

HIV-positive pastor and his wife speak out about AIDS in East Africa

Samson Mulinge Mutuse and Evelyn Mueni Mulinge are among 260,000 Kenyan married couples where one spouse is HIV-positive and one HIV-negative.

by [Fredrick Nzwili](#) in the [January 3, 2018](#) issue



Evelyn Mueni Mulinge and Samson Mulinge Mutuse in the compound of Deliverance Church in Nthange, Kenya. RNS photo by Fredrick Nzwili.

Samson Mulinge Mutuse lost his wife to AIDS in 2013 and his 13-year-old daughter the next year. After he tested positive for HIV, congregants who learned about his status tried to push him out of the church he helped found, and someone tried to burn his church and home.

“I realized I was being abandoned by my flock and other church officials,” the pastor said. “They did not even help me bury my daughter.”

After his recent marriage to Evelyn Mueni Mulinge, a primary schoolteacher whose first husband died of AIDS in 2006, the couple is speaking out about showing compassion to those who have HIV or AIDS and about stopping the virus from spreading.

AIDS has wreaked havoc in Nthange, Kenya, where Mutuse, 42, leads Deliverance Church, a Pentecostal congregation. In 2016, nearly 20 million people were living with HIV in eastern and southern Africa, representing the vast majority of people carrying the virus worldwide, according to the United Nations.

In Nthange people whisper about the virus in coffee and tea shops and under the giant baobab trees.

“People with HIV are isolated and neglected,” Mueni said. “They are also ostracized in the church and the community.”

Many were shocked that Mueni, 39, who is HIV-negative, would marry a man who had the virus.

“They can’t imagine this has happened,” Mutuse said. “It is a community still full of stigma and discrimination.”

Mueni said her faith convinced her that she should marry Mutuse, who started antiretroviral drugs in 2014, she said: “I was already aware of his status. I know everything about him and I am ready for it.”

They have become a sort of poster couple for what’s known as discordant marriages, where one spouse is HIV-positive and one HIV-negative. Such couples have become a focus in the efforts to prevent the spread of AIDS in Kenya and globally. According to the Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey 2012, about 260,000 discordant couples live in the country.

Mutuse runs what he calls a Hope Team, which helps people who have AIDS with washing and cooking. He also founded the Fatherhood Initiative Network to encourage men to overcome their fears of taking an HIV test. For most African men, he said, revealing that they have HIV is considered a sign of weakness. For World AIDS Day on December 1, Mutuse assembled 70 older boys from the region to speak to their peers about what HIV is and why it’s important to get tested.

Mutuse's efforts to educate his congregation and the people around it seem to have begun to pay off. Gradually, people have returned to the pews, though he sees about 200 from the pulpit on holidays when he used to see 500.

Meanwhile Mutuse continues to take his message to other churches and pastors: "It is good to disclose to your partner one's status and also test together. Use condoms all the time. Then seek medical advice if you want to have children." —Religion News Service

A version of this article, which was edited on December 19, appears in the January 3 print edition under the title "People: Samson Mulinge Mutuse, Evelyn Mueni Mulinge."