



Would you please do me a big favor this week?
Susan Vinton, March 14, 2007

The letter read, "If you come to teach us, you will be welcomed with wide open arms." That was the letter which I received from Pastor Josephu Milisayo, inviting me to come preach this past Sunday. I was so delighted with the offer, that I forgot any nervousness. (I'd be preaching in Swahili and on a good day I don't even like speaking in English in front of a group!) I was invited to preach in Malanga! (If you remember from my other letters, Malanga is one of my two problem villages.) Although I didn't know Pastor Milisayo personally, I knew though that he is one of the few pastors here who embraces and follows-up on my friends living with AIDS. What a wonderful day that I had. The Malanga church was a lively, rowdy bunch and I had a wonderful time sharing the Gospel and talking about the opportunities we had to be "salt and light" in a hurting world (especially in light of AIDS) to the sick, the widowed and the orphans. I saw so many of my new Christian friends there that I felt I was getting a little glimpse of what heaven will be like. What a reunion it will be on that day!

The risk-taker in me has been gambling these past 9 months. I have been gathering up the sick and sending them to get tested for HIV/AIDS not really knowing how this would all work out. The numbers have really grown! In the beginning I was helping a couple of families using my kitchen money - and now we have 176 families we are helping! It has been awesome watching people being restored to life and hope, seeing people able to go back to their fields to carry on their livelihoods and to take care of their families. Christina is one of those people. Last May, she really was dying, and she knew it and I knew it. This year she is bounding up the mountain to her field to farm,

praising God all the way. What a joy! I love just seeing her!

The Christian in me has compelled me to exercise more faith than I ever thought I had, believing that God loves these people here in these out-of-the-way villages and wants them to know where eternal salvation comes from as well as to be restored to life right here and now. I have been burdened, though, because there are just so many people here with AIDS that I wondered if I could possibly ever keep up. Certainly I was afraid at times of being overwhelmed by the tide of the sick and the dying - but I kept returning to the bedrock fact that I had no choice. As a Christian I could not simply turn away and say that it was too much. But I also knew I had to do something to stay sane. One step was to enlist my students in this work and so I choose five of my students to act as representatives in the villages, to be my hands and my feet, to do what I knew I couldn't anymore. Their job is to make sure that my friends living with AIDS have bus fare, that they get to the bus and get special helps as needed.

I have from the beginning though been hoping and praying that if we signaled to those with the power to make decisions that we really have a terrible problem here in our cluster of villages that they would send our people help. Well, now I think we are one step closer to that day arriving, and I want to share that with you - my friends back in America and Canada and Europe and ask you to pray that somehow those who are in authority will act to help my friends here.

You see we now have the incredible blessing of

having Patrick and Kate with us. Patrick is a doctor with plenty of HIV/AIDS and TB experience. His wife, Kate, also has much experience working with the sick and the handicapped while they were serving in Uganda. These past few weeks, they have visited the sick with me and surveyed the local medical scene. Last week, we visited the Lugoda Hospital and spoke with the doctors there about the AIDS problem in our villages. Would you believe that the largest percentage of AIDS patients in the Lugoda program come from our area? They have all been wondering why. Well it's simple. There's no more AIDS here than anywhere else. It's just that we're intervening and spending a ton of your money to help people who would have never made it to that hospital to actually get there.

And instead of dying, they are living.

And so what we are doing is messing up the statistics! It is because you all are helping me send them there!!! I could never thank you enough for helping all of my friends here. The matron of the program said that really that in order for an AIDS program to be effective that the program must go to the people. (Yes! Yes!) The Lugoda AIDS program is trying to find community "links" and she considers us that "link" to these villages. So who knows, maybe it will just so work out that we will have the opportunity to get this vital care to these great people here. We just might be able to get them to agree if we can quickly build a clinic and use Patrick's wonderful credentials as a real doctor they might agree that we can be a center to help these people right here in our villages without them having to travel all of those hours on the bus!

So I'm asking you in addition to your continual generosity, to do me a big favor and to please

pray that if this would be according to His will and plan that HIV/AIDS/TB help would make it to our villages. We have been busy trying to get all the stats right, so we can present them with something to hold. (Governments like that sort of thing!) This Friday, we hope to talk to the decision makers there.

I just pray that something can happen soon.

I found out today that we lost Catherine Ugulumu, leaving her seventh grade son to fend for himself. His name is Emmanueli - I want to make sure he doesn't drop out of school, that he's got food to eat, that he's taken care of because his mother isn't here to take care of him anymore. On any given day, I might find a person like Christina bounding up the hill and the next moment receiving an emaciated scared mother with a baby - and then an hour later I find out that Emmanueli's mom just died and that now he has no one in the world. So I do pray that we can be "the link" for our community to get help. People get better if they just get to help soon enough. For the many of you who have written to me asking about Mr. Kabonge, our friendly "witch doctor", well he did indeed go with us on the medical visit to Mdabulo last week for HIV/AIDS and TB testing. The great news is that he is not HIV positive. His wife was so happy with the news that she bought him a grape soda to celebrate. Bursting with smiles, he even claimed that "God is so good." At that point when he said that, I invited him to church. When he gets a little stronger, I believe that he will even accompany me! It might even be to visit my lively, rowdy bunch at Malanga.

Thank you for your prayers!

We really could particularly use them now.