

Octogenarian learns how to read so he can better understand Bible

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#)

May 27, 2011

Nairobi, Kenya, 27May (ENInews) -- A film about Kimani Ng'ang'a Maruge, an 84-year-old man who enrolled in primary school in 2003 so he could learn to read the Bible, has inspired the creation of an educational charity for unprivileged children around the world.

Directed by Justin Chadwick and written by Ann Peacock, "The First Grader" is set in a remote primary school in Kenya's Rift Valley Province. It depicts the stir Maruge created when, amid hundreds of children jostling for admission, he arrived at the school, desperate to learn to read despite his age. Once he could read the Bible, Maruge embraced Christianity, and was baptized before his death in 2009. The film was released in New York and Los Angeles on 13 May.

According to a statement on the National Geographic Entertainment website, Capella University will make a \$0.50 donation--up to a total of \$50,000--to three charitable organizations each time the movie's trailer is viewed on YouTube. The charities, which promote literacy and education around the world, include Reading is Fundamental, the Minnesota based organization which provides free books to needy children; Kenya's Kakenya Center, which support underprivileged girls in the Maasai community; and the South Sudan Institute, which trains teachers for early child-learning.

Maruge, a veteran of the 1950's Mau Mau independence struggle, said reading would clear up doubts about his preacher's Sunday sermons. Maruge also wanted to write a history of the struggle, and count compensation money he hoped to receive from the British government for abuses he suffered during the turmoil. In 2004, the Guinness Book of Records listed him as the world's oldest pupil.

"I cannot understand why somebody should read the Bible for me and preach things I don't understand. I want to know how to read and write so that I can read the Holy Book myself," he told the Daily Nation on 17 January, 2004.//

Fr. Paulino Mondo, the Roman Catholic priest who baptized Maruge, said he had an exceptional spirit. "At that age not many people would attend school... We need to make sure what he inspired is propagated," Mondo told ENInews on 26 May.