

Kenya Revisited, Part III

by Fr. Mark Pavlik
November 6, 2011

While we were in Kenya, we had 5 medical clinics in various villages and were able to treat over 700 people with various ailments. Among the most common were pains in joints that developed as a result of strenuous carrying, especially among women. It is common for the women of Kenya to carry things on their heads: baskets, laundry, produce. They will begin as early as age five years old, carrying five pounds, and work their way up from there. Another common ailment we saw was respiratory problems, which were caused by cooking in huts with poor ventilation, causing them to inhale a great deal of smoke.

For three of the clinics, I helped out by distributing medication. It was surprising to me just how simple most of the prescriptions were to fill. It was not at all uncommon to prescribe 30 ibuprophen tablets or cough syrup or cough drops. It was amazing that people did not have access to basic pain relievers. On so many levels, I was struck by how different life is in Minneapolis. One evening the hotel we were staying in lost power. There was no point going to the front desk to ask why there was no power. People just adapted. In Minnesota, if you have a headache and do not have any aspirin, you just stop in a store and buy some. In Kenya, so many people had no access to even the most basic medication.

One afternoon I was walking back to our clinic after running to the pharmacy to buy medication, and a woman stopped me. In her broken English, she thanked me for bringing help to her village. She said that she had not been able to raise her arm above her head for years but with our help (and a cortisone shot) she could finally move her arm. Her gratefulness reminded me that while we are not able to change the whole world, we are able to change part of it — and even in small ways, we can make a difference.