



buzz

Learning in the Context of a Loving Home

One day in 2004, another child was delivered to Annette and Paco Castillo. This tiny person did not speak at all, despite appearing to be about 3 years old. The Castillos named her Marina Loua and welcomed her into their growing family at La Casa Grande, a children's home in Benin and a Mennonite Mission Network partner.

"Was there a problem with her vocal chords? Had she lost her voice due to unspeakable trauma? No one knew," said Melanie Hire, who was visiting La Casa Grande when Marina arrived. Hire was part of a partnership delegation from Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana.

Hire and Marina formed a bond and communicated through hugs and smiles. After a period of basking in the love that is tangible as soon as one enters La Casa Grande's compound, the inseparable twosome were participating in vibrant worship that is part of the daily fabric at the children's home. Music is lively and accompanied by drumming and dancing. Prayer is punctuated with "Amens" and fervent declarations of "Thank you, Jesus!"

In the middle of a prayer, an unfamiliar, little voice shouted out, "Hallelujah!" Reverently closed eyes popped open and all heads turned toward Marina.

"We were all stunned into silence," Hire said. "Despite the suffering little Marina had endured, the first word we heard from her was one of praise to God!"

With good nutrition and education, Marina quickly grew physically and developmentally into a much older child than she first seemed on her arrival. La Casa Grande helped her become a seamstress through an apprenticeship, a common way to receive vocational training in West Africa.

Soon after Marina's arrival, Annette and Paco Castillo turned the directorship of La Casa Grande over to Annette's sister and brother-in-law, Esther Zingbe

continued on back

Katie and Leo Wetli

Katie is originally from Lexington, Ky. She went to college at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta, Ga., majoring in biology and playing basketball there. She then went to medical school in Louisville, Ky. and did her residency in South Bend at Memorial Hospital. Currently she is a family physician at Goshen Family Physicians. In her free time she likes to read, travel and take their dog Riley for long walks.

Leo is from Fowler, Ind. He went to Purdue University, earning a degree in mechanical engineering. He spent 10 years after college working and traveling with Cargill as a maintenance supervisor. Since moving to Goshen, Leo works part time for the Parks Department at Bonneyville Mill and then spends his free time doing woodworking and leather working.

Katie and Leo would like to add that "we both grew up and were married in the Catholic Church but we started feeling out of place there lately. After our visits to Waterford with Mandy Schmidt, we always enjoyed how friendly and welcoming everyone was so we wanted to learn more about the Mennonite faith and the people here."





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continued from front

and Paulin Bossou, and they moved on to another ministry. The Castillos returned to their home congregation, Comunidades Unidas Anabautistas, in Burgos, Spain, where they began laying the groundwork for the realization of Annette's childhood dream of working with the children in her hometown of Man, Ivory Coast.

An armed conflict had ravaged the area and interrupted the education of nearly all the children. Many children were conscripted to fight and turned to crime in order to survive. In 2010, Annette and Paco Castillo opened the doors of Jeunes Espoir d'Afrique (Youth – Hope of Africa), where they work to rehabilitate child soldiers and young prisoners. There are about 30 youth currently participating in the community, where, following schooling, they are taught trades like masonry, electrical wiring, sewing, and raising small animals such as rabbits and poultry.

One young man, Landry Gondo, lost both his parents. His father died about 10 years ago when Landry was 10 years old. Then, four years later, his mother died.

"I was very depressed because I was all alone in the world," Landry said. "I had to leave school because I had no money. I turned to prostitution and danced in nightclubs to buy food. I became a juvenile delinquent and started smoking and using drugs."

Landry described how he slept in the streets because no one would welcome him into their home. All this changed when Landry encountered Paco Castillo and decided to join the Jeunes Espoir d'Afrique community.

"God has done so much for me. Not only am I learning a trade, but God has given me a new family who are my brothers

and sisters," Landry said.

In addition to finding fulfillment in developing his artistic gifts, Landry said that God has also given him the peace and joy



Photo: Steve Wiebe Johnson

for which he had been searching. He was among the 24 youth who were recently baptized at Jeunes Espoir d'Afrique.

"The most marvelous part of my new life is that I accepted Jesus as my Savior and Lord. Jesus gave me a new life that trans-

formed my behavior," Landry said.

Marina is also using her gifts for God's glory. She has joined the staff at Jeunes Espoir d'Afrique where she teaches sewing and helps to mentor young women.

Landry puts words to the gratitude that he, Marina, and their brothers and sisters feel.

"I praise the Living God who listens to orphans' cries and helps children in difficulty," Landry said. "I, who danced as if possessed by evil spirits, now dance for the True and Living God."

—Lynda Hollinger-Janzen via <https://www.mennonitemission.net/news/Learning-in-the-context-of-a-loving-home>

Thank You

I wish to thank all of you for your prayers, visits, cards and gifts which came to me during my surgery and weeks of rehab.

They were greatly appreciated. You will be remembered for a long time.

—Nelda Nussbaum

From the Everence Office

The Everence Sharing Funds provided \$2,999.73 in matching funds to support special needs in our church last year. Miriam Stauffer serves as the Everence advocate for our congregation. Please contact her for more information.