2017 MISSISSIPPI CONFERENCE LENTEN DEVOTION GUIDE

IMAGINE NO MALARIA

Includes Giving From Abundance Calendar
Within this Lenten Devotion Guide are writings from some of our very own Mississippi Conference church leaders and stories of how Imagine No Malaria, an arm of The United Methodist Church, is saving lives around the globe. It is our hope that your heart will be touched as you read how God uses his people—how God can use YOU—to give life, abundant life, to his children everywhere.

In the center of this guide is a Giving From Abundance calendar. It invites us to think every day about our access to resources and services that support our health. Clean water, electricity, transportation, medicine: Many of us take these “necessary conditions for life” for granted. In reflecting upon our abundance, we are called to help create abundant life for others.

These proposed gift amounts may generate between $50 and $100 over the course of Lent for an average household. You can add the money in a jar, an offering box as you go, or note the amounts each day and make one big donation at the end of Lent. The giving calendar ends on a Saturday, and Easter is the following Sunday. Make sure to bring your donations on Easter Sunday so that you can celebrate lives saved with your congregation.

We invite you to impact our world by saving lives through Imagine No Malaria. You will be blessed.
As we enter this Lenten season, we are reminded we will never fully comprehend the depth of Jesus’ sacrificial act of death on the cross to pardon us for our sins. We are called during this season to reflect on the Savior’s sacrifice by taking our own journeys of self-denial and surrender.

In that same spirit, I invite you to consider the suffering of persons who live on the other side of the globe. Many of these persons are children who do not have access to the necessities and amenities we daily take for granted. It is my hope that through this journey of the Lenten season you will become aware of your opportunity to have a significant impact on the overall health and well-being of your sisters and brothers in Christ, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. It is in this part of our world where a child dies every two minutes from a disease that is 100 percent treatable and preventable. This disease is malaria.

As you may or may not know, our mission focus for the next two years in the Mississippi Conference is to imagine a world with no malaria! When we allow every person to have the opportunity to live a life free from a disease that has a definite cure like malaria does, we are living out justice. Isaiah 30:18 tells us, “Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice …”, and we are people that imitate our Lord.

We are granted unmerited favor, mercy, and grace daily. Just as the Lord has been gracious to you, I encourage you to take this Lenten journey so we can discover together God’s goodness. I invite you on this journey with me as we discover afresh and anew “The POWER of We!”

Blessings,

Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr.
During a medical mission trip to Accra, Ghana, in 2009, our team was blessed to witness many miracles. Not so much the stunning, headline-grabbing miracles of TV evangelism, but the quiet and reassuring miracles of God revealing power when God’s people show up in the right place at the right time.

We had with us a group of orthopedic therapists. Without advertisement that we had this type of expertise, men and women by the dozens came complaining of their “side” pain (sciatica), and were remedied on the spot with adjustments from the well-placed hands of Spirit-placed therapists. I watched the miracle of “the woman with the crooked back healed” come to life before my eyes.

What does that have to do with malaria? It speaks to expectations. When my back hurts, I expect to make one phone call, get an appointment, show my insurance card, maybe purchase a steroid or anti-inflammatory, and be back to normal within a week. I do not expect to have to walk for hours or even days with a bad back in the hopes that some strange foreign doctor will understand my side pain.

Here was my reality check: We knew to bring medicines that would protect us from contracting malaria, and I fully expected to be protected by the meds—in a country where the people we were partnering with fully expected to contract malaria at least once in their life and require treatment. Those are very different expectations.

So, if I expect to be free from malaria, if I expect that I will not have to watch my children suffer from its ravages, should I not also expect that for my neighbor? Then what am I doing about it?

Jesus asked in Luke 10:36-37, “Which of these was his neighbor?” The lawyer answered, “The one who showed mercy.” Jesus responded, “Then go, and do likewise.”

The Rev. Leanne Burris has spent most of her life on the Gulf Coast and has served The United Methodist Church as an elder for the last decade.
Many Babies Not Named Until Age 5 in Congo

A gravedigger walks among dozens of fresh graves in the children’s section of the Penga Penga Cemetery in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Only one in five children in this city of 3 million survive to age 5 due to malaria.

You may notice that several of the graves are unmarked. These are perhaps the saddest stories malaria tells—in many African cultures, naming ceremonies for children do not take place until around age 5. This is because families know all too well that malaria may very well take their young children from them and feel that it is bad luck to name a child until that child has a good chance of survival.
“Jesus, knowing what they were thinking, took a child and stood him by his side. ‘Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever received me receives the One who sent me.’”
Luke 9:47-48

Malaria is the silent emergency that kills one child every two minutes, more than 800 children daily. Hundreds of thousands die from malaria each year, most of them children under the age of 5.

No more.

That’s the goal. No more malaria.

But the goal still eludes us. Even though treatment is available, still too many are infected, affected, and too many die.

It is just and right to pursue and put down malaria.

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito.” – African proverb

Take this very same thought, add the will to deal with a disease like malaria, and just one “turned on” person can begin to make a difference.

Let’s get the word out, and let people know our call in this moment of history includes bringing justice to the curse of malaria.

“No more let sin and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground, he comes to make his blessing flow far as the curse is found.” – Isaac Watts, “Joy to the World”

Found, and treatable — then and now.

Let’s learn more, share what we find, and lift the banner of our ultimate hope:

No more malaria.

The Rev. Keith Tonkel has served as pastor of Wells UMC in Jackson since 1969. He has also brought the Sunday school lesson for The Hour, our Mississippi Methodist TV show, for the past 30 years.
Sad Ending

Domingos Antonic was 8 months old when his parents brought him to the hospital in Malanje, Angola. Domingos weighed only 15.5 pounds when he came into the hospital. His fever was raging, foam was all over his lips, and he lay completely still in his mother’s arms.

Domingos was suffering from acute anemia and couldn’t breathe because he was infected with malaria. He had been sick for days. While his parents made the right choice to bring Domingos to the hospital, the medical staff did not have the necessary supplies to save him in the late stage of the disease. It was too late.

At 3:50 p.m. on Sept. 25, 2006, five minutes after this photo was taken, baby Domingos Antonic died. His parents watched helplessly as their son died from malaria.

“His veins were so small it was hard to give him the transfusion he desperately needed,” Domingos’ mother said. “A pediatric surgeon would have been able to cut deeper and find a vein. It might have saved his life.”

Asked what else would have saved his life, she answered softly, “Oxygen.”

The hospital does not even have an oxygen tank. The heartbreak is even harder to deal with knowing that malaria is a disease that can be prevented and cured if the resources are available, she said.

*Adapted from Interpreter Magazine, July/August 2009, p. 15-17.*
“Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore, he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!”

Isaiah 30:18

A few years ago, I was gifted a trip to Africa. Besides the chance to study, our group received money for the trip. The sponsor wanted us to enjoy the trip and not miss anything. We converted our money, looking forward to shopping for ourselves.

We arrived exhausted, but school and ministry awaited us. The money sat in our pockets as we engaged in pastoral care in this setting. Our hosts poured out love toward us, ministering to our tired bodies and souls. After two weeks of fish, they surprised us with fried chicken, ribs, veggies and sweets, which we gobbled up. We laughed that the meal saved our lives. We didn’t know the cost.

Before leaving, we went shopping for souvenirs, but discovered the cost of the family’s gracious hospitality—a month’s pay. We were shocked. We could do without souvenirs. That family couldn’t afford a month’s pay. We knew what we had to do. “Therefore, whenever we have opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially those in the family of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Prayer: Lord, you are the God of justice and you demonstrate new mercies daily. Help us not to be so selfish that we miss opportunities to do right by others, especially in the family of faith. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The Rev. Maxine Bolden is campus minister and director of the Jackson State University Wesley Foundation.
Teaching Net Use in Zimbabwe
By Catherine Szczybor

We were 15 sunburned Americans at a primary school in Dindi, a rural village in the northeast corner of Zimbabwe. Under the auspices of The United Methodist Church we were delivering hundreds of malaria nets and teaching the people how to use them. For me, it was a daunting job. How well we taught the people to use these nets could mean the difference between life and death.

The people listened so attentively as we talked about how malaria is contracted and how it attacks a body’s red blood cells. We described how mothers, young children, and the chronically ill—especially those with HIV/AIDS—were most at risk. Finally, we showed them how to use the nets.

“You must use the net every night,” we repeated.

We asked some members of the audience to come up and show us how to use the nets correctly.

Then came the net distribution. Each child showed such gratitude upon receiving a net. Despite long lines in the hot sun, each child said, “Thank you,” or, “Mazviita,” along with a traditional hand-clap of thanks. Handing out 800 nets was a pleasure!

Later as we drove away from Dindi, we were struck by the women and children who were walking so far with the bright blue nets propped on their heads. They were the tangible symbols of generosity of The Methodist Church and the promise of lives to be saved radiating throughout that village.
During Lent we are called to pray, to sacrifice and to give. Imagine No Malaria helps us put our faith into action as we think about the blessings in our lives and give so that others may live, and live more abundantly! The Giving From Abundance Calendar invites us to think every day about our access to resources and services that support our health. Clean water, electricity, transportation, medicine … “necessary conditions for life” many of us take for granted. In reflecting upon our abundance, we are called to help create abundant life for others.

Living Out The POWER of We

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<th>SUNDAY</th>
<th>MONDAY</th>
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<td>WEEK 1</td>
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<td>MARCH</td>
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<td>These proposed gift amounts may generate giving between $50 and $100 over the course of Lent for your household. You can add the money in a jar as you go or note the amounts each day and make one big donation at the end of Lent!</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pray for good health for all people around the world</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$5 for each time you traveled out of the U.S. this year</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>$5 if you live within a 10-minute drive of a hospital or clinic</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Pray for doctors, nurses, and community health volunteers</td>
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<td>$1 for each time your family visited a dentist this past year</td>
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<td>$3 for each toilet in your home</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Read devotion by Rev. Keith Tonkel, page 4</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Pray for children under age 5 who are the most vulnerable</td>
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<td>$5 if you have a garage; $10 if you can’t park in it</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>$.25 for each soap dispenser in your home</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Read devotion by Rev. Maxine Bolden, page 6</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Pray for pregnant women around the world</td>
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<td>$.25 for each pair of shoes in your home</td>
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<td>$1 if you have ice in your freezer</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Read devotion by Rev. Ethel Magee, page 10</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Read devotion by Rev. Steve Casteel, page 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>$5 for each person who has been vaccinated in your family</td>
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<td>$5 for each car in your family</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>$1 for each load of laundry done this week</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Pray for researchers working on malaria vaccines</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Read devotion by Rev. John Moore, page 12</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>$2 if you got a new toothbrush this year</td>
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<td>Read devotion by LaToya Redd Thompson, page 14</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Palm Sunday Pray for those who have lost loved ones to malaria</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>$1 if you have a garage; $10 if you can’t park in it</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ash Wednesday</td>
<td>Read devotion by Rev. Leanne Burris, page 2</td>
<td>$2.50 for each T-shirt in your home that represents a Mississippi college</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>$1 for every purse or wallet you own</td>
<td>Read about babies not being named until age 5, page 3</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>$.50 for each device you own that connects to the Internet</td>
<td>Read about 8-month-old Domingos, page 5</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>$2 if you got a new toothbrush this year</td>
<td>Read about net distribution in Zimbabwe, page 7</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Tell someone about Imagine No Malaria today!</td>
<td>Read about survivors in Mozambique, page 11</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>$1 for each television in your home</td>
<td>Read about a boy’s life saved in central Congo, page 13</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Maundy Thursday</td>
<td>Read how a pregnant woman with malaria was helped, page 17</td>
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As God’s servants, we have three great human duties. First, do justice. Be true always with no extortion, speculation, forestalling, monopoly, or oppression. For a just person hates every false way, keeps far from false matters, neither raises nor bears false reports, is no false accuser, and takes no false oaths.

Second, show mercy. Mercy must be shown to the poor. When loving mercy, our walks, visits, and inquiries will make active love our first concern.

Third, walk humbly with God. Walking humbly with God provides a teachable spirit, carrying us away with Spirit-filled words in sermons and prayers. We walk humbly before him and also with his dear son, Jesus. We enjoy his presence while lifting up the light of his face.

This Lenten season, let’s all open our hearts and do justice, have mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Prayer: Lord, help us remember Easter is the greatest day in the history of the world, but first we must walk through Lent. Bless our world. Pour out justice and mercy in our hearts so that we will lead the way in beating malaria. Amen.

The Rev. Ethel Magee is pastor of St. James UMC in Magnolia and is chair of the Local Pastors Committee in the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church.
Hidden dangers lie in the neighborhoods of Mozambique. It is a parent’s nightmare.

“This one here, when she had malaria the temperature of the body was very high, and she had severe diarrhea,” said Lare Xaviaf, a mother in Mozambique about one of her children.

Poor drainage areas near homes are breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Their bites can cause malaria. All three of Xaviaf’s children have had malaria, but they were lucky—they survived.

Now there’s a bed net at the family’s home to protect the children. But many families cannot afford to buy nets. Xaviaf supplements her income selling food on a street corner in front of her home. She makes about $2 a day.

“I always live in a spirit of gratitude,” said Xaviaf. “Even though I may be poor, there are people who are poorer than me.”

Bishop Joao Machado is leading United Methodist Church efforts in Mozambique to save children from malaria.

“[Lack of] education, poverty are why we have this disease,” Machado said. “Malaria is killing more than HIV.”

Machado says the nets being distributed across Africa are making a difference. He’s hoping one day a vaccine will be developed for malaria. But in the meantime, families continue to struggle.

“We don’t have enough to provide food for our children on a daily basis,” Xaviaf said. “It’s only by faith that you go to bed without even knowing what you’re going to eat tomorrow. We only live by faith.”
“Who among you will give your children a stone when they ask for bread? Or give them a snake when they ask for fish? If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give good things to those who ask him?”

“Therefore, you should treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you; this is the Law and the Prophets.”

Matthew 7:9-12

Imagine a child living in sub-Saharan Africa and reading these words from Matthew’s Gospel. Imagine that same child witnessing siblings infected and dying from malaria. Imagine that child asking, “How long, O Lord, how long?”

Imagine if the scripture had posed the question, “Who of us would give malaria to our child’s quest for health?” None of us would, of course. And how much more God desires the well-being of all his creation.

How is the child’s quest for health and safety answered? How is God’s desire for well-being realized? The scriptures offer us God’s answer: “… Treat people in the same way that you want people to treat you.” There are no ifs, ands, or buts about it.

It’s time for us to be an active part of God’s desire for the children in sub-Saharan Africa. It is hard to “imagine” that being part of God’s answer could be so simple. Don’t overthink it, people. Buy some nets!

The Rev. John C. Moore is a retired elder of the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church.
This little boy is alive because of Imagine No Malaria and its comprehensive effort to save lives.

He was admitted to the Health Center of Kananga, Congo, on April 4, 2013, with a case of severe malaria and anemia.

Our work has helped to fund a project in six different health facilities in the Central Congo Episcopal Area, including this health center. There, he received a blood transfusion to correct the anemia and then drug treatments to combat the malaria itself.

For a poor family, the cost of that intervention is too great to bear, but Imagine No Malaria is working to fund precisely these kinds of treatments to save lives.

The father of this child arrived with tears streaming down his face because of the pain his child was experiencing. They had walked over 15 miles to get to this health facility and find treatment. Those tears turned into smiles with the full recovery of his son.

The father offered a profound testimony of gratitude both for the staff of the health center and the leaders of Imagine No Malaria.

This family never would have known about the treatment options available if it were not for the effective communications that are a part of our Imagine No Malaria efforts. Remote areas of the Kasai Annual Conference and the country are benefiting from information about prevention and how to access treatment thanks to The United Methodist Church.

*The details of this story are from the Imagine No Malaria Report – July 2013, from the team in Central Congo.*
During Jesus’ 40-day fast in preparation for ministry he was tempted three times. The second was the temptation of power and glory for the price of worshipping the devil (Luke 4:5-8).

What a high price to pay. But also what an easy deal to make. In our culture it can be so easy to pay the price the world demands for what we think we want—only to realize the world does not actually possess our desires.

As a lawyer, I have seen many people absolutely ravenous for their day in court. They think justice is some type of power and glory—if they can get before a judge and declare the wrong of the person who allegedly harmed them, they will be able to make the person pay for their wrongdoing.

Indeed, God calls for payment of sin, but God rarely metes out instant justice. Our role in justice is to be patient and to learn to have the heart of God so that our heart of vengeance changes into more of a heart of hope for the wrongdoer’s right relationship with God than for his or her punishment. That’s a tough transition to make.

That’s why, like Jesus, we must quench our hunger for power and glory and allow our hunger for God to rise. It is only from that place that we will respond to temptation like Jesus did—that we worship the Lord and serve only him and not our own selfish interests. Then we will experience justice the way God intended—as a win-win situation, an opportunity for the “wrongdoer” and the “victim” to become closer to God.

LaToya Redd Thompson, an attorney, is the lay leader of the Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church. She is a member of Christ UMC in Jackson.
Grandmother Prisca Nekesa was determined to protect her grandchildren from malaria. At age 100, she had outlived her husband and many other family members. Malaria had already stolen several of her grandchildren — she said every time the fever came, she imagined death itself knocking on her door.

Prisca’s remaining five grandkids, who lived with her in her tiny house, suffered from malaria so often they could not attend primary school. Medical care was too expensive, so she prayed to God for healing.

Then the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) partnered with a community organization to bring insecticide-treated bed nets to Prisca’s community. This partnership’s program has now expanded to cover HIV/AIDS, malaria, sex education, and substance abuse. This year, a project called Grandmothers Against Malaria won a grant from UMCOR through Imagine No Malaria.

Through Grandmothers Against Malaria, 633 grandmothers, pregnant women, orphans, and vulnerable children have received insecticide-treated bed nets, and 180 health care workers have received training. This education ranges from history of malaria and the disease’s transmission to home treatment and environmental management. Malaria information continues to be spread by local radio stations, case managers, and even the distribution of T-shirts with messages printed on them.

Grandmothers Against Malaria helped Prisca realize her dream of a healthy family. In June, she received a bed net and training. This gave her hope, dignity, and purpose in life.

Several months after the distribution, volunteers visited her house and found her still using the bed net perfectly, true to her word. Prisca and her five grandchildren now sleep without fear. They no longer suffer from malaria.
“The Enthroned continued, ‘Look! I’m making everything new. Write it all down … . ’”
Revelation 21:5

Often our conversations on justice begin with passionate condemnation. Injustice is an elemental part of all human culture. Greed, lust, power, prejudice—there is an endless list of our breaking the creation God once called “good.”

As Christians, we are called to draw upon the power of God to renew and redeem. We are invited to act as agents of the world’s beautiful rebirth through the power of God’s presence. Any time God moves into our lives or our neighborhood, justice lives and thrives. I love that in Revelation God promises a second Genesis as the coming of a just world, but something must first change.

In Mark Batterson’s book Chase the Lion: If Your Dream Doesn’t Scare You, It’s Too Small, one of his stories is about the Wright brothers. When Orville became seriously ill, Wilbur began to read to him from a collection of writings on the theory of human flight. One of the selections he read was by French dreamer Louise Pierre Mouillard called “L’Empire de L’Air.” Mouillard was like a prophet, “calling the world to repent of their unbelief in the possibility of human flight.” This became fuel to drive the brothers toward their historic moment at Kitty Hawk.

We each need to repent of our unbelief in the possibility of a just world. We must begin seeing the world as God dreams it. Are you convicted? Then go out and welcome this God that is “making everything new.”

What is the dream you have? Can you imagine no malaria? The day is coming. Count on it!

The Rev. Steve Casteel is pastor of Heritage UMC in Hattiesburg. He is the executive director and host of The Hour, our Mississippi Methodist TV show.
A group of Imagine No Malaria staff visited Sierra Leone last summer for a bed net distribution. At one of their meetings with villagers, a man named Christopher Johnbull pushed through the crowd.

“Please. My wife is pregnant and very sick,” he said. “Can you help?”

They followed him back to his house to meet his wife Adama, who was nine months pregnant. It was obvious her baby would come soon, but she was in no condition for delivery. Her feet were swollen, she had a fever, and she was very weak. She was not strong enough to make the trip to nearby Mercy Hospital on foot.

The team was able to escort Christopher and Adama to Mercy Hospital in their vehicles, since the family had no money to hire a cab. This United Methodist health center specializes in maternal and child health care.

Immediately, a nurse named Comfort Beah took Adama under her wing. Adama was diagnosed with malaria, severe anemia, and preeclampsia. Any one of those conditions can be life threatening. All three of them together meant that Adama was unlikely to survive labor without swift medical attention.

With help from Comfort and other staff at Mercy Hospital, Adama received treatment and began to regain her strength. A few days later, she delivered a healthy baby girl. Adama and Christopher named their child Jan, after one of the Imagine No Malaria staff people. Today, their little family is thriving.
HAPPY EASTER!

Bring your celebratory offering to the altar on Easter Sunday!

Checks may be made payable to
The Mississippi Conference of The United Methodist Church
with “Imagine No Malaria” in the memo line.

EVERY LIFE  SAVE A LIFE