

Led to Tend to the Sick in Mind and Spirit

The "Chima Education Fund"

by Donald Laitin & Heather Anne Lambert

"What do you think I should do?" Chima Nwogwugwu showed his acceptance letter for the special education degree course at Texas Southern University to a Yonge Street Friend. It was the first step in Chima's dream to bring back the training and education that would help the people of his small village in Nigeria.

Chima is a member of Port Harcourt Worship Group in Nigeria, where he works with people who are suffering from mental illness or disability. When Chima graduated in theology at a seminary, he decided that instead of becoming a priest he felt led to help the suffering people of his village. The centre he works in is supported by the Methodist church in that village but, although they are able to improve the conditions in small ways, they lack the training and education required to give these people the help they really need. Some of the mentally ill face appalling situations and many of the women are abused and forced to endure prostitution and rape. Chima wanted to be able to do more.

Chima decided to volunteer at L'Arche Daybreak, an organization founded by Jean Vanier in France that is dedicated to helping mentally challenged people. Through his work at L'Arche, Chima has expanded his practical knowledge and skills, which he can take back to Nigeria.

However, the Special Education degree course offers Chima and the people in his small village the training and knowledge needed to deal more effectively with the challenges there. That's why, with Friends' guidance, Chima decided to write a letter to YSMM Clerk requesting spiritual and financial support for his first year at Texas Southern University.

YSMM, after prayerful discernment of costs and the long-term commitment involved, approved a minute to undertake receiving donations and guarantee payment of \$10,000. (Can.) for the first academic year only. These funds were raised within the Meeting and Chima's university education was launched, with the valuable assistance of Canadian Yearly

Meeting Friends Foreign Missionary Board and its Clerk, Jean Dean, who transferred funds to the university. Chima's visa was approved and his sister guaranteed his living costs, which are estimated at approximately \$6,000 (US). After flying home to arrange for a four-year absence, Chima arrived in Houston early this year to begin his education at Texas Southern University.

Chima is currently living with Friends of Live Oak Meeting in Houston. He can begin to work off-campus this November and will be taking a summer course through June. His tuition, fees and books for the fall and spring of 2001 - 2002 will be approximately \$12,000. (Can.). Chima has applied for a Federal grant, which, if approved, will bring his tuition costs down 60-70% for the fall semester. However, Chima still requires funding to realize his dream and help the people of his village.

Chima is a determined and spiritual person who is willing to work hard. He is seeking support where he can, but the financial burden of 2001 - 2002 education expenses is a pressing reality. He will need to find that money to continue this acutely needed education.

An oversight committee has been nominated by YSMM to continue to respond to Chima's needs, but more funding is needed to help Chima with expenses for the coming school year. Our hope is that Friends, who are able, will be generous in giving financial and spiritual support to Chima so that he can continue this education, which is so vital to the people of his small village in Nigeria.

Donations to the Chima Education Fund can be sent to the attention of the Clerk of Finance Committee for Yonge Street Monthly Meeting, Dan Poisson at 221 Hodgson, Newmarket ON L3Y 1E 3, 416-824-8921, Daniel.Poisson@cibc.com.

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