

SISTER CONNECTION NEWSLETTER

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Sponsorship Connection Story — *Ladegonda*

Denise Patch, SC President

To look at her, you would never guess her story. She's young and healthy, a beautiful baby strapped to her back. Her name is Ladegonda, and she is a 35-year-old widow of Burundi's war. Homeless and robbed of all her belongings after her husband's death, she and her two children were taken in by her god-brother.

When she starts to tell her story, the incongruity of her truth is difficult to absorb.



LADEGONDA AND LITTLE CLAIRIA

"One night as I slept in the home of my god-brother, thieves broke in to steal. There were three of them, and they began to beat me. They beat me until I was no longer able to scream, and then they raped me."

All three of Ladegonda's children were in the room. "After they raped me, they left me there to die. They stole my brother's bike, and they left."

Ladegonda's injuries were so severe that she was believed dead. In fact, her death was actually announced on the radio. But she didn't die. For three weeks, she lay unconscious in a local hospital while police searched for the bike thieves. They wanted to recover her brother's bike for him. They couldn't pursue the attackers for rape, they claimed, because Ladegonda was unconscious and could not give a statement.

Ladegonda is a widow. She is without advocate. She is essentially worthless to society. A bicycle is very useful, and of high value to one who owns it.

It took a year for Ladegonda to fully recover from the attack, but a few months from that night, she discovered the attackers had left her with a permanent reminder of themselves: she was pregnant. Horrified and shamed, Ladegonda sought an abortion. On her way, she was intercepted by some people who believe that life is precious—even the lives of a widow and the child conceived during a violent rape. In her words, "Some Christians stopped me in the path. And they began to care for me."

Ladegonda and her children ended up in the home of Cecile, a fellow widow with eight children of her own. Cecile is a SISTER CONNECTION widow.

Ladegonda continues, "I heard about a woman who has an organization that helps widows like me. People said I should go see her. So I did. And she heard my story, and she helped me. Now, I have sponsors who are caring for me, and I praise God!"

Ladegonda was referring to Joy Buconyori, SISTER CONNECTION National Director. Joy profiled Ladegonda into Sister Connection in October of 2007. She sent the profile to our U.S. office as a high priority. Within days, a connection request came in from a young couple wanting to sponsor a widow. Ladegonda became their sister.

In January 2008, I was in Burundi. At a prayer meeting with some of our widows, I met Ladegonda and her little girl, Clairia, and she told me her story. What I can't forget is the joy shining in

her eyes. Even as she detailed what was done to her, the joy she has found in Jesus is almost tangible.

There's something else I won't soon forget. After she told her story, I gave her more good news: her sponsors had challenged the youth group of their church to help Ladegonda get a house and land. And they did it!

Ladegonda stood quietly listening to me give her words of encouragement, and then I said, "I would like you to know that you will receive land a new home!"

She body-slammed me and nearly took me to the floor—so great was her joy, so enthusiastic her hug. The group of 40 widows gathered for prayer and sharing that morning erupted in applause and

laughter—each of them rejoiced with Ladegonda as she danced and sang praises to God.

Ladegonda's attackers will never be brought to our version of justice. But she is a testimony to Christ's power to overcome evil and to restore hearts and lives.

Connecting to Burundi's widows is saving and changing their lives. It was a SISTER CONNECTION widow that took Ladegonda and her children in, and loved her into the Kingdom.

As you reach out to one widow, she, in turn, is reaching out to others. Our mission is to bring healing, dignity, and hope to these widows. Because of individuals like you partnering with us, that is exactly what is being accomplished.



CELEBRATION!



Youth Seminar

500 SC young people will gather for 3 days to learn that **Jesus has a plan for their lives**, and be challenged to intentionally follow Him by a team from Warm Beach Camp of Washington state, paired with a team of Burundian youth leaders.

Burundi Ministry Trips—2008

Partner with us in ministry!

Sponsor a Youth: \$20

Sponsor a Leader: \$50

Prices include: food, lodging, and transportation.

Leadership Seminar

Widow leaders within Sister Connection will be treated to a 5-day seminar on trauma recovery, spiritual renewal, and servant leadership.



Trip Dates

August 22—September 6

For more information:
info@sisterconnection.org

Does This Role Fit You?

Occasionally sponsors present us with the following question, "I sponsor my widow every month and I built her a house. What else can I do to help her?"

Our answer to that question? Become a *Foundational Supporter!* **SISTER CONNECTION gives 100% of every dollar a sponsor donates to that sponsor's widow.**

How can we do that? Because the gifts of *Foundational Supporters* cover the daily operational and administrative costs of the whole organization.

The entire United States staff of SISTER CONNECTION works on a volunteer basis—even the president. We have recently begun paying our Burundi staff as part of our effort to bring jobs into the region. This is much like our use of local supplies and labor to build widows' homes, which reduces the cost and helps the local economy.

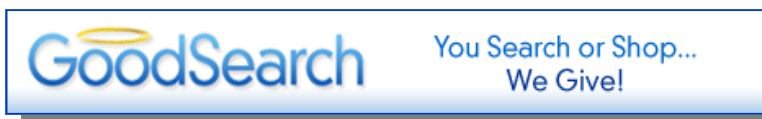
In effect, Foundational Supporters say, "I believe in this ministry and I believe in what you are doing. I want to support SISTER CONNECTION on a regular basis

to assure that the organization can continue its work, and continue to grow."

The SISTER CONNECTION board stepped out in faith that God would meet our needs when the decision was made to give 100% of every sponsor-donated dollar to each widow. Please prayerfully consider joining us in this commitment by sponsoring the organization on a monthly basis—**become a Foundational Supporter.**

Call or email to find out more.

- 317.888.0135
- dan@sisterconnection.org



You can **RAISE MONEY** for SISTERCONNECTION just by searching and shopping on the internet!

Go to www.goodsearch.com

- Type "Sister Connection" in the box labeled "enter your charity here" and then click the "Verify" button. After that, GoodSearch will donate one cent to SISTER CONNECTION for every search that you make starting from their website (For convenience, make it your home page.)
- There is also a tab/link for GoodShop—Register "Sister Connection" as your charity of choice there, and participating merchants will donate a portion of every purchase you make to SISTER CONNECTION. Merchant choices include: Amazon.com, Best Buy, Home Depot, Ebay, Barnes & Noble, Expedia, Wal-Mart, Sears, Office Depot...(ever shop any of these?)

Home-Building Connection Story — Pelagie

Denise Patch, SC President

Her name is Pelagie (Pay-lah-gee), and she is 46 years old. Her stature is shortened by her crippled legs, but she is still able to walk. She is a SISTER CONNECTION widow,



and she has a brand new house!

Built with funds lovingly given to

honor the memory of a daughter tragically taken from this world in the prime of her life, Pelagie's house is the finest in which she's ever lived. Constructed with sun-dried mud bricks and covered in a cement/mud mixture, this typical Burundian home has a metal roof, wooden shutters and doors, a receiving room, a kitchen and a bedroom. The lumber for the rafters, doors, and shutters was provided by the people of her church.

As we approached her yard to visit her new home, we saw Pelagie's little form standing proudly beside her front door.

A white paper cut-out of no particular design hung above the door for decoration, in honor of our visit.

When she saw us on the path, she turned quickly and unlocked the door to welcome us in. While locks on doors are standard features on American homes, Pelagie's pride in her little padlock was very humbling. A victim of attack many years ago, one can only imagine the peace of mind afforded her with that nice, new, lockable door.

But a SISTER CONNECTION home brings more than peace of mind. It brings shelter, security, and a sense of belonging.

Pelagie showed us through her new home, and gave us these words: "The home in



Pelagie's new bed

which I used to live was in very bad condition. I could not sleep at night because I feared that the walls would fall on me as I slept. Now I live in this beautiful home, and I can sleep in peace. I feel like it is a palace."

With sponsorship funds, Pelagie has even bought herself a real bed, complete with blankets.

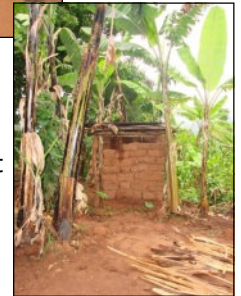
No more sleeping on the hard dirt floor wrapped only in her clothing...no, Pelagie resides in a palace, by her own description—a palace made of mud walls, hard-packed dirt floor, outdoor toilet and water hauled from the valley.

When you give a home to a Burundian widow, you give her a permanent place in her community, and she is no longer forced to beg for shelter from neighbors. Five hundred dollars built what we would consider to be an extremely humble home. But it is so much more than a home that you provide. It is healing from the past, dignity for today, and hope for the future.

Pelagie spoke for all the widows who have received homes through SISTER CONNECTION when she told us, "What you have done for me is very great. I could never imagine that I would receive a home this beautiful! May God bless you!"



The Kitchen



The Toilet

Burundi has hundreds of thousands of widows. SISTER CONNECTION is honored to come alongside the people of Burundi to assist them in responding to the overwhelming needs. The local church near Pelagie's home is a great example of the Burundian people's desire to help their own, if they are just provided with a manageable opportunity. Building an entire house for Pelagie was more than they could handle. However, when Sister Connection came in with the funds for the house, the church people donated lumber to assist with the construction.

Help us Make the CONNECTION!

Help us spread the word to others about SISTER CONNECTION. Get your church or group involved with us. Tell the SC story to your friends, relatives, and business associates.

To request a speaker for your event, a free promotional DVD, or free brochures, contact our office at 317.888.0135 or email info@sisterconnection.org.

HOW TO CONTACT US...

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Email: denise@sisterconnection.org



www.sisterconnection.org

WHO WE ARE...

- We are an organization dedicated to bringing healing from the past to Burundian war widows and orphans, restoring their dignity and offering hope for their futures.
- Founded in equal partnership between a Burundian and an American, SISTER CONNECTION offers direct aid to widows with a personal, self-help approach. Firm in our commitment to dignify widows with the right to manage their own families, we adhere to an “ask, don’t tell” philosophy. Self-sustainability is our ultimate goal for the widows.

Did You Know?

Cultural Awareness

In America, many people consider their pets to be members of the family. Your Burundian sister would have a hard time relating to this practice.

In Burundi, animals are considered to be just that—“animals,” and nothing more!

Sponsorship Milestones

- Connections to-date = 260
- Homes built to-date = 155

We Love Our Prayer Partners!

Do you love to pray? We would love to have you on our Prayer Team!
Email: prayer@sisterconnection.org
Or call 317.888.0135

Roughly 90% of our widows are illiterate. Their letters to you, their sponsors, every few months are actually dictated to a literate widow, or to one of our SC staff. Please be assured that the words you receive are from your Burundian sister, even if she cannot write them herself. Each month the widows of each region come together to receive the sponsorship funds that you give. During this time they worship and fellowship together, and then sit down to write, or dictate words of appreciation and love to you. Some of you may have noticed a thumb print on your letter. That’s your widow signifying that the letter is truly from her! Most do not thumb print their letters, but some have.

A letter from you is a great gift to your sister. Send your letters to our Indianapolis office. We will then forward them to our Burundi staff for distribution. **Not sure what to write?**

- Greet her and her children in the name of Jesus
(Similar to the ways that the New Testament authors began their epistles)
- Introduce your family, giving names and ages (of your children)
- Tell her how you feel about being connected to her and her children
- Share some favorite scripture or hymns, and why they are special to you
- Tell her you are praying for her, and what you are trusting God to do for her