

A Perspective on Aging

Aging in any culture brings many challenges—the loss of relationships with loved ones as they die, the frustration of dealing with infirmities and illness, changes in housing, the possibility of limited resources, and eventual death.

In the developing world, the challenges the destitute elderly encounter are even more stark. They are faced with navigating these uncertain and painful waters alone, without support at a time in their lives when they are most vulnerable. If any of you have been faced with handling the care of an elderly loved one, you know how traumatic the smallest changes can be for them - even under the very best of circumstances. Now imagine them trying to handle these changes alone, without support, direction or resources. Imagine trying to manage aging while also trying to manage merely existing from day to day alone. It is beyond difficult. It is horrific and frightening.

Michael's House is honored to be able to reach out to our elderly poor and do whatever is possible to ease this traumatic situation. With your help, we offer our elderly poor the most basic care to ease the day to day pain. But more than that, we strive through our assistance to relay a message of caring. We relay a message, at this fragile time of life, that these destitute elderly do in fact matter and that they are worthy of respect and care. In short, we affirm their value in a world that does its best to deem them worthless.

Lynda Mischler, Vice President and Trustee, Michael's House

“A Day of Thanks Giving to the Michael House” Celebration in Rwanda

August is a time to celebrate the harvest in Rwanda. In Kirambi, the main crop is sorghum, a grain. The elderly supported by Michael's House decided to celebrate the harvest with a celebration they called “A day of thanks giving to the Michael house.” Every person arrived with a basket containing a gift for the celebration. In Rwanda, the basket is a symbol of life and hope. The celebrants dressed in the finest clothes, usually their only fine outfit or borrowed bright outfits for the occasion.

Below: Aloysie, our Michael's House care partner, pours the sorghum from each basket into a container for preparation of the celebration meal.



Below: The day ends with celebration and a dance of thanks.



Above: Rwandan elderly who receive ongoing care from Michael's House.



Sixth Annual Michael's House Golf Tournament Held

On May 12, Hawkins Electric Service and Hawkins Electrical Construction hosted its sixth annual golf tournament to benefit Michael's House at Whiskey Creek Golf Course in Ijamsville, MD. Our deepest and heartfelt thanks for their continued support! Thank you also to WCS Construction, LLC, and all the other company sponsors and participants. It was a great day for a great cause!



South Sudan Update: Food Costs Spike as Inflation Rises Over 58% ; Roof Repairs Completed

Good progress has been made to repair the roofs of huts lived in by many of the destitute elderly. In our last newsletter, photos showed the tattered conditions of the roofs in Wai as the rainy season approached.

While hope is ever present, the civil war continues with most of the fighting in the north. The uncultivated fields, lost jobs, abandoned and destroyed businesses, and the cost of the war has now created another devastating blow—inflation. As of August, the annual inflation rate rose to over 58% and the scarce food has become even more expensive. Michael's House will continue to help the destitute elderly survive with our available funds and your support.



Volunteers repairing the roof of the home of Koleta Ushala Matti.

Regina Maktab Ugbanda sits outside her repaired hut which will now withstand the heavy downpours of the rainy season.

Unnamed woman in front of her home with new roof.

Abandoned Elderly and Disappeared Families: Insights of the Refugee Crisis

In the last couple of weeks, I had two occasions to visit the Famine Museum in New Ross, Wexford, Ireland.

The Great Hunger (Famine) took place between 1845 and 1852. The depravity of the Famine caused the destruction and displacement of millions of lives. The letters are heartbreaking and agonizingly expressive, dictated to writers by illiterate old people in desperation to make contact with a son or daughter who emigrated. Not knowing how to contact them, the letters were mostly addressed to “Post Office” of the city they headed for.

The older people too feeble and weak to make the trip themselves used their last pennies to help the young make the journey. They sold anything they had to pay the fare. They literally had nothing left except the hope that soon they would receive some money so they would not starve.

One woman wrote in a letter that was found unopened, that by the time her son received her letter she most likely would be dead. She says “*goodbye my son*” and wonders why he had forgotten his parents. She relates that her husband had already succumbed to starvation. She says that they had resorted to eating grass and begging.

Another of the unopened letters said “*please help me I’m begging you, I am in the most wretched condition. I have been abandoned by God and you. Your sister has died and I am left alone. I tied her poor skeleton to my back and carried her to the church graveyard hoping someone would bury her. We are all starving and nobody has anything to share.*”



Michael Craig, Founder, Michael's House

With no method of communication available to them, the parents were oblivious that thousands of immigrants suffered many perils and unimaginable risks on their long trek to their anticipated destination. In 1847, during just one year of the Famine, 7,000 people died of typhus on the way to America. Another 10,000 died soon after arriving in quarantine areas in the United States. Of course they could never write and their parents were abandoned.

When I arrived in France after visiting the Famine Museum, I was whisked forward to today and the harsh reality of another human disaster. I saw hundreds of men women and children who had come thousands of miles from all over Africa and the Middle East trying to sneak onto trains and trucks to get to England. Many had already drowned in the Mediterranean, electrocuted, or worse - unscrupulously robbed and thrown overboard. Many had died from hunger and disease on the way. They will never be able to write home, and their disappearance will always be a mystery to their parents. I wondered how many old parents they left behind in their country of origin and what would become of them. Who would take care of them?

In the developing world, offspring are the primary caretakers of the aged. The aged suffer terribly when the young leave whether it is to another country or even to the large cities of their own country. At Michael's House, we are helping the abandoned elderly of Wau in South Sudan, with shelter, food, and other essential needs. A large number of the working, younger generation fled Wau some time ago to escape the ongoing civil war strife. Crops were left unplanted and supply routes shutoff.

Large aid organizations are now working to reestablish agriculture and food distribution systems in Wau. While the focus of the large aid organizations is supporting the working class and children and building sustainable infrastructure, Michael's House is one of the few organizations in Africa focused on the elderly destitute. Your support will help us continue to help these aged live their last days with dignity and without hunger.

Michael Craig, Founder, Michael's House

Providing Pensions in Tanzania

Michael's House provides monthly support for 30 destitute elderly who live outside Makiungu in the Singida Region of Tanzania. Many older people reach an age when they can no longer work and they have inadequate personal savings to sustain their basic living costs. After a lifetime of poverty and deprivation, poor diet and healthcare, they are fragile and vulnerable. In Tanzania, old age benefits do not exist.

Bibi Petronilla had five children who left the Makiungu area long ago. Tanzanian elderly sometimes receive support from their family, although this tradition is waning. Bibi is not blessed with such support. Michael's House's support provides food and the medical care she needs to relieve her pain and treat her medical conditions.



Justinia Himu has one surviving daughter, who is married. Justina, her daughter, and her husband are struggling and do not have the money to assist her. The past year has been especially difficult for central Tanzania as a drought resulted in widespread crop failure. As a result, the cost of food is high. Justina thanks all the supporters of Michael's House for her daily food and medical treatment.



Annual Meeting for Election of Trustees and Officers held on June 20, 2015

Trustee Appointments

Three year term:

Dr. Michael Craig, Clara Isama, Felicia Pendorf, and Lucilla Akanegbu

Two year term:

Ann Costello, Ph.D, D.M.D., Sharon Craddock, and Dennis Tarner

One year term:

Matt Rogers, Deborah Halpern, and Lynda Mischler

Election of Officers (one year term):

President:

Dennis Tarner

Vice President:

Lynda Mischler

Secretary:

Sharon Craddock

Recording Secretary:

Ann Costello, Ph.D, D.M.D.

Treasurer:

Deborah Halpern

SUPPORT

Your support makes all that we do for the destitute elderly possible. They have come to depend on the love and generosity from those of us more fortunate on the other side of the world. We cannot let them down!

Donate on the web (www.michaels-house.org) or make checks payable to: Michael's House Inc., Post Office Box 856, Burtonsville, MD 20866. Michael's House is a U.S. based 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Contributions to Michael's House in the United States are tax-deductible to the extent allowable by law.



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