

## **ELCA MALARIA CAMPAIGN –EAST CENTRAL SYNOD OF WISCONSIN FALL 2010**

Sometimes, in the midst of work, holiday preparations, and news reports about the latest natural disaster or scandal, we can all use a reminder that there are wonderful, amazing things in this world. The ELCA and the East Central Synod of Wisconsin are involved in one. It's called the ELCA Malaria Campaign.

Malaria is rare in the United States, but in other parts of the world, including places where our companion churches are located, it kills about 850,000 people a year. According to the Centers for Disease Control, it is the leading cause of death for children under 5 in Africa. It kills people in some of the poorest parts of the world, people already fighting malnutrition and AIDS. And malaria is treatable and preventable: we know what causes it, how to prevent it, and how to treat people infected with it.

Jesus told us that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do it for him. The time has come for us to do something about malaria, and the ELCA is doing just that. Through the ELCA Malaria Campaign, and in coordination with our companion churches in Africa, the ELCA is working to control malaria deaths by 2015, and the ECSW is one of 10 pilot synods leading the way.

Here is how the Campaign works. Because each of our companion churches has its own unique set of circumstances, each will submit a long term plan for how they will use the money to fight malaria. We have already received some of the plans.

Part of the money will go to spraying and to distributing insecticide-treated nets as well as teaching people how to use them. You see, a parasite causes malaria. Mosquitoes carry the parasite. When the infected mosquitoes bite someone, usually while they are sleeping, the parasite infects them, giving them malaria. Bed nets protect people, especially children, from mosquitoes. The cost is \$10, but many families in Africa live on less than that per month, so distributing these treated bed nets will be an important first step.

Part of the money will go to education, to teach people what causes malaria and how to avoid it. For example, because mosquitoes carry the disease, and mosquitoes breed in standing water, getting rid of standing water reduces the number of mosquitoes, which reduces the amount of malaria.

Longer-term goals include things like creating a medical infrastructure where one does not already exist. Where our companion churches need them, money will go to building clinics and training first responders. This is where the project starts to get very interesting, because building a medical infrastructure has ripple effects: clinics and first responders can treat other conditions besides malaria, increasing the project's benefits.

Another longer term goal with ripple effects is to help our companion churches build the capacity to access other funds. Organizations exist that have funds available, but to get access to those funds our companion churches need to know how to write a grant request, put together and run a program, and monitor finances and program goals, and be able to show they can do all these things. As our companion churches build this capacity, they will gain access to additional sources of funding that they can use to improve their communities.

Evangelism is alive in our companion synods in Africa and here in our area as we accompany each other doing the work of Jesus Christ. We have been blessed by visits back and forth which have increased our understanding of each other. Their love of music and importance of worship is inspiring our singing and spirituality. We have learned of the tremendous pressure of the AIDs and malaria problems and their connection to hunger and poverty issues. Because the Lutheran church has taken an active role in addressing hunger, there are Africans wanting to know more about us and why we would send food half-way around the world to someone we have never met. The ELCA Malaria Campaign has the potential to do the same thing with a broader group of people.

Evangelism works both ways. We are changed here in America as we witness the church so alive in Africa and the joy of the families we are able to help. We benefit as we see hope in the toughest of times. The image of Christianity in this country has suffered in the media in the last several years. Projects like the ELCA Malaria Campaign will witness to truly helping our neighbors in need. That's the living Word who can help us all grow as the body of Christ!

The work we do together will save lives, reduce suffering, control a disease that has been with us since before recorded history, build medical infrastructures and the capacity to reach additional funds, and reflect Christ's love in the world. And when we have done our part, we will pass the lessons we learn along to the other synods.

We need your help! Check out how your church would like to be involved this year and/or next year. Call or e-mail your Synod's SWAT TEAM for ideas and help to get started containing malaria.

The ELCA Malaria Campaign is starting now. Come, join us!

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