



Press Release

Mark Burrows Cultivates Children's Choir in Kenya

November 13, 2009

By invitation of Bishop John Kobia Ataya, composer and author Mark Burrows spent the last half of August helping to form a children's choir in the Miathene Synod, a collection of more than 150 churches in the Meru region of Kenya.

Over the course of nine days, Mark and two other staff members from First United Methodist Church in Fort Worth, Texas coached sixty enthusiastic children from throughout the region. For more than five hours each day, they practiced vocal technique exercises, choral singing, music games, movement, and musical reading and writing. Their work resulted in a quick transition into part singing, learning partner songs that incorporated English and Swahili texts, and an invitation to sing for the presiding Bishop of Kenya.

In addition to their work with the children, Mark and his colleagues spent time training some of the region's music leaders to read and write musical notation. Their efforts were well received and will help to ensure that the sixty-voice children's choir will remain an active part of the Meru community for years to come.

Mark spoke highly of his experiences in Kenya, praising the cultural value attributed to choral music, as well as his students' passion for singing and for learning. In a country where poverty is common and electricity is often unavailable, he said, "I got to be with people who look for a reason to be joyful at the smallest things... virtually everyone has a smile on their face and a song in their heart. And I learned what real hospitality is all about. (I thought I knew.) Hospitality is more than saying 'hello.' It's a man who wants to share his meal with you even though he doesn't know where his next meal will come from."

Mark is planning to return to Kenya in 2010 to continue assisting the choir and its leaders. There are also plans to bring some of the children to perform in the U.S. in 2011.