

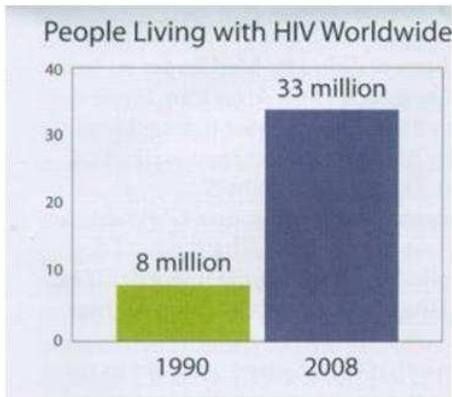
Where

by Dr. Bill Clemmer

The Global Trend

In my eighteenth year serving as a medical missionary in Africa along with my wife Ann, an educator, we continue to be challenged, if not overwhelmed, by the toll that HIV/AIDS is taking on this continent. HIV is a virus (the Human Immunodeficiency Virus) that leads to the illness of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). While there has been recent progress in developing an early HIV vaccine, none has proven 100% effective and scientists believe we are years away from anything that could be used in the general population.

Children particularly are victims of this virus. A quarter of a million die each year from AIDS, typically infected in utero or at birth, and the toll of orphans now lies between eleven and twelve million!

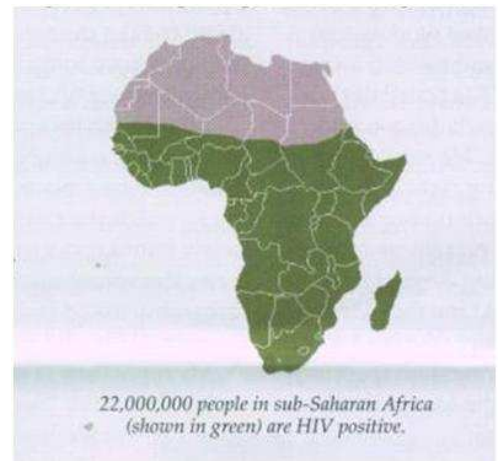


A Cure... for Some

The good news about AIDS is the availability of drugs (anti-retroviral) to keep the virus in check, which for many means being able to live a normal life. Such drugs, however, are expensive and woefully unavailable in sub-Saharan Africa where we serve. Most patients, therefore, have no access to such therapy. We are painfully aware that in the midst of daily suffering and death there lies a cure on the other side of the ocean where economic barriers and lack of political will prevent its wide-scale use on a dying continent.

Combating the Disease

With support from international donors and through American Baptist-affiliated agencies, such as IMA World Health, we have been able to make some progress on the ground in Congo. Over the past three years we have helped set up and currently support 129 prenatal clinics that provide anti-retroviral drugs to women in labor in order to prevent the passage of the deadly virus to their babies. We currently receive more than 5,300 pregnant women each month in these clinics for HIV/AIDS counseling and screening. Widespread prevention in both medical and social arenas remains the cornerstone of treatment. Through IMA we are also sponsoring HIV awareness campaigns in schools, churches and social clubs. We even sponsor such programs within military and local law enforcement agencies—renegade groups of which are some of the biggest propagators of AIDS.



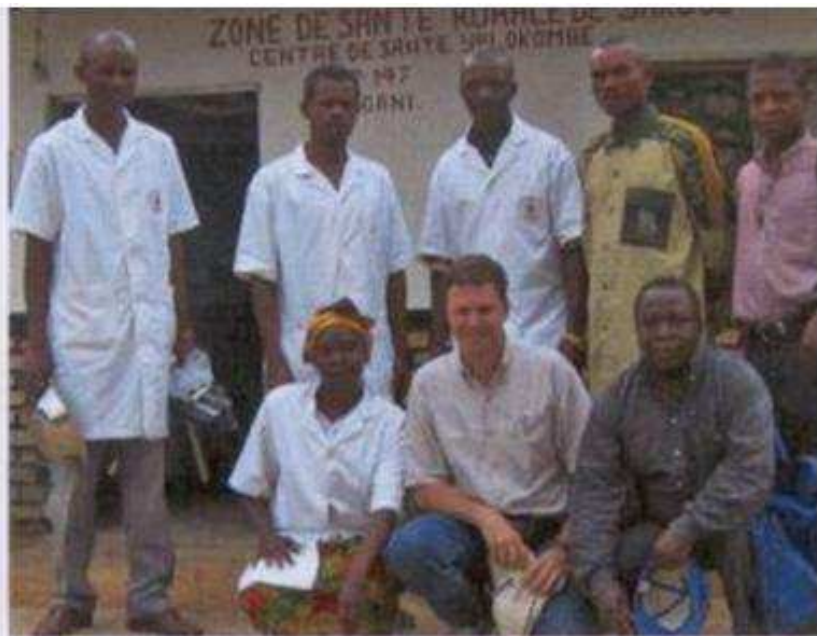
The Hands of the Sender

You may wonder, "Where is the church, where is the Gospel, where is the presence of the Holy Spirit in such misery, suffering and despair?"

God is in the hearts and attitudes of local political leaders, military authorities and churches. We are starting to see seeds of reform in the new Congolese government including a constitutional amendment that defends the rights of women. Military tribunals are making soldiers accountable for rape and war crimes, and some have been prosecuted. Cultural norms that allow multiple partners are being challenged by churches. Moreover, the root cause of AIDS (sexual transmission)—for years the ultimate taboo subject—is now being talked about from the pulpit. Lastly, God is

manifest in the hands of the sender—the churches like yours that send and support international missionaries and national workers who are called to live and minister in the midst of tragedy. I believe God has heard the cries of the innocent victims in places such as Congo and is moving the hearts of many in our nation to respond. For Ann and me, the realization that we have been called to live in this environment and benefit from the faithful support of our American Baptist congregations back home are powerful forces that keep us rooted and encouraged during the most difficult of days. Though the difference we make often seems like “drops of water in the overwhelming flood of death

and disease,” we are privileged to be part of a larger plan and know that He who has “overcome the world” (John 16:33) will overcome HI V/AIDS. God is able to bring justice, repentance and accountability to the accused, the uncaring and the indifferent. I believe time will come when peace and reconciliation will triumph over conflict... and those who suffer will find healing and relief. In that process Christ will be evident. We want to be here when that happens



At a rural health clinic—similar to those across the country—Bill is with Congolese doctors & nurses being equipped to prevent the spread of AIDS in pregnancy.