



Community Spirit

Fighting The Devastation Of AIDS In Africa

by the Rev. John L. McCullough

(NAPSA)—There is still much to be done in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa but caring—and supporting programs that help make a difference—are two of the first steps.



McCullough

Africa has 10 percent of the world's population, but 70 percent of global HIV/AIDS cases. In sub-Saharan Africa, 23.5 million African women and men are HIV-infected, plus another one million children.

More persons will die of AIDS-related causes in Africa over the next decade than have died from all the world's wars of the 20th century.

The epidemic threatens Africa's fragile progress in education, food production, economic development and political stability. By virtue of its magnitude, HIV/AIDS has become one of the most serious challenges of our time.

Of course, these staggering statistics tell only part of the story. It is important to remember that the reality of HIV/AIDS—whether in Africa, the United States, Asia or Europe—is lived out one person at a time.

One such person is Bongi, a South African who didn't know she was HIV-positive until her six-month-old son died of AIDS. "My life turned upside down," she said.

A friend suggested Bongi visit the Sinikithemba Christian Care Center in Durban—an HIV/AIDS program that Church World Service supports. Sinikithemba (which means "we give hope" in Zulu) is

one of the few AIDS clinics in Durban that provides a complete array of effective services that care for the whole person, medically, emotionally, spiritually, socially—even financially.

For example, the center's innovative income-generating Zulu beadwork enterprise enables HIV/AIDS-infected and affected women—including Bongi—to earn an income. The center finds markets for their products and reimburses workers at fair prices.

Furthermore, Bongi says the center has helped her to "accept everything I am. People should welcome every person that reveals his or her HIV status. We must not be pitied, cast away or looked down upon. We are all the same in the eyes of God."

Church World Service, a global humanitarian agency, has launched a special initiative on HIV/AIDS in Africa—working with Sinikithemba, the South African Council of Churches and partners in Rwanda and Guinea-Bissau to combat the stigmatization associated with the disease, provide effective care and promote the dignity and rights of HIV-positive people.

To support the initiative, top Billboard-charting U.S. musician Tim Janis has produced a special benefit edition of his "A Thousand Summers" CD. Available only from Church World Service, it features special tracks recorded in South Africa.

John L. McCullough is executive director of Church World Service. To learn more about CWS work, call 1-888-CWS-CROP or visit www.churchworldservice.org.