



# WOMEN WITH A CALLING TO SERVE

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Wende is the name of a group of 26 women (pictured below) who have joined hands with a goal to improve their



livelihoods and reach out to the needy around them. Wende is a Kihehe (a local ethnic language) word for Upendo (Kiswahili word for LOVE). These women have been joined in God's love to help each other and the communities around them. It's one of the groups we work with under the Iringa Diocese of the Lutheran Church. The two white ladies in the picture are my friends Donna and Gayle from Michigan (USA), and during their visit to see me and my work in October, I took them to the Wende group and by the end of the visit, they were given honorary memberships.

Wende members are committed to helping women headed households, orphans left by those who have died of HIV/AIDS, and home-based care for people living with AIDS. To get started with raising financial resources to accomplish their community outreach goals, the women started with savings from their small businesses and from their jobs. Some of them are primary school teachers, a couple are nurses, and others have small businesses that range from raising chickens, dairy cows or goats to baking and selling their baked products to buying and selling in market places, etc.

When the women assessed their individual incomes from their various activities, they thought it wise to first boost their own businesses through small loans from their savings after which they would start contributing towards their community

projects. At the time of the last visit, the women had saved Tshs. 500,000/ (about US\$ 415) and some of them had taken loans and invested in their businesses. The group is well organized and CRWRC has committed to walking with them through the community projects. The honorary members have also committed to helping Wende group members to attain their goal.

During a study tour to HIV/AIDS projects and other women's groups in Dar-es-Salaam last week, three representatives who came for the tour learned how to prepare nutritious food for people living with AIDS among other ailments and situations. The three went back renewed, and recommitted themselves to serving their people as God would want them. We need more groups like Wende, and when we all join hands, we reach a little further in the fight against HIV/AIDS and in reducing high levels of poverty.

## 2006 - A year of challenges and God's presence

It's that time of the year when I wrap up 11 months of work and go home to be with family and friends. I am grateful to my Lord and Saviour for being present in my life and in my work. It is a year that had many discouraging moments, yet a year with many blessings!

Whoever thought mission work was an easy job got it all wrong. This year, I have been taken to a court of law for trying to convert people into Christianity; I have been threatened with expulsion from the country by partner people; partner people have sought witchcraft charms to destroy me; people have tried to spread false rumours, we have had no electrical power for seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.; no running water for days, and many other trials. What has encouraged me so much is how close God has been during these discouraging times. Notes I have received from friends and colleagues have been just words of reassurance of God's presence. And when people around me thought I would be affected psychologically or

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spiritually, they have found me strong and serving. I have told them that my God is not like the electricity company that keeps switching off power. I have remained connected and switched on to my God through trying times, and I have found strength, energy encouragement, and joy to keep serving Him!

Some people are not comfortable when we pray during meetings, training sessions and visits with the community people. We have the light and we cannot cover it! Others do not want to be accountable and transparent. We serve God with integrity! But not all people want to see the light or want to be held accountable. That's how I have met resistance.

I want to thank all of you who have been with me in thought and in prayer. Some of you have visited me this year and have seen our work, some of you have continued to support our ministry in Tanzania – to you all, I say “*thank you.*” It's my prayer that you will enjoy this Christmas season and that you will keep thinking of and praying for me.

In our Lord's service

***Margaret Njuguna***

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