News
Ministry



Sr. Mercy Kanyoro interacts with patients at the Mother Theresa Hospice. The hospice is a refuge for the sick and dying, located on the outskirts of Kabulonga, an exclusive suburb adjacent to Kalingalinga, a slum in Lusaka, Zambia. (Derrick Silimina)



by Derrick Silimina

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Lusaka, Zambia — November 7, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Moffat Tembo, who has HIV/AIDS, remembers the day he was hospitalized at Mother Theresa Hospice after gasping for breath due to the devastating effects of the virus.

The Mother Theresa Hospice, a refuge for the sick and dying, is on the outskirts of Kabulonga, an exclusive suburb adjacent to Kalingalinga, one of Lusaka's slums. The facility is managed by the Missionaries of Charity, a community founded by Mother Teresa of Kolkata in 1950.

The congregation is dedicated to serving the poorest of the poor, irrespective of social class, creed or color. Since 1989, the hospice has followed the words of its founder, welcoming people of all ages who knock at the gates, welcoming and giving them care, medicine, food, school amenities, shelter and love.

Tembo, 34, said that living with HIV/AIDS in a country already grappling with poor health care services is arduous, a dilemma that has thrown thousands of families into extreme poverty.

"I always thank the sisters day and night for saving my life. Without them, I would be dead by now," Tembo told Global Sisters Report.

> 'I always thank the sisters day and night for saving my life. Without them, I would be dead by now.'
>
> —Moffat Tembo
>
> Tweet this

He was brought to the Mother Theresa Hospice in early 2007 while very sick, and the sisters immediately put him on antiretroviral treatment. He later regained consciousness after nine drips of medication.

Tembo discovered his HIV-positive status at the age of 17. The thought of being on medication depressed him, and he lived in denial for some time. But his immunity couldn't withstand the ravaging effects of HIV.

After his mother's untimely death, Tembo lost hope in life. Living in Mandevu township, a slum a few kilometers north of Zambia's capital, Lusaka, Tembo experienced the harsh reality faced by orphaned children in the country, which forced him into extreme poverty and further deteriorated his health.

After he sought refuge at Mother Theresa Hospice, Tembo's health improved. Following this he enrolled in a community school based at the center to revive his academic journey.

"After I recovered, I dedicated my life to helping the sick here, counsel patients [to] take [their] drugs consistently and encourage the hopeless to have a fighting spirit in life," said the father of four, touched by the sisters' tireless care.



Moffat Tembo, a former patient and now caregiver, enjoys a break after his shift at the admission wards at the Mother Theresa Hospice. (Derrick Silimina)

Like him, several others who once came in need of emergency health care are now healthy and working at the facility as drivers, teachers, carpenters, tailors, security

staff and caregivers.

Mirriam Chisha is a young woman with an extraordinary story. She is still in disbelief that her life is back to normal after surviving life-threatening surgery after her unexpected ectopic pregnancy.

Chisha, 25, became homeless at the age of 15 after her parents divorced. When her father remarried, she said she couldn't cope with her stepmother's abuse, forcing her to endure life on the streets of Lusaka.

"I discovered that I was two months pregnant at the age of 18, and [suddenly], I got very ill while living on the streets of Lusaka. My fellow street kids organized transport and help [for me] at the Mother Theresa Hospice," she said.

Advertisement

Chisha said that had it not been for the sisters' immediate referral to the University Teaching Hospital for surgery, she would have lost her life.

Sr. Mercy Kanyoro is in charge of the Mother Theresa Hospice. She is excited about her calling because she enjoys witnessing terminally ill patients gradually return to life.

"We see them coming in despair, in hopelessness, and worn out physically. We take care of them and restore their health. We also restore faith in their lives, and we see them get up to resume their normal lives," Kanyoro told GSR.

Coming from a humble background in Kenya, Kanyoro is glad her mission at the 35-year-old hospice has been life-changing, acknowledging that divine providence has made the facility operate smoothly.

She added that many patients who recover from poor health choose to give back as a form of appreciation from the facility that houses a hospice, novitiate, a community school for vulnerable children and a skills training center for vulnerable teen mothers.



Sr. Mercy Kanyoro shares a light moment with Florence Mulenga, left, and Mervis Mwewa (right). Both women work at the facility and have devoted themselves to giving back what they received from the center when they were in need. Mulenga is in charge of security at the facility after surviving a severe illness. Mwewa works as a tailor and grew up in the facility after she sought refuge as a teenager. (Derrick Silimina)

"When our patients recover, some usually come and say, 'Sister — you have cared for me, and I want to give back.' Whenever we can, we offer them a job to help them get reestablished in life," she stated.

Kanyoro, 44, said the facility goes beyond its mission of taking care of the poorest of the poor, restoring their physical and spiritual health, and offering capacity building through lifelong skills so that they are not dependent on anyone.

With almost 300 beneficiaries taken care of each day, the facility has its share of challenges since the hospice alone accommodates 60-100 patients suffering from

HIV/AIDS-related illnesses, most from Lusaka's surrounding slums.

Although Zambia has made significant strides in reducing the HIV/AIDS infection rate in recent years, the southern African country still has a very high rate of infectious diseases. Estimates in 2021 showed that 1.3 out of almost 20 million Zambians are living with HIV, and women are the most affected.

Kanyoro, with her vast experience in humanitarian work in other countries including Kenya, India, South Africa, Madagascar and now Zambia, said her congregation's quest to serve Christ through their fellow humans is in line with their charism, "To labor for the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor."

"I get inspired to instill hope in the hopeless, provide for the needy, and see terminally sick people back to good health because I get bothered to see how vulnerable people struggle to afford the basic needs in a world of plenty. My hope is to see a sharing world that will transform humankind!"

This story appears in the **HIV/AIDS Ministry** feature series. View the full series.