Women of Vision are making a difference worldwide. Page 20

Treasures of the Heart

WorldVision AUTUMN 2003

SEVEN STEPS TO POVERTY | Page 5  C. EVERETT KOOP ON AIDS | Page 7
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   World Vision, a free quarterly publication, affirms people responding to God’s call to care for the poor by providing information, inspiration, and opportunities for action, linking them with children and families in nearly 100 countries where World Vision ministers. In an effort to be careful stewards of our resources, the publication costs less than 35 cents a copy to print and mail.

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   » ON THE COVER

   Kristen Paulson traded art breaking for a fourth-grade classroom after her life was transformed in Nairobi’s notorious Soneto slums.

   Photograph by Anne Cusic

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We’d love to share more information with you about our programs and about partnering with World Vision to care for the poor. Check the boxes on the form below, and return it in the envelope provided between pages 16 and 17. For more information, call (888) 85-CHILD, or visit www.worldvision.org.

One of the most difficult things to communicate is what it feels like to be poor in this developing world. How can Americans really understand global poverty without actually traveling to see it? Let me try to help you by taking you on a brief, imaginary journey. I will transport you mentally and emotionally simply by taking seven things away from you, one at a time. Really.

First, I will take away your clothes. Don’t panic. I won’t take them all. You can keep the clothes on your back. But you will feel embarrassed. Your children feel the brunt of this humiliation at school.

The rest of your life is still intact, and things are not all that bad. But next I must take away electricity. Now you come home to a dark house each night. None of your appliances work: no refrigerator, telephone, dishwasher, television, computer, or stereo. Your showers are cold, and you have to wash your clothes by hand. Your quality of life has dropped precipitously—"inconceivable" is an understatement. But you shouldn’t feel too bad; you are still better off than most of the world.

Talawke No. 3 is really tough: clean water. None of your faucets, toilets, or showers work, and the only water source is a stagnant water hole. Takeaway No. 4 is devastating: water.

Each night you must take away something else. You live in a 20-by-20-foot mud hut with a dirt floor and very little furniture. Despair and desperation start to set in as you see your children suffering.

Your whole family must sleep in one room on the floor. When it rains, the walls leak, and the floor turns muddy. How much more can you take?

The rest of your life is still intact, and things are not all that bad. But next I must take away food. You find a little food by picking through your neighbors’ garbage. It’s your only source of nutrition. You notice your suffering. No one seems to care or even notice your suffering.

What else could I possibly take away? No. 7 is hope. Without these basic necessities of life, you and your children have no hope for the future.

The rest of your life is still intact, and things are not all that bad. But next I must take away your children. Your children have no hope for the future.

Takeaway No. 5 is heartbreaking: health care. To live in the developing world is to constantly be alive with the threat of disease. Your 4-year-old girl seems to be slipping away.

Takeaway No. 6 is heartbreaking: food. Your children have no hope for the future.

Takeaway No. 7 is heartbreaking: hope. Your children have no hope for the future. You are trapped in a nightmare. How can this be happening? Why has no one stopped it to help? Unbelievably, everyone around you is living as they always did, but no one seems to care or even notice your suffering.

What else could I possibly take away? No. 7 is hope. Without these basic necessities of life, you and your children have no hope for the future.

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me. — Matthew 25:35,36

Seven Steps to Poverty

ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS TO COMMUNICATE IS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE POOR IN THIS DEVELOPING WORLD. HOW CAN AMERICANS REALM UNDERSTAND GLOBAL POVERTY WITHOUT ACTUALLY TRAVELING TO SEE IT? LET ME TRY TO HELP YOU BY TAKING YOU ON A BRIEF, IMAGINARY JOURNEY. I WILL TRANSPORT YOU MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SIMPLY BY TAKING SEVEN THINGS AWAY FROM YOU, ONE AT A TIME. REALLY.

FIRST, I WILL TAKE AWAY YOUR CLOTHES. DON’T PANIC. I WON’T TAKE THEM ALL. YOU CAN KEEP THE CLOTHES ON YOUR BACK. BUT YOU WILL FEEL EMBARRASSED. YOUR CHILDREN FEEL THE BRUNT OF THIS HUMILIATION AT SCHOOL.

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IS STILL INTACT, AND THINGS ARE NOT ALL THAT BAD. BUT NEXT I MUST TAKE AWAY ELECTRICITY. NOW YOU COME HOME TO A DARK HOUSE EACH NIGHT. NONE OF YOUR APPLIANCES WORK: NO REFRIGERATOR, TELEPHONE, DISHWASHER, TELEVISION, COMPUTER, OR STEREO. YOUR SHOWERS ARE COLD, AND YOU HAVE TO WASH YOUR CLOTHES BY HAND. YOUR QUALITY OF LIFE HAS DROPPED PRECIPITOUSLY—"INCONECEIVABLE" IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT. BUT YOU SHOULDN’T FEEL TOO BAD; YOU ARE STILL BETTER OFF THAN MOST OF THE WORLD.

TALAWKE NO. 3 IS REALLY TOUGH: CLEAN WATER. NONE OF YOUR FAUCETS, TOILETS, OR SHOWERS WORK, AND THE ONLY WATER SOURCE IS A STAGNANT WATER HOLE. TAKEAWAY NO. 4 IS DEVASTATING: WATER.

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE IS STILL INTACT, AND THINGS ARE NOT ALL THAT BAD. BUT NEXT I MUST TAKE AWAY FOOD. YOU FIND A LITTLE FOOD BY PICKING THROUGH YOUR NEIGHBORS’ GARBAGE. IT’S YOUR ONLY SOURCE OF NUTRITION. YOU NOTICE YOUR SUFFERING. NO ONE SEEMS TO CARE OR EVEN NOTICE YOUR SUFFERING.

WHAT ELSE COULD I POSSIBLY TAKE AWAY? NO. 7 IS HOPE. WITHOUT THESE BASIC NITISITIES OF LIFE, YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN HAVE NO HOPE FOR THE FUTURE.

The rest of your life is still intact, and things are not all that bad. But next I must take away...
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) > Families fleeing tribal violence in the eastern province of Ituri received assistance from World Vision. Conflict between the Lendu majority and Hema minority escalated after Ugandan troops pulled out of the area in early May. The tribes are fighting for control of resource-rich areas of Ituri, especially Bunia town. Tens of thousands of people fled the brutality in Bunia by foot, traversing miles of equatorial jungle to reach relief camps. At a camp in Eringeti, World Vision provided emergency goods for some 5,000 people. Additional 10,000 people in a camp in Komada received supplies as well as water and sanitation care from World Vision.

Iraq > World Vision delivered aid to families and began rebuilding efforts in Al Rutba, western Iraq—an area hit hard by bombings in the war. Four thousand families received kits containing blankets, clothing, collapsible water containers, plastic sheets, and cooking sets. In addition to restocking a container store and restoring electricity to 25,000 residents, World Vision chose the site of a former Baath Party headquarters to set up a temporary hospital replacing the one damaged in the bombing. World Vision also works in the northern city of Mosul, where staff originally expected to distribute food to 250,000 people. Once on the ground, however, they realized that food wasn’t the most urgent need. Instead, World Vision is providing shelter and other assistance for 2,000 people forced to flee from their homes after the fall of the Hussein regime. Families had taken refuge anywhere they could in the guardhouse of the local presidential palace and even in a former torture center.

Algeria > Following a devastating earthquake in May, World Vision flew in emergency goods to help survivors. The magnitude 6.7 quake killed more than 2,000 people and injured 10,000. Working with partner agencies in the capital, Algiers, the relief team offloaded 15 metric tons of blankets, cooking sets, plastic sheeting, collapsible water containers, and a 10-ton truck to aid delivery. It was a demonstration of solidarity, says Tan Van Zumphen, World Vision’s Middle East relief manager: “We wanted to let the people of Algeria know that we are with them and not forgetting those in pain.”

Zimbabwe > World Vision helped restore sight to 156 elderly people during a recent weaklight campaign. World Vision provided transportation, accommodations, and food for the patients, who came from all over the Mberengwa district. Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Health coordinated ophthalmologists to perform the procedures, mostly treating cataracts and glaucoma. Blindness is common in rural Zimbabwe communities, where even simple ophthalmologic procedures aren’t available.

Mexico > Sponsored children hit the airwaves as guests on a radio show hosted by a popular Mexican actress, Talina Fernandez. “World Vision has supported me a lot,” said sponsored child Lucia Ramirez Martinez, 11. “I know my sponsors; I have their picture, and I love them very much.” At the end of the program, Fernandez invited the radio audience to support World Vision in Mexico through sponsorship, volunteer work, and donations.

Philippines > A corporation known for keeping babies healthy is caring for more than 100 Filipino children. Employees at the Manila office of Johnson & Johnson, the international manufacturer of health care products, are signing up to sponsor children through World Vision Philippines. Their contributions are automatically deducted from their paychecks, saving World Vision the administrative costs. The response has been overwhelming, said Robin Valencia, Johnson & Johnson’s human resources manager and a child sponsor himself: “I strongly believe that as employees have good experiences in sponsoring a child,” he says, “more willing sponsors will be coming our way.”

Ecuador > World Vision is sending its special delivery. It was a demonstration of solidarity, says Tan Van Zumphen, World Vision’s Middle East relief manager: “We wanted to let the people of Algeria know that we are with them and not forgetting those in pain.”

Hope Update

Q&A With Dr. C. Everett Koop

As surgeon general during the Reagan administration, Dr. C. Everett Koop fearlessly spoke out against a little-known disease called HIV/AIDS. Twenty years later, he’s still talking.

Q. Is HIV/AIDS really the greatest health crisis of our time?
A. There has never been a disease like AIDS. We’ve had diseases that have taken a tremendous toll on life. Smallpox, for example, killed 500 million people in the last century. But none of those diseases had the stigma that goes with AIDS—changing the way people support AIDS treatment and how they treat [affected] people.

Q. Why should Christians care about HIV/AIDS?
A. Christians, if they’re Bible-believing, will understand that the ethic of the Good Samaritan applies here. Also, we have the admonition in James that true religion is taking care of widows and orphans. With those two together, we can’t avoid it.

Q. Is HIV/AIDS the new leprosy?
A. There’s a tremendous association of leprosy with AIDS. Our great-grandparents responded to the missionary call to help leprosy. This generation is being called to help AIDS. The hospitals in Africa [where I used to see leprosy patients 20 years ago] are filled with AIDS patients now. What’s the same is that both patients are outcasts from society. And in countries that already have prejudice and poverty and [lack of] good health care, that’s just one added burden they shouldn’t have to bear.

Q. Do you think the tide is turning on the HIV/AIDS crisis?
A. I don’t know whether there’s a turning of the tide yet. But I do believe there has to be. And that’s why what World Vision is doing with its Hope Initiative is so important. It could be the tide-turner.

f.y.i. Thanks to U.S. sponsors, 14,611 sponsored children in Peru now have Bibles. A partnership between World Vision and the International Bible Society enabled distribution of the Bibles, which contained personalized bookplates signed by the children’s sponsors.
Glad You Asked

Does World Vision provide for sponsored children who become gravely ill or have special medical conditions?

Yes! Natalia Almada dos Santos is a good example of how your extra gifts to World Vision's Childcare Ministries Fund help children who have special needs beyond what sponsorship covers.

Natalia, 5, lives with her mother and great-grandmother in Brazil. Her mother, Jalida, a junior in a health clinic, raises Natalia alone on a salary of $66 a month. Living on $2 dollars a day was difficult. Then, in April 2001, Natalia became sick.

It started as a cold that hung on. Natalia couldn't breathe through her nose. "I thought she was going to die," Jalida remembers. "I took her to a doctor in 2001, Natalia became sick. It started as a cold that hung on. Natalia couldn't breathe through her nose. "I thought she was going to die," Jalida remembers. "I took her to a doctor in

Prayer Point > On Oct. 1, would you join World Vision’s 20,000 employees worldwide in spending the first day of our fiscal year in prayer? During the annual Day of Prayer, every World Vision office around the globe prays for God’s guidance and wisdom in the coming year. It’s also a chance for us to pray for you.
In the Spotlight

As a child, Al Dwyer belonged to the World Explorers’ Club. Now his job involves not just exploring—but bringing assistance to some of the world’s most dangerous places.

At 17, Al joined the World Vision Junior Program—20 experts in disaster response who are ready to go when World Vision responds to an emergency. In May he was in Iraq with a team of 20 relief experts, meeting food, medical, and other humanitarian needs.

It’s a world away from his old job as a terminal manager for a freight company. On the edge of burnout seven years ago, he traded a six-figure salary for $1,200/month with World Vision in Angola. His experience in the high-stress world of managing freight gave him the logistics savvy needed. He had also already learned Angolan’s language, Portuguese, when courting his Brazilian wife, Katia. Still, apart from a visit to Europe, Al’s only experience in a developing-world country had been shopping in Tijuana, Mexico. He had never worked in a combat zone before. He had never seen children dying of starvation.

“My first day in Angola I was almost in shock,” he says. “I remember thinking, ‘What have I got myself into?’”

It was hard to stay focused—to devise programs to provide the help Angolans so desperately needed. Despite the shock, however, he was soon saying to himself, This is probably the most interesting thing I have ever done in my life.

“I honestly felt like I was reborn,” he says. “Twenty-four hours earlier I had been distributing food. But in the camp I was receiving that same food.”

Katia moved to Angola with Al, working as a training officer for World Vision. In 2000, they moved to Florida and Al joined World Vision’s Global Rapid Response Team. Since then Al has worked wherever disasters happen, from earthquakes in India to reconstruction work in Afghanistan.

It’s hard for Al’s three boys—ages 2, 4, and 6—and his wife, who rarely see him for any length of time. Katia says the boys ask God nightly to protect their father as he helps other people in dangerous places.

Places like East Timor. Al was there in September 1999 as the situation unraveled—distributing food and caring for those who had fled their homes, even as militia groups roamed the tiny state. During the last few crazy days before international aid workers were evacuated, Al was shot at and forced to flee toward a U.N. compound. When a militia man fired a machine gun in the air as the terrified crowd began scrambling over the barbed-wire fence into the compound.


Al himself became a refugee, trapped with thousands of others for three days without money, food, or spare clothes, and enduring appalling hygiene, while marauding gangs of thugs burned and looted around them.

“It gave me an insight into refugee camps,” Al says. “I don’t want any of my boys to go through that experience.”

That's Entertainment

World Vision has launched a partnership with Toonacious Family Entertainment. Toonacious is dedicated to providing high-quality entertainment for children that is fun and faith-based. The first animated release, “Love Thy Neighbor,” features Lenny, a quiet rabbit, and Sid, a fast-talking mouse—two opposite personalities whose friendship is constantly reshaped and challenged by the kinds of circumstances children understand. Lenny and Sid serve as animated ambassadors for World Vision as well, with “Love Thy Neighbor” featuring an invitation by Jodi Benson (singing voice of The Little Mermaid) to sponsor children through World Vision.

Finally, he was bundled out of the compound and onto a plane sent in with Australian Special Forces.

When he arrived in Australia, Al grabbed a cheeseburger at McDonald’s and called his family to tell them he was safe.

“The thousands of kids I come into contact with at every emergency—they are identical in attitude, needs, energy, and smiles to my boys,” he says. “I really know what it means for those children to miss meals, to not have clean water or a safe place to sleep.”

It’s all in a day’s work for Al, whose childhood dreams of world exploration have resulted in a brighter future for the world’s children.

— James East

Making world hunger real and relevant is the goal of the 30 Hour Famine. If you want to get involved, go to: www.30hourfamine.org or call 1-800-7FAMINE. Next year’s national dates are Feb. 27-28, but you can do it any time!

Thanks to You

On May 7, more than 7,000 of our supporters responded to a special World Vision e-mail with an urgent request: Implore Congress to pass a bill launching an emergency effort to fund the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Congress listened and acted. On May 27, President Bush signed that bill into law. Over the next five years, $15 billion will go to fight AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean. It’s the largest public-health commitment in history aimed at a specific disease. And you helped make it happen. The next step: Encourage Congress to appropriate the funds.
Hope for HIV/AIDS Spreads Nationwide

World Vision events around the country call attention to the pandemic.

Seattle/Tacoma  Pastors Armed for Action

World Vision invited more than 90 influential members of Puget Sound communities—church leaders—to the organization’s Federal Way, Wash., headquarters to hear some sobering news: Eight thousand people a day are dying of HIV/AIDS around the globe. In Africa, the loss of farmers has contributed to the current crippling food crisis.

“In 100 years, historians will look back at the 21st century through the lens of HIV/AIDS,” World Vision President Rich Stearns told the pastors, “and ask, ‘Where was the Church?’”

The presentation wasn’t all bad news. Rich discussed a “window of hope” for African youth ages 5 to 15. Young people can remain AIDS-free if they learn and live by biblical values of abstinence and marital faithfulness.

Princess Kasune Zulu, an HIV-positive mother from Zambia, provided inspiration through her story of speaking out about the disease despite intense stigma. She encouraged the pastors to do the same. “The Church is a watchtower,” she said.”It has an obligation to warn its people about a disease that is preventable.”

After hearing from Rich, Princess, and two medical experts, the pastors received resources to help them present HIV/AIDS information to their congregations. (For a copy of this pastors’ toolkit, please go to www.worldvision.org/hope.) World Vision also invited pastors to travel to Africa to see the needs firsthand.

“This is something that was needed,” said Carol Danner, wife of Senior Pastor Rick Danner of New Light Christian Church in Seattle. “As Princess Kasune Zulu said, knowledge is power. We’re definitely interested in taking back information to our church.”

New York  Church Sponsors Children in Kenya

The global HIV/AIDS pandemic is overwhelming. But members of one church in New York City decided they could still do something significant. Through child sponsorship, Grace Church of Brooklyn is caring for the children of an entire African village.

It began back in December 2002. Grace Church mobilized around HIV/AIDS in Africa—and World Vision’s efforts to fight the pandemic—during a special event called Hope Sunday. Leading up to that day, flyers and weekly announcements raised awareness of the overwhelming needs of families struggling with HIV/AIDS. Then on Hope Sunday, a PowerPoint presentation flashed faces of needy children. Pastor Ken Griepp talked about his sponsored child, John.

Months later, the church still buzzes with excitement. “Every Sunday, somebody will come to me all excited that they got a letter [from their sponsored child],” says Letitia Maxwell, volunteer coordinator for Hope Sunday. In addition to writing letters and praying, sponsors from Grace Church talk of traveling to Kenya to meet the children.

For Lucia Gripp, a church staff member, the point is putting faith into action. “What we actually believe,” she says, “is not worth much if we are not willing to have compassion on these people who are in such need and pain.”

Chicago  Hope Tour Touts Urgency of HIV/AIDS

World Vision leaders and celebrity guests traveled across the country this year, reaching grass-roots groups in 15 cities with urgent information about HIV/AIDS. The first stop of the Hope Tour in April in Chicago.

Bruce Wilkinson, best-selling author of The Prayer of Jabez, joined Rich Stearns and Princess Kasune Zulu to address a group of 400 people in Oakbrook, Ill. Bruce shared how he stepped out of his comfort zone to begin a new career focused on HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa.

“Princess and I didn’t want to deal with this issue of AIDS,” he said.”Because I was thinking, ‘If they didn’t do what they did, they wouldn’t have it.’”

Meeting innocent women and children affected by the disease changed his mind. Rich Stearns urged the gathering to get involved in turning the tide of the deadly pandemic—by volunteering in AIDS-affected countries or supporting World Vision’s Hope Initiative—programs providing care, prevention, and education.

“I didn’t know the scope of the problem of HIV/AIDS,” said Shayne Moore of Wheaton, Ill. “I want my kids to know this is going on too. I don’t want people to say to me 30 years from now, ‘You mean your generation didn’t do anything about it?’”

—by Jennifer Lytle in Seattle, Amy Weaver in New York, and Jonathan Miller in Chicago

Get Involved

Kids Equip Kids for Learning

As the new academic year approaches, students will soon head to stores to load up with school supplies. It’s not so easy for children in some countries to do the same. That’s why World Vision created School Tools—providing valuable school materials so that all children, regardless of where they live, can advance their education.

Children around the world lack school supplies for various reasons. For some, it’s poverty—after buying food, there’s no money left in the family budget for school materials. Some live in countries recovering from natural disasters or wars, where even basic necessities are scarce. And children in communities hard-hit by HIV/AIDS might be on their own after their parents have died, struggling simply to survive.

Orphans in the Chipemba Children’s Home outside Nairobi, Kenya, recently received 100 school kits from World Vision. The gifts produced both smiles and tears. “Many of the children cried,” said Dean Salisbury, World Vision’s gifts-in-kind operations manager, “because no one had ever given them anything so nice before.”

You can help. Check out our Web site (www.worldvision.org/schooletools) for specific instructions and supply needs. Then, get together with a group—perhaps your church’s Vacation Bible School, youth group, or Sunday school—to assemble the kits, including a personal card. Send the kits to the World Vision International Distribution Center in Pennsylvania, and World Vision will ship the kits to needy children in 21 countries.

For more information on getting involved, check our Web site or call toll-free (888) 511-6492.

Kits Equip Kids for Learning  "As the new academic year approaches, students will soon head to stores to load up with school supplies. It's not so easy for children in some countries to do the same. That's why World Vision created School Tools—providing valuable school materials so that all children, regardless of where they live, can advance their education. Children around the world lack school supplies for various reasons. For some, it's poverty—after buying food, there's no money left in the family budget for school materials. Some live in countries recovering from natural disasters or wars, where even basic necessities are scarce. And children in communities hard-hit by HIV/AIDS might be on their own after their parents have died, struggling simply to survive. Orphans in the Chipemba Children's Home outside Nairobi, Kenya, recently received 100 school kits from World Vision. The gifts produced both smiles and tears. "Many of the children cried," said Dean Salisbury, World Vision's gifts-in-kind operations manager, "because no one had ever given them anything so nice before." You can help. Check out our Web site (www.worldvision.org/schooletools) for specific instructions and supply needs. Then, get together with a group—perhaps your church's Vacation Bible School, youth group, or Sunday school—to assemble the kits, including a personal card. Send the kits to the World Vision International Distribution Center in Pennsylvania, and World Vision will ship the kits to needy children in 21 countries. For more information on getting involved, check our Web site or call toll-free (888) 511-6492.

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embracing the scorned

In India, World Vision embraces victims of the so-called “women’s disease”—HIV/AIDS—with God’s love.

In the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, sub-Saharan Africa still dominates in severity. But tragedy looms in other regions, particularly in Asia, where the disease is exploding through densely populated countries. India claims the most cases of people living with HIV/AIDS outside of sub-Saharan Africa.

The TV screen gives off a wan glow in the sunless room where Neeta,* 29, spends her days. Lying prone on a thin mat on the floor, the HIV-positive widow subsists on little more than tea and can barely summon the strength to bathe. Neeta’s whole world is reduced to this dingy, 3-by-12-foot rented house in the slums of Mumbai, India. Watching her favorite channel has become more than a pastime—it’s her lifeline.

Her mother, Meera, gladly provides it. “I love my daughter very much, and I cannot see her in tension all the time,” says Meera. The money that Neeta was once able to earn as a painter is now gone, leaving her with little more than her television for comfort.

Neeta’s life is a stark reminder of the dangers that women face in India’s fight against HIV/AIDS. Many are being shamed and ostracized because of the disease, even when they have been faithful to their partners. Neeta is one of the fortunate ones. She is surrounded by her family and friends, all of whom understand and support her.

By Jane Sutton-Redner

with reporting by Raju Bhagwat, Rupak Johnson, and Lily Venkatarangam

Photographs by Caleb Mpamei

*Names changed for privacy.
Meera, 47. “She coughs, vomits, moans, and groans. She needed something to divert her attention away from her pain and agony. I knew she loves watching TV.”

The monthly TV payments burden Meera, who works from dawn till dusk to support her family. But it’s the only way she can provide a little happiness for her daughter, who has lost so much.

Neeta is among an increasing number of Indian wives who contracted HIV/AIDS from their husbands. Nearly 4 million people in India live with HIV/AIDS, a figure that rivals some of the worst-afflicted sub-Saharan African countries. Some sources predict that India could see more than 20 million people infected by the end of the decade. Transmission trends have moved beyond high-risk groups into the mainstream population. Statistics from antenatal clinics, where pregnant women’s blood is tested, tell the story of the rising rate of HIV infections—not among sex workers, but ordinary housewives.

These women invariably outlive their spouses, causing them to bear the stigma of what’s now called, in some parts of India, “the women’s disease”—an isolating existence. But in two of India’s largest cities, HIV-positive women and their families need not suffer alone. World Vision staff reach out with medicine and practical care, demonstrating through their compassion the love God who is always there.

MUMBAI: A CARING NETWORK

IN INDIA, CULTURAL GENDER ROLES CONDONE MEN’S SEXUAL promiscuity, yet wives cannot refuse their husbands even if they know the men are indulging in high-risk behavior. Ravi, a bus driver in Mumbai, used to frequent prostitutes with five friends. In 1995, they submitted to a blood test together and found that they all tested HIV-positive. Today, Ravi and just one other man are still alive. And his wife, Kala, is sick. “I am responsible for contracting my innocent wife with HIV,” he says candidly.

Whatever tolerance a man might expect for his HIV status does not extend to a woman. “Women are discriminated against generally in a political society like India, and more so if the woman is found [to be] HIV-positive,” explains Heather Ferriera of World Vision’s HIV/AIDS program in Mumbai. “After the death of the HIV-positive husband, the widow faces an uphill task of surviving on her own.”

A widow’s only family might also pull away—but not Meera. She lavishes love on Neeta, her only daughter, as she has always done. After her husband left her for another woman, Meera continued feeding Neeta and to see her married—the ultimate goal for Indian women. Two years after the wedding, Neeta’s husband, Dutta, started falling sick frequently.

Dutta was secretive about his medical records, raising Meera’s suspicion. “Though I am not well-educated to understand these things,” she says, “I had a feeling that this disease comes from some bad doing.” When Neeta’s health began to fail in May 2001, Meera took her for a blood test and received the horrifying news that she was HIV-positive.

Dutta died in February 2002. Sickly Neeta agreed to let a brother-in-law raise her son, Kaustubh, now 2 and a half. Mother and daughter struggled to survive alone—until the day they encountered some unexpected advice at a bus stop.

“A gentleman standing next to me saw Neeta’s poor health and must have understood the cause,” Meera recalls. “He said, ‘There is an organization called World Vision [nearby]. You take your daughter there. They will help you by giving medicines and other things.’”

The chance meeting connected the women with World Vision’s Network of Care program in Mumbai slum communities, where sponsorship projects have benefited poor children and families since the 1980s. Now in its fifth year, Network of Care provides HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, health care (through a drop-in center), and support groups for HIV-positive people. Staff also buy food and reimburse medical bills for patients who are too sick to work.

Primary beneficiaries are women like Neeta who have no other place to turn. Heather Ferriera notes that of the 600-plus cases the center has handled, only two women were proven to have contracted HIV outside of marriage.

World Vision also trains HIV-positive counselors to check for infections among the men in their husbands’ lives. “We do not violate the privacy of affected men. But we do try to get them to understand they need to protect their wives,” Heather says.

The Hope Initiative

Nine-year-old Dhanam, a sponsored child in Madurai, southern India, points to the plastic bracelets and the hair band she wears. They are gifts from her mother, who died last summer of AIDS. “I miss my mother’s pet,” she says.

Dhanam, who never knew her father, now lives with her great-aunt, Meenatchi. The elderly woman struggles to support Dhanam in her one-room, thatched home—especially after inheriting debt from the girl’s mother.

Fortunately, World Vision sponsorship helps. Staff at the Ululampatti project helped Meenatchi start a candy-selling business to pay down the debt. And World Vision will send Dhanam, who has tested negative for HIV to a girls’ boarding school, assuring her a good education.

“In my home there is no stigma,” Meenatchi says. “I am not worried about Dhanam’s future, as World Vision is there to take care of her.” Meenatchi says, “I can now live in peace.”

As in many World Vision sponsorship projects across India, Ululampatti staff have intensified efforts to care for HIV/AIDS-affected families and their children. The disease threatens World Vision’s decades-old development work in these communities: Leaders and teachers fall sick; parents can’t work; children drop out of school to help support the family—and all that sponsorship has accomplished in nurturing children’s potential is left to languish.

HIV/AIDS programs don’t just help the dying but fight for the living; the next generation. Children benefit from appropriate, values-based HIV/AIDS education and prevention programs conducted in all World Vision projects in India—and across the globe.

World Vision’s Hope Initiative allocates a certain percentage of sponsorship funds to HIV/AIDS care, advocacy, and prevention efforts worldwide. For countries with HIV prevalence rates above 5 percent, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, the percentage is 15 percent; in India, it’s 10 percent. World Vision staff in every country receive HIV/AIDS training for responding to affected families and promoting awareness and prevention of HIV/AIDS to all in project areas.

The Hope Initiative allows World Vision to live out God’s call in James 1:27 to care for widows and orphans. “The ultimate hope we can offer as Christians is Jesus Christ,” says Vijay Edward, HIV/AIDS specialist for World Vision India.
on patients at home. Every few days, a cheerful woman named Neelam appears at Neeta’s door, bringing advice and companionship, sometimes a bag of groceries, and always encouragement.

On a recent visit, Meera tells Neelam that Neeta can’t keep food down. Neelam—whom Neeta calls Taai, or Sister—advises Neeta to eat slowly, drink lots of water, and move around more to aid digestion. “Look at me: I take proper food,” she says, “and that’s why I’m in good shape.”

Neelam’s smile brightens Neeta’s dark days. The work is also good for Neelam, 30, who has plenty in common with widows like Neeta. She knows well the feelings of betrayal and the heartache of loss—but she’s learned how to overcome the hopelessness. Neelam lost her husband to AIDS in 1997 and then her daughter to stomach problems in 2001. Resolving to go on living if just for her son’s sake, she researched HIV/AIDS facilities and found World Vision. The accepting, nurturing staff felt like a new family to her. And by listening to the plight of other patients, “My own problems seemed less important.”

As an HIV/AIDS counselor, Neelam earns $1.50 a day from World Vision plus food and medical expense reimbursements. Most importantly, she receives a kind of comfort with eternal benefits. “World Vision staff daily sit for prayer. They sing songs and share God’s words from the Bible,” Neelam says. She often joins in, and now she finds that Jesus’ name brings her solace. “I pray to take strength from Jesus. He only will tell me how to live with AIDS.”

**CHENNAI: A HEALING TOUCH**

Faith plays a major role in the way people deal with AIDS’ death sentence, says Dr. Punitha Victor, the medical officer at World Vision Chennai Integrated HIV/AIDS Center (CIHAC). For four years, World Vision has been caring for destitute women and children here in the city where India’s first AIDS case appeared in 1986.

“When I talk to patients, I invariably present God to them,” Dr. Punitha says. “They are hopeless and helpless. Their only hope is in God. I believe God has placed me here for this purpose.”

The loving treatment is standard for a facility established in the memory of Mother Teresa. But it’s expensive: Care for one person at the home for one year costs about $2,000. The payoff is longer life—invaluable for women and the children they will dare not leave behind.

At World Vision’s Chennai care home, Madavi received extraordinary care. Staff saw her through heart surgery, started her on drug therapy that returned some of her vitality, cared for her two children, and even helped her reconcile with her father. The loving treatment is standard for a facility established in the memory of Mother Teresa. But it’s expensive: Care for one person at the home for one year costs about $2,000. The payoff is longer life—invaluable for women and the children they will dare not leave behind.

Six-year-old Akash appeared at World Vision’s center ravaged by tuberculosis, one of the harshest diseases that preys on HIV-weakened immune systems. The boy weighed just 15 pounds and was so frail he couldn’t even stand. His mother, Vasantha, found help. Dr. Punitha Victor (at left) says her work leaves her “physically tired but spiritually satisfied.”

Once in awhile they would open the door a crack and set out a plate of food. When they saw Dr. Punitha touch Madavi, they gasped in shock.

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Money seeking treatment for Akash from “quack” healers. She dared not take him to qualified doctors, fearing they wouldn’t treat her HIV-positive son.

Dr. Punitha started Akash immediately on anti-TB drugs. As a result of a protein-rich diet, he has gained four pounds in a month. Gently patting his cheek, housemother Subhadra Devi says, “He has put on some flesh now.” Akash loves to scribble on pads of paper as he has seen the doctors do. Vasantha looks forward to the day that he will walk and even go to school.

Vasantha allows herself to hope for the first time since her husband, Mani, died in 1998, a month after Akash’s first birthday. Back then, she tried to end her life by eating poison, but her parents intervened. Now determined to survive, Vasantha traces her change in attitude to her first visit to World Vision’s center and glimpsing Dr. Punitha’s bracelet decorated with a cross. “When I saw that,” she says, “I had a strange feeling that God brought me to the right place.”

And he has. World Vision staff, equipped by faith, rescue women and children from the pain of isolation and prolong their lives with the most important medicine of all: hope.*

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* All the names of HIV-positive people have been changed to protect their identities.
SUZANNE PAULSON DIDN’T BUDGE.

“I was praying I wouldn’t have to get out of the van,” she recalls of her first trip to the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. “When we stopped and others got out, I just sat there. I was the last one out.”

Little did Suzanne know that, by day’s end, she would unearth priceless treasures in this wasteland of broken dreams—treasures that would change her heart forever.

Even before the van doors opened, the stench of waste assailed her. Ramshackle huts leaning desperately against one another spoke of consuming poverty. Grimy children in tattered dress swarmed dusty streets that doubled as their playground.

All of it stood as a stark contrast to the comfortable life Suzanne had carved out in her artsy, California oceanside community. Simply put, she was stunned as she witnessed the byproducts of poverty: filth, decay, deprivation.

Stepping from the safety of the van, Suzanne haltingly crossed into the crowd. Soon two local women emerged to usher her through the throng. She couldn’t know it at the time, but these women, Christine and Jane, would become lasting friends.

Home to thousands—many who migrated to Kenya’s capital city in search of work—the Soweto slum teems with families who have few possessions and even fewer options. “I came away from that first visit seeing so much poverty—and so much joy because these people had faith,” Suzanne, 66, says as tears fill her eyes. “I realized then that I was the one who felt poor—in spirit.”

In the dozen years that have passed since Suzanne’s first visit, this mother of three still returns to those slums at least every two years, to spend time with the Soweto women. The trans-Atlantic bonds between these women are evident even in Suzanne’s Laguna Beach home.
Arranged among the avant-garde art she and her husband, Ted, collect are the exotic beaded necklaces of Kenya’s Maasai tribe. The merging of California contemporary and Kenya traditional reflects the metamorphosis that has taken place first in Suzanne’s life, and subsequently in the life of her daughter, Kristen Paulson.

Today this mother-daughter team heads the Orange County (Calif.) Women of Vision chapter, the group that introduced Suzanne to Soweto. A volunteer ministry of World Vision, Women of Vision is devoted to serving poor women and children locally and internationally. This grass-roots group brings together more than 800 women who share a passion to participate in the transformation of women who are poor—and in the process be transformed themselves.

“We provide a vehicle to women who are called to serve the poor in the name of Christ,” says Penny Wood, Women of Vision national director, who equips and inspires 14 Women of Vision chapters from her bustling Orange County office. “Women of Vision is a community of women who, through their ongoing work, present living proof of a loving God to a watching and needy world.

“We’re about relationships. We continue our involvement with women and children all over the world who know we’re there for them in prayer and in raising awareness and resources.”

Women of Vision members have crawled beneath the streets of Mongolia’s capital, into the tunnels where homeless children find refuge from the frigid northern winters. These women have rocked infants growing up in Romania’s orphanages. They’ve also worked to help mothers so that they aren’t compelled to leave their children long term at state-run facilities. They have assisted young women surviving on the streets of Mexico City, Zambian women struggling to raise healthy children without adequate resources, and Honduran women whose poverty is tethered to illiteracy.

Closer to home, these passionate volunteers embrace homeless women, children who lack simple items such as school supplies, and young women in need of mentors. They help build houses in poor communities, teach the undereducated to read, and advocate on behalf of women in need.

Each Women of Vision chapter selects the projects it will support. Together, these chapters fund more than 50 projects, raising money by hosting a multitude of annual events. Women of Vision members also sponsor children through World Vision. Earlier this year, they initiated sponsorship drives in their local churches to encourage more individuals to change the lives of children in need.

In Miami Valley, Ohio, a college campus is home to one of the newest Women of Vision chapters. A Hispanic chapter is also taking shape. And sister organizations are sprouting in Mexico, Canada, and Bermuda. As the number of women committed to this ministry grows, so do the testimonies of lives changed not only among the poor, but among the Women of Vision women as well.

Suzanne and her daughter, Kristen, are living testimonies to transformation. No stranger to travel, Suzanne has employed her far-reaching experience in art to lead art tours throughout the world. She also traveled in Kenya on safari in 1987. When faced with the chance to revisit Kenya in 1991, this time with Women of Vision, Suzanne remembers her mixed motives: “wanting to see if I’d love the people as much as I loved the animals.”
Four-year-old Diana from Romania moved to a day-care center in Boju, where her fear of the left arm she was born with botched surgery erupted each day as she rallied her strength to attend school. She was a bright star in their otherwise darkening life. She lived, but we thought she’d never attend school.

Eight-year-old Diana went through the day-care center under Laura’s tutelage and now is at the top of her elementary-school class.

When children were first placed in Laura’s care two years ago, they had no idea how to play with each other and became dead quiet with wariness when a stranger walked in the room. “They were self-contained,” explains the principal. “They would grab toys and go off in a corner alone. Now they share, they trust, and they enjoy each other.”

In some cases, the behavioral transformations are nothing short of miraculous, Laura says. Two mentally handicapped children now talk instead of just pointing at things.

Here in Boju, the center is both day care and kindergarten—allowing parents to work without worry and preparing children to walk confidently into first grade. They even participate in field trips.

When parents first learned that a day-care center was coming, they joined forces to help turn a large, shabby classroom in the village’s old schoolhouse into a joyous refuge. They painted and helped install new windows. Nothing was too much, says Laura, whose trust with these parents has grown to the point that she regularly visits their homes to talk about child-rearing.

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“Life is very simple here,” says Maria Calugar, 41, principal of the elementary school that houses the day-care center. “Parents work long hours in the fields and care for their children at home. They don’t have the luxury to think about education for their children.”

Six of the 10 upturned faces in the room belong to parents whose children attend the center. “God is the one working out his potential in women and their children,” Linda smith, co-chair of the Evergreen/Denver chapter, says. “Parents have never had the luxury to think about their own education.”

Working long hours, parents are often outnumbered, and one of their biggest challenges is keeping their children safe. “Parents are often too busy with their work to participate in field trips,” says Linda. “It’s all about getting the focus off ourselves and hearing God’s call in our lives. It changes us for the better.”

John Schenk has been a World Vision communications officer since 1986.
The 10-year-old sleeps each night in the tunnels that pipe hot water into Mongolia’s capital city, Ulaanbaatar. Each evening as day-light wanes, he returns to his makeshift home. There he struggles to liberate the cumbersome cover from its man-hole, descends a ladder into darkness, lies down on a piece of cardboard, and waits for sleep to overtake him.

Each morning the boy Uuganbaatar, wakes to a new day of hunger, filth, and little hope for a better life. While Uuganbaatar is poor, home-less, and underfed, there is one thing he is not alone. Thousands of children crowd this city’s dirt passageways, the pipes radiating enough heat to keep them from freezing during Mongolia’s sub-zero winters. As many as 15 children live in a section of tunnel as small as 5 square yards. To fill empty stomachs, most of them steal or scrounge in dumpsters—simply don’t eat.

Poverty, abuse, and abandonment have sent legions of children to the streets here. They grow up uneducated, lacking the skills to more wholesome lives. World Vision invites them into its eight shelters that offer unconditional love, assistance, counseling, and schooling. These Light Houses exist in part because of the dedication of Mongolia’s, Women of Vision’s, Light House Centers—eight shelters that offer unconditional love and the hope needed to start over. When children enter the Light House doors, they receive food, clothing, bathing facilities, medical assistance, counseling, and schooling. When Uuganbaatar is poor, home-less, and underfed, there is one thing he is not alone. Thousands of children crowd this city’s dirt passageways, the pipes radiating enough heat to keep them from freezing during Mongolia’s sub-zero winters. As many as 15 children live in a section of tunnel as small as 5 square yards. To fill empty stomachs, most of them steal or scrounge in dumpsters—simply don’t eat.

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Fatherhood, Finance, and Faith

World Vision sponsorship helped Juan Elias prepare for a career—and become a better parent. by Mónica Olivares

JUAN ELIAS RODRIGUEZ KNOWS what it’s like to have an absent parent. Poverty forced his father, Orofónia, to seek work in the United States, leaving his family behind in El Salvador. Orofónia missed the five crucial years when Juan changed from boy to man. Now a father himself, Juan Elias wants to be a good one. He has built a successful career that means he’ll never have to leave his 4-year-old daughter, Rebecca.

Thirty-two-year-old Juan Elias works as an auditor for the finance ministry of El Salvador’s government, meeting with bank chairmen and visiting new businesses. He has provided a comfortable, three-bedroom home for his family in Ciudad Merliot, a city outside the capital, San Salvador. It’s the life he dreamed of as a farm boy. But without World Vision sponsorship, it wouldn’t have been possible.

“I was raised in the countryside, helping my father in agriculture, and I helped my mother with household chores,” Juan Elias says of his impoverished childhood in rural Nueva Concepción, Chalatenango. “I had many dreams and aspirations, but I was afraid they would never come true.”

Orofónia and his wife, Celestina, brought in about $35 a month raising corn, beans, rice, and millet—a meager salary for supporting five children. Just when the family budget was so tight that his parents couldn’t afford the shoes, uniform, and supplies he needed for school, 10-year-old Juan Elias became sponsored through World Vision. The assistance kept him in class—and kept him healthy. He received regular medical and dental care, vaccinations, and nutritious food.

“I remember when I went to the project office to write letters and Christmas cards to my sponsor,” Juan Elias says. “I was happy to write to him, because in that way I had contact with him.” Although Juan Elias doesn’t remember his American sponsor’s name, he says, “I still keep him in my mind and ask God to reward him for the assistance he gave me.”

World Vision’s aid extended beyond this one young boy in Nueva Concepción. Staff improved the community’s schools, adding six more classrooms so that education from elementary through high school was locally available. Staff helped construct apiaries and communal farms for families to raise additional income.

World Vision also established a small pharmacy that offered medicine at low prices. And thanks to his sponsor, Juan Elias completed high school. He earned a scholarship to study accounting at the University of El Salvador, juggling classes and working as a government auditor—the beginning point of the job he continues today. He graduated in 1997, and later, a job-related scholarship enabled him to return to university to obtain a finance degree.

“God has answered all my needs and has blessed me in all areas of my life,” Juan Elias says. His wife, Sandra, runs a computing business from home, contributing to the $2,000 monthly income. And their larger family is reunited. Orofónia returned to El Salvador in 1991, and now he and Celestina live less than 10 miles away.

“My parents have a small retail store,” Juan Elias says, “and I have a good job that permits me to help young people prepare for jobs, there were classes in sewing and other trades.”

Celestina recalls World Vision’s impact. “Most of the families were very poor,” she explains. “The benefits were not only economic but also moral, because we felt supported, and this encouraged us.”

Even with all the community improvements, Juan Elias’ father believed there were better opportunities in the United States. In 1986, when Juan Elias was 15, Orofónia traveled there, eventually finding work at a vegetable-packing company and a furniture factory.

A few months later, El Salvador’s civil war came close to home. Juan Elias’ older brother, a soldier in the army, was shot and killed. Juan Elias was away at a church activity that day. He came home to the sight of a coffin.

The tragedy hit the family hard, especially with Orofónia’s absence. But some good came of it for Juan Elias. “My faith in the Lord grew,” he says, “because I knew he was going to help us overcome this, and it was so.”

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“My parents have a small retail store,” Juan Elias says, “and I have a good job that permits me to help them economically.”

Now that his family enjoys security, Juan Elias hopes little Rebecca will appreciate their struggle—and he knows the perfect way. “I want Rebecca to sponsor boys and girls and be a blessing to others as my sponsor and World Vision were to me many years ago,” he says.

Of all the life experiences Juan Elias can pass to his daughter, this lesson in compassion is the most important. “God has answered all my needs and has blessed me in all areas of my life,” Juan Elias says. His wife, Sandra, runs a computing business from home, contributing to the $2,000 monthly income. And their larger family is reunited. Orofónia returned to El Salvador in 1991, and now he and Celestina live less than 10 miles away.

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Mónica Olivares is a communications officer for World Vision in El Salvador.
God’s Main Work

GOD KNOWS WE ARE CHILDREN, which is why the Bible so often draws on that human parallel. At the same time, God yearns for us to grow toward the parent stage of sacrificial love, which most accurately reflects God’s own nature. We draw near to God in likeness when we give ourselves away.

Even without birthchildren, we can gain some sense of loving others unconditionally, as God loves us. When my wife ran a senior citizens’ program in Chicago, I used to answer people who asked how many children we had: “Dozens, but they’re mostly twice our age.”

For many seniors in public housing and flophouse hotels, Janet served a parental role, battling welfare agencies, Medicaid, hospital workers, and the public housing authority on their behalf. She became an advocate, which in its Latin root means one who gives a voice to those who have none.

When Sarah had her electricity cut off through a misunderstanding, Janet became her fiery advocate, advancing payment and- shaming the utilities for acting so ruthlessly at the expense of a confused senior citizen. When Hank lost his leg to diabetes and gangrene, Janet stayed by his side, explaining why he still felt his “phantom limb” and teaching him to walk without crutches. When Zida lost circulation in her feet, Janet sat by her hospital bed massaging them and drew up a chart to make sure the neglected nurses turned her frequently enough to prevent bedsores.

Janet did these things not because the seniors had somehow earned her care, but because she believed that every neglected senior citizen in Chicago was loved by God, yet might only sense that love through the hands of one of God’s servants.

One day Janet came across this quote: “The poor express their gratitude not by saying thanks but by asking for more.” She had just spent an exhausting day and felt besieged by whiny, insistent demands for ever more help. That quote proved oddly comforting.

A curious thing happened during my wife’s time at the senior citizens’ center. Watching her and the others involved in outreach to the poor, I saw the personal sacrifice involved. Social workers get little pay for their long hours and receive few accolades. It surprised me, though, that despite the personal toll on her, Janet seemed to benefit as much as the seniors did.

The missionary-martyr Jim Elliot once observed that many Christians are so intent on doing something for God that they forget God’s main work is to make something of them. I saw that principle lived out in my wife.

As she showered her own skills and compassion on people judged undeserving by most of society, she grew stronger in the ways that matter most.

In a fundamental human paradox, the more a person reaches out beyond herself, the more she is enriched and deepened, and the more she grows in likeness to God. On the other hand, the more a person “incurves,” to use Luther’s word, the less human she becomes.

Our need to give is as great as anyone’s need to receive.


Philip Yancey is a journalist and writer who writes a featured column for Christianity Today. He has authored more than a dozen books, including Reaching for the Invisible God.

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