

**Bennett & Idong Ekandem**  
MSC Missionaries in Georgia, USA

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This month I would like to reflect with you, on the beginnings of our ministry and show the comparison with what is happening today. A little over five years ago, we were just starting out with big ideas of what we thought God wanted us to do, but with few resources. We had a lot of kids but almost no volunteers to help tutor many needy immigrant families - with only Idong, me, and a handful of prayer partners to assist them.



Hardly anyone knew about us. There were no weekend events, no youth groups to come in and spend time with our children, few partners to share in the ministry.

When I look back over the years and see what God has done in this ministry and in the lives of the children and their families, I marvel, because only He could have accomplished what I see happening today. Now we have churches and other organizations in partnership with us, weekend and holiday events put on by various church groups, college students coming at spring break, youth groups coming in the summer, many volunteers (although we can never have too many), beautiful homelike facilities created by our homeschool families and other volunteers, a waiting list to get into our after-school tutoring program, a music program, and a soccer team, just to name a few of our blessings.

My greatest thrill is to watch the children grow up and see the changes in their lives. I have seen these children as preschoolers grow into middle-schoolers and some into high-schoolers. Many of them came directly from the war-torn countries of Africa and the Middle East. Most could only count on the fingers of their two hands, could not speak a word of English, and of course couldn't read. Some were unruly; some were shy, distant, with vacant eyes. Who knows what they had experienced before they came here?



Now the children come in smiling and laughing, high-fiving, and hugging. Those who still don't speak English understand the language of love, and they come, even when they have no homework. The atmosphere is one of love, love expressed by the Holy Spirit through all of our volunteers.

I had the opportunity this week to talk privately with one of our fourth-grade boys after everyone else had left for the day. He said to me, “Mr. Bennett, I don’t know where I would be without you. You’ve made me want to do my best and be somebody someday.”



He didn’t just mean me; he meant the ministry, the volunteers who have spent countless hours with him helping him with homework, projects, and just loving him. Our rooms at Willow Branch are like a haven to him and to others. Last year I had to ask him not to come back to the program for several months. He was disruptive, had a bad attitude, and was, we heard, a leader of a gang at his school. But now he is one of our top students. Love made the change in him, the love of Jesus. When I hear something like this and see the happy faces of the children, it makes me want to go the extra mile to do whatever else I can do to help them.

All of our programs are ultimately geared toward leading the children and their families to Jesus. Many children attend the Wednesday night Bible Study, including some who are Muslim. Their mothers are waiting on the other side of the room to pick them up afterwards, all the while hearing what the Bible teachers are saying. These teachers pull no punches! They teach the Word of God dynamically; they and the children pray together and individually. These moms hear their own children pray to Jesus. In the past Muslim parents probably would have pulled their children out of our program because we teach in His name. We have had some kids cover their ears when His name is mentioned, because this is what they’ve been taught to do. But now the parents are seeing the transformation of their children. They are listening. God is working behind the scenes. We rejoice in advance, believing that God is drawing these people close to His kingdom.

We have certainly not arrived yet. Please don’t think that we don’t need you. We need your presence, your prayers, and your provision. We may have enough volunteers one day and not enough the next. People have to drop out from time to time because of other commitments. Some move away. In this newsletter we wanted to take a look with you at where we started and where we are today. What a difference Love makes!

Jesus said, “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” In whatever way you have participated in this ministry, you have blessed the Lord Himself and will be blessed by Him.

God bless you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bennett Ekandem". The signature is stylized and written in cursive.

Bennett Ekandem

*Please support our ministry!*

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