



**Transformational
Discipleship:
HIV/AIDS
Awareness**



HIV/AIDS Awareness Seminars

by Justine Hayes

Community Health Worker Faith Somanje and Bible teacher Sam Tambala serve in several roles at Namikango, including that of HIV/AIDS prevention trainers. Along with 13 others, they lead HIV/AIDS awareness seminars throughout the year. These seminars address many topics, from a physical understanding of HIV/AIDS that dismisses superstitions regarding transmission to lessons regarding stigma and how the church should respond.

The ministry began in 2014 through a partnership with Dr. Bruce Smith who was working with Blessings Hospital in Lilongwe. Dr. Smith along with his wife, Beth, created the seminar and mobilized a select group of trainers to conduct trainings within the Church of Christ family.

Every ministry at Namikango is aimed at transformation of the whole person through discipleship, which involves meeting people where they are, while working to get to the heart of the issues with which they struggle.

This ministry is one critical piece of the process. Sharing information is never enough to change minds or hearts. Faith, Sam, and their team have experienced first-hand the complex challenges that arise when attempting to address HIV within the church.

There are many social challenges from the stigma that people experience once they are discovered as infected. But there are deeper worldview challenges that Biblical teaching works to address, beginning with the idea of covenant. The idea that God has created a special

and unique promise to mankind, which is echoed and symbolized in the marriage relationship, is often not within the scope of the everyday person's imagination. Marital unfaithfulness is a major issue both within and outside of the church in Malawi, and it can be all too common to have partners outside of the marriage covenant. Even marriage itself is a bit complicated as there are several different ways to interpret being "married," whether it is a "common law" marriage (due to the expense that it takes to have a full ceremony,) a legal marriage, or a full event. However, when one discovers an understanding of covenant and what it means both for the church as well as for the marriage and family, it is life changing.

"In the HIV/AIDS ministry, we are trying to build better marriages that can help couples financially and relationally as they remain faithful to one another," said Faith. "We also want youth to understand the seriousness of the marriage covenant."

One of the reasons the new Discipleship Training Institute is focused on training couples is to strengthen and encourage discipleship amongst the entire family.

"We always say all people are affected (by HIV) and some are infected (with HIV)," Sam said. "We want people to understand the importance of not discriminating in order to have a happy family."

There is still much work to be done, please join us in prayer for the 15 trainers and the strength and health of their own families as well as of those that they are able to reach through this program.

Celebrate Transformed Lives!

The Namikango HIV/AIDS seminars emphasize the importance and understanding of covenant. The trainers also go deeper by teaching participants to understand the symbols used by the church to mark this covenant—communion and baptism. These are two things not taken lightly within Malawi. We'd like to introduce you to some of the individuals who have chosen to follow Jesus in these effective symbols through this ministry.

Three Women

Late last year, the HIV/AIDS ministry team traveled to Rumphu in Northern Malawi for a seminar. At every seminar different subjects arise as “key issues” that the people want to be addressed. In fact, church leadership issues often come to the light as people discover differences in understanding of various scriptures that they see pertaining to the issue of HIV/AIDS. The trainers always come back to unlocking the texts of the scriptures through a lens of understanding covenant, grace, and the words of Jesus.

On one evening during this particular seminar, three women came to the home of the church member who helped to facilitate the training. They came seeking answers for many questions that were prompted by the days' discussion on Ephesians 5:22. This verse talks about women being submissive to their husbands while men love their wives as Christ loves the church. After much discussion they walked away with a deeper understanding of not only the marriage relationship but the relationship between Christ and the Church. All three saw the love and faithfulness of God in a new light and made the decision to be baptized.

A Passerby

During another recent seminar in the city of Blantyre, the focus was on addressing the stigma of those infected with HIV/AIDS. The teacher spoke loudly from the pulpit:

“We are to love those infected with HIV.”

He continued to go into detail about the responsibility of the church to love people regardless of their HIV status.

As he spoke, a woman passed by. This woman had recently been excommunicated from her home church in a different denomination because it was discovered she is positive for HIV. She entered the building, and talked with the leaders, saying, “I have never seen that kind of teaching.” She was deeply moved and wanted to hear more, thanking them profusely for their words of love.

They heard later from the church that she chose to be baptized, submitting to this effective symbol of the covenant of which she discovered she, too, could be a part.





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UNDER THE MANGO TREE

RECENT NEWS FROM THE MISSION FIELD



Coffee Harvest Underway

It's been a great start to the coffee harvest season: picking, processing, and drying several hundred kilograms of coffee beans. Namikango Coffee Roastery hires about 20 ladies to do the picking and several others to oversee the processing, drying, and hulling. Our farming partners are also hard at work processing several tons of coffee cherries already this season. It's going to be a fantastic year of wonderful Malawian, honey-processed coffee!



DTI Completes First Term

Seventeen DTI students finished the first term well, and there were only small challenges as the new program started at Namikango with students integrating into mission life. The students have responded really positively to the curriculum, the work, and to the extra activities prepared for them. We are now taking a two-week break before starting the second term. We want to finish the second term in time to get the students home so they can prepare their gardens before the rains!



Save the Date!

60th Anniversary Mission Celebration
Lubbock Christian University
October 23, 2021