

ELCA Malaria Campaign Temple Talk
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Today, I come to you bearing a story of hope. It's a story born out of countless stories of despair—the despair caused by malaria, a disease that resulted in 800,000 deaths last year alone. A disease that is readily preventable and easily treatable. Freed in Christ to serve, the ELCA Malaria Campaign responds to our sisters and brothers in Africa's plea for the little things that prevent malaria's devastation. In the following story, based on dozens of interviews with our neighbors from Africa, please listen for the many little things that could have brought healing to the child.

In Africa, a young and loving mother, we'll call her Chika, had a son; we'll name him Ayo. Ayo brought enormous joy and hope to Chika's life. However, suddenly, Ayo became ill. Chika cradled her crying baby in her arms for long hours as his fever rapidly rose.

Chika considered brewing an herb tea, but she didn't know how strong to make it for her infant. Anyway, Ayo couldn't keep food or water down, so Chika stopped feeding him. She couldn't walk hours to retrieve water, which was always filthy, so she stopped giving Ayo water.

Chika didn't know why her son was so very sick and there was no one to ask. Chika's own mother had died of HIV/AIDS. All the young women in her rural village had lost children to this same rapidly progressing illness and they didn't know what to do either.

Even if someone could have told Chika that Ayo had malaria and needed immediate medical treatment, she had no transportation from her remote village to the tiny makeshift clinic many miles away. To access this minimal health care, Chika would have had to carry Ayo and walk for hours through the hot day and/or unsafe night.

If she had reached the clinic, Chika didn't have any money to pay for his care. Even if she could have paid for treatment, the clinic personnel always had so many critically ill people awaiting care that they might not have gotten to baby Ayo in time. If they had seen him, they may already have run out of malaria medications. If tiny Ayo needed IV medications, Chika would have to carry him much farther to a hospital. If she arrived at the hospital in time, by then, Ayo may also have needed a blood transfusion to treat the potentially fatal anemia caused by malaria. Often, the hospital did not have blood for transfusions.

So, Chika didn't seek health care for Ayo. Chika did the very best she could and what she knew to do. She prayed. She continued to cradle Ayo lovingly during his ever-rising fever and convulsions that led to a coma. Soon, Ayo died.

Ayo died for the lack of little things, such as \$2 for 24 little pills, \$10 for a mosquito net, \$25 for indoor spraying, or \$100 for a village education team. Tragically, a child dies every 45 seconds due to malaria. Ten thousand pregnant women with their unborn children succumb annually to this deadly disease. Malaria ravages people who are already vulnerable—people who are elderly or who are suffering from HIV/AIDS. Malaria is most prevalent among our neighbors who live in severe poverty and have no access to the little things needed to contain this disease. Malaria is not simply a health matter; it is deeply a justice crisis. Malaria destroys the lives of people who are outcasts forgotten by their societies and the world.

However, God never forgets. God hears the cries of all people who society casts out, forgets, and leaves dying from malaria. Isaiah says God cannot forget God's children because their names are inscribed on the palms of God's hands. As part of the ELCA, we boldly proclaim, "God's work. Our hands." As the hands that do God's work, who are inscribed on our palms? Who are the people dying from malaria that we must never forget? Out of our abundant blessings with whom must we generously share the life-saving "little things"?