

“Our understanding of racial inequality helps us in our ministry in Africa.”

— Sarah West, IM missionary to Zambia

by the Rev. James G. Layton, Senior Writer/Editor

Dreaming God’s Dream

Imagine a school constructed of plastic bags and 2 wooden sticks on three sides with the wall of a house providing the fourth. Then picture more than 60 pupils trying to learn in that environment with just one teacher. That is what **Charles and Sarah West** saw in the city of Lusaka soon after they began their work in Zambia with International Ministries in 2006. While Charles devotes his time to training future church leaders, Sarah ministers



Although these children presently huddle in a cramped two-room school, they receive an education from loving Christian teachers.

primarily to vulnerable women and children. When she learned that the community school described above was recently abandoned by a struggling congregation, Samaritan Baptist Church, she and her husband began dreaming God’s dream. They wanted to help meet a critical need. “It’s very easy to come alongside our Zambian brothers and sisters,” Sarah says, “because they *do* ask for help.”

The result of that help is the Well-Spring of Faith and Hope Center, which is both a small community school and orphanage. The name of the center is based on two verses in Proverbs — *Understanding is a wellspring of*

life to the one who has it. (16:22) and *The wellspring of wisdom is a flowing brook.* (18:4) “A wellspring is an abundant source,” Sarah explains, “a fountain of life. Our prayer is that the center will be the source of an abundant life in Christ that might not otherwise exist for these children.”

Education in Zambia is not compulsory, resulting in 40% of females and approximately 20% of males being illiterate. This lack of educational opportunities hampers progress for Zambia, which attained independence in October 1964. The imprint of colonialism remains evident with adult women who serve as maids still being called “house girls” and grown men who are truck drivers and gardeners still referred to as “lorry boys” and “garden boys.” Sarah observes: “As African Americans, raised in the United States with its history of racial inequality for blacks and other minorities, we as missionaries in Africa understand the struggle of indigenous Black Zambians in overcoming unfair treatment and being given limited opportunities.”

One of the center’s goals is to provide *expanded opportunities* for a new generation, opening the eyes of the children to possibilities other than a life of abject poverty. These children need the love of Christ shown in other ways as well. Many are orphaned as a result of AIDS — of the 67 children who attend the center nearly 40% have lost one or both parents.

A Newer Dream

In April 2008, Charles was invited to preach for the Nyankuba Baptist Church, located in a rural area where there were large expanses of land lying

uncultivated. Sarah tells of the result, “We asked if we could possibly build near their church building, thinking that both they and the Samaritan Baptist Church could come together and care for the children in a new facility.



Having lost both parents to AIDS, some orphans have had to become young heads of households as they try to care for their siblings.

We were granted several acres of land on which to build.”

The Wests then began to take other steps in dreaming God’s dream. Those included planning to construct a more adequate community school and orphanage and using solar panels since electricity is not to be available in rural areas for several years. Challenges have abounded as this dream edges toward



Sarah West’s ministry centers in the capital city of Lusaka, and Charles teaches at the Zambia International Theological College in Kalulushi.

reality. For instance, there was the need for clean water. Sarah successfully found a drilling company to fill that need at no cost, while the finishing steps for the well have been funded by the Canaan Baptist Church of New Castle, Delaware. Building materials have also been critical, but instead of the expense of having bricks or cinder blocks transported, the local clay soil has been transformed into bricks made by church and community members.

Becoming attuned to God’s dreams also means imagining future possibilities. Sarah says, “With these several acres what we would like to see is several blocks of school buildings, residential buildings for the children with house mothers and a large library that will service everyone in the rural area, as well as a clinic with basic services.”

Sarah has been considering another aspect of the dream that will sustain this ministry through income-generating projects. She envisions not only having livestock and vegetables for food and sale but also...“projects such as candle making and bag making that will hopefully bring in needed income to create independence. We will also be introducing a training component such as basket weaving, welding, masonry and other marketable skills.”

As Charles and Sarah West minister in Zambia by dreaming God’s dream, they have witnessed the truth of the scriptures, “For nothing is impossible with God.” (Luke 1:37)

Learn more about the Wests’ ministry at: www.internationalministries.org/missionaries/West



From *The Baptist Missionary Magazine*, November 1884

Lulu Fleming, an American Baptist, is shown here with British missionaries who served with her in the Congo.

Lulu Fleming

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ing, but to us whom God has given the privilege to labor here it is very encouraging. [It] fills us with unspeakable joy.”

Lulu seemed unwilling to let herself get weary. She eagerly combined her teaching with weekend evangelistic work in the towns. Within a year she had learned Kikongo and no longer required a translator. When Lulu saw that women needed to be reached, she began making home visits while urging the mission society to send more women. Help came to her in 1890 with the appointment of Nora Gordon, a graduate of Spelman Seminary. Lulu’s young half-sister, Emma Hawkins, also went to the Congo to assist her as a volunteer.

“This seems a poor report... and perhaps many may think the work almost discouraging, but to us whom God has given the privilege to labor here it is very encouraging. [It] fills us with unspeakable joy.”

Illness forced Lulu to return to the United States in 1891. But up to the time of her departure, she continued her ministry in the towns, now numbering eight. In the mornings she taught in the town schools, while in the afternoons she made home visits, preached in the villages and cared for the sick and dying.

While recuperating in the U.S., she studied medicine at the Women’s Medical College in Philadelphia, and in 1895 she returned to the Congo as a medical missionary. In this second term, Dr. Fleming was stationed at Irebu, further up the Congo River where she needed to learn a different language. This also proved to be a difficult assignment in other ways as well. She observed rampant illness and anguished over school children being kidnapped in “native wars.”

The power of Dr. Fleming’s ministry came from her identification with those among whom she served. The Baptist Missionary Magazine described her as “particularly successful in winning the hearts of the Congo people, putting herself in close touch and sympathy with them.” Later, African sleeping sickness again forced her back to the United States for medical care, but it was not effective. In 1899 Dr. Fleming died in a Philadelphia hospital. She was still planning to return to her work, celebrating the fact that “the Lord had need of me in Africa.”