

Global Strategies for HIV Prevention



December 2004

Newsletter



Pennies from Heaven

It began with just 300 pennies and grew to an outpouring of love and immeasurable blessings...

We had just returned from Jos, Nigeria where 12 volunteers, including three from Bayside Church in Granite Bay, California, had assisted us with an HIV training workshop for traditional birth attendants at the Faith Alive hospital and clinic. Bayside's Pastor Ray Johnston asked Sandy, Judy, Janelle and me to give brief presentations at their four church services. At each one, Ray asked for donations for Save a Life, our program to test pregnant women for HIV and provide those infected with nevirapine, a drug that could save the lives of 50 percent of their babies. At the last service, Ray handed me a plastic butter dish sealed with duct tape. Two young boys who heard me speak in the morning went home, broke their piggy bank and counted out 300 pennies, which they calculated might be enough to save three babies from a fatal HIV infection.

It didn't end there. Those pennies were followed by many, many more. When I was told that the total contributed from just four services was \$104,000 — I was overwhelmed with gratitude. It was the largest single donation that Global Strategies for HIV Prevention had ever received. And it wasn't over yet. Additional donations were received during the week — the total donations were \$149,000.

It is difficult to express my feelings. I was profoundly moved to see individual Christians responding. But it wasn't just the money; it was what it represented — a growing acknowledgement that Christians could reach out from their hearts to HIV-infected people in desperate need. The three individuals from Bayside became the catalyst for a journey of 14 individuals who traveled back to Jos six months later to expand a ministry of spiritual and physical health.

I wish it were possible for me to share the thousands of words I've received from those who went on their journeys to Jos, as well as the words of Dr. Isichei, his co-workers and patients at the Faith Alive Clinic. Here are a few of the volunteers' memories —

"...now AIDS has a voice, a face, and a name.... seeing all these men and women and children....they're faithful and some are orphans, all are broken, most are poor, all shed tears, all are humbled, but still sing praises trusting that God will care and meet their needs."

"Going to a village that had never seen a white person...the sky was blue, the weather perfect, the women's clothes were bright and beautiful, the children were laughing. It's hard to get my mind around the fact that 30 percent or more were HIV infected."

"Praying with the widow and mother of five children...I prayed that she would live long enough to raise her children."

"What's amazing is that HIV is so prevalent and fatal but the workers in the clinic are compassionate toward all...it is truly bringing God into the picture that makes a difference."

"When we returned from the clinic they told us about the (HIV) testing they did. The results were staggering — out of 39 people, 16 were HIV infected."

"...the more you give away the more God gives back."

What happened? The volunteer's views of the HIV epidemic changed from 40 million HIV infected worldwide to Esther, Danny, Anja, and many more — individuals infected with HIV who nevertheless shared their faith and found their strength in God. Those from the U.S. could not help but be blessed by them. Yes, we go to help others, but God has greater blessings for us - as we reach out and learn their names, we carry out the ministry of Jesus.

Next year we are planning three training workshops — at a Catholic hospital in a Liberian refugee camp, a Presbyterian hospital in southern Congo, and an Adventist hospital in Madagascar. We provide the training and tools for implementation: manuals, HIV tests, and importantly, the drugs to prevent transmission of HIV infection to babies and drugs to prevent secondary infection. Above all, we bring hope to those struggling in despair.

Bridget Nolan, one of the volunteers from Bayside who went on the most recent trip recounts a poignant example:



"We had the opportunity to visit Bakin-Kogi, a village with a clinic started by Hauwa Kandima, a local woman who attended the Birth Attendant Training Workshop in March. When we were introduced as friends of Dr. Ammann, she lit up and grabbed my hand. Women and children danced and sang behind us as she walked our team down the road to the village chief's "palace."

"The chief and village elders met with us and then presented us with a picture of the first baby that had been saved using nevirapine from the Global Strategies' workshop. They asked that I accept it on behalf of Dr. Ammann and bring it back to him with their gratitude."

Here, in a village where two-thirds of the people are infected with HIV, is a child the entire village celebrates — a child with a future."

We are grateful to you who make it possible to bring hope and transformation to those who suffer in this epidemic. And we thank you for your support that allows us to deliver a message of prevention and care through the incredible volunteers who journey with us.

"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 2:6

Sincerely,



Arthur J. Ammann MD, President