

How am I? Hopeful.



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Sometimes you have to laugh to keep from crying.” This is how I often feel when I read Vicki’s column on this closing page of the Journal. Vicki moves us from tears to laughter and then to a whole new place of reflection through her writings, and I wonder how I can do that in light of these stories of a generation at risk. The experience that comes to mind that makes me feel the joy and pain of Africa is the sing-song greeting of the children everywhere you go.

“How are you? How are you? How are you?” These words ring out like a chant in the streets of Nairobi, Kigale, and Addis Ababa. Everywhere I go, I hear it — the children singing this greeting, showcasing their English and welcoming us with open arms. To me, the greeting both haunts and encourages me.

One of my most vivid memories of the children singing this greeting is when we drive through their cities and towns. We drive by, they chase us. Their feet are almost underneath the van as we drive. The driver never slows down and neither do the children. How am I? As I laugh and wave, I feel great. The joy, the energy, and the laughter of the singing children are contagious. As we pull farther ahead and they fall farther behind, I feel sad. The metaphor of driving away is all too real for how many of us on these trips feel.

But I realize there is more to the story when I consider the new opportunities many children are being exposed to in Africa — particularly in terms of their education. The children are calling to us in English, because now it is a language they are exposed to as early as preschool and kindergarten. In some of the poorest areas where state schools aren’t available, churches, local leaders, and families have come together to create schools. These leaders know children are their future. They know the power of language.

The second United Nations Millennium Development Goal is for children everywhere, boys and girls alike, to be able to complete primary school education. The most significant breakthrough on this front has been in sub-Saharan Africa, where enrollment increased by 15 percentage points from 2000 to 2007. Now almost 75% of children in sub-Saharan Africa are in school. Just 10 years ago, that number was less than 60%.

The rates for poverty and disease and mortality in Africa are still overwhelming. This is a generation at risk. However, there is more to their story. The children are resilient. The children are hopeful. And so, I am also. This too shall pass, but we must play our part. Please let us hear what your churches are doing. And, contact us if you want to do more.

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