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## Fair Oaks church mission strives to aid East Africans

By Lakiesha McGhee -- Bee Staff Writer  
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Members of a Fair Oaks church are on a mission to help weave a better life in a distant land.

Each Tuesday night, about 15 women gather at New Life Community Church in Fair Oaks, armed with crotchet and knitting needles. They make scarfs, hats, sweaters and other colorful garments that will be sold locally or donated to help support a faith-based mission project in Entebbe, Uganda, a small African fishing village on the shores of Lake Victoria.

"There is a very high rate of children in Uganda who are orphans," said Sharlene Saathoff as she knitted a tiny hat. "Knitting baby clothes is one way we can help."

Saathoff also is one of a few knitters in the church club who will travel to Uganda on June 8 as part of a 28-member team with World Harvest Mission.

The Sacramento-based nonprofit organizes churches throughout the United States to participate in annual service projects in East Africa. Last year, 37 World Harvest missionaries from the area and other states spent two weeks in Uganda, where they built a 3,000-square-foot primary school for orphans, taught and preached at 48 other schools and universities and developed a women's training center to teach hand and machine knitting, and computer skills.

The organization's work is supported entirely by corporate and individual donations, said the Rev. William Kasirye, World Harvest's executive director.

Kasirye, now a North Highlands resident, was born in Uganda and founded World Harvest Mission in 2001 after moving to the United States to attend college. He explained that many volunteers from last year will return to Uganda next month to help further the organization's goal: to respond to the spiritual and physical needs of the most vulnerable adults and children.

"It's going to be quite intense," Kasirye said last week while meeting with members of New Life Community Church, where he attends. "But we are excited, and these people have done it before, and they know what to expect," he said of the volunteers.

Many in the East African region are from communities stricken by HIV/AIDS, poverty and war. An estimated 940,000 children and newborns in Uganda were orphaned by AIDS, according to a 2003 study by UNICEF, a global child advocacy group. That figure compares to about 2 million newborns and children in Uganda orphaned due to all causes that year. An estimated 270,000 women ages 15 to 49 in the country were HIV-positive, the report states.

Kasirye said women from Rwanda and Kenya - two other countries hard-hit by the AIDS epidemic - will be brought to Uganda next month by World Harvest Mission to learn the art of crotcheting and hand and machine knitting. The goal is to provide women with skills so that they can return to their communities to teach others and foster economic growth.

Each of the 37 students in the program will receive a knitting machine and a kit consisting of scissors, knitting needles, yarn and books, Kasirye said. The items, along with donated computers, will be used to help the women establish a knitting and computer training center in their hometown.

Saathoff, a Roseville resident, said she was inspired to return to Uganda to teach knitting because of the women's determination to learn. She said the trip also is like a homecoming for her, because she was born in Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



New Life Community Church members, from left, Betty Morgan, Marjorie Goering and Jasmine DeWitt finish last-minute knitting projects that will go in a shipment to Uganda.

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"There was a lot of familiarity, and the people were so sweet and loving," Saathoff said of her experience last year. "They had a servant's heart all the way from the beginning, which seemed kind of backwards, because we came to help them."

The mission team next month also will preach at churches, teach at schools and conferences and visit orphanages. But one of its most ambitious projects will be to help build a prayer room and renovate a building for Scripture Union of Uganda, which teaches life skills to junior high and high school students, Kasirye said.

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### How to help

World Harvest Mission seeks donations to sponsor women from Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya to attend a four-day intensive training course to learn hand and machine knitting. Donations of \$150 for each woman will provide training, accommodations, meals and a stipend of \$20 a day. For more information, call World Harvest Mission at (916) 339-2684, or visit the Web site [www.worldharvestmission.org](http://www.worldharvestmission.org) to view photos of last year's trip to Uganda.

### 2005 mission trip sponsors

Numerous businesses and organizations have helped to sponsor World Harvest Mission's service project and trip to East Africa.

\* PPSP Recycling, Sacramento, donated four scanners, five computer monitors and processors, 10 keyboards and other technical items to help establish an Internet cafe in Entebbe, Uganda.

\* Magnussen's Auburn Dodge Chrysler Jeep, Auburn, will provide vans and drivers to transport the mission team to San Francisco International Airport.

\* Citrus Heights Building Club donated work gloves and painting materials to help construct and renovate teaching facilities in Uganda.

\* British Airways will transport 2,000 pounds of the donations for free.

\* Folsom Lions Club donated 2,500 eyeglasses for women and children.

\* Loomis Basin Congregational United Church of Christ donated several boxes of quilts, clothing and books.

\* New Life Community Church in Fair Oaks' women's ministry donated \$400 to sponsor three women from Rwanda to learn hand and machine knitting. The ministry group also provided a knitting machine, yarn and baby clothing. The church's youth departments are collecting DVDs, compact discs and VHS tapes for Scripture Union of Uganda, an organization that teaches life skills to junior high and high school students.

About 12 knitting machines were donated by various individuals, churches and organizations.

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A group will teach Ugandans to use knitting machines. **Sacramento Bee/Jay Mather**

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Knitters from New Life Community Church, from left, Christel Collins, Linda Wheeler and Nancy Challand finish projects to be sent to Uganda. **Sacramento Bee/Jay Mather**

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