

# Iowans race to save lives of three children

A group of Iowans is racing right now to save three Tanzanian children who survived a nation-shocking school-bus crash that claimed the lives of 32 of their classmates.

The story is a testimony to God's timing and the Church working in unity; and The FAMIly LEADER is telling you about it because these three children urgently need your help.

Dr. Steve Meyer is president and co-founder of Siouxland Tanzania Educational Medical Ministries, or STEMM, based in Sioux City, Iowa. The ministry provides medical, educational, and spiritual outreach to children and orphans in the African nation of Tanzania.

Meyer told TFL a STEMM team had just finished a medical mission to central Tanzania on Saturday, May 6, when their plans to take some R&R time on safari were held up, over and over. Only after finally getting on the road did they discover God had been orchestrating the timing.

It had been a rainy day, the steep, muddy roads slick and treacherous, when the STEMM team came across a horrific scene: A school bus had lost control and plunged into a ravine.

"Our medical team slammed on the brakes and jumped out," Meyer said. "They were just the third vehicle to arrive on the scene. They went to work coordinating the effort to pull 35 victims out of bus, but among the broken bodies, they identified three children who still had a heartbeat. They scrambled to stabilize the surviving children and ensure they made it to the hospital."

But the story only starts there.

“The team felt they needed to visit the children afterward,” Meyer said. “One of the girls had a head injury, her pupils fixed and dilated. Local doctors were sure she wasn’t going to make it.”



To have the best chance of recovery, the three survivors – Wilson, Sadia, and Doreen – needed to come to the U.S. for treatment.

“But to be honest,” Meyer said, “though God’s arms are never too short, the odds were long. The Tanzanian government discounted the children’s need for Western aid. Visas, transportation – so many hurdles.”

But one of STEMM’s co-founders is a member of Tanzania’s Parliament and got Meyer an audience with the nation’s vice president. When they met, the vice president remembered meeting Meyer 20 years previous, and she was moved by his offer to help.

It was the morning of the nation’s memorial service for the lost children.

“It was one of the most sobering and emotionally charged things I had ever seen,” Meyer said. “50,000 people were packed into a soccer stadium that only held 15,000. International cameras were rolling. Then the vice president stood up, thanked us publicly, and told the nation if it weren’t for us, there would be three more caskets in the stadium. Then, she set into motion getting the children visas to come to the U.S.”

Back home, Iowans began to respond. Mercy Medical Center in Sioux City offered to treat the children at no cost. Hometown paramedics volunteered to transport the children. U.S. Rep. Steve King was a “bulldog,” Meyer said, trying to arrange a medical evacuation flight ... but to little avail.

Then Meyer got a call from a voice he recognized instantly: “Hello, Dr. Meyer. This is Franklin Graham of Samaritan’s Purse. How can we help?”

Meyer told TFL Samaritan’s Purse has never provided this kind of medical evac before, but Graham’s call was just the first of several that came in within 36 hours in which hurdles began to fall.

Meyer explains STEMM is now waiting with baited breath. The plane is on the tarmac. They await news that the last of the papers is signed and the children are in the air.

***Updates on Wilson, Sadia, and Doreen can be found on STEMM’s Facebook page. Click here for more.***

Meanwhile, Meyer said, the people of Tanzania are grief-stricken, but amazed that these American doctors would be so dedicated to three African children: “The entire continent of Africa is watching and drawing hope from this.”

“I spoke to the father of one of the girls,” Meyer said, “to reassure him that his wife and daughter are warmly welcome, and we’re not just trying to convert them, but that we respect him and his beliefs. With tears in his eyes, he asked me, ‘Why? Why would you do this?’ I told him it was because Jesus didn’t differentiate between Christians, Samaritans, or Gentiles; He offered his love to everyone. And this is how we live out Christ’s example, reaching out to people of a different color and creed, taking three broken remnants of a horrific accident and restoring them to be a light in this dark tragedy.

“The answer to why is Christ’s example of love,” Meyer told TFL. “He met people where they were at, addressed their physical and emotional needs, and that created opportunity to speak to their spiritual needs. People sought Him out, and when the opportunity came to Him, He responded in loving way.

“When this opportunity came to us, we couldn’t say no,” Meyer said. “Rescuing kids from accident scenes and bringing them to the U.S. is not part of our usual ministry, but we were there. All of us are given multiple occasions to say yes to those moments, and there’s so many excuses to say no, but in my weakness God is made strong. So say yes.”

***Please say “Yes” to supporting STEMM’s efforts to save Wilson,  
Sadia, and Doree.***

***Visit the STEMM website to donate or volunteer today.***