

For Lipscomb and Don Meyer, a court of reconciliation

BY MURRAY EVANS | FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

It was a moment that would have seemed improbable 12 years ago — longtime coach Don Meyer walking onto the basketball court at Lipscomb University, with friends and university officials there to celebrate the naming of the court in his honor.

As Meyer spoke while surrounded by dozens of his former players, his



Meyer

voice choked with emotion — not just because of his love for them, but also his love for the university at which he worked from 1975 to 1999 before leaving because of a bitter disagreement over athletic affiliation.

“I made a lot of mistakes coaching here, but we did a good job of getting the right kind of guy to come to Lipscomb,” Meyer told the crowd during halftime of a Lipscomb-Kennesaw State game at Allen Arena on Lipscomb’s Nashville, Tenn., campus.

“All these guys are important to me,” he said. “As you get old and you can’t coach anymore and you’re

See **MEYER**, Page 12



ERIK TRYGGESTAD

Fear and faith

AS KENYA BATTLES ISLAMIC TERRORISTS from Somalia, a Church of Christ prays for opportunities to take the Gospel to its increasingly Muslim neighborhood.

Young Muslims, many from Somalia, walk the streets of Nairobi’s Eastleigh neighborhood near the meeting place of a Church of Christ.

BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD | THE CHRISTIAN CHRONICLE

NAIROBI, Kenya — A Sunday morning drive in this East African capital is a journey through a sea of burqas.

Young Muslim women tiptoe through the muddy streets of the neighborhood known as Eastleigh, dressed in long, flowing Islamic garments in shades of

yellow and baby blue. In sandaled feet, children at their heels, they navigate the massive craters that dominate the streets. Recent rains turned the potholes into lakes, bringing traffic to a standstill.

Many of the Muslims come here from neighboring Somalia, a lawless land where Kenya recently deployed troops in pursuit of an Islamic terrorist group.

In Eastleigh, hand-painted signs denote what buildings are — and aren’t — for sale. Somalis have bought much of the neighborhood’s real estate, presumably with money plundered by pirates.

Among the signs is one that reads “Nairobi Church of Christ, Eastleigh ... Meets Here. Everyone Is Welcome.”

See **NAIROBI**, Page 10



The heart of Tennessee

Mt. Juliet church moves from ‘serve us’ to service.

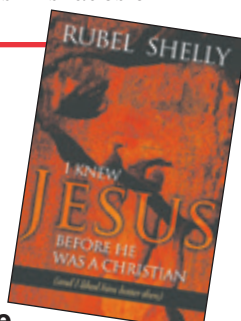
17



David Kinnaman

‘unChristian’ author discusses his new faith-based research.

21



The church Jesus wanted?

Authors critique today’s Christian communities.

32

INSIDE

CALENDAR.....	29
CURRENTS.....	17
DIALOGUE.....	21
INSIGHT.....	34
INTERNATIONAL.....	8
LETTERS.....	31
NATIONAL.....	5
OPINION.....	30
PARTNERS.....	25
PEOPLE.....	28
REVIEWS.....	32
VIEWS.....	31

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NAIROBI: Church is 'praying for calmness'

PHOTOS BY ERIK TRYGGESTAD



Children raise their hands to answer a question during Bible class at the Nairobi Church of Christ Eastleigh in Kenya. Teachers use a mix of English and Swahili to teach the students.



A mixture of nationalities and religions can be found in the Eastleigh neighborhood.



Students in KCITI's program for ministry training line up before graduation.



About 400 Christians sing hymns at the Nairobi Church of Christ Eastleigh. The special service combined the church's Kenyan, Ethiopian, Congolese and deaf congregations.

'This area has become the mecca for Somali Muslims. I am going to pray to God so that I may ... preach the Gospel here.'

— **Harrison Omari**, former Muslim, now a minister in Mombasa, Kenya



The large auditorium for the Nairobi Church of Christ Eastleigh dominates the church's compound, which also is home of the Kenya Christian Industrial Training Institute, or KCITI.

FROM PAGE 1

A security guard opens the gate and waves as church members arrive for worship. Inside its high walls, the church's paved parking lot and manicured lawn are a stark contrast to the world outside. A massive auditorium dominates the courtyard, surrounded by multi-level classroom buildings. During the week, the compound is the home of a church-run technical college.

Sounds of a cappella singing echo from the auditorium. Inside, nearly 400 Kenyans raise their voices as song leader Samuel Muthike leads hymns in Swahili, *"Leta Mavuno"* ("Bringing in the Sheaves") and *"Kumtegemea Yesu"* ("Leaning on the Everlasting Arms").

After the songs, Stephen Mwambisi stands at the pulpit and prepares worshipers for the Lord's Supper. Donning spectacles, he reads from John 6:51:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Kenyans — regardless of creed — see

daily the connection between bread and life. All around Nairobi, a terrible drought has gripped the region, causing widespread hunger and death. Especially hard-hit is Somalia, where the famine has driven many Muslims from their homes to the Eastleigh church's doorstep.

As they pray, Mwambisi and his fellow believers focus on the spiritual sustenance that comes from God, and his promise never to leave them hungry.

"We eat this bread so that we can live forever," Mwambisi says. "Father, we thank you for the opportunity to eat food given from above."

TERRORIST ATTACKS AND FORGIVENESS

Nairobi is a hub for traders, travelers and Western tourists who stop here on their way to view East Africa's elephants, lions and even pink flamingos. A tapestry of races, religions and nationalities comprise the city's 3.3 million inhabitants.

Most coexist peacefully, but ethnic and religious tension has scarred the city. A monument in downtown Nairobi honors the more than 200 Kenyans and

Americans killed when a truck packed with explosives detonated outside the U.S. embassy on Aug. 7, 1998. An Egyptian terrorist group carried out the attacks, coordinated by Muslim fundamentalists including Osama bin Laden.

More recently, in the midst of the famine, Somali militants kidnapped foreign workers bringing aid to eastern Kenya. The Kenyan military invaded Somalia to hunt down the militants.

A Somali terrorist group, al-Shabaab, promised retaliation. Weeks later, a grenade attack at a Nairobi bus station was blamed on the terrorists.

Evidence of the heightened tension is easily seen in Nairobi. At an upscale grocery store, security guards search purses and pat down shoppers. Hotel clerks pass minesweepers under cars before opening the gates.

"Besides prayers, we are just careful of any suspicious person," says Isadora Auma, a 24-year-old Kenyan who has

attended the Eastleigh church since she was a teenager. "Of course, you don't know who is al-Shabaab."

Despite the tension, the children she teaches in Bible class, ages 2 to 13, run, jump and laugh as they play on the green soccer field behind the church building.

"I want to follow in the footsteps of my grandfather," says 14-year-old Eugene Masitsa, a third-generation church member at Eastleigh.

Natalie Sumbi and Chelsea Kwayesa, ages 10 and 12, say they love learning Bible stories, especially the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15.

The parable "shows how people can forgive and forget," Kwayesa says.

Most of the children's parents come here from outside Eastleigh, Auma says. Her class attendance has dropped slightly as church members move farther away from the neighborhood.

The church is multinational and has four Sunday services — one for Kenyans and English speakers, a second for immigrants from Ethiopia, a third for French-speaking Congolese Christians

and a fourth for the hearing-impaired.

A few Somalis are Christians, says Lydia Wanjiku, a longtime member of the Eastleigh church. For security, they meet in a private home.

Recently, a Somali was assaulted for carrying a Bible, Wanjiku says.

"I am praying for calmness, especially in this area," she says, adding that the church has, thus far, coexisted peacefully with its Muslim neighbors.

Wanjiku, who grew up in the slums of Nairobi, was the first student to enroll at the technical college that meets here — the Kenya Christian Industrial Training

Institute. Now an accredited, two-year Christian college, the institute trains more than 500 students per year in information technology, business, auto engineering, electronics and Christian ministry.

Wanjiku is the school's top administrator, a job she took over from long-

time missionary Berkeley Hackett, who resigned after 14 years to concentrate on preacher training.

The institute, known as KCITI, has Muslim students, Wanjiku says.

"They can come here with their attire," she says, "but they must attend Bible classes and chapel."

CONVERSION 'TAKES A MIRACLE FROM GOD'

After Sunday worship, nine Kenyan men and one woman don caps and gowns and form a line outside the auditorium. Each participated in a yearlong intensive ministry course sponsored by the institute. Most of the men preach for Churches of Christ across Kenya.

"This was quite a sacrifice for their congregations," says Hackett's wife, Charlotte. Some of the students received financial support from the U.S., but the congregations for which they preach supplied them with food and additional support as they studied. The Saturn Road Church of Christ in Garland, Texas, sponsors the Hacketts and the preacher training program.

Before handing them diplomas and posing with them for photos, Wanjiku challenges the students to put into practice the knowledge they gained through the program.

"People are tired of false doctrine and are searching for something spiritual and powerful," she tells the graduates. "Remember, we are never alone. God has his people everywhere. ... It's time to harvest and gather the people God has called to his kingdom."

After the ceremony, Harrison Omari smiles as he receives congratulatory hugs from his fellow students.

Omari's path to the Gospel was an unlikely one. He once was an instructor of Islam and had memorized the Quran.

But a group of Christians refused to give up on him, and after four years of study, he was baptized in 1994.

"Some of his relatives said he should be killed," Charlotte Hackett says as

she interprets for Omari. But the convert remains steadfast in his faith.

He uses his knowledge of the Quran to reach other Muslims and preaches for the Kidomaya Church of Christ, an 80-member congregation in the seaside city of Mombasa, Kenya. Many of the church's members formerly practiced Islam.

During his year in Nairobi, he walked outside the protective gates of the church compound and preached on the streets of Eastleigh to anyone who would listen.

"This area has become the mecca for Somali Muslims," he says. "I am going to pray to God so I may come back and preach the Gospel here."

He also dreams of the day when his countrymen, hand-in-hand with Somali converts, plant new congregations in Somalia itself.

"It's not so easy," he says of reaching Muslims with the Gospel. "They have hard hearts. It takes a miracle from God."

After all, he points out, "it took a miracle for me to be changed."



Auma



Wanjiku



Omari