

# Life for Children Ministry

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## Why I Love my Job.



### **Michael Agwanda, Missionary and Director of "Life for Children Ministry"**

**Job:** Missionary and director, Life for Children Ministry, Sandy Springs

**What I do:** Michael Agwanda is working a long way from home. The Kenya native spends nine months of the year in the United States, raising money and building support for his mission to care for orphans of AIDS in his home country.

Agwanda works with North Springs United Methodist Church in Sandy Springs and the Mission Society, a nondenominational missionary organization, to house, feed and educate Kenyan children whose parents have died from AIDS. Life for Children Ministry provides clothing, food and education for children orphaned by AIDS in Kenya. AIDS has touched Agwanda's life; his father died of the disease about 10 years ago, and his stepmother has been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Agwanda's organization operates out of North Springs United Methodist Church in Sandy Springs.

"We've done so much to stop and prevent AIDS, but very little to help the orphans that are a consequence of it," he said.

Agwanda, 32, knows about the problem firsthand. His father died of AIDS about 10 years ago, and his mother died of other causes when he was 9. His stepmother, who lives in Kenya, has been diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

Now, he heads a team in Kenya that helps about 50 orphans. And they're looking for more. Members go to villages throughout the country to identify needy orphans. They attempt to find relatives who will agree to house the children while the ministry provides money for food, medicine, school uniforms, clothing and other expenses -- about \$65 per month per child.

"We ask only that [the relatives] take care of the children as they would their own children," Agwanda said. "My responsibility is making sure the orphans are well taken care of and get what they need."

Agwanda spent about three months during his ministry's first year in Kenya ensuring acceptable care for the children and getting the staff started. The rest of the time, he speaks to churches and other organizations in the United States to raise money for his work.

While the North Springs church has adopted his ministry as part of its outreach, other churches and individuals are helping, Agwanda said.

**What interested me in this:** Life for Children Ministry began as a training project for Agwanda. He came to the United States in 2004 to pursue Bible studies and his dream of helping people. North Springs was the closest church to his home. He began training as a missionary, and during that training he proposed the Kenya project. He set up the ministry, recruited a board of directors and began building support to help the orphans.

**Best part of the job:** "When I see a child carrying shoes on his shoulder because he won't put them on and wear them out -- this child eats because of this ministry," Agwanda said.

He said he is heartened when, during visits to Kenya, communities "sing and praise us for support. I shed tears of joy because of that appreciation. We make a positive change in somebody's life who was very needy."

**Most challenging part of the job:** "Trying to meet the needs of the orphans," he said. While his ministry provides food and medicine to the orphans, he also sees villages that don't have reliable water supplies, which can lead to disease. It's also difficult to stand before people and ask for money, he added.

**What keeps me going:** "This is what God wants me to do," Agwanda said. "This is beyond me."

**What people don't expect:** "How widespread AIDS is in Kenya," he said. Agwanda said that cultural traditions in his tribe, the Luo, intensify the problem of HIV exposure. For example, if a man dies, his brother is expected to marry the widow. In a situation in which a man can have multiple wives, the disease can spread quickly.

He also noted that AIDS cases aren't limited to poor, rural regions. Well-educated, urban people also contract the disease.

In Kenya, he said, people are surprised to learn that Agwanda is a bachelor. As a Christian, he says he would not practice polygamy.

**Preparation needed for this job:** "Be on the ground, see what people are suffering from, see their needs," Agwanda said. He said the utmost need isn't always obvious. "Sometimes, they may just need a goat."

Agwanda has a bachelor's degree in sales and marketing from Transworld International College in Kenya and has been a researcher in Nairobi. He is an online student at Trinity College and Theological Seminary of Indiana.

- *Article Written By Karl Ritzler, for Atlanta Journal Constitution, Feb. 4, 2007*