United Methodist serves hearing-impaired in Mozambique

By Roxanne Dass
Staff Writer

Belucha is a 7-year-old girl with hardened skin, rotten teeth and the eyes of a 50-year-old. She is also unable to hear the world around her because of hearing loss.

Belucha is from Mozambique, the third poorest nation in the world, where there is no resident audiologist in the entire country and no advocacy for the hearing impaired.

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In 1999, the Mozambican government started creating classrooms for children with hearing loss, but there was no official sign language of Mozambique. Dr. Clark and her team started to teach
the children American Sign Language because they had nothing else. In 2005, though, an official Mozambique sign book was created.

Dr. Clark said the mission is almost a burden because once she's started; she can't stop helping the people of Mozambique. She has to go back every year not only because she feels it's what God wants her to do, but also because people need to get new batteries for their hearing aids and more supplies.

"If we just stop, we're going to alienate a whole community that is already pushed aside," she said.

Dr. Clark is working with colleges in South Africa to help her carry the burden. She said she would continue going to Mozambique until the program is self-sufficient and she is out of a job there.

It's also children like Belucha that keep her coming back. When Dr. Clark first met the little girl, she would scream in terror when anyone came near her to run tests. After many hours of coaxing, Dr. Clark and her team were able to make ear molds and fit her with hearing aids.

"When she first heard my voice, she gave me a big, beautiful, toothless grin," she said. "It's because of moments like those that I came in the first place and continue to come."

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