



St. Raphael's/Kenya

vulnerable residents.

On the day we arrived, the brand new maternity ward had only been open for 16 days and the staff was about to welcome its seventh baby into the world. Bishop Maurice Crowley had christened the new ward on Oct. 3, 2011, and the first baby born at St. Raphael's was named, you guessed it, Raphael.

Prior to the opening of the new ward established by Dunford, the health center already ran a child wellness clinic, a tuberculosis clinic, a pharmacy and an HIV/AIDS volunteer testing and counseling service. With a core staff of six people, the center treats malaria, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, sexually transmitted diseases, sickle cell disease and much more. When we asked Dunford what ailment they see the most, she told us, "malaria, malaria, malaria."

"It's about 40 to 60 percent of our patients," Dunford says. The other major health issues the center deals with are HIV/AIDS, the pandemic that has ravaged East Africa, and tuberculosis.

"The most important thing is to convey to them that you're sorry but it isn't the end of the world," says the missioner from Monmouth Beach, N.J. "Even though HIV is incurable, you

can live a decent life and most of all have a decent life for your family. Some people just don't want to know (they have the disease) and I tell them you have to think of your kids too."

Dunford trained as a physician assistant specializing in surgery, graduating from Cornell University Medical College in New York City, and worked with trauma cases in the States. "At least I know what I can do and what I can't do, which is the most important thing in medicine," she says.

After an exploratory trip to Kenya with Friends Across Borders, sponsored by the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, Dunford became a lay missioner herself in 2008.

"I was very pleased with the way Maryknoll treats people and treats missioners and I saw a lot and I decided I would apply and so I did," she says. Soon after, she traveled to Kitale, Kenya, where her medical knowledge and skills are sorely needed.

The new maternity ward answers another huge need in the region. According to a report by UNICEF, worldwide, a woman dies of complications in childbirth every minute, about 530,000 each year. The nations with the highest maternal and infant death rates are in Sub-Saha-

Follow-up  
Lay Missioner  
Kathleen  
Dunford greets  
mother and  
infant waiting  
to enter St.  
Raphael's  
Dispensary in  
Matisi, Kenya.

# LIFE SAVER IN MATISI

by Kathy Golden

Maryknoll lay missioner opens new maternity ward at health center on outskirts of Kitale, Kenya

**S**t. Raphael's Health Center is tucked behind the Giruka Butchery off a dirt road in Matisi Village on the outskirts of Kitale, Kenya. There, Maryknoll Lay Missioner Kathleen Dunford, a physician assistant, serves as clinical officer, helping the center's staff to treat the area's poorest and most

ran Africa, where a woman has a one in 16 chance of dying during pregnancy or in childbirth.

Most maternal deaths in the developing world happen because of the lack of a trained attendant. Most doctors move to the bigger cities, leaving community health-care clinics in rural regions overwhelmed treating TB, malaria and AIDS patients.

"In the cities it's better," Dunford says. "But in the rural areas there are still the traditional birth attendants and they've done a wonderful job, but certain conditions need to be attended to." The government of Kenya is trying to encourage more women to go to prenatal clinics and to have their deliveries under safer and more professional conditions, she says.

Unfortunately, Dunford says, training for traditional birth attendants is minimal and most of it is on-the-job experience. "They're not professionally trained, like nurses and midwives here," she says. "All nurses in Kenya are trained to be midwives."

Even St. Raphael's isn't equipped to deal with all the complications that can arise in childbirth, and cesarean deliveries are referred to the nearest hospital in Kitale.

While the clinic's services are low-cost, they aren't free.

Since most of the rural poor in Kenya do not belong to the national healthcare system, the average St. Raphael's patient pays cash. Dunford says a delivery costs the equivalent of \$80 and afterward the clinic offers training in hygiene, vaccinations and wearing.

"There's a wide extended family network here in Kenya and most people can come up with some of the money," says Dunford. "Rarely has it happened that they don't have any money whatsoever. And if they don't have money, if they're

here, we do what we can for them. Certainly we're not going to turn anyone away—never, never, no."

St. Raphael's center also serves as Matisi's emergency room and sees about 20 non-maternity patients a day.

The stated mission of St. Raphael's Health Center is to "care for the health needs of the poor and vulnerable people in Matisi, Kenya, as well as being a presence of Christ's love for all his people." The center's dedicated and enthusiastic staff fulfills

this mission every day.

As for the young woman preparing to give birth on the day of our visit, we knew with the assistance of Kathy Dunford and the clinic's staff, the mother-to-be was in the best of hands. ✕

*Kathy Golden is a reporter and producer with Maryknoll's Voices of Our World radio program. This story was adapted from her radio program, which is available at <http://twvu.voicesofourworld.org> by typing Dunford in the search box.*

**Check-in Physician assistant Dunford, left, reviews medical record with a mother and son at dispensary in Matisi, Kenya.**

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