

Missionary Doctor Sees 'Miracle' in HIV Victim, Prays for More

People worldwide took note of Hannah Gay when an HIV-positive child in her care went into remission—the first functional cure of HIV in a child.

But the “shiest pediatrician in America” told Baptist Press (BP) she was just standing by as God performed a modern-day miracle.

It’s something she’s gotten to tell often in the more than a year and a half since the baby first went into remission, and in places as prestigious as the Oxford Union in England, where she presented a case study Nov. 5.

“I think [God’s] teaching me submission with all of the speaking business,” Gay, a pediatrician with University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, Miss., told BP. “I don’t particularly like that, but it is an opportunity for me to be able to say ... when I treated this baby I was not even thinking of curing the baby. That was the furthest thing from my mind. I was simply trying to prevent infection, and I failed at what I was trying to do.”

But her “failure” became a “miracle” in God’s hands, she says: “It was God that cured the baby, and I just happened to be standing close by at the time.”

Gay’s high view of God has been nurtured by years of trust in Him, including six years spent with the International Mission Board in West Africa.

“[Faith] influences every area of her practice,” Paul Gay, Hannah’s husband, told BP. “Hannah ministers through

everything she touches. Her ministry is supported and guided by prayer. The affection, the love that she has for the families and the children, the commitment she has, all [stem] from her faith. She has a dedication that flows from her relationship with God, and I think that has attracted a team to work with her who share her commitment.”

While in Africa, the Gays came face to face with those dealing with AIDS and its effects.

“There [were] just huge numbers coming out of Uganda and some frightening numbers coming out of Kenya about HIV,” Paul Gay says. “There was great work going on in Uganda to try to get some kind of handle on the massive problem.”

At that time, a third of the adult population in Uganda was infected with HIV, Paul Gay told BP.

“Although we could not document it, the rumor was that [in Ethiopia] people who contracted HIV disappeared,” he says. “None of the nongovernmental organizations, none of the international organizations that were there in the country, did testing because we were afraid that a diagnosis would be a death sentence, not from the disease but from whoever was responsible for these disappearances.”

It was a silent problem, he says.

“It was only after the fall of the Communist government to the coalition of Eritrean and Tegrean forces in 1991 that people in authority began to speak,” he told BP.

Today in Africa

In Africa, the problem persists.

“Today in families where there is education concerning HIV/AIDS and the use of ARVs, there is less of an impact from AIDS as there was,” says Sharon Pumpelly, who served as a missionary in Uganda for 17 years. “But there are many

families who do not fit in this category and AIDS has a devastating effect.”

The effects come in the form of loss of income, need for care and uncertainty for the family, she says.

“There are still elder-child-led families or grandma-led families,” Pumpelly says. “In our [True Love Waits] program, we ask youth to share their dreams for the future and base where we go from that.”

True Love Waits presenters noticed that Ugandan children raised by grandparents struggled to answer that question, she says.

“The older generation was supposed to relax, be cared for by their families and share stories and wisdom, not raise another generation,” Pumpelly says. “So this youth did not think about the future.”

AIDS affects people psychologically and socially, she continues.

“Through the Kenya government, Kenya Interfaith AIDS Consortium, I met a man who God saved after he tried to kill himself when getting a positive HIV diagnosis,” Pumpelly says. “His wife and children were HIV negative, but it was difficult for them financially.”

Though the government discouraged discrimination, that didn’t mean it stopped, she says. And the social embarrassment of AIDS is a problem too.

Pumpelly says she and her colleagues challenge missionaries to get tested for HIV, just so they know what it is like and mostly so they can encourage others to be tested.

“If testing for HIV did not carry a stigma, the amount of HIV in the world would be reduced,” she says. “No one is tested without counseling to help them deal with their results, which

helps folks plan better for their future.”

Make a Difference

Christians can make a difference in the lives of those who test positive, Pumpelly says.

“AIDS is no longer on the world’s front burner, yet in poor countries or areas of countries, it is still forefront in the devastation it causes,” she says. “People need to look for ways to impact AIDS beyond just helping orphans—many want to only help the innocent victims.”

There are many ways to help. For instance, many missionaries would love to have teams trained to teach the Africa True Love Wins program.

“As Christians, we need to be encouraging life that glorifies God. Discipleship must include sexual purity and building right relationships in the marriage and home,” Pumpelly says. “People are suffering, and our hearts should be breaking.”

Help children in Africa affected by AIDS through these One Life projects:

- One Orphan—Every child deserves a caring family. Sixty-five percent of the children in Zimbabwe have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS.
- One Notebook—Provide composition notebooks for 150,000 orphan school children in 200 schools in Zimbabwe.
- One Community—Transform a community by loving orphans, caring for the dying and bringing hope to those who live in poverty and despair. Many children become the head of their household because their parents have died of AIDS.
- One School—Help transform the lives of students and their school, families and community. Hunger, poverty, absentee parents, gangs, HIV/AIDS and low academic achievement are daily challenges for these students.