

Jews and Christians Partner for Incredible Medical Missions Program in Africa

What do you do when you're the only surgeon within a hundred miles for 2 million people? First, you do many more surgeries than your U.S. counterparts. Second, you train local docs to help.

Meet Dr. Jason Fader, a gifted American with a bright future in medicine who moved with his young family to a country called Burundi—the world's hungriest, where the only thing in abundance is abject need—to operate and to train new docs. To get to Central Africa, Dr. Fader and his fellow missionary physicians had to secure their own funding and study two new languages. Once there they learned quickly to navigate shortages in electricity, water, sanitation, equipment, workers, beds and meds. Imagine a hospital short of blood or even gloves.

Kibuye Hope Hospital, where Dr. Fader is assistant medical director and a surgeon, caps a hill in a coffee-growing region. Near it a soccer field stays noisy with kids, and inside the packed 172-bed hospital, sick patients have come long miles for what in the U.S. are routinely available surgeries or for meds most Americans get at corner drugstores.

Some patients arrive in baskets carried by friends, Dr. Fader says, like the story of the paralytic brought to Jesus. Many have traveled a full day to get there. Of the hospital's 25,000 patients a year, the majority come with common diseases in extreme stages. Instead of a small breast mass, the cancer is full-blown; normal hypertension has become a stroke. A broken leg, poorly mended, makes walking painful.

And walking is everything. Most Burundians are small-plot

farmers, growing what they eat, and most are malnourished. What they have is faith, Dr. Fader says, adding that his doctors-in-training exude joy. Kibuye Hospital deepens healing because its doctors also study the Great Physician.

Dr. Fader tells about the mother whose child had a cleft lip and was badly malnourished. Kibuye's pediatrician got the baby to a weight to survive an operation, but the first opening in Dr. Fader's schedule was two months away. Having sold land just to travel there, the woman settled in to wait for her child's surgery.

He sees too many parents like that, Dr. Fader says, desperate to help their children with problems easily curable in the West. "My days are already overfull, but it's hard to say no to them," he said.

Dr. Fader recently received \$500,000 in the first annual Gerson L'Chaim Prize for Outstanding Christian Medical Missionary Service. If his selection seems obvious, it's because you don't know the other candidates—they're all similar to Jason Fader.

Dr. Fader's prize money will produce new docs, help more Burundians walk and add hospital beds so two or three patients don't have to share each one. His three co-finalists' needs are no less practical or haunting:

- Dr. Stephen Foster, in Angola for 38 years, has headed a growing medical center. In a country of 12 million and almost no modern healthcare, an internship could help him upgrade new Angolan physicians—training 24 , each one to see 4,000 patients a year.
- Dr. William Rhodes, in Kenya, a reconstructive surgeon, has performed 15,000 surgeries. He wanted the prize to help him mentor two young Kenyan surgeons and thus double the hospital's operations. The money also would expand services outside his region and buy much-needed

basic surgical equipment.

- For Dr. John Spurrier in rural Zambia, where the money could improve HIV care for 4,000 patients in rural areas, add electricity and water for his mission hospital and provide suitable housing for staff.

“One of the things about work here,” Dr. Fader says, speaking for all missionary physicians, “is that every day we see the things in Luke 4—the blind see, the lame walk, the Good News is preached to the poor.”

This past year, I was privileged to help found the L’Chaim Prize with my friend, Mark Gerson, who is Jewish, and his wife, Rabbi Erica Gerson, to boost the heroics of these doctors stretched thinly across the world’s poorest continent. After missionary medics applied for the Gerson Prize, a panel of missionaries and other experts in African healthcare chose the winner.

Two different faiths that some think would separate the Gersons and me instead weld us in love and service to Africans—every person an image-bearer of God. Again quoting Dr. Fader, “There’s no reason why someone who breaks a leg anywhere in the world should be crippled for the rest of life. There’s no reason why anyone should be blind for lack of a 15-minute operation. There’s no reason a young woman should lose her baby or end up with a birth injury or die, leaving her children motherless, because she needs a C-section.”

If that makes sense to you, too, here’s every reason to come alongside a small army of givers like Jason Fader in work that is overwhelming and difficult and good, at . {eo}

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