

Dear friends!

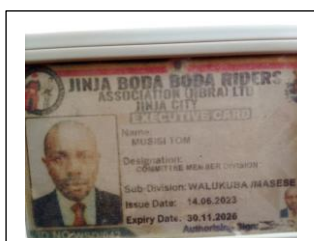
Happy Holidays!

How were your Christmas celebrations?

In my last update, I promised to wind up my family adventure of Christmas celebration in the slums of Jinja, near the source of the longest river in the world.



After our survey visit on Dec. 20, we made an arrangement with our hosts, to alert the entire family to be present on 26/27 for our celebration. The reason of not Dec. 25, was that here in Africa everybody is busy in the church activities. There are those who are singers, ushers, and those who are involved in thanksgiving. The churches are very busy that day because people travel from towns to the villages of origin to be with friends and relatives. Our hosts being part of the choir, together with the children, were so busy. We chose to meet on Friday, two days after.



From that particular moment, I kept myself out of the scene; my wife Emily and Hope, as ladies, had so much to finalize to make the day so colorful. Up to now you are wondering if this woman is married or not. Culturally, men must be out looking for money to sustain the family. That is why when we went for our first visit, we couldn't get him at home; he was so busy with his motorcycle taxi to get some money to pay off the loan and also have a good celebration for Christmas.

The D-day came; my family of seven was going to meet a family of nine. We prepared ourselves knowing that we were going to a different place. I had spotted an INN—guest house in a walkable distance, and it is where we landed. The children were so much happier to visit a new family; they had baked small cakes, and they had wrapped them into small polyethylene bags for each person to give something to the new friend. We reached the guest house tired but children were able to make sure that all the gifts were in place.



On Friday the 27th at 12:30, we all walked to the place for about 40 minutes. Emily and I had to convince the children that we shall not drive to the home of our new friends. We did not want to attract attention from the neighbors. Seeing a car and very well-dressed people could pull many people to come and see what was going on. We just took the gifts and drinks, and we went together answering so many questions from each child on how, why, what, who, and so on we chose this place, not a fancy one, to enjoy.



Reaching the premises, they had put up a shelter just as a provision to avoid rain and sun disrupting the day's enjoyment. Hope was very busy cooking. She had many charcoal stoves to cook for 16 people. She stopped a bit to welcome us. The husband, Tom, also came out of the house, followed by the six children (one was away), who were changing their attire to look smart for the day.

Very well prepared, they had informed the neighbors about our coming, so therefore no interference. They kept themselves inside their houses—there were six tenants, all with families in a shared compound of 2X7m. Our sitting arrangement blocked four homes; they could not go in or out.



After sitting, the conversation began, and drinks of sodas and water were provided; first, their daughter in primary four led the welcoming prayer, and the drinks (for us that is a good sign for a Christian family). We got to know that the one room they are staying in is rented from someone who owns the six rooms in the same compound. People in the slums have a way to make money!!

The landlord is paid \$15 per month for each room in which he makes \$90 per month. When asked if they desire to buy the room they are staying in, they declined, saying that if God gives them money, they will purchase outside the slum and build a better home for the children.



Anyway, the party started, to my surprise, food was in plenty, as a promise, Emily and I had agreed to buy meat (fish for soup), sodas, and Christmas cake. They were to bring all other foods that they could get locally. We ate and gave to the neighbors. Time of cake came, and all the children were happy to join me because Christmas is my birthday, so the men and the youngest children were the ones to cut the cake. They sang Happy Birthday song to me, and the joy of being together surrounded all of us.



What a great day it was! After we had a prayer in which each one of us was to thank God for at least one thing they have experienced in this encounter. I paid attention from the children, one said, *“Oh God, help us to be like this family, that has visited us.”* After the prayers and benediction, I asked the girl who prayed that prayer what she meant. She said, *“You are exceptional; we have never seen good people like you, many people despise us that we are poor and we live in a slum in the same room with our parents. I do not want to live this kind of life when I grow. That is why I want to be like your children!”* All our eyes were full of tears." We all paused, and I said, *“Study well, be a good child, and love God with all your heart; God will answer your prayer.”*



After we had a leisure time, we walked to the lakeshores just 400 m from their home, we took pictures, and we socialized with the community. Each child was holding one another to have their own conversation. The final questions were—When are you coming back? And how can we (the family in the slum) pay you a visit and see where you live? The answer was that this is the starting

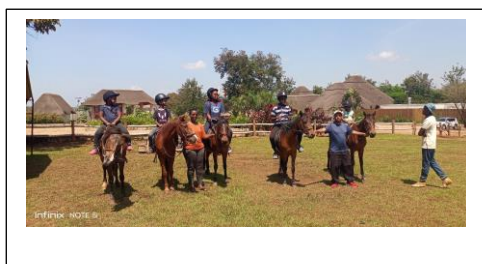
point, “you have accepted our friendship; therefore, we are going to plan together for next year. For sure we shall come back, and you will also visit us.”
The child smiled!!

Here comes a puzzle: How can you help this family? God has done a miracle, as I write, someone has donated a brand-new motorcycle for Tom, the husband, so that there is no more work to pay back the loan. We praise God for that gift! It is not easy to raise children in this kind of environment. That is why we have so many early pregnancies in the slums, just from age 12, young girls are having their own children. You can understand sleeping in one room with teenagers!



Way forward: We are praying that God will help us to have all these children go to school beginning this coming year. The father will have a new motorcycle and that one is covered. The mother has a small business that we want to boost by giving her more capital and paying for her a vocational training to acquire hands-on skills. We shall pursue their firstborn, who dropped in p.4 (now 19 old) for vocational training as well of his choice.

The road is long and wide! I remember a story of a boy with starfish who saw fish left at the shores by the surf/waves, and he took one by one throwing them back in the ocean when asked if his task will be fulfilled, he said: “*At least I have done my part, that one will survive!*” The work is too much, but if we work together, we can change one life for the glory of God! We shall continue to work with this family, and if God provides more, we shall enroll two or three families in our programs. Just keep praying for us!



To let you know, my family benefited a lot from this encounter, especially my children, who knew little about the slums. In the same way their children were happy to have people who love them. After this busy day, we went for horse riding lessons to crown the adventure.

May you have a blessed year of 2025.

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(The full story and pictures are in the attachment feel free to share it within your network)

Love and prayers

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