

# Planting His Word ...

## One Seed at a Time



By Melissa McCrory Hatcher

When planning my enormous Lutheran wedding, my mother and I had laundry lists of things to get done: pick out dresses, cakes, flowers, and favors. But in lieu of handing out the usual favors of candy or picture frames, my now husband and I decided we should donate money to a charity in honor of our guests. And we both knew right away which organization we would choose ...

The seed for that wedding decision was planted years before. After my first trip to Africa with the Mid-South District, I was convinced that the *only* thing that would change the lives of the impoverished children whose plight had broken my heart was a Christ-centered education. No amount of money, clothes, or medical supplies we left behind would make enough of a difference. My search began for organizations that provided education to children around the world.

*[Photo] Edie Jorns with a scholarship student at Redeemer of the World Lutheran School, Santiago Zamora, Guatemala.*

First, I stumbled upon the United Nations' Web site, where I learned these facts: because many countries lack free public education, 100 million children are not in school around the world; and more children are *out* of school in Africa than *in* school in America.

I continued my online search and stumbled upon the Children's Christian Concern Society's Web site, purely by accident, only to find a familiar purple cross! I had almost resigned myself to the idea that I might have to give support to one of those celebrity-driven charities frequently promoted in the media, so I was overjoyed to find that there was an official LCMS-recognized service organization (RSO) that supported Christian education for children in 16 countries all around the world. This same surprise was echoed by guests at my wedding. "If only I'd known there was a Lutheran organization like this!" was a common refrain throughout the night.

The Children's Christian Concern Society, originally created by Jim and Edie Jorns to find persons to sponsor a child at a boarding school in Zacapa, Guatemala, for a year, now sponsors schools in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Venezuela, Bolivia, Mexico, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Chad, Paraguay, Thailand, and Bethlehem, Palestine. Over 12,700 children are educated and learn about Jesus, including those attending schools in Sierra Leone, recipients of the 2005–2007 LWML mission grant "Lutheran Teachers in Sierra Leone."



A year ago in St. Louis, I finally had the opportunity to meet face-to-face Edie Jorns — the woman whose mission vision so deeply touched me — and I also learned her story began the same as mine: in a Lutheran elementary school. Edie explained to me that every day at St. John Lutheran School in Topeka, Kansas, her sixth grade teacher, Carl Wisch, read stories of Lutheran missionaries serving around the world. Edie shared with me that she believed “a seed was planted” in her as a schoolgirl to tell people about Jesus in far-off lands.

After graduating from Kansas State University, marrying a farmer named Jim, and having three children, Edie attended an LWML district convention in Kansas City. The seed that was planted long ago began to stir within her. She knew that the Lord was preparing her “for something more.”

Jim had been teaching agriculture for several years when he read a call for an agriculture missionary in a 1963 issue of *The Lutheran Witness*. The only catch: it was in Guatemala. Edie told me she remembers thinking, “Where is Guatemala?” After thoughtful prayer, Edie, Jim, and their three children moved to Zacapa, Guatemala, in July 1964. Speaking very little Spanish, Edie bravely set out alongside her husband to spread the word of Jesus to the people in that part of Central America.

In the mornings her three children would go to a Lutheran grade school, and in the afternoons she would teach them in her home. In the evenings, however, Edie would go with her local pastor to the villages to work with the children while he visited with the adults. Edie found the children to be patient and eager to learn, but she was shocked to find out that many did not attend school. Why would bright children not attend school? Simply put, there were no schools in their area. As a teacher, Edie felt compelled to help them, but she wasn't sure how.

During their first year in Guatemala, Jim traveled to a distant fishing village where he met a ten-year-old girl named Gloria de Jesús Garcia, who had never attended school. Gloria made an impression on the Jorns family, and they began to wonder how they could help her. Edie thought about all of the children she worked with in the villages who, like Gloria, had no schools in their area. Edie and Jim prayed to their heavenly Father for direction and came to



*The Jorns family in Guatemala in the mid-1960s [top]  
Edie with Dan Murphy at Christ the Saviour Lutheran School,  
Puerto Barrios, Guatemala [middle]  
Edie and Gloria, now grown [bottom]*

realize that the solution was quite simple — a boarding school! Edie’s plan was that “children could live in the boarding school and go back to their villages on the weekends.” The hope became a reality in April 1968, when — thanks to God’s many blessings, community hard labor, and donations from the Jorns’s friends in the United States — a boarding school was dedicated for 30 children in Zacapa. With the school building completed and ongoing monthly financial support in place, Edie returned to her former life in the States with her family.

But the seeds that were planted kept sprouting! Little Gloria, who was the spark behind Edie’s idea, grew up and married a fellow student at the boarding school. He became a Lutheran pastor, and they wanted to start a boarding school in their region of Guatemala. CCCS soon spread throughout Central America and the world.

With thanksgiving to God, the efforts begun all those years ago by the Jorns continue to bear fruit. Edie recently had the privilege of attending the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the boarding school in Zacapa. The celebration took place at City Hall, with a former scholarship student — and now Lutheran pastor — as the preacher. The school that began with 30 students is now the center of the Lutheran Church in Guatemala. Luis Jasinto, a graduate of the Zacapa boarding school, currently serves as the President of the National Church.

But it all started with a Lutheran woman, a teacher, in Guatemala. As a young girl sitting in her sixth grade classroom at St. John Lutheran School, Edie could never have imagined the many, many children she would teach about Jesus.

A verse that has inspired Edie throughout the years is Mark 4:8: *But a few seeds did fall on good ground where the plants grew and produced thirty or sixty or even a hundred times as much as was scattered* (CEV). May the Holy Spirit continue to bless the seeds that Edie planted, and may hearts and minds everywhere receive the message of salvation in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and grow in that faith.

*Melissa McCrory Hatcher, a University of Memphis Ph.D. candidate in English specializing in Children’s Literature, has had the opportunity to travel to almost 20 countries on mission trips with her husband, an LCMS pastor, including two trips to Tanzania that were funded in-part by local LWML groups.*



*Edie in Guinea, West Africa [top]*

*Edie celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Zacapa Boarding School with its first Director, Rev. Ciro Mejia, the first national Lutheran pastor in Central America [second]*

*Edie at a Lutheran Church in Dhaka, Bangladesh [third]*

*Former students — now working professionals — with Edie in San Pedro Sula, Honduras [bottom]*