

**Salt  
and  
Light**

Women  
as Agents of Change  
in East Africa

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**LI TIM-OI FOUNDATION**  
a charity helping women  
in the two-thirds world training  
for Christian work in their own countries

## Living as Salt and Light

I am travelling with a young Anglican priest on a difficult pastoral visit. We are being driven through the Rift Valley in a four wheel drive vehicle by the Rev Pam Wilding, a CMS missionary, who is my host for the first part of my stay in Kenya. We are also accompanied by a third priest, another young incumbent in a nearby parish that stretches nearly 20 miles across the countryside to the northwest of Lake Nakuru.



The three women are dressed formally and soberly in clerical collars and dark suits. I just about pass muster in a long burgundy skirt and top. It is too hot to be dressed as we are, but the situation demands it. In silence, we dab our foreheads and the backs of our necks with handkerchiefs and steady ourselves as the ragged road becomes a barely discernable track across open grassland, the skyline punctuated by occasional flat-

topped acacia trees. The village we eventually come to is a small group of wood and mud houses clustered around the base of a huge tree which casts its shade over the tiny community.

A woman in her fifties and a leading light of her local church has died. Her husband, home from time to time from his job in Nairobi, had infected her with HIV/AIDS, and then abandoned her when he learned she was ill. Their adult daughter has asked to see the priest. She is expecting a visit, but she is not expecting three priests and a foreign visitor.

What follows is an extraordinary meeting, with each of the priests, and me, being received as honoured guests. Each of us in turn is asked to give a short message to the neighbours and family packed into the sitting room of the deceased woman's house. My English words are translated into Kikuyu. I am told that the daughter, until now resisting her mother's faith, today wants to give her life to Jesus. We all pray for her, and there are many tears. The daughter's sobbing changes from grief and bitterness to something else – a letting go, an acceptance, a discernable sense of peace in the midst of heartache.

For the next three weeks I travel around Kenya and then on to Uganda, meeting more Anglican priests as well as lay workers. All the women I meet have something in common: the training for the work they do now was made possible by grants from the



Pam  
Wilding

Li Tim-Oi Foundation, a charity set up in honour of the first female Anglican priest.

As one of the Trustees of the Foundation, I was sent to East Africa to meet with some of the alumnae to discover what work they are doing and to learn about the challenges they are facing in their lives and ministries.



Elizabeth  
Thumbi

My involvement with the bereavement visit with the Revd Elizabeth Thumbi and her neighbouring colleague, the Revd Peninah Kamau, was only one of many encounters that showed me just what these women have to contend with. I expected to be introduced to women of faith and commitment, but I was not prepared for the levels of strength, courage and dedication that I found in these amazing women. Also, I wanted to see whether the training, which the Foundation had enabled the beneficiaries to have, was appropriate for the work they went on to do. What I discovered excited and astounded me.

Ordained women in their twenties, like Elizabeth and Penninah, were overseeing parishes with a confidence and authority beyond their years. Penninah had been put in charge of eight rural churches in Nakuru Diocese in the Rift Valley. She explained that if parishes cannot pay their quotas to the diocese, the clergy do not receive their stipends. Penninah had not received her stipend for the past several months. She was being supported by some of the parishioners who gave her fruit and vegetables from their gardens, and also from her parents, who would bring her chicken and goat meat from time to time. Penninah also had no transport, and she sometimes walked for up to six hours on the days she visited her parishioners.

Weeks before my visit, she had asked for repairs to her loo, but no one had yet been sent by the diocese, and she was without a flushing toilet. However, she realised that she was still better off than most of her colleagues from other parishes who only had the traditional wooden huts built over a hole in the ground, often placed some distance from their vicarages.

When I asked Penninah how she manages eight congregations spread across an area of nearly 20 miles, she promptly showed me the schedule she had devised. She gets around to all her churches every two months, and rotates spending a month at a time in what she calls her 'main' church. Penninah is assisted by eight lay readers - three women and five men. Her week is rigorously organised: pastoral visits are on Wednesdays and Thursdays, she works in her office and offers counselling on Tuesdays, prepares her sermons on Fridays and holds meetings on Saturdays. Mondays are her days off, when she visits her parents and other family members and catches up with domestic chores. Although Penninah would like to get married

one day, she rarely meets up with other single friends, and confessed with some exasperation that she could not see how she would ever meet a suitable single Christian man. This concern was expressed by a number of the single women I met. Their education has put them on a professional level, but most of the professional men they know, particularly male clergy, still look down on women. They are acutely aware that they are ministering in a culture that discriminates against single and childless women.



**I thank God for the Li Tim-Oi Foundation, and I really appreciate the help they offer for us women who are mostly discriminated against in the African culture and also in the Church. Through the Li Tim-Oi support, I believe many women will help to change our society. *Revd Penninah Kamau, parish priest, Dundori Parish, Nakuru Diocese, Kenya***

Overall, the living and working conditions I observed required great resourcefulness and strength on the part of the clergy women, yet it was not the physical hardships that caused them to complain. Time and time again, the women spoke with a sense of gratitude and joy about their ministries, thankful to have been trained for the work they were doing. Rather, what upset them was the way they were treated by their male colleagues and, in some cases, by the Church.

Many of the women I spoke to told me how women are denied the same opportunities for further training, and not expected or encouraged to attend any of the conferences and seminars being offered. Consequently, even the most able women are not developing in their ministries in pace with the men, and an inevitable gap between them and their male colleagues is growing.

**I would like to thank you so much for the vision you have of empowering women for ministry in their own settings. Please continue with this good work. Reach as many women as possible, for most are very much discriminated against by our male counterparts. I feel privileged and honoured to be one of the beneficiaries of your Foundation. *Revd Rhoda Luvuno Patrick Dzomba, HIV/AIDS Co-ordinator at the Provincial Office, Kenya***

I was privileged to meet a number of the bishops who had women clergy in their dioceses, and they spoke movingly about the special problems that the women face. The bishops I met were strongly supportive of their female clergy and were working to change the culture in the churches so that ordained women would be treated fairly and well, but they were all too aware of the uphill struggle that lay before them.

Thank you so much for having the heart to support women's ministries which have especially faced a lot of opposition in Africa. May God continue to use you in helping many women out of the terrible situations they are in.

*Revd Rosemary Maina,  
Parish Priest, Nakuru Diocese, Kenya*

The bishops paid great tribute to the women in their dioceses, and spoke of their ability, courage and faithfulness, in spite of the discrimination and prejudice they received from some of their male colleagues. They also recognised some of the women's distinctive gifts. Bishop Alfred Chipman of Mount Kenya West Diocese was fulsome in his praise for the Reverend Ruth Wakanene, whom he rated as one of his most effective preachers and evangelists. He called Ruth a "phenomenon" and told me that "Ruth is like having our own version of Billy Graham in our diocese."

He is amazed at her deep understanding of people, and her ability to present the gospel in ways to which congregations can relate.

I asked Ruth how she had managed to become close to so many of the people in

the seven parishes she serves. When Ruth hears that someone is ill, she will travel to their village and spend time with them, even staying overnight. She has no car, so always walks or takes a bus. Now, wherever she goes, Ruth is recognised and welcomed. "Everyone is in favour of women in this area," she told me with a smile. Evidently, Ruth also has a gift to inspire people to take stewardship seriously. Bishop Alf said quite simply that when Ruth preaches on the subject, giving goes up!

What impressed me about Ruth, in addition to her many spiritual gifts and talents, is that she wants to see all people reach their potential as well-rounded human beings, as well as become committed Christians, and she

has a growing desire to minister especially to women and girls.



Rosemary  
Maina



Ruth Wakanene  
& Alfred Chipman



Rahab Kariuki

You are doing an excellent work to remember the discriminated. It inspires and revives me to know that somewhere, someone cares. I pray that the Foundation grows much stronger, to reach the whole world in empowering women in theology.

*Revd Rahab Wanjiru Kariuki,  
Diocese of Mount Kenya West*

The Revd Rahab Kariuki understands more than most about some of the prejudices women face: she herself was born into a polygamous family. Polygamy still exists, but it is the wives and children who face discrimination. Rahab teaches the Christian ideal of one woman and one man united in marriage, but she preaches and practices forgiveness and acceptance of those involved in polygamous families. Many of the women I spoke to had experienced some of the wives in such relationships converting to Christianity and bringing Christ into their families and marriages. They understood that a hard line approach would turn people away from God, rather than draw them towards the Christian faith.

The challenges the women face in the context of their traditions are immense. The Revd Niceria Nkonge works with great patience to bring about the changes she knows need to happen. On her vestry wall is a poster warning about female genital mutilation, still widely practised in Africa [see page 8]. She has enlisted the support of the members of the Mother's Union, a



Niceria Nkonge  
with Mothers' Union member

powerful and respected body in Africa. Together, the women are educating their families and whole communities about a more Christian lifestyle.



Irene Mondo

While I was in Uganda I visited Irene Mondo, who used her Li Tim-Oi Foundation grant to train in adult literacy. Irene lives on the outskirts of Kampala where, a few years ago, she started up an adult literacy centre in her own home. Since then, her husband has built an extension onto their house which now contains the classrooms, a small library and a reading room. Alongside a colourful poster of the alphabet, another poster caught my eye, warning parents not to support practices involving child sacrifice. "Your child could be next" it read, "Stop rituals that sacrifice children" [see

page 10]. I asked Irene and some of the other women about this tradition and they told me that it still went on, in spite of the fact that it had been made illegal. One woman pointed to the skyline of Kampala, with its high rise buildings. "Behind every large building, there is a child sacrifice. The smaller buildings only need a chicken."

Some of the women I met were making a positive impact on the growing problem of street children. In Uganda, 65% of the population is under 16, the terrible legacy of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Often, the orphaned children drop out of school and start to live on the streets, earning money from begging or prostitution. Tragically, many of these go on to develop full blown AIDS and are dead within a few years.



Alice Wataka

Ironically, it is often the Christian clergy and lay women who end up caring for the offspring of their sisters, brothers and cousins who have died from AIDS related illnesses. Alice Wataka, a single priest, was bringing up six children orphaned by close family members, even though she has not received her stipend in months.

Over and over again I was told about the vital work these women are doing, work that has the potential of transforming their communities from within. Not only are the women I encountered standing against the extremes of their own traditions, they are offering a radically alternative way of life. Sarah Nyiuro trained as a development worker and is now the deputy manager of Child Restoration Outreach, an organisation that works to get street children back in full-time education and living again with their extended families.

**It gives me tremendous pleasure to see street children transform from the dreaded urchins and juveniles to people who worship and serve the Lord. It is wonderful to see them join formal school and vocational schools to become self-reliant and productive community members. Sarah Nyiuro, Deputy Manager, Child Restoration Outreach, Mbale, Uganda**



Sarah Nyiuro

Sarah's organisation provides physical care for these children, while it also fights against a culture that has stigmatised and rejected these young and vulnerable victims. Sometimes, Sarah told me, the municipal councils round up the street children and beat them. Sometimes men abuse them. Sarah acknowledged the heartache of her work but spoke passionately of the positive results she was seeing every week, with children returning to education and reconciling with their families and communities. With great pride and obvious delight, she told the story of a young woman of 16 who had been successfully reintegrated with her family and who had recently decided to work with street children herself.



Alumnae of the Foundation meeting in Kenya

### Gathering at Conferences

In order to learn more about the lives and ministries of the Li Tim-Oi alumnae, I held a conference in St Paul's United Theological College in Limuru, Kenya and another conference in the Namirembe Guest House to the north of Kampala, Uganda. These gatherings also gave the women the opportunity to meet each other and discuss common issues and challenges.

**It was thrilling for all of us alumnae to discover each other. Some of us knew each other before, but never knew that we belonged to the same family ! Uniting together as 'daughters of Li Tim-Oi' has caused us to develop new commitments in relation to the Foundation.**

*Revd Edidah-Mary Mujinya, Bushenyi, Uganda*

At both conferences I handed out a short questionnaire, asking the women to identify the major issues for the people in their parishes and communities and also asking them about their own personal challenges.

In both countries, four issues emerged as the most pressing ones facing people in the parishes: poverty, HIV/AIDS, ignorance and illiteracy. Other issues included discrimination against women and girls, traditional values, being bound by culture, domestic violence, infidelity, incest, child abuse and child sacrifice, polygamy, family disintegration, female genital mutilation, barrenness, cleansing rituals, commercial sex workers, ethnic clashes, tribalism, reliance on witchdoctors, corruption, lack of materials, lack of biblical knowledge and lack of fellowship.

Challenges facing the women themselves included discrimination, prejudice, oppression, generation gap,



Child with AIDS

singleness, polygamy, family problems, poverty, being despised, looked down on, not trusted, traditional values, lack of further education and training, lack of transport, lack of recognition, overwork and loneliness.

I also asked the women to list the changes they wanted to make. Overwhelmingly, they wanted to help people to become more self-reliant and able to support themselves economically. They also wanted to see the people with whom they worked become more confident and grow in feelings of self-worth. The women wanted to see the Church making more of a difference in people's lives, empowering them to create new ways of making a living and new ways of relating. The women also shared the vision of the Li Tim-Oi Foundation, of empowering women within their own countries to train for Christian work – whether in the Church or with community projects.



The women articulated the specific goals of reducing discrimination against those infected - and affected - by HIV/AIDS, of helping women to come out of bondages to cultural practices and expectations that were not part of the Good News of Christ, of encouraging both women and men to relate in a more mutual way, and of ministering more effectively to younger people.

The women also identified the help they need in order to be able to make some of these changes. They recognised the need for more training, more practical support, such as transport, materials for teaching and training and networks for sharing and fellowship. There was also the simply stated need for more money and more medical supplies, without which so much of what needs to be done can never even be started.

In addition to these extensive lists of challenges, goals and needs, the women spoke movingly about what they would like to be able to communicate to their bishops and their bosses. In spite of the support many of them received from their Church or other places of work, they believed they had insights which had not been taken on board by the powers that be.



It was clear to see that the women are strongly motivated to become agents of change within the Church as well as from within their communities. They want to redefine their futures, not accepting the patterns of poverty, disease and early death. They are eager for the Church to speak out against traditions and cultural practices that have no place in the Body of Christ – for example, the practice of husbands beating their wives and being deceptive and unfaithful and the practice of female genital mutilation. They long to do more to teach parents



and young people about human biology and reproduction. They would like to see more premarital counselling and safe houses built for women and girls. They would like to work more closely with the Mothers' Union and support other women also working for change. For themselves, they recognise the need to address the issues of loneliness and lack of a social life for single women, particularly clergy women. They so valued the time spent together that they also wanted to have more opportunities for getting together, to pray, to talk and listen to one another. They are already doing so much, yet they outlined even more ideas for transforming their cultures for Christ.

It was an immense privilege for me to meet these women, and I returned to England in awe of their strength, resilience, courage and determination, and, above all, their sense of gratitude to God and their joy. Their joy is not dependent on material possessions or the size of their bank accounts, but in seeing changed lives and in following their call no matter what demands it makes or sacrifices it requires. I went to Africa to discover what the Li Tim-Oi Foundation's alumnae are doing and what challenges they face in their lives and ministries. I found women working and ministering in Christ's name, bringing hope and new life to their people and communities. It excited and humbled me to see the huge difference they are making in the lives of the people among whom they live.

I could write so much more about the women I met and what I experienced, and I feel this short booklet is all too inadequate, but my hope is that it will inspire you to join with the Li Tim-Oi Foundation in empowering more women, against all the odds, to become salt and light - the role Christ gives to all his apostles.

## Messages from the alumnae of Kenya and Uganda to the Trustees of the Li Tim-Oi Foundation

Li Tim-Oi Foundation - you saved a drowning woman by the name of Revd Pamela Oloo in 1994 while she was trying to swim, to reach out to many people in her community who needed the Gospel. Thank you for showing me that God is real and that his love is real in people. I am what I am in ministry because you made me so.

*Revd Pamela Oloo, Priest in Charge and  
Director of Theological Education by Extension,  
Kenya*



I would like to express my heartfelt regards to you for making it possible for me to study at Carlile School of Theology in Nairobi. I would like to assure you, that, by God's grace, what you have invested in me will not be a waste.

*Sr Alice Kishagha Wamaza, Church Army Sister, Taita-Taveta Diocese, Kenya*

I thank God for the way He has helped you to think about women, who are despised, less educated because of culture and who are seen as inferior and thus less fortunate in society. Through your help many women have been uplifted and trained, now having better chances of serving God in society.

*Revd Rose Mithamo, Vicar in Charge, Nyahururu Diocese, Kenya*

I am very thankful to the Li Tim-Oi Foundation for the financial support they offer to us. Despite the challenges we face in the ordained ministry, we are determined to serve the Lord our God.

*Rosemary Agunda, ordination student at St Paul's  
United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya*



You really changed and restored my life. In the 1994 Rwandan genocide, many people died, others were badly affected. I ended up jobless for quite a long time. I tried many things but still I was not succeeding, so I do not take your support for granted. Thank you so much for your effort and for accepting to be used by God to help women to fulfil their calling.

*Jeanne d'Arc Mukamana, Rwandan Student of  
Business Administration and Management, St Paul's  
United Theological College, Limuru, Kenya*

I pray that God may continue to pour out His blessings upon you as you advance in your ministry. We need to continue to change the attitude of the male church leaders so they can encourage women to fulfil their God-given calling and be released to find their rightful place in God's work.

*Revd Meibo Nyanguwen Dwori,  
Bukedi Diocese, Uganda*

I am very thankful to the Li Tim-Oi Foundation for offering to sponsor me in my BA in Community Development at Daystar University, Kenya. At the moment I am using my skills and training so that I can change the attitude men have about women. It is my prayer that I leave a positive mark in my parish that will lead to economic stability and to women being appreciated in my community.

*Dorcas Nyorsok, Community Developer,  
Kitale Diocese, Kenya*



Dorcas Nyorsok

In the African culture women were not educated because they would be married to some other family, and so it was a waste of resources educating them. No wonder the illiteracy rate was high among women. Through the Foundation I have been empowered and I am working as a Community Projects Coordinator. My diocese is just recovering from war, so my task is to reach out to the people to solve the many challenges they are faced with.

*Aidaloi Syauswa, Projects Community  
Coordinator, Kasese, Uganda*



Susan Ameso

This is to express my gratitude and appreciation for your love, support and great Christian concern for me. Thank you for blessing me to bless others, for empowering me to empower others, and for giving me a sense of worthiness and respect as a woman.

*Susan Ameso, Accountant,  
Kanungu, Uganda*

Li Tim-Oi's story, with worship resources, and information about the Foundation can be found on the website : [www.litim-oi.org](http://www.litim-oi.org).

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