

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people?

Improving mothers' health can mean a stronger world for all

Work in Zambia provides insight into needs, challenges

Sixth in a 10-part series

Helping the people of the world attain any of the Millennium Development Goals requires hard work every day. Below you will find some insight into the work of the church in one African nation. The Anglican Church in Zambia is a member of the Church of the Province of Central Africa, one of the 38 member provinces of the Anglican Communion. Episcopal Relief and Development works in partnership with the Zambian Anglican Council on primary-health and food-security programs, in HIV/AIDS work, and in its malaria-prevention program.



By Grace Phiri

Zambia has a population of 10 million people. The maternal mortality rate is 729 deaths per 100,000 live births. Zambia aims to reduce this rate to 162 deaths per 100,000 live births. (The rate in the United States in 2000 was 17 deaths for 100,000 live births.)

This is a difficult task requiring concerted effort, and this is where the Anglican Church in Zambia has focused its community mission.

The first step was to identify problems related to pregnancy and child birth and develop interventions. Major problems contributing to maternal deaths and complications include: inadequate number of trained traditional birth attendants; harmful cultural practices (e.g. use of traditional herbs to accelerate labor); lack of knowledge of basic key information about reproductive health; traditional religious beliefs and practices are still strong about the use of contraceptives and condoms; average age at first pregnancy of 15-16 years; high number of deliveries conducted at home; high incidence of malaria and HIV; poor nutrition for women, along with heavy workload and inadequate rest; and limited access to health services and long distances to facilities.

The church undertook a deliberate policy, with clergy and lay leadership, of social teaching that encourages a holistic approach that opposes rigid theological approaches in the emerging issues of health and development.

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Government policies attempt to ensure the improvement of life chances of women and girls throughout their life cycle. The policy strongly calls for partnership; the church has strong links with the government.

Zambia is a multi-ethnic society with 73 tribes giving it a diversity of cultural beliefs, customs, values, and practices, most of which affect pregnancy and childbirth management, contributing to complications, disabilities and death. Men still dominate decision-making, even about their wives' health needs. They sometimes hinder their wives from participating in reproductive health activities. The church has a program aimed at forming male motivation groups whose aim is to sensitize communities on safe motherhood.

Let us pray for the health of women, children and families, that in building healthy families, all God's people may be empowered to strengthen their communities and repair the breaches which divide nations and peoples.

- Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations

The church also offers a strong HIV/AIDS program aimed at preventing mother-to-child transmission; a "Roll Back Malaria" effort (malaria in Zambia contributes to 20% of all maternal deaths); a food-security program (malnutrition contributes to maternal death); and community capacity building to increase the number of trained traditional birth attendants. ■

Grace Phiri (gmazala@yahoo.co.uk) is national health adviser for the Anglican Church in Zambia.

Learn more about it

- **ONE Episcopalian**
<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/ONE/>
- **DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa)**
www.data.org
- **Educational resources from Episcopal Relief and Development**
http://er-d.org/programs_36756_ENG_HTM.htm
- **Resources from Episcopal News Service**
http://www.episcopalchurch.org/3577_77743_ENG_HTM.htm
- **Episcopalians for Global Reconciliation**
<http://e4gr.org>
- **United Nations Millennium Development Goals**
www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
www.millenniumcampaign.org

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