

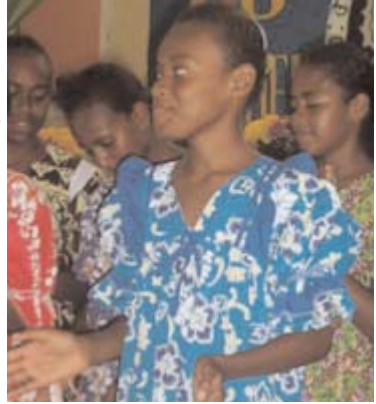


MINUTE FOR MISSION

April 1, 2004

Lifted by Hymns of Praise

Onesua Presbyterian College is a beautiful boarding school in Vanuatu. Our life there is measured in song. The singing is part of the place, just like the rows of coconut trees and the low, cinder block classrooms. There is also the gentle, steady bass of the waves against the reef and the high, soaring descant of the lorikeets in the trees, but it's the singing, the sound of youthful voices, that defines the campus.



A pair of girls sing sleepily as they heat the tea for breakfast in the dining hall. Their friends, arms tucked inside their T-shirts against the early morning chill, walk sleepily toward the soft melody.

After breakfast, four boys wash the tables. They sing loudly in a goofy falsetto interrupted by laughter. The echoes reach out across the lawns as the students gather for morning devotions.

During break time after lunch, one can hear a group of boys down by the chapel. Their uniforms are splotches of white against the cool shadows. They are practicing some close harmony for next Sunday's worship service.



After classes are finished, the students divide up for outside work. They sing songs as they pick up trash down by the entrance, and as they weed the flowerbeds outside the library songs float down the path from the school farm, where the students work in the vegetable garden that feeds them.

Just before "lights out," the choir director closes practice with a short prayer. The last song, refusing to be stilled, suddenly starts again as the students come down the steps. They interrupt the song to say "Good night!" to one another, and the "goodnight" forms its own lilt, as if it were part of the chorus. The boys and girls drift off toward their separate dorms, still singing, the harmonies fading into the stars and the sound of the surf.

On one of Vanuatu's islands, Emau, one village has a beach where, long ago, many big stones were moved out of the way so that boats could safely reach the shore. The villagers tell the story that the stones were lifted by song, by the people singing them to the spots where they should rest. That's how we feel about our life here; we are lifted by hymns of praise throughout the day.

Bruce and Lora Whearty
PC(USA) Mission Co-Workers
Port Vila, Vanuatu

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For more information on the Witness Season mission education emphasis contact Billie Healy, Associate for Mission Education Resources (888) 728-228-7228, ext. 5689, or Bhealy@ctr.pcusa.org.