



The Gweimen Centre Newsletter

A Self Sufficiency Center for Widows and Orphans of HIV/AIDS

Summer 2010

Gweimen is a Mighty “Mite”

Recently my wife Nancy and I had a special opportunity to have dinner with a wonderful couple we happened to meet during our recent trip to Gweimen Center in Kwoi, Nigeria. Both of these dedicated people have been missionaries serving in Nigeria for many years; presently, active in operating a large facility known as the Gembu Center for HIV/AIDS Advocacy. It is located in the town of Gembu, in the southwestern region of Taraba State very near the border between Nigeria and Cameroon.

We both listened wide-eyed, trying to gather in as much information as possible, firing questions one after another in an effort to imagine how these two rather small people could generate and sustain such drive and energy over the past six years to establish such a large and complex operation. In addition they managed a staff of over 100 employees, a clinic served by 3 medical doctors and their staffs serving over 1000 people every month, three-ambulance service, many HIV/AIDS outreach and community programs providing medication and feeding for thousands of AIDS victims! On top of all this wonderful, much needed work they bore the responsibility of managing the grant monies provided through USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and other generous agencies. Very impressive indeed!

As we walked back to where our car was parked and made our way home we realized a noticeable quietness between the two of us. Both waiting for the inevitable question to arise from one or the other, “What do you think?” Okay, I went first. Expecting that neither of us had an immediate response, we continued on our homeward drive talking about our children and work.

As a result, I suffered through a restless and mostly sleepless night thinking about Gweimen Centre, how through a simple yet profound discovery by our founder, Dr. Beatrice Kadangs, she encountered the suffering and extreme need being experienced by orphaned children and many widowed women living in her hometown, Kwoi, and the surrounding area. How she took the burdening word of that need, shared it with a few at home and here in the U.S. How in a rather dismal inadequate building she began taking in orphans and widows infected with a devastating disease, always hungry and with very little hope, a grassroots movement arose. With a prayer on her lips and a burning in her heart to help her people, Gweimen became a reality.

Why did the experience of hearing about this obviously successful and well-fortified ministry in Gembu cause me such a restless night? Was it its scope in service? Was it the size of its staff and its capabilities? How about the facilities and amenities or maybe the scope of the funding sources? Or maybe, from the viewpoint that if “big” how much more can be done. Gratefully, morning brought clarity to my ponderings. What does this marvelously equipped and staffed center in Gembu provide (other than a complete medical team and 3 MDs) that Gweimen endeavors to provide? We are open and available to help any who come to us in need. We feed and care for the orphaned and widowed. HIV/AIDS medications and testing is available. Guidance, counseling, and HIV/AIDS outreach programs are being provided throughout the local region. School uniforms and tuition expenses are made available to our children. The list goes on and on.

Gweimen began with an all volunteer staff and only just recently has been blessed with the first paid staff in key supervisory positions, and as need requires, we will work toward adding additional staff positions. Most importantly, we have operated on a pay-as-we-go mentality, not beholden to mega-governmental sources of aide that come with expensive and voluminous trappings. Gweimen Centre remains a certified not-for-profit NGO on both sides of the Atlantic, in Nigeria and the United States. It carries no loans nor indebtedness other than a sincere debt of gratitude to the many friends and supporters who have donated their monies, time and energies to enable the Gweimen to continue its work.

As I lean back in this chair and contemplate these thoughts, I am reminded of a teaching by our Lord Jesus as He sat near the offering place in the temple. As it happened, a poor widow came along and dropped two very small copper coins worth much less than a penny into the receptacle filled with much larger offerings of gold left by the rich. Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.” (Mark 12: 41-44)

Gweimen Centre may never grow into a large complex with all the modern amenities and equipment, extensive staffing and a name with world recognition, but the caring force that drives its course and purpose today will always prevail as long as the needs of its neighbors exist. The power surrounding the story of the little widow dropping her two mites in the plate should remind us no matter how much we can give, how much time we volunteer or how often we can step up to aide and defend

the impoverished, hungry, homeless and sick, it is more than enough to those who need our help.

Mike Richardson, President, Gweimen, U.S.A.

HELP US PRAY FOR SAMSON!



We have just received word from Gweimen Centre that one of our orphan boys, Samson Joseph, has been very ill. Nine year old Samson is HIV positive. His mother was HIV+ and is now deceased. Samson's father is also HIV+, and his whereabouts are unknown.

Sam lives with his Uncle Joseph along with his five brothers (all are also HIV+). At this time,

we do not know what is causing his illness. It could be related to his HIV status, or something else that is attacking his immune system. At present, those at the center will continue to provide care and medications and pray for improvement in his condition. The Board of Directors requests that you would include little Samson in your prayers for his healing and speedy recovery.

A heartfelt "thanks" to all of our Gweimen Friends.

Spring Fundraiser Report

The Board of Gweimen U.S.A. is delighted to report that our first annual Vegetable and Herb Sale was a smashing success! Thanks to all of our volunteer sales people, which included our Directors, many student volunteers at Elmhurst (IL) College, and a host of Gweimen friends and supporters, we were able to bring in over \$6,000 in vegetable and herb plant sales. This effort will provide a real boost to meet the needs of Gweimen Centre in 2010. We wish to extend a very sincere expression of gratitude to all that made this fundraising event such a success. We look to spring 2011 for our 2nd Annual Vegetable and Herb Sale!

Mike Richardson, Chairman, Gweimen, U.S.A.

Gweimen Centre Adds Three New Staff

Exec. Dir. Dr Beatrice Kadangs recently announced with enthusiasm and gratitude that the Gweimen Board in Kwoi has concluded a process leading to the hiring of three new full-time staff members. After two months of searching and interviewing numerous well qualified candidates, a final decision was made to fill three much needed and important positions. Mr. Eddie Jeremiah, holder of a Master's Degree, will take the helm as Centre Operations

Supervisor. Ms. Sunday Shimen, a nurse with a degree in Community Health, will be in charge of medical care, administration of medicines and treatments, and starting and operating an on-site clinic. The third hiree, Mr. Douglas Bature, who holds a degree in Business Adm. will fill the position of Administrative Assistant. Ms. Shimen and Mr. Bature began duties late this July, and Mr. Jeremiah came on board on 8-1-10.

We are very pleased to have these young, highly qualified people join in the work of Gweimen Centre. Their contributions have long been awaited and will obviously forward the momentum of our program. Thanks always to the continued generosity of Gweimen supporters.

Open Our Eyes

On a recent Sunday morning in my church we sang a prayer that has these words:

To the ones broken hearted: open our eyes.

To the plight of the poor: open our eyes.

To the innocent children: open our eyes.

Teach us compassion and love.

Every verse of the song spoke to me of Gweimen. To the ones who seek justice. To the needs of the lowly. To those suffering illness. To those lost or forgotten. These are the ones the Gweimen Centre seeks to serve. If you are reading this, God is answering that prayer. He is opening your eyes.

At the Gweimen Centre orphans are fed, taught about Jesus, given medication, encouraged and loved. Sometimes they are helped with school fees, uniforms and school supplies. There are also unexpected needs. I remember one particular example that happened when I was at the Centre this past January. I could see one of the widows employed by the Centre talking seriously with Abigail Kato, our Coordinator. She had her niece, about 18, with her. I wanted to know more about what was going on, but I felt I couldn't intrude. I waited.

Eventually, Abigail asked me to join them. The young girl, Rachel, was suffering from appendicitis. She was in a lot of pain and needed an operation. However, the hospital would not perform the operation until her aunt, who is responsible for Rachel now because her parents are dead, could pay the hospital fee. I asked how much this operation would cost. The answer stunned me. About \$40 in American money. My brother almost died when his appendix gave him problems. I think most of us know about what can happen if this isn't taken care of.

The day I left home, a doctor in my home church put money in the shoe on my front porch with a note: use it wherever there was need. This was a true need. I asked Abigail if it would be alright if I paid for Rachel's operation with this money. She nodded with tears in her eyes. I gave Rachel the money from the doctor in the United States. She had surgery that afternoon.

It amazes me to think that \$40 could make a life and death difference in the life of this beautiful young girl. But it did. And her life was spared because of the presence of Gweimen in the village. Rachel came to see me right before I left. She was recovering and smiling. She can continue to go to school and help her aunt with the younger children.

This is only a small part of the work of the Gweimen Centre. There is much to do, but we need the funds to do it. If God has opened your eyes to the plight of those who suffer in Kwoi, Nigeria, I hope he will teach your heart compassion and love, and I also hope you will act on that compassion and open your wallets to help us feed and care for these who are often lost and forgotten.

Mary Sytsma, Gweimen U.S.A.

The Heart of Giving

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. Acts 4:32-35 (NRSV).

One of our granddaughter Kate's favorite activities when she visits is to throw pebbles into the river and see how much of an impact that little stone can make. On one of those particularly exquisite summer days last week, I was sitting on our pier doing just that; tossing small stones into the water. I watched the ripples evolve into an endless, expanding ring, wondering if they eventually would lose their energy and die out, or perhaps meet other tiny waves, only to join them and create a much larger wave. Indeed the amount of the movement created from all the ripples that met would be so much more than each tiny ripple could have achieved on its own.

Luke, the apostle, speaks of individual stems of generosity and love given for the greater good of the whole community in Acts 4:32-35. The early believers found their hearts touched by the grace and love of the Holy Spirit, and were moved to sell their land and homes with the proceeds distributed to those in need. The amazing part of this story is that there was no law, no command involved in leading these disciples to such an act. It was through the apostles' testimony of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that joint these Christians together in one heart and soul for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Let each of us be that pebble and allow our ripples of love and commitment to Jesus Christ join with others to

become a huge wave that can make a difference, not only in our daily lives, but in the world at large. Let our stems of generosity and love be used to better the lives and touch the hearts of those who struggle with disease, poverty and lack of education. *Linda Palmer, Treasurer of Gweimen, U.S.A.*

Changing the World

When I teach composition classes at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, IL, I tell my students that they are being blessed with a quality education from a respected college for a reason, and that reason isn't just so they can make money. They are being educated so they can be the problem solvers and leaders of the future. They need to write well so they can change the world and make it a better place.

This past spring, a former student, now a senior ready to graduate, came to see me. Her assignment in her social work class was to change the world. She remembered the papers she had written about the AIDS crisis in my class, so she came to my office with her partner for this project. She and the members of her group sat in my office and asked if I could help them figure out what to do.

We talked. We tossed around ideas. I gave them some suggestions to talk about in their group. The next week they came back. They wanted to help the Gweimen Centre in some way. If they could do something that would provide an orphan food, medicine, and education, wouldn't that be changing the world for that child? Since the Gweimen Centre reaches many children like this, they could have a real impact.

These college students got involved in the Gweimen Centre's first ever plant sale fundraiser. They set up tables outside parks, offices, and events, taking orders for tomatoes, peppers, herbs and many others. They worked tirelessly. And as they worked, they learned more about the Gweimen Centre and they shared what they were learning with the rest of their class. This coming January I hope that these students will be able to travel with me to Kwoi, Nigeria, to see the widows and the children and participate in an internship opportunity at the Gweimen Centre. These young people made a difference through their efforts. They were part of something that changed the world.

Mary Sytsma, Gweimen U.S.A.

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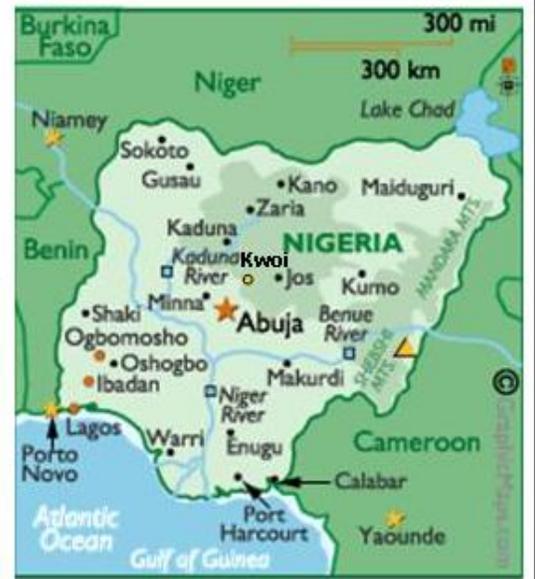
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