

## Kenya trip changes life direction for Duncannon man

Thursday, July 30, 2009

By Thom Casey

Those around the Rev. Michael Goodling told him to pay no attention to the child clinging to his leg.

The child greeting Goodling at a 2007 meeting in Kenya, Africa, had large patches of white skin with bloody edges. Many speculated the child had leprosy, but Goodling didn't care. He gave the child a hug. He wanted the child to know he was loved.

It was the single moment that changed Goodling's life. He decided to devote the rest of his life to missionary work in Africa.

Next February, Goodling, 45, of Duncannon, his wife Darlene, 44 and the daughter of the Rev. Dale Rosenberger, and daughters Alyssa, 17, and Kia, 6, will travel to Swaziland as missionaries for the Assemblies of God.

The family, aside from Alyssa, will stay for four years, return to the United States for a year and share their stories with congregations before returning to Swaziland.

The couple's son Jordan, 20, is serving with the Pennsylvania National Guard.

Goodling and his wife have made two previous trips to Africa. His first was 2004-05 to Ghana, and in 2007-08 to Kenya. When he first arrived in Ghana, he said "it felt like home."

Goodling tries not to focus on the negative aspects of his work. When he tells his stories, there is a deep sadness, but one can tell from his tone that what he's seen has only reaffirmed his decision. He's removed the bodies of children from trees after a flash flood decimated Piedras Negras, Mexico, a border town. He's seen a pair of African sisters sharing one pair of shoes, each wearing one shoe. He's witnessed humanity being stripped from the survivors after one Assembly of God church was burnt down in Kenya. He's had to go behind buildings and let his emotions out, or sit in bed and let the tears flow.

"I don't know if I've ever said, 'this is enough,' but, I've gotten close."

Currently, Goodling is traveling across Pennsylvania and other states in the mid-Atlantic region. He shares his tales with congregations, and watches the reactions. "I tell them, up front, they're not going to hear things they normally hear from missionaries."

In order to fully tell the stories, he offers multimedia presentations. "It's not unusual to see audience members in tears."

He also shares tales of compassion. Goodling tells of an Africa many only imagine. He tells how those who attend services want pastors to speak for at least an hour and a half. He tells of Africans who have nothing who want to give something.

"I've been treated in such incredible ways in Africa by people. They are tremendously hardworking, industrious people and gracious."

At the end of the day, Goodling has never looked at his work as a job or a vocation, but a calling.

For more information about the Goodlings or to make a donation, readers can visit the family's Web site at [www.thegoodlings.net](http://www.thegoodlings.net).

(Note: This article appeared in the Duncannon Record, Perry County Times & News-Sun newspapers in Perry County, PA.)