



This awesome privilege ...  
Susan Vinton, September 28, 2007

There was a glimmer of hope in Blastwell's eyes. He had been by the house several times during this past month where he got the "everyone get HIV tested" pitch. Certainly not what this man wanted to hear – but he got it nonetheless! Blastwell managed to be my one neighbor to go to the hospital three times to "to get tested" and to come back each time with the results of every other medical test possible, except for the HIV test! As I explained to him, all those folks who tried to avoid testing, are already buried, so if he wanted my help, we needed to know the truth. Dejected, this sad man went back to get "the health test," and the results indicated that he was HIV positive. He arrived at the door the next morning with the news. He really looked hopeless. Fortunately, some of my lady friends (all HIV positive) were there too and they encouraged him as no one else could. The following morning Blastwell went to Lugoda to begin the journey of HIV/AIDS care. It was after this trip that he came back with that first glimmer of hope. In his own words, "Looks like I will need to get back to work – I am going to live!" What a great way to start the day. There is always hope.

There is also sorrow.

Veronika looked frightened and tired. At age 28, this mother of one who was brought home from the hospital to Igoda to die. Her mother came to get me that morning to tell me about her daughter and I promised to visit that afternoon. Sure enough she was indeed ill. I talked to her about the virus and about getting better as she had been tested the week before. I also talked to her about God and having peace with Him and about death to which we will all one day succumb. She interrupted me by

saying, "I want to be saved." She meant it too. Mama Zuena (her older sister and also one of my friends who is living with AIDS), prayed with her and this sweet woman had peace in her fearful soul. Three days later, they sent for me as her health had worsened and she died before I could get there. That same day we also lost little Lukas who at nine months had known only illness. His mother is now alone.

Sunday, we (Rachel, Kenneth – my student helper and I) took a 5 hour trip road to the village of Mlevelwa to follow-up on 11 of our friends in that village. The last place we stopped was at Kristian's home. He was the oldest of several rough-looking and agitated brothers. This very sick man, anticipating our visit, had chairs arranged and again I felt this awesome privilege to be able to serve this very ill man and his family. A man ill, lost and truly without hope – sores, swelling and nothing to dull his pain. On visits such as this, we come equipped with food and other helps to those in real need. He certainly needs help and he certainly needs peace. We were privileged with the opportunity to share with him about God. There's no church any where close to this man's home, so we asked if he would receive one of our pastor friends from the next village if we asked him to come visit. He agreed. Kenneth will follow up as well. Even the brothers calmed down by the end of our visit and thanked us for coming.

In spite of the sadness, there is so much hope. This week, I saw 12 year old Tatua who has suffered most of his orphaned life with HIV/AIDS, and now was headed out with his peers to hunt monkeys! He looked absolutely great. He is back in school, living with his siblings and just being a happy kid. We are

now at just over 500 households we are serving since we have started our outreach to those affected by the virus. There doesn't seem to be a single day that I don't talk to at least one person about AIDS. As I say, there is no time like the present to talk about AIDs. They do laugh when I tell them that if anyone passes through my doors -- even priests and pastors -- they are advised to get tested. Christians should be the first!

One of the most exciting parts of this week though and what gives me hope amidst this sorrow is that the kids of my friends with HIV/AIDS are ready to join our school. And there they are in class -- fully participating. They are the future. They are the ones that will take care of their younger siblings if their parents die. They are the kids who have

already lost mom and dad (like Atu -- Tatu's older sister) and who need the chance to go to school more than anyone. There is hope. And I know that God has sent us at this dark time in the lives of these people to bring that hope. At our schools they're not only going to get a good education, this is where for many of them they're going to hear the gospel for the first time. This is where they're going to have good Christian teachers who will take an interest in them, love them, get involved in their lives.

This is where we're going to train them to be men and women of God who will be ready to serve Him by giving of themselves to help others.

Thank you for helping us to serve these lovely people and their families in their greatest time of need.