

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF BURUNDI

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Integrated Health Programmes

“Jesus had compassion on the crowds and healed many.” Matthew 14:14

A new administration block, isolation ward, and laboratory at the hospital at Matana, and a new staff house and isolation ward at the health centre at Nyankanda - formerly a leprosy hospital - are signs of the Church's growing involvement with and commitment to health care in Burundi.



**Administration block
Matana hospital**

In the year that the Anglican Church in Burundi is celebrating its 75th anniversary it is appropriate to remember that health was one of the priorities of the early pioneers who brought the Gospel to Burundi. Each mission station had its church, school, clinic or hospital – a witness to God's care for the whole person.



Inter-confessional workshop

As it continues to expand its health related programmes, the Church is seeking to work collaboratively with the government and other agencies; sharing experiences and resources, and looking at ways to enhance facilities and encourage good practice. A workshop bringing together the expertise of the UNFPA and the Church, for example, was organised for key religious leaders to look at issues relating to reproductive health, especially in reducing maternal mortality and the prevention of transmission of HIV from mother to child.

Countrywide, the challenges are immense in terms of destroyed or poor infrastructures, inadequate financial and material resources, and few well trained and experienced personnel. The drain of good doctors and other practitioners to other parts of the world leaves the country depleted in terms of adequate health provision. There is a need for the expertise and compassion of Christian doctors and nurses.

Through its integrated health programmes the Church is seeking to assist those most at risk and vulnerable especially children, orphans, youth, and women, specifically in the areas of malaria and HIV/AIDS prevention.

Malaria continues to be the leading cause of death in Burundi especially among women and children. That fact was restated recently by the Archbishop, the Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi, when, to mark World Malaria Day 2010, mosquito nets were distributed to returnees who have been repatriated in the commune of Giharo, not far from the border with Tanzania. While participating in the distribution he explained that in some areas of the country children attacked by malaria are thought to be subjects of witchcraft. He said, “Having the World Malaria Day raises the awareness not only of those immediately concerned but also the international community. Malaria is still the number one killer but it is preventable. That means people need to be aware and responsible”.



Explaining the use of mosquito nets

The message was reiterated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams. "Malaria", he said, "is a massive yet solvable problem taking the lives of close to one million people every year, mainly women and children in Africa. However it is an entirely preventable disease – every death is needless....Tragically the challenge of malaria has grown worse not better. World Malaria Day is a day of unified commemoration of the global effort to provide effective control of malaria around the world. This year's World Malaria Day marks a particularly critical moment in time as the international malaria community has less than a year to meet the 2010 targets of delivering effective and affordable protection and treatment to all people at risk of malaria, as called for by the United Nations Secretary-General".



With help from Netsforlife the Church is actively engaged in a comprehensive programme benefiting all dioceses involving education about malaria and the use of mosquito nets, the distribution of impregnated nets, and the monitoring of their proper use.

As in many other parts of the world, the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is very real. The extent of the problem in Burundi is difficult to assess due to lack of testing and fear of trauma and discrimination.

Distribution of mosquito nets

The Church is committed to engaging with some of the issues and trying to impact constructively the lives of those suffering from HIV and AIDS. Since 2006 around 200 associations have had access to micro-credits in order to start small projects that empower people to enjoy some independence. Training events and workshops have facilitated discussion at community level and helped to increase awareness and knowledge regarding HIV and AIDS (SIDA in French). In association with Mothers' Union efforts are being made to address the problem of mother to child transmission. Special support is provided for pupils who are HIV positive and orphans. Stop SIDA Clubs are being established in some Church schools in order to educate pupil about sexual matters and HIV and AIDS. Such clubs provide safe forums for students to ask questions and encourage responsible behaviour.

Makamba diocese has been promoting the Universal Chastity Education programme. The UCE team has toured parishes targeting the 15-35 age range with a message of abstinence and faithfulness as the best methods of fighting against HIV/AIDS.

Education on health issues is not restricted to the young. Men are being encouraged, in a culture in which they do not normally engage with such issues, to be involved and act responsibly in their families and communities, particularly in the care and respect of women, especially pregnant women.

Students preparing for ordained ministry at Matana Theological Institute have had a short course looking at some of the relevant ethical issues in a theological framework.

In all this the Church is responding to the Biblical imperative to support widows and orphans, take care of the vulnerable and those at risk, show compassion for the sick, and support the dying. Acknowledging that it cannot work alone, the Church is grateful to all those partners who work alongside and enable the transformation of people's lives to become a reality.