

The Business of Death:
*A Mortuary in Rural Western
Kenya*



Proposal for Funding through
Straw to Bread*

*Registered 501(c)(3) Non-Profit

Helen's Story

Helen did not know how old she was, but she was thought she was in her 90's. She had lived all of those many years in a mud hut in Kenya with a few animals and a garden—marrying, raising children, and then outliving them all.



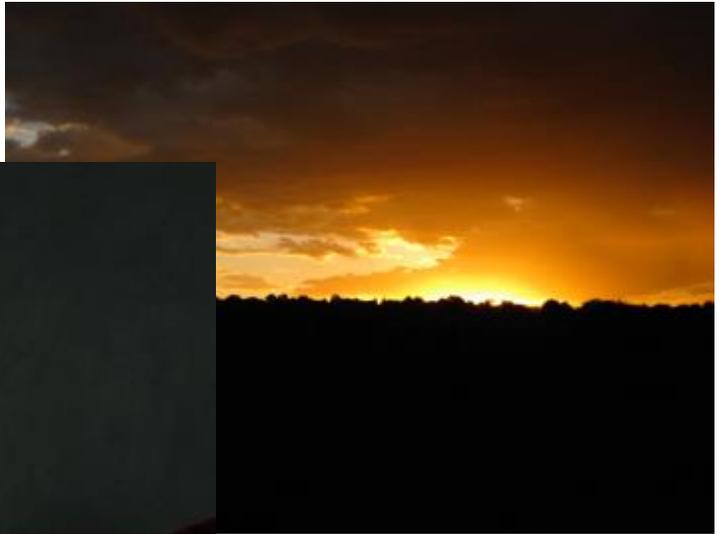
She never went to school, and she had no shoes. She spoke only Luo, her tribe's unwritten language. Helen's simple surroundings disguised the fact that she was one of the most treasured elders among those who knew her. She walked for several hours every Tuesday to go to a prayer meeting, but she never prayed for shoes. Instead, she prayed for others.



When Helen died last summer, she was taken to the nearest mortuary, which consists of one large room with closets where bodies are sometimes stacked three deep on shelves meant for one. The smell of formaldehyde is overwhelming there—not surprising, given that it is a substitute for refrigeration.

Death haunts every home.

Every day brings death and life in rural western Kenya. The Nyakach Plateau, with the country's highest maternal and infant mortality rate and the highest HIV rate, is home to more than 135,000 people whose precarious survival depends on growing their own food. The mortality rate for children is a shocking 15%, and for adults it is 8-10%. Forty-two people die on an average day in this area of destitute poverty.



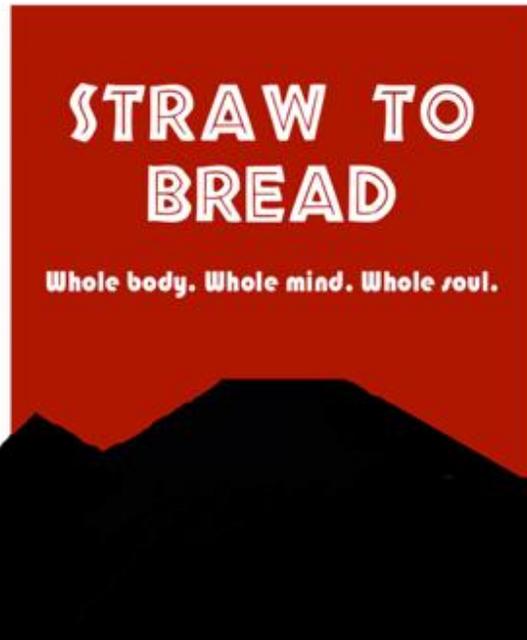
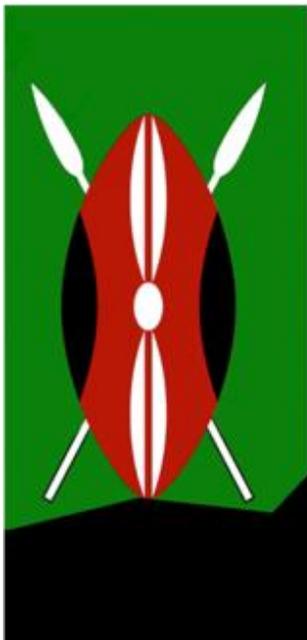
What is Bethlehem Home?

The resilient and dynamic *Bethlehem Home* is a comprehensive development project originated by the people who live on this rocky plateau. Against all odds, they have brought into being a hospital, a high-achieving school, access to clean water, three large community gardens, and numerous small businesses.



What is Straw to Bread?

A unique partnership has developed since 2001 between this community of Kenyans and a U.S.-based non-profit group called *Straw to Bread*, which grew out of a friendship between the founder of *Bethlehem Home* and an American physician.



Bethlehem Home Hospital

With the support of *Straw to Bread*, a local Kenyan young man received his medical training at the University of Nairobi and returned home as Dr. Don Ogolla, physician for the new *Bethlehem Home Hospital* that opened in October of 2015.



Almost everyone who lives on the Plateau travels by foot, and the two other hospitals within walking distance of several miles—a Catholic mission hospital and a government hospital—have no permanent on-site physician, and are too expensive for most Nyakach residents. With the new hospital's busy out-patient clinic and an in-patient ward often filled to capacity, *Bethlehem Home Hospital* is meeting a vast need. Though the new hospital means that healthy newborns and healing are more common now, death still haunts every hallway.

We need a mortuary.

In order to maintain a government license, all hospitals in Kenya are required to have a mortuary. Bethlehem Home Hospital now needs to take this step, and Straw to Bread is moving ahead to support these friends by raising the needed funds.

The law requires that bodies be removed from a hospital within thirty minutes of a patient's death. Once the body arrives at a mortuary, however, it is kept there for two to four weeks before people are finally able to gather for the funeral. The importance of funerals to the Luo people is unique among Kenya's fourteen tribes. Families who are desperately poor will sacrifice to pay for a funeral, expecting relatives to travel long distances to share rituals and food.



The *Bethlehem Home Mortuary* also will serve as a new and crucial source of income for the *Bethlehem Home* community. Tragically, the high death rate means that the business of renting large tents and providing catering has provided the most dependable income of all the businesses started by *Bethlehem Home*. The mortuary services would be combined with this already existing funeral business to provide comprehensive and efficient care for families.

What is the PLAN? Is the business sustainable?

All funds are given in US dollars. The estimated exchange rate is \$1 (USD) = 100 Kenyan shillings (Ksh).

How much will it cost?

- **Cost of building** the 2700 square-foot mortuary and equipping it with modern refrigeration will be approximately \$100,000 (\$90,000 plus 10% allowed for cost overrun).
- **Initial supplies**: \$3,000
- **Start-up costs**: annual license (\$250), billboard advertising (\$350)
- **Monthly expenses**: Approximately \$500
 - **Salaries**: (\$380/month for two mortuary attendants, two watchmen, and a clerk)
 - **Utilities**: water (\$35/month), electricity (\$80/month)

Building cost, supplies and start-up costs, three months operating expenses = \$105,100

FUND-RAISING GOAL: \$110,000

How much income will it provide?

Minimum local cost for embalming and keeping a body for two weeks = \$80

At the minimal local cost, if half of the 42 deaths/day on the Plateau (20) were brought to the Bethlehem Home Hospital Mortuary, and if they were kept for the minimum of two weeks, the income would be \$1600/month.

Location advantage: Bethlehem Home already owns land at the bottom of the Nyakach Plateau on the major road running throughout the district (total population 250,000). There is a high probability that some of the business from this wider catchment area would shift to the new Bethlehem Home Hospital Mortuary due to its accessibility, high quality, and the comprehensive services that will be offered, including funeral needs (coffins, clothing, tent rental, and catering) as well as preservation of the body.

Capacity of the mortuary: 30 bodies

Profit margin: With an estimated expense of \$500/month and an income of \$1600/month, the profit margin would be \$1100/month. Even in the extreme event that the expenses might double, or the income might be cut in half, the business would still operate at a profit.



From a sustainability point of view, this business plan assures a strong basis for expected ongoing success of the mortuary.

The mission of Straw to Bread is to support the Luo people of the Bethlehem Home community on the Nyakach Plateau in achieving their vision of health and sustainability.

After more than ten years of partnership, the model of providing seed money and funding the construction has proven to be the springboard of hope and practicality for life-giving progress among people who, while desperately poor, are hard-working, responsible, and visionary. **To stay open, the hospital must have a mortuary.** We get to help. **Will you join us?**



Send a check to "Straw to Bread" at PO Box 241 Waco, TX 76703
For more information, email Executive Director Lisa Baker MD PhD
Lisa.Baker@Baylor.edu