

# The Link

## Social Distancing

*Can one be social at a distance?*

**Oxymoron:** As Candy and I crossed over from Virginia to West Virginia to receive a covid test, we saw a large “thought provoking” decal plastered on the rear window of an old rusty pickup truck. In large black letters it stated, “**Social Distancing is an Oxymoron.**” As you know, an oxymoron is a figure of speech that shows contradictory words (similar to a paradoxical statement). I am reminded of phrases we all use from time-to-time such as: “Bitter sweet,” “deafening silence, or the expression “terribly good” **Social distancing** is a contradiction of terms—being social and at the same time being distant. **DO NOT FOOL YOURSELF,** true corporate fellowship/worship is not meeting together on the internet using a program called ZOOM! Though it is the best we can do under the circumstances, it does not replace church gatherings as some may believe.

One major reason I visit East Africa three times a year is to be socially/physically/spiritually/intimately connected with Africans. For the past 10 months, MLI has had major issues in Africa that necessitated my physical presence. Though texting and emails are an acceptable “tool” for short-term communication, it lacks true intimacy/fellowship. Unfortunately, Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms have in some instances replaced spiritual/intimate connectivity with other believers. Yet, in a very real sense, the church has been moving toward less physical interaction for the past decade with the introduction of the “mega church.” Just because a mass of people are gathered together does not necessarily mean they are connected. One can be in a group and still feel lonely—disconnected. These large Sunday gatherings foster anonymity. People can easily attend services with little or no commitment or spiritual connection. In fact, many churches have stopped Sunday evening services; plus, the mid-week prayer meetings have been on life support for many years. For the most part, the church is no longer the central focus of our progressive culture.

The New Testament is saturated with passages encouraging the gathering of the people of God (i.e. Hebrews 10:25). Communion, preaching/teaching, sharing agape meals, discovering/using spiritual gifts to strengthen the Body of Christ, corporate rescuing one who has drifted away from the church or who have plunged into sin, ALL necessitate that believers be deeply involved with each other. It is true—one cannot be “social” and remain at a distance. In fact, the pandemic of 2020 had clergy either ceasing Sunday services, or reducing the numbers of parishioners coming together while mandating masks, staying six feet apart (which meant no shaking hands or hugs.) Consequently, this has affected the strength of the corporate gathering. Yet, even before the pandemic, when we were able to socialize (greet, shake

hands, hug, exchange pleasantries), many believers wore their “invisible mask” to protect them from being truly “transparent.” In fact, allow me a few minutes to explain several facets of church life that has seriously infected true fellowship. (The following bleeds over to being paradoxes.)

A large number of churches have been hijacked/kidnapped by a small group of longstanding family members who have taken “ownership” and “wheel the power.” When attending Southeastern Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, I was instructed by seasoned men of God how to succeed in a small church. They explained that a new pastor must first befriend (win over) the “power people” (owners) of the church in order to make any real progress. Students were informed that the “owners” will potentially frustrate the pastor and stall church growth. For example, when moving to Pearisburg a few years back, Candy and I visited several churches. We went to one church for over a year having never been asked our names. In fact, that seemed to be the norm in other churches we visited. We even went to a church of color, and one individual whispered to us as we sat down in the pew that “you are in the wrong church.” After being a pastor for over twenty-five years, I have witnessed first hand how people are greeted (or not greeted). Another example is one who utters from their lips one thing, but by their actions state the opposite. For example, some say with tearful emotions that they do not want to see anyone go to Hell, but never share the gospel? Or, there are those who believe the Bible is the Word of God (God breathed), but spend far more time reading FaceBook or watching TV rather than studying the Bible. Or, we cast harsh judgment on an individual for moral failure, yet forget the sobering words shared by Jesus in Matthew chapter five—the Sermon on the Mount: If you even lust after a woman, you have committed adultery.

Clearly, we must tear off the hypocritical mask and be more transparent...be REAL! The truth is, the pandemic has only exacerbated what has been going on for years among believers. To a certain degree, we have ALL hid behind a mask. To be social means to be deeply involved with one another. We need each other! A hot coal that moves away from the fire (the church gathering of other hot coals) will soon discover that they have become spiritually cool/cold. May God help us to be more open to one-another, spiritually intimate (close), transparent—biblically social. May we do away with the hidden forms of “social distancing” and be more transparent. I look forward to the day when we will gather before the throne of God MASK-LESS and be truly/socially intimate praising our KING.

**Rick**

**2021—A New Year has begun bringing new challenges and numerous ministry opportunities.**



**Top Pics:** Widows given their 5th food distribution, monthly funds and a fun Christmas party. **2nd Row:** Evangelist Richard Kasanka's building a home; Glasses given to Pastor Wandera for distribution. MLI Staff party and Christmas bonus. **3rd Row:** Thomas Kunya's house being built; Phiona given school fees; New MLI Office in Pearisburg, Va.—Moving 01/12/2021.

**CURRENT "SAMPLING" OF NEEDS:** \* MLI has helped fund Evangelist Richard's Kasanka's and Tom Kunya's housing projects (both pictured above.) **Any amount appreciated.** \* Future water-well \$6,500 for the Deaf School. \* MLI needs \$450 signage for new office building. \* **January/February food distribution—Any amount.** \* Milling project did not take into account "3-phase" electrical service at \$5300—need additional \$2,500! \* Our deaf school construction project will soon begin. Presently, we are working on refining architectural plans & obtaining approval by local gov't. \* Tires/servicing for MLI Van: \$400. \* Building simple shelters (housing) for widows will be explored in 2021.

**Mission Link International East Africa Headquarters:** Our large two building facility is being used free of charge by a number of people. **Attorney Stephen Muzuusa's law office** is located at the MLI facility. **Mary Kunya** has a bakery shop in the lower part of the main building. **Mission Link Christian Church** uses the MLI auditorium at various times during the week. **Abraham**, a young street kid, lives on MLI campus (MLI sponsors school fees, food, clothing, medical, etc.) **Vincent**, carpenter and furniture maker, uses our tools and facility. We have a **pastor that disciples students** in our facility on Saturdays. From time-to-time **church and civic groups** use our facilities for special events. Last but not least, **Mission Link International has their offices** and conferences in the facility. **URA** (Uganda Revenue Authority) cannot comprehend that we do not charge for others to use our facilities. In fact, last month MLI was called in by URA to testify (give an account) of how we operate our mission. **THE COST OF MAINTAINING THIS FACILITY (MAINTENANCE, SECURITY GUARD, UTILITIES, TAXES, ETC.) IS FUNDED BY THE GENERAL FUND. THANK YOU FOR HELPING MLI TO HELP OTHERS.**



**UGANDA NEWS**

Below are a few highlights of Uganda's pandemic and the upcoming election.

Presidential Candidate, **Bobi Wine**, witnessed his security guard being run over by Museveni's military police. Last month, at least 45 Africans were killed during protest. Wine has been beaten and jailed multiple times and poses a treat to President Museveni's 30 year reign. The Ugandan election is January 14, 2021. Please pray for Uganda's upcoming election, and as they enter a 2nd wave of the Coronavirus



**CORONAVIRUS UPDATES**

- As of December 29, 2020
- 33,811 confirmed cases
  - 248 DEATHS!
  - Recovered—11,180

**NOTICE:** Again, **January** is a continuation of MLI's cell phone collection. Please ask your family, friends, Bible study group and church (Pastor) to donate their old cell phone to Mission Link. Also needed are laptops, tablets, electronic keyboard, and cameras. Thank you for helping!



**Thirty (\$30) a month brings great happiness & needed provisions for our African widows in Uganda!**

**Edinansi Namugere** was born in 1968 and has 3 children. Her husband died in 1992 of a serious hernia complication. Edinansi is thankful for the protection God has bestowed upon her life even though she lost her husband. She is thankful for the provision and care through MLI—Food supplies, medical and for spiritual help through monthly widow fellowships. Edinansi attends Itukulu Baptist Church. Challenges: Sicknesses, medical bills, her shelter leaks when it rains, and limited provisions to care for her grandchildren.

**On Going Prayer Concerns**

- \* Pray for the timing of Rick's next trip to Uganda
- \* Continue to pray for those sick in Uganda and for protection from C-19.
- \* Much prayer for the upcoming MLI office move. The transition will make thing easier for Rick & Candy not having to travel each week to C'ville.
- \* Prayer for supported projects to remain strong.