

UU GLOBAL AIDS COALITION NEWSLETTER, 6TH EDITION, OCTOBER 2005

WHAT IS THE UU GLOBAL AIDS COALITION?

The UU Global AIDS Coalition (UUGAC) was founded in Spring 2003 as an action group of the First Unitarian Church in Portland, Oregon. We had the ambitious goal of making a difference in the fight against the global AIDS epidemic in three ways, by education and outreach, by political advocacy and by direct service. We hoped to enlist other congregations so that we could speak out as a combined voice for liberal religious religion.

From this small beginning we have grown in size and more importantly in the connection with UU's who are involved in direct service projects or who want to learn more about how all of us can get involved. We have contacts in around 100 UU congregations throughout the US and Canada and a couple in other countries, including several who are directly supporting projects in countries impacted by AIDS, and we are continually learning of others. (Including UUA President Bill Sinkford who will travel to Africa in November – see separate note). We are forming a Youth Division to harness the amazing energy of our youth, and we have strong partnerships with local and national organizations within and outside the UUA. Here in Portland we played a lead role in founding the Portland Area Global AIDS Coalition, a network of over 25 local groups all working on some aspect of global AIDS issues.

UU'S MAKING A DIFFERENCE

No Easy Answers: AIDS Volunteer Work in Kenya

3 members of 1ST Unitarian, Portland, OR, Kirsten Carpentier, Marlene Anderson and Ann Pickar, worked in Kenya this summer. The following article is by Kirsten and describes her experiences in the village of Kisayani helping build an orphanage.

After several days in Nairobi we drove several hours into rural Kenya to a dusty, dry, desolate village, near the town of Kibwezi, called Kisayani. It hasn't rained there in four years and the ecological devastation of prolonged drought, over-grazing and deforestation was clearly wrecking havoc with the local economy. Every day the sky clouded up as if to rain, and every day, like a cruel joke, the heavy sky would not release a drop. As volunteers we were there to help build an orphanage, develop a microfinance program and identify orphans for a sponsorship program. During the three weeks we stayed in a camp with about 45 other volunteers and we lived in mud huts, with thatched roofs and cow-dung floors. There was no electricity and no local source of water. Water is very precious in that area, and it was brought in by truck. Our living circumstances were basic, primitive and harsh. We ate better than the local people, but for most of us it wasn't close to adequate.

Every weekday there was work to be done on the orphanage, which we were literally building from the ground up. The mamas from the Ndiwa ("ndiwa" means widow) women's group would come from miles around to work along side of us and help us learn about the true grit of being a woman in Kenya. They are very tough and yet

sweet survivors, and they have my unfaltering admiration. No matter how far the walk and how many troubles and ills they might have, they kept showing up. They would smile, laugh at us (wow, were most of us ill-equipped to do back-breaking manual labor for hours!!) and sing when things got a little dull on the brick-passing line. They have the most amazing and open faces, each of which tells a story of loss, hardship, endurance and surprising resilience. There are over 100 in the group and many of these women are HIV+ and are caring for orphans. Most of the mamas were bone thin and ate one, maybe two meals a day. The food they ate is mostly ugali, a corn mush that lacks nutritional balance. Many mamas and their children had terrible coughs (bronchitis, pneumonia, TB, AIDS?) and many had bouts of what the locals called “malaria.” So we were in challenging conditions, indeed, and yet to use a Kenyan phrase, “slowly by slowly” a building started to emerge from the rocks we gathered and the mud bricks we made together.

In the afternoons there were long meetings, usually in three languages (Kacombe, Kiswahili and English) and much discussion about how to proceed with microfinance projects, child sponsorship projects and a health clinic project. At times these discussions seemed absolutely endless and exhausting. But in a place where there is no television, no radio, and only each other, discussion was clearly the main focus of culture and entertainment!

One of the highlights of my three weeks at the camp at Kisayani was visiting homes in the villages nearby to take case histories of orphans to determine who might come to live at the orphanage after it is completed and who might be best served by sponsorship while remaining with their families. Our camp was constantly filled with local children who came to play or because they were curious about us. Visiting the families of orphans, while emotionally draining, made the human story of AIDS come alive for me in a very personal and intimate way. Over and over families told our team how the orphans’ mothers had “gone to look for work in Mombasa or Kibwezi” and come home sick, then died. The cause of death wasn’t always clearly AIDS and sometimes the children were asked to leave as we asked delicate questions. It was very apparent that there is no future on the desolate farms where there was nothing but empty fields swirling with dust. This is why the mothers, daughters and sons leave to find work, and over and over I heard the request of assistance with food and education for the orphans. Most of the families I met had one meal a day and my own hunger made this more acutely real for me. Without an education, these orphans and most of the rest of the children as well, have very few options for employment and so the sex trade becomes an option as they become adolescents.

In summary, the trip showed me just how intertwined economics, culture and women’s roles are in the AIDS pandemic. Because women have few rights and can’t own property, they have very few options, especially without education or skills and when the farms aren’t producing. They make certain handicrafts that may be marketable, but there are logistical and cultural barriers that sometimes make those goods difficult to sell. What is encouraging is their ability to organize and work together for a common goal, despite undercurrents of mistrust, which are endemic in the culture. There is an

absolute need to reach out to the generation of children who have been left in the wake of AIDS and help them become educated. Without education it is very clear they have few options and may be doomed to repeat their dead parents' mistakes.

As I reflect on my time in Kenya I suspect I will be processing the complexities of what I experienced and learned for many more months, perhaps years to come and I find that I hope to have a chance to return.

TOWN DWELLERS

*Town dwellers be warned
Watch over this epidemic
AIDS my friend is no joke
The price is only one dead
Stop drinking yourself silly
And enjoying unprotected sex
Women stop selling yourself
At this expense in your life
You must choose your own faithful partner
Celebrities have died
Heroes have disappeared
Who are you to survive?*

*Brothers and sisters
Let us join in the race
And fight UKIMI*

Poem by Nick Bitu, leader of the Rescue Team. Nick is one of the Kenyan volunteers in the project described above, and a tower of strength in the community. On his own initiative he has recruited several groups who make presentation on HIV/AIDS prevention in schools and other venues in the area of Kibweze, Kenya. He can be reached at Rescueteam3@yahoo.com

Supporting education for Girls in Mozambique

By Priscilla Laws and Tania Werry, Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland valley, Pennsylvania. (UUCV)

The greatest wish of those impacted by AIDS is to take care of the children, and in response to this many of us become involved in direct service projects focus on the needs of children, either by helping them find an education, or by working with orphans. This is an inspiring story of how a small UU congregation found a way to make a difference.

In July 2004 Priscilla Laws of the UUCV spent some time traveling in Northern Mozambique with Ruth Mkhwanazon who directs education and AIDS prevention projects for Oxfam Great Britain.

One of Ruth's projects involved supporting girls from a rural village who wanted to attend upper primary school (grades 6 and 7). Rural villages in the area rarely have schooling past 5th grade, and only 60% of children receive primary education. 10% of these are girls. But because Mozambique is a very poor country, a bursary of only \$150.00 pays all the expenses for a year of schooling. Priscilla decided to enlist her

congregation in raising “bursary” funds to enable 125 girls to attend upper primary school starting in January 2005.

Initial efforts focused on selling fair trade chocolate, chutney and African Rooibos tea at local farmers markets and bazaars. Members also began to identify individuals inside and outside the congregation who would be willing to sponsor girls. But it took all Fall to scrape together 2.5 bursaries, out of the 25, and in the meantime the project had identified 25 girls who were eligible to start school in mid January.

Efforts were redoubled and congregants started collecting pledges from non-UUCV members, including two from another UU congregation, and by January 12th they had secured enough funds to support all 25 girls! By doing this through the church all contributions were tax deductible.

Through the efforts of this small congregation 25 girls were able to attend upper primary for a full school year with the multiplier effects of enhanced family lives, and the long term lives of their future children. Pictures and biographies of the girls are prominently displayed at the church, and the congregation has enjoyed learning more about the girls and their aspirations – and they are working hard to continue and expand the project for the 2006 school year.

REPORT FROM THE G8 SUMMIT IN EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

This report is from Pat Rumer, founder of the Portland chapter of Jubilee. UUGAC and Jubilee work closely together on efforts to advocate for debt reduction. Those of us who have experienced the depth of poverty facing those who are heavily impacted by AIDS realize that we in the west need to become involved in efforts to reduce poverty as the most effective way to address the impact of the AIDS epidemic)

In 1998 I attended a World Council of churches meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, and met with African women who shared how the debt burden and international reforms required by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were killing their families. In order to make payments and interest on IMF loans, African nations have slashed funding for health care and education. The voices of the women expressed the desperation in their lives because the AIDS pandemic combined with very limited health services is killing the next generation, and they challenged women from the G8 countries to go home and do something about the debt burden that was destroying their countries. This led to my involvement with Jubilee and in 2000 I organized a Jubilee chapter in Portland.

This year world wide advocacy efforts appeared to be paying off. The G8 summit in Edinburgh in July 2005 had debt reduction and aid to Africa as a key part of the agenda. Tony Blair, the British prime minister played a lead` role in setting the agenda and specific goals. And advocacy groups led by DATA the organization founded by Bono, lead singer of the U2 and an amazing advocate for action on debt reduction and AIDS issues led a widely publicized campaign to end poverty. I was invited to Edinburgh to attend a parallel summit with ONE campaign representatives from all over the US and activists from all over the world. While the summit did result in debt cancellation for 18 countries, much remains to be done. We can all get involved.

We can take action to urge our government to:

1. increase aid to people of the global south as part of our commitment to the UN Millenium goal of 0.07% of the US GNP (Gross National Product)

2. cancel 100% of the debt owed to multilateral lending organizations – IMF, the World bank and to multi regional development banks.
3. bring about trade justice – removal of unfair barriers to trade from the south.

DID YOU KNOW? (WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WORLD OF GLOBAL AIDS LAST MONTH)

The following stories were reported in Kaiser Network News last month

- A study in Uganda found that women are at greater risk of HIV infection during pregnancy (10/03/05)
- A debate is swirling around the assertion by AIDS advocates that as the US ramps up financing for abstinence only approaches to HIV prevention there is a “dramatic” shortage of condoms in Uganda, the country with the greatest success in reducing its rate of HIV/AIDS infection (10/05/05)
- Bono met with President Bush and in an interview before the meeting stated “Bush and other world leaders will be held accountable for what happens on their watch”. (10/20/05)
- The US could play a larger` role in curbing HIV/AIDS if President Bush would stop holding up vital funds earmarked for the UN Population Fund. This is the 4th year this has happened, and \$34 million is being “held hostage to politics” which could be being used to expand maternal health and HIV prevention efforts.(10/20/05)
- UNICEF and UNAIDS have launched a new campaign, “Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS”. It will focus on reducing the incidence of mother-child HIV transmission and provide support to children who have lost parents to AIDS.
- The health minister of Lesotho will announce a plan for universal HIV testing. 33% of adults in Lesotho, a small African country with 2 million inhabitants are infected with HIV. (10/25/05)
- A study in S. Africa found that male circumcision may reduce the risk of men contracting HIV through sexual intercourse with women by about 60%.(10/26)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

UUA President Bill Sinkford plans to visit Africa

Rev. Olivia Holmes, the UUA Director for International relations, reports that our President, Bill Sinkford, will travel to Africa in early November with 2 overarching goals: firstly to increase` his knowledge of the challenges of addressing the AIDS epidemic on the ground, and using this information to challenge the Bush Administration’s “abstinence only” policy and its impact on African education and relief. Secondly he will listen to those who were involved in the Truth and reconciliation process in South Africa in order to help us with own efforts toward racial reconciliation and affirmation both within the denomination and in this country.

He will visit Manya Krobo, where the UU UNO office has partnered with the “Queen Mothers” to take care of 400 AIDS orphans, and talk with experts in Ghana and South Africa on strategic efforts they

have found effective in combating AIDS and spend time in Ghana with an extraordinary group of youths who go from village to village to educate their peers through drama and workshops.

UUGAC is proud and excited that the leader of our denomination is becoming involved in global AIDS issues and advocacy. We wish him an amazing, life changing trip and eagerly anticipate hearing about his experiences.

HIV/AIDS In Africa: Engaging America in the Battle

UUGAC Board member Carla Feldhammer in partnership with Southern Illinois University in Carbondale has been a lead in partnering with other organizations to send human resources, supplies and funding to fight the war on HIV/AIDS. They have now produced a DVD and brochure which they hope will help other UU congregations and local communities form a plan of action. For more information contact the Public Policy Institute,.. web: www.siuppi@siu.edu; e-mail siuppi@siu.edu.

UUGAC Youth Division

Erica Lindegren (Youth Rep) and Toniann Read (Youth Advisor rep) are working hard together to develop opportunities for UU youth to become involved in work on global AIDS issues. Their first project is to promote youth involvement in World AIDS Day activities in the first week of December/worldday. Readers of this newsletter should already have received an announcement on what they are doing and how to become involved, or you can contact them at allaroundgurl@aol.com or dtzjread@comcast.net, or you can go to the World AIDS Day website, www.avert.org/worldaid. A huge thank you to Erica and Toniann for taking this on.

UUGAC Real Web Site!

Our previous web site, www.uuglobalaidscoalition.org has been taken over by forces outside our control and is now pushing bank loans among other things! **Don't go there!** Our new site, www.uuglobalaids.org IS up and running , BUT IT STILL NEEDS WORK. Please contact Ann Pickar at apickar@cs.com if you could help with web site development and maintenance. Many thanks to Greg Zupan of First Church for taking over from Chris Gates and helping get us back on line.

Stop Press: Orphans Bill Passes!

Largely thanks to tireless work by advocacy groups, the US House and Senate have JUST passed the so-called "Orphans Bill" (HR 1409) .This will help protect the World's orphans and vulnerable children by coordinating US assistance and providing aid for programs providing basic care , treatment and work to abolish school fees and promote inheritance rights. This is great news for many of us involved in working with women and children impacted by the AIDS epidemic!

CONTACTS AND LINKS

HELP US GROW!

We encourage both individuals and congregations to join our coalition. Any individual can sign up to receive the newsletter, but we are especially looking for people who will be the contact for their congregation. Besides letting us know that you are out there, we hope that congregational contacts will

- Distribute the newsletter and brochures and perhaps maintain a local sign up list
- Share news of what is happening in your congregation and community.

TO JOIN OUR “YOUTH DIVISION”

Contact Erica Lindegren (allaroundgurl@aol.com) or Toniann Read at dtzjread@comcast.net

TO USE THE RESOURCES OF THE UUA ADVOCACY OFFICE

The UUA Advocacy Office in Washington DC does a wonderful job of tracking global AIDS issues and developing resources for congregations. You can sign up for advocacy alerts, find help on their web site, or get personal support.

To sign up for UUA advocacy alerts: <http://www.uua.org/uuawo/new/>

LINKS TO OTHER GLOBAL AIDS ORGANIZATIONS

Africa AIDS Response: www.africaaidsresponse.org; contact daynakirk@hotmail.com

DATA and ONE Campaign: www.data.org; www.one.org

Global AIDS Alliance: www.stopglobalaids.org and www.globalaidsalliance.org

Jubilee: www.jubileeusa.org

Kaiser Network daily reports: www.kaisernetwork.org

Physicians for Human Rights: www.phrusa.org

Portland Area Global AIDS Coalition: www.pagac.org; contact apickar@cs.com

RESULTS: www.results.org

UNAIDS: www.unaids.org

Zimbabwe Artists Project: www.zimbabweartistsproject.org; contact Dick Adams at zimartpro@hotmail.com

TO RECEIVE THE NEWSLETTER

Answer this e-mail newsletter or send an e-mail to: apickar@cs.com, with UUGAC newsletter in the title line. Please note that this is not a membership organization; no costs or solicitations are involved; we simply want to spread the word.

TO SEND A CONTRIBUTION FOR THIS NEWSLETTER

This newsletter comes out three times a year, normally January, April and September, E-mail apickar@cs.com with contributions or suggestions.

UU GLOBAL AIDS COALITION NATIONAL BOARD

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