

Stonewall United Church's Journey of Hope

In the early part of 2007 Stonewall United Church was visited by Rev. Justin Laki who shared with the congregation his story about the deplorable conditions in his home country, Sudan. He also relayed the circumstance around and his brother and sister-in-law's murder in Sudan leaving seven orphaned children. In 2005 Justin had gone back to Sudan and moved the children to Uganda where they were a bit safer. Justin filled out all the paper work and applied to adopt all the children including a baby, born to his 17 year old niece. Many people in the congregation were very moved by Justin's story. Justin had no idea how he would find the money to get all the children here, but he knew somehow, with God's help, he would. His faith would carry him through.

The Kinette Club of Stonewall under the direction of Mrs. Pat Moldowan paid to have the adoption papers completed. A local singer /songwriter, Bambi Rutherford, approached the Stonewall United Church Council and asked if they would join and support her "Journey of Hope" to bring the 8 orphaned children home to their uncle in Winnipeg. Her vision was to do free concerts throughout the province of Manitoba to raise awareness and the funds needed to re-unite the children with their uncle in Winnipeg. Stonewall United Church Council agreed to support the project and established a Journey of Hope for Justin's Children Committee.

The kick off concert was held March.24th, 2007 at Stonewall United Church. After just seven concerts and together with other donations \$29,638.00 was raised. Even though the funds were in place and adoption papers completed, the process stalled. It was then that Bambi Rutherford, as representative of the Journey of Hope Committee, contacted the local MP Mr. James Bezan and shared the story with him. Mr. Bezan agreed to support this endeavor and contacted the Minister of Immigration who pushed this case forward as an "Act of Compassion."

Further delays occurred but through the persistence of the Journey of Hope Committee members the final clearances were announced. In December, 2010 the first 6 children arrived and by March 2011 the last of the family flew into Winnipeg. Their arrival was celebrated Monday May 30 2011 with a potluck supper organized by Stonewall United Church with all the children in attendance. People from all across Manitoba who supported the project including the local Member of Parliament, Mr. James Bezan were able to meet and talk with the children.

It was a wonderful evening of Celebration, and a wonderful affirmation of Mother Teresa's quote: "We do no great things, only small things with great love" There was a lot of loving and caring people that saw Journey of Hope come to fruition.