

Baird's Congo Journal #8 – “Yatima” Means “Orphan”

The Macedonian Christians: Elizabeth, Brenda and I taught a Women's Seminar at Bizimana Christian Church last week. When the taxi picked us up at 7:30am I had no idea I would come home praying about a second ministry to Congolese orphans, or Yatima, in Swahili. My thoughts went immediately to the Macedonian Christians (II Cor. 8: 1-5), who gave out of their extreme poverty. This is what the Christians at Bizimana are doing! In the middle and the end of each month they take up a special offering that goes to the families who are housing orphans. This money helps to provide 20 children with clothing and food, and, if possible to pay their school fees, which is \$20.00 per trimester per child. Then another \$20.00 per child is required at the beginning of each school year to buy uniforms, close-toed shoes, a backpack, and a notebook and pen. The school year begins in September.

The Negative Picture: The people who worship at Bizimana are hungry and many of them can afford to send only 2 or 3 of their own children to school at a time (out of 7 or 8). They live in shanties made of tin, tarp and dried thatching with no yard or plumbing. The beds have no mattresses or pillows and often no blankets. Because of this situation, the church is careful to give money to the household for food, rather than just the Yatima, and to be sure that at least some of that family's children are in school before it sends the orphan they are caring for to school – so much to think about and be aware of culturally and socially.

The Positive Picture: When this ministry began, the elders asked for a show of hands for those families who thought they might have room for one or two more children to sleep in their homes. Many raised their hands. The elders specifically said that no one would be looked down on because they did not raise their hands. Those who kept their hands down would be the ones to give support to the families housing the Yatima. The majority agreed.

The Rest of the Picture: The women who attended the Seminar drank in the teachings as if they were the delicious cold water all were longing to drink. As we were preparing to leave, the women began to explain about Bizimana's ministry to the Yatima who are looked down on and how they are the last ones to get to go to school, if at all. Bukavu, Congo is raising a generation of thousands of illiterate street children who are growing up to be thieves because they are hungry and neglected! We praise God for the willingness of the Bizimana Christians, as well as Christians in other congregations who are doing their best keep the Yatima off the streets.

“God, what shall we do?” The last thing we want to do is take away the blessing and the initiative of the Bizimana Christians. Conversely, they have asked for help, not for themselves, but for their ministry to the Yatima. Right now, we need funds to get all 20 orphans in school. At \$40.00 per child, that is \$800.00. We believe this is good way to begin a Yatima Ministry even if it means in 3 months we will need to ask for another \$20.00 for each child's next trimester. This way we will have time to observe how the Bizimana elders distribute funds and then begin to set financial and spiritual goals for a permanent ministry.

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God Bless Our Ministries Together, *Bob, Dawn and Elizabeth Baird*

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! I John 3:1