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Mission Work in Nigeria

Oral history interview with Lois Spangenberg

Right before Jesus ascended into heaven he gave his people a command. Jesus says, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) In this interview, I talked with Lois Spangenberg, the wife of Raymond Spangenberg, who had the privilege of literally taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Raymond and Lois Spangenberg are the grandparents of my wife, Rachel (Waldschmidt) Olson. Raymond went to public schools his entire life. He graduated from a public university with a teaching degree. It never occurred to him how the Lord would use him to help spread God's kingdom. After college, Raymond was called by the Synodical Conference to teach high school in Nigeria. The mission board trained him by sending him to St. Louis for "mission school."

Raymond's call to Nigeria was very specific. He was supposed to teach in the high school and also be the athletic director. I learned that the education system in Nigeria was a lot like ours today. Almost every church was joined with an elementary school. These elementary schools were essentially "feeder" schools for the high school. After high school, some would go to the PTC where there was a one year curriculum to train teachers for the elementary school. Others would go to the Normal School, where there was a two year curriculum to train teachers for the high school. Others would go to the Seminary and finish their pastoral training. Education was very important to the people in Nigeria. Therefore the education that the schools offered was an amazing evangelism tool. The missionaries didn't have to go and find people. The people found them and flocked to their door steps. They not only learned history and math. They all learned that they have a Savior from sin. They all learned the love of Jesus.

Lois Spangenberg also helped spread the gospel. Even though she never helped out at the school, she served her Savior in a different way. She ran a foundling home and helped out with the hospital. She was a registered nurse and used her God given gifts to serve Him in that way. At the foundling home she took care of new babies. At one time she was caring for up to thirteen babies. All of these babies were cared for and baptized by the missionaries. These babies are with their Savior in heaven, because of the foundling home. It was very interesting to see how God uses people of all different abilities to serve his kingdom. The missionaries used the hospital and the foundling home as a point of contact to reach other people. I learned that there has to be a healthy balance between caring for babies and the sick and spreading the gospel. This foundling home and hospital gave the missionaries an opportunity to reach, not just the patients, but the rest of the family with the gospel. This should never be over looked.

The greatest lesson that I learned from my research and this interview was that gospel ministry is a privilege and a joy. The zeal and enthusiasm of these missionaries, teachers and nurses to spread the gospel was very inspiring to me. World missions should always be in our prayers and on our minds. Jesus says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20) God uses ordinary people to do this. What a privilege!