

Pray for Africa

Of the 43 million people in the world with HIV or AIDS, 70 percent live in Africa. I was aware of the problem because we've reported on it in Charisma and because I serve on the board of World Relief, an organization that helps persons with AIDS. But I had to see it for myself to get the full impact of the heartbreak it causes and to see what Christians are doing to make a difference.

In early June I traveled with my 17-year-old son, Chandler, to Kenya, Rwanda, Malawi and Mozambique, where I saw some of the worst poverty I've ever seen. The people live on an average income of \$40 per year. The grinding poverty contributes to the spread of AIDS.

But I was impressed by what World Relief is doing. This organization has mobilized churches from many denominations to help prevent AIDS and to care for those dying of AIDS and for orphans (one in 12 children in Africa is orphaned because of AIDS).

"It's not just a government problem," one pastor in Rwanda told me. "It's a problem of all the people. Satan brought HIV/AIDS because of the sin of fornication, and the church must respond."

World Relief works through churches to foster awareness of how HIV is transmitted, to teach people how to care for and support those who have the virus, and to strengthen families economically through microeconomic development. In many places the programs are working. I was told that in the early '90s 30

percent of the population of Uganda had HIV. Now it's only 6 percent.

But the statistics don't reveal the human side of the story as visiting does.

In Kware, a slum outside Nairobi, Chandler and I visited the home of Milka, who learned last November that she has AIDS. She got HIV from her husband, who left her to raise two daughters alone.

Milka is getting treatment and is still able to function, but she worries about the day when she can no longer work. She wants to live long enough for her 6-year-old to finish school. Chances are, she won't last that long.

Milka became a Christian after being helped by World Relief. That's the story we heard over and over. Though the AIDS-prevention training and care of the sick are not specifically evangelistic, the people being helped are prompted to ask about becoming a Christian because of the love of those who are reaching out to them.

While we were there, we also saw more evangelistic programs, such as youth clubs organized by World Relief in Malawi. In Rwanda, we saw a microeconomic development program that has provided \$35 loans to 17,000 desperately poor people. The people meet weekly in groups of 35 to repay the loans, encourage one another and learn business principles.

The seemingly small amount of money allowed one woman to buy an electric razor and set up a barbershop in the local marketplace. Another woman bought a sewing machine and does

mending and tailoring. She has earned enough to send her children to school, repay her loan and buy a goat—a highly prized possession in Rwanda.

What impressed me most was seeing the church be what it is supposed to be—the hands of Christ extended to the desperately poor. It helped me understand why the church in Africa is growing in spite of the increasing pressure of Islam.

I returned from Africa determined to focus more on helping the poor and encouraging others to do the same.

Toward the end of my trip I asked pastors in Mozambique what message I should bring back to America. One Assemblies of God pastor stood and spoke for the group:

“Pray God will give us strength, and pray the AIDS patients who aren’t saved will be saved,” he said. “And pray we will find homes for the orphans.”

He reiterated: “Ask them to pray for us. Their prayers can reach across the sea to help find a cure for AIDS.”

Stephen Strang, publisher of Charisma, invites you to support the work of World Relief through a tax-deductible gift to Christian Life Missions, our nonprofit partner. You can send it to P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL 32795-2248.