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Nursing graduate to continue legacy of saving infants

After sharing his home and his parents with over 200 infants throughout the course of his childhood and teenage life, Chidi Anyanwu plans to carry on his parents' legacy of saving infants and meeting the needs of Africa's Eziamma community

/24-7PressRelease/ - LANGLEY, BC, CANADA, July 11, 2005—With a freshly minted nursing degree from Trinity Western University, Chidi Anyanwu, 32, is preparing to return to his Nigerian hometown to help run Grace Hospital, a rural health facility that opened in May 2005. Established by Chidi's parents, the hospital is just one of four organizations they've begun since moving from Vancouver to Africa 27 years ago. The creation of these organizations—The Eziamma Motherless Babies Home, King's Kids Elementary School, Elijah Memorial Skills Acquisition Center and Grace Hospital—was set in motion by one tiny baby only weeks after their arrival. And the ramifications of this event set the course for Chidi's life.

Chidi's parents returned to the Eziamma community—a grouping of 80,000 people in 23 villages in rural Africa—after attending Bible school in Canada, intending to plant churches. Up until that point, the community—Chidi's dad's hometown—had been torn apart by war, superstition, poverty and a lack of health services and education.

"They began the normal missionary process, but two weeks after we arrived in Eziamma, a woman died giving birth, one village over," says Chidi. "In those days the custom was to leave the baby to die because it was deemed responsible for the mother's death. And according to superstition, harm would come to anyone who cared for the baby."

After hearing about this baby, Chidi's mom went to the village, took the baby home, and cared for it.

"Word spread about what my mom had done. The villagers and everyone around expected something evil to happen to her," explains Chidi. "As time went on and nothing happened, word spread that there was this lady taking care of babies. Soon after, another lady died, this time giving birth to twins, and they were brought to our home so we took care of them. Within six months we had 24 babies in our house."

Today, twenty-five years later, the Eziamma Motherless Babies Home is established and effectively provides care for infants in need. Home-staff care for the infants until they are 18 months old and can either be adopted or returned to their families. Since arriving in Nigeria, the family has rescued over 200 babies, and succeeded in breaking the superstition that these children bring a curse. Being a part of this revolutionary work inspired Chidi to pursue a career that would allow him to bring tangible help to the Eziamma community and carry on what his parents had begun.

"Nursing is a caring profession," explains Chidi, who is currently working at Peace Arch Hospital in Surrey, gaining experience before he returns to Africa. "It's not about diagnosing and singling out a certain ailment, it's about seeing the individual as a whole. Nursing allows me to encompass everything I've seen in African societies particularly in dealing with motherless babies. When you deal with babies, you're not just dealing with their needs, but you're also dealing with the extended family. It's really about community education."

"Chidi knew from day one that he'd be going back to Africa to serve the hurting people of his community," says Catherine Ho Harwood, M.Sc., RN, TWU nursing professor. "However he didn't talk about his parent's mission or his own background until the spring of his second year when I happened to get him talking in the hall one day. I had him share his amazing story with his classmates, and they were as dumbfounded as I had been. His selfless heart and burning passion for the oppressed is humbling." One Trinity Western University business student, Marilyn Ens, was so inspired that a year ago she moved to the Eziamma to work as an accountant for the Hospital.

Motherless babies aren't the only group in Eziamma affected by the Anyanwu family. In 1991, an elementary school was established to provide accessible education for underprivileged children. Now enrolling over 500 kids, the school is expanding to a high school. They have also planted ten churches and opened a skills acquisition centre for poor uneducated girls, who are often the most vulnerable people in African societies. "Education is an exit to poverty," says Chidi.

For more information about these humanitarian projects contact Angela at Hungry For Life International: (604) 703-0223 or angelag@hungryforlife.org

Trinity Western University, located in Langley, B.C., is a not-for-profit Christian liberal arts university enrolling over 3,500 students this year. With a broad based, liberal arts and sciences curriculum, the University offers undergraduate degrees in 38 major areas of study ranging from business, education and computer science to biology and nursing, and 14 other graduate degrees including counselling psychology, theology and administrative leadership. For more information: www.twu.ca, (604) 888-7511