

GAIA Update

January, 2007 - Guardians



Entering 2007 we re-commit to the people of Africa as just now we particularly salute the caregivers, known in Malawi as guardians. Most of these are women - grandmothers, aunts, daughters. Here is an excerpt, slightly edited for clarity, from a larger document coming to us from a guardian:

"We have cared for 8 patients living with HIV. We have no nursing knowledge so we link our patients with nurses elsewhere to screen for viruses and provide counseling. We also partner with St Luke's hospital, which gives anti-HIV medications to our patients. And we work with Dr. K, who runs a nearby clinic. She teaches the guardians about local food combinations that boost the nutritional status of the patients...."

We found one patient, Doris, when distributing maize to the hungry in the Zomba area. She was a divorcee caring for one child, but she was not well. The end of her life was difficult for her guardians because she required complex medical attention. First we helped her come to terms with her sickness. Then she agreed to receive HIV testing. We recommended that she bring a loved one with her and she chose her brother. She was HIV positive. We helped Doris access the right medications. For three weeks she lived in the home of one of our staff members. Her health temporarily improved and she was briefly able to harvest maize for herself and her child from her family's tiny plot of land. Then everything became worse. She prayed for healing, and she died peacefully on September 25th. The transports to the hospital, the nutritional supplements, and the guardians were possible only because of GAIA. Your support reduced much suffering for Doris and for her elderly parents. Though separated from her husband, during her palliative care she was reunited with him. He is also living with HIV and receiving TB treatment. Seeing the love GAIA has shown, her husband has started living a positive life. Doris's illness and dying became less burdensome to her when she learned GAIA would purchase even the coffin. She leaves one child, a 4 year old who may also be infected."

The guardians include you who enable this work to go on, and for you I add one more thing. A friend sent this from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The White Company*. The imagery comes from the Christian heritage, but I presume it describes a hope rooted in broader human longing.

"Heaven, too, was very near to them in those days. God's direct agency was to be seen in the thunder and the rainbow, the whirlwind and the lightning. To the believer, clouds of angels and confessors, and martyrs, armies of the sainted and the saved, were ever stooping over their struggling brethren upon earth, raising, encouraging, and supporting them."

To guardians everywhere, very much including all who support our work, I convey most heartfelt thanks for your kindness.

William Rankin