**Global Mission Engagement in the Great Lakes Area of Africa**

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**Introduction**

Charitable organizations live with new demands from their supporters. Currently, donors expect that organizations will work efficiently, reduce overhead costs, and critically evaluate the impact of their work. Financial supporters want regular factual communications about the projects they support without an accompanying avalanche of direct mail appeals. The nature of communications should be reports rather than propaganda.

A further phenomenon is the desire for hands-on involvement in an organization’s mission. This request is articulated more by the younger generations of donors than by their parents and grandparents. This generational cohort wants to see the work, get their hands dirty, and meet the clients. Accordingly, many charities have volunteer service programs that allow financial donors to make a hands-on contribution to the organizational mission, to interact with the clients and staff members, and to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that are addressed.

**International Mission Engagement**

A visit to the Mustard Seed Calgary for a few hours of volunteer service provides a donor with the opportunity to meet the homeless, work alongside employees, and to enter into the social world of Calgary’s poor in a limited manner.

The situation is much more complicated with international charitable organizations whose programs are located in places of extreme poverty. Travel to the project are involves issues of health, safety, language translation, and transportation along with an extended time commitment required for travel. As a result, there is a tendency to seek the nearest available “third-world country” in order to reduce the budget of time and money to a manageable level. Mexico and the Dominican Republic have become destinations of choice. One could argue that the experience of life and service among the poor in these countries has the capacity to transform the worldview of the participants. However, the primary missiological criterion becomes the price point rather than the need and the potential contribution of North American Christians.

**The Case for the Great Lakes Region of Africa**

How would we make the case for a mission engagement in the Great Lakes Region of Africa? Perhaps the first point is to clarify the region. The Great Lakes countries are the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Tanzania. The lakes are Lake Tanganyika, Lake Victoria, Lake Kivu, Lake Alberta and Lake Edward. At Westview, our attention is focussed on the countries of Uganda and Rwanda. Both countries are relatively stable within a politically volatile area.

Two questions can be asked: (1) What would draw Westview to this area? (2) What kind of contribution could we make?

**Drawing Points**

* Africa, in general, has the highest percentage of people living in extreme poverty and enduring chronic hunger. The 10 countries with the highest rates of extreme poverty are in Africa. The average percentage of malnutrition (hunger) in Sub-Saharan Africa is 22%. These statistics simply point toward the humanitarian need of the continent. In terms of Uganda and Rwanda, the former ranks 162 in the UN Human Development Index and the latter is ranked in 158th place. (Norway ranks 1, Canada 12, Mexico 74, Lebanon 80, and the Dominican Republic 94).
* The situation of poverty is compounded by widespread violence in the Great Lakes region. The 25th commemoration of the Rwandan Genocide Against the Tutsi will be observed in 2019. Rwanda now stands as an example of country that made the difficult transition from ethic violence to peace. However, civil violence, often ethnically based, is rampant in the DRC, Burundi, and Uganda. Over 6 million people have been victims of violence in the DRC since 1998. Conflict in Northern Uganda has resulted in over 400 thousand displaced people. Violence against women and girls is a major human rights concern. Perpetrators are rarely brought to justice.
* Gender discrimination is a challenging social and ethical issue in the Great Lakes region. The DRC is considered the worst country in the world to be born a female. The use of rape as a weapon of genocide has been part of the legacy of violence. The governments of Rwanda and Uganda have passed legislation to protect and enhance the rights of girls and women. Development programs of governments, churches and civil society organizations have increased women’s literacy and access to schools and universities.
* The Christian church is well rooted in the Great Lakes countries including denominations such as the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and various branches of the Pentecostal Church. The presence of Christian Churches and believers makes the violence more difficult to comprehend.
* Westview has numerous existing points of contact in the Great Lakes region.
	+ Funds from the growing project of the Foodgrains Bank are used in Rwanda and the DRC to support food security programs that address rural hunger.
	+ Bill Webb travels to Uganda each year to offer volunteer service to an orphanage and surrounding communities.
	+ Braden Swab’s organization, EMI, has a regional office in Uganda. Braden has done engineering work in Rwanda.
	+ Regine King, is a genocide survivor who has told her story at the United Nations. She returns to Rwanda each year to participate in the peace and community initiatives associated with the Healing Life Wounds organization.
	+ Gordon King gave leadership to church-based community development, food security, and peace work in Rwanda and the DRC.
	+ Gato Munyasamoko, a former colleague of Gordon, was awarded the Human Rights Award of the Baptist World Alliance at their fifth congress in 2015. He was later granted an honorary doctorate by Acadia University. Dr. Munyamosoko currently works for CBM in Uganda where serves alongside Ugandan churches and communities in fostering peace, especially in areas that have a strong refugee presence. He is working on a training curriculum on peace-building and integral mission, which will benefit churches throughout Africa and beyond. He is associated with the Uganda Christian Lawyers Fraternity.
	+ Emmanuel Katongole, professor of peace studies at Notre Dame University, has invited Westview Baptist Church to meet with the Great Lakes Leaders Initiative (of which Gato Munymosoko is a board member). Dr. Katongole is Christian leader with roots in both Rwanda and Uganda. He has become a leading African theologian and peace activist. The Leaders Initiative has created a network of Christian leaders throughout the Great Lakes area. We are grateful for this invitation to meet with committed and experienced Christian peace workers.

**What Would a Partnership Look Like?**

At this stage, we can only speculate on the nature of a partnership in the Great Lakes area.

* We have been asked to investigate the potential of relating to Baptist congregations in the Bugesera region of Rwanda. This area is approximately 20 minutes drive from the capital city of Kigali. It was one of the regions most deeply affected by the 1994 Tutsi genocide. The Rwandan Baptists have two schools in this area and Foodgrains Bank food security projects. Westview might want to consider ways to facilitate retreats and training for pastors, women’s groups, and youth leaders in which sharing between Canadians and Rwandans would take place. The schools present opportunities for extended volunteer opportunities.
* Gato Munyamosoko’s work in peace and reconciliation is difficult and dangerous. Westview’s prayer and financial support would be meaningful. The dialogue with Gato might enable us to examine our calling to be peacemakers in Canada and abroad. It is a challenging calling.
* We submit that a partnership would give us opportunities to understand the world of the poor in a deeper way and to be involved in ways that are informed and transformative.

**Process:**

1. Send a preliminary team in Summer 2019 to learn about the region, make connections, and investigate the possibilities for shared ministry.

2. Bring back a report to church, and create interest and excitement in the area.

3. Create a strategy for sending mission team trips on an annual or bi-annual basis

4. Assemble a team of people for a mission trip in 2020 to go primarily to develop relationship and to learn, and possibly to serve in areas such as: medical, education, church related training or construction, as discerned through local partnerships.

**Costs of a Mission Trip:**

The costs of a 10-day mission trip to this area are not insignificant: Estimated cost per person = $4000

We would set up a fund so that a portion of the trip would be paid by WBC and a portion would be paid by the individual. As this trip is through CBM the individual amount is tax deductible so they would receive a portion back in a tax refund. So, the out of pocket cost of the trip would be reduced.

As well, the church has money in various accounts that would be used to pay for actual mission costs in Rwanda (but not for any of the mission trip). For example, many churches need roofs and we have about $15,000 set aside to cover the material for some. The money would be taken to the churches by the mission team not sent in the mail from Canada. Several years ago, we created a fund for helping with international church building funded by the tithe from our building debt repayment. This fund still has $45,000 in it. This is where the $15,000 refenced above would come from.

If we approve the revised tithe allocation in our budget this would create a fund of about $20,000 for mission projects in this area each year.

The mission committee has about $8000 in their budget each year that could help cover the promised $2000 for team members travel.

We could designate the Easter offering for missions, including the youth SERVE trip and for these trips. This could raise $10-12,000 a year.

**First Steps:**

We are sending a mission team in Summer 2019 to explore the region and make the initial contacts.

The team consists of:

Dayle and Dawn Medgett - As the primary vision casters and communicators to adults and children it is important that Medgett’s be involved in the creation of this new emphasis.

Bill and Christi Christieson - As the pastor working in this area Bill will be creating the mission process and developing the first team to return in 2020. Christi’s medical background will inform the team’s interaction with that aspect of the work in the region.

Gordon and Regine King - Gordon chairs our mission committee and has worked extensively for CBM and has lived and worked in this area. Regine is from Rwanda and has also worked with World Vision in this area. Regine’s participation with the Westview team will be coordinated with other work she is doing in the region.

Also travelling with the team is Dennis Shierman who is the Calgary based, western Canada representative of CBM. Dennis is an experienced missionary who will also be an ongoing support to this project over the coming years. His expenses are covered by CBM.