

*Front Page Article – July 21, 2006*

## **North Georgia plays key role in Kenyan mission**

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When his full scholarship to an Indiana Bible college fell through in September 2004, Michael Agwanda still felt a strong calling from God to find a mission to lead. A series of coincidences brought him the long way from Kenya, Africa, to North Georgia, and today he is commissioned missionary working “to bring life, hope and Christian values to HIV/AIDS orphans” in his homeland.

Back then, as he visited with a friend in Atlanta, he searched for a church where he could worship that was within walking distance. That church was North Springs UMC in Atlanta and conversations with the church’s former pastor, the Rev. Gil McGinnis, about what he should do next led Agwanda to study at the annual Lay Missionary Training Program of the North Georgia Conference.

“When he (McGinnis) called, I told him I’ll do anything that spreads the knowledge of God,” Agwanda recalled. He attended the training at Simpsonwood for nine months, feeling all the while that “God wanted me to do this.”

One of the assignments of the training was to identify a mission that each participant wanted to carry out, and to write a proposal for such a project. “I wrote about the HIV/AIDS orphans in my native country of Kenya,” said Agwanda.

The need for help for these children is great. His information shows that 500 people die from HIV/AIDs every day, creating 1,500 orphans every day. Approximately one in 10 Kenyans is already infected, and over 5,000 parentless children attempt to support their siblings. He said that about one-half million orphans are living on the streets in chaos conducive to drugs and prostitution.

Instructor Bill Gross studied and worked with Agwanda’s proposal and asked the 32-year-old, who himself had been orphaned, “Do you really think God is calling you?”

“My answer was that I didn’t want to just disappear into the good life in the U.S.....I wanted to go back there and help those people,” said Agwanda.

The next step in his journey was an introduction and acceptance by the Mission Society for United Methodists, then more training. He went back to Kenya in August 2005 and began raising funds for the mission. In February of 2006, the mission, dubbed “Life For Children Ministry,” opened an office in Kisumu, Kenya, with a nurse and a social worker and now has 30 orphans under its care.

According to Agwanda, the Kenyan government has realized that people who grow up in orphanages don’t usually succeed as independent adults, because they lack parental love and care. As a result, the government has decided to identify orphans who may have extended family members, but who may not have the funds to pay for the orphans’ upbringing. This is where “Life for Children” helps, by providing food, clothing and school supplies, including uniforms, so that family members can be freed to focus their efforts on caring relationships.

“We are having a lot of positive response,” reported Agwanda on the mission’s sponsorship of these 30 children. He came back to the U.S. in March, and will return to Kenya July 23. Requirements of the Mission Society include that the ministry have a board of directors registered in Kenya as well as one in the U.S. One of his U.S. board members, Dick Weber ( a member of North Springs UMC), will travel to Kenya with Agwanda and will meet with that board. Agwanda said that additionally, two individuals have donated money to dig water wells in a nearby village.

Also, Winder First UMC’s youth pastor, the Rev. Curtis Gibbs and his wife Shana are going to Kenya to conduct Bible school; 100 children are expected, said Agwanda. The team will stay in Africa until mid-August. Agwanda is excited that the Mission Society has signed on another missionary, Julie Campbell, to travel to Kenya as well.

In August, there will be an opportunity for individuals to contribute to the cause. A charity auction will be held at North Springs Aug. 19, complete with dinner, live music and silent and live auctions. For information, or reservations, visit the church’s Web site at [www.NorthSpringsUMC.org](http://www.NorthSpringsUMC.org).

Other ways people can help include partnerships between churches and the Kenyan mission,, supporting a child for \$65 a month; going on a mission visit to Kenya, and praying for this ministry. Agwanda is happy to visit churches or other organizations to speak about Life For Children Ministry. Contact him by visiting [www.LifeForChildrenMinistry.org](http://www.LifeForChildrenMinistry.org).



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