



## Making a Difference Together

Our family went to the Muppet movie together, if only because the main characters are two brothers named Gary and Walter. It was a rousing, toe-tapping, smiley extravaganza. See it.

Not to turn the plot of the Muppet movie into a theological treatment, but it does prove the adage “none of us is as good as all of us.” The Muppets had disbanded, made irrelevant by changing entertainment tastes to the crass and cynical. Gary and Walter reunite them to renewed popularity. Working together, they save the Muppet Theater against all odds.

“None of us is as good as all of us” is a valued biblical principle for us. It undergirds our very ethos. We chose the name *Covenant* to describe our commitment to each other. We covenant, we partner, to live this life in Christ with one another. We believe we are better together.

It is true for the individual. It is true for the congregation. And it is true for the entire denomination. The Covenant collectively is not the complete expression of the body of Christ. Our efforts can have even greater impact when we join forces with others. What is unattainable becomes attainable; what is formidable becomes do-able; what is out of reach becomes within our grasp.

With that conviction we are entering an unprecedented partnership with World Vision for the grueling conditions holding back the children of Congo, their families, and their communities. The Covenant has been involved in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1937. It has been seventy-five years. What has developed is impressive. Today our Congolese friends lead a growing and vibrant movement (known as the CEUM) that includes 1,600 congregations, five hospitals, ninety medical clinics, a school system serving some 60,000 students, and micro-enterprise initiatives. We stand in partnership with them through a skilled missionary team, Paul Carlson Partnership (which focuses on medical and micro-enterprise projects, named in honor of a slain Covenant medical missionary), and important financial support.

And yet, even with these expansive efforts, huge needs and tremendous opportunity remain. We work largely in the rural northwest, the Equateur Province. It is reasonably stable these days, due in part to its relative isolation from the east where bare-knuckled conflict is seemingly subsiding. But the crippling effects of war elsewhere in the country clearly reverberate in our area. Medicines are in frighteningly short supply. Children are dying needlessly from preventable diseases. Most roads are virtually impassable rutted paths. Electricity is spotty, even at the hospitals. Classrooms are overcrowded. Leaky thatched

roofs close schools during the rainy season. Family plots provide some food, but it is not nutritionally balanced. Poverty is grinding.

All totaled, DR Congo is rated dead last by the United Nations on the latest Human Development Index, 187th out of 187 countries.

Our Congolese friends are indomitable, capable, and resourceful. But the situation reminds me of the Old Testament predicament of the Hebrews in Egypt—it’s virtually impossible to make bricks without straw. This partnership with World Vision is about making sure our Congolese friends have the straw they need. Not only have we been in our area of Congo since 1937, World Vision has been in other parts of the country for nearly forty years. Both organizations care deeply for these inspiring friends who teach us about perseverance and hope.

Bringing together the CEUM, the Covenant, and World Vision, we dared ask, “What might happen if we came together as the body of Christ in a bold partnership and pulled out all the stops for the sake of a radically different future for the children of Equateur, their families, and their communities?” We dreamed. We did extensive work around feasibility, scope, and scale. Most importantly, we felt continuously drawn by the Holy Spirit into the conviction that this was of God.

The result is Covenant Kids Congo powered by World Vision. This is the first ever child sponsorship program between World Vision and an entire denomination. In addition to the spiritual work of the CEUM congregations, this revolutionary joint venture will result in community-identified initiatives around clean water, nutrition, education, health, and micro-enterprise that will benefit everyone in the community, while multiplying Congolese leadership for replicating these efforts elsewhere.

Over the next year, all 800 of our congregations here in the United States and Canada will have the opportunity to make a real difference in turning around the most overlooked province of the neediest country of the world by participating in a comprehensive child sponsorship initiative throughout the Covenant Church.

At the Midwinter Conference this month, we are planning a signing ceremony including Mossai Sanguma, president of the CEUM, Rich Stearns, president of World Vision, and Covenant representation. This is no quick fix. There are no handouts. This is simply the way it is supposed to be: the body of Christ coming together in a God-birthed partnership to take on a God-sized challenge. ■

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