

Six Students Answer Call To Teach In Africa



By KYLIE AKINS
student reporter

For children in Africa, education is a privilege many do not receive. Public school is generally provided up to a low primary level, but African children typically do not continue their studies past that point. Many children never enter a classroom. Boarding schools are common, but families can often afford to send only a few of their children to these schools. Students are frequently pulled out of school early to help work on the family farm or are unable to attend because their parents no longer have the money to send them. Some parents are reluctant to pay for their children's education at all.

However, the Mariann Primary School is a private Christian school created by a congregation of African Christians in Sang'alo, Kenya, in hopes of providing African children with a valuable Christian education. In 2004, a group of six Harding graduates taught at the Mariann School for seven months. During their time there, the school's enrollment doubled in response to the young women's credible teaching.

In January 2010, another group of six Harding women will arrive in Sang'alo to live and teach at the Mariann Primary School until August.

Though none of the women are graduating with an education degree, the women said they realize that each of them has been blessed with an education that many people, especially in many underdeveloped parts of Africa, do not receive. Harding students are privileged, Senior Linzi Lawson said, to come from a place rich in spiritual knowledge, and this is a great gift they can share with not only children, but also with adults.

"We feel a lot of times that we don't have anything to give, or it's really hard to know what we can do over there," senior Libby Heyen said. "But just the things we've been able to learn or go through are going to be so wonderful to give to those people, and I'm hoping we can translate that into something

we can share with them."

The entire group agreed that their main goal is to be encouragers to the people there.

"I just want them to feel love from us," senior Sarah Hackney said.

Each woman said she came to a realization that God had put this opportunity in her life for a reason, and it postponed all other plans.

Senior Rachel Brown was already applying for physician's assistant school when she heard about the Mariann School, but through prayer, she said, she was able to make a clear decision.

"I had this peace when I finally decided to stop the application process for PA school," Brown said. "I just knew it was right."

Heyen said she always knew she wanted to be involved in international missions. However, she said it was a rare thing to find a mission group of young, single women to join. Suddenly, doors were being opened for her, she said, and it quickly became a reality.

Lawson said she had never considered long-term mission work and was planning to go to graduate school after graduating. However, she heard about the opportunities available for mission work and decided to take a year off before graduate school to teach in Africa.

Senior Rebecca Norris spent two weeks in Africa a few summers ago. She said during that time, she said she fell in love with the people and children there.

"I felt like God was putting it on my heart to go back for a longer time," Norris said. "I knew that was where God was calling me to be."

Graduate Jenny Carroll said she first heard about the program through her sister, one of the original six girls who taught at the school almost six years ago. Carroll said she felt like the Lord had put it on her mind, but she hadn't found a way to express the desire until she discovered this opportunity. She said once she joined the group, she said everything fell into place.

Hackney said she decided she wanted to work with missions in Africa when she

participated in the Harding in Zambia program.

"I knew I wanted to go back some day," Hackney said. "I just didn't realize it would be so soon."

The women said that during their time teaching at the school, they hope their effect will extend past the classroom.

"We're going to have an opportunity to possibly go into the kids' home, meet their families and go to the local churches," Carroll said. "We'll start out at the school, but hopefully from that we'll be able to branch out to the community."

The women said they know they will be shaped by their experiences in Sang'alo. Teaching the children will give them the opportunity to learn to appreciate the African culture.

"We will know that we are not any better than them, and they have so much to teach us," Carroll said. "We are so much the same."

Learning to cooperate will also become more imperative as the women are living and working with each other every day.

"There are a lot of challenges that come with that, and we're really going to have no other option," Carroll said. "We're going to have to learn to work out differences smoothly and have open communication. So I think it's going to be a good team building experience."

Being able to educate the children of an underdeveloped nation that lacks most modern conveniences will be something these women have never experienced before. Norris said she does not know what is ahead of them, but she trusts in God that this is what they are supposed to be doing.

"I'm hoping to gain a different perspective," Carroll said. "I hope to be selfless in serving the people there. I just want to be that myself and see the rest of my team put that into action, too. And if we all do that, there's no way others cannot be encouraged. I think what we will get out of it, we can't even fathom right now."

"It's going to be an awesome experience. I'm open to what God's saying to us and willing to follow that."

