

# An Inspirational History of Charity African Missions

by Denny Kenaston

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish...." Proverbs 29:18*

**1986 - The Birth of a Vision.** Whenever God wants to do something, He always begins by putting a vision in the hearts of men. Nineteen years ago, God began to impress the command from Matthew 4:19 on my heart, "...Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." We sat down to have our regular brothers' meeting with about nine brothers present. There was a burden on my heart that we as a church should be involved in world missions if we were going to be a New Testament church. We were very grateful for the opportunities to reach out to our community, but we felt like this

was not enough. I remember that evening. We presented the burden and then discussed it amongst ourselves. We saw how clearly it is laid out in the Bible and how God's heart throbs for the lost. We asked ourselves, "What about us? What about the fish who aren't being caught? Where will we cast our nets?"

With these questions on our hearts, we nine brothers fell on our knees and earnestly prayed, "Okay God, we don't know how all this gets worked out, but we feel like You are leading us to do something. We don't know where You are calling us to-perhaps Africa? If this burden is from You, then make it plain to us!"

Only a few days later, Brother Luke Zimmerman received a letter. It was a Macedonian call from a group of people in Ghana, West Africa saying, "Come over and help us!" A group of people who print tracts had received this letter, and they deliberated as to what to do with it. They didn't feel the Lord leading them to open a new field of ministry, but someone mentioned to them that perhaps Charity Christian Fellowship in Lancaster County would be interested in it.

So they sent it by mail to Brother Luke. We were in awe! It was like God was saying to us, "I want you to go to Ghana." We didn't know a thing about Africa, much less about Ghana, but we felt like it was God confirming our way. We sent a letter to the man who wrote the original letter and notified him when we were coming, our flight schedule, etc.

Although we never received a confirmation back from our response (looking back now with all our knowledge of Ghana, the man possibly never even received the letter), Brother Luke and I went to



Where will we cast our nets?"

Ghana for a ten-day trip. It was most unusual! Nineteen years ago, the country of Ghana was half Communist, and the customs officials were quite harsh. We were a bit afraid. After we got through the airport, we faced a wall of black faces, with people grabbing our bags and demanding money. We stood there and waited to see if the man we had contacted would come to pick us up, but after an hour of waiting, we gave up and took a taxi.

Our days in Ghana were filled with many different experiences. The morning after we arrived, a taxi driver took us to the address on the first letter. Was he ever one surprised man when he saw two white men walking up to his house! Although we had some disappointment with this contact, he did take us on our first missionary journey. His "church" was quite a mixture of Christianity and Animism, but he took us around to many villages. We found so much hunger, people begging us, mobbing us for one tract. We had open-air meetings almost every evening in different villages along the coast. That was a thrill to our hearts!

We wanted to let our families know that we had arrived safely, so we sent a telegram. But we later found out that communications weren't very good. The telegram arrived 2 ½ weeks after we were safely home! When we got home our wives and families were very glad to see us. They hadn't heard a

peep from us the whole trip.

That was our first trip to Ghana! From our visit there, we saw open doors of opportunity and potential everywhere, and we began to make trips to Ghana, bringing brothers and sisters along with us. We had some heavy setbacks. We found out on our second trip, much to our disappointment, that our first contact was basically after money. We could have easily quit. People kept warning us, discouraging us. But God kept moving us forward and so, with the spirit of an inventor, we took our mistakes, looked at them, learned from them, and kept on going.

#### **1989 - Ministry Beginnings.**

The Lord led us to Brother Francis who became an asset to our ongoing work. At this same time we started the first youth teams. We saw the potential for our youth. We knew that God would change the youth's lives forever. To this day, most of these young people are servants of God in many different places.

The young people would go for two weeks, and I was the first team leader. We wanted many of our brothers and sisters to experience the joy of leading souls to Christ. The team's time was filled with village crusades, open-air meetings, ocean baptisms, passing out tracts, and ministering to already established churches. Those young people ate food they didn't like, slept on mats on the hard floor, and got malaria--but their lives were changed!

**1993 - First Family Sent.** Our vision began to grow, and we sent our first missionary family! Brother Ross Ulrich and his family moved over to Ghana. We built a mission house, and the work continued to grow. Brother Ross coordinated the work, kept track of funds, and helped establish churches. Now the teams were able to stay at the mission house instead of basing out of motels, which was quite costly.

The next four years were learning years. Before this we were



short-term missionaries, but now we really needed to learn the culture and establish relationships. During this time we ordained Brother Francis, and four churches were planted. The churches were very responsive to Bible teaching and opened up their lives to godly direction.

All the Americans who traveled to Ghana had the opportunity to enter into church life African style! They observed that "Let US pray!" meant exactly that--everyone prayed all together. They entered in and learned to enjoy clapping along with the songs. All the speaking was done through interpreters, which is a stretching experience. I watched many young men turn into preachers over in Ghana as they found the joy of speaking to crowds of hungry people. We had beautiful services and seasons of revival in those dear Ghanaian churches.

We made many mistakes during these learning years and some of the dear church people bore the burden of these mistakes. We evaluated our mistakes and learned from them. Slowly we were becoming missionaries with dreams of other needy areas. We began to believe that God could help us branch out and set our sights on regions beyond.

**1995 - Moving Inland.** Brother Ross moved his family inland about one hour to another home that had no electricity in Wawase, and a church was

started there. After several years the church at Wawase started another church, mostly planted by local men. God was beginning to teach us about indigenous principles.

**1996 - Looking North.** God was preparing to expand the mission. Several of us were receiving a growing vision from the Lord for the unreached people groups of the world. The longer we were in Ghana, the more little paths we saw that led to thousands of villages who had never heard the gospel. Up until this time we were mostly planting churches with church people, but God was calling us on. I presented the subject of adopting a people group as our own responsibility in a Sunday morning to the congregation. We agreed to start praying towards this.

Brother Emanuel Esh led a team 14 hours north of where we were working to do an exploratory survey trip. Brother

Daryl Nolt and my son Daniel were on that team. For ten days they traveled around, asking questions and getting information. They found two tribes in the North that had never heard the gospel, the Dagombas and the Konkombas. They discovered that the Bible translations for both of these tribes were almost finished. Recently, there had been a war between the two tribes, with hundreds of people dying; the Dagombas had won.

After gathering this information, we took up the burden and began to pray and prepare. Now remember, there were no floodgates of blessings, there was no writing on the wall, but we felt God confirming His will to us about these two new areas of ministry.

**1997 - Leadership Established.** I asked Brother Emanuel to take the responsibility of leading the mission here at home. After his trip up to the North, he wanted to go, but he agreed to stay and



be a part of sending. From this point, things started happening much faster. The vision for planting churches among the unreached villages was growing all the time, and now we had a man who could focus his time and attention on the mission.

As I think back over the history of the mission, I see now that this is really when the vision to be a sending church became a reality; before this, it was only a dream. We put the word out, "We are going forward!" and began to encourage preparations for missions.

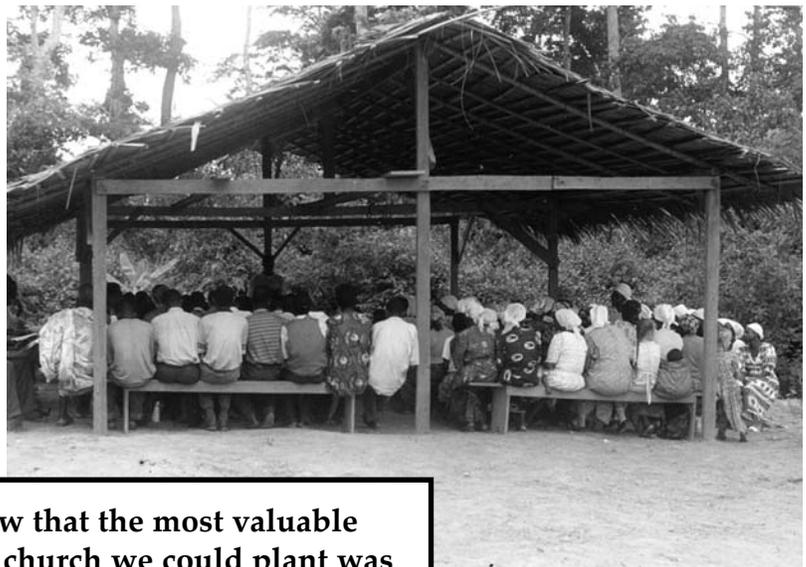
**1998 - Youth Teams and New Missionaries.** My son Daniel picked up the burden for the youth teams and took it way beyond our expectations. We encouraged him to take the youth on a six-week missionary journey that would change their lives forever! They had opportunities we never dreamed of, preaching to hundreds of students in schools all over Ghana. While the youth were able to have full-time, intense ministry preaching, praying, and leading souls to Christ, we were able to evaluate the team members to see whether they could be future missionaries.

The call to go north was a major move, but we felt constrained to take the Light of the world to the unreached villages. About this time, we sent four more missionary families out on the field to more difficult areas.

Brother Willie Halteman and his family moved to Tamale, the major city in the North. We felt that if we were going to begin working in the bush, we needed a family there to support the bush missionaries. They also started a church there in the city.

Mel and Barbie Esh and Daryl and Rebekah Nolt were sent north also to begin a work among the Dagombas. They moved into the town of Gushiegu and began language learning, translat-

ed the *Creation to Christ* series, and planted a church. As that church began to grow and reach out, we discovered much hunger in the surrounding villages. In the villages that are more remote, the longing for the gospel was much greater because Islam had not penetrated as deeply. The village people found out that there was a church in Gushiegu, and they would get on their bikes and travel for 1½ hours or more, just to be at the church service. Some of these people were Konkombas who could understand the Dagomba language. Even though there was



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still fighting among the tribes, God bridged the gap with the gospel, and members from both tribes were worshipping and listening together under one roof.

Brother Steve Clark and his family was the other missionary we sent out at that time. He was our business coordinator. They moved into the mission house at Iture on the coast. Besides keeping all the logistics running, they also started a church there. As time went on, we soon discovered that we had more than a business coordinator--we had a whole missionary family! Without this family's behind-the-scene labors, things would not be the same in Ghana today.

A burden to start a Christian school in Wawase



with a phonics-based reading program was placed on the hearts of Sisters Rosella Witmer and J.C. Victory Christian School was born! From the beginning they began to train national teachers to teach the phonics program. Today this school is known far and wide for its scholastics and the character in the students and teachers. Under Brother Steve's oversight, followed by Brother Eric Cherry and now Brother Andy Zelinski, the school basically supports itself.

**1999 - Konkomba Land.** In December Daniel and Christy Kenaston moved over to Konkomba land. Through the work in Gushiegu we began to realize these Konkomba people are very hungry and ripe for teaching, and we could not just let them sit there. We must send someone to them! We sensed that perhaps God was moving in a special way among this tribe of people. I have the opinion that through their humiliating loss in the tribal



war, God opened their hearts for the gospel.

**2002 - Karaga Work.** After the work of establishing the church in Gushiegu, Daryl and Rebekah Nolt moved to Karaga with a vision for village evangelism. We saw more and more that the hunger was out in the villages where there is no electricity and where it was even harder to live. So Daryl's vision was not to plant a church in Karaga, but rather to reach out.

During this time, we faced our dependency issues head on. We realized that the more we gave our money to local workers, the more dependent they became on us. They started thinking that the only way to evangelize was to do things exactly like us, using slide projectors, pictures, etc. So, God showed us that we needed to simplify and re-evaluate things. We saw that the most valuable kind of church we could plant was an indigenous, self-supporting, national church.

With these new concepts in mind, the village evangelism began. Young men went over for six-month terms, living in the villages all week long, teaching and preaching to the people and then coming back to the Karaga station on the weekends to rest and recoup. God's Word was going forth!

This same village work was also going on among the Konkombas. God has led the missionaries to a very simple life, coming down to where the people live. We see this clearly worked out in the methods of village evangelism. Instead of using our Land Rovers, the young men go out on bikes and put hundreds of miles on them, going from village to village. They sleep out under the stars on thin mats, they wade through rivers, and they eat village food, whatever that might be. There are many extra hardships to this way of life, but we knew it was the right way. Although the village people sometimes scratch their heads knowing that the missionaries could be using their vehicles, they look on with a growing respect for these people who have chosen to live like them. We were learning!

As the village evangelism unfolded and churches were planted, the need for disciplined leaders grew, and so we started the Karaga Bible School. Here the emerging leaders are able to receive Bible training and learn methods of evangelism in a corporate way.

**2003** - Wes and Charity Leibee were sent to Gbintiri. There they spent 1½ years in language learning in order to work among the Konkombas. Their study time is coming to a close, and they are eager to begin ministering when they move to the village of Katani. Although there are now 50 national leaders in 31 villages who are co-laborers with the missionaries, there are still over one thousand Konkomba villages that have not yet heard the gospel!

**2004** - Brother Mike Stoltzfus and his family took over the work in Karaga. Mike has been overseeing the village work and teaching at the Bible school for the last year.

### **Field Leadership and Administration**

Brother Ross Ulrich and his family are now stationed in Tamale. Brother Ross has been given oversight of the whole work in Ghana, counseling and giving fatherly encouragement to the entire missionary family. He also teaches at the church in Tamale and at the Karaga Bible School.

As the work has grown, so have the administrative responsibilities. The long and dangerous two-hour trip by road from Iture on the Cape Coast to Accra led to placing a family in the capital city. Rodney Nolts took on that vital work of receiving visitors, making airport runs, looking after finances, liaising with government offices, and shopping for the missionaries up country. Last year the Loren Overholt family moved to Accra to continue this work as business coordinator.

**2005 - Expansion** The work continues to expand. The opportunities, though rigorous, are



endless! In this next year, we plan to send three more missionary families to Ghana. Ernie and Anna Tschetter are planning to take up the work in Karaga, to help with discipleship and leadership training and to support the continuing work in the 30+ Dagomba villages.

Sam and Kate Kenaston plan to go to the Saliga area, southeast of Tamale about 2½ hours, later this year. There are 30 Konkomba villages there, ready and waiting for evangelism.

In the next half year, Tanner and Rebecca Leibee plan to do a two-month survey among the Gunja tribe, south of Tamale about one hour. Depending on what they find, this could lead to pioneering a new work among them. The Gunjas are another totally unreached tribe. This would be another language, another culture, and yet another people group for us to carry on our hearts.

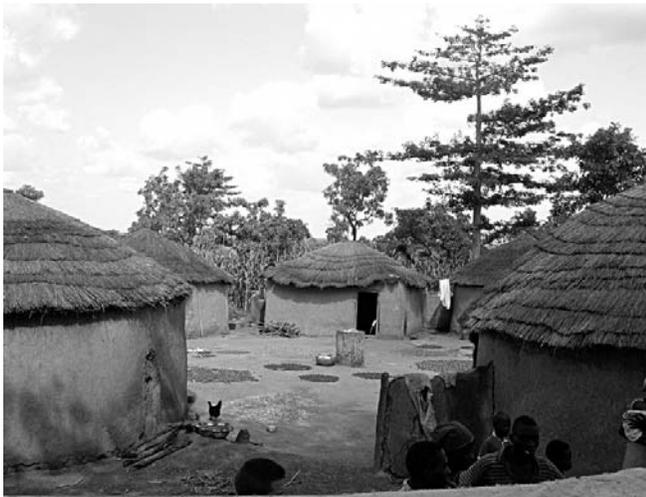
### **GES Workers**

We now also have an open door to government schools. The success of the phonics program at Victory Christian School led to a proposal to the Ghanaian Department of Education to place ten teachers in schools in areas where our missionaries already minister. Last year we sent four workers. They have a unique window into the lives of young students and ministry in the community.

We are looking for six more to go in the near future.

### Summary and Challenge

Through the years we have seen over and over that God's work done in God's way will not lack God's supply. As a mission, we have learned to live on the edge financially and move forward in faith. We do not wait till there is extra money and then send another missionary. If we see the opportunity and the worker matches the need, we send them and trust God to provide. We are trusting God in the same way with these three new missionary couples and others.



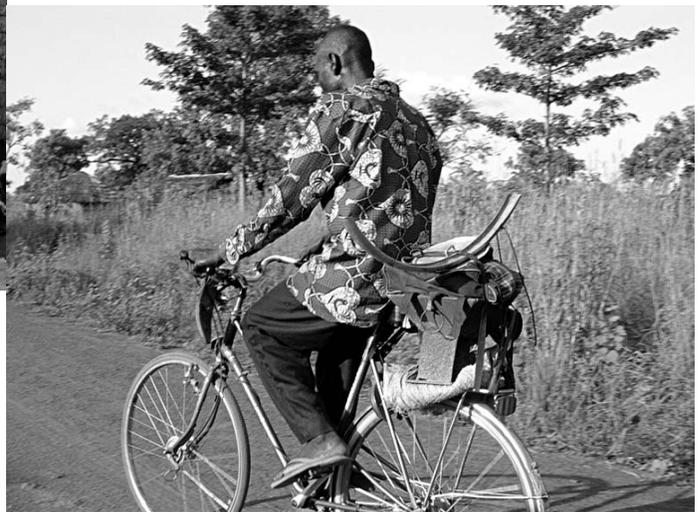
Looking back over the years and pondering all that God has done, my heart has been both humbled and blessed. There has been so much fruit from such a small beginning. Nine sim-

ple men with no big ideas at all--just a keen sense of responsibility. We fell on our knees and said: "Lord, we believe You want us to be involved in

There are many more villages that sit in darkness and fear, searching for the light. We know that "The Light of the world is Jesus." Will we show them the way?

The call still is, "Go and make disciples among all nations." You and I represent New Testament churches across this land. May God enflame our hearts with the responsibility to do what is right and trust God for all the results.

**There are still *over one thousand* Konkomba villages who have never heard.**



*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because He hath annointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;  
he hath sent me o heal the brokenhearted; to preach deliverance to the captives,  
and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. . ."*

Luke 4: 18