



Paper for water

Two young girls organize a life-changing ministry, bringing clean water to more than 90 villages and cities.

BY KRIN VAN TATENHOVE

It's never too early to develop a heart for mission. Just ask Isabelle and Katherine Adams.

Four years ago, at the precocious ages of eight and five, they learned some painful realities about our world. Rather than attend school, many girls in developing countries spend time hauling water for their families. In dry seasons this entails lengthy roundtrips, multiple times per day. The very water they work so hard to retrieve is often unclean, causing the death of a child every 15 seconds.

"It was shocking—children my age unable to go to school or enjoy normal recreational activities," Katherine says.

"We knew it wasn't right. We knew we needed to help them," says Isabelle.

The girls hatched a plan. Their father, Ken Adams, is a physician and son of a Presbyterian missionary. Half Japanese by ancestry, he had taught his daughters the centuries-old art of origami. The girls especially loved to fold ornaments at Christmas. Why not increase their production, sell the creations, then donate the money to clean water projects?

So often in life, it's the simplest ideas that gain strength and momentum. The girls had their first "show" of ornaments at a Starbucks in their hometown of Dallas in 2011. They sold out, raising more than \$700 the first night. This gave them energy to continue their efforts. Soon they raised more than \$10,000, enough to sponsor the drilling of a well in Ethiopia.



Paper for Water is helping build wells and bring clean water to countries all across the globe.

A movement sprang up like fresh water. Family, friends, church members, and classmates all began to share their vision. They joined in making ornaments, sponsoring sales at mission fairs, and raising money for matching donations.

The girls call their effort Paper for Water.

Under the umbrella of Keiki International Foundation, a non-profit they established, their primary function is to fund water wells in developing countries, increasing sanitation. But they also seek to empower youth both here and abroad to practice philanthropy and community organizing. This is about self-empowerment, they say, not just charity.

To date, Paper for Water has raised \$675,000, funding more than 90 wells in Ghana, Liberia,

Kenya, Mexico, Ethiopia, Uganda, Peru, Zimbabwe, and India. New projects are in the works. Paper for Water seeks to partner with other nonprofits, including Living Water International. And they have felt the strength of our Presbyterian system, joining hands with congregations in Grace Presbytery.

Along the way, the girls continue to deepen their knowledge. You cannot talk to them for long without hearing a stream of statistics.

With a tone that belies her years, Katherine says, "783 million people

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To explore the work of Paper for Water and get involved or purchase their origami ornaments: paperforwater.org



Isabelle and Katherine Adams make and sell origami ornaments to raise money for their clean water projects.

in our world lack access to clean water.”

Isabelle chimes in. “In sub-Saharan Africa, people waste 40 billion hours a year hauling water. . . . Think of it!”

The girls’ activism expands their horizons in other ways. In 2013 they visited India, touring villages, orphanages, and schools they have helped, hundreds of miles from New Delhi. They met US Ambassador Nancy Powell and a member of the Indian Parliament. The conditions they witnessed, especially in schools, left indelible impressions.

“They have dirt floors, metal roofs, no electricity or running water, not even desks,” says Isabelle. “But they are still so grateful to get an education.”

“They have so little, but are happy and content,” Katherine says, “We have so much, but are often discontent.”

This summer, the girls and their family visited the Navajo Reservation. They discovered not only the scarcity of water in arid New Mexico, but the difficulty in

delivering it. Average water usage per person in the United States is 100 gallons a day; each Navajo family receives 100 gallons a month, traditionally delivered by truck. The nonprofit Dig Deep is sinking a new well. Paper for Water has joined them, raising money for family storage tanks.

Activism is shaping more than the minds of these sisters. It’s enlarging their spirits.

“We have learned,” says Katherine, “just how powerful prayer really is. If we will only trust, God will take care of everything.”

Isabelle adds, “Jesus was right. If you ask, it will be given to you. We just need to ask with a sincere heart.”

The girls have received many accolades. In 2014 they were inducted into the Caring Institute Hall of Fame, the same weekend

as President Bill Clinton and Representative Gabby Giffords. They have been recognized by the UN Women’s New York City chapter, Chiapas International, and the Presbyterian Communities and Services Foundation. They also have appeared on television and radio, and a documentary film is in the works.

Understandably, Ken Adams is proud of his daughters. And the evolution of Paper for Water has been a lifetime experience.

“My faith has been bolstered and uplifted by this project,” he says. “The amazing things we see happening confirm that there is a loving and caring God.”

Krin Van Tatenhove is a PC(USA) teaching elder who lives and writes in San Antonio, writing regularly for Presbyterians Today.