

## The Vision for a Women's Center in the East Congo

As many of you know, Bishop Unda was very grateful for all of our donations to Imagine No Malaria. It is personal for him, since his wife and daughter both died from Malaria. But when he was meeting with a small number of people on the mission committee of a North District Church, he told the story of a tragedy that affects far greater numbers.

Bishop Unda said his wife was the spiritual rock of their family. She suddenly became ill and died, and the oldest daughter stepped into the role of mother for her younger siblings. And then she also died of malaria. The people who loved them were full of grief, and didn't know what to do. Bishop Unda told them that while this was his personal tragedy, they should begin to work on the tragedy affecting so many others.

For 20 years the East Congo has been beset by wars, brought on mostly by the fact that the area is a great place to mine something that is necessary to make all of our cell phones. As you can imagine, it is very valuable. Rebels from other places have come into villages with machetes, hacking people to death, raping women, killing children. Over 6 MILLION people have died. Bishop Unda was hopeful that this had been brought under control, but as we all heard recently, it just happened again. During these events, the women and children often run off into a forest, which is very large, and affords good hiding places. Some of the women were raped by the rebels, and became pregnant, giving birth in the forest. Some contracted AIDS, and died in the forest. Some of the children who were born in the forest never had the opportunity to be educated in basic life skills, let alone in skills that would allow them to earn a decent living. Many of these people were out there for years.

When the Bishop thought this was pretty much over, he had the churches coaxing the women back into the villages. This is the point in the story where the translator, Bill Lovell, had a hard time speaking because he too was overcome with grief. The women were not welcomed back, because they were considered "damaged goods." With no skills and no homes and no family support, all they could do was go back to the forest.

The Bishop wants very much to build a facility for these women and children. He hopes it will be big enough to house about 50 people at a time. He envisions a place of healing, where women and children can stay for several months and be treated for both their physical and emotional afflictions. And he sees it as a place where they can learn basic life skills, and skills that will allow them to earn a living wage as well. He is working through the churches on healing the attitudes that allow others to keep these women away.

The facility will cost about \$370,000. I believe our district can raise a significant chunk of this money. The need is great and ongoing.

Rev. Diane Rehfield  
Pastor, Atascadero UMC