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Clinic's Care Includes 'The Best Medicine'

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Clinic's Care Includes 'The Best Medicine'

EDITOR'S NOTE: IMB President Tom Elliff and his wife Jeannie visited the Horn of Africa over Thanksgiving. This report is his response to the plight of people in the midst of famine.

HORN OF AFRICA (BP) -- The African air is hot and still, stirred only by people brushing silently by as they are invited into the clinic courtyard from the weary line gathered outside. My wife Jeannie and I are taken by the silence. People who are tired, hungry and ill are often very quiet, even the children and babies. They have long ago given up on mere pleading as an effective means for getting help.

The medical clinic "waiting room" is a wooden bench on a shaded porch. Patients are asked to sit, five at a time, while waiting for someone to inquire about their problems. Just being there, where someone cares, is medicine in itself -- and you get the feeling they'd love to linger. But the time is short, and the sun will soon make it too hot to continue.

Standing in the doorway, wiping perspiration from her forehead with the back of her hand, is a Southern Baptist health care worker, one of six at the clinic today. She, along with a few nationals and volunteers from the States, will treat approximately 120 patients before the day is half done. This is the first of three similar clinics they conduct each week in a joint effort with Baptist Global Response in the Horn of Africa.

Toward noon I hear a sudden, excited "buzz" among the Christian workers who motion toward the bench and whisper "God has answered our prayers!"

Pausing for a moment, one of the workers draws me aside to tell me that only four days earlier the team began praying for an open door to the Muslim community in a village far from the clinic. "Look!" she exclaimed, "those are eight people from the very village we've been praying about. These people have walked all the way here and are our very first contacts."

I look again at the sad group sitting on the bench and clustered beside it. Little do they know that very soon the light of the Gospel will break across the landscape in that distant community ... the result of YOUR praying, YOUR giving and YOUR praying some more!

Soon they will receive what one Christian worker called "The Best Medicine." Very soon, many of them could join the multiplied thousands turning to Christ with hearts softened by the love of these Southern Baptists who minister in a very hard place.

This week is critical to our Southern Baptist ministries around the world. It's the week our churches focus on prayer for our personnel and give to international missions through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, which keeps personnel on the field. But the world deserves more than a mere week of prayer and giving! And the commission of our Lord, "Go! Teach all nations!" demands more of us than ever before.

This past October the world's population exceeded 7 billion people, each of whom will be alive millions of years from now in heaven or hell. The Best Medicine is Jesus! Yet it is estimated that 1.7 billion people will die without ever hearing His name.

That is both unthinkable and unacceptable for Southern Baptists who eagerly and sacrificially seek to carry the Good News to the very ends of the earth.

As Jeannie and I sat on our bed that evening, we reflected on the importance of praying and giving and praying some more. We must both pray and give with sacrificial determination. But if we can continue wearing what we wear, living where we live, enjoying all that we have enjoyed and going anywhere we want to go ... then where is the sacrifice?

Sacrifice results in change, a present change in our lives with the anticipation of a future change in the lives of others. It will take sacrificial giving, praying and going if Southern Baptists are to effectively impact the world for Christ's sake.

This year, let's pray and give and pray some more ... like people who take the Great

Commission seriously. Let's do everything necessary to be His heart, His hands and His voice.

This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions in the Southern Baptist Convention is Dec. 4-11 with the theme of "His heart, His hands, His voice -- I am Southern Baptist missions" from Acts 1:8. Each year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering supplements Cooperative Program giving to support Southern Baptists' 5,000 international missionaries' initiatives in sharing the Gospel. This year's offering goal is \$175 million. To find resources about the offering, go to imb.org/offering.

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