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### **Gardner-Webb Dimensions Featuring Olive Aneno Leaves Lasting Impression**


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# Gardner-Webb Dimensions Featuring Olive Aneno Leaves Lasting Impression

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Office of University Communications

September 13, 2013

## *Survivor of Hardships in Uganda Gives Credit to God and Child Advocacy Group*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Officials at Gardner-Webb believe students will likely never forget one of the most powerful messages ever conveyed during a Dimensions program. On Sept. 10, Olive Aneno offered personal testimony on how God redeemed her from childhood trauma and heartache and gave her an overall sense of inner peace, in part through the efforts of Compassion International, a Christian child advocacy group.

Aneno, a native of Uganda, spent many years of her childhood as an orphan and had to learn how to survive on her own. Aneno was afraid, empty, sexually molested at the age of six, and on the run from a ruthless militant group that terrorized villages by kidnapping children and forcing them to become slaves and soldiers. Although she became a believer at the age of five, Aneno said these frightening circumstances caused her to doubt God at the time.

“My defenses were there in part because I was so traumatized at a young age,” said Aneno. “I’m so happy that I attended a local church (in Uganda’s capital city, Kampala) that offered one of Compassion International’s child development centers. In 1988, I was sponsored by an Australian couple that brought hope into my life.” The couple, members of the mega church Hillsong, located in Sydney, Australia, demonstrated consistent emotional and financial support of Aneno and ultimately became instrumental factors in her future success.

Founded in 1952, Compassion International aims to release children from poverty in Jesus’ name. According to their website, they are Christ-centered, child-focused, church-based, and committed to integrity. Compassion International currently provides sponsorship support for nearly 1.2 million children in 25 countries around the world and offers such services as food, health, hygiene, and even counseling.

“I was a beneficiary of the support that Compassion provides to a child, both physically and spiritually. Once a child is sponsored and shown God’s love, it becomes about the relationship between them and their sponsor. I have never forgotten receiving a letter from them that simply said ‘we love you’,” said Aneno.

Aneno’s athletic ability enabled her to obtain a volleyball scholarship at South Carolina State University, located in Orangeburg, S.C., where she earned a bachelor’s degree in social work. She then attended the University of Georgia (Augusta, Ga.) where she earned her master’s.

Today, Aneno is employed as a social worker and helps children with special needs through the Georgia Dept. of Family and Children Services. She also serves as a volunteer speaker for Compassion International.

“I work with lots of children who have severe and emotional behaviors. Looking back, I can say this is what I was meant to do,” she reflected. “I received compassion and now I feel it’s my responsibility to pass it on. When someone believes in you and you show them Christ it makes all the difference in the world.”

She hopes that students who attended Dimensions walked away with a desire to help others in the name of Christ. “When you give of yourself that is true giving. I hope I’ve inspired the students to realize that giving of ones self is a way of worshipping Christ,” she declared. “When we follow Jesus, we are at peace.”

Gardner-Webb University’s Dimensions programs are free and open to the public. The goal of Dimensions is to enhance the spiritual, intellectual, and cultural life at the University and also to promote a sense of community. Dimensions programs are held on Tuesday’s at 9:25 a.m. in Paul Porter Arena, located in the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center (LYCC). More information is available at 704-406-4277.

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for career success and for engaged, responsible citizenship in their professional, civic, and spiritual communities.*