



Now I have my team ...  
Susan Vinton, January 20, 2007

The morning started with the news that both Iddy and Jastin had died.

Iddy left one child without a mom or dad. Jastin had never married, but left his widowed mother (who is also HIV positive) and 5 younger siblings dependent on her. Truly, a loss to both families and our community. I had been visiting Jastin recently as he was close by and looked bad and afraid. My presence usually made him laugh and I enjoyed talking with him and his mom. Because he wouldn't eat or drink much anymore, I always asked him, "If there was only thing that you would want to eat or drink, what would it be." He would always answer, "Fanta." And somehow, that Fanta would brighten his day. But he was obviously dying. Last week I asked him about having peace with God. Would he like that? I shared with him the hope I have in my own life. He said he did want to know more, so I found one of my Christian friends living with AIDS to talk with him. She sent Yohane and that day, Jastin received Christ as his Savior. Two days later when I saw Jastin he told me he was no longer afraid to die and this morning he left this world behind. Iddy never heard this good news as there are just more people with HIV/AIDS than we can physically visit on a regular basis. What makes me happy though is that we have some wonderful students with a heart for service, who love God and who have known the hurt of HIV/AIDS in their own families.

I have four more students trained now to join us in this effort of reaching out to those with HIV/AIDS - with both the love that comes from Christ and with treatment that comes from the hospital far away at Lugoda. Last year they were just my students; this year they are my co-

laborers. As we walk together long distances, the time is ripe to discuss about how to be Christ to these people who have been silently rejected.

One of these rejected folks is Mama Janet.

I met her at her husband's funeral. She was 9 months pregnant and in the beginning stages of labor. I had spoken to her brother-in-law Charles to see if we could get her to a hospital quickly so that she could be given the medicine that could perhaps prevent HIV transmission during the birth of the baby. The following day, Charles agreed that it was a great idea and I gave him money to rent a pick-up and to pay for the hospitalization (about 40 dollars). What I didn't know was that Mama Janet had already given birth the night before to baby number 7. I was horrified at the deception. (It was the other widows who came to set me straight on this point.) I finally called for Mama Janet who confirmed what I knew - she had already had the baby by the time I tried to get her to a hospital. What I also learned is that while she was having her baby in Malanga, her house in Mweifu was completely stripped of her food and meager belongings. She cried. My heart did too. Where does one start to rebuild the life of a mom in such circumstances? There are just so many widows and orphans. My mind spins trying to work it all out. I certainly can't do it alone.

But now I have my team.

As Festo, the student body president at our school said, "We are walking with you mama, shoulder to shoulder." We are encouraging the sick, providing practical help and now lately we

are going after people who try to step on other people in their despair.

All of us here are playing a part in this battle with AIDS. We simply cannot sit here and shut our eyes and ears to the despair. Our roles are all different though. Last semester Helen lived at our school and served beautifully. One young man in the village who touched her heart was Alex. He is a 20 year old young man who has both HIV and TB. He is a brother of one of our students. She visited him nearly daily towards the end and just before she left to return to America she left him a cross necklace to wear. Alex was wearing this cross during his last visit to my house. When I saw the cross, I asked him if he knew what it meant to which he replied, "I really don't know. I just like it

because Mwalimu (the teacher) gave it to me." So I gave some introductory ideas about the gospel and told him to go to talk to his aunt who I knew was a good Christian woman. Well we saw him on the way to Jastin's and Iddy's funerals today. I again pointed to the cross and asked him what he learned. He said that his aunt told him the same thing I did and that he is now going to church to learn more and more. There is just something remarkable about one living with HIV/AIDS (plus TB) who has met the One who can really heal us.

It is amazing what is happening here. I would have never dreamed of all of this when I first came to make my home in this village. I have never loved more being a missionary than I do now.