to the camp, they agreed to hold a harambee (Kiswahili for fundraiser).

What sort of experiences did these Kenyan youth share? On the eve of the conference, ten youth volunteered to share their stories with me. With their permission, I shared the following excerpts in my keynote address:

*"They are afraid of us... they no longer help us....they see us as evil."*

*"I was afraid that I would be killed....afraid that they would come and burn my house... I'm confused."*

*"I can't see a bright tomorrow...I can't save...I am living hand to mouth."*

*"My neighbors and friends were no longer with me....I feel lonely."*

*"I didn't go to school for two months....we slept in the bush."*

*"I lost friends....people look at me differently."*

During small group times, youth shared their losses with each other and began to identify the "new thing" God was doing in their midst. The youth were eager to talk. They discussed many things over those three days. The youth talked about Biblical shalom, the challenge of sin, and how to become peacemakers. I reminded the youth that shalom has a price, and if they are truly committed to living out God's vision of shalom, they needed to count the cost. When I gave the invitation for youth to become peacemakers, to my utter amazement, thirty youth stepped forward. The youth leadership then announced the launch of a peace movement.

This March, RCEA youth are planning a follow-up conference for all youth who missed the Christmas camp. They are asking me to provide further training. They also are planning youth forums to bring together youth from the most highly impacted areas in Rift Valley.

I am in awe over what is unfolding. God is doing a new thing. I am glad CRWRC gets to be part of it.



~ Fred, Georgina & Mariah Witteveen

### **Please pray :**

1. That the RCEA youth's enthusiasm for peace and reconciliation becomes a deep, unshakeable resolve.
2. For Georgina and I as we serve as youth advisors to the International Conference of Great Lakes States.
3. That Georgina acquires her work permit.
4. For our family's continuing adjustment to living in a new culture.



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