

STORY ONE, WITH SIDEBAR:

Myanmar Connection: Thousands of Zomi people moving to Tulsa from Myanmar

Zomi people establish new homes near ORU



Saturday, April 13, 2013

By Bill Sherman

World Religion Writer

***Editor's note:** Tulsa World religion writer Bill Sherman recently returned from a nine-day trip to Myanmar, where he investigated the connection between Tulsa and the Zomi people of Chin State.*

CHIN STATE, Myanmar - A narrow, rutted, rocky road through steep mountain canyons is all that connects northern Chin State in Myanmar to the rest of the world.

From that isolated mountainous area, home of the Zomi ethnic group, have come 3,000 Tulsans.

They worship in a dozen Zomi churches in Tulsa, with services in their native dialect as well as Burmese and English. They work in Tulsa businesses, and their children attend public schools.

The Tulsa Zomi community is centered in the neighborhoods around Oral Roberts University. On any given day, they can be seen shopping in the Walmart at 81st Street and Lewis Avenue, or at Tulsa's two Zomi-owned stores, the OK Asian Market and Hornbill Oriental Market, both near ORU.

"We feel that ORU is the heart of the city," said the Rev. Kham Khai, pastor of the Myanmar Christian Church that meets at Victory Christian Center.

The Zomis are one of several ethnic groups in Myanmar. The nation formerly known as Burma is situated between China and India and until two years ago was under 50 years of a military dictatorship, isolated from the rest of the world and suffering from severe economic sanctions. Newly enacted democratic reforms are rapidly and dramatically changing the country of 60 million people.

About a third of the 300,000 Zomis live in nearby India, and the rest are from the northern section of Chin State in Myanmar.

Most are refugees

A few Zomis began coming to Tulsa three decades ago to attend ORU, but most of Tulsa's Zomis have come in the last five years as political or economic refugees.

Catholic Charities has been the primary agency receiving Burmese refugees in Tulsa.

"Tulsa is becoming a little diaspora for Burmese people in the United States," said Deacon Kevin Sartorius, executive director of Catholic Charities in Tulsa.

The agency's Migration Refugee Services works with the U.S. State Department to resettle refugees, and for the last five years in Tulsa, nearly all of them have been Zomi, he said.

"The Burmese people who come here are incredibly smart and hardworking and so appreciative," he said. "They're almost instantly contributing to society. It's very inspiring to see their dedication and perseverance."

About three times a week, Catholic Charities picks up incoming refugees at the Tulsa airport and helps them with housing, clothing, food and jobs.

Religion a factor

Religion has been one factor drawing Zomis to Tulsa.

Chin Do Kham, a native of Chin State who now lives in Tulsa, said that while most Burmese are Buddhists, the Zomis have been Christians for a century and feel comfortable in the Bible Belt.

He said the Zomi people have strong family ties, so that when one family member comes to Tulsa, other relatives often follow.

Amber Knecht, who supervises the refugee services at Catholic Charities, said Zomis are drawn to Tulsa because of their faith, and also by a relatively good job market and affordable living.

"Chin State is predominantly Christian, and the Zomis are very in tune with their faith," she said. "The church is the center of their social life."

Zomi pastors help

The pastors of Tulsa's Zomi churches, many of them educated in the United States, help their countrymen adjust to life in America. Most of the churches offer English as a Second Language classes.

"I work as a religious worker. I can go back any time," said the Rev. Vung Niang, pastor of Full Gospel Assembly International at 74th Street and Memorial Drive. Her husband remains in Yangon, Myanmar, where he pastors a large church they founded together 25 years ago. He comes to Tulsa often.

She said she regularly accompanies Burmese people who do not speak English to job interviews and doctor's appointments, and she helps them fill out employment forms and understand job-safety training material.

Her church has Sunday services in Burmese and Zomi, and once a month in English.

Jenks Public Schools has some 300 Burmese students, she said.

Her daughter, Dim Saan Lun, was 17 when she came to the United States in 2002. She studied English, enrolled at Jenks High School and graduated three years later.

"I could understand English, but it was difficult to speak," she said.

She joined the U.S. Navy and became a jet engine mechanic, serving in the Middle East on an aircraft carrier, and then two years in Japan.

Burmese people like the United States, she said.

"They can work and pay for their needs here. In Burma, it is hard to find work, especially for young people."

Language barrier

The Rev. Nang Khen Khup, pastor of the Far East Mission Church at 81st Street and Harvard Avenue, said the Burmese people are hardworking and make good employees. Most are doing well here. However, the older people are less motivated to learn English than the young people.

He said about 80 percent of them do not speak English.

"We survive because we help each other."

More than 50 families own their own homes, he said.

He said Myanmar is a fertile land, and people there can survive, but not thrive, by subsistence farming. He said foreign investors have avoided the country because it did not have the rule of law. That could change under democratization.

The Rev. Kap K. Hatlang, of ZBCM of Tulsa Church in Broken Arrow, agreed that most Burmese in Tulsa are doing well, and that those over age 30 have difficulty with English.

"The American people are so good to us. We are so thankful for the American people, and the Tulsa people," he said.

Tulsa known in Chin State

Tulsa is well known among Zomis in Chin State, Myanmar.

"We call Tulsa the Zomi capital of the USA. Most Zomis know of Tulsa, even if they don't know of New York City or Los Angeles," Kham said.

The Rev. Cin Lian Sum, associate pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Kalaymyo, Myanmar, said 300 people from his village in Chin State have relocated to the United States, many of them to Tulsa. Most of them are political refugees.

Zam Ngaih Man, the wife of a pastor in Kalaymyo, said her brother, Dal Khek, fled Myanmar as a refugee and went first to Malaysia and then to Tulsa, where he now lives.

The Rev. Go Za Nang, founder and senior pastor of the largest Assemblies of God in Myanmar, with 1,700 members, estimated that 80 members of his church have moved to Tulsa in the past 10 years. He was in Tulsa in October for a reunion, where he saw many of them.

At his Palm Sunday service in Kalaymyo, at the request of a visitor, he asked people who had relatives in Tulsa to raise their hands. Twenty-five hands went up.

Some 300 to 400 members of his congregation now live in various cities across the United States, he said. Some immigrated because of political problems, but most came for the economic opportunity.

"They were making (the equivalent of \$1) a day, not enough to even buy food for a family," Nang said.

Three of his brothers and a sister moved to Australia.

Nang said most people in Myanmar are happy about the changes in the nation.

Khai Pu was 18 when he came to Tulsa in 2009. He spent most of his life in a small village in Chin State, and in 2007 he left his homeland with his parents as political refugees after trouble with the government that he did not want to discuss. They were refugees in Malaysia for two years before getting permission to enter the United States.

He is a senior at Jenks High School and plans to study business at Tulsa Community College.

Cecilia Pau Cing, a case worker for Catholic Charities in refugee resettlement, came to Tulsa with her husband and son from Chin State in 2009 after two years as a refugee in Malaysia.

"We had a problem with the government soldiers," was her only explanation of why they left.

The exodus begins

The exodus of Zomi people to Tulsa began with Kham, who was raised in a small village in Chin State. He walked two days from his village to attend eighth grade in Tedim, a small city on a mountaintop that is the informal capital of the Zomi people. He later

moved to Yangon, the former capital and largest city in the country, to continue his education.

Eventually he made his way to Tulsa to attend Oral Roberts University in the 1970s. He is well-known not just in the Tulsa Zomi community, but also in Chin State. He has taught doctoral students at ORU and at universities in Europe and the Far East, and he is involved in leadership training among Christians worldwide.

Now a U.S. citizen, he travels to Myanmar several times a year. Last week he opened a permanent office in Yangon to help the Burmese people through leadership development, business training and social programs.

Some may return

With the rapid changes in Myanmar creating new economic opportunities and political freedoms, some Burmese people in Tulsa may return to their homeland.

"People are expecting to see their sons and daughters coming home," Nang said after a Good Friday service in Kalaymyo. "It's amazing. Everybody is talking about it."

Pu is among those who plan to return.

"I'm not going to stay here. I miss my village and my friends," the Jenks student said.

"I have things I want to do in my village. I want to teach them how to get a better life."

Cing at Catholic Charities said she likes living in the United States but hopes to return to Myanmar.

"I miss my country. I love the mountains," she said.

Khup predicted that 80 percent of Burmese in the United States will return, but not right away.

Kham said the Burmese community in Tulsa will be torn about going back because they will now have children and grandchildren in America.

Myint Swe, the patron - or president - of Asian Wings Airways, in a meeting in his office in Yangon, said that under military rule over the last 50 years, many of Myanmar's brightest and most educated people left the country.

"We expect many people will come back in the next two to five years," he said.

"Our country is going to be a land of opportunity."

MYANMAR SIDEBAR:

End of military rule in Myanmar brings big changes

April 13, 2013

By Bill Sherman

World Religion Writer

YANGON, Myanmar - After five decades of military dictatorship, isolation and economic sanctions, the people of Myanmar are exhilarated by the rapid changes coming to their nation.

The recent end of military rule and shift toward democracy have produced a flood of foreign investors, building projects and social changes, as well as freedoms unheard of just months ago.

Nuam Bawi, a reporter with the Myanmar Times, said that until last year, every story she wrote was submitted to the government censorship office, which regularly red-lined portions of the stories or killed them altogether.

"It's very much open now. The newspaper can criticize the government," she said in a recent interview in downtown Yangon.

"We feel a sense of responsibility not to abuse our new freedom."

She said Myanmar's first daily newspaper was scheduled to begin publication April 1, and the Myanmar Times would begin daily publication in May.

"It's exciting because before this, the government didn't allow the publication of daily newspapers," she said.

Maria Danmark of Denmark, also with the Myanmar Times, said the newspaper had added 53 reporters since January and has been developing a network of freelance reporters all over Myanmar.

Sian Nun Siam, a medical student and publisher of a small newspaper that serves the Zomi people in the Chin State in northwestern Myanmar, said that when the military was running the country, publishers like himself had to self-censor their writing to avoid a visit from the government.

"Now we have no more fear of the secret police. That's the biggest change," he said.

Newfound freedoms

Faith leaders, too, are reporting new freedoms of expression and religion.

Saw Shwe Lin, executive secretary of the Myanmar Council of Churches, said his organization and other Christian groups, including Catholics, have been invited by the new government to participate in the process of building a new nation.

"It's now very easy to communicate with the government," he said. "Before it was impossible."

He said he has met with Myanmar President Thein Sein and with Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the pro- democracy movement, a national hero who was released in late 2010 after 15 years of house arrest and now is in the Parliament.

"For 50 years, we've never experienced democracy," Lin said. "We're urging our members to become more aware of the democratic process."

David, a young man outside the airport at Kalaymyo, said: "Things are much better now. We are able to speak our mind. Before, if they tell you to stop, and you don't do it ..." he held out his hands to suggest being handcuffed.

"Now we can freely talk about the human condition," he said.

The Rev. C.K. Hrang Tiam, academic dean of the Myanmar Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Yangon, said Christians in Myanmar have been subject to persecution for the past 50 years under military rule.

"Maybe that will change now," he said.

Many churches meet in apartment buildings because they cannot get permission to build church buildings.

Economic gains

Since the democratization process began about two years ago, more than 1,000 political prisoners have been released, President Barack Obama became the first sitting U.S. president to visit Myanmar, and economic sanctions have been eased.

Most visible are the economic changes.

Building projects are springing up all over Yangon, the largest city, where streets are jammed with newer cars.

Myint Swe, the patron - or president - of Asian Wings Airways, said Myanmar is "totally different now, politically, economically and socially."

Tourism has nearly doubled in the past four years, with a million foreign visitors in 2012 and more expected in the next few years, he said.

Myanmar is encouraging foreign investment, and Thailand and Singapore are leading the way, he said.

Burmese people in several cities expressed hope that democratization would mean more and better jobs and also improved social services and education that suffered under military rule.

In the short term, however, prices are skyrocketing, especially in Yangon.

"The cost of real estate has more than tripled," one cab driver said. "And food prices are going up. Investors and businessmen may be making money, but the little guy is being hurt."

Chin Do Kahm, a Burmese native living in Tulsa who travels to Myanmar every few months, said the cost of a luxury hotel in Yangon last year was \$85 a night and now is \$250, and traffic is noticeably heavier each time he comes.

STORY TWO, WITH SIDEBAR:

Tent revivalist keeps alive the old-time religion

Saturday, July 27, 2013

By Bill Sherman

World Religion Writer

When the era of the old-fashioned tent revivals was drawing to a close in the 1960s, one tent preacher was just getting started.

David Terrell, now conducting a tent revival in north Tulsa, has been preaching almost non-stop for more than a half century.

He turns 80 on Monday, runs three miles a day and shows no signs of slowing down.

Four decades ago his huge gospel tent drew up to 10,000 people to nightly revival meetings as he traveled the so-called "sawdust trail" across the South, named for the sawdust spread in the aisles to keep worshippers out of the mud.

He boasted his was the largest gospel tent in the world, covering nearly two football fields.

About 800 wooden folding chairs are set up in Terrell's tent at Apache Street and North Lewis Avenue, but empty chairs greatly outnumbered the worshippers at his opening service last week.

If attendance was low, enthusiasm was not.

The service started with more than a half-hour of exuberant worship.

Then Terrell, wearing a black shirt and black suit, took up the offering, a process that took close to another half hour. When it was over, he said that people who wanted God to bless their finances should bring up another \$20. More than a dozen did.

Then he picked up a guitar and began to sing. Soon the entire congregation was singing and dancing. At one point, young people raced around the perimeter of the tent at his suggestion.

After the singing, he preached, striding from one edge of the platform to the other, telling stories about miracles and huge crowds at his revivals in Africa and South America.

Then he invited anyone who needed healing to come up for prayer. A line quickly formed, and for more than an hour, he laid hands on people and prayed for them. Some laughed and some shouted as they received prayer. Others shrieked and danced, or slumped to the ground.

Terrell came on the scene near the end of the era of huge tent revivals that characterized America during the late 1940s and 1950s, said church historian and author Vinson Synan, former dean of Regent University who was recently named to the Oral Roberts University Board of Trustees.

"It just suddenly caught on nationwide. Anybody with a tent could draw 10,000 people," Synan said.

Terrell was one of the last of the big tent revivalists, he said.

Terrell took time during his meetings to praise two Tulsans he said had greatly influenced his life, Oral Roberts, a tent revivalist who later moved into television ministry and in 1963 founded Oral Roberts University, and T.L. Osborn, who pioneered huge outdoor revivals overseas, drawing crowds in the hundreds of thousands. Both are deceased.

Terrell boasted that most men last only 10 years in the tent revival ministry, and he is still going after more than 50 years.

At the height of his ministry, some of his followers, dubbed "Terrellites," set up communities, called "blessed areas," isolated from the rest of society to wait for the soon-coming end of the world. One such community was in Bangs, a town of 1,600 in central Texas.

The Heritage Association of Brown County website notes two things about Bangs, that tent revivalist David Terrell founded a New Testament Holiness Church there in 1973, and that a woolly mammoth was unearthed there.

"Everybody in Brown County knows who David Terrell is," said Bangs Mayor Eric Bishop.

Bishop said he was born four years before Terrell and his followers came to Bangs. He cannot remember a time when he did not know who Terrell was, but he has not been inside his church.

Bishop said a minister from India once told him that of all the American preachers who came to his part of the world and promised to help, only Terrell actually did.

"By and large, most of the people that have bad things to say about David Terrell and his church have never been to his church, and never met the man," he said.

"I personally know several folks who wouldn't have moved to Bangs if it were not for David Terrell, and Bangs is better for having those people in town. In all honesty, he brought some really good people to Bangs," Bishop said.

Terrell founded several New Testament Holiness Churches, including one in north Tulsa that sponsored his Tulsa revival.

Terrell's ministry declined in the 1980s when allegations surfaced that he had fathered children outside of his marriage and when he was imprisoned for tax evasion, said Donna Johnson, his stepdaughter who wrote a book about her experiences growing up under Terrell's tent.

In a Tuesday interview in Tulsa, Terrell denied Johnson's allegations in the book that he fathered her three half sisters while he was not married to her mother.

"We were secretly married," Terrell said.

He said he was gone all the time, and understood when Johnson's mother wanted a divorce, which was amicable.

"She was a great lady," he said.

"People told me I should sue the book publisher, but I'm not going to do that. ... What has always helped me was not to fight back," he said.

Terrell also denied that he was guilty of tax evasion.

He said he was wrongly charged by the Internal Revenue Service and served 20 months of a 15-year term before a judge overturned his conviction and the IRS returned the money he paid that they wrongly said he owed.

He said he has a clean conscience with respect to women and money.

Terrell now lives in Hamilton, Texas, and maintains a busy preaching schedule that includes revivals in Tulsa and across America, and also in numerous other nations.

Synan said he didn't know a lot about Terrell. Many of the tent revival preachers were men of character, but "some were just rascals, Elmer Gantry types," he said.

"Some of them didn't have basic good character to start with, evidently," he said.

For example, tent revivalist A.A. Allen was put out of the Assemblies of God for being an alcoholic, he said. Allen died in his 50s from liver failure brought on by acute alcoholism.

"Oral Roberts was more middle of the road theologically," Synan said. "He was very careful about women and money. ... He was more like Billy Graham, a man of integrity."

Synan said the early Christian church dealt with the issue of immoral priests, deciding that a person's sacraments were valid despite the character of the priests.

The modern Pentecostal movement takes a similar position, he said, that people can be converted and healed in spite of the preacher, not because of the preacher.

"God honors the preaching of the word, and the faith of the people, even if the preacher is unworthy," he said.

Terrell's Tulsa meetings continue at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday. He also is scheduled Nov. 27-30 at the Green County Event Center, 12000 E. 31st. St.

TENT REVIVAL SIDEBAR

Tent revivalist David Terrell's stepdaughter speaks out

By Bill Sherman

World Religion Writer

The figure of tent revivalist David Terrell looms large in a memoir written by Donna M. Johnson, who spoke in Tulsa this month.

She calls Terrell her stepfather, though she says he never married her mother, an allegation that Terrell denies.

She was at his feet through part of her childhood in the 1960s and 1970s, when he drew thousands of people into his huge tent on the sawdust trail, as the era of traveling tent evangelists across the South was drawing to a close.

She was there when there wasn't enough food on the table and later when the ministry was awash in cash and new cars.

She was in and out of his life as he fathered her three half-sisters with her mother and later when he was imprisoned for tax evasion.

And by coincidence, she was in Tulsa, speaking at the Tulsa Book Smart program, held at All Souls Unitarian Church, just two weeks before Terrell began holding tent revival services at Apache Street and North Lewis Avenue in Tulsa, services she will not attend.

She hasn't talked to him for years, but she did attend one of his revival services when she was preparing the book, she said. Maybe 100 people were there.

"All he did was take up offerings."

She is not surprised he is still preaching at age 80.

"His whole identity is wrapped up in being a preacher and a man of God and a prophet," she said.

Johnson's book, "Holy Ghost Girl," (Gotham Books) has gotten good reviews.

She discussed the book sitting in the lobby of the Campbell Hotel on 11th Street, where she stayed for her Tulsa Book Smart engagement.

The book has done well but might have done better if it was a pure exposé on a corrupt preacher, she said, but that would have been dishonest.

"He was both good and bad, like all of us."

She said the book "airs some dirty laundry" but she hopes it also is a fair, compassionate look at holiness people in the era of the tent revivals.

Her experience "both affirms and negates stereotypes about evangelists," she said.

"People are getting a little tired of the black-and-white categorizing we do with people."

Terrell himself was a complex person, she said, handsome, charismatic, generous, sweet, with a quick temper but quick to apologize.

"We revered and really loved him. He was funny," she said.

"He was well meaning and seemed sincere. He believed he was a healer and a prophet, but he was seduced by his success. ... He had all these lovely women around him and he took advantage of it. He was utterly seduced by wealth."

Terrell said this week he secretly married Johnson's mother and has a clear conscience concerning women and money.

Theologically, Johnson said, Terrell came out of the southern holiness tradition but devolved into a personality cult and became "very paranoid."

Johnson said she could not write off everything she saw under the big tent as fraudulent.

"I saw some remarkable things happen," she said. She experienced healing herself when Terrell prayed for her.

But she also saw "a lot of things that didn't make sense to me." For years, her mother left her and her brother with an assortment of caretakers for months at a time while she traveled with Terrell.

One abusive caretaker told the children their mother had given them to her permanently. They later learned that was false.

Johnson "married her way out" of that lifestyle when she was 15, a marriage that lasted about two years, she said.

She later distanced herself from Terrell and went on to college, marriage and a career as a writer. Now in her 50s, she and her husband live in Austin, Texas, where he runs a marketing firm.

Johnson said she carried a lot of pain from her childhood that she never looked at. She began to attend an Episcopal church because her daughter wanted to.

"I had kind of a God transplant in that church," she said. "I would sit there and weep, for five years.

"I could hear the message again. I realized there was a place for me within the church. I found out that faith and doubt are different sides of the same coin."

Johnson said she calls herself a Christian ... "I can't get away from it" ... but is also drawn to Buddhist teachings.

STORY THREE:

Dog attack victim recovering, back to Jehovah's Witness ministry work ahead of upcoming convention

Saturday, June 29, 2013.

By Bill Sherman

World Religion Writer

Beverly Wright walked with a cane, slowly, avoiding uneven ground on Wednesday morning as she went door-to-door on North Delaware Avenue inviting people to an upcoming Jehovah's Witnesses convention.

A week ago she had what she hopes will be her last of five skin grafts to repair wounds she received March 19 when a pit bull mauled her so badly that doctors told her she might lose her leg.

Wright, 43, could have escaped injury that Tuesday morning when an 80-pound pit bull burst through the front door of a house in the 200 block of N. Lewis Place and attacked her ministry companion and longtime friend, Irene Parker, 78.

But it never occurred to her not to help her friend.

Both women were severely injured in the attack. And both knew their injuries would not keep them from going door-to-door with the Jehovah's Witnesses. Six weeks after the attacks, in early May, Wright returned to her ministry.

"The doctors are amazed how fast I am healing," she said.

She goes out weekly, usually tiring after two or three hours, even with breaks.

She does it, she said, "because it's what Jehovah wants ... to let people know what God wants."

At first she was a little nervous, she said.

"But I realized it was one of those things that happened. It doesn't happen all the time. That helped me get out of the car."

She has been going door-to-door with the Jehovah's Witnesses for 18 years, and nothing like that ever happened before, she said.

Parker's recovery has been slower.

She went off her pain medication a week ago and is still in constant pain but is able to sleep, she said this week at her daughter's Sand Springs home, where she is recuperating.

"I'll be glad when I can get back to my ministry. It'll be awhile. When I get better, I'm ready to go out again. The only thing is, I'm going to be more cautious.

"I'm doing better and I'm happy about it. ... All the prayers and cards and gifts have been very encouraging," she said.

The events of that day three months ago are still fresh in Wright's mind.

She was two houses away from Parker when the dog attacked.

"I heard the screams and ran down there.

"I pulled the dog off of her. I had it in a head lock," said Wright, who is 5 feet tall.

The dog squirmed free and continued to attack Parker. When Wright pulled it off a second time, it turned its attack on her, tearing at her arms and then dragging her across the yard by her leg.

Wright grabbed a baseball bat from the dog's owner who was standing by screaming and struck the dog twice before losing her grip on the bat.

The dog continued to tear into her leg.

"I was seeing him do it. It was awful," she said.

The attack ended when a man working two blocks away heard the screams, grabbed a gun from his truck, distracted and shot the dog.

Parker has little memory of the attack that broke seven bones, disfigured her face and nearly killed her.

When she knocked on the door that day, she said, she heard a dog barking.

As soon as a woman opened the door, the dog charged through the screen door, knocked her to the ground and attacked her head.

She heard her right ear being ripped off and saw blood.

"I don't remember anything after that ... I didn't feel nothing," she said.

Both women were taken to St. John Medical Center, where doctors used several hundred stitches on each of them to close their wounds and then placed them in intensive care.

As Jehovah's Witnesses, they do not believe in receiving blood transfusions. One hospital worker told Wright she would probably die without blood.

"So be it," she said.

Wright was released in eight days, Parker in 18 days. Both are still in physical therapy.

Parker has had five surgeries, with more scheduled.

Her latest surgery rebuilt part of an eyelid that was ripped off, making her unable to close one eye.

Wright said she still has dreams about the dog.

"I see him shaking Irene.

"I might be afraid of dogs, but I'll never let them know it," she said defiantly.

The two women have been in contact with Mike Harrell, the man who shot the dog.

"He's very polite and humble," said Mike Elliott, Parker's son-in-law.

Harrell saved Wright's life, and Wright saved Parker's life, Elliott said.

"And I believe Jehovah had a hand in it," he said.

"We believe angels accompany us in ministry."

The women have had no contact with the dog's owner.

Jehovah's Witnesses spokesman Mark Snead said church members "always try to exercise due caution" in neighborhoods, taking note of dog warning signs.

"It's very rare for these kinds of events to happen," he said.

"I've been going out since I was a child, and I've never had a dog attack me."

Tulsa-area Jehovah's Witnesses are in a three-week door-to-door campaign to invite people to their annual district Bible convention July 5-7 at the Donald W. Reynolds Center on the University of Tulsa campus.

"We hope to reach the majority of homes in the Tulsa area," Snead said.

The convention will draw more than 5,000 people from 49 congregations in northeast Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri, he said. It is identical to about 300 other conventions being held around the United States that will draw more than a million people.

The Tulsa area has more than 20 Jehovah's Witnesses congregations that meet in nine Kingdom Halls.

Wright said that accounts are set up in the women's names at the Bank of Oklahoma to help with medical expenses that are not covered by insurance.
