

Reflection on a Basic Economic System

By Matt Kane and Reggie Whitten

It is fairly easy as Americans to forget how great both our country and economy are even in its recent current financial climate, at least until you venture outside the U.S. and travel nearly half-way around the world to a dry, land-locked country in eastern Africa. Recently, several members of the Oklahoma bar, along with several doctors, engineers, journalists and four NFL football players (Adrian Peterson, Tommie Harris, Roy Williams and Mark Clayton) took part in a mission trip to northern Uganda. As a part of PROS FOR AFRICA, an international nonprofit organization, five bar members (Reggie Whitten, Mike Hinkle, John Hargrave, Matt Kane and Jay Mitchel) spent a week in northern Uganda providing destitute children with food, water, medical care and most importantly — love.

There one finds a land and people marred by the ravages of war and its companions — disease, famine and despair. Concerns there are sharply focused not so much on the nuances of a commercial system but the mere availability of particular products.



Sister Rosemary

Any water, let alone clean water, is worth a several hours walk. Food is dependent on the weather, and variety is not an option. Primitive medical care can only be found at a rundown building disguised as a hospital about 70 kilometers south on a desolate dirt road. PROS FOR AFRICA set out to alleviate some of these concerns, even if only for a short time.

On the heels of one of Africa's longest standing conflicts where thousands have perished and more than 20,000 children have been kidnapped, it is not as if the Ugandan people are without a desire to enhance the stability of their country's economy. In a remote area near the

border with Sudan, harshly afflicted by murder, maiming, kidnapping and rape at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army, a spark of hope endures. Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe, an unassuming Catholic nun, who can best be described as an oasis in a vast desert of violence and poverty, directs the St. Monica Girls' Tailoring Centre in Gulu, Uganda.

At great personal risk, Sister Rosemary takes in young women who have been abducted, raped and even impregnated by LRA soldiers during the long-standing conflict. Not only does she provide these young women with necessary life skills and vocational training, but more importantly, she instills them with a sense of hope and self-worth. By helping them find an income-making activity, they become self-reliant.

Spend less than a minute with Sister Rosemary and you will have no doubts that each and every girl who walks into St. Monica with little more than the clothes on her back will leave with training she can

use to support herself and her children, if need be. Equally, if not more important, is the mindset that each girl gains from Sister Rosemary. A sense of love and accomplishment coupled with a notion that their life has meaning. What could be better? Along the way, she and the young women at St. Monica make necklaces of colorful beads from recycled newspaper, construct purses on foot-powered, treadle sewing machines, cater meals for various events and bake cakes that are legendary throughout Uganda — all of which raise funds to support the school's activities.

As each student embraces Sister Rosemary's teachings, the people of northern Uganda move one step closer to lasting peace and economic prosperity. For those of us fortunate enough to witness St. Monica first hand, it serves as a reminder that, with an open heart, a bit of forethought and elbow grease heavily applied, each of us can make a real and lasting difference.

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