



One life at a time



**A survivor of  
history's worst  
pandemic,  
Kenyan native  
Michael Agwanda  
returns home  
to care for AIDS  
youngest victims.**

By Reed Hoppe  
Photos by Rick Roberts

Long before organizations such as ONE.org, World Vision, and others made the African HIV/AIDS epidemic global news, Michael Agwanda experienced the ravaging effects of the disease firsthand. Born in eastern Kenya, Michael was fortunate to escape contracting the deadly disease before birth. Although he began his life with the odds stacked against him, Michael is a true testament to what God can do with a life surrendered to Him.

When he was eight years old, Michael's mother died of HIV/AIDS. Several years later, his father succumbed to the same fate. His father's second wife (Michael's step-mother) now suffers with HIV/AIDS.

After the death of his parents, Michael was left to care for his two sisters and five brothers. They grew up in what Michael describes as a "semi-slum area." The entire community shared one bathroom. Michael remembers begging for food and often going hungry. Childhood, for Michael, didn't include playing with toys. Instead, he worked to try and help support the family from a young age. Now in his early 30s, Michael has joined the fight to stop AIDS in Africa. He is passionate about helping other orphans have the opportunity to a healthy and promising future.

## HIV/AIDS around the world\*

More than 38 million people are infected with HIV/AIDS worldwide.

25 million people are infected with HIV/AIDS in Africa.

More than 15 million children worldwide have lost one or both parents to AIDS.

12 million African children have lost one or both parents to AIDS.



Michael moved to the United States in 2004 after being offered the opportunity to take a course in church leadership and management. His pastor in Kenya encouraged Michael to pursue ministry training so that he could help lead the church in Kisumu, Kenya. Michael was already active, serving on the church worship team, as a youth leader and church librarian, and as head of evangelism and discipleship ministries.

After arriving in Georgia, Michael learned that the program had been postponed for one year. He lived with a friend in town and began to look for a church. North Springs United Methodist Church was within walking distance from his temporary home, so Michael began to get involved.

While attending North Springs UMC, Michael was encouraged to enroll in the Lay Missionary Training Program, hosted by the North Georgia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. The program requires each participant to write a proposal for a mission project with which the student wanted to be involved. From that assignment, the Life for Children Ministry (LFC) was born.

Michael founded Life for Children in early 2006 with the help of boards of advisors in Georgia and Kenya. LFC's vision is "To give hope and life to HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children." Their mission is, "To identify orphans whose parents/guardians have died of HIV/AIDS and to support them physically, spiritually, and socially by providing food, housing, healthcare, education, and spiritual nourishment."

Now in its second year, LFC has grown to support 60 orphans in the Kisumu and Homa-Bay areas. LFC provides food, clothing, education, healthcare, school uniforms, mosquito netting, Christian teachings, and placement in a home with relatives so the orphans can enjoy growing up in a family environment. LFC uses the funds donated from churches and individuals to support the orphans in its care.

In 2006, more than 500 pairs of shoes were collected and shipped to Kenya for distribution among the orphans and the surrounding community. Fifty-three shoeboxes full of supplies were assembled, packaged, and delivered before Christmas. Several short-term mission teams travel to Kenya each year to provide medical care, Vacation Bible School (VBS), and help with facility construction for LFC and its participants.

It is expected that there will be 25 million AIDS orphans worldwide by 2010.

AIDS is the leading cause of death for adults age 15-59 in Sub-Saharan Africa.

AIDS is the world's fourth leading cause of death.

More than 25 million people have died of AIDS since it was first discovered in 1981.

*\*Statistics from ONE.org and World Vision*



Michael is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Theology with a concentration in Christian Philosophy and Apologetics from Trinity College. Upon graduation he will return to Kenya and reside there full-time to coordinate the ministries of LFC.

Joining Michael in the fight against AIDS is Julie Campbell, a resident of Pennsylvania. Julie and Michael were commissioned as missionaries with The Mission Society together in August 2005. Like Michael, Julie is called to provide hope and health to Kenyan orphans. A school social worker for 23 years, Julie will now assist LFC in connecting orphans with extended family members and performing regular house visits to check on the children and families.

In Kenya alone, more than one million children have been orphaned from HIV/AIDS-related illnesses to date. In a nation of nearly 35 million people, 10 percent suffer from the HIV/AIDS virus. Recent estimates indicate that Kenya is one of the few African nations to report a drop in HIV/AIDS cases. It's believed that this decrease is the result of the United States' abstinence campaign, Voluntary Testing and counseling (VCT), and education regarding preventing infected mothers from passing the disease to their unborn child.

Worldwide, more than 38 million people are infected with HIV/AIDS, and 25 million of those are in Africa. Twelve million of the more than 15 million AIDS orphans around the world reside in Africa. Since AIDS was first discovered in 1981, 25 million people have died from the disease. AIDS is now the fourth leading cause of death worldwide.

When faced with such staggering statistics, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and incapable of making a difference. Thankfully, Michael, Julie, and many others like them around the world have committed themselves to the fight. As Michael can attest, there can be hope and a bright future for anyone, even those born into the most unpromising of circumstances. †

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