

## A Legacy of Love

In 1982 Joe Talago, who died on 9/29/18, and his wife, Shirley (died 2012) moved to Scrabble where they built a home, and Joe operated a small nursery. By the early 90's Joe was fully retired. 5:30 Mass attendees knew Joe and Shirley as faithful members, and some knew of Joe's major involvement in St. Agnes' cash card program, fewer knew of his work on the new church building committee and the finance council. And most parishioners knew little about Joe's earlier life: that he was born in a mining camp in WV; left home as a young teen to study accordion; that he enlisted into the Navy V12 College Training Program and was commissioned in 1946 and ordered to sea duty. His last sea duty was commanding officer of the Submarine USS Raton. Joe and Shirley were the parents of 6 children, two of whom died, one at 19 and one at 28. Joe had three Master's degrees, two in engineering and an MBA. After leaving the Navy in '65 he worked first as an engineer and then as a financial manager. An impressive resume!

Hardly anyone knew of Joe's true legacy. Yes, there was his gift in his final years of \$250,000 to the Shepherdstown Library in memory of Shirley, and of \$250,000 to St. Agnes toward a Social Hall. But what Joe was most proud of, what brought tears to his eyes, was the Kolofata (Cameroon) Scholarship Fund which he started after reading his National Geographic magazine. He realized that educating young women is the best way to transform and develop a society, so at 91 he set out to do just that.

Some of you may have heard Dr. Ellen Einterz speak at St. Agnes in 2016. Ellen was the founding director of a hospital/school complex in the poor, rural, Muslim, northern region of Cameroon for over 22 years. While home on leave Boko Haram invaded Kolofata killing or capturing many. Joe and Ellen e-mailed and talked and planned. In the fall of 2017 four girls from Kolofata enrolled in the Protestant College (HS Boarding School) in Ngaundere, Cameroon, 400 miles south of Kolofata, and one girl started college. Joe's only stipulation was that the girls come from families too poor to pay for their educations. Joe set up a fund to cover the educational costs of these 5 girls.

Joe asked that we continue his efforts. By word of mouth here at St. Agnes and through other friends we have started to raise funds. We'd raised enough to start two more girls at the Protestant College in Ngaundere (\$3800/year/student for room, board, travel, computer and small clothing allowance) when we received an urgent plea. A girl's mother wanted to marry the girl off. Her sister had been paralyzed in a Boko Haram bombing and her father was at the hospital with his paralyzed daughter hundreds of miles away, another sibling had died in the bombing and the mother was desperate. A St. Agnes parishioner stepped forward to pay the first year expenses if the girl passed both the difficult national qualifying exam and boarding school exam. She did. There are now 6 Kolofata girls in boarding high school and 2 in college.

When word of Joe's death reached Kolofata the villagers researched American funeral customs and decided to send flowers. In a village that lacks electricity and running water they raised \$100 for flowers and a donation to the St. Agnes building fund in memory of Joe. And they sent this letter:

*For us, Mr. Joe was the beam from a lighthouse on a stormy night, shining brightly but so unexpectedly in the distance. He never met us and never heard us speak, but by some heavenly grace, in his generous heart he saw us, listened to us, and shone for us at a time when we most needed that light.*

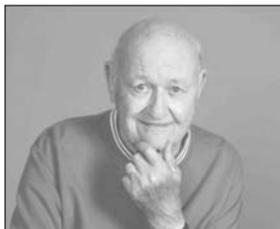
*May his seas now be forever calm and sparkling, a reflection of the hope and joy he gave to others, not least of all to us.*

*To Mr. Joe's family and friends we send warm condolences. We stand beside you in honoring him. May your sadness be lessened by knowing that in this corner of the world an ocean away and so different from yours, Mr. Joe will live on as a part of our future for many years to come.*

*With eternal gratitude, from the people of Kolofata, Cameroon.*

We are hoping that what Joe started, the St. Agnes community will adopt as our own commitment to changing the world one person, one young woman, at a time. We invite parishioners to make either a four year commitment (4 years of high school) of any amount - \$10, \$25, \$50 or more per year, or a one time contribution. Please make checks payable to St. Agnes Church and note *Kolofata Scholarship Fund* on the memo line.

Here are photos of the 5 girls that Joe has sponsored, and of the flowers at his funeral.



Aissa-Boukar



Vidada-Elisabeth



Falmata-Ali-Abba



Hawa-Sali



Hadja Mairamou