



The Gweimen Centre Newsletter

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

Spring 2010

Meet Mr. Joshua Maikori

One of the great strengths of Gweimen Centre in Kwoi, Nigeria, is that it has been an “indigenous” organization from the start. That is to say, it was founded, and from the beginning has been developed, directed, staffed and governed locally by Nigerians in Nigeria. A key figure in that guidance and governance is Mr. Joshua Maikori who, since 2006, has been the Chairman of the Board of Directors for Gweimen Centre in Nigeria.

The reports of our U.S.A. board members who have visited the Centre in Kwoi, and of Dr. Beatrice Kadangs, the director in Kwoi, all emphasize that without Mr. Maikori there is no way the Centre could have grown and served so many orphans and widows so effectively. He has been visionary and dedicated in his leadership role, and extravagantly generous in his personal involvement.

This remarkable man serves on many other boards and organizations, chairing some of those as well. An accountant who received his MBA degree in the UK, Joshua has held various professional positions over 30 years. In addition he has served on the Finance Board of ECWA (the Evangelical Church of West Africa), is Chairman of the ECWA Seminary, and served 9 years as an elder in his local church.

Joshua and his wife Lois have been blessed with 4 children, Emmanuel, Lynda, Alheri Grace, and the late Daniel. His hobbies include tennis, and the study of religious and political history. His life philosophy is “Serve and fear God, serve but do not fear humanity, be firm but fair in all your decisions. Respect everyone.”

An indication of the high regard in which he is held was the 60th birthday and retirement party which was celebrated at two different venues in Dec., 2009. The “Service of Thanksgiving and Celebrating God’s Goodness” featured an 18-page printed program with pictures, testimonials, and biographical profile.

A recent development vividly illustrates Joshua’s key role and dedication: as the current Gweimen facility proved inadequate for the growing program, he generously volunteered space in his own compound to accommodate the

entire Gweimen program until a more permanent facility can be found.

We are truly blessed to have a leader of this calibre and very thankful that his recent retirement did not include retiring from his position as Chairman of the Board of the Gweimen Centre.

Giving Account

With gratitude to God and heartfelt thanks to all of our generous supporters, the Board of Directors of Gweimen Centre, U.S.A., is pleased to report that during 2009 we were able to send \$18,000 in contributions to assist the Gweimen Centre Board of Directors in Kwoi, Nigeria. These much-needed funds help to provide meals, educational assistance, medications, HIV/AIDS testing, school uniforms, Bible study, wages for 7 widows that work at the Centre, hygiene services, and much more. In addition Board Directors traveling to Nigeria this year carried over 300 pounds of over-the-counter meds, vitamins, toothpaste, toothbrushes, underwear and socks to our needy orphans and families.

While the year 2009 was a dismal financial situation here in the United States, and giving was down throughout the nation among all nonprofit assistance agencies, generous people everywhere continued to step up to help the poor, sick, hungry and displaced over the world. Giving just a little from our abundance does make a real difference for unfortunate ones who have no one to turn to in their hour of need.

Thank you, Gweimen supporters, for helping us meet some of the many needs of orphaned children and widows of the Jaba people in Nigeria.

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

Giving by Credit Card

We are now able to receive contributions in the form of credit card donations, using Master Card, Visa or Discover Card.

This can be done through our website. Log on at Gweimencentre.org/donations.html. Then click on the “Donate Now” button to donate through our secure site.

“Here is Your Mother”

Movies about Jesus dying on the cross can be really gruesome. Paintings, too. If you take your eyes off the figure of Jesus hanging in torment, you'll usually notice others in the picture. Roman soldiers, religious officials, other convicts and gawking spectators. But huddled nearby are a few women and one man.

One of the women is Mary, the mother of Jesus, usually in blue. Another is her sister, an aunt of Jesus. The man in the picture is John, the dearest friend of Jesus among all his followers. Our attention is drawn to Mary's heart-rending sorrow and the efforts of the others to comfort her.

What a horror for Mary! She not only suffers with every mother who lives to lose a child. Her son is also condemned as a criminal, tortured and brutally executed.

Let's remind ourselves that Mary was a widow, one of the truly vulnerable persons in her world. Without a father or husband to care for her, a woman would expect her first-born son to take her in. But now she's losing him. Who will care for her?

In her anguish, however, it is very unlikely that such a thought even crossed her mind. So imagine her confusion when she suddenly hears Jesus say to her, “Here is your son.” And think of the jolt for John when Jesus adds, “Here is your mother.”

What does it tell us that Jesus used his dying breath to provide for his widowed mother? And to teach John that this widow is a new mother in his life, a mother for him to care for? We are not left to wonder if John understood: “from that hour he took her to his home.”

And since that dramatic moment with its startling new teaching, those who are followers of Jesus have understood that the widows in our lives have a special claim on our care. Providing for widows is “a God thing”.

For example, there are some folks in Kwoi, Nigeria, who really believe this stuff! As AIDS spread through their community, they couldn't help but notice the growing number of widows. Maybe it happened one day that someone watched one of these widows going down the street. And maybe it was a widow who had lost her home when she lost her husband. And maybe the one watching was thinking how terrible that was. And wondering how that widow was going to survive. Did she suddenly hear a voice saying, “Here is your mother”?

However it may have happened, these folks in Kwoi knew that the widows in Kwoi were their mothers, or their “aunties” as they sometimes call them. And that they themselves were sons and daughters, or nieces and nephews to these

widows. And in the moment that they agreed together to provide for the widows in their community, “Gweimen Centre” was conceived and born to be a “self-sufficiency centre for widows and orphans of HIV/AIDS.”

And as AIDS swells the ranks of widows, these caring folks in Kwoi have more and more mothers. So as you read this, do you hear an echo from the cross whispering, “Here is your mother”? For those who do, support for Gweimen Centre may be one way to answer that call.

Vern Geurkink, Gweimen, U.S.A

Sad News

It is troubling that so many children are caught up in the overwhelming horrors of the AIDS epidemic: the loss of a parent, the collapse of family, the poverty that can follow, lack of money for attending school, and the final insult to the innocent of testing positive for HIV. On top of all that we recently learned of a totally unexpected tragedy that took the life of one of our orphans. Our Director in Nigeria, Dr. Beatrice Kadangs, wrote on March 30:

Our Gweimen family was thrown into mourning last week when the news came that Abel Jerry has died. He was one of our vibrant little boys in the center. He and his sister Precious come to the center everyday. One fateful evening, he and the sister went to a neighbor's house and the neighbor's dog jumped on Abel and bit him right on his mouth. He was treated for only tetanus because the dog owner told them his dog takes his rabies shots. But days later Abel got so sick that he was rushed to Jos where he died. He's been buried but investigation is ongoing. Pray for Abel's mother and his little sister, Precious. Thank you.

Beatrice Kadangs, Director, Gweimen Nigeria



Abel Jerry – November, 2009

We Have a New Grain Mill!

Who could be thrilled with a new grinder? A new hat maybe, a new bicycle perhaps, even a new rug, but a new grain mill? A mere machine that mulches whole grain kernels into flour? Why such a big deal?

If I had to haul three 40-kilo bags of maize a half kilometer down the road to get it milled into flour, I might appreciate having the grinder right here in the next room. Or suppose we had to spend money to rent a grinder every time we ran out of flour, and then hit one of those days when there was no electricity!

What a relief to have our own grinder! It's always right there when the electricity comes on. And we don't have to pay someone else every time we make flour. And now we can earn extra funds for our Gweimen programs when others bring their grain to us for grinding! Thank God for our new grain mill!

The Doctor Makes Housecalls

(from the journal kept by Mary Sytsma during her January, 2010, visit to Nigeria.)

Today our children who are HIV positive went to the hospital to see the doctor. This real hospital, with a lab and an operating theatre and wards, held clinic hours today. Because of Gweimen, Dr. Kola, a young Nigerian doctor trained in Nigeria, sees 100 patients twice a week right in our village of Kwoi. These patients include our children.

The waiting room was crowded with women and small children. Others waited outside in the dusty courtyard. The children wiggled and fussed on the hard wooden bench or leaned listlessly against us for support.

Then it was our turn. Dr. Kola's office was crowded with files stacked everywhere. He seemed eager to talk. "PEPFAR has changed everything," he said. PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) was launched in 2003 by Pres. Bush. Because of this program, women and children now have access to treatment. The US government funded this program with 10 million dollars while the Nigerian Government contributed only \$50,000. Dr. Kola noted, "Nigeria is a rich country with poor people."

In all of Nigeria no programs address the problem of malnutrition, yet he says almost all of his patients are malnourished. But for malaria, another urgent health problem he sees daily, free drugs are available for children under five.

TB, on the other hand, is difficult to treat. Many start the long series of treatments but give

up before they are finished. Also, getting the medications into the hands of the caregivers is another problem. For example, the Netherlands sent drugs for TB treatment, but Nigeria's government was so inefficient that it took six months to distribute them. By that time they had expired and could no longer be used. TB is a huge problem, but he thinks it "lacks the romance of HIV, so little is being done."

Dr. Kola works long hours under difficult circumstances. His biggest needs are trained staff and regular electricity. He was eager to tell of one of the hospital's successful programs. Nigeria has made it a priority to treat pregnant women who are HIV positive, so mother-to-child transmission has been virtually eliminated. In a recent study, out of 100 babies with HIV positive mothers, only two of the babies were born HIV positive. This is a cause for gratitude and rejoicing. Two of our current Gweimen children have a chance at lives free of HIV because of this medication.

Later, after a long day treating patients, Dr. Kola came to see what was going on at Gweimen Centre. He wanted to know more about our work. He checked on a couple of children who had been at school when we were at the clinic. He prescribed a cream for Samson who had a fungus on his head. He told me that everything is difficult to treat for HIV positive children because any new problem or new medication can upset the delicate balance in their bodies when they have such fragile immune systems.

I greeted Vincent by name and he leaned against me for a hug and some attention. Dr. Kola seemed surprised. "You know their names?"

"I try to know them by name." I can't really grasp the millions of children in the grip of this pandemic. I'm not very good at statistics, but "Yes, I try to know the names of our children. These are the ones God gave me to care about."

I know that all of the orphans of the world matter. They are all important to God, but these are the ones whose names I know, the ones I can't forget. Best of all, Dr. Kola will remember the name "Gweimen" from now on, and he will remember our children, and they will have one more person who will think that they matter.

Mary Sytsma, Gweimen, U.S.A.

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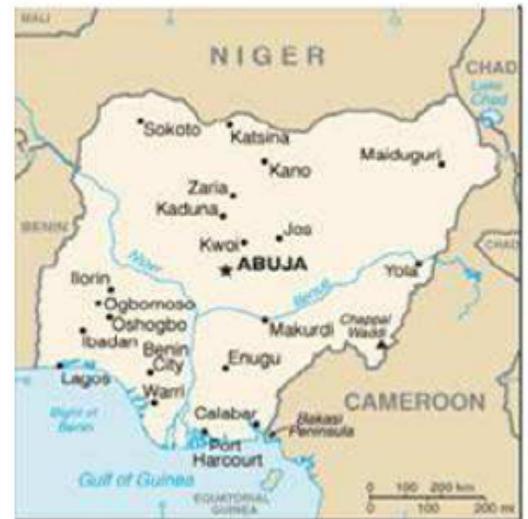
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Gweimen Centre
P.O. Box 165
LaFox, IL 60147