



MINISTRY of HOPE

COMMUNITY-BASED ORPHAN CARE • MALAWI, AFRICA

Ministry of Hope is a Christian relief organization founded by Malawians to meet the physical and spiritual needs of children orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. MOH sponsors feeding centers, discipleship and education programs, a crisis nursery and international volunteer efforts through a Christ-centered, community-based approach.

The Crisis Nursery's 100th Baby: "We are thankful"

He was only nine days old when he was brought to the Crisis Nursery, but baby Tiyamike was already making his mark in the world as the 100th baby to enter the Ministry of Hope program for abandoned and orphaned infants.

His name means "We are thankful," and it's an appropriate moniker for the milestone he represents at the Ministry of Hope Crisis Nursery.

There is much to be thankful for in this ministry which started less than three years ago in the living room of Frank and Nancy Dimmock, Presbyterian missionaries from North Carolina who have served in Malawi for more than 15 years. Today it is the only service in the central and northern regions where these vulnerable children are cared for until they can be returned to relatives or placed with foster/adoptive parents.

Of the babies admitted before Tiyamike, 28 have been returned to relatives, 40 have been placed with new foster/adoptive families, 19 are currently in the nursery and 12 have passed away.

It all started in February 2000. While on retreat with her husband, Nancy Dimmock said the Lord gave her a vision of caring for infants, and she began asking people who worked in orphan care in Malawi, "What happens to abandoned/orphaned infants?" The universal answer was: "They usually perish."

Then the vision started to become a reality. While visiting a Malawian village the Dimmocks were told of an orphaned infant girl whose mother had passed away seven months before. They found her emaciated and very listless, sitting on her great-aunt's lap and learned that she was more than two years old, although she looked like a 6-month old baby. Through the government social welfare of-



fice, they took her in as foster parents and nursed her back to health, ultimately adopting her and naming her Alifa, (from Alpha in English), which means "the first" – she was God's first in bringing the Crisis Nursery ministry into being.

"We learned about caring for a very fragile child, and we got to know the people and the process through adopting Alifa," Nancy said. "The experience helped me see that God had a plan for intervening and giving some of these babies a chance at life."

The first "official" baby admitted to the Crisis Nursery was Angelina, in October of 2002. More soon followed. During the next two years 40 babies were cared for in cribs that lined the Dimmocks' living room walls. Nancy said one of the biggest challenges during that time was having enough physical and emotional energy to care for her own family of seven children plus the extra infants.

"Their care and their futures were my responsibility and it was a heavy load at times," she said. "But then I would remember that God had called me to do this, and it was ultimately His responsibility. This always helped to ease the pressure. I just laid the needs before Him – more help, a house, more money, favor with Social Welfare, more foster parents – and He always came through."

Yet, despite the encouraging progress and growth, there have been plenty of difficult moments. Twelve babies have died, and each passing caused great sadness.

"The death of a baby is very hard to handle," Nancy said, "especially if they have been generally healthy and one has given them lots of love and attention. But the relatives of the children are very understanding and appreciative of our efforts. The saddest ones are the ones that have no relatives and are buried in the city plot. We are their only family and we cry plenty of tears on their behalf."

Formal foster care and adoption are still relatively strange ideas in Malawi, and yet, as word of the opportunity to foster a child through the Crisis Nursery has spread, more foster and adoptive parents have stepped forward to take children. The longest a child has stayed at the Crisis Nursery is 14 months.

In July 2004 the Nursery moved out of the Dimmocks' living room into spacious, new accommodations. Many generous donations, from within Malawi, from churches in the U.S., and elsewhere made it possible to build a three bedroom house, which can house up to 25 babies at a time.

The center now has a staff of fifteen, which includes a new social worker/director. All of the staff, whether nanny, housekeeper, grounds keeper or Social Worker, act as mothers and fathers to the babies. It is a place of joy and caring. Yes, the Crisis Nursery's hundredth baby was well-named. There is much to be thankful for. God has been amazingly faithful.



Alifa Dimmock, "the first," as she is today - a happy, healthy seven-year-old.