

## Grassroot funding supports malaria programs a world away

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Walk into just about any ELCA church in the Northeastern Iowa Synod and you're likely to see or hear something about malaria. The same is true for Lutheran churches in Africa where the ELCA Malaria Campaign is helping to bring malaria prevention, treatment and awareness programs to local communities.

“The grassroots fund-raising efforts of congregations in our synod has helped bring grassroots malaria education to Lutheran congregations a world away,” says Pastor Mark Anderson, assistant to the Bishop. “Building on the trust of the local churches in African countries is one of the best ways to reach out to families and gain their acceptance of preventive malaria programs.”

The ELCA Malaria Campaign works with companions to design and implement malaria strategies in 11 African countries: Angola, Central African Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A partnership with the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA), a sub-regional expression of the Lutheran World Federation, is focusing on five of those countries where malaria prevention and programming is well established and is setting the groundwork for programming to expand into other regions.

The ELCA Malaria Campaign helps congregations of the Lutheran church and other denominations in Africa build on their own abilities to oversee local malaria programming, such as keeping good financial records, training congregational leaders so they can train others, hiring coordinators and field officers, and advocating for families to know what their prevention and treatment options are.

According to Jessica Nipp Hacker, coordinator of the ELCA Malaria Campaign, churches have a key role in communicating with families and teaching them skills that can keep their family members safer from malaria. Families learn to recognize malaria symptoms so they can get to a clinic within the first 24 hours. They learn to always ask for a diagnosis of malaria before accepting treatment so that they don't overuse medications.

Field officers tailor educational programs for the behavior and culture of the people living in a community. Mosquito nets—considered one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent malaria—can be misused without education and an understanding of their purpose.

“In some places, some beliefs might hinder the usage of mosquito nets,” Hacker explains. “Nets have been used for fishing, as poultry runs for chickens and as bridal veils. Our education is very specific for what the net does and doesn’t do. It’s a life-saving opportunity to talk about how the nets are treated with insecticide to kill bugs on contact and to protect people.”

Malaria programs help ensure that clinics are well supplied with safe, reliable medications and not any of the less effective or counterfeit drugs frequently sold illegally on the informal market. The ELCA-funded campaign partners with LUCSA and other malaria organizations to address some of the broader issues related to malaria, such as longterm poverty. According to Hacker, families living in poverty are more susceptible to getting malaria and dying from it due to malnutrition or diseases that compromise the immune system of women, children and men.

“The LUCSA malaria program teaches income-generating skills, such as beekeeping, sugar cane farming, and gardening to sell produce at market so that people can work toward a sustainable livelihood with household incomes and the stability to seek treatment for malaria,” Hacker says.

The creative fund-raising projects that ELCA congregations in the Northeastern Iowa started developing nearly two years ago have helped make these malaria projects in Africa possible. Sales of net corsages, mosquito swatters and T-shirts, special offerings, craft fairs and music events, vacation Bible school themes, honorary and matching gifts, and elaborate displays in the churches helped raise awareness and connect congregations with a common goal.

“ELCA Lutherans are very generous people,” Hacker notes. “Once we understand the scope of the issue and the ways our companions in Africa are working to respond, that generosity explodes. It’s been an entirely positive and supportive response.”