

THE DAY THE OGWALS CAME TO TOWN

Mid-August, 1987. Rector of R. E. Lee only since June, I was still settling in. The phone rang: Nancy Roosevelt, who had led the congregation wonderfully during the interim, had become Bishop Heath Light's assistant. She asked for him whether we would consider hosting a bishop from Uganda, then exiled to Ventnor, NJ., with his family of (um) nine. Bishop Light, who chaired the Standing Commission on World Mission for the Church, wanted to help out this family, and said that R. E. Lee was the only congregation in the diocese that could pull it off.

Stunned, I walked over to Newcomb Hall to chat with Minor Rogers, fellow priest and former missionary who taught at W&L. He listened to my rambling of pros and cons, then wisely advised, "Don't say 'no' until you're sure."

With that, I spoke to others, lots of others. None said "Absolutely YES!," but none said "no" either. Folks at the Episcopal Church Center—"815"—were encouraging and figured out how to help the funding. But housing? for nine, in September in a college town?

Enter Sarah Lanford. She heard of a house on Route 11 heading out of town available for rent. On a Wednesday morning in early September, we took a look: No way. Discouraged, with time running short when the Ogwal family had to move, we went to the 12:15 service and included special prayers for guidance. By 2 p.m. *two* viable options appeared, each large and affordable. The one right around the corner from the Rectory on Myers Street was clearly the one. Owned by the Association for Retarded Citizens (Wally Fogo being an active board member), they needed to rent it for a year...and we needed a house. But it needed redoing, not quite top-to-bottom, but nearly, with all the furnishings and provisions a family would require.

That's when the congregation and community set to work. I let the parish know that Sunday that we had one week to pull off a miracle, for the Ogwals were coming the following *Saturday*. Volunteers poured forth to paint rooms, repair pipes, upgrade electricity, beautify grounds, hang curtains, most of them from R. E. Lee, some from the community who heard what we were doing. From garages and attics appeared enough furniture to fill the house; and from stores and pantries and kitchens came food to welcome this family, so far from home, to a new one. It was all so joyous, so cooperative, so spontaneous, so Spirit-filled, so amazing.

Late that Saturday, they arrived: The Right Reverend Benoni Ogwal-Abwang—Bishop Ben; his wife, Alice; their children, Patrick, Peter, Jessica, twins Janani and Gladys; Alice's sister Nancy and her daughter, "Baby Alice." When I greeted them, great were the prayers of thanksgiving...theirs, and mine.

For the Ogwals, and for R. E. Lee Church, it was the beginning of a wonderfully blessed year and, for me, wonderfully blessed rectorship. I realized I was amid some pretty amazing people. All of us saw what astonishing things the Lord can do; and remembering it now as Ben and Alice return, it remains, as the Psalmist says, "marvelous in our eyes."