



The Sprout Report

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed..."
Matthew 13:31

The Newsletter of Mustard Seed Ministries

"Hi, Scott, one of our pastors asked for help with one of their members who tested positive for HIV. Can I refer them to you?"

I received this text a couple weeks ago and was happy to help this pastor. We were encouraged when the pastor actually came to the clinic with the patient and the patient's family.

My first encounter with the global HIV/AIDS epidemic was in the 1980s when I was working in Haiti. In the years before anti-retroviral medications it was devastating to see patient after patient suffering and dying from this disease. Arriving in the Philippines in the early 1990s it was a relief not to have to regularly deal with HIV in addition to the other challenging illnesses. Unfortunately a series of cultural shifts, fueled by the internet, cellphones, movies, etc. seems to have created the perfect conditions for an epidemic. We have watched the slow breakdown of the nuclear family among urban poor. A nearby birthing home (partner ministry) currently has rates of unwed mothers at 90%. There's also been a growing fascination with sexual experimentation among the very young.

Meanwhile, there has been very little effort on the part of the government to address it. The Philippines now has the fastest growing rate of new HIV cases in the Asia Pacific region. From 2010 to 2016 there was a 700% increase in cases detected (http://www.doh.gov.ph/stat_of_the_month). Most of the rest of the world has seen declining rates of new infection. Perhaps one question is how will the country pay for the treatment going forward? One of the largest funding resources for treatment is called The Global Fund but, due to the track record of corruption, the Philippines no longer qualifies to receive funding from it. [see update below]

So, imagine how encouraging it was to hear from a local pastor wanting to care for one of his members! This patient thought his diagnosis was a death sentence. It wasn't until a partner ministry did a free health teaching at the patient's church that he realized there was medical treatment available. Praise God for this opportunity to show Christ's love to this man and his family.

I'm mindful of Paul's greeting to the church in Galatia 1:3-5, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Please pray for us as we seek to serve these patients and work with local churches to increase their awareness and capacity to minister to the affected. Moreover, please pray that we can effectively disciple young people to follow Christ and be aware of the dangers of peer pressure and temptation. Thank you so much for your part in helping us proclaim Christ to the marginalized.

Love, Scott and Cindy

September 15, 2017 update:

Erratum. Mea culpa!

I try not to sensationalize our newsletters but try to get things “right” when I write them. In our most recent newsletter, I wrote a statement regarding the current status of the relationship of The Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria with the Philippines that was not entirely correct. I got to thinking today that I should have included a link substantiating the allegation that “the Philippines is no longer eligible to receive support due to corruption”. When I looked for the link reporting that I could only find a reference to that effect on Wikipedia, not on the website of The Global Fund. I was incorrect and I apologize. The comment on Wiki was footnoted but when I tried to follow that link it was a broken link. Therefore, I do not have a reference to substantiate that statement and now believe it to be incorrect.

As I read through the website of the Global Fund and the activity it is involved with here I found a few things of note (for those who are interested in this):

The Philippines is currently listed as a country which is eligible to receive funding for support in HIV, TB and Malaria but when clicking on the contact page for the committee responsible for evaluating and submitting proposals from the Philippines to the Global Fund, the page currently comes up “no contacts”. I’m not sure why.

(<https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/portfolio/country/contacts/?loc=PHL&k=3704e863-33a9-430e-902e-baf34ebc2485&ct=cm&grant=PHL-T-PBSP>)

There are 3 organizations in the Philippines which are currently receiving funding, 2 of which are working in the areas of MDR-TB and HIV. Those projects are due to expire the end of this year and it is unclear from the website if they will be extended.

The largest of these 3 organizations has received \$108 million since 2014 and is working with the Philippine Department of Health.

There was a disagreement starting in 2009 which lasted until 2012 with allegations made by the Global Fund of fraud involving a high profile organization in the Philippines. Funding for that project was interrupted until an alternative recipient was found.

At any rate, I was encouraged to know there is both ongoing funding and potential for more from this very valuable resource. Again, I apologize for my mistake in the newsletter.

Sincerely, Scott