

February 2005

## Nigeria Mission Report

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Dear Mission Partners:

This is our second newsletter since coming to Nigeria six months ago. Our journey to Africa bears a certain resemblance to a frequent trip that we took with our children when they were much younger. We made several trips to Florida to camp and experience the sultry surroundings of that subtropical climate.

In Florida we occasionally ate at a popular smorgasbord restaurant. It was part of a chain known throughout the South for its mouth-watering array of regional dishes. One of the things that made this particular smorgasbord unique was the rotating table where the food was on display. You merely stood in place, like you would at an airport baggage claim, and watched the food go by until you saw something that appealed to you. Or, unlike the airport baggage claim, you could sample everything that passed by.

Our first six months in Nigeria have provided a smorgasbord kind of experience. During the first couple of weeks we could do little more than stand and watch with amazement as the exotic assortment of sights, sounds, and smells of this place passed before us. It was hard to decide how to begin, where to focus our attention, or what to put on our plate. At first, almost everything looked inviting, and we wanted to take in as much as possible. The biggest problem seemed to be figuring out how to say "No" to all of the things that tugged at our hearts and yet were clearly beyond the limits of our ability or our faith.



Woman with two children in rural village, typical of those who are victimized by HIV/AIDS. By the year 2010, Nigeria will have 2.6 million orphans because of the disease.

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Jesus said, “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ be ‘No,’” but after six months in Nigeria we are still trying to figure out what to say ‘Yes’ to and what to say ‘No’ to. Here are a few of things we’ve said yes to. Carol offers hospitality to a countless number of guests who come to greet us, eat with us, or stay with us; counsels woman who have reproductive and other health issues; provides nursing care at a free women’s clinic; offers medical assistance to others as time allows, has gotten training to teach ESL (English as a second language); advocates for children in our neighborhood; and is a member of the HIV/AIDS committee.

Bob does the work of mission coordinator in Nigeria. In that role his duties include: walking with Nigerian church members and leadership; serving as a team leader for our mission staff; helping to communicate Brethren identity and practices; representing the US church within and among the Nigerian church; helping to connect stateside members with the work of the Nigerian church; and overseeing the support systems that undergird these ministries.

However, if we had to name the one area of our work that we find most compelling, we’d have to say it is our work with the HIV/AIDS ministry of the church. HIV/AIDS is endemic throughout Africa. Millions of African men, women and children are infected with the virus, and, with few exceptions, that number continues to grow. Fortunately, the problem of AIDS isn’t as bad in Nigeria as it is in some African nations where 30 percent of the population is infected. Nevertheless, HIV/AIDS is still a huge problem in Nigeria. According to government statistics, 5 to 12 percent of Nigeria’s population is infected with HIV/AIDS. That means that between 6 and 15 million Nigerians are infected. Far too many Nigerians are either infected, afflicted, or affected by the disease.



**Carol checks the sugar levels of an elderly EYN member who has diabetes.**

Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN—the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) has been slow to respond to the pandemic. That is partly because EYN is primarily a rural church, and until recently, rural Nigerians have viewed AIDS as largely an urban problem. Typically, rural Nigerians don’t know much about how

the virus is spread, and, because of the taboo associated with sexual behavior, they are not inclined to talk openly about the issue.

In December 2004, we were asked to work with EYN's HIV/AIDS committee in developing a strategic plan to launch an HIV/AIDS ministry. Ten of us, two Nigerians, two Swiss and two Americans, met for three exhausting days at EYN headquarters in early December to hammer out a plan that will unfold over the next three years. The plan endeavors to:

- Develop an HIV/AIDS awareness campaign through education, communication, and information;
- Create an HIV/AIDS action team that will take a program of music and drama to EYN congregations hoping to lessen the stigma and raise the awareness of HIV/AIDS;
- Train 4000 volunteers to provide HIV/AIDS education and a support network in each of EYN's more than one thousand congregations;
- Offer HIV screening in all EYN dispensaries and pre/post test counseling;
- Provide access to affordable antiretroviral drugs;
- Encourage a biblical model of marriage and family; and
- Empower victimized women by promoting gender equality.

Our vision is to have an HIV/AIDS free generation built upon the foundation of solid, healthy families that will create a strong, secure society. Carol and I feel that our work with the EYN HIV/AIDS committee could be the most significant thing that we do during our sojourn in Nigeria. We could easily spend all of our time working with this one ministry alone, but this is one of many projects that demands attention.

Nigeria offers a many-sided smorgasbord of challenges and experiences. Many times we feel inadequate to meet the challenges and are overwhelmed by the experiences of life in Nigeria. But mostly we've been stirred by the challenges and blessed by the experiences we've had since coming to this exotic land with its amazing people. After a brief mission trip to Thessalonica the Apostle Paul wrote, "We were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well." (I Thessalonians 2:8) That describes how we feel as well.



**Please hold in Prayer:**

- The work of the HIV/AIDS committee;
- The growing number of orphans who have lost parents due to AIDS;
- The leadership of the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN);
- The staff at Kulp Bible College;
- The students at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria;
- Traveling mercies for us;
- A speedy adjustment for Stephanie Hartley who has just joined our staff as a teacher at the Comprehensive Secondary School in Kwarhi; and
- The blessings of health and harmony for all of our staff: Paul Leipelt at KBC in Kwarhi, Matt Haren at Hillcrest School in Jos, Nancy Steedle at the Women's School in Kwarhi, and Callie Surber at the Comprehensive Secondary School in Kwarhi.

Blessings,

Bob and Carol Krouse

To support the mission in Nigeria, please send contributions to: Church of the Brethren General Board, 1451 Dundee Ave., Elgin, IL 60120. Make checks payable to the Church of the Brethren and designate for Nigeria missions.