

Personal Reflection – August 22, 2022

A Joyous Reading Lesson

In a conversation with [Rebecca Miller](#), Director of the [The Cleveland African American Prostate Cancer Project at Case Western University's Medical School](#), I learned how tireless student researchers spent hours at neighborhood barber shops, talking to men about the advantages of getting prostate tests to avoid cancer. Wow!

It reminded me of an amazing experience I had many, many years ago as a Maryknoll Sister in Tanzania.

I was invited to teach Tanzanian women in their homes how to read. These women had never been to school. I gave each woman a large piece of paper, asking her to share in pairs a story about what her firstborn had done last week. I can still hear the volume in that thatched-roof house, and the laughter and joy as they bragged about their boy or girl. I asked each woman for the name of her firstborn and wrote it in large capital letters on her paper. Then, I invited the women to read the name. More laughter, more joy, more pride: they were reading! The first word they ever read was the name of their child. I then asked to hear the story they had told their partner. I wrote one sentence on their paper from their story: e.g. "Abdul brought us wood". Each woman then read her own story. More joyful laughter!

Each woman ultimately wrote her own primer – her stories, one on a page, printed as one sentence.

--by Jane Vella