

Hallelujah Moment from Kenya

"Alternative Rite of Passage"

By Jerri Savuto and Jodi Cataldo

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Maua women celebrating an alternative rite of passage. Photo: Savutos

Joy and excitement filled the room as Mary Gitari, President of the Women's Fellowship and nursing officer-in-charge at Maua Methodist Hospital, opened the first ever "Girls Alternative Rite of Passage" five-day event in Maua, Kenya, with 96 young female participants ranging in age from 14 to 18.

The Rev. Jacob Munoru, pastor of St. Joseph's Methodist Church in Maua, then told the myth of how female genital mutilation (FGM) began among the Igembi people. The myth is that many years ago, the Igembi went to war over their stolen cattle and goats, and all the men, except for the young boys, were gone from the village. When they came back, they found all the women pregnant. The men decided the women must be punished, and to prevent them from having further sexual desires, the practice of FGM started. When the girls undergo FGM, they make a vow with their blood that they will continue this tradition or bring down a curse upon their families and land.

Various attempts have been made to end the practice. In 1952, the Njuri Ncheke (a group of male elders given the authority to make final decisions for the Igembi people) declared that FGM was no longer needed. A 1998 Kenyan law banned it, but FGM continues nevertheless.

Mary dreamed of a "Girls Alternative Rite of Passage," and this dream took flight. She and the Women's Fellowship leaders recognized the need for a time of celebration to acknowledge when a teen takes her place as a woman in the community. They began planning educational sessions and a celebratory event. Although the team had hoped for 70 participants, they were blessed with 26 more than that.

Light blue tops and skirts were made for each girl to wear at the completion of their retreat, and sashes were pinned on their tops, identifying the program. Then the girls began their march through Maua. The people watched with delight and amazement as the girls, filled with new confidence and pride, marched and sang. As the graduation came to a climax in the church, the excitement soared. The congregation rose to its feet, singing loudly with the girls, "It is over, it is over! Female circumcision is over!"

Ways to Support this Ministry

You can support the ministry of "Girls Alternative Rite of Passage" by sharing your gifts through The Advance or by designated giving through your local church:

[#3020448](#)—Alternative Rite of Passage Ministry, Kenya



Hallelujah Moments

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