

# ORPHAN GRAIN TRAIN

**Relief for Human Need Worldwide**

## 'Grain Train on the Move

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## Harold Gessner Couldn't Say "No"

By SHERYL SCHMECKPEPER, *Norfolk Daily News*

Harold Gessner couldn't say "no" when Sam Freeman appeared on the doorstep of his North Dakota home asking for help for his fellow Liberians.

The African country was in the midst of a Civil War, and many of the people had been forced to abandon their homes and flee to refugee camps. They were in desperate need of clothing, food and medical supplies.

Freeman had gathered enough money to come to the United States in search of aid. He was familiar with America, having attended a Bible college here and was now the minister of a non-denominational church.

His contacts in New York didn't provide the needed support, and he was about to give up and go home when he learned of Harold and Avonne Gessner and the Orphan Grain Train.

"He (Freeman) spent time with us on our farm and we decided to send him a container of 40,000 pounds of North Dakota wheat and 6,000



Harold Gessner with some of the children in Monrovia, Liberia.



Children at Harold Gessner Lutheran School during a break from class.

pounds of used clothing," Mrs. Gessner said.

The Gessners had experience in shipping food around the world. In 1992, the couple arranged for a container of North Dakota wheat to be sent to Latvia, which had just gained its independence from the Soviet Union.

While in Latvia, Gessner met the Rev. Ray Wilke of Norfolk, who urged him to continue his mission work and introduced him to the Orphan Grain Train.

So when Freeman came calling in 1996, Gessner turned to the Orphan Grain Train for help in getting the food, clothing and medical supplies to the minister, who was often in danger

of being killed.

"Sam spent a lot of time dodging bullets and hiding in swamps trying to save his family during Liberia's civil war," Gessner said.

Founded in 1822 as a refuge for former American slaves, Liberia currently has a population of around 3.5

million. The tiny country, comparable in size to Tennessee, lies along the Atlantic Ocean on the southern part of West Africa. The country has a long history of political unrest and turmoil, leading to the poverty that haunts its people.

In the past 13 years, Gessner and the Orphan Grain Train have shipped about 15 containers to Freeman, and the Gessners have visited the country three times.

"Sam Freeman led the way for the North Dakota division of the Orphan Grain Train to support the Evangelical Temple Lutheran Church and an Orphan Grain Train Medical Clinic," Mrs. Gessner said.

Plus, around 400 students attend the H.A. Gessner Lutheran School,

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# Harold Gessner Couldn't Say "No"

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and around 800 people receive medical care at the clinic every month. Three years ago, Liberians elected Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as their president, and since then, a fragile peace has prevailed. But much work remains before the people are truly independent.

"It is a very difficult situation," said Freeman in a phone interview from Liberia. "We are emerging out of a civil war, but the people are sick and

in need of clothing. They (the Orphan Grain Train) help us to reach out to the people in need."

There have been ancillary benefits as well.

Freeman and the Gessners have helped establish the Lutheran Church of Liberia, and Freeman is a called pastor at the church.

And Gessner, who retired from farming 15 years ago, now serves as the manager of the Orphan Grain

Train's North Dakota division.

"I'm not a rocking chair person," the 76-year-old said. "In my later years, I thought I'd like to do something meaningful."

(Editor's note: During 2009, Orphan Grain Train has shipped "Kids Against Hunger" food packets, clothing, medical and school supplies to Liberia.)

## Miss America Visits Camp Restore

Miss America 2009 Katie Stam, an LCMS Lutheran, visited New Orleans and RAI Ministries' Camp Restore October 7 to volunteer, take part in a house blessing, and speak to local schoolchildren. To watch a video of Miss America's visit, go to [www.youtube.com/raiministries](http://www.youtube.com/raiministries).

Ms. Stam's blog includes this reflection on the day's activities: "I feel blessed to be able to give these homeowners a part of their life back, after such a devastating loss. I know just being there helped to lift their spirits."

Camp Restore and its sister, Camp Biloxi in Mississippi, continue to welcome mission-trip groups year-round to their Orphan Grain Train-equipped camps as they engage in restoration and community outreach projects on the Gulf Coast.



Katie Stam delivers a Welcome Home Pack to Gladys Hays at Miss Hays' newly restored home.



Rev. Scott Schmieding (left) leads a Christian house blessing as Katie Stam, Gladys Hays, and Rev. Kurtis Schultz participate.



Katie helped paint a room in Chiquita Day's home with other Camp Restore and Camp Biloxi volunteers. Miss Day is living with relatives while the restoration continues.

# What's "Grain" about Orphan Grain Train?

By Rev. Ray S. Wilke

I can still see the sights and smell the smells of rush hour in Manila, when everybody's going home or going to work. Skinny, little kids three feet tall with big brown eyes are squeezing between cars--sometimes there's only ten inches space. The traffic is intense. They're calling out "Opo! Tenapi opo! Tenapi opo!" And they rub their little bellies, usually bare bellies for boys and girls alike. "Please sir, give me bread." That image is so strong in my mind because I happen to know some of the numbers about what happens to those kids. When we were in the Philippines in the 1970's half the children that were born were dead by their fifth birthday because of upper respiratory diseases due to malnutrition.

I can still hear those pleadings in my ears. I can still hear the African children's pleadings in my ears as well. And sometimes it's intense. Sometimes it's too intense for me to think about for very long.

Back in 1992, when the Orphan Grain Train idea was just getting started, I was asked to come to Saint Louis to talk with Rev. Dr. Jack Preus. He had been the president of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod. He and about ten doctors were very interested in the medical part of the Orphan Grain Train idea. We talked the whole morning long. As the conversation went on Dr. Preus asked, "Tell me, Wilke, what's 'grain' about Orphan Grain Train?" (He called me Wilke because that's what he called me when he taught New Testament Introduction to second-year seminary students.)

His question forced me to think. What do we do? Deliver grain? When this idea was first beginning to develop, a lot of people were critical of the name, Orphan Grain Train. But that name was fixed in my brain

because I knew the stories about orphan trains that delivered children without parents to this part of the country. They are powerful, dramatic stories. So, I inserted "provision"--"grain"--into the phrase "orphan train." My original idea was to start a train in Canada and take it all the way to Houston, filled with grain. I knew farmers were zealous to help Russia as the Cold War was just then being dismantled. I personally was also zealous towards that idea. I knew that farmers, north to south, east to west, were, too.



"What's 'grain' about 'Grain Train?'" I knew I couldn't deliver grain, and hand it into the hands of these children. I said to Dr. Preus, "Just wait. I'm going to come back." With the help of Roland Collison we improvised a homemade flourmill from a leaf shredder. It made wonderful flour.

At the next meeting in Saint Louis I brought some loaves of freshly made whole wheat bread and cut the bread in slices, buttered them with sweet cream butter and passed them out to those eleven men, and they ate it. Then I said to them, "That's what's 'grain' about 'Orphan Grain Train.'" It's to feed the children, the starving children. Will you help me?" And Dr. Preus said, "I will most certainly help you."

Until the day of his death he worked for Orphan Grain Train and the children of the world who are

dying because they are poor and they don't have enough food. They don't have enough clothes, and they don't have any medical care at all. Only half of them ever go to school. They die from diseases every day that are preventable. We can do something about that, because Jesus said, "I am the bread of life, and I want you to be the heaven."

The whole Old Testament is full of the story of God's people who would not--help--their--poor--neighbor and for that the whole works went into captivity into Syria and Babylon. The text in the New Testament is strewn with information about how Jesus went about kneeling, mending, restoring, lifting up, giving sight, giving mobility, giving food, talking about the Bread of Life. Jesus preached a seamless fabric. It was not doctrine and teachings on the one hand, and serious talk about "help your brother" on the other hand. His fabric for the feeding of the 5,000 was without seam from beginning to end. He fed them, man, woman, and child--some fat, some skinny--some taking nourishment from the breast--he fed them all.

We're not doing that. We're not feeding them all. We're feeding ourselves. From the time the sun rose this morning, until it sets tonight, 26,575 children will breathe their last because they are poor.

You know that if an airplane carrying 260 people crashes, it's on every news channel. We want to know why and how, and we search the depths of the ocean to find the black box. There are "100 airliners crashing" per day, and there's not a thing on the news about it. The children die because they have cholera, because they don't have clean water. They die because they have malaria because they don't have mosquito nets. They die

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## What's "Grain" about Orphan Grain Train? *(continued from page 3)*

because they have tuberculosis because a third of the people on the planet are infected. They die because they have HIV that they caught from their momma in the birth process. The wife catches it from the father, and nobody knows that he's infected for three years and all the while that virulent disease goes on killing ten million a year. HIV has removed one whole generation from Africa and we could be doing something about it.

John Adams said, "Facts are stubborn things. They don't change according to our ability to stomach them." The whole Old Testament is full of how it is we are to care for our neighbor who's poor, even if he happens to be born in a different latitude from us. What was the cardinal sin of Sodom and Gomorrah? They were unwilling to take care of their poor. And it grew into sexual immorality. Consider Ezekiel chapter 16. Listen to what it says: "Now this

was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy." (NIV) God's chief complaint about his people in the Old Testament was not that they didn't worship. It was that they refused to help the poor who were their neighbors. Christ's chief complaint against his people in the New Testament was not that they lacked spirituality but that they refused to help the widow and the orphan. We are not excused anymore because we don't know it, because we know it very well.

When Jesus saw that horde of 5,000 coming toward him he had "compassion." That is a visceral word. It means that your guts hurt. Have you ever broken into tears--on the spot--with a skinny kid holding out his hand, or a mother holding her dead baby because there was no nourishment? If you have broken into

spontaneous tears over this it means that they're on your back porch too.

My mom used to take in bums at 512 Columbia Street in Horicon, Wisconsin. I think our house was marked and known, because she fed every bum who ever got off the tracks two blocks away. They came and she always invited them in to eat what we ate, but they never came in. They always sat on the back porch and they were always grateful. She was always glad she did it. She did the right thing.

With today's blessings of transportation, communication and the post-World War II abundance and affluence we enjoy we can help those in America and around the world who need provision--who need "grain." Nowadays we can see with our own eyes the needs of others, whether it is across town or across the globe. We can't say we don't know.

They're on our back porch too.

## Peace Lutheran Church in Greensburg Dedicated

Peace Lutheran Church in Greensburg, Kansas, dedicated its new building on Sunday, November 8, 2009. The Greensburg tornado--rated E5 with a mile-wide diameter--destroyed more than 95 per cent of the town and obliterated the original church building on May 4, 2007.

Thanks to a grant from LCMS World Relief and other generous Tornado Relief donors, Orphan Grain Train provided a 18-by-56-foot structure for Peace Lutheran to use during its rebuilding process.

Representatives from Orphan Grain Train at the church dedication included Vern and Wilma Steinman and Aaron and Laura Walter from Norfolk, Nebraska, and John and Joyce White from Stuttgart, Kansas.



Peace Lutheran's new home.



Members and guests visit after dedication.



Two other Greensburg congregations also used this modular structure as their temporary worship centers.



Nearby monument to the Greensburg residents who lost their lives in the May 4, 2007, tornado.

# Orphan Grain Train Annual Report

## Fiscal Year June 1, 2008 through May 31, 2009

With God's blessing and a generous outpouring of time, effort and contributions, Orphan Grain Train, Inc., is a hands-on international network of volunteers structured to bring help to human need here in America and around the world. Orphan Grain Train's physical effectiveness lies in its network of eighteen regional divisions across America. Volunteers collect, sort, restore and prepare for shipment educational material, medical equipment and supplies, food and climate-sensitive clothing. These materials are arranged for shipment and stored in warehouses located across the country.

Each year Orphan Grain Train distributes goods valued at more than 10 million dollars (U.S.) to its mission partners in America and around the world.

Recipients are cleared through their local jurisdictions to receive and helpfully distribute the goods. Checks and balances are in place to be sure that the goods are appropriately placed.

### Accomplishments During Fiscal-Year 2008-2009

Orphan Grain Train donors and volunteers filled 62 semi-loads of humanitarian aid and relief supplies for disaster relief and development projects in the U. S. and 66 more semi-loads to international recipients. Fifty-one smaller trailer-loads and vanloads were sent for flood and tornado relief in the U.S. Disaster Response

Semi-load shipments to the hurricane devastated areas of the U.S. Gulf Coast continued during 2009 with 10 semi-loads of aid delivered to relief camps and distribution centers. More than 127 pieces of

Orphan Grain Train equipment were in use throughout Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, including bedroom units, storage units, and shower and restroom units. Orphan Grain Train's 45-ft. kitchen trailer is used to provide three meals a day to volunteers at Camp Restore in New Orleans. These camps will continue to use Orphan Grain Train housing and equipment. They are organized to welcome volunteers year-round.

Orphan Grain Train's Indiana and Ohio Regional Divisions sent semi-loads and small trailer-loads of relief supplies to nearby flood recovery areas, continuing the response that began in 2007.

Other semi-loads were sent to American humanitarian missions such as Ysleta Mission and Cornerstone Children's Ranch on the Texas-Mexico border and to Native American nations through non-profit organizations in South Dakota and New Mexico.

### International Shipments

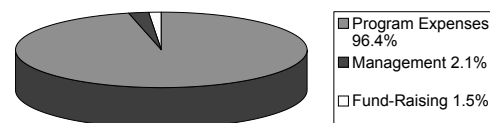
International relief items most requested are food, medical equipment, clothing, quilts, and relief supplies. Thirty-seven of the 66 foreign shipments in fiscal 2008-2009 went to humanitarian efforts in the republics of the former Soviet Union. Orphan Grain Train sponsors 54 orphanages, three hospitals and three prisons in Estonia, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, and Russia. These orphanages are part of Orphan Grain Train's Adopt an Orphanage sponsorship program whereby donors give monthly gifts for their Orphan Grain Train-sponsored orphanage, prison or hospital.

Orphan Grain Train has begun a pilot program in South Sudan, Africa, to provide a clinic and infirmary in the Upper Nile region. In connection

with the clinic, river transport will be provided make it possible to teach and supply clean water technology, school provisions, and agricultural development.

### Summary Financial Report From Orphan Grain Train, Inc., Audited Financial Statements for the Year Ended May 31, 2009:

Total support, revenues, and gains (losses):	\$11,158,028
Expenses Mission (Program Services):	10,752,680 (96.4% of total)
Administration:	234,764 (2.1% of total)
Fund Raising:	172,524 (1.5% of total)
Total for Fiscal 08-09:	\$11,159,968 (100.0% of total)



Ratio of expenses reported in Orphan Grain Train, Inc., Audited Financial Statements for the Year Ended May 31, 2009.

### Net assets, end of fiscal year:

Unrestricted:	\$2,292,698
Temporarily Restricted:	535,299
Permanently Restricted	20,000
Total net assets:	\$2,847,997

Learn more at [www.ogt.org](http://www.ogt.org).

### Did you know?

For more than 10 years, missionaries in Kyrgyzstan have provided medical care to the people in a mobile clinic shipped there by Orphan Grain Train.

For more on Grain Train efforts in Kyrgyzstan, go to [www.ogt.org/index.php/internationalefforts/asia\\_full/kyrgyzstan/](http://www.ogt.org/index.php/internationalefforts/asia_full/kyrgyzstan/)

## Our Mission:

In loving response to Christ, the Servant, the Orphan Grain Train movement encourages and enables God's people to share personal and material resources in bringing Christ's name and character to needy people both far and near.

Sometimes that character expresses itself as a word well spoken, sometimes as a bandage well applied, and sometimes as a child well fed.

## Global Outreach

In the past 17 years, the Orphan Grain Train has shipped 63,200,000 pounds of Bibles, clothing, food, medical supplies and much more to needy people living in all parts of the world.

In the past three years, those goods have gone to:

Liberia	Tajikistan
Madagascar	Uzbekistan
Nigeria	Vietnam
Sudan	Mexico
Tanzania	Belarus
Uganda	Latvia
Zimbabwe	Lithuania
Nicaragua	Moldova
Armenia	Russia
Azerbaijan	Ukraine
Georgia	Dominican Republic
India	Haiti
Kyrgyzstan	Guatemala

## Wisconsin Regional Division Annual Meeting

On Saturday, October 3, 2009, the Wisconsin Division of the Orphan Grain Train held its annual meeting at the Brakebush plant near Westfield, Wisconsin. About 120 Orphan Grain Train supporters attended the meeting. A business meeting was held followed by a review of five overseas shipments and 13 domestic shipments thus far in 2009.

Wisconsin reports that it has sent twenty-five 40-foot ocean freight containers to Kyrgyzstan since 2001. Rev. Bob and Mrs. Sue Pfeil, missionaries from Kyrgyzstan, reported to the convention that they would be attending the 10th Anniversary celebration of the Medical Semi-trailer which was shipped to Kyrgyzstan by Orphan Grain Train. Workers from this mobile medical van have thus far cared for some 250,000 children and women. Many elderly have received glasses through

the Eye Glass Clinic, and through the evangelist, many now know our loving Savior.

The other guest speakers was Rev. Gary Martin, from Iglesia Luterana Cristo El Salvador Mission in Del Rio, Texas. Wisconsin has sent over 85 semi-loads of humanitarian aid to Del Rio since 1997.

Pastor Martin shared how using Orphan Grain Train humanitarian supplies opens doors to people of that area. He shared a number of experiences where the Holy Spirit has worked through the Word to bring Good News and hope to people who are struggling. They have Bible study, Internet classes, youth-led VBS, and apartment ministry. He explained how music touches the heart and opens doors to the Gospel. Pastor Martin played the guitar and sang several songs during his presentation followed by questions and answers.



Rev. Gary Martin of Del Rio, Texas, leads Wisconsin volunteers in song.

Rev. Bob Pfeil and Mrs. Sue Pfeil gave a report on their work in Kyrgyzstan during the past decade.





# Orphan Grain Train Convention 2009

Three hundred sixty-four people attended the 11th annual Orphan Grain Train convention in Norfolk. Topics included Hurricane Katrina Relief, Hurricane Ike Relief, Greensburg Tornado Recovery, and ministries in Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and El Paso, Texas. Breakout sessions were a successful addition to the schedule, allowing special interest areas to be covered in small group settings.

A full-scale Volunteer Village displayed equipment returned from

Greensburg, Kansas, including a kitchen trailer, restroom trailer, bedroom unit, storage, frozen storage containers, and the Hammar trailer used to position them.

**Orphan Grain Train's next annual convention will be September 17 and 18, 2010, at Lutheran High School Northeast in Norfolk.** Please mark your 2010 calendars now! Details will be in future editions of this newsletter and at [www.ogt.org](http://www.ogt.org).



Volunteer semi-driver, Mike Widhalm of Hastings, Neb., used a 48-ft. storage container to demonstrate lifting and placement capabilities of the Orphan Grain Train Hammar trailer at September's convention.

# Gifts of grain for Orphan Grain Train

To make a gift of grain at your local elevator, simply instruct the grain elevator manager that Orphan Grain Train wishes to "sell the grain upon receipt." To do this, the grain elevator must create an account for Orphan Grain Train, Inc., to receive the in-kind donation. Then, a check for the net sale price and supporting details about the amount of grain and price at which it was sold should be sent from the elevator, directly to the address listed below, or, to the Orphan Grain Train regional satellite division of your choice.

Although in-kind gifts of commodities cannot be deducted like cash gifts, their cost of production may still be deducted.

(Please consult with your financial or tax advisor, as Orphan Grain Train, Inc. does not give tax or legal advice.)

Share the following note where you market your grain to create an in-kind gift for Orphan Grain Train. If you would let us know of your gift we'll be happy to let you know when the check arrives!

-----  
Please create an account for Orphan Grain Train, Inc., of Norfolk, Nebraska. Orphan Grain Train is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation organized under the statutes of the State of Nebraska for charitable humanitarian purposes.

Payee: Orphan Grain Train, Inc.  
P. O. Box 1466  
Norfolk, NE 68702-1466  
(402) 371-7393 phone  
(402) 371-7350 fax

Federal Employer Identification  
Number (EIN): 31-1614650  
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## Greatest Need

Every year, the Orphan Grain Train receives tons of clothing and other merchandise that is distributed to needy people throughout the world. However, some items are always in short supply.

- Those items include:
- Infants and children's clothing
  - Summer clothing for people of all ages
  - All-cotton underwear and socks for all ages
  - Quilts and comforters

## Orphan Grain Train

P.O. Box 1466  
Norfolk, NE 68702-1466

Telephone: 402-371-7393  
www.ogt.org

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## Miss America Visits Camp Restore



Chiquita Day greets Miss America, Katie Stam, and other volunteers from Camp Restore who worked at Miss Day's home this fall. (Story on page 2.)

## Lincoln Division has its own forklift

Warehouse manager LaVern Thomas and Lincoln Division chairman Elwyn "Swede" Glover pause by the division's first fork-lift. Paint and body shop labor were donated. Having a forklift and trained fork-lift operator helps minimize the number of times volunteers need to lift a box.

