

## The Cutting Edge

*When GAIA staff travel in Malawi, we keep daily travel journals to record and document our project visits. Below we share sections of staff journals from our 2004 visits to the projects that you, our donors, support. This work is your work.*

### From Bill Rankin:

**August 8, 2004**—We drive to Salima Parish, in a remote area near Malawi's huge lake at the southern end of the Great Rift Valley. Salima was a 19th century slave trading hub. Lots of orphans, HIV positive patients, volunteer caregivers, and orphan guardians greet us with song. Last summer we trained the youthful Father Francis Ngalande. Now he coordinates the parish's HIV/AIDS program and he welcomes us warmly.

As the singing ends, everyone forms a large circle under some trees. A young teenaged orphan reads a speech. He hopes to become a doctor. He introduces the other orphans, asking them to stand -- first the youngest and then those of high school age. He explains that the orphans urgently need monies for school fees, since no one is left to pay these. The fees were recently increased and at \$100 per year they are way beyond the children's reach. But GAIA has helped the Salima children before and the young man politely asks us to continue this. He also asks our help in buying blankets for the younger ones. Another child adds, "We hope you will not abandon us."

Six women living with HIV describe their support group, which meets twice weekly at the clinic. The "clinic" is the ground under a large tree outside the church. The women report that their Home Based Care (HBC) program helps 512 people living with HIV, working with them both before and after HIV testing. About 50 volunteers, mostly women (and some of these HIV positive), visit and deliver care. They encourage hope, provide continuous counseling, reduce stigma,

help with household chores, find medicines, and conduct Bible readings and prayers. This is the only care that some patients receive. There is only one physician in this district, and many never see a doctor.



*Caregivers and orphans at Salima parish*

**August 9, 2004**—We drive west, almost to Mchinje on the Zambian border. Ludzi is another remote parish. Its HIV prevention and care project is administered by the Sisters of Charity (the "Grey Nuns") and all HIV activities are under the charge of Sister Agnes Eneya, whom I first met last year at a GAIA training conference in Lilongwe.

Again we are greeted by singing women and introduced to the parish leaders, HBC volunteers, youth, and other religious leaders, including Muslims and evangelical Christians. The religious leaders collaborate on AIDS issues. Sister Agnes says that at last year's GAIA conference she learned the importance of interfaith work, "as members of one family." She says this has been helpful in do-

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ing HBC and orphan care. (The training conferences can obviously make a tremendous difference.)

The parish serves 60,000 people and is divided into 5 zones, each with its own executive and volunteer caregivers. A caregiver is assigned to 5 to 6 patients and 10 to 15 orphans. The children are taught such survival skills as vegetable gardening, cooking, sewing, and carpentry. The program provides the



*Medical gloves drying for reuse at Ludzi Parish Hospital*

children one meal each day—nsima (the national staple, a corn meal porridge), and a vegetable. We meet with a group of orphans. Their clothes are tattered, but excitedly they sing and dance for us. The poverty is crushing, but the people are determined to survive. A nun tells me that having visitors all the way from America “helps us not to become discouraged.” At the end of our time here all the women, men, youth, and children stand and sing the hymn-like Malawi National Anthem. This is haunting, very beautiful. Someone says a closing prayer, and we are done.

On the way out we stop at the tiny parish hospital. Each of the four wards has six beds. There are hardly any medications here. Occasionally a shipment comes from the outside, and the boxes are carefully parceled out. We pass a rack of rubber gloves that had been washed for reuse and are now drying in the late afternoon sun.

## From Ellen Schell:

**May 14, 2004**—Rachel Fiedler directs the Lydia Project and teaches theology at Chancellor College in Zomba, the former British colonial capital. Rachel is a keen, vibrant, and deeply compassionate person. Widowed herself, she is acutely sensitive to the plight of women in Malawi. Rachel saw the need for those unable to complete a secondary education and determined that they should have that opportunity. She started a secondary school in her back yard and has enlisted the local University students as teachers. Her spacious back yard is now filled with several buildings and we saw the students constructing a new classroom for the burgeoning student population.

The school now serves 150 students, about 30 of whom are orphans. Fees are 700 Malawi Kwachas

(about \$7.00) per term, though scholarships are available to any who cannot pay. The rate is less than half that charged in government secondary schools, and the quality of the education is much higher. I was impressed by the sophisticated science lesson on a chalkboard. This presented the effects of atmospheric temperature on photosynthesis and the agricultural implications.

With GAIA's help the project also provides small loans to women to start businesses selling donuts, handicrafts, etc. The revolving loan funds help women to be less dependent on men and therefore less subject to sexual exploitation and HIV infection. We are shown the meticulous financial records kept by the project staff.

We visit one of the Lydia Project's village outreach programs. We meet the volunteers who visit the orphans, providing them food, school uniforms and supplies, and personal items like soap. Under the trees next to the church we watch a drama, locally written, about an AIDS orphan being mistreated by the family that has taken him in. The foster parents keep the boy in rags, and make him do all the gardening and household chores, while their own children play and go to school. They steal the blanket and the food given him by the Lydia volunteers. Suddenly the spirit of the boy's dead mother appears and strikes the family into a fit. The audience cheers and hoots with delight. The family repents of their mistreatment of the boy. As we watch, Rachel leans over and whispers with a chuckle, “African traditional religion in the fight against AIDS!”

Rachel and her husband pay \$80 of their own money when an orphan is married. “Orphans should have a nice wedding too.” We are given a photo of a groom clad in an academic gown, and we notice underneath it the tattered clothes we see in the villages.

As we leave, I tell Rachel that GAIA will provide



*At this AIDS drama, the ghost of an orphan's mother returns to tell the family caring for her son to treat him well*

further funding to her project. She drops to her knees to thank me. I am embarrassed and overwhelmed.

# Women's Empowerment Project



Caregivers from the Gates project proudly hold up cards showing that they have undergone voluntary counseling and HIV testing.

GAIA teams visiting the Women's empowerment project in May and August were moved and energized by what they saw. Some 1800 orphans in 25 villages are receiving food, blankets, school uniforms and supplies. Many children are now ready to attend secondary school. We have allocated our grant from the Gates foundation for orphan care and home-based care kits, so there is no money left for secondary school fees. But GAIA's donors have enabled us to cover these additional costs.

More than 350 AIDS patients and their families receive home-based care. The caregivers visit patients, provide medicine, food and blankets, and help with household chores. The visits have greatly reduced HIV/AIDS-related stigma because villagers see the caregivers, their own neighbors and friends, helping people in the community who have fallen ill.

Household visits are crucial. In each village the coordinators have drawn a map showing every dwelling. Caregivers visit homes in rotation to provide individual counseling and information about HIV/AIDS. The visits offer a chance for people to ask sensitive questions that they might not feel comfortable asking at the community health talks our people give. Our African colleagues and we are astonished at the numbers of villagers undergoing voluntary counseling and testing (VCT), a number now exceeding 3400. HIV testing is essential to bringing this epidemic under control, since people testing negative will try harder to remain uninfected, and people testing positive will try not to infect others. The 125 caregivers and coordinators led the way, by being tested first. Because the home visits are so important, and because the caregivers showed us how bicycles were vital in reaching outlying dwellings, supplementary funds from GAIA donors were used to purchase one bicycle for each village group. This has greatly boosted their productivity.

The enthusiasm, energy, commitment and hard work of the Gates project caregivers and staff were truly inspiring. We are certain this project can serve as a model for other communities and in other parts of Africa. We are very grateful to the Gates foundation and to our donors who have made possible this life-saving and life-extending work.

## Top Artists Team with GAIA for Fundraiser to Fight AIDS in Africa

### Honorary Chair

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Desmond Tutu has put out a call for help in the struggle against the African HIV/AIDS epidemic, and 30 noted local and national artists are responding with a fundraiser for GAIA:

### Art Out of the Box

Sunday, November 7, from 2 to 5 p.m.

Western Justice Center, 55 S. Grand Ave., Pasadena

An auction of cigar boxes magically transformed into unique works of art by noted national artists, with live jazz and a wine and hors d'oeuvres reception.

Tickets: \$125

For more information please contact:

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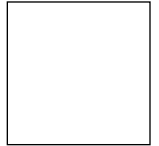
## Update on HIV/AIDS Treatment in Malawi

The summer, Global Fund monies slated for Malawi began to roll out anti-retroviral (ARV) drug programs. ARVs, while not a cure, greatly prolong the life of people infected with HIV. Government clinics are beginning to treat patients who qualify with a free drug regimen. Up to 25 new patients will be added at each clinic each month. Patients must have a CD4 t-cell count below 200 to qualify for treatment. About 300,000 of the 950,000 people infected in Malawi are thought to meet that criterion. Critical to the effective use of ARVs is patient education. Persons who begin ARV treatment must stay on the drugs for life. Viral resistance to the medication is possible if drugs are missed or taken incorrectly. The plan has a target of treating 50,000 people by 2005. We are pleased to learn of this good news, although the plan meets the needs of just a fraction of those who need treatment.





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GAIA's mission is to partner with religious organizations in resource poor countries for community based HIV prevention and care.

## Thank you for your support

There are many ways to give to GAIA and the brave women, men, and children of Malawi, Central Africa.

- Checks may be mailed in the enclosed remittance envelope.
- Donate on line using your credit or debit card. Visit our website ([www.thegaia.org](http://www.thegaia.org)) for instructions or call us.
- Donate stocks, bonds, or other securities.
- Matching gifts may be provided by your employer. Check to see if a program exists at your company.
- Memorial and honorary gifts provide a special way to pay tribute to a friend or family member, or to acknowledge a birthday, anniversary, or other significant event.
- Name GAIA in your estate. Your attorney, accountant, or tax advisor can also provide additional information.

## Questions?

Please call  
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## About GAIA

GAIA, a 501-(c) (3) non-profit organization, was founded in June 2000 by the Rev. William Rankin, Ph.D., M.P.P.S., President, and Charles Wilson, M.D., D. Sc., M.S.H.A., Board chair, and Emeritus Professor in the Department of Neurosurgery at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco (UCSF). We serve 18,000 people in Malawi through our work with faith groups to:

- Prevent HIV infection.
- Provide care for people ill with AIDS-related diseases.
- Provide care for orphaned children.
- Develop women's leadership in the struggle against HIV/AIDS.
- Train clergy and religious leaders in HIV/AIDS prevention and care strategies and de-stigmatization.

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