

Nigeria: A New Era in Missions

by Sarah Lin



Pilot Ray Browneye helped transport critically ill patients to CRWM's hospitals.

Garba Umar, 49, had planned to be a lawyer.

But shortly after finishing his legal training, he realized that the nudging on his heart to become a pastor was growing. So in 1997, at the urging of then-Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) missionaries Bob and Ineke Lodewyk, Umar became a church planter in Nigeria.

Today Umar is an evangelist with the Christian Reformed Church of Nigeria

(CRCN). He is also the coordinator of the CRCN's evangelism program in Abuja, Nigeria. For 15 years, he and his wife, Helen, have shared the gospel with people in the Abuja suburb of Kabusa.

As the Kabusa church expanded, the Umars began building up local believers for evangelism and discipleship. In the spring of 2012, the Umars moved to Kuje, another suburb of Abuja, to begin building a church all over again.

Abuja and its suburbs are home to more than 3 million people. As Abuja

grows, so does the CRCN's vision for reaching people with the gospel.

In the fall, Umar led a three-day evangelism training event in Kabusa for about 70 people. He offered strategies, tips, and tools for effectively reaching out to people and then sent the participants out to apply what they had learned.

They fanned out through five neighboring villages, starting conversations with people on the streets and making records for follow-up with the people they met.

You add.
God multiplies.

“God had worked through their witness that day to bring 45 people to himself.”

Some, including Umar, went to a village known for its drugs, alcohol, and wild parties. They held an outdoor service in the middle of the village’s open-air bars, telling people how Jesus had brought them hope and forgiveness. Nine villagers committed their lives to Christ.

Later the participants gathered to share their experiences. God had worked through their witness that day to bring 45 people to himself.

“People realized [that God used] ‘ordinary’ members for extraordinary work,” said Umar. “People understood evangelism is a way of life.” The events of the day led seven people to commit themselves fully to being evangelists.

The CRCN’s ministry through Umar and other evangelists marks a new era for Christian Reformed World Missions’ work in Nigeria.

When CRWM adopted Nigeria as a mission field over 70 years ago, the missionaries largely focused on sharing the gospel.

Many people in central Nigeria in the 1940s were following Islam or African traditional religions. Missionaries settled

in Jos, Mkar, Takum, and other villages and began building relationships in the communities. They opened schools and medical clinics, taught in Bible colleges and seminaries, planted churches, and joined Nigerian evangelists in telling people about Jesus.

Thousands of Nigerians put their trust in Jesus. By the 1970s, three Nigerian Reformed denominations, including the CRCN, had formed as a result of the work of CRWM and its partners.

Today, CRWM missionaries work in partnership with these denominations. Missionaries are still involved in ministry to Muslims, teaching, and other evangelistic roles, but the focus has shifted to strengthening the Nigerian church for ministry in Nigeria and beyond.

“Increasingly CRWM works as a partner in ministries that are owned, governed, and sustained by Nigerian counterparts,” said CRWM missionary Albert Strydorhst. CRWM missionaries mentor and train Nigerian leaders, support outreach efforts, and encourage Nigerian churches and believers to apply their faith to every societal sphere.



Evangelist Garba Umar with his wife, Helen, and their children, Miracle and Victor.

Since 2010, CRWM and the CRCN have also worked together to do ministry in Sierra Leone.

The years when Nigeria was simply a missionary-receiving nation have passed. Now, Nigerian Christians are sharing the gospel they once received with those who have yet to hear it. ■



Sarah Lin is a staff writer with Christian Reformed World Missions.



CRWM alumnus Dave Dykgraaf explains a point to Bible school students.

CRWM at 125

Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) is celebrating 125 years of helping Christian Reformed churches to fulfill the Great Commission.

What began as a mission to share the gospel with Native Americans has expanded to ministry in more than 50 countries. During these years, many people and churches have faithfully partnered with CRWM to extend Jesus’ message of hope worldwide.

Please join us as we celebrate God’s work through our partnership together. Visit crrwm.org/125 to learn about anniversary events being held near you.