

True Love Waits Uganda Director Uses “Bonus Years” to Spread Abstinence Message

November 6, 2006

By Don Beehler

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—Growing up in a polygamist home, Andrew Mwenge learned first-hand about the devastation and heartbreak of AIDS.

His father had four wives and 23 children, nine of which were from Mwenge’s mother. Five of those nine have since died from AIDs. One of his remaining sisters is HIV positive and the other one refuses to be tested. Only he and his brother know for certain that they are free of AIDS.

“Most of the people I grew up with in the village are not alive...if it was not for Christ, I wouldn’t be here. I know that for a fact,” Mwenge told an audience that had gathered in Nashville to learn more about LifeWay’s *A Defining Moment* capital campaign.

In a country where AIDS has reduced the average life expectancy from 54 to 42, Mwenge, 45, has had three “bonus years,” as he puts it, and he is determined to make the most of each day.

Mwenge became a Christian through the ministry of missionaries Larry and Sharon Pumpelly. Today he is pastor of Kampala Baptist Church, one of the largest churches in Uganda, and director of the country’s True Love Waits movement.

The Pumpellys introduced True Love Waits to Ugandans in 1994. With the help of Uganda’s president and first lady, they organized a parade in downtown Kampala to bring True Love Waits’ abstinence-until-marriage message to what Sharon Pumpelly described as “a desperate place.”

“We were aware that people were dying [of AIDS] – just fading away – before it had a name,” she recalled. “We heard about True Love Waits and wondered how it would translate in Uganda.”

True Love Waits became a catalyst for bringing people together to address the AIDS problem and spread the message of biblical purity to schools, youth groups, communities and other places. In the 12 years that followed, Uganda’s HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (the percentage of people living with HIV/AIDS) – which in some areas was above 30 percent – dropped to about 6 percent.

“God began to move in hearts,” Mwenge said. “The government was open and people were open. God’s standards for sex began to catch fire in Uganda.”

Other African countries have since sent representatives to Uganda to learn how that country has done such a remarkable job of reversing this deadly trend. The statistics for the continent are alarming: In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, 23.3 million people were HIV positive in 1999. By the end of 2004, that number had risen to 29 million, leaving a staggering number of orphans and a human tragedy that is almost beyond comprehension.

“We can change the story,” Mwenge said. “True Love Waits helps young people put sex in context and fit within the totality of life. As they think through that process, they realize that God’s standards are best.”

In addition to being one of the speakers for *A Defining Moment*, Mwenge participated in strategy sessions about expanding True Love Waits’ work in Africa and conducted interviews with reporters eager to learn how True Love Waits has made such a remarkable impact in Uganda.

“The success of the abstinence movement is greater when it is multifaceted – involving government, business, education, health organizations, church, schools and others – because students hear the same message from different avenues,” said Jimmy Hester, co-founder of True Love Waits.

“It just takes one generation to following God’s plan to end this [the AIDS crisis],” Sharon Pumpelly said. “God gave us a program that can multiply easily.”

Mwenge hopes his “bonus years” will help him not only continue to reach young people in Uganda, but also parts of Africa where he is confident the True Love Waits Uganda model can be replicated.

Seeing the success in Uganda and the possibilities for other parts of Africa, as well as the way Jesus Christ has changed his life, gives Mwenge a passion to rescue as many people as possible from the ravages of AIDS and help them live of biblical purity.

“One of my great privileges as a pastor is to do weddings where I was part of the process of speaking with young people about abstinence, watch them exchange their True Love Waits commitment cards and say to each other, ‘I waited for you.’”

###