

# CENTRE DES JEUNES KAMENGE



Mary Nordick  
National Chairperson of Community Life

The van hurtles through the chaotic traffic of Bujumbura, Burundi's capital city, headed for the poorest and most northern quadrant, and the Centre des Jeunes Kamenge (CJK). The Canadian Catholic Organization of Development and Peace (CCODP) delegation is tired and hot, having just deplaned after an all night journey from Zambia.

atmosphere of the place. Born out of Burundi's troubled war-driven history, CJK exists to bring children from the poorest sector of Bujumbura, from varied ethnic, tribal, economic and religious backgrounds together and teach them to live in [peace](#) under one rule: "Behave like respectable people, not savages". Students are divided into small groups, as socially, ethnically, religiously diverse as possible. They stay in their groups,



Awaiting mass in the CJK gym



Enthusiastic liturgical musicians



CJK's library is a rarity in Bujumbura

Nearing our destination we bump through an unpaved section that can only be called a slum; full of tiny makeshift dwellings; a bustling marketplace selling whatever people can; an open sewer in the middle of the rutted road; and people, people, people and animals everywhere. The heat, noise, congestion, and smell are indescribable.

Finally we arrive at CJK, a cluster of buildings surrounded by soccer pitches and basketball and volleyball courts, which are deserted as everyone is packed into the gym waiting to begin Sunday mass. Our two bishops and monsignor are rushed off to vest and the rest of us are lead to reserved seats (classroom desks) three rows up in the centre of the gym. As we enter, we are handed hymn sheets and a square of brightly coloured cloth. A band on one side of the altar on the raised stage and a choir on the other enthusiastically begin. As the hymns are sung, young men and women go up and down the rows twirling the cloths and encouraging the congregation to do likewise. What a wonderful celebration of the Eucharist; faith, especially the joy of faith, is palpable in that hot, crowded gym.

Later in the week we return for a longer visit at CJK. This time the fields and courts are filled with young people, laughing and playing. Several little boys about eight years old are delighted to interrupt their soccer game for a photo opportunity. CJK is the brainchild and care for over 20 years of an Italian priest, Father Claudio Marano. Father Marano refers to the centre as "une grande famille" and that is the

doing activities, attending classes and above all learning to get along. During the summer, CJK hosts young people from other areas and even countries to take part in work projects.

As we tour CJK, we see many things. We notice large, albeit primitive by western standards, showers and learn that one of the first things offered is the chance to take a shower, something not available in homes that lack running water and power. A truly mind-boggling daily and weekly schedule board outlines the many activities available from educational, to artistic, to religious, to athletic, to social. Father Marano and a staff of 24 (many of the animators are former students) manage the centre along with several volunteers.

We see a band and singers rehearsing in the gym, students lounging, playing ping-pong and watching videos, a computer class with more students than machines, a lively discussion group, a craft class and several sports activities that emphasize teamwork rather than competition.

Most impressive is the library, one of the few in Bujumbura. There isn't an inch of unoccupied space. Books are stored in rooms behind a counter and must be requested. They cannot be taken out, and even if they could, most students do not have space to study nor light to study by in their homes. The quiet, studious, focussed atmosphere of the library is impressive.

One of the animators tells us that as a child, it was the library and the chance to read and learn that drew her to CJK. Now she works with young girls in surrounding schools to keep

them in school, an impossible dream for many young girls. One of the biggest concerns at CJK is the small percentage of girls who attend, less than 20%. Women, even very young girls, are expected to work at household tasks, leaving little time for education. Girls are married very young, ending their education. It is not always safe for girls to go to school or activities because abductions, molestation, and disappearances are common. CJK is working hard to overcome these problems.

In the main hallway, we see a chilling reminder of Burundi's violent history, a memorial wall dedicated to staff and students killed in conflicts. One of the pictures and story is that of a former student who had become a promising teacher at CJK and who was killed shortly after his wedding day. Sadly, neither the wall nor the number of names on it is small.

While we listen to presentations about the work of CJK, we experience another reality of life in Burundi. The power goes out; the staff members nonchalantly continue talking in the dark until it kicks back in. Such blackouts are frequent.

We have the opportunity to have supper there, a lively meal filled with talk and good food (spaghetti is popular). My table companion is one of the animators, a 26-year-old woman who works with young girls. With my limited French, her limited English, laughter and hand gestures we somehow manage to communicate. Her personal story is sad, but even sadder, a not uncommon one. She first came to CJK as a child, drawn by her love of books and a chance to learn. She was engaged, but lost her fiancé in a recent conflict and is now the main support for her widowed mother and younger sisters. She is a beautiful, courageous young woman who is deeply devoted to her work and to *hope* for the future.

Le Centre des Jeunes Kamenge is one of the projects in Burundi that CCODP sponsors. Its staff is impressive in what they manage to do with few resources and under trying conditions. Please pray for them and keep them in mind when you consider making a personal donation to CCODP. Help light a candle for Burundi. ✠

# FINDING "HOPE" IN THE LEGISLATION STANDING COMMITTEE



**Mary Heinzlmeir**  
Legislation Subcommittee Chairperson

**A**s we continue to focus on the national theme of *Women of Peace and Hope*, we consider various ways of making God's world a better place through members' efforts. What changes are necessary to improve life for all? Although there are opportunities each day to bring *hope* to others, some changes require legislation, be it municipal, provincial or federal.

The legislation chairperson is called to monitor and study legislation at all levels of government and prepare briefs and position papers on proposed legislation.

The legislation standing committee encourages members to take action to bring about positive changes. Legislation is about making a difference. Legislation is about *hope* for a better tomorrow. Each action will change things and can bring *hope* for a brighter future. Members have the responsibility to make this a better world. If nothing is done – nothing will change! Let us make our *hopes* come to life through our actions.

**Remember, prayer is one of our greatest sources of *hope*.** ✠

## AUTOMOBILE TIRE AGE – SAFETY RISK

### DID YOU KNOW?

- that you can determine the age of a tire from sidewall labelling?
- that there is an increased potential for belt separation from a tire of more than ten years of age since date of manufacture, regardless of when the tire was put into use?
- that at least one automobile association strongly recommends that unused tires should not be put into service if they are over six years old?
- that environmental conditions such as exposure to sunlight and coastal climates, as well as poor storage and infrequent use accelerate the aging process of tires?

With issues that concern public safety, consumers have a responsibility to ask questions and seek answers. For more information, go to [www.safetyresearch.net/safety-issues/tires](http://www.safetyresearch.net/safety-issues/tires)