

Grandmother Has Led Thousands to Christ on the Mission Field

Gwen Edland describes book of Acts-style miracles when recounting her ministry travels to more than 40 nations

Instead of relaxing in retirement, a 70-year-old Nebraska grandmother has become a globetrotting evangelist, willing to share the gospel even in the world's more dangerous places.

Sometimes teaming up with the Omaha Rapid Response Team to offer food and supplies, other times going off on her own, Gwen Edland has prayed with thousands to receive Christ in more than 40 nations, including Iraq, China and Russia. A registered nurse, certified teacher and licensed pastor, Edland has given away countless copies of the Jesus video and the evangelistic Step Up to Life (SUTL) booklet, which has been translated into 28 languages.

Despite the danger she sometimes faces, Edland believes she is serving out her life's purpose. A widowed mother of four and grandmother of 12, the Canadian native once prayed that God would send her to places where people have not heard about Jesus. It seems her request was granted, though her first missions trip wasn't exactly to reach a remote people group deep within the 10/40 Window.

Instead, in 1991 she traveled to Sweden, where she said God miraculously taught her to speak Swedish and she preached the gospel to everyone who would listen. "All people have a right—it's their birthright—to know their Creator," Edland said.

A member of Trinity Interdenominational Church in Omaha, Neb., Edland accompanied a Baptist medical team to Hinche, Haiti, in 2000, 2003 and 2004. They assisted a Haitian dentist and doctor and distributed Creole Bibles, eyeglasses and medicines. She reported that 200 people made decisions for Christ each trip. Among them was a voodoo priest who accepted Christ in 2000 and subsequently brought 25 of his warlock friends to hear about Jesus. In 2003 Edland saw him again, cleaned up and studying the Bible with other former warlocks.

"[Edland] is constantly encouraging people to reach out to the poorest of the poor in the world," said Trinity missions pastor Connie Bissen. "This woman will travel anywhere in the world in order to share the love of Jesus. What a beautiful example she has been to many in our congregation as well as our city."

Edland accompanied a Tennessee medical team to Recife, Brazil, in 2003. The group visited men sentenced to life in prison for murder and their involvement in gang violence. That year, she said, 480 inmates came to Christ; the following year she reported 850 converts.

In Rio de Janeiro, Edland and her translator went into the darkest ghetto, where the police wouldn't go. "You need this. Jesus loves you," she told the drug lords as she handed out SUTL. "They started reading it on the spot," she said.

Edland has taught English in Chinese universities nearly every summer since 1994. She said the Bible is her textbook, and she shares Jesus with everyone she meets. One year a university president affiliated with the Communist Party accepted Christ after he and Edland read SUTL together during lunch.

“Being with Gwen is like walking with a modern-day Moses because it seems like the sea just parts and we walk right through,” said Dave Collins, who heads Trinity’s pastoral care ministry and has accompanied Edland on trips to China. “It’s an astounding experience. She’s so dedicated and so focused in her devotion to the Lord and the Chinese people.”

And the testimonies keep coming. From her Omaha home, where she hosts parties and Bible studies for international students, Edland describes one adventure after another, many ending with dramatic accounts of miracles or salvation experiences.

On their first trip to Iraq, Edland said, one of the intercessors began praying intently as she handed out SUTL booklets on Iraqi streets. The police came to arrest her, but then stopped suddenly and left.

In Brazil, a missions team prayed for a deaf and mute teenager who came to their medical clinic. Edland anointed his tongue, and his ears popped and he began to speak.

When Edland accompanied an international disaster team to Iraq in 2004, thieves shot a hole in their car door as they traveled between the Jordanian airport and Baghdad. “God kept us safe,” Edland said. On their return trip she said there was a dense fog around their car until they passed through the area where the shooting occurred.

This year Edland journeyed with the Omaha Rapid Response Team to southern Asia after a tsunami devastated the region. She helped build shelters until pain in her hip sent her to the hospital. While there, she said she led the head of the

orthopedic department to salvation.

“I remember Jesus said, ‘If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto Me,’” she said. “If people don’t hear about Jesus, they will go to Hell, and that is unthinkable.”

Audrey Hebbert in Omaha, Neb.