
Good News Department

African Children's Choir Honors New Yorkers

by Peter Feuerherd

(NAPSA)—They came, they sang, they offered hugs to a city still in need of them. To tell the story of the African Children's Choir visit to New York last March, however, one must go back to the day now summed up in the cryptic shorthand of 9/11.

When the World Trade Center towers crashed to the ground, a group of orphans in one of the world's poorest countries looked on with a quiet horror. These children from Uganda had previously visited New York and stayed in the homes of New Yorkers; with the collapse of the Twin Towers, they believed their friends were imperiled. This was more than just a jarring news event; they needed to come to New York and see for themselves.

"They referred to the people they stayed with as aunts and uncles," says Ray Barnett, founder of the African Children's Choir. "They were inconsolable."

Using the American Bible Society (ABS) headquarters as a base, the choir provided a mix of traditional African melodies, dances, Christian hymns and "God Bless America" to appreciative audiences around the city.

Perhaps the most appreciative was the group of rescue workers, police, fire and sanitation workers who saw the choir perform at St. Paul's Episcopal Chapel—located next door to Ground Zero—which had been transformed into a makeshift lunch canteen for the workers.

When the two dozen children sang their patriotic medley of



The African Children's Choir came to New York to mark the six-month anniversary of 9/11.

"God Bless America" and "America the Beautiful," a grizzled New York City sanitation supervisor held up his walkie-talkie to capture the sounds.

The New York appearances—the choir also performed at ABS, various churches and Hunter College—were part of the Bible Society's *Project Constant Hope*, a ministry intended to bring healing and comfort to those who are dispirited and wounded of heart. A series of Scripture-based booklets that addressed topics such as grief were distributed at the concerts, which coincided with the six-month anniversary of the 9/11 attacks.

The African Children's Choir is composed of children between 7 and 12 years of age from Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria and Ghana. They began after a 1984 visit to Uganda by Barnett—a Canadian citizen who was raised

as an orphan in Northern Ireland—who noticed the large numbers of orphans throughout the country due to a bloody civil war. The choir raises funds to build and staff schools in large cities and villages.

Other choirs are planned for war-ravaged countries in today's news headlines, including Sudan and Afghanistan. The choir offers a concept of family that can be transferred around the world, said Barnett, who noted that the choir helps to transform the image of African children wherever they perform.

"They've had tough lives," he says. "They are the victims. They are also the answer."

For more information about the African Children's Choir's visit to New York and other American Bible Society programs, visit the Web site at www.americanbible.org.

Founded in 1816 and headquartered in New York City, the American Bible Society is a non-profit, interconfessional organization with a rich Judeo-Christian heritage committed to the translation, publication and distribution of the Holy Scriptures. The American Bible Society distributes more than 107 million copies of the Bible, New Testaments and Scripture Portions in the United States each year. Its mission is to provide the Scriptures to every person in a language and format each can readily understand and afford. The American Bible Society Web site is www.americanbible.org. Also available on the Web is ForMinistry.com, sponsored by the American Bible Society. ForMinistry.com provides links to thousands of churches across the United States as well as articles offering continuing education in effective ministry.