



## Connecting Faith and Life

A FAITHLINK Special Issue

### Session at a Glance

The United Methodist Church is joining a global effort to prevent and eradicate malaria during the Change the World event April 24–25. What causes malaria, and what are its consequences? How can Christians make a difference in the fight against this disease?

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# Imagine No Malaria

by Pamela Dilmore

## Hard to Imagine?

Imagine no malaria? That is not hard. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), malaria was considered to be eradicated in the United States in the 1950's; yet the CDC also reports that around 1,500 cases are reported each year in the United States. Aside from those who travel to areas that are at high risk for contracting malaria, most who live in the United States are at minimal risk for becoming infected.

But this is not the case for people who live in other areas of the world. The CDC reports that each year, 350–500 million people contract malaria, and over a million die from the disease. The World Health Organization estimates that between 708,000 and 1,003,000 people died from malaria in 2008. Ninety percent of these deaths occurred in sub-Saharan Africa; and sadly, most of them were children under five years of age. Every thirty seconds, a child in Africa dies from malaria.

Worldwide, malaria is the fifth leading cause of death, after respiratory infections, HIV/AIDS, diarrheal diseases, and tuberculosis; in Africa, death from malaria is second only to HIV/AIDS. Half of the world's population—3.3 billion people—live in areas at risk of malaria transmission. These sobering statistics call Christians in the United States and around the world to do something to end the suffering.

## Change the World

On April 24–25, United Methodist congregations will participate in an event called Change the World. The concept for the Change the World event originated with the Reverend Mike Slaughter, lead pastor at Ginghamburg Church in Tipp City, Ohio. In his book *Change the World*, he calls congregations to take the church into the world instead of coaxing the world into the church. Inspired by his concept, the Change the World event in April was created as part of the Rethink Church campaign in partnership with The United Methodist Publishing House and Imagine No Malaria, a United Methodist effort to eliminate deaths caused by malaria.

The Change the World event will connect United Methodists all over the world in local and global service in the fight against malaria. April 25 is World Malaria Day, a day instituted by the World Health Assembly in May 2007 to recognize and encourage global efforts to prevent and treat malaria. On World Malaria Day, The United Methodist Church will join this global effort by launching the Imagine No Malaria campaign. Bringing the names of these campaigns together offers a compelling imperative to United Methodist congregations:

## Core Bible Passages

**First Kings 17:8-23** tells the story of a widow who, with God's help, discovers that a little can go a long way and that life is possible even in the midst of poverty and grief. The widow is desperately poor. When Elijah first approaches her and asks for a drink of water and something to eat, she tells him she has only a handful of meal and a little oil to make the bread for her and her son to eat. She expects that she and her son will die when the meal is gone. Miraculously, through this little bit, God provides enough to sustain them through the drought. Tragically, the woman's son does die; and in her grief, the widow cries out against Elijah and her God. Elijah, in turn, cries out to God. God listens and restores the son's life.

In **Mark 2:1-12** and **Luke 5:17-26**, we find a story in which Jesus heals a man who is paralyzed. One of the remarkable features of the story involves the extraordinary role of the man's friends. Four friends carried the man. They could not get through the crowd, but they did not give up. They managed to get to the roof of the house where Jesus was speaking. They dug through the roof and lowered the man to Jesus. The healing was an occasion in which Jesus demonstrated his power to forgive sin and to restore the man to health; yet the story shines because people were willing to help a man be healed.

Rethink Church, Imagine No Malaria, and Change the World. And changing the world in local communities through the Imagine No Malaria opportunities can help end needless suffering and loss of life.

## What Is Malaria?

Malaria is a disease caused by parasites that are transmitted from one human to another by infected mosquitoes. The parasites can also be transmitted by a mother to her unborn baby and by blood transfusion. The parasites migrate to the liver, where they mature, enter the bloodstream, and infect red blood cells. These infected red blood cells rupture in 48 to 72 hours and infect more blood cells. Symptoms of malaria usually occur from ten days to four weeks after infection and may include chills, fever, sweating, headache, nausea, vomiting, muscle pain, anemia, bloody stools, jaundice, and convulsions. The symptoms can range from very mild to very severe; left untreated, they can result in coma or death. But malaria is curable if it is promptly and correctly diagnosed and treated.

## Preventable and Treatable

Malaria is a preventable and treatable disease. This fact makes the high number of deaths all the more tragic. It also fuels the hopes of global initiatives against this disease. A *New York Times* online slideshow (<http://tiny.cc/K5pA6>) features photographs provided by the Malaria Consortium that are part of an eight-week exhibition at the United Nations headquarters in Manhattan beginning March 15.

One photo demonstrates hope. It features a mother, Pheap Sung of Cambodia, carrying her sick child, Kam Sot Sung. In the caption, she says, "He was sick for three days, had a very high fever. I would have sought help at a private clinic, but I did not have the money. The free clinic is a long way, but I decided I had to take him. I thought he might have malaria. He looks so much better. I am thankful for the doctors here."

A photo of Allen Namaweje of Uganda shows him under a mosquito net. He says, "I get bitten a bunch of times at night. I get sick five times a year, I think. When I get sick, I stay in bed. I am not lying in my bed; this is not my mosquito net. I do not use a mosquito net. We only have one and there's no place for me."

Yet another photo underscores a personal tragedy as Saroeung Vuth of Cambodia tells of his efforts to save his sick brother. "It was October. The roads were impassable. We knew my brother had malaria. But it just kept raining. No way to use a taxi or bike, the roads were impassable. We took turns carrying him. Sometimes we sank to our waists in the mud; it took two days. But when we arrived at the main road he had died. He was a gentle man, a lot of fun. Whenever there was a party he was always invited."

Hope and tragedy, side by side. All it takes is prevention and treatment, which includes things we take for granted: access to clinics and

## Young People Make a Difference

**First Timothy 4:12** reminds us, “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example.” In the fight against malaria, three young people demonstrate their willingness to make a difference.

Twelve-year-old Charles Ssali, a soccer player and malaria survivor from Uganda, came to New York City in November 2009 as an ambassador for United Against Malaria, an initiative to provide universal access to mosquito nets and malaria medicine in Africa by the end of 2010. The initiative will promote awareness of the campaign at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. Ssali says, “I love soccer and I hate malaria. I live in Uganda where I love to play soccer with my friends, but, sometimes they’re too sick to play. I hope my global journey will help soccer fans all over the world understand this disease that affects my home town and many others in Africa.”

“This Is What We Do” is a video on the Imagine No Malaria website featuring teenager Elizabeth Clymer (<http://tiny.cc/xlrir>). Elizabeth envisioned a “swat team” that uses fly swatters to encourage donations from the members of Messiah United Methodist Church in Springfield, Virginia. Elizabeth’s efforts have raised \$15,000 so far.

Katherine Commale is an elementary school student and a member of Hopewell United Methodist Church in Downingtown, Pennsylvania. With the help of her family, her church, and her community, she has raised \$120,000 for the Nothing But Nets campaign.

medicines. And something as simple as a mosquito net can make a world of difference.

## Malaria and Economics

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) says malaria is both a cause and a result of poverty. In Africa, the disease causes a net loss of \$12 billion every year because of the loss of productivity due to illness and death. Malaria accounts for 40 percent of the public health expenditure, 50 percent of all outpatient visits, and 30–50 percent of inpatient admissions to a hospital or clinic. Guilleme Roux, president of the cement division in the Lafarge group, which owns Hima Cement Company in Uganda, says that “health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and wealth.” In April 2009, Hima Cement launched a two-year community malaria prevention campaign.

## Global Health Initiative

The United Methodist Church partners with global efforts to combat diseases of poverty, such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis, through ministry programs of the Global Health Initiative (GHI). While the church has worked with hospitals, clinics, and missions in Africa to combat malaria for over 160 years, it is renewing its efforts to eliminate diseases of poverty through the initiative. The World Economic Forum launched the GHI in 2002 to improve global health through advocacy, dialogue, and partnership. The program has focused on communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. The church is enlarging and renewing its efforts toward global health by joining the GHI as a key area of ministry, and the first major focus for the initiative is the prevention and treatment of malaria in developing nations.

William H. Gates, Sr., chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and father of Microsoft founder Bill Gates, thanked United Methodists at the 2008 General Conference for their work in the fight against malaria. Gates expressed confidence and respect for The United Methodist Church when he reminded the conference of the words and beliefs of John Wesley: “Almost 300 years ago, your founder, John Wesley, explained the moral implications of what is now . . . called globalization. Wesley’s statement ‘I look on all the world as my parish,’ describes our mutual responsibility. The fight against malaria is going to take a firm commitment to John Wesley’s idea. You are 12 million people armed with the conviction that all the world is your parish. That makes you the most powerful weapon there is against malaria.”

We may be a bit taken aback at Gates’s expression of our power; but if we think about our church and how it is organized for mission, we can begin to sense our potential to reach out beyond ourselves and help heal our world. We are already deeply committed to several initiatives, including Nothing But Nets, Community-based Malaria Control, Community-based Radio Outreach, and Hospital Revitalization.

## Malaria: An Ancient Scourge

A February article that appeared in *The New York Times* sounds more like an episode of *Cold Case*, but this one is thousands of years old. It involves the boy-pharaoh of Egypt, King Tutankhamen. Even though some scientists speculate that foul play was involved in his death, DNA evidence shows that he was not immune from the parasites carried by the anopheles mosquito that infested the Nile valley. Scientists have recently determined that malaria was probably a primary agent in his death at age 19 in the fourteenth century B.C. King Tut was frail and lame, and a severe bout of malaria combined with a degenerative bone disorder most likely caused his death. The scientists report that several other mummies in their study also showed DNA evidence of the presence of the malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum*.

*The New York Times* also reports that malaria had a tremendous impact on ancient Rome and that Attila the Hun may have turned back from sacking Rome because of the fever raging there. Archaeologists have found evidence of several epidemics of malaria during Rome's decline from greatness.

Symptoms of malaria are described in ancient Chinese medical writings dating from 2700 B.C. and by Hippocrates in ancient Greece, where the disease was widely recognized by the fourth century B.C. A Sanskrit medical writing called the *Susruta* describes the disease and attributes it to insect bites.

## Not Hard to Imagine

In the United States, we have a legacy of eliminating the threat of malaria. We no longer live with the fear of contracting this disease. Even so, malaria has not yet been eradicated; however, we know that it is preventable and treatable. What better legacy could we offer those who suffer from this disease than to help create a future in which their children can say, "It's not hard to imagine no malaria. We have eradicated it!"

### Nothing But Nets

One very successful initiative in the fight against malaria is Nothing But Nets. In 2006, Rick Reilly's column in *Sports Illustrated* challenged readers: "We need nets. Not hoop nets, soccer nets or lacrosse nets. Not New Jersey Nets or dot-nets or clarinets. *Mosquito* nets." His plea led to Nothing But Nets, a global campaign to send insecticide-treated mosquito nets to cover the beds of people who live in areas that are at high risk for malaria. Ten dollars provides an insecticide-treated net that can save lives by preventing mosquito bites. It covers the cost of purchasing the bed net, distributing it, and educating communities on its use.

The Nothing But Nets website reports that nets save lives ([www.nothingbutnets.net/](http://www.nothingbutnets.net/)). If you eliminate mosquito bites, you eliminate malaria. Malaria-carrying mosquitoes bite most often between 10:00 P.M. and 4:00 A.M. The bed nets create a protective barrier against them. The nets last about four years, and those treated with insecticide can reduce the number of mosquitoes that enter the house. The nets have been approved by the World Health Organization for safety and effectiveness. The insecticide has a very low level of toxicity for humans but is very toxic for the mosquitoes.

The United Methodist Church is a strong partner in the Nothing But Nets campaign. The United Methodist Board of Global Ministries has an advance dedicated to this initiative, Advance #982015.

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## Imagine No Malaria

How can Christians  
make a difference in  
the fight against  
malaria?

### CREATE Your Teaching Plan

Keeping in mind your  
group members and  
your group time,  
choose from among  
the OPEN, EXPLORE,  
and CLOSE activities  
or from “Teaching  
Alternatives” to plan  
the session.

## OPEN the Session

### Pray Together

Invite participants to pray aloud the following prayer: God of all people, fill our hearts with compassion and hope as we hear about the causes and consequences of malaria. Guide us as we seek ways to help; in Christ we pray. Amen.

### Discuss Knowledge of Malaria

Ask: What do you know about malaria? List responses on a marker-board or large sheet of paper. Read aloud the first paragraph in the section “Hard to Imagine?” (page 1). Ask: Is it easy or difficult for you to imagine no malaria? Why? Explain.

## EXPLORE the Topic

### Discuss Malaria Statistics

Read or review highlights of the section “Hard to Imagine?” (page 1), and ask the following questions: Which statistics stood out for you? Which ones surprised you or challenged you? Why? How do you respond to the fact that a child dies of malaria every thirty seconds? How do these statistics speak to you about human need?

### Create a Change the World Crossword Puzzle

Read or review highlights of “Change the World” (pages 1–2). Ask: How do you think Christians can “take the church into the world”? Write the words “Change the World” on a large sheet of posterboard. Invite group members to add words to make a crossword puzzle. Tell them the words should suggest ways churches can change the world through local church activity. For example, someone might write the word “give” down from the “g” in “Change.” Or one might write the word “nets” over the letter “t” in “the.” Participants may add words across and down from any words that are added to the puzzle. Have participants tell about their words and what they suggest when they add them to the puzzle. When they have finished, ask: What connections do you see between local church action and the hope of changing the world?

### Learn About the Disease

Review “What Is Malaria?” (page 2) and “Malaria: An Ancient Scourge” (page 4). Ask: What new thing did you learn about malaria? How do you respond to the finding that malaria was partially responsible for King Tut’s death? How do you respond to the speculation about Attila the Hun? What do these ancient stories say to you about science?

### Discuss “Preventable and Treatable”

Form teams of two or three people. Review the section “Preventable and Treatable” (pages 2–3). Discuss the following questions: Since malaria is preventable and treatable, how do you explain the high incidence of suffering and death from this disease? How does the fact that malaria is preventable magnify the tragedy of so much suffering and death? How does it give you hope? What obstacles need to be overcome in order to alleviate the suffering and reduce the number of deaths from

malaria? Tell the teams to share highlights of their discussions with the entire group.

## Consider “Malaria and Economics”

Read the section “Malaria and Economics” (page 3). Invite participants to tell about their experiences with illness and missing work. Ask: What experiences have you had or do you know about in which illness has caused a major economic impact? What were the circumstances? How did you or the person you know get through the situation? How does this compare to the situations of those who cannot work because of malaria?

## Have a Bible Study

Form two teams. Assign 1 Kings 17:8-23 to Team 1 and Mark 2:1-12 and Luke 5:17-26 to Team 2. Tell the teams to read their Scripture passages and the associated material in “Core Bible Passages” (page 2). Ask: What does the Scripture say to you about God? about humans? How does the Scripture inform the issues related to malaria? Have the teams tell the entire group about their assigned Scriptures and the highlights of their discussions.

## Discuss the Global Health Initiative

Form teams of two or three. Tell them to review the section “Global Health Initiative” (page 3) and discuss the following questions: What facts surprised you in this section? Why? What potential do you see in the level of cooperation described in this section? What does it say to you about the hope of changing the world? What thoughts or feelings do you have about Wesley’s concept of the world as our parish? What did you think of Gates’s view that commitment to Wesley’s idea makes us “the most powerful weapon there is against malaria”? Do you agree or disagree?

## Prepare Group Reports

Form two teams. Assign “Nothing But Nets” (page 4) to Team 1 and “Young People Make a Difference” (page 3) to Team 2. Ask: How did your assignment help you imagine no malaria? How did it speak to you about what you, your church, and your community might do to make a difference? Tell the teams to prepare a report in which they will review highlights of their assigned section and their team discussion.

## CLOSE the Session

### Create Imagine No Malaria Cards

Give each participant an index card and a pen or pencil. Read aloud the section “Not Hard to Imagine” (page 4). Have participants silently reflect on how individuals, local churches, and communities can help people in other nations in the fight against malaria. Ask: What one simple action can we do as individual Christians? as a local church? as a community? Tell them to write a response on an index card. Invite participants to tell their ideas to the group.

### Pray Together

Pray silently for God’s strength as you seek ways to combat malaria. After a few moments of silence, have the group read aloud verse 2 of the hymn “Cuando el Pobre” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, 434) to close the prayer time.

## Teaching Alternatives

◆ Review the section “Young People Make a Difference” (page 3). Take time to view the video “This Is What We Do,” which features the “swat” program envisioned and implemented by Elizabeth Clymer, a middle school teen from Messiah United Methodist Church in Springfield, Virginia (<http://tiny.cc/xlrir>). Ask: How does this video inspire you? Do you think we could do something similar to combat malaria?

◆ Review the information about Nothing But Nets on page 4. Look at the Nothing But Nets website mentioned there. Suggestions and resources for creating a Nothing But Nets campaign in your local church may be found at <http://tiny.cc/EUmkL>.

◆ For more information about ways to become involved in the global fight against malaria, look at the website for Imagine No Malaria at UMC.org (<http://tiny.cc/GCfvF>). This website offers a variety of resources and ideas for action.