

There's No Such Thing As Retirement

AT 80 YEARS OLD, ELEANOR WORKMAN IS STILL FEEDING, HOUSING AND TEACHING HUNDREDS OF ORPHANS IN HAITI.

Childhood is supposed to be a carefree, idyllic time, a time of making happy memories to cherish and remember throughout life. Not so for the children of Haiti, where most youngsters, even 4- and 5-year-olds, can be found carrying water jugs on their heads, baby-sitting, running errands or cleaning house. Statistics show that in this, the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, about half the children die before age 5 because of starvation, malnutrition or exposure to disease and inclement weather. Many are abandoned by their parents or orphaned and left to roam the streets, begging for food.

But amid the destitution, political upheaval, voodoo worship and witchcraft that hangs like a heavy, dark cloud over this small island in the West Indies, there is an angel by the name of Eleanor "Mom" Workman who relies on the power of God to save—both physically and spiritually—as many of Haiti's children as possible.

The energetic 5-foot-4-inch, 120-pound Eleanor is 80 years old and doesn't plan on slowing down. In the 27 years she's lived in Haiti, she's accomplished, virtually singlehandedly, what it would take most government agencies ages to do.

Her five-acre Christian Haitian Outreach (CHO) compound in Mariani, located just outside Port-au-Prince, houses an orphanage, a school, dormitories, offices, a church, a playground and a soccer field. The orphanage has been home to a total of about 1,800 children, ranging from newborns to teen-agers.

Many of the children are brought to CHO by area doctors as

seemingly hopeless cases. But during daily worship, called Baby Prayer Time, everyone from the youngest baby to the oldest adult staffer gathers together, and Eleanor teaches them how to pray and beseech God for divine healing.

In Haiti education is not mandatory, and parents who are unemployed are unable to send their children to school because they can't pay required fees or buy school uniforms. To assist such parents and their children, Eleanor fills her school—current enrollment is about 600—with the poorest of the poor.

Many graduates have gone on to college or trade school while others joined CHO's staff. One bright young man was accepted into medical school but lacked funding. Eleanor dipped into her own pension fund to pay his tuition. He is now doing his internship and plans to return to Mariani to run a much-needed medical clinic.

Eleanor first came to Mariani when she was 52—an age when most folks are slowing down in preparation for retirement. But upon seeing the rampant poverty, she soon found herself running a makeshift school under a tree in an empty lot.

"I didn't have any money or funds," says Eleanor, "but I was so concerned about these suffering children—I just began to love them. I put them under the tree and started teaching them the alphabet." Eleanor showed up each day with a lesson and whatever food she could find.

When asked to care for 6-week-old twins who had been found on a garbage dump with their terminally ill mother, she rented a house and started her orphanage.

"A doctor asked me what I was going to do for the babies—they were very ill," Eleanor recounts. "I told him about the healing power of the Great Physician, Jesus."

The doctor didn't offer much hope. But before the mother died,

she signed her babies over to Eleanor. Today they're 13 years old and living happily with their adoptive family in New Jersey.

CALLED BY GOD Like the children of Haiti, Eleanor didn't have the happiest childhood or young adulthood. She grew up in a New Jersey home with an alcoholic father. Her mother made sure her children were in church every time the doors were open. It was there that Eleanor developed a love for singing and later got saved and filled with the Holy Ghost.

She married at age 27 to a man she met at church. "I married him not because I was in love but because he and the church elders thought we should," Eleanor says. By the time the couple moved to Los Angeles, the young bride was acquainted with her husband's unfaithfulness and violent temper.

Eleanor started fasting and praying. When her husband left to take a job back East, never offering an explanation or penny of support, Eleanor accepted it as God's intervention. Years later she found out he had died.

For income, Eleanor converted her Los Angeles home into a successful, licensed day care center. "It seemed I had been born with a skill for caring for children," she says. However, there was a still small voice speaking to Eleanor about the mission field.

Faced with financial burdens, Eleanor went on a 21-day fast that culminated with God's instructing her, she says, to sell her house. Unsure she had truly heard from God, Eleanor went on a longer fast that ended with the same instruction.

Finally, she decided to put out a fleece. "I told the Lord, 'OK, I'll let the realtor list my house, but I won't let him put up a For Sale sign. Only one person may look at it, and if that person isn't interested, then I'll know this wasn't of God. I'll know the devil is trying to trick me.'"

The one person who looked at Eleanor's home decided to buy it.

Eventually Eleanor met missionaries from Haiti who invited her to come and see their work. The experience changed her life. "It made me want to give my whole life to sharing the gospel with these people," she says.

Today, when Eleanor is not in Haiti, she is traveling around North America, speaking and singing at churches and groups to raise funds for her ministry.

She leaves the CH0 compound in good hands, employing 113 staffers: nine laundresses, plus teachers, nurses, cooks, housekeepers, janitors, guards, electricians, carpenters and painters.

"The children have great constant care," says Eleanor. "I've hired my neighbors. They're very happy to be here since there are no other jobs in the area."

Some may say Eleanor stands against insurmountable odds, but she fights the problems in Haiti with all she's got: prayer. "There is no defeat in the Lord Jesus Christ," she says. "I don't have money, but I have a wonderful faith. My greatest joy is to see these precious children grow up and become such vital members of God's kingdom."

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