

November 2009

Welcome to the November 2009 edition of eNews, the electronic newsletter from Christian Reformed World Missions. With this monthly email we hope to keep you informed with stories and news about what World Missions' missionaries are doing worldwide. We hope you enjoy these stories of transformation from around the globe.

Learning From the Body of Christ *Albert & Carolyn Strydhorst, Nigeria*

Increasingly, CRWM missionaries are building connections with missions organizations and denominations engaged in similar ministries within their countries. As part of this on-going effort, Albert Strydhorst, the CRWM Liaison for National Church Partnerships in West Africa, and two other CRC missionaries recently participated in a Redeemed Christian Church of God's Mission Conference in Lagos, Nigeria.

The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is one of the fastest growing churches in Nigeria. Begun in 1952 by Rev. Josiah "Pa" Akindayoi, this Pentecostal/indigenous church is now under the leadership of Pastor Enoch A. Adebo and grown to more than 3 million members. Today, the RCCG sends out thousands of missionaries not only to Nigeria but also to at least 80 other countries.

Like many churches, the RCCG organizes conferences for its missionaries to visit with one another, share ideas, and be spiritually refreshed. Around 140 missionaries and additional presenters gathered from October 5-8 in the RCCG's Redemption Camp facilities in Lagos, Nigeria for three eleven hour days of workshops and worship.

Because the RCCG is such a fast-growing church, one of its critical needs is for biblical training for its missionaries and pastors. One of the conference organizers, Segun Adekoya of Missionary Training Partners International, asked CRC missions staff in Nigeria to participate in the conference and lead some sessions for the missions leaders.

Albert Strydhorst and Mike Ribbens from CRWM and David Tyokighir from CRWRC each presented at the conference. David spoke about holistic community development, Mike initiated the Timothy Leadership Training curriculum, and Albert led sessions on the biblical interpretation and mission partnerships. Each of their workshops focused on biblical principles for leading and engaging in ministry.

But for the missionaries, perhaps the most meaningful part of the conference was simply the opportunity to join with other believers.

"I was impressed by the participants' fervor to serve God in missions, amazed by the growth of this church, concerned that the 'word of truth' be handled correctly, humbled that the CRC input was requested for this conference, and encouraged that Reformed understanding of the Bible is both appreciated and needed in the global Church," reflects Albert.

"The daily times of prayer and worship with the conference participants were moving and meaningful," Albert says, "They were charismatic, active, and sometimes loud - but/and they resonated with my spirit, renewed my sense of awe in God's presence, and reinvigorated me to serve Him more passionately."

"As CRC facilitators, we marveled at the phenomenal growth of this church, its great potential, and the

Do you know a young person (ages 18-30) who is interested in missions? CRWM's Summer Mission Program (SMP) gives young adults the opportunity to work alongside CRWM missionaries and their national partners. Visit www.crwm.org/smp for location information and an application.



Time to add a new spice to your fundraising program? Use CRWM's "International Cuisine" cookbook as a missions-related fundraiser for \$5 per book. Missionaries from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America have joined together to give you the inside scoop on recipes like Mango Upside-Down Cake, Pineapple Chicken Curry, and Creole Sauce. To order a fundraiser kit, email crwm@crcna.ca (Canada) or crwm@crcna.org (USA). For a sneak peak, see the recipe for the month listed on our website.

amazing testimonies of lives being transformed in Jesus Christ. We recognized in our RCCG brothers and sisters a familiarity with the Holy Spirit that sometimes seems distant in our theological tradition and ministry experiences. We observed a passion to communicate Jesus that humbled us. We agreed that it was good, and right, and critical that we were together.”

RCCG church leaders also affirmed the decision to include presenters from other denominations. A communiqué from the provincial delegates of the RCCG to the leaders of the RCCG and its Central Mission Board urged the church to “continue promoting and practicing ‘the unity in diversity’ in the body of Christ demonstrated by having facilitators from various church traditions all united in enthroning Christ as King among the nations.”

While the RCCG and the CRCNA have some theological differences, the RCCG and CRCNA share much in common - starting with an affirmation for the Trinity, Scripture as the Word of God, and salvation through faith in Christ alone. Although theological differences will affect the degree to which CRWM and RCCG can work together, the differences do not detract from what they can learn from each other.

“We should look for every opportunity to fellowship together,” Albert says, “to discuss hard theology with each other, and to reciprocate trainings that will root us more deeply in God’s Word and equip us for more faithful Christian service.” By learning and sharing with one another, the RCCG and the CRCNA, though different parts of the body of Christ, may together, help the greater Christian community towards active service for God.

Albert and Carolyn Strydhorst live in Jos, Nigeria with their three children. Albert’s role as the CRWM Liaison for National Church Partnerships in West Africa brings him into contact with church leaders from a variety of denominations. Carolyn is the “Mission nurse” for CRCNA missionaries and their children in Nigeria, and is known for her gift of hospitality.

Healed to Serve *James & Barbarita Lee, Mexico*

Tijuana, Mexico is often in the news for drug-related violence, but a recently held Family Festival offers another glimpse into the city with a harsh reputation. James and Barbarita Lee, CRWM missionaries in the area, share how men from the local rehab center and a missions team from Calgary, Alberta hosted a family festival to reach out to the community.

The men from Forjando Nuevos Destinos (Creating a New Destiny) Christian Drug and Alcohol Rehab Center were looking for a way to give back to the community as a response to the blessings they had received from God. As they thought about the people in their community and what would speak most to them, they decided to address people’s need for a sense of belonging and community.

“People come to Tijuana from all over the world,” say James and Barbarita Lee, “People are drawn here for work, but then must leave behind their families and friends. They often don’t feel ‘at home’ here or that they belong in this town.”

So the men from the Rehab Center began organizing and planning a Family Festival to help recreate a sense of community and encourage the value of family. Emmanuel CRC, a partner church of the Lees from Calgary, Alberta in Canada, joined in the effort by sponsoring the event and sending a Service and Learning Mission Team to Tijuana to participate in the festival. With the men from the center, the missions team, and additional volunteers, around 65 people in total were involved in planning and hosting the event.

After much planning and practice, the day of the Family Festival finally arrived. On Sunday, October 11, over 500 people gathered in a park in Terrazas de Valle, a neighborhood in Tijuana, to join in the celebrations and hear the Gospel.

The men from the rehab center performed a series of skits about drugs, AIDS, and the freedom found only through faith in Christ. Several of the men wrote lyrics for the dramas and performed them as a rap. Games, praise bands, puppets, family-oriented games, face painting stations, health screenings, and haircuts were just some of the ways the festival joined families and individuals together through both practical and fun means.

Then Jose, a former drug addict now studying at the Presbyterian Reformed Bible Institute and a leader at the rehab center, gave a message to the people gathered. At the end of his message, he extended an invitation to those who had never accepted Christ to do so; over 50 people responded to God’s call, accepting Him as their Savior.

“We used to steal things from our own families, friends, and neighbors because of our addiction to drugs and alcohol,” says Carlos Vazquez, the director of the rehab center, “But now that God has changed our lives through His word, He has given us the opportunity to bring healing and transformation to our community.”

The men at the center have truly taken the center’s motto, “Sanos Para Servir” (We are healed to serve), to heart, asking God to use them to bring healing and transformation to their homes, communities, and all of Mexico.

James and Barbarita Lee have served with CRWM in Tijuana, Mexico since 2007. They recently completed their service at Mission Dios Altisimo Church, a church plant they began a year and a half ago, and are now exploring possibilities for another church plant.

Bridging the Gap *Tom & Deb de Ruiter, West Africa*

In the beginning stages of our ministry, we would try to gauge reactions as we arrived at Fulani villages. Some people would smile, walk toward us and greet us, some would stop what they were doing for a few seconds and then go back to their tasks, others would deliberately leave and walk into bushy areas and still others would just give us a disdainful stare. When you considered the turbans, the tattooed lips, long robes and animals all over the place, there were times when it was quite intimidating to us.

Now look at the situation from a Fulani’s perspective. These heavy, tall white people arrive in a vehicle the whole village all together could not afford to buy. You’ve heard you need to fear these heathens from the west because they own airplanes that can bomb villages. You’ve heard that they’re spies here to make money off of you or to get you to join their corrupted religion. Our arrival in a village was also intimidating to the Fulani.

There is a huge cultural and religious gap between the two sides. As these two sides meet, there is fear and distrust evident in large quantities. The gap cannot be shrunk or bridged overnight- it takes time. We need to reach out, albeit tentatively at first, to reduce fear, to gain trust and to correct some of the misconceptions we have of each other.

One man in particular used to give us the disdainful stare. He had studied his holy books for four years and thought we were way off base. We would drink tea together in a group, but he would leave whenever the Bible came out. As time passed, he would still leave the hut, but stay within hearing distance of the discussions. His brothers (three are baptized believers) would pray for him and would gently discuss the Gospel with him.

Eventually, he too would meet us when we came, greet us and then ask if we brought books for him to read. His brothers saw him reading Scripture by flashlight far into the night. He started to ask questions and wanted explanations of what he was reading. He began joining in on the Bible discussions and he started to sit in on worship times. In August, he biked 35 kilometres to tell us he had accepted Christ as his Lord and Saviour and wanted to be baptized next Easter.

We have known this man for almost seven years. What narrowed and bridged the gap was not anything he or we said - it was the truths he read in Scripture. Christ was the bridge. While fear and distrust paralyze even the bravest individuals, Christ eliminates the paralysis. As missionaries, we need to have patience to gain trust so that God can use us to bring people to Him in His time.

Tom and Deb de Ruiter began ministry in West Africa with CRWM over thirteen years ago. They rejoice at the way they’ve seen God at work in the people they meet.

Thank you for your interest in Christian Reformed World Missions and our mission to help Christian Reformed Churches to fulfill the Great Commission.

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