

SYNERGY newsletter



Ideas To Ignite Your Church's Global Impact

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MARCH 2008: AN ALL-CHURCH WORLD IMPACT PROJECT

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An All-Church World Impact Project

When Patasi's husband died, his family came and removed all his belongings, leaving her with nothing but her six children to raise and support. At 17, Sedawo is only in the second grade. His parents both died when he was just nine, and his relatives abandoned him. In Congo, life for widows and orphans is hard.



But both Patasi and Sedawo have new hope today because of the love shown to them by the members of Arlington Heights Evangelical Free Church in Illinois. This congregation has responded to the plight of widows and orphans in Congo through their all-church World Impact Project.

Indeed it is an "all-church" venture--from Sunday School through senior adults, every age had a part. Whether by praying, doing odd jobs to raise extra money, building a jeep for transportation, or funding the construction of a home for a widow in Congo, all can use their gifts and skills to participate! A young autistic boy put on a garage sale to raise money and proudly presented the proceeds to help support Congolese children. Middle school children raked lawns, shoveled snow, cleaned houses, helped grandparents and gave their birthday money. Even the 3-5-year-olds collected shoes and socks for orphans.

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Background and Beginnings

Between 1996 and 2003, Congo was engulfed in devastating civil war. Hundreds of women were abused by soldiers, leaving scores of them living with HIV/AIDS. Many are unaware of their infection, leading to further spread of the disease. Thousands of children have lost both parents to AIDS; 15% of all children in Congo are orphans today. Many live with extended family. They are often alone and fearful.

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The Arlington Heights church focused their first World Impact Project on these orphans and widows, designing the program to be financially supported by the congregation and to encourage all-church involvement. Their vision was to sponsor an **ongoing series** of projects, giving them **high visibility** so that **the entire church family** would feel part of the effort. "As children, families, singles, empty nesters and seniors are moved by this desperate need, they will have the opportunity to be involved in initiatives to address it." The goal was that every member of the congregation would be "acutely aware of the need and feel part of **making a difference in our world.**"

In the fall of 2004, four members from the church visited Congo. This initial research team met with church leaders of the Evangelical Free Church of Congo to better understand their struggles with AIDS and to listen to their vision for responding to the crisis. All of the programs were initiated and conceived with and through the African church. While the Congo church had the burden and vision, the Illinois congregation volunteered to provide resources. Naturally the Congolese church was greatly encouraged and energized at the promise of seeing their prayers answered and their dreams become reality!

The following year Arlington Heights partnered with the Congo church to help provide materials for AIDS education, transportation, a communications system, resources to build two small homes, and the kick-off for an orphan sponsorship program. Specific projects



included provision of: 500 backpacks filled with school supplies and necessities, a jeep, two motorcycles, 23 bicycles, 23 portable sound systems, AIDS education flip charts, houses for the AIDS sponsorship director and the communication director, and installation of a V-Sat Satellite system. They exceeded their fund-raising goal, making it possible to complete and pay for the entire endeavor. How did they do so much?

A Job for Everyone

The church website says, "The project was a success because we worked together, the children, youth, and adults all did their part in making a very significant beginning into a major problem in Congo."

Greg Norwine, Growth and Outreach Pastor, says,

The World Impact Project helped us to see that we could do great things in Christ's name

if we worked together. For months after the project, World Impact became synonymous with team work. Several times, when we faced a difficult challenge, leaders suggested working together like we did on World Impact.

This teamwork also united age groups. One of the delightful parts of our World Impact Project was pairing up adult Sunday school classes with children's classes.... Groups that normally would not have interacted were united around a shared cause.

Children's classes raised money and collected all the items for the backpacks, while the adult classes committed to sponsor an orphan for every backpack purchased.

Building a Jeep

During the exploratory trip, the African leaders expressed a need for transportation, saying that a jeep would be appropriate for their situation. With a good supply of free army surplus parts available to the Arlington Heights church, the most reasonable way to provide for that need was to use these parts and build a jeep! Not only was it the least expensive way, but it also could give many more individuals an opportunity to participate and be involved. However, it would require a significant commitment of time to build the body and construct the entire vehicle.

The leaders were surprised to note the diversity of volunteers who came forward to assist with the project! Some were active church members, while others were not even believers. One participant shared how he had always wanted to serve in the church but didn't feel he had gifts that were useful. Now men like him were "energized by the prospect of using their mechanical abilities to make a difference in the world. The fellowship was sweet as these men labored for hours with welding torches, grinders and wrenches as this jeep took form."



When the jeep was nearly finished, they displayed it in the church foyer! Someone added a red plastic gas can on the side to collect donations for construction costs. When the can was later emptied, they found several hundred dollars, including three crisp new \$100 dollar bills, all clearly donated by the same person: someone

responding in obedience to God's still small voice.

Two Keys to Success

Involvement of the Entire Congregation. Of course a key dynamic of the World Impact Projects is the involvement of the entire church family. In designing such a program they specifically looked for a project with a significant ministry

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to children and their needs, giving the children of their own congregation a definite point of interest and connection. The wide variety of projects and tasks permitted them to divide up the cost and project goals among many different groups within the church, allowing small groups and classes to take ownership for specific pieces of the entire undertaking.

Evaluation and Ongoing Involvement. This project was the first of two projects partnering with the Congolese church. Leaders of the Illinois congregation are now reviewing next steps with the church in Congo. In April 2007, Pastor Dave Wardle and Gary McKee traveled to Congo to see results of the previous project, to evaluate the current needs, and to determine with the African church leaders how to best help in the coming year. They interviewed widows, listened to their stories and visited their homes.

The church is currently raising money for this year's projects which include additional sponsorships, housing, and vocational training for widows, unwed mothers and orphans. They plan to build a training center where sewing, masonry and carpentry can be taught, giving hope and a way for the people to support themselves without resorting to thievery and prostitution.

The World Impact Project has brought the church together in a common effort that is indeed making a difference in Congo. Because of their vision, unity and love, Patasi and Sedawo anticipate a brighter future. Better than that, because these two--and many others--have heard and responded to the gospel, they look forward to mansions in Heaven!

The World Impact Projects will be "an integral part" of the Arlington Heights church for many years to come. If you would like to learn more, see the church website at <http://ahefc.org>, or contact the missions pastor, Dave Wardle, at Dwardle@ahefc.org.

TOOL PACKAGE

Review the PowerPoint that introduced the project to the congregation, and find out what steps the church followed in setting up the World Impact Project.

GREAT IDEAS

Discover the ideas that helped the church leaders determine the project and how it could benefit their members.